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Episode 278 – More bad British war comics? But of course!  
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It was a nice apartment, well-lit, spacious and well furnished. A pair of nice, plush leather couches set the scene, arranged in a neat L-shape, with a small coffee table between them. What dominated the room, however, was the massive flat-screen against one wall, so big as to loom over all else around it. By comparison, the broad windows with views out over a strangely futuristic metropolis and the other doorways leading away to gods alone knew where seemed like afterthoughts.

“Hey guys!” Natasha beamed as she stepped in; Rebecca, Rick and Matt all noting her arrival. “Have I got news for you!”

“What’s up?” Rick asked. “Land a major record contract?”

“Well, as awesome as that would be, no,” She admitted. “In fact, the last record guy I spoke to pretended not to know who I was when I called him back.”

“I cannot think why anyone would do that,” Rebecca smirked.

“Anyways!” She continued without missing a beat as she headed over to the coffee table. “Inspired by something somebody said last time we talked, I did indeed take up chainsaw sculpture. And I think I may have found my true calling!”

“Oh!” Rick beamed. “I’d love to see what you came up with.”

“Well that’s why I bought my first masterpiece with me to show off.” She nodded.

“Is it outside?” Matt asked. “Like an installation or free-standing sculpture?”

“Nope, I got it with me on my person,” she explained as she reached into her tattered backpack, rummaging around inside it. “Hold on a moment...” Rebecca glanced at Matt, scepticism in her eye. He in turn remained impassive as he watched Natasha fumble. “Aha! Behold my creation!”

With a dramatic flair, she placed a small, misshapen lump of metal on the table. “So what do you all think?”

There was a long, tense silence. “It’s... unique” Rick offered.

“Nice. Unusual,” Rebecca said. “Different.”

“It makes a statement,” Matt added. “I’m not sure what that statement is, but it makes one.”

“Cool beans!” She beamed. “I’m really proud of this one. I mean, I looked at the raw materials and this shape just suggested itself to me from there. All I needed to do was bring it forth with my own two hands. Well, them and a chainsaw.”

“So what was the raw material that yielded this... thing?” Rebecca asked.

“One of those huge metal shipping containers,” Natasha nodded.

“Well, I think that was a fantastic use of time and resources,” Matt considered, looking like he was trying not to say what was really on his mind. “And it is a good start too. Much like your band, it’s an... interesting creation”

“Your ability to fake being nice is impressive,” Rebecca quietly added. “And better than mine.”

Matt ignored her as he continued. "But I'm just curious as to what else you do with your time."

Natasha looked thoughtful for whole moments before replying. "I mean, I go out a lot with the band when we're not playing gigs. Get wasted, have a good time—"

"Get regrettable tattoos," Rebecca cut in.

"Pretty sure that's never happened," she causally shrugged off, then picked up form where she was. "Chase guys and all that sort of stuff. If we're lucky, we wake up hung over at my place. And if we're unlucky, we wake up hung over at Lynne's place."

"Have you ever woken up hung over at Trabe's place?" Rick asked.

"I ain't goin' back there," she quickly shot back. "Not never."

"Fair enough then," Matt said. "Though is there anything else you do just for yourself?"

"I like to swim a lot," Natasha replied. "I mean, it's super convenient what with my having a pool in the place where I live and all."

"You work underwater and yet your swim to relax," Rebecca noted. "Odd choice."

Natasha shrugged. "I guess I just like the water and all. Besides, there's a great swim-up bar, and who can say no to that?" She glanced back at Matt. "How's about yourself, mister international man of mystery? What do you do for laughs?"

He gave a small, professionally friendly smile. "Well, my job involves travelling a lot," Matt explained. "I spend a lot of time in transit and, as such, don't have much time to myself. So the end result is that I read a lot."

"I'm surprisingly underwhelmed," Natasha admitted. "I mean, isn't the life of a super-spy all super-glamorous and stuff?"

"Agreed there," Rick nodded. "I always saw you as a 'casinos, high-stakes card games and mysterious women in backless dresses' kind of a man."

"That's an oddly specific trait," Rebecca smirked.

"Oh, if only," Matt laughed. "No, in my line of work, there's very little that you can get from being a high-roller. If you want to find out what the general thoughts and feelings of a world and its people are like, then you have to get down and dirty and mingle on the street."

"The best way to know what the man on the street is thinking is to talk to the man on the street," Rick suggested.

"Amazingly enough, yes," Matt told them. "So I spend a lot of my time at community events and other large gatherings. Street theatre, sporting or entertainment events, markets—"

"You probably end up having to buy all sorts of crap there," Rick added. "Like home-made organic preserves or hand-printed tea towels."

"Or the amateurish messes made by struggling local artists," Rebecca smirked.

"It's a bit like that," Matt agreed. "But every hand-printed tea towel is a potentially useful source of information, so I do such. Besides, I can claim it all back on my expenses under the research budget."

"Even cheap, crappy sculptures made by local hacks?" Natasha asked. Everyone stopped to look at her. "Wha?"

"Good morning all," The Voice cut in, mercifully preventing any further retaliation. "How is everyone going today?"

"Look at what I made!" Natasha beamed with all the excitement of a five year old who had just gotten back from pre-school, holding aloft her sculpture.

"That's... that's... a thing, yes," The Voice managed. "Yes, it's a thing all right. Very, uh, thing-like."

"Awesome!" Natasha grinned as she placed her masterpiece back on the table. "Glad you like it, Voice."

"For once, you and I are in agreement, Mister Skullhead," Rebecca quipped. "So what's on the hurt menu today?"

"Well, after 'Death in South America' proved to be so popular-"

"In an 'inverse values' kind of way," Matt added.

There was a short sigh. "I thought that some more from Battle Weekly would be appropriate," the Voice finally spoke up.

"So more licenser-approved tales of plastic army men then?" Natasha queried.

"Actually, no," the Voice explained. "Rather than some more Action Force, I thought that it might be interesting to explore some of the book's entirely original works."

"Oh wow," Rick said, seeming strangely enthusiastic. "This could be awesome."

"Wait, it could?" Rebecca raised a sceptical brow. "I thought that this stuff was mostly chest-thumping tales of jingoistic heroism and killing dastardly foreigners."

"Well, mostly," he replied. "But in among that you'd have tales like Charley's War, which was a stark, bloody and brutal tale of a soldier in the First World War. It pulled no punches and didn't even try and portray the war as even remotely heroic. It's considered one of the greatest British comic stories ever."

"That sounds genuinely interesting," Matt admitted. "But I suppose that's not what we're getting is it, Voice?"

"Well no," the Voice stated, almost sheepishly. "Instead, today you'll be reading the first part of an entirely new story, one based more in fiction than historical events. It's called Storm Force, and it's a daring tale of international espionage and supertech spies."

"So not, say, stark, brutal and bloody then?" Natasha asked. "Not even a little?"

"Well it's still potentially interesting," Rick admitted as he sat. "Well, okay, probably it's crap."

"I'm betting on crap," Rebecca agreed as she joined him, along with the others. The big screen switched on, converting the world into script format.

> STORM FORCE

Matt: Is a measure of water speed and wave size in storm conditions.

> Starts today

Natasha: Riiiiight... wait for it, wait for it.... riiiiight now!

> [Masked figures with guns sneaking through a hole in a mesh fence,

Rick: The lengths people will go to in order to jump a queue at Comicon are impressive. And somewhat scary.

> shadowed buildings in background]

> Zero five hundred hours: Maxton Atomic Research Centre, Cornwall.

Rebecca: Home to England's strategic tea and scone reserve.

> Intruders!

Natasha: Let's not be too hasty to jump to conclusions here. There could be perfectly legitimate reasons why armed, masked men are breaking into a secured nuclear facility.

Matt: Just think about what you said there

Natasha: True, it's unlikely, but...

> [Masked figures firing guns and flamethrowers at soldiers,

Rebecca: Can I see your security pass sir - aaaargh!

Rick: Again, not the worst thing people have done to get ahead in the line.

> exploding and burning buildings in background]

Matt: I think it's fair to assume that these are the bad guys.

Rebecca: I tend to agree with your assessment.

> A pre-arranged signal...

Rick: A series of uploaded selfies with the top-secret nuclear research facility in the background with the hashtag 'maxtonatomic sneakattack'

>and suddenly Maxton was a hell on Earth!

Natasha: Who could have thought that working at an atomic research facility in a comic book could possibly end badly?

Rick: They probably have a "days between supervillain attacks" sign.

> [Masked figures firing at soldiers]

Matt: Say, Carl, you ever wonder if you've made the right choices with your life?

Rebecca: What do you mean by that, Bob?

Matt: Well, here I am, a masked goon for a nefarious evil agency breaking into a research centre. I can tell you now that it's not where I'd originally seen myself going.

Rebecca: I know what you mean, but truth is? In this job market, you got to take what you find.

Matt: I know that but... I just can't help but think that this is not me, you know? I mean, it pays well and the dental's great, but I just think I want more for myself than being a nameless henchman.

> The security guards didn't stand a chance.

Rebecca: On one side, masked infiltrators, clearly well trained and well-armed. On the other side, rent-a-cops who's greatest job perk is a donut allowance.

> They were being systematically wiped out.

> [Giant drill emerging from the ground]

Matt: International Rescue has arrived!

> Until... an amazing machine appeared out of the Earth...

Rick: Screwhead in a surprise guest appearance.

Natasha: You know, that has to be one of the most inadvertently dirty and awesome names ever.

Rick: And if you think that's bad, you should hear his Japanese name.

Natasha: Which is?

Rick: Rod Drill.

Natasha: Awesome.

> [Masked figures being gunned down by weapons fire coming from giant drill machine]

Matt: After gunning down some nameless guys, the nameless guys were gunned down by nameless guys.

Rebecca: This comic appeals to me with its deep and nuanced characterisations.

> The odds had changed!

Rick: Their card counting scheme was a huge success. Well, that is until the casino boss broke all their fingers.

Natasha: Details.

> [Soldiers running out of machine,

Natasha: Someone let rip while they were under Birmingham, and it was getting really ripe in there.

> leader at front with gun in hand]

Matt: Enter our hero, designated hero.

Rebecca: You go, designated hero.

> Troops poured out of the machine...

> Leader: Go get 'em, lads!

Rick [Fake British]: Show those Jerry blighters what's what and all that. Pip pip, jolly good show, I say what.

> [Masked figures surrendering to soldiers]

> Victory was swift...

Rebecca: One incredibly tense and gripping battle sequence later. No really, take our word on it.

> Masked Man 1: No more... we surrender!

Matt: Your unexpected subterranean emergence has clearly rendered our nonspecific objective unfeasible!

> Masked Man 2: D-don't shoot!

Natasha: Though it's okay if you shoot Carl. I owe him fifty.

> [Leader lying dead on the ground, soldiers around him]

Rick: Oh no! They killed That Guy!

Matt: I will never forget you, That Guy. You lived a rich and full life, and made us all a little better through it. Truly, you were a great man, That Guy, and the world is a little dimmer for your passing.

> But sometimes victory can have a high price!

> Soldier 1: Combat leader stopped a bullet!

Rick: His plan to block bullets with his face did have certain drawbacks, ones that he should have, in retrospect, foreseen.

> He... he's dead!

Natasha: I can but assume this happened during the aforesaid tense and gripping battle scene.

Rebecca: Either that or an undiagnosed peanut allergy. Your choice.

> Soldier 2: "Dead"? B-But he... he seemed indestructible!

Rick: The endless hours they spent throwing things at his head had seemed to prove the point.

> Soldier 3: The Mole isn't going to be happy about this...

Matt: Oh drat and botheration.

> [Patch of scrubby land, warning sign with skull and crossbones and atom symbol on it in foreground,

Natasha: The yard of that one house in the street that nobody talks about. You know the one.

> rolls of barbed wire behind it]

> Security Classification Alpha:

Matt: Super-duper tippy-top secret.

> Somewhere in central Britain, one hundred square miles of lands

> designated unfit for human habitation.

Rebecca: Milton Keynes.

> Cause: Radiation leakage.

Natasha: Resulting from nobody cleaning out the fridge and leaving the leftovers to rot for way too long.

> Sign: DANGER KEEP OUT

> [Ventilation duct in amongst scrub]

Rebecca: Below it, the secret research facility where Pepsi scientists work to come up with new, even more undrinkable flavours.

> But deep underground,

Natasha: In a split-level cave twenty miles below the surface of the Earth.

>in a vast lead and concrete shell,

Matt: Filled with rusted iron barrels full of toxic runoff.

>there was life. Life of the most bizarre kind...

Rick: This is where they hold Anthrocon.

> [Lone figure in wheelchair in the middle of massive bank of monitors]

Rick: Ozymandius, the later years. Each one of these monitors is tuned to a different Frasier rerun.

> Security Clearance T55/91/A662/B.

Natasha: That clearance means you get access to Bo and Sunny's pooper-scooper.

> View of Mole Operations Centre

Matt: This is what most people think they're going to create when they plan to convert the basement into a 'man cave'. What you usually get is an old ping-pong table and a box full of mouldy Playboys.

> Figure [Thinking]: The loss of Combat Leader is a set-back...

Rebecca: We are all at a loss due to the death of that great hero, Combat Leader.

Natasha: Truly, Combat Leader's name will be sung throughout the ages.

> [The Mole – a diminutive figure with an oversized head and large eyes,

Rick: Hi, my name is Bob Obvious Supervillain.

> sitting on a wheelchair with caterpillar treads and built-in weapons

Matt: You know, I hear that Stephen Hawking has one of those too.

> – computers in background]

Rebecca: In 1988 terms, that's probably the most powerful computer in the world. Today? Probably wouldn't even handle Angry Birds.

> Mole [Thinking]: But the fight must go on...

Natasha: It wouldn't be much of a comic otherwise.

Matt: I dunno. It could be a deep and emotional tale about coming to terms with loss and the price of duty and the like. Combat Leader's family and loved ones knowing that he gave his life for them, but still feeling bitter over his having died on them. Or Mole's quiet guilt over what he ordered Combat Leader into, feeling responsible for his being killed and so on.

Rick: In a British war comic? Pfft.

Matt: You're right. I have no idea what I was thinking.

Rick: Next thing you'll be suggesting that a girl might do something. Or even exist.

> [Close up on Mole face]

All: AAAH!

Rebecca: The T-zone of terror!

> Mole: He will be replaced!

Natasha: With... Combat Leader Number Two!

Matt: A truly heroic and inspiring title.

Natasha: I try.

> [Mole's long thin fingers on keyboard]

Rick [Mole]: But first to finish up the next episode of my worm-farming podcast.

> Mole [Thinking]: There are twenty-three possible new combat leaders.

Rebecca: Three of them are cats.

Matt: Another four are his imaginary friends.

Natasha: Two more are My Little Pony characters.

Rick: And the last one is actually Brick Hactar.

> Ten in Europe, five in the Americas,

Matt: Seven in Antarctica, oddly enough.

>three in Africa,

Rick: Two in tax havens in the Caribbean.

>one in India

Rebecca: Currently working in a tech support call centre.

Rick: Hey, that's make anyone into a blood-thirsty monster.

>and four in Australasia...

Natasha: Is one of them Crocodile Dundee?

> Mole: Mega-Computer

Rebecca: Mega-Computer! One exponent better than a super-computer!

>to analyse and report...

Matt: Which is his way of saying he's just going to type random words into Google image search.

> [Computer screen with portrait of John Storm, a square-jawed, heroic-looking man with black hair]

Rebecca: Hello, my name is Designated Protagonist.

> Eight point four seconds later

Natasha: Not even enough time to make a sandwich? It is indeed a mega-computer.

Matt: You're one of those people who opens a new tab if the one you're on hasn't loaded instantly, and then sticks with it for a minute tops before opening another, aren't you?

Natasha: How'd you know?

Matt: It's my job to know.

> Computer Screen: MOLE SQUAD

Rick: Mole Squad! In Insectivorecolour!

> COMBAT LEADER REPLACEMENT

Matt: I wonder how many would-be "combat leaders" there are on LinkedIn?

Rebecca: I wonder how many of those once lead a paintball team and then claimed that they were a "combat leader" afterwards?

Matt: I suppose resume padding even happens in the world of secretive supertech strike forces.



Rebecca: All of a sudden, Showdown in San Rivera makes a lot more sense.

> ALPHA CLASSIFICATION

Rick: Apparently, he's looking for a Teenager with Attitude.

> STORM, JOHN F.

Matt: Somebody called Storm in a comic called Storm Force? What a pleasant coincidence!

> AGE: 22

> OCCUPATION: UNEMPLOYED

Natasha: Spends his days watching pirated anime and eating Cheezles off his chest.

Rick: His life goals are to go to university maybe some day and get married to a supermodel.

> SECURITY READOUT: CODE FOUR

> HISTORY: FORMER ARMY CAPTAIN AND MERCENARY,

Matt: At twenty-two? Did he go through boot camp while in Kindergarten?

Rebecca: He was in the same academy graduating class as Tom Dyrone.

> INJURED IN A CLASH WITH TARANTULA

Natasha: His pet tarantula bit him while he was cleaning out its habitat. Stung like all hell.

> LEFT ARM REMOVED AFTER MAJOR SURGERY

Matt: Unfortunately, it was his right arm that was injured. His surgical team were not the best.

Rick: Look on the upside. You'll never forget which hand is which now.

> [Image of John Storm on screen, dressed in uniform and firing a rifle]

Rebecca: His computer has a Stock Footage setting.

> Computer Screen: PRIOR TO ARM REMOVAL AN OUTSTANDING LEADER AND STRATEGIST

Natasha: Nowadays largely sucks ass.

Matt: His first post-amputation decision was to take up knitting.

> [Computer Screen]

> Computer Screen: WITH RENOVATIONS

Rick: Put in a sunlight, a new timber deck and fix the electrics and he'll double in value.

> AND MICROSURGERY,

Matt: And gluing a new arm on. [Glances at Rebecca]

Rebecca: What?

> SUBJECT WILL BE BEST AVAILABLE RECRUIT

Rebecca: The other recruits were a Naruto Cosplayer, a marmoset and a rock. It was a hard choice.

> RECOMMENDATION: RECRUIT IMMEDIATELY

Rick: And hurry up, because Richard Kimble is out to get him.

> [Mole at computer screen]

Natasha: His plan was to search for new recruits. Instead he spent hours making Lolcats.

Rick: A typical day in the life of any given office worker.

Rebecca: Like you'd know.

Rick: Please. I at least have a drawing board in front of me when I'm wasting time.

> Mole: So it shall be!

> Voice [V/O]: You want we should fetch him?

Matt: That sounds less like an operative of a secret agency and more like a professional dog walker who's charge has run off to do its business in the bushes.

> [Three figures; Stiletto, a black-haired woman in a jumpsuit;

Rebecca: Agent Girlfriend!

> Porcupine, a man in a suit of scale-like armour

Matt: The Human Pangolin!

>and Magnus, a huge man in a metal suit]

Rick: Imitation Colossus!

> Mole [V/O]: Not you three, as you would half kill him...

Rebecca: I sense a certain flaw in your recruitment process.

Matt: And that's just the preliminary interview too. Second stage means a fight to the death with the Gorn captain.

>or he would kill you,

Rick: Or you both kill each other, and then it would be really awkward.

>and you are too valuable to lose.

Natasha: The April O'Neil impersonator, the Ren Faire guy and Ironbutt are too valuable to lose?

What

kind of half-arsed secret organisation is this?

> [Porcupine's suit bristles up to reveal that it is covered in knives]

Rick: Well that just went from 'mildly goofy' to 'just plain ridiculous'

Matt: When he bristles at something, he really bristles.

> Porcupine: A pity, since it is days since I faced combat!

Rebecca: Porky here gets antsy if he doesn't get to beat someone up once a day.

Natasha: Before he worked here, he was a 'techspert' in an Apple Store.

Rebecca: That would do it to anyone.

> [Outside a hotel,

Matt: This is a really classy place. They only let the best international superspies in here.

> John Storm and a blonde woman leaving, doorman nearby]

Rebecca: His job is to make the patrons feel better about themselves. After all, they're not him.

> London's West End, two nights later...

> Doorman: Good night, mister Storm!

Natasha: And may a flock of seagulls sing thee to thy rest.

Rick: I think that's a flight of angels.

Natasha: I know what I said.

> Storm: 'Night, George

> Voice [V/O]: It is him! Strike now!

Natasha: The hotel restaurant is sick of his dine and dashes, and are going to do something about it.

> [Three thugs running at Storm,

Rick: Need a way to move your plot forwards? Random muggers work every time!

> woman in foreground]

> Thug: UUH!

Rick: We have our first death-grunt!

Rebecca: And one that was brought on by the apparently strenuous task of being a mugger.

> Storm: What the-

> [Thug hitting doorman with a stick; Storm ducking another while chopping the third]

Rebecca: Three of them against a one-armed man. This seems perfectly fair and reasonable to me.

Matt: It's like going after the seemingly harmless old man in a martial arts film. It's never going to end well for the thugs

> Thug 1: Doorman dealt with...

Natasha: So what did you think they achieved by taking him out rather than the dangerous guy who's obviously their objective?

Rick: Is he really? For all we know, the Doorman could be the real target.

Natasha: Clever.

> Storm: Six arms against one... fair odds...

Matt: Well, I suppose "cocky idiot" is a personality.

Rebecca: We should feel lucky for that much

> Thug 2: URRGH!

> [Storm leap-kicking two thugs]

Rick: The best part of the comic book medium? You don't have to show how that kick happened. You can just take their word on it.

> Storm: Particularly as I've got two feet!

Natasha: That's still only three limbs. And if you count legs, they've now got twelve.

Rick: So his quipping needs work.

> Thug 1: NRGH!

> Thug 2: ZZZNK!

Matt: Rick, you speak comic book death screams. What does that mean?

Rick: It means that he's trying to loudly sniff back his excess phlegm.

> [Storm standing over downed thugs,

Natasha: So I got to ask. Are muggers ever a risk in a superhero story?

Rick: Only if you're the parents or other loved ones of a hero and it's his origin. Otherwise... no.

> Woman behind him]

> Storm: Okay you thugs, beat it before I turn really nasty!

Rick: He gave them a good beating. You got to hand it to him.

Rebecca: Really?

Rick: What, did that leave you stumped?

Rebecca: Rick, I will hurt you when we're done.

> Woman [Thinking]: He's good...

Matt: He's no Batman, but he's definitely okay.

>but he reckoned without me...

Rebecca: Wait, she's an origin story mugger too? I guess it takes all sorts.

> [Woman chops Storm on the neck]

Natasha: He's doing well. Usually the girl does that earlier in the night.

> Storm: What... UUURGH!

> [Mole, blurry and out of focus]

Rick: Well, either he's been kidnapped by a sinister supervillain, or he's just waking up after a really, really bad batch of peyote.

Natasha: I wouldn't want to see that face unless I was high.

> When he recovered consciousness, Storm opened his eyes...

Rebecca: And for once realised that he was neither in the drunk tank nor a back alley.

Matt: This was turning out to be a very unusual date for him.

>and thought he was having a nightmare...

Rick: He dreamed that he was in a crappy superspy comic created as a desperate effort to reverse collapsing sales of a magazine that had just lost its sole drawcard.

Natasha: It's an oddly-specific nightmare.

> Mole: It is lucky you have a thick skull!

Rebecca: It wasn't the one chop that he was worried about. Rather, it was the savage beatdown the three thugs delivered afterwards for laughs that was the issue.

> [Storm sitting up in bed, Mole in foreground]

Rick: It's like Jack Kirby got completely krunk off his face and then drew Professor X.

> Storm: Wh-who the heck are you?

> Mole: You've heard the expression "I am a mole and I live in a hole"

Matt [Storm]: Not once in my life, no.

Rick [Mole]: Work with me, here, okay? I'm trying to build a metaphor.

> ... that applies to me!

Natasha: So you are a fan of fifties British vocal groups. Got it.

> I am the Mole!

Rebecca: Not the Mole Man, as that would be copyrighted and all.

> You are in my underground headquarters!

Matt: This whole thing started out as a simple wine cellar, and then the project just kept on growing. The result? A billion dollar secret headquarters packed with the latest in communications and surveillance technology. There is one flaw in it, however.

Natasha: Which is?

Matt: In the end, there's no place to keep the wine.

> I am the head of an ultra-secret organisation!

Rick: The Mole, agent of SHIELD.

Natasha: I don't think that's the one he means.

Rick: In that case, clearly he works with Amanda Waller in ARGUS.

Natasha: Nor is it that one.

Rick: So he's actually a part of the Global Peace Agency.

Natasha: Or that one either.

Rick: Well, I suppose he's working for IO then.

Natasha: No, not that.

Rick: Maybe it's the DWT?

Natasha: I don't think he's been quite transparently evil enough yet.

Rick: Okay, how about the BPRD?

Natasha: ...you could keep at this forever, couldn't you?

Rick: Comic Books love their secret superspy agencies. I'm just getting started.

> [Mole and Storm, computers in background]

Rebecca: And behind that's the guy busy slow-feeding twenty miles of tape drive.

> Mole: My combat leader has been killed.

Rick: I was at Combat Leader's funeral, truly moving stuff.

Natasha: I'm not going to lie. I cried when Combat Leader Junior saluted the coffin.

> I want you to take his place!

> Storm: Me? A guy with one arm? You've got to be joking!

Rebecca: The truth is that he's doing this as a part of an affirmative action program. It was either Storm or a Jewish hunchbacked albino vegetarian.

> Mole: If you work for me, you will have two arms!

Matt: Or three! Or more! Arms for everybody!

> [Mole and Storm, operating theatre behind them]

Rebecca: And this is what the critics claim Obamacare will be. Don't believe the lies.

> Mole: Behold... the most modern operating theatre in Europe.

Rick: Filled with all the best technologies that the 1980s have to offer.

Natasha: If it doesn't have cupholders, I don't want to know.

> I have the world's best doctors waiting to perform surgery on your arm.

Matt: It would be awfully inconvenient at this point if Storm decided that he had accepted his injury and decided to move on with his life.

> [Operating theatre, Mole and Storm in background]

Rick [Mole]: And over there is the device for implanting the mind-control chip in your butt.

Natasha [Storm]: The who what now?

Rick [Mole]: Forget I said that. Moving on...

> Mole: I can make you whole again!

Rebecca: They're using a new process developed by a Doctor Curt Connors.

> Storm: Guess I've got nothing to lose.

Matt [Storm]: I mean, what's the worst that could happen? I lose the other arm? [Laughs]

Rick [Mole]: Well...

Matt [Storm]: That was a joke, right?

Rick [Mole]: Yes. A joke. Of course.

> Life was getting boring anyway.

Rebecca: Yes, it's so awful to be a twenty-two year old veteran officer and international man of danger.

> [Storm and Mole]

Rick: I wonder if he noticed that Mole has had his fingers crossed the whole time?

> Storm: Just one question. Who the heck hit me?

Matt: I suspect it was Colonel Mustard in the ballroom with the candlestick.

> Voice [V/O]: That was me. Sorry if I overdid it!

Natasha: You lie. You enjoyed it, and you'd gladly do it again.

> [Stiletto in doorway, Storm in foreground]

> Storm: You! The girl I was out with! Honey, you sure pack a wallop!

Natasha: Sure they fight all the time, but the sex is... pretty mediocre, actually.

> I suppose you're a part of this!

Rick: Technically, she is. In truth, she's a freelance consultant who the Mole pays a small fortune for.

> Stiletto: Too right. The Mole recruited me last year.

Matt: She got the club on the head routine too.

Rick: But did she have one arm?

Matt: No, so they had to amputate one and then give her a replacement to bring her up to spec.

> Hope you liked the blonde wig.

Rebecca: Storm thought it'd look better on himself.

> [Operating theatre, surgical team at work]

Natasha: Medical Stuff!

Rick: Give the thing some of the stuff and pass me the thing.

> Operating sequence classified code alpha. Ultra secret.

Matt: Fixing Mrs Mole's Shitzu.

> Surgeon 1: How is Storm?

Rick: Leading her own X-Men spinoff and doing okay at it.

> Surgeon 2: Pulse steady. Blood pressure holding up.

Rebecca: Or the whole thing could go horribly wrong and you end up mutated into an inhuman monster. They're still working out the bugs in the process.

> [Surgeon working on mechanical plate]

Rick: Here at Mole labs, scientists are working on a better rotary dial.

> Surgeon 1: What's this guy expect to find when he wakes up?

Natasha: Storm's going to regret choosing a cheap Thai clinic, isn't he?

> A new arm?

Matt: Well that was the basis of the Mole's pitch to him.

> Surgeon 2 [V/O]: If he does, he's going to be disappointed!

Rebecca: The malformed secretive genius in a subterranean lair lied to him? This comes out of nowhere.

> [Storm sitting up in bed, shocked expression. Mechanical plate on stump of left arm]

Matt: It's not that he didn't get a new arm that bothered him. It's that they cut the other one off to match.

Rebecca: The Mole's obsessive about symmetry. He once burned down a whole forest because the trees had different branches on each side.

> Operation completed. Patient kept unconscious for three weeks.

Natasha: Many wangs were sharpied on his face.

> And then...

Rick: Tarantulas exploded.

> Storm: Hey... what is this?

Rebecca: I'd say that he's a little short-handed.

Rick: Wait, I get killed for that but you're allowed to?

Rebecca: I have an excuse. [Waves metal hand]

> There's no arm... it's still missing!

Matt: His arm eventually turned up at an unclaimed lost property auction. It was bought by a fat guy who used to reach for the remote when he couldn't be bothered.

> Doctor!

> Voice [V/O]: No doctors...

Natasha: Not even Matt Smith. So quit it with your disturbing tumblr posts, already.

> [Storm in bed pointing to arm stump,

Rick: No, Storm, the Arm Fairy didn't come in the night and give you a new one.

> Mole in foreground in wheelchair]

Matt: I do have to wonder about the viability of a giant, tracked wheelchair.

Rebecca: He likes to get drunk and tear up the neighbour's lawn with it.

> Storm: You double-crossing freak!

Natasha: To be fair, Storm, it's not like you signed a legally-binding contract or even had a witness at the time.

Rick: He's just disappointed because he was looking forward to finally living his dream of using a UFO catcher machine.

Rebecca: Yeah, but he can still engage in his favourite hobby one-handed.

> What have you done?

Matt [Mole]: Not going to lie. We performed an appendectomy while you were out.

Rick [Storm]: Oh, there you go. Thanks for that!

> What's happened to me?

Rebecca: You think you're upset now? Wait till you try and get out of bed and see what you look like under the sheet.

> Mole: I lied to you. You have no new arm. Instead, you have dozens of arms!

Matt: This is the point where you start looking around for something you can use as a club.



> Get dressed and come with me!

Rick: Storm hears that a lot, usually from Police officers.

Natasha: I'm just glad that Mole told him to get dressed first.

> [Storm and Mole in doorway; rack of mechanical arms with various weapons in foreground;

Rebecca: Well, that's it for me. Any hint of sanity just went out the window.

> drill, lance, hammer, claw, axe and various firearms]

Matt: It looks like somebody emptied out their old toolshed and started sticking what they found to spare mannequin limbs.

Natasha: Can your arm do any of that?

Rebecca: Please. I'm much more subtle.

> Mole: These are your new arms! Flame-throwers, swords, drills, lasers... anything you care to fit!

Rick: Flyswatters, skillets, back-scratchers, tennis ball launchers, soft-serve dispensers... anything.

> Storm: Huh?

> [Mole handing Storm a mechanical arm]

Rebecca: Wait till he realises that these are all \*right\* arms while he's missing his left.

> Mole: Here... take one.

Matt: Leader of a secret organisation demonstrating a new weapon or a guy on the street with pamphlets?

> This converts into a human machine-gun!

Natasha: As opposed to your usual mechanical machine gun, I assume.

> Clip it into place!

Rebecca: Then you just need to install the drivers, patch the firmware and deal with the potentially lethal security exploit.

> [Storm attaching arm to metal plate]

Rick: The Cobra BAT, which had a similar 'detachable weapon arms' gimmick was in UK stores at the time this was released.

Rebecca: Your point being?

Rick: Well, it could be just a coincidence and all...

> Storm: This is crazy!

Natasha: You think?

> Mole [V/O]: Not crazy... brilliant!

Matt: No, really crazy.

> [Storm on firing range, pointing weapon arm at targets;

Rick: Other cops eyeballing the rookie to see how he'll do.

> Mole in foreground]

> Storm: How... how do I fire this thing? I can't see a trigger...

> Mole: No trigger is needed. You merely have to think you want to open fire. Your brain will send the  
>signal!

Natasha: Mole's main use of his massive intellect is providing clumsy exposition.

Rick: And this is just the backstory. Wait till the actual plot starts and you'll have reams of it.

> [Machine gun firing, Storm being knocked back by recoil]

Rebecca: You know, I might be crazy in saying this, but maybe the first thing you handed him in order for him to learn how to use this complicated piece of technology shouldn't have been the automatic weapon.

Rick: Mole's a big fan of the NRA. He thinks nobody's too young to learn.

> Storm [Thinking]: This guy's a nut!

Matt: A carefully and well-considered opinion, no doubt.

Rebecca: Given that it's coming from the guy who let Mole operate on him with no guarantees, I'd say that Storm shouldn't be complaining.

> Storm: Okay... so I'm thinking...

Natasha: You can just hear the gears stripping.

>nothing's h ... AAARGH!

Rebecca: Recoil from an automatic firearm? This comes out of nowhere!

> [Storm on floor, Mole in background]

Natasha: If he's such a genius, why did he sit near the guy spraying wildly with a gun?

Rick: Genius, but not terribly smart.

> Storm: It... it worked!

Matt: He did indeed shoot mind bullets.

Natasha: Now he has the power to kill a yak at two hundred yards.

> Mole: Of course it worked.

Rebecca: It would be a pretty lousy comic if it didn't. That's not to say it hasn't been pretty lousy so far, mind you.

> Next time, maybe you will keep your balance!

Matt: Newton's laws of motion are funny.

> [Mole and Storm, Mole taking arm]

Natasha: Enough machine gun arm for you, young man.

Rick: Aww, but I wanna...

Natasha: You can have it back after you finish your homework.

> Storm: Th-that's absolutely amazing...

Rebecca: A weapon that shoots out small lead projectiles at a high rate? Truly remarkable!

Matt: I think it's more of the 'built into a mechanical arm and controlled by thoughts' he's amazed by.

Rebecca: Yeah, if you want to get hung up on the simple things.

> Mole: It is not all. Come... to the vehicle park.

Rebecca: Where shady guys are selling stolen DVD players out of the back of vans.

Rick: Nothing bad has ever happened in a car park in an action movie ever.

> [Hangar with high-tech fighter jet in foreground;

Rick: I see he got a good deal on those used Colonial Vipers.

>other jets, tanks and drill machine in background.

Matt: They wound up in Gerry Anderson's workshop instead.

Rick: I am so jealous right now.

> Storm and Mole in doorway]

> Storm: Wow-eee! Just look at this lot. You could start a war with these!

> Mole: If need be, we will.

Rick [Storm]: What was that?

Matt [Mole]: Nothing, nothing at all.

Rick [Storm]: But I thought you said-

Matt [Mole]: I don't have any evil plans.

> Get into the jet!

Natasha: I thought it was the choppah you got to.

> [Storm climbing into Jet, Mole in foreground]

> Storm: I've got a pilot's licence,

Rebecca: Ever wondered what happened to his arm? Yeah, he didn't earn it easily.

Matt: And here was me thinking it allowed him to pitch concepts for new shows to NBC.

>but I'm not sure if I can fly this beauty...

Natasha: He's really only qualified to "fly" rocketships made out of cardboard boxes.

Rick: He was one of the greatest aces in the packaging wars. Shot down a zillion paper plate flying saucers.

> Mole: You will have no trouble... in the cockpit, you will find a link-up for your arm.

Natasha: I'm beginning to think that losing his arm was the best thing that ever happened to Storm.

Rick: Better then the time he beat Thunderbolt and Smokey from Crowe Street Comp at Conkers

Natasha: I have no idea what you said. Matt, can you translate?

Matt: He defeated two boys from another school in a traditional British game that involves smashing nuts together.

Natasha: I think I was better off not knowing

> [Storm wearing helmet and connecting arm to computer,

Matt: A lot of these new tablet interfaces just confuse me.

> Mole in background]

Rebecca: That's the sort of face that you'd associate with phrases like 'Big Brother.'

> Mole: The arm connection links your brain directly into the aircraft's main computer.

Matt: Most people would go with some sort of mind-reader helmet or funky cybernetic interface in the head or neck but I guess if that works for you, then go for it.

> You will fly entirely by thought waves!

Rick: But you have to think in Russian.

> [Jet fighter facing hangar door,

Natasha: He's managed to figure out which way the jet goes. Good start.

Rebecca: I imagine that took him a while too.

> Storm in cockpit; Mole nearby]

> The doors of the vast hangar slid open...

Matt: The comic couldn't decide between 'showing' and 'telling' and so opted to go with both.

> Mole: It's like when you fired the machine-gun.

Natasha: Only falling on your arse will be so much worse.

> Just think what you want the 'plane to do!

Rebecca: But no, it will not turn into a giant robot, no matter how hard you want it too.

> Storm: Impossible! I can't move a thing this size...

Rick [Yoda]: Size matters not, to the Force.

> [Jet taxiing on runway]

Rebecca: After spending over an hour sitting on the tarmac, Storm is finally ready for takeoff.

Rick: It's a fifty minute flight! Why do we need to spend more time on the ground than in the air?

> Suddenly, the fighter started to move...

Matt: It went backwards. His thought process still needs some work.

> Storm: I can move it!

Natasha: Yes, but can he move it, move it?

> [Jet taking off]

Rick: And yet, the Ring Raiders still turned down his application.

Natasha: I'm going to pray that's another Brit comic reference, because the alternative is too horrible to consider.

> [Jet in flight over scrubby wasteland]

Rebecca: Storm accidentally flew over Nebraska.

> Storm [Thinking]: I... I'm doing it.

Natasha: He's riding a unicycle while juggling live ferrets!

> I'm flying this thing,

Matt: I believe the technical term is "aeroplane."

>just by thinking what I want it to do!

Rick: This is one of those situations where you wouldn't want to be easily distracted.

Natasha: You'd be in so much trouble.

Rick: Oh yeah. Next thing I know, the plane would have flown into a mountain because something on it caught my eye.

> [View of approaching tunnel entrance from cockpit,

Rick [Ringo Starr]: Thomas the Tank engine was surprised at what he saw at the other end of the tunnel.

> Storm in foreground]

> Storm: Now all I got to do is discover how to land it!

Natasha: This is the part of flying that I always get hung up on. I know how to start, just not how to stop.

> Mole [V/O]: Observe your landing path. Thought waves are all you need.

Rebecca: He's in a jet piloted by his thoughts and connected to his robot arm, working for a secretive supergenius. All we need is the reveal that it was all the machinations of some ancient space ghosts and that everyone has a laser sword and we've hit the eighties sci-fi bingo.

> Storm: A runway coming out of the hillside!

Matt: Subterranean airports never really caught on, did they?

Rebecca: Some times, futurists have great ideas. Other times... not so much

> [Jet landing on runway]

> Storm: Done it!

Natasha: Said with all the enthusiasm of a toddler who's just finished with the potty.

> [Jet in hangar]

Rick: Interestingly enough, Mole employs both the same doorman and the same valet parking as the hotel Storm was at.

> Arrestor hooks slowed the fighter's speed...

Rebecca: Thank you, comic. I could have never lived without knowing how they slowed him down.

Matt: I'm thrilled by these small but vital details.

> [Jet with Storm in cockpit, Mole beside it]

> Mole: Well mister Storm? You had a good flight?

Rick: I don't want to sound sexist but... the stewardesses on this airline are a little ugly.

> Storm: Amazing... just a-mazing!

Rebecca: That was the best thought-controlled jet fighter flight he'd ever had.

Matt: Because it's such a common experience, of course.

Rebecca: No comment.

> [Storm climbing out of cockpit, Mole in foreground]

Rick: The way Mole is staring at his butt is kind of creepy.

Natasha: As opposed to anything else Mole does?

Rick: Fair point, true.

> Storm: Mister, you've got yourself a new combat leader!

Rick: He may be the new combat leader, but he'll never be Combat Leader.

Natasha: Combat Leader will be the only combat leader for me.

> Mole: It's a decision you won't regret!

Matt: Years later, when he was still stuck in the same job and hating every moment of it, behind on his mortgage payment and after his wife left him for another combat leader, Storm had indeed begun to regret it.

> Mole [Thoughts]: Had he refused, it would have been necessary to terminate him!

Rebecca: After you'd spent all the time, effort and presumably money to develop the cybernetic arm, its integrated weapons and an interface to allow him to pilot a jet on its own? You'd think that you'd want him to be committed before you went to such expenses.

Matt: Agreed there. It's a lot of effort for a very exacting set of circumstances.

Rebecca: I mean, the only rationale that I can see is that all twenty-two other potential candidates also were missing their left arm, were all the same size with the same arm length and also were qualified pilots.

Matt: Which makes me wonder why he was recruiting for those exact circumstances. I mean, if one of them was missing his right arm instead, then it would throw the whole thing off.

Rebecca: I suspect we have given this matter more thought than the comic's writers ever did.

Matt: This does seem to happen a lot.

> [Mole and Storm in front of computer]

Rebecca: And this is the point that Mole challenges him to a Battlefield 4 deathmatch. It's the only way he can actually beat someone.

> Mole: You will be activated immediately.

Rick: He will give Storm an action token and order him to attack.

> You will lead a combat team to secure the release of one of our operatives...

Natasha: Rex Dart, Eskimo Spy.

> [Mole looking at computer screen, image of a man on it]

Rebecca: Mole's computer seems only to have a 'generic white guy' setting

> Mole: ...this is Donald Winston.

Matt: A member of the Outer Party who works for the Ministry of Truth.

> He is an undercover agent in the South American country of Tolavia...

Rick: Tolavia. Famed for its pipe organ music, its export of muskrat wool, and its national dish, emu eggs on soy bread toast.

Natasha: Tolvia's got a very strong curling team. They're considered the best in South America.

Rebecca: It's a landlocked country with excellent surf beaches, which attract a lot of mountain climbers.

Matt: The national currency of Tolvia is the Yens.

> [Winston caught in gigantic spider webs]

Matt: I expect an oversized spider puppet to menace him at any moment.

Natasha: Followed by a sword-waving B-movie actor, no doubt.

> Mole [V/O]: He is being held captive...

Rebecca: In South America, they take loitering charges seriously. Twenty years without parole.

>and is close to breaking point...

Natasha: Then he goes surfing with Patrick Swayze.

> Winston: N-no more... please... no m-more!

Rick [Winston]: No more emu eggs and pipe organ music. I can't stand it!

> [Tarantula; an ape-like man with bestial features and large fangs,

Matt: I don't want to leap to conclusions, but I suspect that this is our villain.

Rebecca: There are subtle signs that indicate this may be the case.

> looming over Winston]

> Mole [V/O]: His captor is... Tarantula!

Rick: Not to be confused with the two different DC characters by that name, or the five different Marvel ones with that name either.

Natasha: Marvel has five Tarantulas?

Rick: Not including Ultimate Tarantula, yes. Or for that matter, the M2 Black Tarantula.

Natasha: And the differences between them?

Rick: One of them's a girl.

Natasha: Somebody needs to get some new bad guy ideas.

> Tarantula: Then tell me what I wish to know... or die!

> [Storm and Mole]

> Storm: "Tarantula"?

Rebecca: As in the fluffy spider that fat Goth girls keep as pets to prove that they're being 'different' and 'edgy?'

> That hunk of evil,

Matt: A hunka hunka burning evil, no less.

>the... the one who...

Rick [Storm]: Once beat me at Pokemon?

> Mole: Removed your arm?

Rebecca: Doctor Tarantula, trauma surgeon.

> The very same.

Matt: So I can assume that Tarantula's involvement in this situation is the reason why Mole recruited Storm specifically. After all, a desire for revenge does give Storm a strong motivation.

Rebecca: True that, but at the same time, Storm also spent three weeks unconscious after the operation.

Matt: So then either this emerging situation is just a coincidence, or Mole has been leaving Winston hanging for the better part of a month.

Rebecca: I'm beginning to suspect that either is just as likely.

> [Storm in jungle, surrounded by panicked African soldiers]

Rebecca: The black guys flee in panic, while the white hero bravely stands his ground. There's some good old-fashioned family racism for you.

> John Storm's mind went back one year,

Rick: The baseball glove he got for his birthday that year was a cruel joke.

>when he was a mercenary in Africa...

Matt: A grizzled, battle-scarred veteran twenty-one year old mercenary.

> Storm: What the heck's scaring you so much?

Natasha: Sudden onset Godzilla attacks will do that.

> Stay and fight!

> Soldier: Not anymore! We're no longer facing human enemies...

Matt: I suppose it would be horribly stereotypical to assume that they're being frightened of something mundane and their reaction is instead based on 'primitive tribal suspicions'. I also suppose that's exactly what the writers were going for as well.

Rick: You'd probably be right in both cases.

> [Tarantula in tree,

Natasha: Hey! Tree spiders are completely different to Tarantulas!

Rick: I suppose he's branching out then.

Natasha: Really? Really?

Rick: I don't know what came over me. I should leaf it off.

> net in hand; Storm below, unaware]

Rebecca: And then the blonde woman sneaks up and clubs him again.



> Storm [Thinking]: What's wrong with them?

Matt [Storm]: Bloody foreigners.

> They hire me to save them from the local rebels...

Rebecca: And the next thing you know, they've wound up blowing up the Death Star on his watch.

> Then this! I can't see any sign of an enemy...

Matt: Because apparently in a jungle there are never any threats in the trees.

Natasha: You'd only miss Tarantula if you were blind or stupid. I'm guessing Storm's the latter.

> [Tarantula throwing net on Storm]

Rick: Oooh, looks like a good catch there.

Rebecca: Plenty of eatin' in that one.

> Storm: What the-? AUUUURGH!

Matt: Remind me again why this guy was Mole's top pick for the job?

Rebecca: I'm beginning to suspect that the missing arm over-rode all other considerations. Certainly I'd be worried if he was the smartest choice.

> [Storm in net,

Rick: When he said he wanted more web presence, this wasn't what he meant.

> Tarantula jumping down from tree]

Rebecca: He's more of a jumping spider than a tarantula.

Natasha: I thought we decided he was a tree spider.

Matt: I think it's becoming easier to decide what he's not.

> Storm: Net... sticky... like a web...

Rick: The spider guy has a web? This comes out of nowhere!

Natasha: Next thing you know, he'll be crawling up walls or have some sort of super-sense that tingles when danger is near.

> Tarantula: It is a web, human fool. Tarantula's web!

Natasha: So you squeezed it out of your own butt?

Rebecca: Thank you for that.

Natasha: Just saying...

> [Storm in net, being bitten on the arm by Tarantula]

Rebecca: Tarantula gives a hickey like nobody's business.

> Tarantula: Let my poison fangs sink deep!

Natasha: Well this bites.

> Storm: ARRGH!

Rick: Oh, stop being such a baby.

> [Storm looking down at arm stump, Mole in background]

> Storm: The doctor's got to me before the poison could kill me...

Matt: You know that Tarantula venom isn't dangerous to humans, right?

Rick: It isn't?

Matt: There is not a single confirmed death from tarantula bites.

Rick: This guy is getting lamer by the second, and it's still only a flashback. I can't wait to see how much he sucks on-screen.

Natasha: Shouldn't that be how much he \*bites?\*

>but... but... they had to amputate my arm...

Rebecca: And to make it even worse, it was his fapping arm.

> Mole: I know the story.

Matt [Mole]: I know everything about you; your entire life history, your career, your training and experience, your scholastic record, your dating history, your internet browsing habits...

Rick [Storm]: Why did you need all that?

Matt [Mole]: I don't have any evil plans.

> I know that you are no friend of that fiend the Tarantula!

Rebecca: Mole, do us a favour and never try to wax poetic again

> [Storm grabbing Mole]

Rick: Watch as our hero assaults the malformed midget!

> Storm: Send me on the mission right now...

Matt: No need to rush. I'm sure that Winston can hang on a little longer.

> I want Tarantula... he's got to die for what he did!

Rick: Usually in origin stories, this sort of hatred is reserved for someone killing the hero's parents or wife or whatever. By getting so worked up over his arm, Storm seems kind of like a jerk.

Rebecca: As opposed to... well, everything else he's done so far in this comic?

Rick: Fair point.

> Mole: NUURGH! C-calm yourself, mister Storm... the mission will begin soon enough...

Matt: I'm assuming that means 'in next week's issue' then.

> [Mole pointing,

Rebecca: Look! A multi-function polis! [Ding]

> Storm looking surprised]

Natasha: Look! There are readers!

Rick: History suggests otherwise.

> Mole: ...first you must meet the team who will be going with you... the best... and the most bizarre

> fighting team in the world...

Matt: The Telepathic Wolf!  
Natasha: Mutton Head!  
Rebecca: Eye-Rolling Girl!  
Rick: And Bob Anglerfish!

> Storm Force!

Matt: So is the team named after him? Or did in a moment of exceptional synergy, did Mole hire a guy called 'Storm' to lead Storm Force?

Rebecca: Maybe that was his top qualification for the job. The robot arm and all was just a bonus.

On that ponderance, the big screen turned off, switching the world back to script format. "So Rick," Rebecca spoke up. "You know a bit about this crap. Can you elucidate us some more on what the hell it is that we just read?"

"Yeah, because I noticed two things," Natasha added. "The first was that it was kinda crappy. The second is that instead of being called Action Force, the comic was now called Storm Force. I mean, the title can't be a coincidence."

"It probably isn't," Matt agreed. "I'm guessing that it'd be fair to say that there were a fair few reasons for that similarity, and others."

"Small elite supertech team, colourful malformed bad guys and all that," Rebecca. "Sounds like just about every eighties action figure toyline."

"Pretty much," Rick agreed. "See, the thing about Battle is that it started out as a straight war book. As said, it had a lot of crap, but it also had some good stuff. However, that also didn't sell fantastically, and by the early eighties, Battle was on the rocks."

"Enter the licences plastic army men," Matt said.

"Right," Rick agreed. "Action Force started out as a backup, pull-out supplemental comic. It was popular, however, enough to both reverse the declining readership and to rake in the quid big time. So as the years went on, Action Force pretty much took over the book. It made up more and more of the page count while squeezing the traditional war sorties out."

"But I can imagine that it was also their main drawcard," Rebecca added.

"You got it. The editors hated it, but Action Force was raking in the quid for them," Rick offered. "And while they laboured under orders from the toy company, the book was selling well."

"And then I'm guessing something went wrong," Natasha noted. "Hence 'Storm' and not 'Action.'"

"The toy company pulled the licence. Overnight Action's sales plummeted as they lost not only their number one drawcard but also the source of half their content and much of their income," Rick explained, seemingly not taking a breath.

"I can imagine a number of reactions, but 'blind panic' must have been key among them," Matt considered. "And the logical solution would have been to create a new story that was like Action Force, but distinctly different enough to not cause copyright hell."

"Hence, Storm, not Action," Natasha reiterated. "And boy, if that was a blind panic book, it showed."

"Just a bit," Matt agreed. "And I have no doubt that we will be seeing more of it too, right Voice?" He glanced up at the ceiling.

"That is correct," the Voice confirmed. "When next we all meet, we'll be looking at the next part of this story."

"Wow. Maybe the plot will actually begin," Rebecca mused. "But then, given the 'quality' offered so far, I'm not sure if I want it to. Hard call."

"Either way, it means we're done for today," Natasha finished as she stood. "And I, for one, am out of here."

"Something on your mind?" Matt asked as he also stood.

"Well, I've gotta hone my art," she shot back. "I mean, my first chainsaw sculpture was genius and all that, but it's just a beginning. I've got so many ideas and such, and I think that with a bit of practice, I can make something awesome of this."

"Need a hand?" Rick offered. "I mean, I know we work in different mediums and all that, but you never know. One of us could come up with something that inspires the other and the like."

"Won't say no," she replied with a smile and the pair of them headed out.

"Well this should be amusing," Rebecca commented as she stood. "Or Tragic. But no middle ground."

"More Storm Force or whatever those two produce?" Matt asked.

"Either. Both," she laughed. "Regardless, the results should be rather strangely fascinating. The secret is if it's in a good or a bad way."

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Author's notes:

Between the (rather abrupt) cancellation of Action and the launch of Storm Force was a mere six weeks. That's not much time to create an entirely new comic from the ground up, especially not one that is going to be the tentpole of a rapidly floundering book. The end results, especially the gratuitously similar title, speak for themselves.

I discovered Storm Force while doing background research for Death in South America, and I was instantly hooked by this awful yet strangely awesome team. Naturally, I had to hunt down some samples. I was not disappointed.

We'll be looking at more Storm Force in future episodes, although how many that will be is currently in flux. Unfortunately, my collection of SF issues is very slim, and it's not like it's a well-loved or fondly remembered comic. There's no huge online scan archives of it, which limits me to whatever I can scrounge up. If you have some Action Storm Force (or even post-merger Eagle) issues with SF material in it that you'd be interested in donating one way or another, I'd love to know.

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Storm Force written by James Nicholas, drawn by Vanyo. Originally published in Battle Storm Force, 24 January, 1987

Rebecca Bartley, Natasha Isavia, Matt Simmons and Rick R. Mortis created by Rick R. (natch)

Questions? Comments? Complaints? Combat Leader? Email us at elmerstudios00 (at) gmail.com and register your Jeff.

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> fighting team in the world...