
Episode 482 – And so we did

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

“So how's the art direction going?” Rebecca asked as she and Rick entered the apartment. “You seemed to be doing pretty well off of that.”

“Well yeah,” Rick nodded. “I got everything sorted, got all the references I need and made a lot of key layout decisions all while juggling the actual art budget, so I had things in hand.”

“Sounds good to me,” she nodded.

“And then the pledge manager gave people the option to buy more art pages.”

“Oh,” she paused. “And now?”

“I want to die.”

“Rick your capacity to have every project you're involved with go to hell never ceases to amaze me,” Tsuneo added as he and Dan entered. “How do you do it?”

“Talent,” Rick simply nodded.

“Amazing,” Dan shook his head. “If you were in my line of work, you'd either be the top of the game or dead many times over. I'm impressed.”

“Thanks,” Rick beamed.

“Meantime, I have a thought about this, um, fic. Thing,” Dan began. “Dire Straights.”

“What about it?” Rebecca asked.

“It's kinda dull, actually”

“Just a bit,” she agreed. “And to be honest, I think it might be a new level of dullness for us, which is quite impressive in a really bad way.”

“How so?” Rick asked.

“Well If I may cut in here from our own experiences,” Tsuneo spoke up.

“Please do,” Rebecca nodded.

“I was thinking a lot of Girl on Fire, which like this fic, had endless amounts of filler,” He explained. “Interminable scenes of the characters sitting around and doing nothing other than enjoying the sights of Moose Tailings, Alaska, or playing Jenga or whatever else. I mean, the fic spent an entire chapter going to high school for no reason.”

“Bringing back a lot of painful memories there, buddy,” Dan noted. “But you are right, that fic had a lot of filler in it that wasn't doing anything other than padding out the story. Like, literally, the most powerful superheroes in the world sitting around doing nothing for vast stretches of the story.”

"I'm sensing a 'but' coming here," Rick noted.

"Well yes," Tsuneo admitted. "As pointless as these scenes were, they still were strangely character driven. You were involved with them because you know who these people are and what they do, and as such, you can kind of roll with it as being a part of the world."

"Besides which, the thought of Batman playing Jenga is pretty funny," Dan added.

"He's got a point there," Rick nodded.

"How do I put it?" Tsuneo considered. "Girl on Fire was dull in places but it never felt like a slog. A part of this was because, for all its flaws, it had a surprisingly engaging narrative that made you enjoy it in a strange way. And as ferociously inane as the lead character was, the fact that you had an interesting cast of canon characters and some other amusing distractions meant that they were bearable if nothing else."

"None of which are things you find in Dire Straights," Rick noted.

"None at all," Tsuneo agreed.

"I'll also throw in a bit here for Shadow of the Phoenix," Rebecca noted, "Which was our previous longest fic before this... thing. Again, you had an incredibly dull and drawn-out story that was not aided at all by a ferociously inane OC who spent ages agonising over even the slightest little thing, like getting pretzels from a vending machine. Added to that, the fic spent forever on entirely pointless skits and bits that added nothing and only served to waste time and drag it out further. And, of course, the elevator scene"

"I'd locked that memory away," Dan muttered. "Thanks a heap."

"On the other hand, as inane as the fic was, the OC was still reasonably well realised," Rebecca continued. "Furthermore, the fic was built around a mystery premise that it at least tried to build up and give some direction to, even if it took forever getting there and didn't resolve before the fic out and quit."

"I'm still cranky about the lack of Red Shadows," Rick grumbled, "You cannot tease me like that."

"Finally, again you had a supporting cast of canon characters that did a good job of carrying the fic," Rebecca finished. "Which again, are all things that Dire Straights is utterly lacking."

"I'll also put in my voice for the Adventures of Jack," Dan noted, "Because it was dull on so many different levels. On one side, you had Jack who was your basic boring invincible protagonist who is never once challenged or put at any risk or threatened or anything. Instead he effortlessly gets everything without any risk, both in the OASIS and in the real world where everyone bends over backwards to accommodate him. And then on top of that, it wasted so much time on pointless minutiae, such as Jack doing his chores or talking about his piano lessons or going to a stodgy strip-mall Karate dojo or whatever else."

"And yet, we got so much out of it," Tsuneo noted.

"We did," Dan nodded, "But that was because it had so much to offer us. It gave us the villain duo of Lynx and Tridosk who were a pair of total inane goons who were funny in their cardboard villainy and ineptitude and were far more amusing than the protagonist. And let's not forget that it gave us Akira from Programming who was a pure comedy goldmine. In many ways, Adventures of Jack was enjoyable despite its protagonist, not because of it."

"None of which Dire Straights has given us," Rick noted.

"Not at all," Dan agreed. "Hell, we haven't even found a character to inexplicably latch on to and constantly namedrop and turn into a pointless running gag yet."

"And given the depth of the characters so far, I can't see that happening either," Rebecca finished. "Because all Dire Straights has given us is a collection of near-identical talking heads, distinguished only by their names, a point that our alleged protagonist can't even manage."

"So yeah it's kind of dull," Rick finished. "And I don't see it changing any time soon."

"I mean, we've had some fics that end up going in truly bizarre directions," Rebecca noted. "But I sincerely doubt this will be one."

"It could surprise us," Dan suggested. "But it probably won't."

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

"And good morning to you too, Toraizer," Rick replied.

"Cheap but also obscure," Dan nodded. "Well played."

"I get my laughs where I can," Rick shrugged. "Especially given what we're up against."

"And by that I assume we're going to be reading more of Dire Straight today," Tsuneo continued.

"We are indeed," the Voice conformed.

"Can we not and just pretend we did?" Dan asked. "I mean, we know it's going to be all about uniform regulations and counting bog rolls anyway."

"No."

Dan sighed. "It was worth the shot."

"So then out of curiosity, what does happen in this part?" Rebecca asked.

"Well, the story goes to places," the Voice offered. "And people do things."

"You have no idea, do you?"

"It's a rich narrative experience."

"I'll take that as a no," Rebecca finished.

"I think that then beggars the question of what this fic could do to be more engaging," Dan added as he took his place on the couch.

"It could start by not being this fic," Tsuneo offered as he and the others joined him.

"This is also true," Dan admitted as the being screen turned on, converting the world over to script format.

> Chapter 5: Monument City

> There was tension in the background as we did our daily routine.

Tsuneo: They were all concerned that something might happen. Like, literally anything

> Even as we did maintenance on

> the VHT-1 Spartas hover tanks and did inventory on our supplies and equipment,

Dan: Time for the hourly bog roll count.

> the last space offensive was still in memory.

Rick: Years from now they'd look back at the space offensive and laugh

> I had heard from Lieutenant Jack Emerson that Sergeant Bakovic plead guilty;

Dan: His defence consisted entirely of 'but, tequila!'

> he would serve thirty days in the stockade and then be transferred to another unit after
> his sentence is finished.

Rebecca: Offscreen resolution of plot points is the worst way to handle them

Tsuneo: What if they're entirely irrelevant ones that added nothing to the story?

Rebecca: Hm. Difficult.

> We did not know when the final assault will take place, or if the enemy will counterattack.

Dan: This has nothing to do with anything, but there you go

> There was still time for other things besides the military.

Rick: Like macramé or flower arrangement

> I had made a date with Melissa Sharp to

> take a tour bus to a Berber town in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains.

Rebecca: I am mildly surprised that she's still in the fic... Or that our lead remembers she exists.

> The base offered discounted tickets to your buses and other events in the area.

Tsuneo: Package tour of duty

> The bus ride to the town took a few hours along a four-lane highway, with trees to either side.

Dan: I can only imagine that he points out every single one of them while Melissa wonders what she's doing with her life

> The town itself had souvenir shops and cafes and

> other businesses. Street vendors peddled their wares to tourists who were dressed in various types
> of outfits.

Rick: Tuxedos, llama costumes, football jerseys... various outfits.

> As I sat in a sidewalk café with Melissa, sipping on a Coke, the war above and on the ground
> seemed distant.

Tsuneo: I mean, it is mostly happening on another continent.

> Indeed, for a while we could pretend that there was no war.

Rebecca: The war is a mild inconvenience

> But not for long.

> After returning to base, I saw that the men's BOQ was open.

Tsuneo: It was immediately blown up to for the sake of an unfunny running gag.

> The building looked much the same as it did before it blew up;

Rick: Like a stock building asset

> the one big difference was that the pain was brand new and the windows were spotless.

Dan: And yet the latrine was already filthy

> "We get to sleep on real beds again," said Lieutenant Michael Meyers.

Tsuneo: He'd spent the war so far couch-surfing

> "And to think I was gonna invite you to sleep over at the women's BOQ," Melissa said to me.

Rebecca: Every single female soldier on the base rejected the idea.

> We approached the entrance to the BOQ.

Rebecca: Fic, slow down with this intense action. I can't take too much more of this

Tsuneo: You know this is only the second page, right?

Rebecca: Yes, and I am dying on the inside

> "Only male officers allowed here unless you have official business, madam," said this freckle-faced
> private.

Rick: The 'no gurls allowed' sign is implied

> "I will see you tomorrow," Melissa said to me.

> I went inside, and there was a miniature party going on in the lounge, with men dressed either in
> casual clothes or MARPAT camouflage talking to one another.

Dan: Wait, civvies are in the uniform rotation? Why didn't anyone tell me?

> On a table were a bag of Lay's potato

> chips, two one-liter bottles of Coca-cola, and some plastic cups.

Tsuneo: Thank you fic. I don't think I could have lived without knowing exactly how much Coca-Cola there was

> Music was playing from a stereo system, and a Sony color television was on, its sound muted.

Rick: The fic has an odd need to point out what brand each television is.

Dan: It worries me

> "Better not let this party get too wild," said one of the men, holding a plastic cup,

Rebecca: I imagine there's little chance of that.

> "or I'd have to

> throw you in the stockade." I recognized him as an officer with the base's military police.

Tsuneo: You can tell that because of how distinctly he's described

> "Don't worry," said Jack. "We won't get too wild. Maybe as wild as Mardi Gras,

Rebecca: Are we talking the Sydney Mardi Gras here? Because context makes all the difference

> but not too wild."

Dan: The next morning, Wulbren Bongle here wakes up in the lockup with a traffic cone and finds the men's BOQ has burned down again.

> Mike led me to my room. It looked the same as my old room here, with a bed and a dresser and a

> lamp.

Rick: And a pile of Lockon doujins not fit for human consumption.

> I could look out the window to the pavilion in the center of the BOQ. At least I can have my
> own room, instead of sleeping in a Quonset hut with fifty other guys.

Rebecca: You know, I don't know why, but I got this weird impression that he doesn't like sleeping in a Quonset hut.

Rick: Huh. I don't know why you'd think that.

> I put my duffel bag on the carpeted floor and I lay on the bed.

> "Don't get too comfortable," said Mike. "There's still a party going on."

> And so I went down to the party. We were all talking about what men do and say.

Dan [Forced]: Haha, we are having a totally manly conversation about man stuff

Tsuneo [Forced]: Yes, this is a very manly conversation indeed

> "Here's to sleeping in a real room again," said Lieutenant Isamu Shirogane,

Rick: This is literally all he has going on in his life

> holding up a plastic cup.

> "Cheers," we said.

> The party continued for the rest of the day, with us either sitting in the lounge, or playing pool or
> foosball in the den, or even doing barbecues at the central pavilion.

Dan: Getting into fights, shouting death threats and having the cops break it up. A normal party

Rebecca: For you, maybe

> At the end, it was time to sleep.

Rick: He partied until he didn't.

> I had my share of partying back when I lived in Jamaica,

Tsuneo: Jamaica consists solely of beach parties and tourist cafes, I'm sure of it.

> but this is the first time I remember having a party just to celebrate having a roof over our heads.

Tsuneo: Dream big

> I slept on my bed, the mattress springs supporting me.

Rebecca: He tried sleeping under the mattress at first. Took him a while to figure out what he was doing wrong.

> The next morning, Jack woke me up.

> "We have orders to mobilize," he said. "Get dressed."

> And so we went to the parade ground and all assembled in formation, with Lieutenant Colonel Lupon
> Kravshera, Major Yoon, and Master Sergeant Tomas Cabon facing us.

Rebecca: The winner then goes on to the semi-finals.

> "All right, Micronians,"

Dan: Dude, we're the same size

> said Kravshera. "I know it is still early, and most of you haven't had breakfast.

Rick: I'm still in my pyjamas.

Tsuneo: [Kravshera] Shut up!

> Just this morning, I have received orders that our battalion is to be deployed overseas in North

> America, near Monument City. An enemy ship crashed nearby and we are to be part of the

> perimeter team.

Tsuneo: And there are apparently no other units in all of North America that are more conveniently located, I guess

> The Air Force's 8th Transport Wing is preparing to transport us and other units

> there. Everyone prepare for immediate deployment. We will depart as soon as everyone is ready"

Rick: Are we allowed to have breakfast first?

Tsuneo: [Kravshera] Shut up!

> And so we did.

Rebecca: Master of suspense.

> We all made sure that our hovertanks, equipment, ammunition, and supplies were packed,

Dan: And the bog roll was counted.

> with Master Sergeant Cabon supervising the enlistees. We also made sure that our duffel

> bags were packed with uniforms and other essentials.

Dan: Like his tenor saxophone, his twelve pound bowling ball and his lucky autographed glow in the dark snorkel

> The hovertanks were loaded onto trailers,

> and our supplies, ammunition, and equipment were loaded onto other trucks.

Rebecca: It's just like the last loading things onto trucks scene, only so much duller because we've seen it before

> "I wonder what the delay is," I said, sitting in the back of a truck. "We're mostly done."

Tsuneo: [Jack] You're still in your pyjamas.

> "All of the sergeants have to double check the work," said Mike. "And we have to wait on Military

> Airlift Command to get us across the ocean."

Dan: Now he's wondering why they can't just drive there

> And so we did.

Dan: I propose a drinking game. Every time he says they're going to do something that they immediately do, take a drink.

Tsuneo: You'll be blacked out in minutes.

Dan: That's the plan.

> I heard the truck's engine start, and felt its motion along the street.

> "They were fast," said Jack.

Rick: Well that was a speedy and effortless resolution. I feel lucky.

> "Thank Master Sergeant Cabon

Rebecca: We're going to pretend he's a character now.

> and the other sergeants for pushing the enlistees," said Mike.

> The ride took about an hour;

Tsuneo: And we're going to suffer through every second of it.

> I knew that the trucks would go through the road tunnel linking Spain

> and Morocco. We finally got off at this air base in Spain. The trucks were parked on the concrete

> taxiways. There were some hangars where aircraft was stored, as well as a control tower. Also

> parked on the taxiway were a U.N. Air Force C-130 Hercules and an Air Force Liewneutzs

Dan: Bless you

Rick: Thanks

> cargo

> shuttle, which was much bigger than the Hercules and was used to transport mecha. Above us,

> there were only a few clouds in the sky. I noted there were over hundreds of airmen running around

> doing errands.

Rebecca: Either that or setting up an OK Go video.

> We immediately boarded the Hercules; I strapped myself in.

Tsuneo: For security reasons, he was classified as cargo and secured with webbing.

> I glanced at Colonel Kravshera and Major Yoon.

> "We'll have breakfast bars on the plane," said Yoon.

Dan: Seventeen hours later, they had breakfast

> The rear entrance to the plane was closed and secured.

Rebecca: You know, I generally assumed they did that before take-off, but it's good to be sure.

> "Okay people," I heard the Air Force pilot say over the intercom. "Make sure you are all strapped in.

> We are preparing for imminent departure."

> About an hour later, we departed;

Rick: For very generous definitions of 'imminent'

> I felt the plane rumble along the runway and then felt the rumbling

> stop as the plane lifted into the air.

Tsuneo: It's not so much a fanfic as it's bullet points from the world's least interesting soldier.

> I unwrapped the breakfast bar, which was basically a granola bar.

Rebecca: He demanded to know if it was gluten free, whereupon they threw him off the plane

> "We'll get more food once we get to the camp site," said Jack.

Dan: At least you don't get an in-flight meal.

> Ooooooooo

> A few hours later, the Air Force pilot told us to strap ourselves in again,

Rick: Time to tie him back to the wall.

> as we were about to land. I

> felt the plane touch down about half an hour after he made his announcement. The Lockheed C-130

> Hercules

Rick: What I love about this setting is its amazingly imaginative technologically advanced vehicles and aircraft.

> taxied for a bit before stopping.

Tsuneo: Guys, you know how he said he was being redeployed?

Rick: Vaguely.

Tsuneo: Do you think its fair to assume it all went smoothly and skip the blow by blow?

Rick: But what if something happened on the way? What if his transport hit an unexpectedly airborne Morris Marina and had to make an emergency landing in Trucial Abysmia?

Tsuneo: Well, did they?

Rick: I mean, no...

> "Welcome to Monument City," said the pilot.

Rick: Gateway to the modern techno-feudal world

> The rear hatch was opened, and we all stepped out with our duffel bags in tow. The weather was

> sure different; I could feel it was much cooler than it was in Morocco or Spain.

Rebecca: He hadn't expected Canada to be colder than the Sahara Desert

> The sky above was

> concealed in a layer of gray clouds. Around me, I saw what I would expect at a U.N. air base-

> hangars, a control tower, and other buildings.

Tsuneo: The air base looks like an air base.

Rick: Shocking.

> There was a lot of aircraft parked on the taxiways, including the Liewneuatzs

Dan: Bless you

Rick: Must be my allergies playing up

> cargo shuttle that transported our VHT-1 Spartas hover tanks. Another plane landed on the runway.

Dan: Uh-huh.

Rick: Planes sure do land on runways.

Dan: Ayup.

Tsuneo: They sure do.

> "All right, people," said the colonel.

Rebecca: That's a generous assessment.

> "Let's get ourselves ready for transport to the camp site."

> It took less than an hour for the hovertanks, supplies, and equipment to be loaded onto the trailers.
> After everything was loaded, we boarded the trucks and rode to the camp site.

> A few minutes later, we all got out.

Dan: They might as well have walked there at that point

> The centerpiece of the campsite was this huge spaceship sitting on the ground.

Rick: They're using it to roast marshmallows.

> It was big, much

> bigger than a sports stadium. It looked as if it could fit the entire population of Jamaica.

Rebecca: Either the author has no idea how big a sports stadium is or no idea of the population of Jamaica. Or possibly both.

> Already, various types of mecha form a perimeter around the ship.

Rick: Mostly off-brand Scopedogs

> Tents and Quonset huts

Rick: Hey guys!

Dan: What?

Rick: Quonset huts!

Dan: Oh no...

Rick: You reckon he'll have to sleep in one?

Rebecca: I reckon we'll have to hear about it.

> were set up for

> the troops, who were drawn from the Army, Air Force, Spacy, and Space Marines.

Dan: The Space Marines got the best tents. They get the best everything. Bloody GW pet faction.

> Many of the troops had already taken posts, and others were just arriving in trucks.

Rick: They had to hitchhike to the battlefield

> As soon we got off, we- or rather junior enlistees under the supervision of Master Sergeant Cabon-

Rebecca: That basically comes down to him and some guy called Chad.

> started unloading the hovertanks, equipment, and supplies in our battalion.

Dan: He helped by standing there and doing nothing

Tsuneo: To be fair, I'm not sure if I'd want this guy to help me unload military equipment

Dan: I wouldn't want him to help me take out the garbage

> After that, we had to take inventory of everything,

Dan: Nothing for it but to count the bog rolls again.

> in which I had to help. It was tedious, but less so than standing around.

Tsuneo: My review of the fic so far

> "So when do we get to eat?" asks a private in our battalion.

> An Army sergeant informed us where we would sleep. Once again, we would sleep in a Quonset

> hut.

Rick: Not answering my question!

> "At least you will get a chance to sleep in a hut," I said to this lady officer in our battalion; I knew her
> as Lieutenant Tran.

Rebecca: Her hotel suite is only rated at four stars. Can you imagine?

> I placed my duffel bag next to the cot inside the Quonset hut that was reserved for junior male
> officers in our unit; it looked just like any Quonset hut.

Dan: In as far as it had crenulations and an ornate folly

> "Don't get too comfortable," said Major Yoon. "We're not here on vacation."

Rick: But I was going to Disneyland!

> And so we were busy that first hour or so, organizing watches and creating duty schedules.

> "It's chow time, people," said Jack.

> And so we ate inside another Quonset hut that served as the officers' field mess.

Rebecca: Crashed alien mothership is fine on its own.

> Hundreds of
> officers in MARPAT camouflage were inside, sitting on benches or getting food from the cooks.
> Pasta with marinara sauce was served.

Rick: Was there a vegetarian option?

> It was cheap and filling, the kind of meal one would eat out on the field- if one were lucky.

Dan: And assuming the army didn't spring for catering

> "A lot of people will be asking for liberty passes," said Mike.

> "Yeah," I said. "Monument City has a lot more to offer than the middle of that desert."

Rick: Give the Robotech Masters a bit and they'll fix that

> I can still remember that mission- the heat, the dryness, and the revelation about the enemy.

Rebecca: The Bioroids killed Dumbledore

> "We'll get the afternoon off," said Jack. "Major Yoon told us our squadron has the graveyard shift."

> "Jack, it's you," I heard a female voice say.

Rebecca: Jack immediately told her about his Halo guns and started creeping on her

Rick: ...is it bad that right now I'd rather be reading one of Jack's nonsense strip mall Karate lessons?

Rebecca: It's not, and that scares me

> I looked and saw this young lady with short blond hair.

Rick: Haslab Dragonfly Glenda? Because I can't think of anyone else it could possibly be

> The two silver bars on her collar indicated that she was a first lieutenant like Jack.

Dan: I'm glad they have an official designation for when someone's out of his league.

> "Dana," said Jack, placing his hands on her shoulders. "I knew you would come."

Rebecca: Dana is here now. She is a real character. That validates his existence.

> "I'm assigned near Monument City," said Dana.

Tsuneo: So her being here would be logical, actually.

> "And then there was this huge spaceship that
> crashed near there- which my squadron and I shot down."

> I looked at her. "You shot down this ship?"

Rebecca: Yes, a tank squad shot down a space ship. What part of that is so hard to explain?

> "Yes," she said. "I assume you know Jack."

> I introduced myself.

Dan: Mantis Toboggan at your service.

> "I am third in line of command for his squadron," I said.

Rick: And that's all he has going in his life

> "First Lieutenant Dana Sterling of the 15th ATAC squadron. I knew Jack since before joining the
> Army."

Tsuneo: They both went to the same Battle High School

> "You did?"

> "Yeah, after my parents were deployed on the Pioneer mission, I was sent to live with General
> Emerson- that's Jack's dad."

> "That's right," said Jack. "And we have stories to tell."

Dan: He still has the scars

> "What kind of stories?" asked Mike. "Lieutenant Michael Meyers, Jack's second in command.

Rebecca: Nobody asked!

> You can call me Mike, anytime."

> "I will remember that, Lieutenant Meyers," replied Dana.

Dan: Immediately ignoring everything he said

> "Nina," said Jack. I looked and saw Lieutenant Nina Washington, carrying a plastic cup and dressed
> in MARPAT camouflage.

Rick: Given that everyone was wearing their futuristic 80s space uniforms, she felt pretty stupid

> Nina put the cup down on the table and placed her arms around Jack's waist. "How are you doing,
> ground pounder?"

> "Who is your lady friend, Jack?" asked Dana.

> "Are you jealous?" asked Nina.

> "Oh, it's nothing like that," said Jack. "Dana is almost like a sister to me. It would be incestuous for me to ...you know."

Dan: And way to make this all weird and awkward

> "I am Lieutenant Nina Washington, Thunderbolt pilot and a flight leader," said Nina.

Rick: Oh, so she's Citizen V

> Dana introduced herself. "My parents were pilots. They're veterans of the first Robotech War."

Tsuneo: Not that they're anyone famous you might have heard of or anything.

> "I wonder why you never followed in their footsteps," said Nina.

> "Flying never interested me."

Dan: That and she's been banned from ever going near an aircraft again

> "My daddy was a pilot in the First Robotech War and the Global Civil War before that,"

Rick: He fought in the Roy Fokker on Macross Island war

> said Nina.

> "He's now the Air Force's Chief of Staff. So your parents were military. It must have been interesting, > girl, having to move from base to base."

Dan: You know, I'm not even sure Roosevelt P. Needlemeyer is in this scene.

Rebecca: I'm not even sure Roosevelt P. Needlemeyer is in this fic.

> As Nina spoke with Dana Sterling, Shelby Porter sat down next to me.

> "Mind if I sit next to you?" she asked.

Dan: You already did

Rick: Well okay then

> I looked at her; she had put a tray with a plate, a cup, and food and drink on the table.

Tsuneo: [Grim] Thrilling.

> "Uh, no," I replied. "Go right ahead."

> "How have you been doing?" she asked.

> "They rebuilt the men's BOQ.

Rick: This is the highpoint of his life

> I got to sleep there for one night before we were deployed here. And you."

> "At least I got to fly my Thunderbolt all the way here. We did have to wait until our equipment and > supplies were brought in. So you are from Jamaica, right?"

> "Right."

> "Tell me all about Jamaica. It must be a wonderful place."

> I told her about Jamaica.

Rebecca: [Shelby] I regret asking.

> My family was relatively well off due to being in the tourist industry. "But
> there are many people who eke a living scratching dirt or catching fish,"

Rebecca: Did the author do any research about Jamaica at all before this fic?

Rick: I imagine he watched Cool Runnings and called it a day

> I said. "If you want a high
> paying waiter job, you have to be well-connected like my dad and brother."

Rebecca: Or you could work in the extensive aluminium and bauxite mining industries that make up a considerable portion of the country's economy

Rick: Wasn't in Cool Runnings, doesn't count

> "That's terrible."

> I began thinking of home. I remembered that the island imported a lot of food from overseas due to
> the wealth that came in from tourism. "Maybe if we had factories like Japan." I continued eating my
> meal.

Dan: But first they'd need Power and a Tiberium Refinery

> "After we return from here, maybe we can go out," said Shelby.

Rebecca: By why? Why on Earth would you want to go out with this dried-out potato salad?

> "There's a great restaurant a mile from the air base I'm stationed at."

Rick: One that has not yet had a salmonella alert, so it's looking up

> "I don't know," I said. I was thinking of Melissa Sharp back on the base. She was a great lady,

Tsuneo: We assume.

> but to
> just give my full heart to her at this stage? Should I not at least date other women in case things do
> not work out?

Rebecca: Nothing for it but to hide in his basement and rage about women on the Internet

> That evening, I spoke with Mike just outside our temporary quarters.

> "Have you told Melissa how you feel about her?" he asked.

Tsuneo: Articulating human emotions is hard.

> "I like her," I said. "And it would be great if she and I could be in a relationship. But to love her now?
> I don't want to love someone completely only to find out we can only be friends."

Rebecca: And so he sat stewing in his own indecision while Melissa moved on with her life

> Oooooooooo

> So much was on my mind during breakfast-

Dan: Mostly thoughts about Peter Pottamus

> wondering if I should go all in with Melissa, the residual stress from combat.

Tsuneo: I can't go on a date this Friday, I have PTSD

> "Finish your breakfast," Colonel Kravshera said to me. "We have been summoned to Southern
> Cross Headquarters in Monument City."

Rick: Say, what about the alien ship they're meant to be guarding?

Rebecca: I'm sure it won't go anywhere.

> "We're all going, sir?" I asked.

> "Just you, me, Cabon, Emerson, and Avital. Put on your Class "A's"."

Rick: For want of any context, I will assume that means they're wearing waders

> And so I did. It was always important to bring all uniforms with me to a camp site.

Tsuneo: It's almost like logistics would be simpler if they stuck to one type of uniform instead of having a pointless daily rotation.

> A green Toyota Avalon staff car awaited us.

Dan: Generic sedans... of the future!

> I got in along with Jack, Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital, and Master Sergeant Tomas Cabon.

Tsuneo: The people who he said were coming with him came with him. I know, I'm shocked too.

> An Army corporal was behind the wheel.

Rick: An Army Corporal is my new favourite character

> The car moved along a highway flanked by pine trees. The scenery seemed so peaceful, especially
> after the alien ship disappeared from view.

Rick: They don't put that on the tourist brochures.

> "Great place," said Jack. "Dad used to take us- me, Dana, and this other kid named Bowie- out
> camping.

Rebecca: Jack has to constantly name-drop all the famous people he knows.

> The car soon reached a checkpoint, which had several booths. A roof bearing the name
> "Monument City" was located on top. Monument City was considered to be United Nations soil, so
> there were checkpoints for people entering from Canada.

Dan: This just in, Canada still exists after the apocalypse

Rebecca: Do they also have futuristic post-apocalyptic Quebec?

Tsuneo: I imagine that the apocalypse has just made them even more argumentative

> We were quickly waved in, as we were in a military vehicle.

> We were on this elevated highway. I could see all sorts of buildings.

Dan: Buildings! They exist!

> After a few minutes, we took an exit to the Citadel.

Rick: Where Commander Shepard was walking around endorsing stores

- > The Citadel was a complex of buildings in Monument City, all owned by the United Earth Forces.
- > The headquarters for the United Earth Forces was inside the tallest building in the complex.

Rebecca: It meant that the war room had great views

- > The Citadel also contained headquarters for other units like the Military District of Monument City,

Rick: Loosely defined as 'people Dana had picked fights with'

- > the Space Marine Barracks,

Dan: No girls allowed, they are yucky.

- > the Headquarters of the Robotech Defense Forces Command, the
- > Headquarters of the First Spacy Fleet, and the Headquarters of the Southern Cross Army,

Tsuneo: And Capcom all staff

- > the field army that supports the Robotech Defense Forces Command.

Rick: And became strange zombies

- > The car entered through the main gate, with a Space Marine MP

Dan: He's there to arrest people for using third party miniatures

- > waving us in. I could see people in different types of uniforms walking along the sidewalk.

Rick: He was amazed by this futuristic conveyance

- > We passed an Army transport truck going in the opposite direction.
- > "Here we are, sirs," said the corporal.
- > Southern Cross Army Headquarters was located in this huge concrete building.

Tsuneo: As previously indicated

- > A concrete path led
- > from the street to the front entrance. We went through the glass doors of the front entrance. On the
- > other side of the front entrance, the main lobby had some chairs, a wooden table, and a reception
- > desk staffed by sergeants and corporals.
- > "Follow me," said the colonel.
- > So we did.

Tsuneo: One of these days the fic will surprise me with some shocking twist instead of just doing the 'we said we'd do a thing and then we did it' routine

Rick: Do you really think that?

Tsuneo: Well no. But I can dream.

- > We walked along the corridors, with several enlistees briefly stopping, and the colonel
- > waving them ahead. We then entered this room. There were no tables or chairs inside. Curtains
- > adorned a window with a view of the UEF Headquarters.

- > Then some people in Class "A" uniforms entered the room.

Tsuneo: You know, for all their talk of Class A uniforms, I don't think they've ever actually explained what they are.

Rick: I always assumed it was Paw Patrol cosplay.

Tsuneo: What, as part of their standard rotation?

Rick: Yep.

Tsuneo: Sure, why not?

> We all stood at attention. I recognized

> one of them- a big bald man who towered over us; he was United Earth Forces Supreme

> Commander Anatole Leonard. A slimmer,

Dan: Slimmer than Leonard is assumed

> shorter dark-haired man and this black man accompanied

> him. The black man was a command sergeant major, and the other man was Lieutenant General

> Rolf Emerson.

> "General Emerson, if you will," said Leonard.

> "Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital," said the general, "due to your conspicuous bravery,

Rick: She pulled him out of the burning wreckage of the men's BOQ.

Tsuneo: Uh, no.

Rick: The burning wreckage of a Quonset hut?

Tsuneo: His Hovertank.

Rick: There are Hovertanks in this?

> it is my honor to award you with the Titanium Medal of Valor."

Rick: Awarded for going above and beyond the Call of Duty, the Call of Duty Battlefront and the Call of Duty Battlefront II

> Sergeant Avital walked up and received a medal from General Emerson. "I am honored, sir," she
> said.

> Leonard looked at a piece a paper. "I understand the bravery in action was getting out of your
> battloid to save the life of an officer," he said.

> "It was him, sir," she said, pointing at me.

Dan: In an entirely blaming way

> Supreme Commander Leonard looked at me. "Try not to get wounded," he said.

Rebecca: Leonard doesn't want his insurance premiums to go up.

> "Yes, sir," I replied.

Dan: Or at least get yourself killed and end this fic

> "I have other business to attend to now. As you were."

> "How would you all like to have dinner before going back to camp?" asked General Emerson.

Rebecca: Once again, Emerson is left holding the ball.

> Oooooooooo

> Dinner was what the Army called lunch.

Tsuneo: A fact that the fic has already told us twice before

> We all sat at this pizza place located in the Citadel's food
> court. We all ordered pizza and breadsticks.

Rebecca: This strikes me as being well below the station of the Chief of Staff

Rick: He's showing his gratitude for their service in an entirely frugal way

> I myself had a Hawaiian style pizza, which had pineapple chunks and ham.

Dan: A pizza is a flat disc shaped piece of cooked dough that is topped with tomato sauce and cheese and sliced into segments

> I also ordered Coke to wash it down. I would not get to eat like this at the officers' field mess,

Tsuneo: He chose to bask in the luxury of the food court

> and I did not know how long I would be deployed at the camp site.

Rebecca: Probably until the mothership gets bored and leaves.

> Such deployments can last months, from what I had heard.

> "I should thank you for this good food, sir," said Master Sergeant Cabon.

Dan: 'Good' and 'food court pizza' are not words that belong together

> "It is a nice treat for a warrior," said Colonel Kravshera.

Tsuneo: He is astounded by this earth food called pizza.

> He looked to me. "Perhaps you should put yourself in danger so we can get this treatment."

> "I will consider it," I said.

Rebecca: If they're encouraging him to get himself killed then they're doing a great job of it

Tsuneo: I am all for this

> "At least we got that enemy mothership down," said Jack. "That is definitely something."

Dan: Well, Dana did. You were on another continent.

Rick: Say, if Jack grew up with Dana and Bowie, why wasn't he deployed to the 15th ATAC with them?

Rebecca: Let's just say that Bowie is the manly son that Emerson never had.

> "Maybe," said the general. "It is definitely a blow for the enemy."

> "Well, Dad, we really should recall the fleet and have them smash the enemy."

Rick: If you mean the expeditionary fleet, they're kind of busy.

> "I am not too sure about that," said General Emerson. "There are other threats besides the enemy
> in orbit. The galaxy has become a more dangerous place since the end of the last Robotech War."

> "Indeed," said Kravshera. "The Zentraedi kept the peace."

Tsuneo: If you blow up somebody's planet, it will end the war

> But with their numbers severely reduced,

Rebecca: The destruction of nearly five million warships and their crews will do that

> others are trying to fill in the power vacuum."

Rick: Mostly steampunk bear men and space wizards

> "Still, those enemy ships can be taken down," said Jack. "Dana and her team did it."

> "They managed to exploit a weakness," said the general.

Rick: They rolled an eleven-minus

> "And I doubt we can rely on that same weakness over and over again.

Dan: The Robotech Masters won't fall for the unshielded thermal exhaust port trick again

> We won't be able to defeat them using frontal assaults.

Rebecca: Have you tried asking nicely?

> And that is what worries me."

> "How so?" asked Sergeant Avital.

> "Supreme Commander Leonard spent the formative years of his military career poking out the
> Zentraedi insurgency in South America

Rick: An insurgency that he helped fuel through his own actions

Rebecca: Call it job security

> about fifteen years ago, back when Southern Cross was

> only a division. I served with him in that theater.

Rick: He played Alonso to Leonard's Prospero.

> Basically, scouts would find where the enemy is,

> and then Leonard and his regiment would go in full force to crush them. We were effective.

Tsuneo: They had mastered elementary military tactics

> But this

> time it is different. We can not crush the enemy the way we crushed the renegade Zentraedi."

> "So how do we defeat them?" I asked.

Dan: Have you tried asking nicely?

> "We'll have to outmaneuver them," said the general.

Rebecca: They have a giant fleet in space. How do you outmanoeuvre that?

> "Try to trap them.

Rick: Prop a box up with a stick and place some Protoculture under it

> I've done that with the renegade Zentraedi a couple of times back then."

> And so we finished our meal.

Rebecca: The conversation ended on this.

> "I have business to attend to," said General Emerson. "Back to your posts."

> "Yes, sir," we all replied.

> We rode in the Toyota Avalon back to the base camp.

Dan: Well yay for decent market-leading sedans I guess

> "Talking about the renegade Zentraedi reminded me of my early years in the Army," said Cabon.

Tsuneo: [Cabon] I got latrine duty all the time.

> "I was a corporal then, and I drove those old veritech battle tanks.

Rick: He was the 'and some other guys' to Johnathan Wolfe and Ron Bartley. Which when you consider that Ron is the 'and some other guys' to Wolfe is pretty damning.

> I could still remember having to

> stay in camp for months. It was mostly boring, but there were a few exciting times.

Tsuneo: Like the time he got his hand caught in the autoloader. Good stuff.

> Too bad not everyone I knew survived the excitement."

> We soon returned to the camp site. I noticed that there was even more bustling activity than usual.

Rick: There were *two* people smoking outside the Quonset hut.

> A corporal ran to the car. "Sir, there is something going on," he said to Colonel Kravshera.

> "Everyone is to take battle stations."

Rebecca: Good thing they drove back with such urgency then

> "All right, Micronians!" yelled Kravshera.

Tsuneo: Same size as you, sir. Same size.

> "Suit up and prepare for battle!"

> And so we did.

Tsuneo: We are going to end the chapter

Dan: And so we did

> ----

> Chapter 6: Metal Fire

> I immediately suited up and got into my VHT-1 Spartas hovertank.

Dan: He spent a while wondering what happened to the controls before he realised he was sitting backwards

> I pressed the buttons to start the engines. We had to be ready to go.

> "Explain the situation," said Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera.

Tsuneo: It's an overly long incredibly dry fanfic which has managed to make a space robot war boring

> "Colonel, a hovertank troop went into the ship to do recon," said Major Yoon. "If we do not hear from

> them in six hours, or they call for backup, we go in."

Dan: So they're going to base it around an episode of the show, but how will they stop John Longdangler from affecting the story?

Rebecca: John Longdangler doesn't affect his own story.

> "And our battalion is on standby to go into the ship?"

> "Yes, sir."

Rebecca: Didn't we just say that?

Tsuneo: It took a while for the idea to sink in

> I looked at the huge alien ship which was the centerpiece of the camp site. It was massive, bigger
> than our largest ships.

Rick: But how big is it compared to a sports stadium?

> "Has anyone come outside?" I asked.

> "No, Lieutenant," said Major Yoon.

> "Everyone remain on standby," said Colonel Kravshera.

> And so we did.

Tsuneo: Really? Because I thought they were going to hold a giant robot soccer game.

> As we watched for anything to come out of the ship, I started thinking.

Rebecca: It was an entirely new sensation him, and he wasn't sure he liked it.

> About if I

> would have to kill people again, I tried to not think about that, and then started thinking about the
> ladies.

Dan: Huh, gurls

> Melissa Sharp, Shelby Porter. I would even consider Rebekah Avital even though she was a
> decade older than me,

Rebecca: If the fic is trying to make this guy unlikeable then it's doing a great job of it

> were it not for the fact that she was an enlistee.

Tsuneo: And the fact that she's shown no interest in him whatsoever.

> And then I started thinking about the ladies back home in Jamaica.

Rick: How many of them were waiters?

Tsuneo: Only viable profession in Jamaica

> And we kept standing watch, all of us. It wasn't a pleasant duty, on par with scrubbing latrines.

Dan: A pretty fair description of what it's like to read this fic.

> I

> could still remember by days in Basic when I had to do the dirty work. Standby was just boring, and
> even officers had to stand by sometimes.

> "Could we get any relief?" asked Private First Class Glenn La Belle.

> "We wait until we are relieved, Private,"

Dan [LaBelle]: But I need to go!

Rebecca [Avital]: Oh for crying out loud

> replied Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital. "Just keep watch."

> And we kept watching that alien ship.

Tsuneo: It's a slight variant on 'and so we did,' but it's something.

> It was a novelty at first, a huge alien spaceship from God

> knows where, but it got boring pretty fast just watching it. Because just standing here keeps my

> mind wandering, and memories surface that I would rather not indulge.

Dan: Thinking of all the bog rolls going uncounted.

> I could hear some chatter, like how we are still in contact with the infiltration team.

> "You know what's amazing?" asked Lieutenant Isamu Shirogane. "They sent in an Army squad, not

> a Space Marine squad.

Dan: Of course you send Space Marines. They have the best army list.

> You'd think the Marines would be the first to bust into an alien vessel."

Rebecca: If you love the marines so much why don't you just marry one?

> "Yeah," said someone else. "Our job is to take ground so you people can move in, and cover your

> asses when you retreat.

Tsuneo: Okay, so what's your kill count against enigmatic alien space fortresses compared to, say, the leader of the squad that went in?

> We Space Marines are the head of the spear, you know."

Dan: And they get new miniatures every week and don't have to wait years for a mediocre update

Tsuneo: I sense some anger there

> "Quiet," said a colonel. "We don't want to break concentration."

Rick: Meanwhile our protagonist is staring at a rock

> I did enjoy the chatter. It was one thing to distract me from thinking about other things. I hated

> thinking about things.

Rebecca: He said it, not us.

> My mind rambles on and on and on when nothing is going on.

Tsuneo: Next thing you know he's written a manifesto

> "We are receiving a call for backup from the infiltration team," the colonel said a few hours later. "All

> battalions and squadrons get ready."

> "Okay, team," said Colonel Kravshera. "Arm your weapons and get ready for battle."

> And so I did, switching the master arm switch to "on".

Rick: He'd forgotten to switch on his Hovertank.

> We made sure to cover every exit.

Dan: Even the fire escape where a couple of clones had snuck out to have a smoke

> "The infiltration team is out!" someone yelled.

> "They're all accounted for!"

Rick: Except for all the ones that are dead, that is

> "Do we go in?" asked Colonel Kravshera.

> "Negative," said a higher-ranking colonel. "We maintain the siege until RDFCOM orders us in."

> "We copy," replied Kravshera.

Dan: Careful, nearly had an action scene there

Rick: Can't have any of that

> Ooooooooo

> I washed my hands at the hand-washing station

Dan: What a shocking twist!

> after using the officers' latrine.

Rebecca: And for once I am happy for the lack of detail.

> I was grateful that the Army kept us supplied with clean water;

Rebecca: The army had survival game mechanics

> I had learned from history that disease can ravage troops in the field as much as combat can.

Rick: He's played enough Oregon Trail to know how that goes

> I saw Private La Belle standing near the latrines.

> "This is officer country, Private," I said.

Dan: You can't stop here

> "I was here on official business, sir," he said. "I was restocking the toilet paper."

Tsuneo: This is an officer latrine. Only an officer can restock the loo paper

> "Finish what you are doing and get back to your post."

> "Yes, sir."

Rebecca: Well that interaction added so much to the story

> Things have wound down a bit after the infiltration team escaped the enemy ship. From what

> Lieutenant Jack Emerson told me,

Rick: Mostly insane ramblings about the SDF-2 being on the moon.

> Lieutenant Dana Sterling led the infiltration into the ship, the
> same lieutenant whose team shot down the ship.

Rick: A loudmouth who likes to get in fights, buck authority, make trouble and have temper tantrums when she doesn't get her way. Also the most competent officer in the Southern Cross, so take that how you will

> We were once again doing the usual routine of keeping the campsite secure and maintained.

Dan: Smokey the Bear approves

> More trucks moved in to bring supplies from supply bases.

> "I wonder when the enemy will surrender," I later said, eating dinner, which was tacos for me.

Rick: And it's not even Taco Tuesday

> "I don't know," said Jack. "I heard we were broadcasting messages in the Zentraedi language."

> "Zentraedi?" asked Lieutenant Mike Meyers.

Rick: You know, giant aliens, blew up the planet, might have heard of them...

> "The Zentraedi kept the peace in the galaxy before the Robotech War," said Jack. "Command
> figures that every spacefaring power would know their language."

Rebecca: In the same way that so many people in India and Africa know English, really.

> "I wonder what space travel is like," I said.

Rick: I wonder what it would be like to be a satellite orbiting the Earth

> "Basically you are inside this small box," said Mike.

Dan: It's like being stuffed into a locker, but longer

Rebecca: He can relate.

> "I remember taking the Air Force transport ship from Glorie to Earth."

> "And why did you decide to come over to Earth?"

Rick: He doesn't like the goddamn dolphins

Rebecca: Well that was insanely obscure, and yet also precisely on point. Well done.

> "Glorie colony is only a town and a bunch of farms," answered Mike.

Dan: But Brad Wesley bought them a Photomat and a J.C. Penney

> "The only thing to actually see

> is the UEF base. Sure, we get people from Earth who want to observe live scabies- that is what we
> call the native people of Glorie-

Rebecca: In short, lizardmen

> but other than that there is no excitement. Even that new colony in Tirol has more people,

Tsuneo: That's the one we have no contact with?

Rebecca: Shhh!

> since there were cities there before we arrived."

Dan: Cities usually have people in them, yes

> "Well, you guys are pioneers," said Jack. "It takes time to build things.

Rebecca: It also depends on how much vespine gas they have

> Plus the colonists there have to make more babies for future generations."

Dan: Although Harvey Wallbanger here still thinks babies are found in cabbage patches.

> "That's a popular pastime there," said Mike.

Tsuneo: Way to make that as creepy as possible

> "All combat units scramble," I heard a voice say.

Rebecca: Oh thank God, save us from this conversation.

> "There is an enemy attack on Monument City and reinforcements are being ordered."

Rick: Time for more of the great action that this fic is known for

> "Time for us to go," said Jack.

> And so we did.

Dan: Drink!

Rebecca: Oh, no you don't.

> I suited up, started up my VHT-1 Spartas veritech hovertank, and moved out with the

> rest of the battalion as we all traveled on the highway leading to Monument City.

Rick: They got held up because one of them hadn't attached his e-tag and didn't have correct change

> "Everyone stay alert," said Colonel Kravshera.

Dan: They were heading out on the highway, looking for adventure and whatever comes their way.

Rebecca: Born to be mild.

> Ahead, I could see smoke rising. There was no doubt a battle was going on.

Tsuneo: The battle was indeed a battle

> We soon reached the city itself.

> "Follow me," said Jack.

> The hovertanks in my troop followed Jack's Spartas. I barely paid attention to the buildings.

Rebecca: Then he drove straight into one

> Jack then directed me to go down this street.

> "Okay," I said. "Wing, La Belle, stay by my side. Ducasse, Hayase, protect our flank. Rear guard

> goes to Stabler.

Tsuneo: Do you think one of those names could be our protagonist?

Rebecca: Absolutely no way of knowing.

> Switch to battloid and take position."

Tsuneo: Generic people, go do generic things!

> For the time being, I was in command of this small group. The street was quiet,

Dan: Save for the enemy war robots shooting at things, presumably

> lined with shops.

Rick: Ugh, Monument City's been completely taken over by trendy cafes

> Most of the people had taken shelter.

> We were supposed to keep the enemy from using this route to attack the troop's main force.

Tsuneo: Which is a good plan until you remember they have hovercraft that they can fly on

> The quietness was interrupted when the enemy mecha fired upon us.

Dan: Oh yeah, the bad guys

Rick: I had forgotten about them

> We immediately took cover

> and returned fire, striking the enemy and destroying a few of the armored suit.

> Which were operated by people, I thought for an instant.

Tsuneo: Alien clones are people too!

> More and more of them kept coming at us. We did everything we could to hold our position.

Rick: He made a barricade out of abandoned e-scooters.

> "There's too many of them," said Staff Sergeant Wing.

Tsuneo: We assume.

Rebecca: As readers, all we know is that there's an unspecified number of bad guys that may be Bioroids.

> "We're pinned down here," I said. "We need fire support."

> "I hear you," said Lieutenant Nina Washington. "I'll send someone over."

Rick: Sending reinforcements in the middle of the battle or getting somebody to pick up your groceries? You be the judge

> "Copy," I said.

> We kept firing at the enemy from our hiding positions. More pieces of buildings fell on the asphalt
> street.

Dan: The Bioroids are not fans of the architecture

> Then some of the enemy mecha was destroyed from above. A VF-11 veritech guardian flew in, and
> then the nose folded down as it transformed into battloid mode.

Tsuneo: The nose folded down and then some other stuff happened and then it turned into a robot

> "Are you all right?" asked Lieutenant Shelby Porter, her battloid hovering.

Dan: Really helping there

> "Thanks," I said.

Tsuneo: There's still more Bioroids firing at us.

Rick: [Shelby] Eh, they'll be fine.

> "There is more of them coming in from the west."

> And so we went in and took care of them, leaving only smoking husks.

Rebecca: This is like reading Three Bodies Evolution, only without the punchy narration

> "Everything looks clear," said La Belle, looking around.

Rebecca: Quit padding your part, Private!

> "No enemy activity nearby," said Hayase.

> "This is Cabon," said Master Sergeant Cabon.

Dan: Cabon was indeed Cabon

> "We need some fire support."

> "I'm here," I said.

Rick: [Cabon] Where's here?

Dan: In a street.

Rick: [Cabon] Can you give me coordinates?

Dan: Yes.

Rick: [Cabon] Forget it, I'll just die under enemy fire.

> "I'll transmit coordinates. We're under heavy fire."

> "Copy," I said. I pulled a lever to transform into guardian mode,

Dan: Before that, he'd been entirely in Airplane Mode.

> and the veritech shifted around to look like a hovertank with legs. "All right, cover me."

> I received the coordinates on my targeting computer. I then fired several blasts.

Rick: Not at the coordinates, mind you. Saw a Dippin' Dots and got distracted.

> "I'm going over there," said Shelby, transforming her veritech into guardian mode and flying off. "I
> think you hit them."

Dan: You may or may not have hit them. Truth being said, I'm not sure that I care.

> "Thank you, Lieutenant," said Colonel Kravshera.

> "Shall we join you?" I asked.

> "Negative," replied the colonel.

Tsuneo: Truth is that I just don't like you

> "Hold your position."

> And so we did.

Rebecca: Again displaying the universal applicability of 'and so we did.'

> The battle raged on elsewhere. I could hear distant explosions.

Tsuneo: This fic has that constant feeling that something far more interesting is happening somewhere else

> We then got an order from RDFCOM to continue on; the enemy was apparently retreating. I hoped
> it was not another trick.

Dan: And then a Bioroid shouts 'made you look'

> We soon rejoined our battalion and other hovertank battalions. We could
> see an enemy transport ship fly towards the sky. We all fired at it, and our fighters chased after it,
> but the enemy transport escaped.

Rick: The police were still looking for it, and believed that it might be travelling under an alias

> We stood by for a very long time.

Dan: Thus displaying Buford Haberdashery-Section's greatest proficiency as a pilot: standing still.

> "All right 6th Battalion," said Kravshera. "Return to the campsite. And then assemble in formation."

> And so we did. It was dusk by the time we returned to the campsite. There was no word on the alien
> ship.

Rebecca: They all knew it was there, but they just felt awkward thinking about it

> All of us assembled in formation by troop. I then noticed someone was missing.

> "Master Sergeant Tomas Cabon was killed in action," said Colonel Kravshera.

Rick: [Kravshera] Some Jabroni on our side accidentally shelled him while he was heading into a
Dippin' Dots.

> We all felt sad.

Dan: Oh no! Not Cabon!

Rick: Who's Cabon?

Dan: I have no idea.

> Ooooooooo

> "There is neither rhyme nor reason for his death,"

Rick: A hippopotamus fell on him. What are the odds?

> said an Air Force chaplain dressed in MARPAT camouflage.

Tsuneo: He was wearing his combat cassock

> "All we can do is remember his life and his dedication towards his country, family, and his Army."

Rebecca: All of these traits are just assumed

> The entire battalion attended a memorial service for Master Sergeant Tomas Cabon the following morning,

Tsuneo: Was the crashed alien spaceship over the hill invited? Because I feel like it's missing out.

> after breakfast. I felt somber, even though I had not known the master sergeant well.

Rick: He was loosely aware that Cabon was an entity that existed in time and space

> I did remember the advice he gave me about dealing with the fact that I was killing people.

Rebecca: [Cabon] Only officers are allowed to restock the officer's latrine.

Dan: Not as helpful as I thought.

> And now, those people had killed him.

Dan: And it definitely wasn't a shot by some jabroni that struck the Dippin' Dots he'd just stepped into

> People from the battalion staff, including Colonel Kravshera and Major Yoon, gave brief statements

> on how the master sergeant was helpful and how they were grateful that he was in our battalion.

Tsuneo: We'll never forget how he did... those things... we're sure he did.

> I later went out, and saw Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital. Her face was in tears.

Dan: Funnily enough, she wasn't crying before I approached.

> "I served with him for over ten years, on and off," she said, wiping her cheek with a tissue. "He was

> a mentor to me. He was hard on me back when I was still a buck private, but he had good reasons.

Rebecca: She was a Ronmionie but he was a Harmonian.

> And now....now he's dead."

Rick: This is the most emotion anyone has shown in this fic so far. Treasure it.

> "I appreciate the advice he gave me," I said.

Dan [Cabon]: Never eat yellow snow

> "I served with him in the campaign against renegade Zentraedi in Afghanistan about seven years

> ago.

Rebecca: The CIA had started arming the renegade Zentraedi back in the Cold War and things had spiralled from there

> That was my first experience in combat. He told me that he can rely on me, because he trained

> me. And I could rely on him."

Rebecca: [Avital] And to remember the basics of CQC.

> "He trained you so that others can rely on you. Remember that."

Tsuneo: [Avital] That's... what I just said.

Dan: You're welcome.

> "A third lieutenant giving advice to an executive sergeant?" she asked.

> "Yeah, what would I know?" I asked.

Dan: Not much

> "You gave good advice, sir," she said. "You are learning."

> I knew there was work to do. I had to finish my after-action report and do a whole lot of other routine
> tasks.

Dan: Bog rolls ain't gonna count themselves.

> And yet, even as I did my work, I knew that Tomas Cabon's death diminished the battalion.

Tsuneo: We are all saddened by his loss because of all the nonspecific things he did for us

> Ooooooooo

> Jack, Mike, and I got liberty a few days later, along with many other troops.

Rick: They thought they'd visit the alien spaceship. Clone soldiers had set up an open-air market just outside.

> There was still much cleanup in Monument City over the battle with the enemy forces.

Dan: But other people had to do that, so I don't care.

> It was hard to believe that we had

> been here for about a month now. I had wondered how things were going back in Gibraltar Base.

Rick: Mostly, asteroid mining

Rebecca: Go so far to hell

> And I wondered how Melissa was doing.

Dan: He remembered that Melissa existed

> She should be prepared for this sort of thing, as troops

> could be deployed anywhere at a moment's notice.

Rebecca: At any point they could be called to stand around and do nothing.

> Could Melissa have been deployed? Or transferred?

Rick: Or accidentally clipped through the floor and fallen through the world?

> We went to this establishment that was in this part of the city that had avoided heavy damage.

Rick: Monument City tends to exist in a state of being completely destroyed and perfectly fine at the same time

> The inside had a piano and a bar and some tables for patrons. The whole place was dimly lit.

Rebecca: It wasn't that Bowie was playing the piano that surprised them. It was that Angelo was lounging sexily on it.

> "These people are gouging us!" said Mike, looking at the prices that were printed on new paper.

> "Not too many businesses open," said a waitress

Tsuneo: Something to do with alien invaders reducing half of it to ruins

> decked out in a blouse and miniskirt. "So many

> people want to come here; we raise prices to limit customers."

Rebecca: The author has no idea how this works

> "Oh well," I said. "We haven't had much opportunity to spend money since we got deployed here."

Rick: I haven't had a chance to waste money on deliberately jacked-up prices yet

> "He's right," said Nina. She holds Jack's arm. "Come on, Jack."

Rebecca: [Nina] Let's encourage their questionable business practices.

> So I spent about ten dollars on a cocktail, given to me by this blond-haired lady in a ponytail. I made

> sure to take a mental note of her. I could be transferred to a more permanent post in Monument

> City, and it was not like I had any commitments yet.

Dan: Aaaaand he's creeping already

> This dark-haired dude was playing the piano.

> "May I join you?" asked Shelby as she sat on the table.

> "Sure," I said, seeing as she already sat down, a beer in her hand.

Rick: Shelby's just like that. It's her thing.

Tsuneo: She has a thing?

Rick: Look, it's something approaching a habit, so I'm going to hold on to it.

> "What is going on?"

> "Just relaxing I guess," I said,

Dan: He wasn't sure what he was doing in the cocktail bar.

> sipping the cocktail. "Our battalion master sergeant was killed in that battle here a few days ago."

Rebecca: Way to kill the mood there

> "Oh," she said. "I thought flying would be some grand adventure. My squadron lost three pilots since

> this war started."

Dan: Have you tried looking under the couch? That's usually where these things end up

> "I have learned a lot since joining the Army."

Rick: Mostly about migratory bats. Funny how that works.

> I saw Jack talking to the young man who was playing the piano.

> "That was a nice song you played," Shelby said to him.

> "Thank you," he said. "My name is Bowie."

> "Shelby," she replied.

> I introduced myself.

Dan: Hi there, I'm Default Player One

> "I have known Bowie since I was a kid," said Jack. "Dana told me he was serving under her

> command as a hovernaut driver."

Rebecca: Bowie can never escape her.

> "So you like singing and he plays the piano," I said. "Maybe you can play music together."

> "The problem is that piano doesn't go well with gangsta rap."

Rick: And yet, it wouldn't be the worst musical collaboration ever

> "Bowie, meet my new lady Nina," said Jack.

> "Hi," Bowie said to Nina.

> "Hi there," said Nina.

Rick: [Flat] Now you have met Nina.

Tsuneo: [Flat] And now Nina has met you too.

[They smile awkwardly]

> I had barely noticed how far Jack got with Nina.

Rebecca: That would mean paying attention to other people.

> Come to think of it, Jack sometimes spent weekends off the base.

Dan: Come to think of it, he hadn't seen Jack in months.

> "Is there a lady for you, Bowie?" asked Jack.

> "Well, not really," replied the piano player. "There are some complications."

Rick: She's an alien clone who may or may not have been killed once already

Dan: Very complicated relationship, but not the worst

> I could understand. After all, my experience with Melissa and Shelby was a demonstration.

Dan: A demonstration of awkwardness, maybe.

> "So where are you from?" I asked Shelby.

> "Minnesota actually," said Shelby. "It's not too far from here- well, it is a lot closer than Spain is."

Rebecca: It took him a while to figure that out.

> "What do you remember?" I asked.

Dan: Mosquitos, funny accidents and awkward family gatherings

> "I remember how cold it was," said Shelby. "Sometimes we would get blizzards and get a whole lot
> of snow dumped on the ground."

Rick: He's surprised to learn that snow exists in Minnesota

> "I had little experience with snow, growing up in Jamaica.

Tsuneo: [Shouting] I'm from Jamaica!

Rebecca: Being from Jamaica is his only character trait.

> I remember my dad taking us on a trip to Colorado once.

Rick: They went to see the domed city of Denver.

> That was the first time I saw snow. We were all bundled up tight, bundled even more
> than those suits we wear when driving the hoversuits."

Tsuneo: Their driving suits, complete with sponsor logos

> "Did your family practice any of that voodoo stuff?"

Rebecca: And that's the first thing you ask?

> "That's Haiti. You know, there is this Haitian dude in my troop, a Private Philip Ducasse. Maybe he
> can do some voodoo on the enemy."

Rebecca: You know what? Not helping at all fic.

> "Excuse me," said Shelby as she stood up and joined the others in her squadron

Tsuneo: [Shelby] I am getting away from the lot of you.

> who came to this
> bar. I looked around and it was packed, with barely any room to move around. I leaned back and
> smiled, trying to look like I was relaxing,

Dan [Forced]: I'm so relaxed

> even though my mind was running on overdrive. It was
> always like this with huge dense crowds, with me barely even able to hear myself think.

Tsuneo: He joined the army for the peace and quiet.

> "Pretty good business," said another waitress, a dark-haired lady with slanted eyes.

Rebecca: Fic, please stop writing descriptions like this

> "I'm gonna make a fortune tonight."

> Perhaps she did.

Dan: We may never know!

> Ooooooooo

> Having liberty was nice,

Rick: He'd also like some equality and fraternity

> as we went straight back into the routine of maintaining combat readiness
> in the campsite around the alien ship.

Dan: This vacation sucks

Rick: Honestly I thought camping out at an alien ship would be a lot more fun

> Excitement would soon come again. We once again were ordered to scramble.

Dan: But I like my eggs over easy.

Rebecca: [Kravshera] How are you even still alive?

> I suited up and
> started up my hovertank. I saw several of the veritech guardians take off and transform into fighter
> mode.

Rick: As well as several Veritech fighters take off and transform into Guardian mode. Whatever you like, I don't care

> We all waited at the campsite.

Tsuneo: Yes, this is so different from what they were doing before.

> "An enemy ship is approaching," I heard a voice say over the radio.

Tsuneo: I love how this fic captures the tense urgency of the situation

> "Everyone get your weapons ready," said Colonel Kravshera.

Dan: But I left my Hovertank's rifle in my tent.

Rebecca: [Kravshera] Probably for the best.

> I then saw the enemy vessel approach our position, already taking fire from our fighters and anti-
> aircraft artillery. We all took cover and fired on the enemy ship.

> "Come on," said Mike. "Go down in flames."

> It did not go down in flames.

Rebecca: Maybe next time try asking politely

> It picked up the enemy ship that had crashed here nearly a month ago
> and flew to the sky. We kept firing at it until we depleted our ammo.

Tsuneo: There's a metaphor here but it's wasted on this fic

> I saw the spaceships get
> smaller and smaller, hoping that they would disappear in an explosion, but they simply disappeared
> out of sight.

Dan: His day has been disappointingly free of explosions

> "Everyone stand down," I heard.

> "Check for casualties," said Kravshera. "I expect full reports."

Dan: I stubbed my toe getting into my Hovertank, then stubbed my other toe getting out to check it.

Rebecca: [Kravshera] Why couldn't the aliens have taken you?

> Oooooooo

> Not long after the enemy ship escaped, we all packed up. All of us were ordered back to our
> respective home bases.

Rebecca: Honestly, the whole thing felt like a huge waste of time

> We went back to the air base in Monument City, with a C-130 Hercules and a Liewneuatzs

Dan: Bless you

Rick: My eyes are watering

> cargo shuttle waiting to take us home.

Tsuneo: You think they had it rough? What about the cargo guys waiting for them to wait for the aliens?

> It was a cloudy day, with a layer of clouds
> hiding the sky. I was reminded, once again, that Master Sergeant Tomas Cabon was no longer with
> us.

Dan: He looked up at the clouds and saw one that looked like Cabon

> "You take care of yourself, Jack," said Lieutenant Dana Sterling as she hugged him.

> "Don't get yourself killed, Dana," said Jack.

Tsuneo: You can just feel how deep their bond is

> I looked and saw Executive Sergeant Avital.

Rebecca: Somewhere within the general morass that is the alleged cast.

> "I'm not going with you, sir," she said.

> "Why is that?" I asked.

Tsuneo: [Avital] I don't like you.

Dan: No, that's fair.

> "I have orders from the colonel.

Rick: He's sent her to pick up a carton of milk

> I am to be a pallbearer for Master Sergeant Cabon's funeral in Chile.

Rebecca [Avital]: We drew straws. I lost.

> I should rejoin you in two days."

> She saluted me, and I returned the salute. Soon we were on the plane back to Gibraltar Base.

Tsuneo: Well enough of being an incredibly dull creep here. Let's go be an incredibly dull creep somewhere else

> ----

> Chapter 7: An Adventure Across the Strait

Dan: I will take the world 'adventure' with caution here

> "All right, we are closing in," said Lieutenant Jack Emerson. "Stay in formation."

Tsuneo: Location: the men's latrine.

> We were in the French countryside, responding to a request of reinforcements from the French
> government. I barely noticed the rolling green hills and the farms.

Rick: This scene needs a guy in a striped shirt and beret on a bicycle with a baguette tucked in a basket in the front.

> To the distance, I could see smoke rising where the enemy was fighting the local forces.

Rebecca: Wait, that's just a typical Paris riot. Never mind.

> "We're in position," said Lieutenant Michael Meyers.

> "The locals will be sending us coordinates," said Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera. "Fire as soon as you receive the coordinates."

> Soon enough, the locals gave us coordinates.

Rick: Well there you go. Isn't that nice?

> I switched to guardian mode. Using the coordinates received from the French troops,

Tsuneo: The coordinates that the locals just gave them.

> I aimed the turret and opened fire. I looked around and our troop was opening fire.

Tsuneo: They were ordered to do a thing so they did the thing they were ordered to do

> "All right," said Jack. "Let's reposition ourselves and wait to deliver another salvo."

Rick: Our troops will be fine without us for a while.

> One important lesson when performing artillery operations is

Dan: Not to look down the barrel to see if its loaded.

> to assume that the enemy knows

> exactly where we are after we open fire, so we have to move. For a moment I wondered if we
> destroyed the enemy.

> That was answered when enemy fire rained down on our former position.

Tsuneo: Good thing they all stood there staring blankly instead of repositioning.

> "Everyone all right?" asked Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital.

> "Copy," said Private First Class Glenn La Belle.

Dan: And only him. We have to assume everyone else is dead or just doesn't care.

> "We're receiving coordinates again," said Jack. "Transmitting to the targeting system."

> And we fired another salvo. We moved to another position, and waited for further orders.

Tsuneo: All the excitement of playing Battleship without any of the excitement of playing Battleship.

> "Everyone move in," said Kravshera.

> And so we did, moving towards the spot where the enemy had invaded. It was this French town and
> some of the buildings had been wrecked.

Dan: Well, I'm sure they had a perfectly good reason for attacking this one French town.

Rebecca: One that will never be revealed?

Dan: You know it.

> I could see remains of the enemy mecha, which the Supreme Command called bioroids.

Rick: But only if they're from the Bioroid region of France. Otherwise they're just sparkling alien invaders

> French infantry soldiers were patrolling the streets, clutching their rifles.

Dan: And their baguettes

> Civilians peeked out of the doors of buildings and a bomb shelter.

> "It looks like we did a good job," said Major Yoon.

Rebecca: Shelling the alien invaders in this small town.

> I looked up to the sky. I knew that we could not win this war unless we crush the enemy fleet above
> us.

Dan: In the meantime we'd have more scintillating, edge of the seat battles like this

> "Can we get some leave?" asked Mike. "I heard the French countryside could be beautiful."

Tsuneo: Accounting for the apocalyptic alien bombardment, that is

Rebecca: Which does not seem to have had much of an effect on this guy's world

Tsuneo: Its a lot like that

> "If you like battlescapes," said Jack, noting the current scenery.

> "You can visit France on your days off, Meyers," said Kravshera. "Which is not today. Let's head
> back to base."

> And so we did.

Tsuneo: Well that was an effortless resolution to an entirely uninteresting situation

Dan: I feel rewarded

> That evening, I was still finishing up my after-action report in the troop office.

Rick: Non-stop action! Dire Straights!

> Private La Belle was assigned to the office for the graveyard shift.

Dan: LaBelle is the backbone of this unit, I swear.

> "Anything I can help you with, sir?" he asked.

> "See if there is paper in the printer," I said.

> "Yes, sir," he said. He checked the printer and came back. "We have paper, sir."

Rick: The checking the printer for paper scene is given the same weight as fighting the alien invaders.
This fic is amazing.

> I reread my report going over some editing. "And what are you up to?" I asked. "Everything going
> okay with your life, Private?"

Rebecca: [LaBelle] I mean, apart from the fact that I'm stuck with this lifeless cinder block of a junior officer...

> "Aside from Executive Sergeant Avital making me work hard, sir?" replied La Belle. "I am getting
> married."

Rebecca: I'm worried that LaBelle might be the most engaging character in the fic, and that's simply because of the implied relationship to another character.

> "You do not look that old," I said. I was surprised that a young fellow like him was getting married.

Tsuneo: How old is he?

Rick: Younger than our protagonist

Tsuneo: That doesn't exactly help

> "Well, sir, my biggest worry is finding a place for my bride to live."

> "She certainly won't fit in at the men's BEQ."

Dan: He can't store her in his locker space.

> "I would like to have an apartment in base. It would be much easier than hunting for an apartment in

> Tangier, not to mention having to get a car and commuting."

Rick: He doesn't want to commute to the space robot war.

> "You can discuss this with Lieutenant Emerson and Sergeant Avital tomorrow," I said.

Tsuneo: I'm sure they can't wait to laugh in your face.

> "I'm sure you have floors to sweep."

> His words reminded me of my situation. I did want to get married, and there were a few people I had

> met whom I would have married if I had the chance.

Tsuneo: And if they didn't have restraining orders out against him

> And yet, considering marriage was too early. I

> should not imagine being married until I am sure it would happen.

Rebecca: Careful, I think he's winding himself up for a full-blown screed

> I wondered into what La Belle was getting himself in.

Rick: Look at his daughter and call me back

> I did not want to think too deeply about this. It was ultimately counterproductive.

Dan: Thinking was too hard.

> Oooooo

> A few nights later, I had a date with Melissa Sharp since my return from Monument City.

Tsuneo: One automatically follows the other, obviously.

> I briefly spoke to her when I got back, but then our scheduled conflicted.

Dan: He had to go fight aliens in France. Little things like that.

> On one hand, it was nice for

> women to be able to live their own lives and have their own paths, and yet it can be inconvenient at

> times.

Rebecca: Women having control over their lives is so inconvenient for him

Tsuneo: Its like the fic wants us to hate him

> We were in this Italian-Spanish-Lebanese fusion restaurant in Tangier.

Rick: Is it the same one that was mentioned before? Because I would be impressed if there was more than one

- > It was not very
- > crowded, which added to the intimate atmosphere. The dim lighting came from candles and a few
- > ceiling fixtures. The walls were decorated with pictures of various landscapes like ports and villages.

Dan: I can only assume that this is going to be important later

Rick: Like it'll be a key part of the big twist at the end of Act 2

Dan: Oh, definitely.

- > The menu revealed how expensive the food was, with appetizers around ten dollars.

Tsuneo: Which is awfully expensive. Or remarkably cheap. Without any context whatsoever, who knows?

- > I saw the owner of the restaurant, this old Nigerian dude, watching over the patrons.

Tsuneo: Doing his best to conceal his loathing

- > "So how's it like, combat?" asked Melissa.

Rebecca: Based on this fic? Really dull.

- > I stopped to think about my life, and how being in combat had changed it.

Rick: Well, he hurt his head and met a woman, so there you go.

- > "It is thrilling at times," I said. "I remember my first combat a few months ago.

Dan: It smelt faintly of cheese.

Rick: [Melissa] What? How does that –

Dan: Mmm, cheese.

- > I also remember getting hurt- that is how I met you, recovering from an injury.

Rebecca [Melissa]: Yes, I am vaguely aware of this, yes

- > I also know that some people don't come back.

Dan: Like his dad, when he went out to get some milk

- > Our battalion just lost our master sergeant

Tsuneo: He turned up at the Lost Children tent

- > back when we were deployed in Monument City."

Rebecca: And what a thrilling escapade that was

- > "I'm sorry," said Melissa. "I guess I should not bring it up."

Rick: He wants to make Cabon's death all about him.

- > "Well, your work is important even though you do not go out there. I mean, who is going to help us
- > get back on duty whenever we stub our toes?"

- > She smiled.

Rebecca [Melissa]: Oh you patronising arse.

> I suppose people could not help but talk about the war, since it was going on all over the world

Dan: Except here. Never actually here.

> and there had been engagements with enemy ground forces all over the world.

Tsuneo: The war was going on all over the world and it was going on all over the world.

> And people would naturally want to talk about the war with those who served in it,

Rick: Just like Lieutenant Carol of the 72nd Marsh Division

> wanting to understand

> just a bit of what we go through. And yet, we also need our escapes from the stress of war life and

> combat, otherwise people go crazy.

Dan: [Flat] Yes. The stress of war and the loss of my friends has greatly impacted me

> "I wonder if that was what caused the Zentraedi uprisings a few years ago," I said. "All the stress

> they endured from being in combat all the time."

Rick: Actually it was caused by a combination of indoctrination, cultural pressures, their sudden and complete defeat and overly-harsh human pushback and restrictive laws

Rebecca: I wonder if he's considered that.

Rick: Not even once.

> "PTSD," said Melissa. "Post traumatic stress disorder. A lot of combat veterans suffer it. I guess it

> wasn't such a huge problem for the Zentraedi before the end of the First Robotech War, as most of

> them usually did not live long enough.

Tsuneo: Explosion is a leading cause of Zentraedi deaths.

> A lot of the Zentraedi immigrants form close-knit

> communities; there is one in Savannah in Georgia, and another one in Brooklyn in New York."

Dan: I bet they all run over-priced coffee shops and serve 'traditional' Zentraedi pizza.

> "And tell me more about Georgia," I said.

> "Friendly people," she said. "It is the home of southern hospitality.

Rebecca: And flag-waving Confederate apologists

> My town has this café, which serves a great breakfast.

Rick: It only has a single cafe.

> I remember my days in the park with my mom, or hanging out with my girlfriends back home."

Tsuneo: You can just feel the resentment stewing inside of him

> "And why did you join the Air Force?" I asked.

Dan: She filled in the wrong forms. Thought she was applying for a dog licence

> "I wanted to work in physical therapy, but getting the education and training was so expensive, not

> to mention trying to find a job afterward. The Air Force paid for my training and gave me a post.

Rebecca: [Melissa] And here I am, sitting opposite that post.

> And I like my current post. Great weather, just a short flight to world tourist sites-

Tsuneo: It's nice that the war is convenient to her travel plans

> I went to a trip to Egypt with some girlfriends, saw the pyramids in Giza.

Rebecca: Do we need to form a list of the things that apparently survived the apocalypse?

Rick: Oh, I already have. [Pause] It's rather long.

> Plus I get free meals in the officers' mess."

Dan: That's less of a perk than you claim it is

> "You sound like a recruitment commercial," I said, sticking a fork in the pasta.

Rick: [Melissa] Of course, I occasionally have to tape some gimble's arm back on.

> A waitress came to

> our table and served our entrees; I had this fusion pasta with this creamy red sauce as well as

> mushrooms, chickens, and bell peppers.

Tsuneo: His meal is the most interesting part of this fic so far

> "And what they do not tell you is that you could be

> transferred anywhere- including Antarctica or even the other side of the galaxy."

Rick: And so she ended up transferred to Jakku.

> "It's in the small print when you sign to accept a commission," said Melissa.

Dan: Who'd have thought that joining the army would have come with so many conditions?

> "Yeah, always beware of the small print. I wonder what fine print the menu has."

> "Not liable for salmonella poisoning?"

> We both laughed.

Tsuneo: ...was that meant to be funny?

> Oooooo

> We finished up with a bottle of expensive wine.

Dan: I feel like his definition of 'expensive' is 'doesn't come in a cask'.

> It was not at the restaurant, though. It was a hotel

> room in Tangier, a very luxurious hotel room with soft carpets, a king-sized bed, a desk, and a Sony

> plasma television.

Rick: Television brand is named. All is good with the world.

> The wallpaper had this marine-motif design.

> "Nothing like a great bottle of wine," said Melissa.

Tsuneo: And this is nothing like a great bottle of wine.

> "And a great hotel room to drink it in," I said. "At least the combat pay I got from my deployment in Monument City covers it."

Rebecca: Every thing this guy says is a mood killer. It's truly impressive.

> We toasted and sipped the wine.

> The next morning, I woke up in the bed. I had a great sleep, and it was a much better bed than the bed in the BOQ,

Dan: You can tell that's the only thing he's thinking of right now

> like comparing a high-end restaurant to a McDonald's. Some light entered the room, filtered by the curtain over the window.

> "Good morning," I said to Melissa.

> "Good morning," she replied.

Tsuneo: [Melissa] Base called. You were needed at your post six hours ago. You're being court-martialled for dereliction of duty.

> I felt a brief moment of hesitation. There were feelings inside me, churning like a blender.

Rebecca: Nope, that's just the food poisoning.

> Memories of the previous night still surfaced.

Rick: Of him passing out drunk on the hotel floor and her quietly sobbing to herself

> "We should go steady," I said, kissing her.

Dan: Bumbles Clodhopper here is the definition of settling.

> "Of course," she said.

> And so we did.

Rebecca: This is like two chatbots trying to flirt

> Oooooooooo

> A few days later, I was having breakfast in the mess hall. I told them about getting together with Melissa.

Dan: Not a single one of them believed me.

> "Congratulations," said Jack. "And I mean it. Having a girlfriend is great, even though you have to spend some of your time with her."

Tsuneo: He says it like it's a chore

Rebecca: I really worry about these people

> "That's the upside," I said, putting a spoon in my wheat bran.

Tsuneo: The wheat bran has more flavour than him.

> "Don't forget what you learned at that VD workshop," said Mike.

Dan: And so every time he went out with Melissa, he remembered to put a condom on a banana

> I grimaced. I could still remember that mandatory workshop on VD, and the images.

> ooooooooo

> I briefly glanced at a picture of an open marketplace in Istanbul in Turkey.

Dan: Can we assume it was some sort of post-apocalyptic bazar with people hawking old-world junk like they're sacred relics?

Rebecca: Sure, why not? It's more than this fic's giving us

> Melissa and I were in the picture.

Tsuneo: For some reason, Melissa was hiding her face.

> The marketplace was packed with so many people and we bought some souvenirs.

Dan: And then he got beaten up by some thugs and forced to compete in Gymkata.

> During

> our weekend trip there, we visited some historic sites and crossed the bridge over the Bosphorus on

> foot, thus walking from one continent to another. It was hard to believe that it was two months since

> we had decided to go steady.

Rick: The alien invasion had put itself on hold in the meantime

> We visited places around the Mediterranean, as well as local places in

> Tangier. I put the picture away and got back to my paperwork.

Tsuneo: But enough about his developing relationship. Here's more day to day minutiae to dwell on

> "We have some announcements," said Jack. "The battalion has announced it will be demobilized for

> December 23-27."

Tsuneo: So you've only got a week to prepare. Or maybe six months. Context would be nice.

> "So they are giving us a vacation, sir?" I asked, standing at attention with the others.

Rick: No, you're all going to the stockade for aggravated uselessness.

> "Yes, Lieutenant, a paid vacation. A reserve battalion will fill in for us."

Rebecca: The details of their leave arrangements has been given more focus than his romance. Make of this what you will

> I recalled that the UEF can order servicemen and even entire units to take leave.

Dan: It happens if they get too much holiday leave banked up. You have to take mandatory breaks from the space robot war.

> "Well, at least until the enemy ramps up the offensive."

Tsuneo: His idea of a Christmas special is firing shells at unseen enemies with a bauble hanging from his cockpit.

> The war has been pretty low intensity, with skirmishes between enemy forces and the UEF, with no
> large scale battles.

Rebecca: Please ignore the constant worldwide battles mentioned earlier this chapter.

> This did not mean we had nothing to do, aside from paperwork,

Tsuneo: You read this fic and you'd think that was all they were doing.

> we also had to

> train for the battles that surely would lie ahead, absent the enemy completely withdrawing.

> "The base will also be holding a Christmas party on the 21st, just before we go on leave," said Jack.

> "Formal attire is required."

Rebecca: Attendance is compulsory. Fun is mandatory.

> "In the meantime, we still have a troop to drill," said Mike.

Dan: He has to attend the Christmas party and drill his men at the same time! What whacky antics will ensure?

> "And I have a meeting with the battalion XO," said Jack, standing up and taking a manila folder.

Rick: Brick Hactar needs to know what colour the folder is

> Oooooooooo

> It was the day for the Christmas party, and I was buttoning my white shirt.

Dan: Shirt is like pants but you wear on top half.

> It had been a long time since I had to wear the Army's formal dress uniform.

Dan: Mostly they're a business casual army

> I then tied the necktie.

Rebecca: He managed not to strangle himself with it unlike last time.

> "Do you need help with that?" asked Mike.

> "Not really," I said. "You could hand me the coat."

> "Sure thing."

> I put on the dark blue coat, buttoning the buttons.

Dan: Buttons go on back, right?

> I looked at myself.

Rebecca: Nobody else should have to.

> The formal dress uniform had

> blue pants with a yellow stripe running down the pant legs, a blue coat, and a collared white shirt

> and a necktie.

Rebecca: That's nice, but what does he actually look like?

Rick: I just assume he looks like a default spawned Settler

> My rank insignia was on the shoulders. A braid was looped around my left shoulder.

> My service ribbons were pinned to the left side of the coat.

Tsuneo: Yes, I'd definitely say this fits with the general 80's futurism aesthetic of Southern Cross

uniforms and is not conjured from the authour's military wet dreams at all.

> The last time I wore this uniform was at the end of basic training,

Dan: For the ceremonial swirlies.

> when we all had to wear the uniforms and march in formation for a formal march.

Tsuneo: They had to march in a march

Dan: When was that?

Tsuneo: March

> I went out to the common area of the men's BOQ. Many of the men were dressed up for the
> occasion.

Rick: Some even had pants.

> A few of the men were in casual clothes, sitting down on the couches and watching television.

> "You guys look great," said one of the officers who was staying in quarters, a dude whose name
> was Simon.

> "Why aren't you going?" I asked.

Rick: [Simon] Are you going?

Dan: Yes.

Rick: [Simon] That's why.

> "It's just not my thing," he said.

Rebecca: Simon is now the most engaging character in this fic

> I saw Jack decked out in the Army dress blues; I noticed he had many more ribbons and medals
> than I did.

Dan: He had unlocked more achievements

> "Gentlemen, shall we?" asked Jack.

> Ooooooooo

> The party was held in a multipurpose room in the base's community center.

Rebecca: This place feels less like a military base than it does a summer camp.

> It was decorated with all

> sorts of Christmas decorations such as wreaths and Christmas lights. A Christmas tree stood in the
> corner.

Rick: Normally I'd assume that was a part of the Christmas decor, but thanks for making sure fic.

> Many people were there, clad in their dress blues. Other people who were civilians were
> clad in fine outfits.

Tsuneo: And you know that somebody's drunk friend is there wearing the loudest shirt he has

Rebecca: Happens every time

> Christmas music played from the speakers.

> I escorted Melissa inside, holding her hand.

Rebecca: Not for the first time, Melissa is wondering just where her life went wrong.

> "Let's go get some punch," she said, clad in her dress uniform.

> And so we did.

Dan: Wow! What a staggering twist

> Punch was served at this table with a white table cloth.

Dan: Not only did they get punch, but they got it at the punch table!

> I looked and saw alcoholic beverages being served at an open bar.

Dan: And there are drinks, too! At the bar! Who could have imagined?

Rick: You alright there?

Dan: Oh when will this mad whirlwind existence ever cease?

> "Good evening, sir," I said, seeing Colonel Kravshera standing at the table. I noticed he had a lot of
> ribbons and medals, including those for his service with the Zentraedi back when they were Earth's
> enemies.

Rick [Kravshera]: I won this one for exterminating the Pawleens, this one for annihilating Mopek IV
and this one for bombarding your Micronian cities

Dan: That's... nice, sir

> "Good evening, Lieutenant," he said.

> I noticed a dark-haired, ruddy-skinned lady in her thirties standing next to him.

Rebecca: Noticed her, like it was an effort.

> She was wearing this red dress going down to her knees.

> "And you are?" I asked.

> "Leslie," she said. "Lupon is my husband."

Rebecca: He crashed in a flaming burning wreck on her lawn. It was love at first sight.

> I introduced myself. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Kravshera," I said, shaking her hand. "And
> this is my date, Melissa Sharp."

Dan: Her character in a nutshell

> "Nice to meet you, madam," said Melissa. "Where are you from?"

> "From a land called Arizona," said Mrs. Kravshera.

Rick: What is this mystical, faraway place?

> "What's it like there?" inquired Melissa.

> "A lot of mountains getting snow in the winter, plenty of forests and canyons and deserts.

Rick: Although guinea pigs are extinct and the price of chocolate is prohibitive

Dan: Deep cut

> I grew up

> in this little village in the northeastern part of Arizona. Many of us move to Flagstaff. There's a U.N.
> Army base near there. Lupon was stationed there ten years ago."

Rebecca: By calling everyone micronians and wearing his Zentradi service medals, Lupon might be the least racist person from Arizona.

> "Great story, madam," I said,

Rick: Really?

Dan: No

> drinking the punch. I looked at Melissa. "Shall we dance?"

> "Okay," she said, taking my hand.

Rebecca: Just completely brush her off there.

> And so we did, dancing to some holiday rock tune

Rebecca: Weird AI's Christmas at Ground Zero would be strangely apt

> on the wooden dance floor. I enjoyed being close to her.

Rick: I like the way you dance now so pretty!

> And I definitely would love to be even closer to her than we could dancing on this dance floor.

Dan: But didn't they just, you know? In the hotel room and all?

Tsuneo: Apparently not

> After a few songs, we stopped.

> "I've got to take a rest," said Melissa. "And a drink."

Tsuneo: His raw animal magnetism is overpowering.

> And so we went to the open bar. I saw Jack together with Nina Washington.

> "Hello," Melissa said to Jack. "Jack, isn't it?"

> "That's right, Melissa," said Jack. "This is my girlfriend Nina."

> "Hi there," said Nina, shaking my girlfriend's hand.

Rebecca: It's not so much that this fic flunks the Bedschel test that it never has the chance to take it

Tsuneo: Just so you know, Delta Invasion passed it

Rebecca: That is a very damning statement

> I ordered some cocktails. "A toast," I said.

Tsuneo: What to?

Dan: Getting blackout drunk and forgetting this ever happened?

Rebecca: I can see why the characters would want that.

Dan: ...the characters?

> "Cheers," we all said.

> "Sir," I heard.

> I looked and saw Glenn La Belle, decked out in his dress uniform.

Dan: The members of his squad had arranged themselves in a queue to talk to him one at a time

> "Good evening, Private La Belle," I said. "Enjoying the night."

> "Yes, sir," he said. "This is my wife Courtney."

> I looked and saw a lady with a blue dress.

Rebecca: He had failed to notice her before that point

> Her light-brown hair was tied in a ponytail.

> "Good evening, Mrs. La Belle," I said, introducing myself.

> "I'm still trying to get used to being called Mrs. La Belle," she said. "I've only been married for about
> a month or so."

Rebecca: She keeps forgetting that she's married. And with that catch of a husband, who can blame her?

> "And how has that been?" I asked.

> "It seems like such a long time."

> "Especially since the war wound down," said Private La Belle, placing his arm around the waist of
> his new wife. "We now live in a studio apartment."

Dan: They are such hipsters

> It's not much, but it is mostly better than living with a bunch of immature singles."

Rick: Kraft singles, he means. He has an allergy to cheese

> "Now he only has to live with them when you deploy," said Mrs. La Belle.

Rebecca: Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to find another man who'll introduce me to their partner.

> "Who knows," said Melissa. "Maybe the enemy will withdraw. Maybe the Spacy will destroy all the
> enemy ships."

Tsuneo [LaBelle]: Maybe I'll be bitten by an alligator. Who can tell?

> I briefly thought of the expeditionary forces. Did they find the enemy's supply base?

Rick: Yes, the massive expedition across the gulf of space to find... a supply base.

> Or will the enemy crush Earth's defense fleet, giving them the ability to bomb us from orbit at will?

Dan: And did I remember to take out the garbage this week?

> Melissa and I sat down with Jack, Nina, and the other officers in our battalion and their guests.

Rebecca: You know, those unregarded things hanging off their arms

> No

> meal was served, only appetizers like stuffed mushrooms and mozzarella cheese sticks and nachos
> buffet style from a buffet table set up.

Rebecca: They spared no expense with the catering

> "Got to enjoy these appetizers," said Lieutenant Isamu Shirogane.

Tsuneo: You categorically do not.

> "You won't find good food like this in the officers' mess."

> "We had a local catering company," said another lieutenant, a dark-haired woman. "If we had the
> Army prepare the food, we might as well have this party in the mess."

> We all laughed.

Tsuneo: Ha ha?

> "With all due respect, sirs and madams," said Executive Sergeant Avital, standing near us, "the
> Army cooks are not exactly gourmet chefs,

Rebecca: [Avital] Some of them can even hold a ladle properly.

> but they keep us from going hungry when we are out in the field.

Tsuneo: No, that's the freeze-dried ration bars.

> And I heard rumors that the whole battalion will be spending a week in the field soon. So,
> sirs and madams, I strongly advise you enjoy the appetizers. You will soon be grateful for getting to
> eat a hot meal."

Rebecca: You'll eat your mediocre appetizers and you will like them.

> We all remembered our deployment to that campsite near Monument City just a few months ago,
> and the primitive conditions that we endured.

Dan: They had to hunt and kill their own food then cook it over an open fire

> "Okay, the colonel has an announcement to make," said an executive sergeant in our battalion.

> We all looked at Colonel Kravshera.

> "It is my honor to formally announce that the O-5 selection board's decision has been ratified," said
> the colonel. "Lim Yoon is now a lieutenant colonel."

Rick: Hooray for Lim Yoon!

Rebecca: We've never seen or heard of him before, but hooray!

> We all applauded, both those of us in the battalion and those who were in other units and the
> civilians.

Rick: This is an 'NCT Software has been sold to Oracle corporation' level of excitement

Dan: The parallels are staggering

> The newly minted lieutenant colonel spoke up next. "Because of my promotion, I have outgrown my
> post,"

Rebecca: He needs to be re-potted

> said Colonel Yoon. "I am being transferred to my new post at the United Nations Army
> garrison in Glorie Colony."

Rick: Where they definitely don't have a problem with alien invaders coming after enigmatic artefacts
hidden under giant dirt mounds

> We all applauded.

Dan: Yay for random statements!

Rick: I have no idea what that means!

> Mike walked up to Yoon. "Congratulations on your promotion and assignment, Lieutenant Colonel,"
> he said. "Glorie Colony is a great place. We are like pioneers there, sir."

Tsuneo: In as far as they die of dysentery

> "You are from Glorie Colony, correct?"

Dan: Actually no, I just like talking it up because I have an investment property there.

> "Yes, sir."

> We all put on our covers and those of us junior to Colonel Yoon saluted him,

Rick: [Kravshera] He can bite my blue arse.

> and he returned our salute.

> "This is a party," said Colonel Yoon. "At ease."

Dan: He says after they're all done saluting

> I then took Melissa out for another dance.

> Ooooooooooooo

> "It was so much fun," said Melissa,

Dan: Really?

Rebecca: No

> as I walked her back to the women's BOQ. The streets were
> empty; the only light came from the lampposts, as clouds obscured the sky. The outline of the
> building where Melissa's quarters were was revealed, a building that looked pretty much like the
> buildings in the men's BOQ.

Rebecca: The idea that two buildings on a military base that serve the same function look the same is truly beyond his imagining.

> "What else could it be?" I asked.

Tsuneo: A tedious stretch of dry exchanges that adds nothing to the ongoing story?

Rick: That doesn't narrow it down

Tsuneo: This is also true

> My Nokia cell phone rang. I answered it.

Dan: After carefully pausing to make sure the shot lingers on the brand

> "It's Jack," said the voice. "We have to scramble. Gibraltar Air Base is under attack and they have
> requested reinforcements."

Tsuneo: Huh. You'd think the sirens ringing out across the base would have warned him.

> "I have to go," I said, kissing Melissa.

Rebecca [Melissa]: That's fine, I'll be here... existing... as an entity in time and space, I guess

> Ooooooooo

> I sat in my VHT-1 Spartas hoversuit, driving it over the Strait of Gibraltar.

Tsuneo: Without an overly long description of all the procedures involved? Its like I don't even know who you are, fic.

> I was still wearing the dress shirt and dress pants underneath my arming doublet;

Dan: The war has a formal dress code

> I did not have time to change to my MARPAT camouflage that I would normally wear under the
> doublet.

Rebecca: The alien invaders had no consideration for decorum.

> Nina was traveling with Jack.

Rick: He bought his plus one to the war

> "No doubt about it," I said. "I could see the action from here."

Tsuneo: More likely the lack of action.

> "Maybe the enemy will be gone by the time we get there," said Jack.

Dan: He doesn't want to make any effort fighting the enemy

> I doubted it. We soon reached the Spanish coastline and slowed down,

Rebecca: So if they can drive their hoversuits at high speed over the Straits of Gibraltar, why did we need all the tedious loading up trucks scenes earlier?

Tsuneo: That's a good question, one to which I cannot be bothered thinking of an answer

Rebecca: Entirely fair

> navigating along the roads.

> The Spanish authorities had cleared the highways for military traffic, both local and UEF.

Rick: Although giant robots still need to use the designated giant robot lane

> "There's the base," said Mike. I could clearly see the smoke.

> "Okay," said Jack. "Ducasse, check out the hangars. Avital, you are at my side."

> "Enemy bioroids," said Staff Sergeant Wing.

> "Everyone attack."

Dan [Forced]: Oh no. There is the enemy.

Rick [Forced]: We should fight them

Dan [Forced]: Yes

> We could see the enemy bioroids.

Rebecca: The Bioroids were indeed Bioroids

> I opened fire and then we took cover.

> "Everyone to the hangars."

Dan: We'll just assume something happened and move on

> And so we all followed Jack through the streets of the air base.

Rebecca: Jack insisted he knew where he was going and that he didn't need a map

> We soon reached the buildings where the fighter craft were located.

Rick: The aircraft had just tweeted a selfie

> There were wrecked aircraft on some of the taxiways.

> "You, Wing, and La Belle go to the BOQ and try to see if anyone needs help,"

Tsuneo: Help them, but don't put too much effort into it

> Jack said to me. "Nina's going to suit up and get her fighter airborne."

Dan: Nice of him to give her a ride home to the warzone.

> "Yes, sir," I said. I turned the hovertank and drove on the streets, keeping an eye of for the enemy
> forces.

Rick: He stopped at the lights and signalled right.

> "Is anyone there?" I asked over the radio.

> "Here's the BOQ," said Nina. "I'm lighting it."

Rick: But what about the Quonset hut?

Tsuneo: I will kill you in your sleep.

> I could see the buildings illuminated by Nina's aircraft. I headed over there.

> "Cover me," I said to La Belle and Wing.

Tsuneo: Remind me, have we met Wing before?

Rick: I'm assuming he's just there to die pointlessly.

> I got out. "Is anyone there?" I asked.

> I saw Lieutenant Shelby Porter run out of the building, her blond hair unkempt.

Dan: By having blonde hair, she's better described than most of the cast

Rebecca: Mrs Kravshera is better described then most of the cast and I've already forgotten her name

> "We're all pinned down here," she said. "The enemy is all over."

Tsuneo: As you can obviously tell from the fantastically well-realised situation

Rebecca: Which is less described than Kravshera's wife

Tsuneo: Whatever her name is

> "Get inside," I said. Shelby climbed into the cockpit of the Spartas. "Listen," I said. "We need to
> clear a path so the pilots can get to their planes."

> "We copy," said Shirogane. "I'll lead a team to guard the path."

Tsuneo: Guard the path from the highly air-mobile enemy. Got it.

> "All right," I said. "Wing, La Belle, cover me as I get to the hangar."

Rick: So they started a cover band, but nothing really came of it

> "Yes, sir," they said.

> I sped through the darkness, towards the hangar.

> "Where is it?" I asked, being unfamiliar with the layout of the air base.

Rick: The army didn't have the budget for a navigation system, so he's been using his phone for directions

> "Make a right turn here," said Shelby.

> So I did. We soon reached the hangar.

> Shelby leaped out of the hovertank and went inside one of the rooms. I switched to battloid mode in
> the meantime.

Dan: Did you see that?

Rebecca: [Shelby] Busy!

Dan: I turned into battloid mode.

Rebecca: [Shelby] I'm busy here!

Dan: [Muttered] I thought it was cool.

> I looked and saw Shelby in her flight suit, climbing into the cockpit of the VF-11 Thunderbolt.

Tsuneo: Once again wondering what it was doing there

> "We'll cover you," I said through the loudspeaker.

Tsuneo: [Shelby] Really? I thought you were going to dance the Macarena.

Dan: I mean, I could if you –

Tsuneo: [Shelby] Keep shooting, you malodorous pile of goat leavings!

> She taxied the plane to the hangar door and blasted off. I could see a few bioroids flying about in
> their sky sleds; I opened fire on them, shooting one of them down

Dan: I'd be so upset to be killed by this guy

Rick: At this point, I think 'this guy' is his name

Dan: Why not? It's his entire character

> as Shelby's fighter moved up into the air.

> "Okay," I heard Colonel Kravshera say. "Make sure to cover for the fighters' takeoff."

Rebecca: Wasn't he just doing that?

> And we did, shooting at the enemy on the ground and in the sky even as more pilots took off.

> "All right," said Jack. "what is the game plan now?"

Dan: Trips Right Yo-Yo 60 Y-Stick.

> "I dare not broadcast it," said Kravshera.

Rick: Mostly because it's really dumb

> "All troop captains rendezvous with me."

Rebecca: [Jack] We're still under fire sir! I'm covering the hangars and –

Rick: [Kravshera] Goddammit, just do it!

Rebecca: [Jack]: Whoah, okay.

> Jack drove his hoversuit to Kravshera's position, and the rest of us in our troop covered him. We

> stayed on the lookout for enemy activity.

> "We got more of them coming from the northeast," said Private La Belle.

> We saw them and opened up a salvo, with the VF-4 Lightnings finishing them off.

Rick: While making sure never to transform for legal reasons

> Soon enough, Jack came back. He instructed me, Mike, and Sergeant Avital to speak with him in

> person,

Tsuneo: Aren't they still under fire?

Rick: I don't know. Honestly, peace could have broken out and all is kittens and rainbows with this narration.

> as he did not want to broadcast our plan over the radio.

Dan: So instead he communicated it entirely with baseball hand signs

> "The UNOP has a cruiser in the Med," said Jack, referring to the United Nations Ocean Patrol.

Rick: They used to call it the World Oceanic Patrol, but people objected

> "Once we give them a target, they will fire a cruise missile salvo. So we need to lure the enemy into

> the middle of this airfield.

Dan: One of you will have to dress up as a sexy lady Bioroid

> Let's get going."

> And so we did.

Dan: 'And so we did' is official military policy by now.

Tsuneo: Next time we see Southern Cross command, I expect it will have 'And so we did' on a banner over the front.

> I led Wing and La Belle with me, looking for enemy bioroids.

Rebecca: The giant alien war robots easily blend in to their surroundings

> "I see them," said Wing.

> We opened fire, predictably drawing their fire.

Dan: In short, fire

> "Everyone fall back," I said. We slowly retreated while returning fire, taking down a few bioroids. It

> was a slow process,

Tsuneo: The term 'excruciating' comes to mind

> withdrawing to cover, while firing on the enemy. Soon we retreated back to the airfield.

Rick: They regrouped for coffee

> We then raced across the airfield in hovertank mode, with the others laying down cover fire. We
> took cover behind another building.

Dan: Good thing that St. Puppy's hospital for adorable cancer orphans was right there

> I could see the bioroids emerging out of the airfield, firing behind
> them. I figured some of our squads were forcing them to retreat into the airfield.

Rebecca: This is easily the most complex and involved battle scene in the fic so far.

Tsuneo: And yet, I feel empty inside.

> "Keep clear of the target area!" shouted Kravshera.

> The entire airfield was illuminated.

> And then I saw these streaks of smoke.

Dan: Whoops, red smoke. Someone used their artillery consumable.

> A split second later, there was a blast so powerful I could feel it.

Tsuneo: And he hasn't felt anything in years.

Rebecca: Melissa certainly hasn't.

> The smoke obscured our vision for over a minute.

> As the smoke faded, I could see the wreckage of enemy bioroids.

Rebecca: Another thrilling victory for our designated protagonists

Tsuneo: Whee.

> "Score one for the Ocean Patrol," said Sergeant Avital.

> "All right," said Kravshera. "Let's clean up."

> And so we did.

Rick: If this fic ends with Leonard on the deck of an aircraft carrier with a big 'And so we did' banner behind him, it will have all been worth it.

> The enemy did not put much resistance.

Dan: Something to do with being dead.

> The remainder of them escaped in enemy

> transports as they flew towards the sky, with fighter jets chasing them.

Rick: Like yapping dogs. That flew. And had guns. Okay, I need to work on that.

> And yet, I did not feel too victorious. What have we actually won?

Tsuneo: Um, you saved the lives of your fellow soldiers.

Rebecca: Don't interrupt him when he's being randomly emo.

> For all we know, this could have been a diversion. And the enemy is still in orbit.

Rick: What did the enemy actually achieve?

Rebecca: They wasted half a chapter
Rick: Effort well spent

> "We lost Lieutenant Shirogane," I heard a female voice say.

Dan: Oh no! Not... whoever that was.

> Oooooooooo

> The next morning, all of the officers in the battalion had breakfast in the officers' mess. The usual
> was served- scrambled eggs, bacon, oatmeal, ham, fruit.

Dan: Sounds pretty good, actually. I could go some of that

> "Let's have a toast to First Lieutenant Isamu Shirogane,"

Rick: He lived a warrior ans died to an hero

> said Lieutenant Sue Lau, who was in
> Shirogane's troop. She held up a plastic cup full of orange juice.

Tsuneo: A worthy tribute.

> "To Lieutenant Shirogane," we all said.

> I did not know Shirogane well;

Tsuneo: Us either

> he was competitive. I remembered the times when our troop and his
> troop played war games in the simulators,

Dan: He quoted the whole movie to get one of Anorak's eggs.

> using various scenarios from capture the flag to escort missions.

Rebecca: The only thing better than informed character traits are post-mortem informed character traits

> And now he was gone.

Tsuneo: I vowed to never ever think about him again. And so I did.

> I wondered how his family would celebrate the holidays.

Tsuneo: Turns out they don't celebrate Christmas at all. There you go.

> Oooooooooo

> It was evening, and I stood outside the men's BOQ along with many other men. We were all granted
> leave,

Dan: Despite the sudden and unexpected alien attack, that is

Rick: I mean, what are the odds of it happening again?

> and we all booked flights through the base's travel agency.

Rebecca: Do you reckon the military base's travel agent is an enlisted officer or NCO?

Tsuneo: You're bored, aren't you?

Rebecca: You can tell?

> "So what will you do?" I asked Jack.

> "Go back to Monument City," he said, carrying his duffel bag. "It's going to be very cold there.

Rick: Ignoring the blasted wasteland landscapes around the city

> You should be lucky you're going to Jamaica."

Tsuneo: Oh yes, I forgot he was Jamaican. Probably because he stopped mentioning it every other line.

> "Don't forget your skis," I said.

Tsuneo [Jack]: Was that meant to be a joke?

Dan: I... don't know?

> Soon the shuttle van arrived; it was this huge van whose dark red

> color was revealed by the lampposts.

Rebecca: I'm sure this last point will be vital going forwards. Unlike, say, everything else in the fic

> "Goodbye," said Melissa. "And have a merry Christmas." She kissed me, placing her hand on the
> back of my head.

> "I sure will," I said before hopping into the van.

Dan: [Melissa] Oh, and I'll have a happy Christmas too, I guess.

> The van left the base and went along the highway to Tangier.

Rebecca: Not going to spend Christmas together or anything?

Tsuneo: He's taking this relationship slow. Glacially such.

> It was dark, so we could not see anything aside from the lights of the cars, lampposts, and
> buildings.

Tsuneo: It was dark, so he listed things one could expect to see alongside the road for no adequately explored reason.

> The Atlantic Ocean was reduced to a dark expanse. We soon reached the Ibn Battouta

> Airport, the airport that serves Tangier.

> "See you later, guys," I said, heading for the British Airways terminal.

Dan: British Airways survived the apocalypse too, I guess

Rick: Yeah, but now the take-off delays are even worse

> The terminal was busy, as I

> would expect for this time of year. Fortunately, my boarding pass was printed already.

Rick: Thank god for that!

Dan: Had me on the edge of my seat

> I went through

> security to the crowded boarding area where over a hundred people waited for their flight. I sat in
> the terminal,

Rick: And now for an excruciatingly detailed description of his airport novel.

Rebecca: Ironically, he's reading a bland military thriller.

> while others read newspapers or drank beverages they bought from fast food outlets
> and restaurants located in the terminal.

Tsuneo: All grossly over-priced

Rebecca: And I bet the wife's horrible too

> Announcements in various languages blared out from speakers.

> About an hour later,

Tsuneo: It's... It's amazing. Every time I think this fic has reached its greatest possible accomplishment in boredom it manages to top itself.

Rick: And remember, there's twenty-one chapters to go.

> the gate was opened and I walked through a jetway into the British Airways
> passenger jet. I would have to take a flight to British Airways' hub in London before taking a
> connecting flight to Kingston. About forty minutes later, I felt the plane take off.

Tsuneo: Thrill as our hero describes his travel plans!

> ----

> Chapter 8: Homecoming

> "All passengers, this is the captain speaking," I heard.

Rick: [Captain] We've got a warning light on up here, and darn if it isn't the big one.

> "We will be landing in Kingston in about one hour."

> I fully woke up, and saw rows of seats, all full. I was on an airplane that was flying from London to
> Kingston.

Dan: Anything to add, Leena Frost-Wagner?

> I had a two-hour stopover at the airport terminal in London, where I had myself an
> appetizer and some drinks at this bar before my flight to Kingston.

Rick: Only cost him a week's pay

> I had to admit that the flight was
> more comfortable than flying in a C-130 Hercules from Gibraltar Air Base to Monument City Air
> Base.

Tsuneo: Clearly he wasn't flying coach

> Sure enough, an hour later

Tsuneo: All the excitement of a stopover at Heathrow airport in fanfic form!

> I felt the landing gears touch down on the concrete surface of the
> runway at Norman Manley International Airport. A few minutes later the plane stopped.

Rebecca: Everybody immediately switched their phones on like their lives depended on it

> "Welcome to Kingston," said a voice over the speaker. "And thank you for flying British Airways."

Dan: Now get off the plane, you filthy peasants.

> All of us headed for the exit. It took quite a while for me to reach the door. I walked along the jetway

> to the boarding area.

Tsuneo: Thrill as or hero gets off a plane

Rick; I think 'hero' is too strong a word. How about 'designated protagonist'?

Tsuneo: Maybe you're giving him a bit much there

Rick: True. 'Focal character'?

Tsuneo: Except this fic doesn't really focus on anything

Rick: How about 'first guy in the queue'?

> The boarding area looked as much as it did the few times I had been here before, with seats for
> waiting passengers.

Dan: I'm really not sure what he expected otherwise

> One difference I noted was the presence of Christmas decorations.

Rick: As there often is at Christmas time

> The seats

> were mostly empty, as the next flight was still for quite some time. As expected for this time of year,
> the boarding area was crowded.

Rebecca: It was mostly empty, except that it was crowded

> In the distance I could see a Burger King and some duty-free

> shops. A tiled pathway led down the corridor connecting the boarding gates to the main concourse.

Tsuneo: Has such wonder and excitement ever been captured so well in a single scene?

> Many of the people had bags full of gifts for friends and family. A few wall-mounted televisions
> showed images;

Rebecca: As televisions are want to do.

> one of them showed an image of United Earth Forces Supreme Commander

> Anatole Leonard giving a press conference, probably about the war.

Rick [Leonard]: The Bioroids are eating people's pets.

> I turned on my cell phone and made a call.

> "Hello," said my big brother Paul.

Rick: With his girlfriend, MJ Watson

> I told him it was me. "Could you pick me up at the airport in Kingston in about an hour?"

Rebecca: You'd think that he would have planned this ahead of time

Tsuneo: That implies he's capable of thought in the first place.

Rebecca: This is also true.

> I looked at

> the massive crowds. They were not as massive as the crowds I saw in London's Gatwick Airport,
> but I still felt as if I was being squeezed from all directions.

Rick: They were massive, but they were not that massive

> "It's going to take a while for me to get through customs."

Rebecca: Maybe he shouldn't line up in the mandatory cavity search queue.

> I looked and saw a sign for Jamaican customs; already, there was a long line for people waiting to be cleared. I could smell the sweat.

Tsuneo: Real time Jamaican customs action!

> A female voice called out my name.

> I turned and saw a black lady in a blue blouse and skirt, with her tightly-curled black hair tied in a ponytail. She wore pumps on her feet.

> "Ellie," I said.

> "It's so great to see you." She walked over and gave me a hug. "And you're in the Army?"

> "Yeah," I said. I was dressed in my Class "A" service uniform.

Tsuneo: It's the subtle things that give it away

> "How was it?" she asked.

Rick: Moderately dull

> "Very demanding," I said. "I'm glad I'm able to come home for some rest. And you?"

> "Just bust with my career and all. I got back from a trip to Rio. Did you fight in the war?"

Tsuneo: I mean, technically, but...

> "Yes, I did," I said.

Dan: Also, who are you and what is our relationship?

> The line moved slowly as the customs agents in their blue collared shirts checked ID's and conducted inspections. It was longer than lines for rides at Six Flags over Montego.

Dan: He'd taken time to measure these things

> After over an hour, I finally managed to reach the customs desk,

Rebecca: After an hour, the fic reached the customs desk

> a wooden desk

Rick: The desk was a desk? Slow down with these crazy revelations, fic!

> with two uniformed customs agents. I showed my passport and declared some items.

Rick: Like his scimitar-horned Oryx and his life-sized replica of the Sphinx.

> "You are clear," said the customs agent, a bald black guy in his mid-twenties. "Have a merry Christmas."

Tsuneo: Twenty-eight chapters, folks. Twenty-eight!

> "Listen," Ellie said to me. "All of us are meeting at the cantina tonight. For a pre-Christmas celebration."

> "Okay," I said. "I'll be there."

Dan: Clearly there's only one cantina in all of Jamaica

> I left the customs area and went onto the main concourse,

Tsuneo: Ellie vanished in a puff of logic.

> which was predictably a sea of people. I made sure to call my brother.

Dan: You know how I told you it would take an hour to get through customs?

Rick: [Paul] Yes?

Dan: It took me an hour to get through customs.

[Pause]

Rick: [Paul] You're really a Spaceball. You know that, don't you?

> I went outside to the passenger loading area. Cars, buses, and vans slugged along the road, while
> other vehicles picked up or dropped off passengers.

Rick: Other vehicles that included velocipedes, steam cars and trolley busses

> I could smell exhaust fumes from the vehicles.

> Most vehicles still used petrol, as it was cheaper than protoculture.

Rebecca: Elon Musk came out with a Protoculture powered car. It skipped a few steps and drove itself into space

> I looked around. It was great being back in Jamaica.

Tsuneo: He really enjoyed the customs queues and the randomly placed Burger King.

> I saw Paul come out from a blue Volvo that pulled to the curb.

Rick: He succeeded his driving skill roll.

Dan: That two percent will get him every time.

> "Bro," he said. "Great too see you."

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

> "How's the Army life treating you, bro?"

Tsuneo: Well, I had to sleep in a Quonset hut...

> "Okay food, okay quarters, at least when we're on base. In camp everything's primitive."

Tsuneo: They've only just mastered stone tools and paint pictures of horses on the cave wall

> "Okay, Mom and Dad are home with Trina and Larry."

Rick: Oh, Trina and Larry! We can only assume everything about you.

> I threw my duffel bag in the back seat and got into the front seat of the car. Reggae music played on
> the car's stereo.

Rebecca: This is all the research that the author did about Jamaica.

> After a minute, Paul found a gap in the traffic and pulled into the lane.

Tsuneo: Thrill as our hero is driven in moderate traffic!

Dan: Will they make the right lane for their turnoff, or will they have to take the next one and double back?

Rebecca: The excitement of a commute from the airport explodes across the silver screen!

> As we inched along the heavy traffic leaving Norman Manley, I began thinking about my encounter
> with Ellie.

Rick: About how he lost the initiative and she attacked him for 2d4 damage

> I could remember how we met years ago, and how we got along. I got to know her well.
> And we got along together perfectly, like mixing alcohol and water.

Rebecca: Informed characterisation is the best characterisation

> And I remembered loving her.

Dan: She gave him a tingling feeling in his nose. He assumed that was love.

> And I remembered what she said when, one afternoon, I asked when we can start dating.

Rick: Honey, do you want to join the Columbia Record club?

> "It would ruin our friendship."

Tsuneo: The truth was she just didn't like him. And who can blame her?

> I was hurt. We got along together so well, and she sent all the signals indicating that she liked me.
> How could she have not wanted to act on those feelings?

Dan: Maybe she wanted a man who possessed a personality and emotions

> It did not make sense. I had thought that we would be together.

Rick: He demanded it. How dare she have her own feelings?

> I could not imagine her rejecting me, after the way she behaved towards me
> compared to how other girls behaved towards me.

Rebecca: And here we go with another screed. It's like he wants us to hate him

> I looked out and we had left the airport. Traffic was still heavy on the road connecting the airport
> with the A4. I could see the wide expanse of the Caribbean Sea to my right. To my left, I saw
> Kingston Harbour with its many boats and ships, and the skyline of downtown Kingston in the
> distance. I once again thought about Ellie.

Rebecca: He saw buildings in the distance and thought about Ellie.

> And then I was thinking about Melissa Sharp. Am I not going with Melissa now?

Dan: Smash cut to Melissa desperately applying for a transfer to the other side of the universe.

> And did I not get father with her than I did with Ellie? What was I worrying about?

Tsuneo: The fact that she's way too good for you?

Rebecca: A store dummy would be way too good for him

Tsuneo: This is also true

> And yet if someone who actually liked me could reject me, could Melissa simply drop me for any
> inexplicable reason or no reason at all?

Rick: Only one thing to do. Set impossibly high standards and then go on an angry rant on Reddit about it

> I looked around at the scenery. I hated overthinking things.

Dan: He just hates thinking full stop

> I could see familiar landmarks, from buildings to lampposts.

Rebecca: Kingston's most famous landmarks, the building and the lamppost

> We reached the exit from the highway,

Dan: Sadly, it was not the highway to the danger zone

Rick: Some homoerotic beach volleyball would really liven up this fic

> a few miles from Kingston, that we used to get to Mom and Dad's house.

Tsuneo: The sign indicated the turnoff to mom and dad's house

> I could see the neighborhood; there were stores along the sidewalks,

Dan: No, really?

> with people doing some Christmas shopping.

Rick: Hold on, guys. I've got to take a break from the relentless action.

> We turned onto a quiet residential street with houses in neat rows and various

> cars parked on the street. Paul stopped the car by our parents' house.

> "I'll find a place to park," he said, noting that street parking was scarce.

Tsuneo: Paul trying to find a place to park might be the most tension in this fic so far

> I got out of the car and looked at my watch. It had been a little over twenty hours since I got on

> board the shuttle van back in Gibraltar Base.

Rick: And we are all feeling it.

> Carrying my duffel bag, I went to my parent' house and rang the doorbell.

> I was greeted with a hug.

Tsuneo: Notice how mum and dad aren't described, just in case Hoss Pffeffenpfeffer catches character traits by proxy.

> "How are you doing?" asked Mom.

> "Great," I said. "I'm glad to be home. And you are looking well."

> "How is my soldier boy?" asked Dad.

> "Great," I said. "It was a tiring flight, but I'm home."

Rebecca: This may be the most lifelike interaction we've had so far. Treasure it.

> I looked at the living room. It looked as much the same as it did, with a coffee table and couches. A

> blue carpet covered the floor. A huge Sony plasma television

Dan: Television is named!

Rick: Thank god for that. I was worried for a moment.

> served as the masterpiece; it was
> currently off. One noticeable difference were the holifay wraths hanging on the top of the walls. I
> could see toys strewn on the carpet.

> "Larry," I said.

> "Hi," said a three-year-old boy in blue overalls. "What are you wearing?"

Rick: At this point I assume he looks like a two-dimensional crowd NPC

> "It's my Army uniform," I said to my nephew. "I wear a uniform when I go to work."

Tsuneo: He claims to work.

> "Like what Daddy wear when he go to work?"

> "A little different."

Rick: Not that there's anything wrong with being the guy in the Hamburglar costume

> "How are you doing, soldier boy?" asked Trina.

> I looked at Trina. She looked the same as before, with dark tightly-curved hair and dark skin. She
> wore this green dress. I first met her a couple of years ago. I could still remember her wedding with
> my brother Paul.

Dan: Trina didn't appreciate it when he asked to date her. Neither did Paul, for that matter.

> "Great," I said.

Rebecca: There you have it. This fic is a James Ngyen film

> "Did you fight in the war?" she asked.

> "Yes," I said. "Anything exciting happen while I was away?"

> "Nothing aside from a tropical storm or two."

Rebecca: The local weather is more interesting than the space robot war

> "I made a late lunch for you," Mom said to me. I went to the kitchen, sitting at the wooden dining
> table. I could see the Salisbury steak on serving plate, drenched with mushroom sauce. Coco bread
> was served in this straw basket.

Rick: This very specific straw basket

> I immediately went for the Salisbury steak.

> "I can see you're hungry," said Dad.

> "Just wait until I serve jerk turkey and curry goat for Christmas," said Mom.

Dan: Sounds delightful. Best thing in this fic so far.

> "I almost forgot," I said, after having eaten the ground beef patty. I reached into my duffel bag. "I got
> this in a gift shop at the airport in Morocco."

> I took out a plastic toy battloid, which was made for kids Larry's age.

Rick: I wonder how much MDC it has.

> I gave it to my nephew.

Rebecca: 'My nephew' is all the character Larry will ever get.

> "What do you say?" asked Paul.

Dan: [Larry] Cheap arse wouldn't spring for the Bioroid too.

> "Thank you, Uncle," Larry said to me.

> I went upstairs to the second floor hallway

Dan: Well that's enough human interaction for one day

> and entered the door on the right. This was my bedroom.

Tsuneo: They started renting it out before he even left.

> It looked just like I remembered it, with a bed and personal computer and a TV and a dresser.

Rick: The TV is not described! What's happening here?

Dan: It's like I don't even know this fic any more.

> I opened the closet and started undressing.

> Oooooooooo

> I could hear the waves of the Caribbean Sea crashing on the beach as I walked on the boardwalk

> that night. I looked and saw this building with straw awnings. It was the Cantina Loco, a popular

> beach hangout.

Rick: Named after the owner's favourite Gobot

> "Hi there," said a girl at the hostess counter whom I had never met.

Rebecca: He thought he knew everyone in Jamaica

> She was wearing a black blouse

> and skirt with the cantina logo on the blouse. "Welcome to Cantina Loco."

Dan: Is this Cantina Loco? Because I'm not sure if it's Cantina Loco. There are some signs that it may be Cantina Loco, but I can't confirm that it's Cantina Loco.

> Hermes and I entered the cantina. I was dressed in sneakers and jeans and a blue T-shirt, while

> Hermes wore khaki pants, glasses, and a red T-shirt. Hermes had been my friend since childhood.

Rick: His best friend is a guy from Jamaica named Hermes. The author really isn't trying, is he?

Rebecca: Not in the slightest

> "Do they have places like this in Morocco?" asked Hermes.

> "There's a few in Tangier," I said.

Dan: That's where you find Northern Africa's best unironic Tiki bars

> "I thought people there wouldn't drink alcohol."

> "It's not one of those fundie Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia," I said.

Tsuneo: So not only did Saudi Arabia survive the global apocalypse, but its culture didn't change as a response

Rebecca: You really get the feeling that the author didn't think this through

> "There they are."

> Everyone was sitting at this wooden table.

Tsuneo: The default group of everyone, including but not limited to Persey Satori, Jun Yamashita, Dusty Ayers, Bekka Cade, Guppy and Una Von Raxe, the Merchant of Pain.

> Food and drink were already on the table top.

Dan: Our hero could only assume that it was there by magic

> The main

> bar of the cantina had a straw awning just like outside. Mariachi music played over the speakers.

> There were not that many people;

Rick: I mean, why would an obvious tourist bar be busy during the Christmas season?

Dan: It is a mystery

> this place tended to get much busier during the summer.

> "How's the war hero?" asked one of the men, whose name was Fred.

> "Glad to be back," I said.

Tsuneo: Not answering the question

> "And what was it like?"

> "Well, one time my team and I were deployed to the Sahara Desert during the summer. It was

> baking hot.

Rick: Wait, the Sahara desert was hot?

Rebecca: In summer, no less.

> The Army brought ice cold water just for us to cool down."

Tsuneo: Still not answering it!

> "All that talk is making me want a cold drink," said Hermes. "Shall we order some more drinks?"

> And so we did.

All: [Chanting] And so we did.

> "I propose a toast," said a blond-haired guy whose name was Randy.

Rebecca: Randy is better defined than our protagonist. Take this how you will

> "A toast to the war hero."

Dan: Tell us if you see one.

> And so we toasted. I downed the drink quickly.

> "I forgot to mention," said Hermes. "Charlie won't be here."

Rick: That's a shame. Who's Charlie?

> "Where is he?" asked this lady named Barbara.

Rick: While we're at it, who's Barbara?

> "Charlie's in a ship on the other side of the Universe."

Dan: It's the sort of thing you'd remember

> "He is?" asked Fred.

Rick: Who's Fred? Who are any of these people? Who am I?

> "I remember he enlisted in the Spacy,"

Rick: He's a member of Star Brigade now. Has his own spring-loaded missile launcher and everything

> I said, taking a tortilla chip and dipping it in salsa. Charlie was another longtime friend of mine.

Rebecca: Just take his word for it.

> "His ma told me she got a message from him," said Hermes. "He's on this ship, I think it's called the
> Global or something."

> Ellie looked at me; I could see that familiar smile.

Tsuneo: The 'I'm only staying here as long as I need to' one.

> She then looked at all of us. "A toast to those who won't be back for Christmas," she said.

Dan: We'll just have to have their drinks for them.

Rebecca: Oh, no you don't.

> "And for those who will never be back for Christmas ever again."

> My words immediately erased the smile from everyone's face.

Rebecca: Way to kill the mood there.

> The mariachi music and the positive

> attitude from the people sitting at the bar and the other tables felt like light-years away.

Dan: All of a sudden everyone else started making excuses

Rebecca: You get the feeling that happens to him a lot

> "I never thought of that," said Fred.

Tsuneo: Fred is only vaguely aware there's a robot space war going on.

Dan: So is Archimedes K. Boondock-Spring, and he's fighting in it.

> We all drank in memory of the fallen.

Rick: The evil ancient Transformer who's permanently on fire?

> I thought of Tomas Cabon and Isamu Shirogane.

Tsuneo: And the deep impact they'd had on his life
Rick: Sorry, who now?

> "That was very good," said another man, a bald black dude wearing a polo shirt. "We needed to
> learn that."

Rebecca: We categorically did not.

> I glanced at him again; I did not recognise him.

> "I have an announcement to make," he said.

> He took Ellie's hand and led her on the floor.

Dan: Wait, other people can see her?

> He then knelt down.

> "Ellie, will you marry me?" he asked.

> Marry her? Who was he? I remembered her boyfriend from before I left for Gibraltar Base, the
> boyfriend whom she started seeing after she had told me that dating would ruin our friendship, but
> that was not him.

Rebecca: It's almost like she'd gotten over it and moved on with her life

> "Yes," said Ellie. "I will marry you."

Tsuneo: Ugh, it's so gauche taking somebody else's pity party and making it all about you.

> I saw the diamond ring slip on her left ring finger. She gave him a kiss and everyone cheered.

> Except me.

Dan: He just sat there and quietly hated everything

> "How long did you know him?" I asked.

> "Three months," she said.

> Three months? That was the time I was deployed to Monument City. And she was going to marry
> someone after only knowing him for three months? I knew Melissa longer than that.

Rebecca: Well maybe they have a genuinely warm and loving relationship instead of spending every
waking moment fretting and being worried that the other will leave them for no reason

> "That is interesting," I said in a neutral tone.

> "We're in love," she said.

> "What about..."

> "He's old news.

Dan: She said in front of her ex to drive the point home

> My man is right here."

> She wrapped her arms around him and I glanced away.

Rebecca: But, but, she is the only one for me! I have decided it with no basis whatsoever!

> I was soon sitting at the bar, having a schooner of beer. A replay of a football game was on the TV.

> "Are you all right?" asked Barbara.

> "Fine," I said. I looked at her. She looked pretty much as she did before, with creamed coffee skin
> and light brown hair; she was dressed in jeans and a red striped blouse.

Tsuneo: Wearing the exact same red striped blouse and jeans.

> "You're not fine. Is it about fighting in the war?"

> "Yes, it's about fighting in the war." I briefly remembered my battles with the so-called bioroids.

Dan: I'm not entirely convinced that he's ever fought any Bioroids.

Rick: I'm not entirely convinced that there are any Bioroids in this fic.

> "I can still smell and see the war sometimes."

Tsuneo: The war smells like frangipani and fresh-roasted coffee.

> "And it's about Ellie too."

> "What makes you think that?"

Rebecca: Because you're an emotionally crippled freak

Tsuneo: Well besides that, I mean

> "I saw the way you were looking at her. We all know you liked her. And she was fond of you. I never
> understood why you never got together."

Rick: Because he never got around to doing her loyalty quest

> "That's in the past," I said, sipping the beer.

Dan: No matter how determined he is to bring it up.

> And yet, I could still feel that affection that she showed. It was her affection, more than anything else
> that drew me to her. Come to think of it, while Melissa liked me, she did not show that kind of
> affection. And then I was thinking. Was I simply dating Melissa, going steady with her, just to have a
> substitute Ellie? What would happen if Melissa did not show the same affection that Ellie showed
> toward me? And how could Ellie find someone to marry so soon, and know that he is the one just
> three months?

Dan: And above all else, how long has his head been on fire?

> "Why are you sitting here alone?" asked Hermes.

Tsuneo: Because people are being happy over there and he can't stew in his resentment with them around.

> "I wanted a beer," I said. "It has been a long year for me."

Rick: It's been a year between beers

> "Well, after Christmas is over, we should have a goin' away party for you, man.

Rebecca: They will celebrate him leaving.

Tsuneo: You know, that's not... Actually, in his case it probably is.

> You fly back on the 27th , right?"

> "Yeah, or I'll be AWOL."

> "If you fly back on the 27th, then we party on the 26th."

Tsuneo: They had planned the party for the 28th. Took them a while to figure it out

> I saw Ellie approach me with her new fiancé.

Rebecca: Mentally crossing out his eyes.

> "We have to be going now," she said. "Merry Christmas."

> "I will," I said.

Rick: Merry Christmas, Tsuneo.

Tsuneo: Sure can.

> I saw them leave, with his arm around her waist and her head against his shoulder.

Rebecca: How dare they be happy at him!

> "Merry Christmas," said Barbara.

> "Have a merry Christmas," I said to her.

Tsuneo: And so the chapter ends with our protagonist stewing in his own resentment while everyone else enjoys love, life and the festive season

Rick: Merry Christmas!

With that final comment the big screen turned off, reverting the world back to prose format. "And that was the second collection of chunks of text that comprised four chapters of Dire Straights," Tsuneo commented. "Which contained nothing and an awful lot of it."

"I mean, what the hell was with the whole trip to Monument City sequence?" Dan asked. "It added nothing to the fic and there was no reason at all for it to be there. As far as I can tell it was largely there so that we could read all about their riveting loading and unloading sequences."

"Well I have a few thoughts regarding that," Rebecca noted. "And if anything, it's only serving to highlight the problems with this fic."

"Go on," Dan nodded. "Because, you know, the fic has a lot of them."

"So the trip to Monument City serves one major purpose for the fic," she explained. "And that is to connect this fic to the broader world and remind the reader that there's something bigger going on. Unfortunately, what it actually does is highlight that there are far more interesting things going on and that we could be reading about them instead."

"Most things are more interesting than this fic," Rick added.

"No arguments there," Rebecca nodded.

"I'll go one further," Tsuneo offered. "The trip to Monument served the fic's odd need to connect as many of its characters as possible to existing canon characters. Jack is supposedly Rolf Emerson's son, which means that he grew up with Dana and Bowie. This ties him to the actual protagonists and creates a purely artificial level of investment in the character."

"And it's not just Jack," Rick noted. "Lupon is pretty damn conspicuous as well. He's a Zentraedi, his last name is Kravshera and he has lavender skin. He is a literal and figurative Khyron clone and again an effort to remind us of a more interesting character as a substitute for making him interesting in his own regard."

"Given their conspicuous last names, I suppose that's what's going on with Shelby Porter and Glen LaBelle," Rebecca considered. "Especially with LaBelle's only character trait being that he's just married."

"And yet he's also possibly the closest thing we have to a likeable character so far," Dan noted. "Which is pretty damning in and of itself."

"Being attached to a character because they are related to a more interesting character is not the strength that this fic thinks it is," Tsuneo concluded.

"It is not," Rebecca agreed. "But then at this point I don't know what we are meant to like about this fic at all. It's certainly not the protagonist who finally got a semblance of personality and it was instantly loathsome."

"What is it with these fics and spiteful Nice Guys?" Rick asked. "It seems to happen to us a lot."

"I guess we should be thankful that he hasn't gone full Pack Rat on us yet," Dan noted. "But I also feel that might be just a matter of time."

"Well I can tell you're all getting really involved with the fic," The Voice spoke up.

"I mean we have to think about it," Tsuneo replied. "It's not like there's actually anything in it and it has any of its own merits."

"Fantastic," the Voice beamed. "Then you'll be glad to know that we'll be reading another four parts next time."

"Thrilling," Tsuneo replied with an air of dry resignation.

"Well I had better be going," Rick spoke up. "I have art pages to manage and insane requests from overly entitled and finicky backers to try and transform into meaningful compositions."

"Thinking about what I said earlier," Dan spoke up. "You wanna try shooting at desperadoes for a day?"

"Can't be too much worse than managing art pages," Rick shrugged.

Dan beamed. "See? That's the right attitude."

Author's notes:

What even is this fic? Well, I mean, I know what it is; it's a retelling of the Second Robotech War in the 'Tom Clancy thriller' style of fanfic. But I want to know what it actually is, as it seems to be utterly bereft of direction, character, charm or likeability and, above all else, story. And don't think that it might get one in a hurry, because it's going to be a long while before it actually goes anywhere meaningful or does anything that might be mistaken for a plot.

I have to say that I am singularly impressed with our protagonist, even if it is for all the wrong reasons. He has no name, no description and the closest thing he has to a personality trait so far is utterly loathsome. That takes effort.

Next time: This. More of this is good.

Robotech copyright Harmony Gold

Dire Straits written by Michael2

Rebecca Bartley and Rick R. Mortis created by Rick R. (natch)
Tsuneo Tateo and Dan created by Zogster

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Space robots? Email us at [elmerstudios00 \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:elmerstudios00@gmail.com) and register your Jeff.

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> I hated thinking about things.