
Episode 481 – The world’s most boring man fights in the space robot war

---

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

“And so I was all, ‘I don’t care why its been left beside the side of the road in the middle of nowhere, I'm not going to say no to a free fridge’,” Dan noted as he and Rebecca entered the apartment.

“Dan, you are pure class,” Rebecca simply replied.

“With the cost of appliances these days?” Dan shrugged. “I'd be a fool to pass it up. If nothing else, I can gut it for the metal and sell that”

“See what I mean?”

“I dunno, post-apocalyptic fridge retrieval sounds like a story hook,” Rick noted as he and Tsuneo entered.

“In fact, I'd go so far as to add that it's better than most of the fics we read,” Tsuneo offered.

“No arguments there,” Rebecca nodded. “What have you two been up to since the last fic?”

“So I think I told you that I got a job doing research and artwork management for a role-playing game,” Rick spoke up.

“Rick, you've been involved with so many of these projects now that I've lost track,” Rebecca replied. “And every last one of them has been an utter disaster.”

“I have to agree with Rebecca there,” Tsuneo nodded. “In fact, to be honest Rick, you seem to have left a long trail of catastrophically failed projects behind you.”

“To the point where I have to wonder why people keep employing you,” Dan added. “After a while I'd think that somebody would have picked up on that little fact.”

Rick shrugged. “What can I say? Honestly, as much of a mess as all these sorts of things have been, the failure has never actually been on me. I just collect a paycheck and churn out some nice looking art while the rest of the project crashes and burns around me in a flaming heap.”

“Granted, I will give you that,” Rebecca noted. “But I have to wonder how it is that you are always in demand for these sorts of things despite that.”

“Oh that's simple,” he nodded. “I work for cheap.”

“Can't argue with that logic,” Dan noted. “So what's happened this time with your latest project? Because I know that this is going to be another mess. It's always another mess.”

“Well!” Rick beamed. “This time the Kickstarter went really, really well. We got funded in the first hour, made many multiples of the target goal and achieved all of the stretch goals.”

“And let me guess, the stretch goals are stupidly over-ambitious and you have no way of reaching them,” Tsuneo suggested.

“Uh no, they're entirely realistic and the team had actually planned for them.” Rick replied.

“So what was it then?” Dan asked. “Because I know something has gone wrong. Something always goes wrong with you.”

“So well, one of the options for the Kickstarter was to buy art,” Rick explained. “You give the Kickstarter a couple of hundred bucks and I'll draw a page or two to your specifications that will go in the final book.”

“If I read this right, it's basically like taking a commission,” Rebecca assessed. “Which, I'll note, you also have a horrific history with.”

“Yes,” Rick nodded enthusiastically.

Tsuneo sighed deeply. “So what happened this time?”

“Well the company put out strict guidelines as to what could go on your art page,” Rick noted. “You know , must be on-topic to the RPG, must not contain offensive material, can only have so many things per page and so on and so forth.”

“Well I see no way this could end badly,” Dan sighed.

“Well yeah,” Rick noted. “So the first thing is that we sold a lot more art pages than we expected. Like at the screwing up the layout of the manuscript level of more than we expected.”

“But that's not the main problem, is it?’ Rebecca asked. “Because I know there's a bigger problem.”

“Right, because one of the people who bought multiple art pages is being... difficult,” Rick noted.

“Define difficult?” Tsuneo continued. “Because I know that this is the point where the bomb will drop.”

“He's pushing this fussy micromanagement of every last detail of each page he's ordered,” Rick explained. “Like, tiny, minute details that are largely irrelevant to begin with but that he's hung up on. He's posted massive mood boards for every single element. He's even gone so far as to create mockups for where he wants everything on the page and, well, they’re awful.”

“So he's basically telling you how to do your job,” Tsuneo finished.

“Exactly,” Rick nodded.

“Well that's pretty awful,” Rebecca noted, “but-"

“Also he has a foot fetish,” Rick noted. “Like, not even trying to hide it.”

“-never mind,” Rebecca finished.

“Good morning everyone,” the Voice interjected into the conversation.

“And speaking of stupid things, good morning to you too Magnanimous,” Dan replied.

“So what do we have in the hurt bucket today?” Tsuneo asked.

“As long as it's not an overly detailed breakdown of an art page with lots of alien feet,” Rick interjected.

“What?” The Voice just spat.

“So many alien feet,” Rick sighed. “Who the hell would want that? I mean, really?”

“Um, is he okay?” the Voice asked.

“He'll be fine,” Tsuneo shrugged. “Just give him a moment.”

“So what is the pain?” Dan asked.

“Right, well,” The Voice tried its best to recover. “So today we're going to be starting on a Robotech fic called Dire Straights,” he explained.

“Okay, old fashioned fic,” Rebecca noted. “What's it about?”

“Well, there's this guy,” the Voice began.

“And?” Dan asked.

“He, uh, pilots a hovertank,” the Voice continued. “And, um, fills in forms, and describes uniform regulations, and, uh, he goes to karaoke and sometimes goes on dates.”

“Well that sounds, um, fun,” Tsuneo spoke up. “How long is this fic?”

“Its, uh, twenty-eight chapters,” The Voice continued. “And we'll be covering it in seven parts.”

“You what?” Dan asked.

“Well then,” Rebecca managed. “I feel that this will be a lot of fun.”

“As long as he doesn't ask for art commissions, I'm good,” Rick finally spoke up.

“Glad to see you're okay there, buddy,” Dan noted.

“Given how vague the voice's description was,” Tsuneo asked as he took his place on the couch. “Do you feel that we’ll be able to figure out what this fic is about by the time we're done with this part?”

“With our track record, I think we'll be lucky if we figure out what it's about when it's over,” Rebecca replied as she and the others joined him.

“Sadly, that's what I was thinking too,” Tsuneo finished as the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format.

> Dire Straits by Michael2

Rick: Fanfic for nothing and your reviews for free

> Chapter 1: Southern Cross

Dan: It's his favourite constellation

> I hopped into the cockpit of the VHT-1 Spartas hovertank

Rebecca: A sports convertible war robot

> and pressed buttons and flipped switches to start up the engines.

Rick: I had no clue what I was doing

> I made one last check of the instruments,

Dan: Yep, they’re instruments. [Pause] I was hoping for more.

> and then I drove the hovertank out of the garage.

Tsuneo: He immediately backs over the bins

> I looked around. The colonel had ordered the 18th ATAC Troop to take a forward position.

Rebecca: Not sure why I was a part of it, since I'm meant to be a garbage man...

> I could feel myself sweat under my arming doublet;

Tsuneo: He's driving his Hovertank to the renaissance fair.
Rick: I mean... Southern Cross.

> the air was warm.

Rebecca: There was a slight south-easterly blowing and a mild chance of alien invasion.

> I was hoping that this was a drill.

> "All troops, get ready," I heard the colonel say. "Enemy penetration has been detected."

Dan: Oooh baby

> I made a last minute check of my instruments.

Dan: Still instruments. [He gives a thumbs-up]

> I knew that we would be in combat within minutes. I reflected briefly on how I came to be here.

Tsuneo: He drove his Hovertank out of a garage.
Rebecca: Well there you go..

> Not long ago I was on a UNAF transport plane,

Dan: Rick, you're the expert here. What does UNAF mean in a Robotech context?
Rick: Right-wing miltech fantasy fanwank
Dan: Thought so

> heading to my first operational assignment.

Rebecca: Walking the colonel's dog

> It was a crowded plane, and there was a lot of cargo stored in the back.

Dan: I was packed in with the tinned ham.

> The whole flight was about six hours.

Tsuneo: Our in-flight movie was Airplane!

> I had heard that there were suborbitals that could cross the Atlantic in less than two hours;
> those were reserved for generals and admirals.

Tsuneo: Could it be that they just don't like him?
Rick: I mean, we barely know this guy so far...
Tsuneo: But based on our past record?
Rick: ...yeah

> "Attention, all passengers," said the pilot. "We are beginning our descent into Gibraltar Air Field.
> Please fasten your seat belts."

Rick: And get ready for some Asteroid Mining
Rebecca: I hate you so much

> And so I did. Here I was, about to start my career for real. After my enlistment, I went to Oregon for
> Basic,

Rebecca: Where he learned how to make avocado toast

> and then Pennsylvania for Officer Candidate School.

Rick: Or at least, what passes for Pennsylvania in a post-apocalyptic world
Dan: Outside of Pittsburgh and Philly would you even notice?
Rick: Probably not.

> After that,

Tsuneo: Are we really having a flashback inside a flashback?

> I went to a three-month training course at the Hovertank School near Reno, Nevada.

Rebecca: He got his Hovertank learner's permit

> I can remember my transition from learning to follow orders to learning how to give orders

Dan: Turns out it's mostly about shouting. Who knew?

> and learning the ins and outs of the new VHT-1 Spartas hovertanks,

Rebecca: Like where the cup holders are.

> which had been adopted for general use by the United Earth Forces just last year.

Tsuneo: They even had that new war robot smell

> After graduation, I took a one-week leave in my home in Jamaica.

Rick: Okay, so we know he's from Jamaica. What's his actual name?
Dan: Hmmm.
Rebecca: I don't believe we've even established a gender yet.

> My orders were to
> report to Fort Gibraltar. I returned to Reno, making travel arrangements to fly from there to Gibraltar
> Air Field, the nearest Military Air Command terminal to Fort Gibraltar.

Rebecca: I'm hoping that the minute details of his flight arrangement will be vital to the plot given all the time we're wasting on them.
Rick: Again, asteroid mining

> I soon felt the plane land, hearing the rumbling of the landing gears as they rolled along the surface
> of the runway.

Tsuneo: And a slight bump as it runs over the bins.

> In a few minutes we had come to a complete stop.

Dan: Everyone immediately switched on their phones like their lives depended on it.

> I stepped off the plane and onto the tarmac of the air base. I had my duffel bag and my orders with
> me.

Rick: And his garment bag and his tennis saxophone and his twelve-pound bowling ball and his lucky lucky glow-in-the-dark autographed snorkel. [Pause] Too soon?

Rebecca: Naaah.

> I could see the hangar and the control towers. I also saw a suborbital jet; a general was
> probably visiting.

Rick: Actually that's just the Doordash order.

> "Welcome to Gibraltar Air Field, sir," said an Air Force corporal, saluting me. "Please follow me to
> the terminal."

> And so I did.

Tsuneo: Wow, what a twist
Dan: I'm just floored

> The Military Airlift Command terminal was like a scaled-down version of a commercial
> airport terminal, with a waiting room with chairs and tables.

Tsuneo: This fic feels like a waiting room.
Rick: First page.
Rebecca: And yet...

> Desks on the sides provided services for travelers.

Dan: Except for those that died in character creation

> Air Force recruitment posters decorated the room. I waited for a few more minutes.

Dan: Dire Straights!
Tsuneo: I mean, this has been a really slow chapter so far.
Rebecca: This is page two
Tsuneo: Help.

> I then heard someone call my name.

Rick: He wagged his tail and sat up

> I looked and saw this little lady wearing camouflage, which was much more casual than the Class
> "A" uniform I was wearing.

Dan: Her casual uniform, the casual camouflage.

> "Good afternoon, sir," said the little lady. "Corporal Mary Sue Hines,

Rebecca: Spock’s girlfriend, hero of the Enterprise

> from Fort Gibraltar. I'm here to drive you to the base, sir."

Tsuneo: Remember, he is sitting in his Hovertank, reminiscing about someone offering to drive him to the base.
Rebecca: For some people, life is exciting enough.

> We all entered this Humvee that was waiting outside the motor pool. Another man walked in. He
> was dressed in Class "A's",

Rick: For a lack of any other reference, I'll just assume that this means he's wearing a rental tux
Dan: Could that mean we're in for a round of back alley football?
Rick: I can but hope

> and his sleeve emblems showed that he was a buck private.

> "It looks like everyone's in," said the corporal.

> "Take us to the base, then."

> "Yes, sir."

Dan: I mean, the dialogue so far is better than a lot of our fics.
Rebecca: In that it's needlessly functional and bores you to tears?
Dan: Still an improvement.

> As Corporal Hines drove the Humvee out of the airfield, I read the brochure about Fort Gibraltar.

Rebecca: Produced by your friends at the Fort Gibraltar tourist board

> It
> was located on the coast of Morocco, near Tangier, and was a sister base to Gibraltar Air Field on
> the other side.

Tsuneo: Fort Gibraltar is located at Gibraltar!

[They all gasp in shock]

> It had the usual amenities of a permanent UEF base- a commissary, Post Exchange,
> officers' and enlisted clubs, bowling alleys.

Rick: Hobby shops, garden centres, cosmetic dentists and a thrift store that used to be a Pizza Hut.
All the usual amenities

> "We are going under the strait now," said Hines.

> She drove the Humvee into this tunnel with three lanes in one direction.

Dan: If you want to go the other way, well, tough.

> The Gibraltar Tunnel was
> over eight miles long. It is sometimes hard to believe that it was built with technology gleaned from
> an alien spaceship.

Tsuneo: Because nobody had ever tried to build a tunnel before then

> After a few minutes, we were out of the tunnel and in the Kingdom of Morocco. I
> could see the city of Tangier from the highway, with its seaside resorts.

Tsuneo: From near Tangier, he could see Tangier.

> "Here we are," she said, exiting from the highway. We approached this gatehouse, with the sign
> "U.N. Army Base Fort Gibraltar" printed in bold letters.

Dan: No peddlers or hawkers

> An MP checked our papers

Rick: [MP] Sir, according to this you are an animate lump of gristle.

> and then the
> corporal drove us into the base. The base looked much the same as other Army posts, with square
> buildings and signs.

Rick: Mostly warning about the dog

> I saw a platoon of soldiers marching along the street, with an executive sergeant leading a chant.

Dan: I don’t know what I've been told!
Rick: This fic's dry narration is getting old!

> "Here is the base housing office," said Corporal Hines.

Rebecca: [Hines] I went through basic too, you know. Did the drills, the obstacles. Got chewed out by the sergeant. And what do I get? I get to show some nobody pretend officer his room. So here you go, sir faceless. There’s a mint on your pillow. I hope you choke on it.
Tsuneo: Wow. Hines goes hard.
Rebecca: She has had a difficult and complicated life that will never be touched on.

> I entered the base housing office. It has this waiting room with the usual decoration of chairs, tables,
> and recruitment posters.

Dan: Recruitment posters for… the soldiers who had already joined the army, I guess.

> I walked up to the window where a corporal dressed in camouflage was sitting.

> "How may I help you, sir?" asked the lady.

Tsuneo: Definitely a different female corporal in camouflage than the last one.

> "I'm transferring in," I said, handing her a copy of my transfer orders.

Rebecca: I love how this fic transports us to an amazing sci-fi world of intergalactic warfare

> The corporal typed into the keyboard of her computer terminal. "I have your assignment, sir.

Rebecca: [Corporal] I’ll need a name first.
Rick: Uuuh...
Tsuneo: Uuuh...
Dan: Guys, I’ve decided to call him Freddie.
Rick: Freddie?
Tsuneo: Freddie.
Dan, Rick and Tsuneo: Freddie.

> I'll be printing it out."

Dan: The paperless office is a lie.
Rick: The paperless office died in the orbital bombardment.

> She handed me the sheet of paper. I read my new housing assignment. It was BOQ (Bachelor
> Officer Quarters) 33.

Tsuneo: Intense paperwork action!

> "The base has a shuttle service, sir," she said. "We've a map."

Rick: It’s a pirate treasure map. Don't know if it will help, but its yours anyway

> I took one of the maps, and looked at the route that the shuttle would take. The shuttle- a little bus-
> stopped near the base housing office and I stepped inside.

> "Welcome, sir," said the bus driver.

Dan: Can a fic have too much action?

> The bus went around, and I looked around to become more familiar with the base since I would be
> staying here long term.

Rebecca: He bought the base a drink and asked it about its family

> Along the way, I stood up to salute a major who stepped inside the bus.

Tsuneo: Could this be the officer who had previously arrived on the suborbital? Are these important plot points connected?
Dan: Or, more likely, they'll be forgotten the moment they're mentioned.

> Finally, the shuttle bus stopped next to the bachelor officer quarters, and I stepped off along with
> two hours.

> "New here?" asked this young man.

> "Yes, sir," I said.

> "Second Lieutenant Michael Meyers," he said.

Rick [Meyers]: I'll slash your throat later

> I introduced myself.

Dan: Second Lieutenant Abercrombie Fitch here.

> "No rank inside the BOQ," said Lieutenant Meyers.

Rick: But you just introduced yourself as Lieutenant…
Dan: No ranks!

> The BOQ was this three-story brick building, with small trees growing a few feet away.

Rebecca: I can only assume that they're covered in cigarette butts

> We entered through one of the doors and into this sitting area with tables and chairs and a TV.

Dan: Can we at least pretend its a futuristic hologram TV?
Tsuneo: Sure, why not?

> "This is our common living room, so to speak," said Lieutenant Meyers.

Rebecca: [Meyers] I call it our common living room because it's our common living room.

> "Quarters are down the hall. It's basically a bedroom with an attached bathroom.

Rick: They tried doing it the other way around but it didn't work out

> Much cheaper and more convenient than renting an apartment in Tangier."

Tsuneo: The entire army was dependant on Air B&B

> "Better than what I had in Basic or OCS or Hovertank School," I said.

Rebecca: There he lived out of a lean-to shack

> "Much better than when we go out to the field for field exercises," said Meyers. "We junior officers
> get to sleep in a Quonset hut, if we're lucky.

Tsuneo: This base is staffed entirely with tour guides.

> Here, we also have a game room with a foosball set. No girls here;

Dan: Don't want to risk the spread of cooties

> they are in a separate building.

Tsuneo: Wasn't this supposed to be a fully integrated military where female officers would share barracks with their male subordinates?
Rebecca: No girls!

> We take meals in the officers' mess, or we can go to one of the fast food places we have here."

Dan: They even have a stodgey Korean fried chicken place

> "What about going out to town for a meal?" I asked.

> "If you got some money saved up, fine.

Rebecca: Tangiers has a very strong tipping culture

> We're not on deployment, so we can leave the base
> whenever we're not on duty. Savor your relative freedom here, friend-

Rick: [Meyers] We’re going to be good friends, friend. Good friends.

> you could be sent to the other
> side of the world or even out of the solar system on some extended deployment."

Dan: Does that really happen?
Rick [Meyers]: Naw, mostly we just play foosball

> And so I went to my quarters- Room 33. As Lieutenant Meyers had said, it was basically a bedroom
> with an attached bathroom.

Rebecca: The room was exactly how it had been described! What a shocking twist!

> I put down my duffel bag.

Tsuneo: Really? Because I thought he’d be carrying it on his person for the rest of eternity.

> I sat on the bed. It wasn't much, but it was comfortable. I would need the sleep for I am scheduled
> to report for duty at 0900.

Tsuneo: Well this fic is off to a gripping start

> Oooooooo

> I woke up at 0600 on my first day. After getting dressed in my Class "A's"- a coat, pants, dress
> shoes, and hat-

Rick: Clown wig, mesh shirt, baseball mitt, waders and clogs

> I walked over to the officers' mess. Breakfast was served cafeteria style,

Tsuneo: But was the French toast made the French way?

> and I had myself some scrambled eggs, bacon, and orange juice.

Rebecca: It may be dull, lifeless and insipid, but at least he’s having a complete breakfast.

> After my breakfast, I caught a shuttle bus,
> riding over to the headquarters of the 6th ATAC battalion.

> The headquarters was this three story brick building.

Rick: Not that or the other three story brick building.

> I went inside, and the front lobby was a typical lobby, with a reception desk, tables, and chairs.

Dan: The outdated magazines are assumed

> "I am here to see the colonel," I said. "I have transfer orders."

Dan: Slummed for a night in the barracks first though.

> The corporal looked at my transfer orders. "The colonel is on the third floor, sir," he said.

> I took an elevator to the third floor, and walked along the hallway. I entered this office.

Rebecca: Really? I thought he was going to stand outside for the rest of eternity.

> It was a smaller version of the main lobby,

Rick: A sub-lobby, if you will.

> with a couch, a table, and a desk. A sergeant sat behind the desk.

> "The colonel's not here right now, sir," she said, standing at attention. "I'll notify him that you're
> here."

Tsuneo: Why didn't you tell that to the guy at the front?
Dan: They've got to get their laughs somehow

> "Thank you, Sergeant," I replied. I waited inside the office for an hour.

Tsuneo: Waiting inside the office for an hour is the whole feeling of this fic

> Then some people in camouflage uniform entered the room. I checked the rank insignia, and saw
> the silver oak leaves of the lieutenant colonel.

> The lieutenant colonel stood out, for he had pale lavender skin.

Rick: He looked fabulous

> He was a Zentraedi. Twenty years
> ago, his people came to Earth looking for a crashed alien spaceship. One thing led to another,

Dan: A guy kissed his CO, someone sang a bunch, little things.

> and
> the Robotech War started. The Zentraedi were defeated, and we made peace with most of them.

Rebecca: Something something wiping out most of the Earth something. He doesn't sweat the details

> Some of the Zentraedi veterans now serve in the UEF, like the colonel here.

> I saluted and reported for duty.

> "In my office, Lieutenant," said Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera.

Rebecca: Lupon Kravshera the third. His buddies are waiting outside in their Fiat 500

> We all entered the colonel's private office. It was more spacious that the front office. A wooden desk
> was the centerpiece. A window covered with blinds was in the back.

Rebecca: The mini-bar with expensive Scotch is assumed.

> To the right was a small bookcase, and to the left was a steel file cabinet.

Rick: In the middle of the room was an Orc with a pie. Roll for initiative

> "I've read your file," said Colonel Kravshera.

Dan [Kravshera]: Gods you're dull

> "Excellent evaluations from OCS and Hovertank School.

Rick: But how are his parfaits?

> I will assign you to the 18th ATAC troop under First Lieutenant Jack Emerson here."

> I looked and saw this man in his early twenties with close-cropped brown hair.

Dan: Jack here is every Jarhead ever.

> "You will be under my command, Lieutenant," said Emerson.

Tsuneo: The guy who he said would be his commander is going to be his commander
Rebecca: This fic just keeps pulling out the amazing twists. I can't keep up.

> "Yes, sir."

> "My second in command, Second Lieutenant Michael Meyers."

Dan: Don’t ask him about the Love Guru.
Tsuneo: Not going for a Halloween reference?
Dan: I thought I’d aim for the real horror.

> "We've met, sir," I've said. "He showed me around the BOQ."

> A dark-haired woman spoke up.

Rebecca: Also I am here now

> "Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital, senior enlistee with the 18th
> troop," she said. "I advise Lieutenants Emerson and Meyers and I supervise the other enlistees."

> A dark haired man spoke up. "Major Yoon Shon," he said. "I'm the battalion XO. I take care of all the
> details."

Tsuneo: Wait, how many people were in this room?

> "And I want to introduce Master Sergeant Tomas Cabon,"

Rebecca: More, apparently.

> said the colonel. "He's my senior enlisted advisor."

Rick: As well as John Barren, Charles, Charles, Madam Z, Misspelt Saphire, Akira from Programming,

The Saucy Trio, Ghost Flame, Black Flame, Intelligent on Plants Girl, Ken the future space nanotech lizardman and some guy called Lozer.

> "Sir," the master sergeant said to me. "My advice is available to you- if no senior officer needs it."

Dan: Normally he gets his advice from TikTok videos about stonks

> "I guess I am last in line for your advice, Master Sergeant."

Tsuneo: And now, with the pecking order firmly established, the fic can continue.
Rebecca: I sincerely doubt that.

> "Executive Sergeant Avital is a capable sergeant; she will assist you greatly."

> "Lieutenant Emerson, I am sure you and your people can break our new arrival in," said Colonel
> Kravshera.

Dan: Which one was Emerson? I forget.

> "And the uniform for the day is camouflage.

Rick: And the fish of the day is trout a la creme

> Get properly dressed ASAP."

> "Yes, sir," I replied.

> "Dismissed."

Dan: Do they have a uniform rotation or something? Like they have to wear shoulder pads on Tuesdays?

> We left the battalion headquarters. Lieutenant Emerson led me to this building just down the street.
> The ground floor had a garage. It was dimly lit, and several people were working.

> "This is where we keep our hovertanks," he said. I looked around, and saw over twenty Spartases.

Rick: What is the plural of Spartas anyway?

> "The troop office is upstairs." We walked up this flight of stairs and went through the door.

Dan: [Emerson] That is where we keep our troops.
Rick: Amazing.

> The office was this big room, with several desks and partitions near the wall. In the back was a
> coffee maker.

Dan: But enough of the futuristic war machines. Coffee?

> A huge file cabinet was to the left of the office.

> "We have three entrances," said Executive Sergeant Avital. "Aside from the one we just went
> through, another entrance leads directly outdoors, and there is also a freight elevator."

Rebecca [Bored]: Fic, slow down with these break-neck action sequences. I can’t keep up

> "This will be your desk, Lieutenant," said Emerson, putting his hand on a steel desk.

Rebecca: I foresee many thrilling administrative sequences in our future.
Dan: Can Bunt Chugley here file his 32F potted plant requisition form on time? Tune in to find out!

> "Come with
> me." He led me to the corner of the office, which was separated from the rest of the office by a
> partition. "This is my private office."

> "Pretty big," I said. The place was only as big as a small closet.

> "It's big enough,"

Dan: It's entirely adequate

> said the first lieutenant, sitting behind the steel desk. "It gives me enough privacy."

Rick: It allows him to work on his Snorks fanfic in peace

> "What is my assignment, sir?" I asked.

Rebecca: [Emerson] Honestly, I have no clue. I don't even know what I do around here.

> "Your primary assignment is to drill in the Spartas hovertanks,

Tsuneo: Smash cut to our protagonist using a power drill while sitting in his cockpit

> to maintain your personal combat
> readiness," said Emerson. "Your secondary assignment is logistics. Logistics is one of the most
> important things in an Army unit,

Rick: You can use it to restock a card from your hand at the end of your turn.

> whether it is the 18th ATAC troop, the Southern Cross Field Army,
> or the entire United Earth Forces.

Rebecca: If you don't properly inventories your disposable plastic cups then the entire army could collapse.
Tsuneo: Logistics!

> You will get dressed in the uniform of the day,

Dan: Does the army have Casual Friday?

> and then I want you to look over the logistics records. Dismissed."

> "Yes, sir," I said.

> Oooooo

> The rest of the day was like a routine day at the office,

Tsuneo: With all the thrills and excitement that implies.

> as I looked over the records of everything
> that the 18th troop had, from the Hovertanks to ammuntion to spare parts to fuel and supplies.

Rebecca: He lost an entire hour counting paperclips

> I met
> the supply sergeant, Staff Sergeant Takashi Suzaku. I was also fitted with my arming doublet, which
> I would wear when driving the Spartas.

Rick: Why do I imagine him being measured by a moustachioed tailor in a waistcoat?

> I had my dinner break. There were two lunch shifts, and I
> had my dinner break apart from Lieutenant Emerson's dinner break.

Tsuneo: I hope this will become a vital plot point.

> In the military, what we usually call lunch is dinner and what we call dinner is supper.

Rick: And what they call dessert is breakfast. It's a complicated system.

> Lieutenant Emerson dismissed the troop at 1700, which was typical.

Dan: He didn’t want to pay the army overtime.

> Soldiers usually work eight hours a day, unless otherwise ordered.

Tsuneo: They have to make sure everyone gets home from the war on time.

> I decided to have supper at the officers' mess. I got my meal
> from the enlisted food servers, which was ground beef in this sauce, steamed broccoli and
> asparagus, with water to wash it down.

Tsuneo: The glamorous life of the futuristic space robot soldier

> I sat with the officers of my troop. I told them that I was from Jamaica,

Dan: Which was more interesting than admitting he was a grocery bagger from Staten Island.

> and I decided to become an
> officer because I did not want a career as a food server catering to tourists.

Rebecca: It was the only other career available to him

> "I was a military brat," said Jack Emerson. "My dad was one of the original officer candidates for the
> Army,

Rick: He fought with the Sumerians in Mesopotamia. That’s how original he was.

> and I moved around with him. He also took in two others whose parents were deployed on
> the Pioneer Mission; they are like a brother and sister to me.

Dan: As a kid, Dana Sterling would try to playfully break his knees

> My dad is now a lieutenant general
> and he is the chief of staff at the Southern Cross Field Army headquarters in Monument City."

Tsuneo: Rolf Emerson, the smartest man in Southern Cross command.
Rick: Also that is a very low bar
Tsuneo: It is.

> "And what about you, Lieutenant Meyers?" I asked.

> "It's Mike in the mess," he said.

Dan: [Meyers] And I’m always a mess.

> "I'm an alien."

Rebecca: He even has an Interocitor

> "You do not have gills or anything."

Tsuneo: [Emerson] Our commander is a Zentradi, you insensitive jerk.

> "My family resides on Glorie Colony. We were one of the original settlers."

> "What is it like there?"

Tsuneo: Desaturated and blue tinted in some prints

> "Colder than Earth," replied Mike. "The ice caps are a lot bigger on the planet. We have two moons
> there, and we share the world with these four-armed lizard people."

Rick: Wow, I did not expect to see one of the most bizarre niche fan myths in the wild. I will have to give it to you, fic.

> "You met them?" I asked.

> "I've met a few of them; they all have a high pitched squeaky voice, like when you inhale helium."

Dan: Heh, aliens are funny

> "You know," Emerson said to me, "we should go out to town sometime for supper.

Rebecca: What you call supper which they call elevenses

> There's this place in Tangier that has this Italian-Greek-Lebanese fusion cuisine.

Tsuneo: It’s very confusing.

> I definitely enjoyed it, even if the food is a little expensive."

> "Emerson," I heard someone say. I looked and saw this dark-haired man dressed in camouflage.

Tsuneo: Shall we just assume that everyone is dressed in the uniform of the day and move on?

> "Shirogane," said Emerson.

Rick: Cerebro?
Dan: Magneto

> "Ready to get another ass kicking when the colonel assigns another war game?"

Rebecca: All you need to do is recite the entire script and you get one of Anorak’s eggs.

> "First Lieutenant Isamu Shirogane," said Mike. "He's commander of the 17th ATAC."

> "We'll be dishing it out," said Emerson.

> "And who's this?" asked Shirogane.

Tsuneo: We’ve been wondering that for some time now

> I introduced myself.

Dan: As Nigel Incubator-Jones, the world’s most boring man

> "Emerson had better hope you can pull a few tricks up your sleeve," said Shirogane.

> "Hey guys!" yelled this lady.

Tsuneo: Some lady, somewhere.

> "Look at the TV."

> I looked at a wall-mounted Pioneer plasma television

Rebecca: That attempt to be futuristic that immediately becomes dated

> and watched. The caption read Monument City. The scene being shown featured smoke and fire.

Rick: Somewhere in Monument city: a trash fire. Now back to your regularly scheduled program.

> "There is no word yet on the attack which happened just an hour ago," said a news reporter.

Tsuneo: I'm torn. On one side, it's an exposition news report, one of the cheapest and laziest plot devices there is
Dan: But?
Tsuneo: It does mean something is happening
Dan: Hmm, tough

> "The Army had successfully repelled the attack against this yet-to-be-identified enemy."

Rebecca: Although we believe it to be the Greelons

> I rushed back to the BOQ's living room. The television there was already tuned in to an English-
> language station.

Rick: Instead of watching the TV there, we all went to watch the TV somewhere else

> Reporters were on the scene, reporting on the attack on Monument City. All of us
> were glued to the set.

Rick: Not literally, Meyers.
Dan: Aaawww...

> After about half an hour, the scene shifted to a press room. It was identified as the United Nations
> headquarters.

Rebecca: Turns out it was actually a Red Rooster outside Windsor.

> This bald man in a green uniform approached the podium. A caption identified him as
> United Earth Forces Supreme Commander Anatole Leonard.

Dan: Last time they accidentally left the camera rolling on Michael Chickliss
Rick: The mistake is understandable

> "Good afternoon," said Supreme Commander Leonard. "As you know, Monument City had been
> attacked by an as-of-yet unidentified enemy.

Tsuneo: As you know

> We tracked the origin of the attack to a fleet of ships in Earth orbit.

Rick: [Leonard] We assume their intentions are peaceful.

> The design is different from that of the Zentraedi Nation.

Dan: But we have not yet ruled out either the Fire or Rhythm Nations

> The design of the ships is
> consistent with an attack on a space station near Saturn about three months ago."

Rebecca: But that was Robotech the Movie, and we don't talk about that.

> "Do you believe this is a new alien race, sir?" asked one of the reporters.

> "The evidence would suggest that.

Rebecca: But certainly not four-armed lizard people. That would be absurd.

> Excuse me; I have a meeting to attend. General Emerson will
> take further questions."

Tsuneo: Well that was an awkward dodge

> A dark-haired man stepped to the podium to relieve Leonard. A caption identified him as Lieutenant
> General Rolf Emerson.

Rick: A well known Macross character, just like Anatole Leonard and T.R. Edwards

> "What do you plan to do?" asked another reporter.

Dan: [Emerson] Fly to South America. I mean –

> "We watch, we observe," answered General Emerson. "And we learn about our enemy.

Rick: [Emerson] Oh, and repel future attacks, obviously.

> We should
> remember that during the Robotech War, the crew of the SDF-1 Macross learned about the
> Zentraedi, and we defeated them and later befriended most of them."

Rebecca: The tiny portion of them that survived
Rick: Don't sweat the details

> "Could the enemy be a rogue faction of the Zentraedi?" asked a reporter.

> "We can only speculate at this point," replied the general.

Dan: They think it might be Sectopods or Floaters

> "We need intel. We are committed to gathering as much intel as we can."

Rick: [Emerson] Were going to ask the new ships politely.

> "We're going to be very busy," said Meyers.

Tsuneo: This was is such an inconvenience for them

> Indeed, we were. Colonel Kravshera had the whole battalion put on full tactical alert. I myself had to
> personally supervise

Rick: - the fulfilment of printer paper orders. Logistics!

> the maintenance checks on the hovertanks in my troop.

Rick: Fortunately he was aided by his top technician, Brick Hactar

> And then came the message to move out. And here I was, anticipating first combat.

Rebecca: And the fic finally catches up with itself.
Tsuneo: In short, he had just arrived on base yesterday.
Rick: Thank you. That was the entire chapter in one sentence.

> "Maybe this is a false alarm," I said.

Rebecca The attack on Monument City was fake news.

> "We'll just hang out here. We'll be going home."

Dan: Cut to Leonard standing front of a Mission Accomplished banner

> "We have incoming," said Jack Emerson. "Lock and load."

Tsuneo: And they were all gunned down by enemy dropships. The end.

> I tensely waited. The waiting was ended

Rick: [Flat] Yes. So tense.

> by a series of explosions, and we all took cover. Smoke was everywhere.

Rick: The one time the fic doesn't give you an excruciatingly precise location

> It was then that the enemy closed in. Looking through binoculars, I got a glimpse of them. They
> looked like suits of armor riding on sleds.

Tsuneo: They're an oddly whimsical alien invasion

> I pressed a button, transforming the Spartas into battloid mode, a configuration resembling a giant
> suit of armor.

Dan: But was it riding on a sled?
Rick: Sadly, no

> We started firing towards the enemy. A few of them were knocked out of their flying sleds.

Rebecca: He knocked down a few more of them and won a stuffed toy.

> Even so, enough of them landed on the beach. I had a closer look of them. They looked like giant
> suits of armor;

Rebecca: Yes, we already established that

> I did not know if they were robots or piloted mecha. Almost all of them were blue; one
> of them was red. Maybe that red one was the leader.

Tsuneo: Anime logic says he's right

> There were more and more explosions even as I fired at the enemy. Everything felt somehow
> detached, as the rhythm of opening fire, moving, and opening fire continued. Smoke and fire were
> everywhere.

Tsuneo: It’s a rare fic that can make giant robot combat dull and lifeless.
Rick: And yet, I would net expect anything else from this one.

> Even as part of me was engaged in furious combat with the enemy, I could understand the
> importance of this battle.

Tsuneo: And what was the importance of this battle?
Rebecca: Alien robots are trying to kill him.
Tsuneo: Okay, fair.

> The Straits of Gibraltar had been a major strategic area for the past few
> millennia, connecting the Mediterranean with the Atlantic. It was no wonder that alien invaders
> would try to take the straits.

Dan: Can't they just fly over it?
Rebecca: Shh

> The last time Earth was invaded, the invaders only wanted a restored alien vessel.

Rick: To be fair, it was in near-mint condition

> This time, we did not know the invader's motivations yet.

Rick: He had a hunch they were after Earth’s supply of Cool Ranch Doritos, but he was yet to confirm it.

> "We're pinned down!" I heard Jack's voice yell.

> I looked around, and I noticed that we were surrounded by the enemy armor suits.

Rick: Huh. I wonder when that happened?

> There was a flash, and I felt knocked around.

> And then darkness consumed me.

> -----

Tsuneo: Well that was an exceptionally dull slog, but at least it's done
Rick: That was just the first chapter
Tsuneo: Oh
Rick: Of twenty-eight
Tsuneo: Help.

> Chapter 2: Recovery
> I wasn't dead.

Tsuneo: Well there goes my hopes for this fic

> I hurt too much to be dead.

Dan: He’d stubbed his toe.

> Opening my eyes, I looked and saw a curtain surrounding me. I can feel I was on a bed, and there
> was this antiseptic smell in the room.

Tsuneo: I hate this place

> The curtain was opened, and this Air Force nurse in a white outfit was revealed to me.

Dan: In deference to the grim nature of the alien invasion, he did not immediately wolf-whistle and hit himself over the head with a frying pan.

> I figured I was in a hospital somewhere.

Rebecca: His powers of observation are astounding

> "I see you are awake, Lieutenant," he said.

Tsuneo: So she can present him with the bill.

> I saw and felt that my right arm was in a sling. I flexed my fingers, making sure that I can still move
> them.

Dan: Counted them too, just to be sure.

> I moved my legs, thanking God that I was not paralyzed.

Dan: Yeah, but you got your wang shot off

> Standing up, the room spun around and sharp spikes of pain penetrated my head.

> "Take it easy, Lieutenant," said the nurse. "The doctor said you have a concussion."

> "When can I get back to duty?" I asked.

Tsuneo: He said, ignoring the news of a concussion.
Rebecca: Possibly because of the concussion.
Tsuneo: Well, yeah.

> "We'll need to run some more tests. We have a brain-scanning machine in Valencia Air Force
> Hospital in Spain.

Rick: They have their very own Brainwave Scanner

> We'll have to set up an appointment.

Rebecca: [Nurse] Probably in six to eight weeks, depending on your provider.
Dan: Doesn’t the military cover this?
Rebecca: [Nurse] Oh boy, I needed a good laugh.

> Look on the bright side, Lieutenant. You get a free trip to Spain.

Rebecca: He should suffer head trauma more often

> There's a remote if you want to watch TV."

> And so I watched TV on the Sony color television.

Tsuneo: It was the colour part that threw him

> All of the news channels were about the attack.

Dan: It’s kind of a big thing.

> From what I have heard, there were attacks on military facilities all over Earth.

Tsuneo: Like the Gibraltar base. Say, how did that one turn out?

> "We have captured the remains of the enemy," said Supreme Commander Anatole Leonard. "They
> have been taken to undisclosed locations for study.

Rick: Dexter's Laboratory

> Casualty reports have come in. Seven thousand
> of us were killed in this massive attack. Among them was Ocean Patrol Admiral Hao Sung,

Tsuneo: [Leonard] Wait, what's that, We hadn't informed his family yet? Oh...

> commander of the Robotech Defense Forces Command…"

Dan: Ironically voted 'most likely to be killed in an alien invasion' in his high school yearbook

> I lay in bed watching the TV, wondering if anyone in our battalion was killed.

Rebecca: Only Ensign Throwaway

> About an hour later, Lieutenant Jack Emerson and Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital visited me.

Tsuneo: Remind me, which poorly defined concentrations of carbon were they?
Rebecca: I believe the term you're looking for is characters.
Tsuneo: It is not.

> "How are you feeling?" asked Emerson.

> "My head hurts, sir," I replied.

> "If you hurt, you are still alive," replies Sergeant Avital.

Dan: I bet she's fun at staff parties.

> "Was anyone from our battalion killed?"

> "No," replied Emerson.

Tsuneo: Thank god for that. We wouldn't want any sort of emotional impact in this story

> "And you should thank Sergeant Avital for that. She got you out of that
> hovertank while under enemy fire."

Rebecca: Why wasn't she in her Hover Tank?
Rick: Ironically it blew up too

> "Thank you," I said to the sergeant.

Tsuneo: Now she presents him with her bill.

> "It was my duty, sir," replied Avital. "You would do the same for Lieutenant Emerson or me or
> anyone else."

Tsuneo: He most emphatically would not.

> "At least you have a place to sleep," said Emerson. "The men's BOQ was hit. I have to sleep in this
> Quonset hut with the others.

Dan: He's surrounded by poor people

> You got your own private room."

Rick: But this is a hospital bed.
Rebecca: [Emerson] Look here, you brain-dead tit...

> "And it is the same size as my old room," I said.

> "You're lucky indeed," said Lieutenant Emerson.

Rebecca: He really should suffer head trauma more often. It’s working out great for him.

> "I still have to finish my reports.

Rick: The base-wide toilet paper count came up three rolls short. I must investigate.
Rebecca: [Emerson] We were attacked by aliens, you laborious ninnyhammer!

> We will see you soon."

> Sergeant Avital saluted me; I was unable to return her salute due to my condition.

Dan: Shrapnel in the big toe

> And so they left.

Tsuneo: I never saw them again

> Ooooooo

> The Air Force doctors prescribed painkillers to deal with my headaches. The painkillers did make
> me feel a little loopy.

Tsuneo: He was so off his nut that he went around describing random rooms and identifying people’s televisions.

> Having a busted arm was a huge inconvenience those first few days,

Tsuneo: The broken arm is just an inconvenience for a soldier on active duty.

> including when I was using the bathroom, which the Army called the latrine.

Rick: I love this futuristic slang

> I managed to make an international call to my parents back home in Jamaica. It was a privilege
> given to soldiers wounded in combat.

Dan: Everyone else just had to write emails like normal people

> "How are you doing?" asked Mom.

> "My arm is in a sling," I said. "And I got headaches."

Rebecca: You get the feeling that they expect that out of him

> "So you think joining the U.N.'s Army would be some adventure, like a video game?" asked Dad.

Dan: Mostly he was thinking of the fat pension.

> "People get hurt and even killed. If you wanted to march around in the uniform, you could have
> joined the Jamaican Defense Force."

Dan: Do they get giant robots?
Rick: Yes, but they all have dreadlocks

> "Were there any casualties in Jamaica?"

> "Fortunately, no," said Mom. "To be honest, we don't have much worth attacking. We haven't been
> attacked since that Robotech War

Dan: That Robotech war?

Rebecca: You know, just one of those Robotech wars that happens.

> almost twenty years ago."

Rebecca: True, they blew up the entire island, but...

> "I don't have that much time left on the phone. How are Paul and Larry?"

Rick: Paul's doing just fine with MJ, thanks for asking.

> I asked. Paul was my big brother, and Larry was my three-year-old nephew.

> "They're doing well," said Dad. "Try not to get hurt."

Dan: Don't do anything dangerous in the war

> "I'll be careful, Mom, Dad. But I have to put my men's safety before my own."

Rick: I'm teaching them the human shield formation.

> I hung up the phone.

> Eventually, I was transported to the Air Force hospital in Valencia in Spain for my brain scan,

Rick: And the fic veers into gripping medical drama.
Tsuneo: And by gripping, you mean...
Rick: Sitting in the waiting room for three hours.

> to check for any permanent brain damage.

All: Too late.

> I was in this ambulance that took me through the Gibraltar
> Tunnel and then through the highways of Spain and into Valencia.

Dan: Kind of feel like they could have airlifted him there.
Rebecca: I mean, it's like it's important but it's not actually important.

> I wished that I could have done some sightseeing of the Spanish countryside.

Rick: Or at least gotten some oranges

> The hospital was bigger that the one in Gibraltar Base; the inside looked pretty much the same-
> white and antiseptic,

Tsuneo: Turns out the hospital looks like a hospital.
Rebecca: And yet he seems surprised.

> with doctors and nurses walking around in their white outfits. This blond-haired
> doctor in a white coat had me lay down.

> "You will hear a buzzing sound, Lieutenant," he said.

Dan: Oh, I hear that all the time
Rick [Doctor]: Moving along then

> And so I did. I lay inside this chamber inside this huge machine and sure enough, there was this
> buzzing sound. After a few minutes I got out.

Tsuneo: Well, that was about as exciting as...

Rebecca: The battle scene from the last chapter?
Tsuneo: Sadly, yes.

> "We'll be studying the results, Lieutenant," said the doctor. "You should have transportation back to
> Tangier."

> So the ambulance brought me back to the base hospital.

Tsuneo: They kicked him out still wearing his backless hospital gown

> I soon had to do this physical therapy where I had to do exercises with my arm and hand.

Dan: With a little luck and a lot of hard work, he'd be able to resume his career as a professional arm wrestler

> This lady, Air Force First Lieutenant Sharp, was my physical therapist.

Tsuneo: Wow, this is swell. Say, how’s the space war going?

> One day, Lieutenant Jack Emerson and Lieutenant Michael Meyers came to visit me in the hospital
> cafeteria. It looked like a smaller version of the mess, with a coffee machine and a vending machine
> with snacks.

Rick: The vending machine was constantly blocked by a mopey girl staring at the pretzels

> "Are there any news, sir?" I asked.

> "It's Jack while we're in here," said Jack.

Dan: [Emerson] And Florence while we’re in armour.

> "The base is still rebuilding the men's BOQ; we still got to sleep in those Quonset huts."

Dan: So no news
Tsuneo: None at all
Dan: This fic in a nutshell

> "So who is the enemy?"

Rick: Cobra, the enemy

> "We don't know," answered Mike. "They haven't made any demands. We also don't have contact
> with Space Station Liberty; I've tried accessing their public servers and I can't get through."

Rebecca: Space Station Liberty keeps giving them a 404 file not found

> "The real battle is up there, in space," said Jack.

Rebecca: The space war is conveniently giving him time to recover.

> "Our fleet and the enemy fleet are still up there. If
> the enemy destroys our defense fleet, they can bomb us from orbit."

> "I wonder what we can do," I said.

Dan: [Emerson] Depends. You play the saxophone?
Rick: No.
Dan: [Emerson] Well I’m out of ideas.

> I flexed my hand, realizing that I was powerless against the enemy.

Dan: Quick check to see if it's burning red with justice... and we're good.

> Ooooooo

> I couldn't worry about a war that would be decided in space,

Rebecca: He figures that if he doesn't think about the space war then it can’t hurt him

> so I concentrated on getting my hand on tip-top working shape again.

Rick: It took him a while to figure out how hands work

> I got to know Lieutenant Sharp. She mentioned that her first name
> was Melissa, and she was from this place called Georgia, in North America.

> "The Air Force paid for my education," she said. "I want to go to civilian practice back home as soon
> as my service obligation is done."

Rebecca: I suspect this is all the character development she will ever get. Treasure it.

> "And this war?" I asked.

> "I don't know. If we know what these aliens wanted.

Tsuneo: Ironically they're looking for a good physical therapist

> I guess Earth's Supreme Command will have to worry about it."

Rick: [Sharp] Way above my pay grade.

> Neither of us wanted to talk about what would happen if the enemy won.

Rick: I’m guessing unfair trade tariffs?
Tsuneo: [Sharp] You’re new to this while space war thing aren’t you?

> Instead, she spoke about the beagle that she had at home in Georgia,

Dan: We now know more about this random physical therapist than we do our main character.

> and her house in the forested hills.

Rebecca: That sounds so incredibly twee

> Then one day, the doctor came to see me.

> "You have a clean bill of health, Lieutenant," said the doctor. "You may return to active duty."

Dan: Aw gee, do I have to go back to the space robot war?

> I had been so busy with therapy that I did not notice that my headaches were gone.

Rebecca: His concussion had made way for his regular headaches.

> "I'd better get back to the office before I am AWOL, sir," I said.

> And so I did.

Tsuneo: What is this fic?
Rick: Yes

Tsuneo: I was afraid of that

> Along the way I passed by the men's BOQ. It was a wreck,

Tsuneo: Wow, gee, if only someone had mentioned that.

> and bulldozers from a construction battalion were still cleaning things up.

Rebecca: They're really doing a slow job of it, aren't they?

> I went back to the troop office. It still looked the same as before.

Tsuneo: Honestly I'm not sure what he expected

> I immediately noticed the lavender complexion of Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera.

Rick: Admit it, that's all you remember about him

> I immediately saluted and reported for duty.

> "Good morning, Lieutenant," said the colonel. "I'm here to give you something." He opened this
> velvet box,

Dan: After getting down on one knee.

> and there was a purple medal shaped like a heart. "Here is your Purple Heart

Dan: The purple medal shaped like a heart is the Purple Heart? I did not see that twist coming!
Tsuneo: This fic is just fill of them

> for getting wounded.

Rebecca: And now a medal? Seriously, this head trauma has worked out great for him.

> And you should thank Executive Sergeant Avital that you are not receiving this
> posthumously."

> "I will do that, sir," I said. I faced Sergeant Avital. "Thank you."

Rebecca [Avital]: By the way, I am also here

> Colonel Kravshera left the office.

Tsuneo: So much for ceremony.
Rick: [Kravshera] Yeah, here’s a medal or something. Don’t care. Thank the sergeant if you can be bothered. Whatever. I’m out.

> A young red-haired man whose sleeve markings indicated that he was a private first class faced me.

> "And you are?" I asked.

> "Private First Class

Tsuneo: Thank you. Thank you so much.

> Glenn LaBelle, sir," he said.

Rick [Glenn]: My daughter is a nightmare. Help.

> "As you were, Private," I said.

Tsuneo: Well that added a lot.
Rebecca: I feel deeply enriched

> "Lieutenant," Jack said to me. "Listen, we've an important assignment for you. Sergeant Avital will
> be accompanying you."

> And so we went on assignment.

> It was a march.

Dan: Turns out it wasn't that important after all

> All of us were marching along the roads of the base. Being the officer, I marched in
> front of the column, with Sergeant Avital marching beside me.

Rebecca: [Avital] No, that’s okay, I don’t have anything better to do. This is fine.

> I knew the importance of formation
> marching, as it upholds unit cohesion. As I learned back in Basic, we always work as a team.

Rick: Teamwork is dreamwork

> The next few weeks were routine. I had to sleep in the Quonset hut,

Tsuneo Could it be because the men’s BOQ had been hit? [Gasps] If only someone had told us!

> and my first night there was much more rustic than sleeping in the hospital bed.

Rebecca: The roosting chickens only added to the rustic air

> There was little privacy.

Dan: He got to see all of Meyers' distressing tattoos

> "You know," said Mike. "Too bad they can't make the women's BOQ coed until the men's BOQ is
> rebuilt."

Dan: [Meyers] We could stay up late, drinking cosmos and doing each other’s nails...

> I and a few other officers laughed.

Rick: Haha, he's a creep

> For the next few weeks, I saw the scaffolding for the men's BOQ
> go up as the construction crews worked.

Tsuneo: At least the fic's not describing the construction in real time. Thank you.

> I also had to check on the maintenance of the hovertanks,

Rick: And investigate the vital bog roll shortage.

> including a new VHT-1 Spartas that was assigned to me,

Rick: The one that the technicians affectionately called the rolling coffin

> and we continued to do training in the
> simulators as well as PT to keep ourselves in shape.

Tsuneo: Space war seems to be coming along quite nicely without them.

> I had also learned that contact with Space
> Station Liberty was re-established.

Rebecca: Turns out that somebody on Liberty had accidentally unplugged the router.

> One day, Lieutenant Emerson had a meeting in the office.

Tsuneo: But how will he ever fit in a meeting with all the aimless wandering around and identifying TVs he’s got on his plate?

> "The colonel has informed us that we will be doing joint exercises with an Air Force squadron," said
> Jack.

> And so we did.

Dan: A Shaymalan level twist right there and then

> -----

> Chapter 3: Desert Blues

Tsuneo: Okay, where were we?
Rick: Um, nowhere
Tsuneo: Good point.

> "All right you Micronians, we will be linking up with the Air Force's 56th Squadron,"

Rick: The one commanded by Snoopy

> said Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera.

Rebecca: Of the Boston Kravsheras.

> It was a warm summer day, and we were all standing at the parade
> ground, with the colonel, Major Yoon,

Dan: Colonel Major Yoon

> and the senior battalion staff facing us. "Our mission is to
> conducting forward observation operations for the squadron.

Rick: Don't we have a dedicated recon unit for that sir? They have their own special Battloid and recon chopper and signature armour suit with jetpack and everything

> We will find cardboard targets,

Rebecca: So our lead then

> signal them to the Air Force pilots, and let them unleash their hell.

Tsuneo: Not to be difficult, but isn’t there a real space war going on?
Rick: I mean, maybe? It’s hard to tell in this.

> The bombing range is at the bottom of the Atlas Mountains, near the Sahara Desert.

Tsuneo: The general vicinity of the world's largest desert

> This will be a nighttime drill, so cancel your evening plans.

Dan: The military doesn’t care if you have a dinner date.

> We will leave as soon as possible. Try to avoid getting blown up."

Rebecca: [Lupon] I know it’s a training exercise, but I’m sure some of you could manage it anyway.

> I could swear that Kravshera was looking straight at me.

Rick: He's setting his expectations low

> "Let's move out," said the colonel.

> And so we did.

Tsuneo: Fic, please stop this ‘we will x then we did x' thing. In fact, please stop altogether.

> The VHT-1 Spartas hovertanks were all loaded onto flatbed trailers pulled by tractors.

Rick: And yet they still get charged a premium rate for shipping

> We hovertank drivers boarded large trucks.

Dan: They were packed in with the livestock.

> The Army convoy then left through the base's cargo gate, where trucks
> rolled in to bring essential supplies.

Rick: They carried essential goods and services through the leather-clad booster-gang infested wastelands

> "At least we're getting some excitement," said Lieutenant Michael Meyers.

Dan: Really?
Tsuneo: No

> "I prefer this over the enemy giving us excitement," I said.

Rebecca: This is a man who finds organising his sock drawer to be exciting

> We all knew that the enemy was in orbit around Earth, waiting for the next opportunity to attack.

Tsuneo: So far the Robotech Masters have been more of a mild inconvenience than anything else.

> A few hours later, we arrived at the site. Already, soldiers were setting up tents under the
> supervision of sergeants. The sun had set, and the lavender sky is fading into black, with the
> shadow of the Atlas Mountains looming in the west. These giant lights were turned on, providing
> illumination to the rising camp. Major Yoon stood in the center, with Master Sergeant Tomas Cabon
> at his side.

Rick: Tomas Cabon, appearing with all the enthusiasm of a guy who has to get out of bed to be in Dire Straights.

> "This here will be the ground command post," he said.

Dan: [Yoon] Right next to the target range. Any questions?

> "Colonel Kravshera is up in the AWACS with
> the staff of the 56th squadron. Old tanks have been set up in the bombing range.

Tsuneo: I thought they were shooting at cardboard targets
Rick: They're shooting at old cardboard tanks
Tsuneo: Sure, makes sense to me

> The squadron captains in our battalion will receive maps."

Rebecca: [Yoon] You hosers are on your own.

> The other officers and I went inside the officers' tent. It was even smaller than the Quonset hut in
> where we had been sleeping back on base.

Dan: He was surprised that a tent would be smaller than an actual building
Rick: Our hero, ladies and gentlemen

> An aide handed up maps. I recall my military map reading lessons back in boot camp.

Tsuneo: He got his scout badge and everything. His mum was so proud.

> I can see the contours representing the Atlas Mountains as they
> sloped down into the Sahara Desert.

Rick: The up bits are mountains!

> A few minutes later we were summoned outside.

> "We are ready to go," said Major Yoon.

Tsuneo: [Cabon] I'm not.
Rick: [Yoon] Dammit Tom, you're an extra! You don't get lines.

> "All teams move out."

> And so we did. I put on my arming doublet. It was not exactly comfortable, since there was still
> plenty of latent Sahara heat early in the evening.

Dan: Downside is that the armour is going to be hot and uncomfortable. Upside is that it looks cool
Rick: Plus it means we don't see his face
Dan: What does he look like anyway?
Rick: I just assume he looks like the default on any given character creation screen

> Up above us, the stars are clearly revealed; I could see the band of the Milky Way.

Dan: Why do the stars keep sending things to hurt us?
Tsuneo: [Yoon] Is that a philosophical comment on the hostility of alien life?
Dan: A rock fell on my head.

> I got into my VHT-1 Spartas, flipping the switches to start the engine. We then moved out to the
> foothills of the Atlas Mountains. We all switched to battloid mode.

Tsuneo: You can just feel the excitement in this riveting action

> "Okay, team," said Lieutenant Jack Emerson. "We'd better use night-vision systems."

Rebecca: [Emerson] Because... You know... Night.
Dan: That's why he's our leader!

> I had the night-vision system on. It made everything look green.

Rebecca: He'd tried to lick the night vision in the hope that it was lime flavoured

> "The 56th Squadron is approaching," I heard Colonel Kravshera say over the radio. "All ground
> forces, be sure to mark the targets. And remember, this is a live fire exercise."

Tsuneo [Kravshera]: So all of you remain focused and exercise the utmost caution
Dan: My tank turns into a robot!
Tsuneo [Kravshera]: Never mind

> "We copy," said Jack. "Everyone move out and look for targets."

> I can see the outline of the hills, and the main ridge of the Atlas Mountains in the distance.

Rebecca: He always wondered why they named the mountains after a bodybuilder

> "We have a target confirmed," I heard over the radio.

> "Copy," said another voice.

> I looked and saw something streak from the sky. I then heard a thud and saw a cloud of smoke.

> "Keep alert, guys," said Jack.

> I looked and saw this tracked vehicle with a turret- it was a tank.

Rick: The thing that looked like a tank was indeed a tank

> "I've got a target," I said. "I am marking the target." Our battloids were equipped with a homing laser
> that we would use to mark the targets.

Tsuneo: Well that's good. Here I thought he was going to walk up and paint a big X on its side.

> "We see the target," said this female voice. "We are going in."

> Less that a minute later, the tank was blown up with ordnance from the VF-11 Thunderbolts.

Tsuneo: So what's a design from a Macross sequel doing in a Robotech fic?
Rick: Being a vigorous fanwank
Tsuneo: There's going to be a lot of that, isn't there?

> Debris from the tank rained down on us. I heard some more explosions in the distance.

> And so we repeated this with the other targets for about an hour.

Tsuneo: Please fic, spare us no details.

> It was different actually being here instead of just operating the simulators back on base.

Tsuneo: He seems mildly surprised that live fire is different from simulators.
Rebecca: Being fair, he is surprised that his corn flakes are made from corn each morning.

> We got a message from Colonel Kravshera about two hours after starting the exercise. "We are
> done," he said. "Ground units, pack things up and return to base."

> "We copy," replied Jack.

Rick: Before listing all his Halo guns and having a whine about girls not liking him

> "We've done a good job," said Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital. "Now who will volunteer for
> washing the hovertanks?"

Rebecca: Will our protagonist do a bikini carwash?
Dan: It'd help if we knew what he looked like
Rick: I just assume he looks like a pair of disembodied hands and a health meter.

> And so we all took down and packed the tents, loaded the equipment into trucks and the hovertanks
> onto the flatbed trailers, and returned to base way after midnight.

Tsuneo: Okay, so what did that training sequence accomplish?
Rick: Well, we lost several minutes of our lives that we'll never, ever get back.
Tsuneo: Good job, fic.

> The next day, Jack spoke to me and Mike.

Dan: [Jack] I am Jack. I am speaking to Thaddeus Arklesiezure and Mike.

> "I've invited some pilots from the Air Force 56th Squadron over to our O-club on Friday," he said.

> "Interesting," I said.

Tsuneo: Demonstrably not true.

> "I figured that we might as well meet them in person and down a few drinks and onion rings,"

Dan: The O in O-Club stands for onion ring!
Tsuneo [Jack]: How are you even still alive?

> said
> Jack. "And we're not on duty next weekend, so none of you guys do anything to piss off the
> colonel."

Rick: Cut to him and Mike egging the Colonel's house

> Ooooooooo

> After doing some personal errands like depositing my paycheck at the base's credit union,

Rebecca: In the future electronic funds transfer will not exist

> I got
> dressed in my Class "C" uniform- a white short-sleeved shirt and dress pants and dress shoes and
> garrison cap- and went to the O-club.

Tsuneo: Hey Rick, doesn't everyone in the show wear incredibly eighties futuristic uniforms?
Rick: They do indeed
Tsuneo: So why is the cast dressed like extras from an episode of NICS?
Rick: I have two theories on that
Tsuneo: I shouldn't have asked
Rick: The first is that there is a not insubstantial movement within Robotech fandom that echoes many other similar fandoms like Star Wars, Star Trek, Gundam and My Little Pony. That movement strives to make everything as 'realistic' as possible by stripping away the colour and flair and instead turning it into a generic right wing miltech fantasy of drab colours, functional camo, sensible uniforms and gun porn. And as such, this fic is a part of that movement.
Tsuneo: I can see that. And theory two?
Rick: The fic is very boring
Tsuneo: Strangely, I can see that too

> The O-club looked pretty much the same as it did the last few times I was there.

Dan: Can we say that its a completely unironic Tiki bar?
Rebecca: I am completely behind that

> There were two
> sections- a restaurant section and a bar section. The restaurant section had a carpeted floor, while
> the bar section had a varnished hardwood floor.

Rick: The layer of sawdust is just assumed

> The food here was stuff like buffalo wings and onion rings and sandwiches.

Rebecca: His petition to put shark fin soup on the menu had gone unheard.

> The food was not rationed like the officers' mess; officers can buy as
> much food as they can afford.

Tsuneo: Hey that's great. Wasn't there supposed to be a space war going on?

> We were all sitting in the bar section. The centerpiece was a wood-paneled bar with a brass rail.
> Leather-covered barstools encircled the bar. The walls had Army recruitment posters and pictures of
> hovertanks and older veritech battle tanks.

Rick: And, for some reason, a few pictures of Gobots

> There were some small circular tables with seats, and
> there was a clear section of the floor for dancing,

Rebecca: Now I don’t actually know this, but I *know* that he dances like the whitest guy possible.

> and near the floor there was some karaoke
> equipment with a beer-bellied karaoke jockey attending to the equipment.

Dan: And yet, he's still better described than the protagonist

> Jack ordered us some shots as well as onion rings and buffalo wings with blue cheese dressing.

Tsuneo: But does the dressing come with the order or does it cost extra? We need to know, fic!

> "I wonder where they are," said First Lieutenant Isamu Shirogane, who commanded the 6th
> battalion's 17th troop.

> His question was answered a few minutes later.

Rebecca: [Bored] Wow. Such suspense.

> Some more people came into the room; I noticed that they were wearing Air Force "C" uniforms.

Rick: The C stands for crustacean. Its a complicated system

> One of them, a black lady with short hair, ordered some drinks. She then approached our table. I
> looked at her shoulders and noticed the two silver bars of a United Nations Air Force first lieutenant.

> "Are you Lieutenant Emerson?" she asked Jack.

Dan: Wow, straight for Jack. Ron Obvious here is a side feature in his own story.

> "That's right, Lieutenant Jack Emerson at your service," he said.

Dan: Jack Emerson is Jack Emerson in Jack Emerson at your service!

> "First Lieutenant Nina Washington," she said. "Bravo flight leader for the Air Force's Tactical
> Armored Space Corps' 56th squadron, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Wong.

> "It's great to meet you all in person," said Jack, leaning back. "And you can call me Jack, at least in
> the O-club. And are those drinks a thank-you gift for lighting up those targets?"

> "All you did was mark a bunch of old tanks the Army had to get rid of anyway,"

Rick: Take that, Typical High-Tech Tank.

> she replied. "Now if
> you helped us actually destroy a couple of the enemy's war machines, then maybe I would buy you
> and your boys a drink."

> "She's playing hard to get, Jack," said Mike.

> Didn't they all, I thought.

Rebecca: Well that seemed perfectly healthy and not like the start of an incel screed at all.

> Jack introduced the rest of us.

Tsuneo: The vaguely assumed mass of protoplasm that is the collective cast herd, including but not limited to Apatosaurus Ajax and Eggs Over Easy Boy.

> Nina then introduced us to her group, a mix of men and women.

> "I'm Shelby," said this lady with straight blond hair and eyes like blue topazes.

Tsuneo: Her blue eyes were blue like they were blue things.

> I noted that she was
> little shorter than me. I made sure to take a longer look at her; she was a lady after all.

Rebecca: He's making it worse with each passing word

> "Third Lieutenant Shelby Porter of the 56th Squadron's Bravo Flight.

> I introduced myself.

Dan: Arthur Avocado Veeblefretzer at your service.

> "So you fly under Nina's command."

> "Pretty much.

Rebecca: She’s pretty casual about the chain of command.

> She was placed in command of Bravo flight only a few months ago."

> "And what do you pilots do? You must fly planes all day."

Tsuneo: Damn, he’s onto us!

> "Uh, no," answered Shelby. "I spend half of the time in the office, and the most of other half flying in
> the sims. Only occasionally do I actually fly the Thunderbolts."

Rick: And then they get cancelled because Heroes Reborn tanked
Dan: We’re all real sorry Kurt.

> "All, right you people," said the karaoke jockey, attracting my attention. "Let's get ready for some
> karaoke action! I will go first with this classic. Stage fright…"

> And so the karaoke jockey started singing Lin Minmei's classic song.

Rick: Her controversial pop cover of Closer

> "You know, maybe you should sign up," Mike said to me.

Rebecca: Sure, we want to scare off the patrons.

> "I heard there is this music style where you're from. Rugby, is it?"

> "Reggae," I corrected him. "And I don't sing reggae."

Dan: A white guy trying reggae should be considered a crime.
Tsuneo: Is he actually white? Its not like he has any description
Dan: So far he couldn't be any whiter if his name was Whitey McWhiteboy

> "Too bad," said Mike.

> About a few minutes later, the karaoke jockey was done with his song. "All right, Shelby is up next,"
> he says.

> Shelby Porter went up to the karaoke equipment and held a microphone. She started singing some
> pop song I sometimes heard on the radio.

> And she was not singing that song well.

Rick: Just take our word for it

> Glancing around, I saw a familiar-looking lady in a dress smiling at me. I looked into her eyes.

> "I remember you,"

Rick: In the mountains

> she said. "I helped with your recovery."

> For a few seconds, my weeks of physical therapy to get back on duty surfaced.

Rebecca: He remembered her, but then he had to think about it

> "You are Lieutenant Sharp, right?" I asked.

> "Yes," she replies. "Melissa when I am off duty."

Rebecca: [Deep] When I'm on duty, it's Bruce.

> I reintroduced myself.

Tsuneo: I'm.... guy
Dan: Thanks, I was still trying to come up with the next one.

> "I've been so busy that I've forgotten about you."

Rebecca: Then again, he also occasionally forgets to breathe.

> "Our paths don't cross often," she said. "I can be found in the ladies' BOQ.

> "Yeah, I saw that your BOQ is still standing. Our BOQ

Rick: Isn't that where Amuro Rey fought Big Zam?

> is still under construction so we men have to sleep in a Quonset.

All: We know.

> At least I know where to find you."

Rebecca: Combined with his earlier comments, that sounds decidedly creepy.

> "May I buy you a drink?"

> "I must be a real ladies man if you are buying me drinks," I mused.

> "I outrank you. I am a first and you are a third," she said. "We take care of those with a lower pay
> grade."

Rick: She must be a shuttle pilot, because that was a hard burn.

> She ordered this blue-colored shot from the bartender. I gulped it down.

Dan: Sir, that was my Listerine

> I then heard the karaoke jockey mention Jack's name. Jack went up on the stage, holding the
> microphone.

> And then he started singing this gangster rap song. I was listening, and he was good.

Rick: Really?
Dan: No.

> "Your friend?" asked Melissa.

Dan: I deny everything!

> "He's the captain of my hovertank troop," I said.

> Jack was turning out to be a very good singer. His singing was enticing me to dance,

Rebecca: He had that ‘come hither' look in his eyes

> as some of the
> Army and Air Force officers were already doing. He could have himself a career ins singing after his
> service obligation is finished.

> I took Melissa's hand. "Shall we?"

> And so we started dancing.

Rebecca: You call that dancing? I’ve seen people on fire move better than that.

> It felt so much like fun. And there were certain feelings coursing through me.

Tsuneo: Mild nausea

> I was feeling some pressure.

Dan: Wait, that was just her standing on his foot.

> And then Jack was done singing.

> "Great song, Jack," I said to him.

> "Thanks," he replied.

Rick: Great nonspecific song!
Dan: Thanks

> "So you can sing too," Nina said to him.

> "Yeah," replied Jack. "I like singing rap music. I wanted to be a rap star when I was a kid."

> "Then why didn't you pursue your dream?"

Tsuneo: [Jack] I did. I enlisted on a GI bill to study music theory. But then, y'know, space war.

> "It's kind of hard to earn a living. Either you make millions of dollars, or you don't make enough to
> feed yourself.

Rebecca: Music or IT startups? Could be either, really.

> When I became an adult, the Army was the only choice I had to support myself. Don't
> get me wrong, I rather enjoy my position,

Dan: He gets to drive a robot tank and blow stuff up. He's having a blast.

> but once I finish my obligation, I'll get a real job and have more free time to pursue rapping."

Dan: Because nothing sells like white guy rap.

> "You could have been a waiter," I said. "They can make a lot of money if they work at the right
> place."

Rick: He dreams big

> "And why didn't you become a waiter?" asked Nina.

> "Going around busing tables and having to take all those orders," I said.

Dan: I mean, it's okay for Jack, but I've got standards.

> "Well," said Melissa, "in the Army you do have to go around and take orders."

Tsuneo: And so far all he's done is go around in circles.

> "I was commissioned as an officer, so I give orders too."

> "Only when Mike and I are not available," said Jack. "And your authority over the troop is quite
> limited.

Rebecca: Let's face it, nobody listens to you. Or even knows who you are.

> Sure, you outrank Sergeant Avital, but she has more pull in the troop than you do.

Rick: And she's a pot plant.

> You won't
> get to order a buck private around unless someone like me or Avital assigns him to you." He
> glances at Melissa. "And who is your new friend here?"

> "I helped him with his physical therapy," she said.

Rebecca: [Jack] Oh, so you mean dancing with him is a huge ethical violation?

> "First Lieutenant Melissa Sharp, U.N. Air Force."

> "I wonder what kind of therapy you offered," said Lieutenant Shirogane, winking his eye. Some of
> the other men chuckled.

Rebecca [Melissa]: Thanks to my work, he can poop regularly again

> "Yeah, Marvin Gaye sang a song about that, right?" said another officer.

> We stayed at the O-club for a few more hours, and some of the other officers and guests sang
> karaoke.

Rick: And they did a variety of eighties dance moves

> "I will be leaving now," said Melissa.

Rebecca [Melissa]: My home planet needs me

> "How about dinner at the officers' mess tomorrow?" I asked.

> "The officers' mess?"

Tsuneo: I mean, I am an officer.
Rebecca: [Melissa] Technically.

> "I'm only a third lieutenant; we do not make that much."

> And so she left the club.

Dan: While trying to get the stink of his desperation off her

> Not long afterward, I stepped outside.

> "This could be the start of something," said Jack.

Tsuneo: Judging by the fic so far, I sincerely doubt that

> "We'll see," I said. "I've learned not to put all of the fish in one basket."

Rick: Wait, I said fish in a basket-
Dan: Keep rolling!

> Oooooooo

> Oooooooo

> I had dinner with Melissa Sharp in the officers' mess the next day,

Dan: Her transfer papers didn’t come through fast enough.

> I could feel a residue of last night's party with the Air Force's 56th Squadron.

Tsuneo: Mostly because he hadn't washed

> The meal we had was macaroni and cheese and a
> side serving of steamed broccoli; the armed services usually served cheap, filling stuff for dinner.

Rebecca: How very romantic

> It was strange referring to the midday meal as dinner, as the military uses the term "dinner" for the
> midday meal and "supper" for the evening meal.

Tsuneo: As were had previously established

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

> "It's certainly different from home," answered Melissa,

Dan: I'm going to assume she comes from Nome, Alaska.

> picking up some macaroni and cheese with her fork.

Rebecca: And slowly, with much ceremony, smeared it on his face.

> "I've been off base with my co-workers; I visited Tangier and Casablanca. I never knew that
> there would be so much diversity. I was expecting everyone to be Arabic."

> "There is a Spanish neighborhood in Tangier," I said. "Also Italians and Nigerians. There's a little
> restaurant in Tangier that has this Italian-Spanish-Lebanese fusion cuisine, and it's run by this
> Nigerian dude. My people and I went there a few weeks ago."

> "I've heard there are Berber towns in the mountains that are open to tourists," said Melissa.

Tsuneo: The world-ending global alien assault really doesn't seem to have done much, does it?
Rick: It was more of a mild inconvenience than anything else

> "Maybe one day. What was it like in Jamaica?"

Dan: I don't know, I've never –
Rick: Psst! Your backstory!
Dan: Oh yeah! I love Cuba!

> "During the summer, it was humid," I said. I briefly recalled my childhood in Jamaica, the waves
> crashing on the beach, the feel of the moisture in the air.

Tsuneo: Jamaica consists entirely of one beach.

> "I liked it when it rained during the summer. I would just go out and let the rain fall on me."

> "Must be a lot of exciting places there."

> "There are clubs; they cater to the rich tourists from America and Europe,

Rebecca: The tourism industry having apparently survived the end of the world largely unscathed and unchanged.
Tsuneo: It seems to be a part of a growing list

> and you'd have to pay a
> lot. I don't think you could afford to visit Jamaica a lot on a first lieutenant's salary."

> "Ah, but I have a pay bonus due to my specialty," said Melissa. "So I can probably take a vacation
> there once a year."

Rebecca: [Melissa] I make more than you, is what I'm trying to say.
Dan: Yeah, I got it.

> Ooooooo

Dan: The conversation ended on this

> It was a few days later when Jack made an announcement in the troop office.

> "We'll get to earn some combat pay soon," said the troop captain.

Rebecca: Inform your soon-to-be widows.

> "We're being ordered to move out."

> "What is the situation, sir?" asked Executive Sergeant Avital.

> "The colonel will brief us once we get there. Avital, get everyone ready to go."

Rebecca [Avital]: Where are we going?
Rick [Jack]: The colonel will brief us once we get there.
Rebecca [Avital]: But-
Rick [Jack]: No more questions

> "Yes, sir."

> And so we did.

Tsuneo: We were ordered to get ready to go so we got ready to go.

[Pause]

Dan: You’re really a Spaceball, you know that?

> Avital supervised the loading of our hovertanks onto flatbed trailers.

Rebecca: Considered that rather than loading them on to slow-moving trucks you could drive your fast supertech hover tanks there?
Tsuneo: I think you're asking a bit much

> I went to the truck that was
> transporting the battalion's officers, and Jack joined us a few minutes later.

Tsuneo: Future space war seating arrangements!

> Soon I felt the truck rumble as it left the base and headed to its assigned destination.

> "Maybe this is a drill," said a black-haired lady under Lieutenant Shirogane's command.

> I doubted that.

> The trip took a few hours;

Tsuneo: I can only assume it's not a very urgent situation
Rick: They're very casually sauntering into danger

> I had taken a sip or two from my canteen.

> "Thank the logistics company for getting us places," said Mike.

Rebecca: Remember to tip your valet.

> We got off, and we were in this dry place; I figured we were at the northern edge of the Sahara

> Desert.

Dan: The desert was dry and desert-like

> Above us, the sky was soldiers set up tents under the supervision of Master Sergeant
> Cabon.

Tsuneo: What would you be left with if you took setting up tents out of this fic?
Rebecca: The awkward flirting with Melissa
Tsuneo: Good point, let's move on.

> It was hot, at least a hundred degrees, even with me spraying myself with water. I once
> again silently thanked the battalion's logistics company for bringing all the stuff we need to be able
> to function in the Sahara.

Rick: Including his industrial-strength hair dryer. He can’t live without it.

> In a few minutes, all the tents were set up, including the huge tent under
> where our Spartas hovertanks were parked.

> "Sirs, the colonel will be briefing us," said Master Sergeant Cabon.

Tsuneo: We may finally find out what we’re doing here.
Rick: What, them or us?
Tsuneo: Either? Both?

> All of us, officers and enlistees, all gathered in a rectangular formation, except for those on watch.
> Colonel Kravshera faced us,

Tsuneo: Barely concealing the disappointment on his face

> with Major Yoon and Master Sergeant Cabon flanking him.

Rebecca: Master Sergeant Cabon is the perpetual plus one of this fic.

> "If any of you thought this would be a drill, you will be disappointed," said the colonel. "The enemy
> has slipped through our air defenses and set up beachheads on the planet for further attacks.

Tsuneo: They deploy entirely from space on combat dropships so there’s no need for that, but never mind.

> A Bedouin clan spotted the enemy on a plateau about seventy miles east of Abadia, Algeria.

Rick: But then it turned out to just be an ‘off the grid' package tour

> The Algerian government has requested assistance in driving the invaders from their land.

Tsuneo: We had to think about it, but they did ask politely

> We've been detailed to provide support for the mission.

Rebecca: Your job is to throw yourselves at the enemy guns while the officers have tea and biscuits in their tent.

> Once the enemy location is confirmed, we will attack.
> The Space Marines' 25th Spartas hovertank battalion will attack from the east,

Dan: The Space Marines just got a new codex and its overpowered as all hell

> and we will attack

> from the northwest. We will await the command to move out and attack. Make sure the sand filters
> are installed."

Rick: Also don't forget to slip, slop, slap.

> And so we checked and rechecked everything out there in the desert,

Dan: Yep, it's sand all right

> making sure all the ammo
> was loaded and that we had all the supplies that we needed. Supplies were important; I had that
> drilled into my head when I was in Officer Candidate School.

Tsuneo: Then again, he spent most of Officer Candidate School eating crayons.

> And then Colonel Kravshera announced that we would be moving out. Master Sergeant Cabon
> barked orders as we got into our suits and flipped the switches to activate the hovertanks.

Tsuneo: I can only assume we're heading into an intense, action-packed and tightly written battle sequence.
Rebecca: Ha ha ha no.

> And then we moved out, hovering over the sandscape.

Rick: Off to Tolshley's Station to pick up those power converters

> "All right," said Kravshera. "Emerson, you and your troop have point. Shirogane, you will take flank."

> We all moved in formation, heading towards the site of the enemy base. As we were heading there,
> I was thinking of the battle ahead. By now, the Ocean Patrol would have fired cruise missiles at the
> site. I hoped that by the time we got there, the enemy base would be a wreck and we would simply
> secure the area.

> It was not to be.

Dan: Turned out there were bad guys to fight.

> "There is still fighting going on," said the colonel. "Stay alert, people!"

> I could see smoke rising from the plateau straight ahead.

Tsuneo: Maybe it's the bonfire for their beach party?
Rebecca: Sure, lets go with that.

> "Okay, team," said Jack. "I will go up there are spot the enemy positions. Avital, you will be at my
> side."

Rick: [Jack] Everyone else, die with honour.

> Jack ordered me to switch to guardian mode and prepare to fire on enemy position.

Dan: So I pulled the eject lever.

> "Copy," I replied
> to him. I pulled a lever and the hovertank switched to guardian mode. I saw some of the other
> hovertanks switch to guardian; it looks like a hovertank standing on two legs.

Tsuneo: He was ordered to switch to guardian mode so he switched to guardian mode which is guardian mode

> I saw Jack's and Sergeant Avital's hovertanks switch to battloid mode, resembling a suit of armor.

Rebecca: A six meter tall suit of armour with massive shoulderpads and guns coming out of the arms
Rick: Well, you know. Close enough

> They then went up the slope to the top of the plateau.

Tsuneo: I never saw him again.

> And I waited. My heart was racing. I knew what could happen to me, or Jack, or Sergeant Avital, or
> Colonel Kravshera.

Rick: You could get a nasty sunburn

> "All right, I have the enemy sighted," said Jack. "Sending in the coordinates."

> "Copy," I replied. I saw the coordinates on the main screen in my guardian's cockpit. I pressed some
> buttons and used the coordinates to aim the main cannon. I fired the main cannon.

Rebecca: [Flat] Then I went out for waffles. I got waffles. I ate the waffles.

> Jack relayed more coordinates, and I fired more and more shells.

Dan: He had no clue what he was shooting at, nor did he really care.

> "All right," said Colonel Kravshera. "Let's move in!"

> I switched to battloid mode, and I leaped up the slope of the plateau using the battloid's powerful
> mechanical legs. I soon joined Jack and Sergeant Avital.

Tsuneo: They were house hunting and needed a second opinion.

> Even as the rest of the battalion was joining us, I could see the battle. The enemy suits of armor
> were already fighting with the Space Marines who had arrived first.

Dan: I might as well throw my Tyranids in the bin at this rate
Rick: Sorry man

> I could see more wreckage of
> enemy positions that had been obliterated by us. The centerpiece of this battle was this alien ship,
> about the size of a big building.

Rebecca: An entirely unhelpful description

> I could notice damage that was probably caused by missile strikes.

Dan: Is it too much to hope it was caused by drunk driving?
Tsuneo: Afraid so.

> "Okay," said Jack. "Pick your targets and fire. Wing, Bakovic, make sure to watch for any enemy
> forces coming out of that ship."

> And so we did. I saw two of the enemy armor go down. We continued to blast as many targets as
> we could. Move, aim, fire, and repeat.

Tsuneo: We finally get to an action scene and the fic makes it as deathly dull as possible. Well done.
Rebecca: I must admit that I'm impressed

> It was like a rhythm. We moved in closer, our eyes vigilant for any enemy stragglers.

Rick: He was wary for stray Bioroids hiding in bushes

> "This sector is secure," I heard Lieutenant Shirogane say.

> "There does not seem to be an enemy in sight," said Jack.

Tsuneo: And the giant enemy spaceship?

[Rick shrugs]

> We all waited for about an hour. More reinforcements arrived.

> "Okay, people," said Kravshera. "We can stand down now."

Dan: Smoke if you got ‘em

> I looked at the enemy wreckage.

Tsuneo: I’m going to get ahead of the curve and say that it looked like wreckage.
Rick: You might be on to something there.

> Most of the enemy war machines were destroyed beyond
> recognition, their pieces scattered around this plateau-turned-battlefield like someone dumping a
> bunch of jigsaw pieces on a floor; I saw a few that were still in one piece.

Dan: They were destroyed, but they were still in one piece

> I examined the wreckage of one of the enemy war machines.

> There appeared to be a human being in what appeared to be the cockpit.

Rick: Or it could be a weather balloon or some swamp gas

> "You'd better see this," I said, transmitting the video feed from the battloid's camera.

> -----

> Chapter 4: What the Enemy Is

Rick: An orange and blue recolour of Rumble, but that's not important right now

> I felt the ice-cold water as it poured against my skin, providing some relief from the Sahara Desert's
> hot air.

Tsuneo: Does someone want to tell him that's the water for cleaning the tanks?
Dan: He'll figure it out eventually

> The battle was over, and my troop was relieved. The Air Force's Military Airlift Command had
> brought in more troops, equipment, and supplies, especially tanks of ice cold water in which we
> could cool off.

Rebecca: You’re not meant to go skinny dipping in – Oh, wait, too late.

> They had also sent helicopters with red crosses to evacuate the wounded; I prayed to
> Jesus Christ to look out for the wounded warriors. VHT-1 Spartas, VF-8 Logan, and VF-11
> Thunderbolt battloids all stood guard on watch for enemy reinforcements.

Rick: One of these does not belong

> The sun set to the west.

Rebecca: You'd be worried if it didn't

> "Are you staring, sir?" asked Executive Sergeant Rebekah Avital.

Tsuneo: It’s this whole sunset thing, he still hasn’t figured it out.

> She was eye-catching, considering that she was wearing a black tank top along with her MARPAT
> pants. "You do stand out, Sergeant," I said.

Rebecca: And back to being a creep. Thanks fic.

> "I would strongly advise you refrain from touching, Lieutenant," she replied.

> I understood her. Fraternization between officers and enlistees was not allowed.

Tsuneo: That and she just doesn't like him
Rebecca: I doubt the thought had ever entered his mind

> And then some more ladies approached, all wearing nothing but tank tops and pants.

Rick: There you go, Dan. Casual Friday uniforms
Dan: I did wonder

> I recognized Lieutenant Nina Washington and Lieutenant Shelby Porter among them.

Tsuneo: He recognised them from their elaborate and well-realised descriptions

> "Nina," said Jack. "Great too see that you are all right."

> "You too, Jack," replied Nina.

Dan: [Nina] But not you, %n=playername

> "Of course, I did provide the air support you needed."

> "We were fine ourselves."

Rebecca: [Jack] Fine, I won’t bother next time.

> I saw that Shelby was looking really red, like a ruby.

> "You look like a boiled lobster, girl," I said.

> "I forgot to pack sunscreen," she replied.

> "Porter, you would forget your veritech if someone like me was not looking out for you," said Nina.

Dan: Was that a banter?
Rick: Please don't, fic

> "I hope they have something good for dinner, like pot roast," said Lieutenant Michael Meyers.

Tsuneo: Dream big.

> We all laughed. Army food out in the field was not exactly gourmet.

Rebecca: In the back their Michelin Star-rated chef quietly cries to himself

> In any event, they fed us rations, which was meat and boiled vegetables in some spicy sauce.

Rick: Hey, Tsuneo?
Tsuneo: Yeah?
Rick: This fic. Um...
Tsuneo: What is it?
Rick: I mean, is it just me, or is it kind of... dull?
Tsuneo: Huh. You know, I never really thought of it like that.
Rick: Okay, fair enough.
Tsuneo: I mean, yes. Like, it's not just you.
Rick: Oh good.

> Not as good as the food served in Burger King;

Rick: Yes, but how was it compared to Hungry Jacks?

> it did sate our hunger.

> Shelby sat across from me under the mess tent.

Tsuneo: Has Shelby appeared before now? I can't remember.
Rebecca: You know, I'd check but I don't care.

> I told her briefly about what it was like growing up
> in Jamaica, the weather, the fact that the primary industry was tourism from America and Europe.

Tsuneo: Talking about Jamaica is his primary personality trait

> "I like flying," she said. "I remember hearing about the stories of pilots who flew in the Robotech
> War.

Rick: Famous pilots like Steve Kramer, Persy Satori and Kyle Bartley

> I'm glad I was able to become a pilot."

> "Even though you could be hurt or killed in combat?"

> She did not answer; she just stuck her fork into her aluminum ration container and ate a small bite-
> sized chunk of beef.

Dan: Fascinating.

> I started thinking about what I saw. Those machines were not robots, but vehicles driven by people.

Rick: The idea that enemy mecha had pilots seems entirely new to him.

> I started wondering what those people were like. What lives did they have at home?

Rebecca: Wake up in the clone tank, get wired into your Bioroid, fight the enemy and try not to die
Tsuneo: And yet it still sounds more fulfilling than our protagonist's

> What were they told about us?

> "You okay?" she asked.

> "It was eventful," I said.

Rebecca: It was not.

> I looked as the sky got darker and darker, the blue turning to lavender.

Tsuneo: It’s part of that whole sunset thing he’s yet to wrap his head around.

> Soon afterward, the wind started blowing desert sand into the base camp. It was really inconvenient
> having all that sand blow in.

Rick: Stupid desert. Why did it have to be so sandy?

> Fortunately, we had shelter.

> The alien ship that served as their forward operating base was now our shelter from the Sahara
> sandstorm.

Dan: Having been captured? Disabled? Destroyed? Something?

> Cots were set up inside the cavernous space, which was probably used to storing the
> enemy war machines.

Rick: It was the alien rumpus room

> It was convenient, as the interior was cooler, in addition to protecting us from
> the sand-bearing winds.

Rebecca: And probably wasn’t occupied with lurking alien threats at all.

> "That sandstorm is gonna do a number on our hovertanks," said Private First Class Glenn La Belle.

> "Sergeant Avital can have you clean the sand out of the hovertanks," I replied.

> "Sir?"

> "Don't worry, La Belle," said Avital. "I would not have you do that if I didn't believe in you."

Rick: I believe you can perform basic maintenance operations
Dan [LaBelle]: Thank you, sir. That means a lot to me

> As I lay on the cot, I started thinking about what I saw. There were people operating those things on
> the inside. Every time I was destroying those war machines, I was killing people. Did they wake up
> in the morning, expecting this to be their last day in this physical Universe?

Tsuneo: Or did they expect to somehow end up on Earth-3?

> I soon drifted off to sleep.

Rebecca: The thought of killing enemy combatants bothered him, but not too much.

> Ooooooooo

> It was already getting warm by morning of the next day. Once again, we had breakfast rations,
> which was basically scrambled eggs and hash-browned potatoes.

Dan: Just like mother used to reheat

> The soldiers, marines, and
> airmen who had the graveyard shift joined us, hoping to have a breakfast before going to sleep.

Rick: On the downside, you’re up all night guarding an ineffable alien war machine. On the upside,
breakfast for dinner.

> "That sandstorm sure did a number," said Mike. Some of our soldiers were already checking the
> hovertanks for sand.

Rick: Anything to add, Anakin Skywalker?

> "I wonder what the plan is," I said.

> "Simple," said Lieutenant Colonel Lupon Kravshera. "We stay here until we are sent back to base."

Rebecca: He gets to lead because of his amazingly decisive command skills

> "And that video feed, sir?" I asked.

Tsuneo: You go on an insane racist rant on a livestream and it’s your own damn fault

> "It was already forwarded to Southern Cross Army headquarters," said Kravshera.

> It was a few hours later that Colonel Kravshera summoned me to the command Quonset hut, which
> was located near the alien ship.

Rick: Near transport, convenient to shopping and just by the crashed alien warship. The perfect location

> I could feel the air inside was cooler, and hear the hum of an air conditioner.

Dan: This is the officer’s air conditioner. The enlisted men have to sweat.

> "We have a live video feed with HQ ArmySoCross," said a corporal.

> An image of a black-haired man in his forties appeared; I recognized him from news reports as
> Lieutenant General Rolf Emerson, commander of the U.N. Army's Southern Cross Field Army.

Rebecca: In case you'd forgotten what he looked like since last time

> "General," said a colonel who was the senior officer here.

> "How is it going over there?" asked the general.

> "Hot, sir. Very hot."

Tsuneo: Someone smack him just for that

> "I understand the 6th battalion sighted one of the enemy troops."

> "Yes, sir," replied Colonel Kravshera.

> "I was the one who captured the video feed of the enemy pilot, sir," I said.

Rick: This is his career highlight. Treasure it

> "We also found bodies inside the alien craft,"

Dan: Or at least, that's what the cranks on the Internet will have you believe

> said the colonel in charge in the operation. "We won a
> victory, but we both know this war will not be won until the Spacy crushes the enemy fleet and then
> attacks whatever rock they came from."

Tsuneo [Kravshera]: I'm right here, you know

> "We'll have the bodies transported to Monument City for study," said General Emerson. "And we will
> send a scientific team to examine the alien spacecraft. Now back to your posts."

Dan: This report could have been an email.
Rebecca: This fic so far could have been an email.

> The video feed was then cut off.

> It was the next day that our battalion was sent home.

Tsuneo: What, no more inane chats with miscellaneous characters well never see again? For shame.

> On the way, I kept thinking about the
> ramifications of what we were doing. Did the enemy have the same level of camaderie among
> themselves that we did?

Rebecca: Well they’re brainwashed clones, which means that they’ve likely got more chemistry than this lot.

> We felt the air get cooler as we crossed to the other side of the Atlas Mountains, where breezes
> from the Mediterranean Sea moderated the weather.

Rick: The breezes deleted some of the weather's messages and sent it warnings for unacceptable language

> I was relieved to see the base again, with the battalion headquarters, the guardhouses, the officers'
> mess, and the men's BOQ that was still under construction.

Tsuneo: Who's building that thing? Sisyphus?

> I was even glad to see the Quonset hut that was serving as the temporary men's BOQ.

Dan: Hovel sweet hovel

> I looked and saw the enlistees get out of the truck,
> the expression on their faces revealing their gladness of being back on base.

> And then Master Sergeant Tomas Cabon had them unpack everything.

Rebecca: The enlistees are happy. We can’t have that.

> We settled into the usual routine of staying prepared and drilling.

Tsuneo: And arbitrarily changing our uniforms.

> But the knowledge I recently got kept me thinking.

Rick: Why didn't they just kickban Lynx?

> I even had some trouble sleeping more than the others in the Quonset hut.

> I spoke to Sergeant Avital about it.

> "The best person who can help you is Master Sergeant Cabon," she said. "I have known him for
> eleven years, and he had served as a mentor to me."

Rebecca: [Atival] I’ll never forget his inspiring words, when he told me ‘get out of my face you useless grunt, can’t you see I’m busy?’

> "He must be very busy."

> "I can arrange an appointment with him for you, sir," she said. "He'll make time for you if I ask for it."

> And so he did.

Tsuneo: In an amazing twist, the thing that he said would happen then happened
Dan: I am shocked.

> I noticed he had a corner office, and it was larger than Lieutenant Jack Emerson's "office";

Rebecca: Jack knows it’s a supply closet but he insists on the name.

> it
> revealed how important the master sergeant was to the battalion. It has a wooden desk as its
> centerpiece, a bookcase, and some pictures hanging on the wall, as well as a steel filing cabinet.

Rick: As well as a four-poster bed and an ornate hardwood wardrobe.

> "Sergeant Avital asked me to meet you, sir," he said, sitting in the leather chair. The master
sergeant
> was a tall, olive-skinned man with close-cropped black hair.

Tsuneo: He gets a description several scenes after his introduction.

> He was dressed in a Class "C" uniform, the uniform worn on base during warm weather.

Rebecca: Shorts and flip-flops it is

> He spoke with this accent indicating that he was from South America.

Rebecca: It was a general purpose South American accent, from the nation of South America.

> "Please be quick, Lieutenant, I have important things to do."

> "I just learned we were killing people, Master Sergeant," I said.

Dan: And I haven’t killed since junior high.
Tsuneo: [Cabon] Okay, not sure where to start unpacking that.

> "And you had no idea that the enemy was people?" he asked.

Tsuneo: He didn't expect that he'd be fighting when he joined the army.

> "Until I saw them, I did not think about it when I was fighting the enemy. Now it is all I think about."

> "Look at these ribbons, sir," he said.

Dan: I don’t see how –
Tsuneo: [Cabon] Look at them, dammit!

> I looked at the ribbons, which represented his medals. I recognized the Distinguished Service Medal
> and the Titanium Medal of Valor among them.

> "You are well-decorated, Master Sergeant," I said.

Rick: He has icing and a cream frosting trim

> "This medal here was for my participation in the campaign against renegade Zentraedi," he said.

Rick: Fought in the Zentraedi Breakout. He'll never forget all the MDC he lost.

> "I

> enlisted in the Army after the end of the First Robotech War. There were still many Zentraedi who
> wanted to continue fighting even after their Supreme Commander ordered them to stand down. I
> remember the first time I was in combat. I knew we were killing people,

Rebecca: [Cabon] Hell, I couldn't wait for it.

> and after that first time I kept
> thinking about it. Unfortunately, it gets easier. If I may ask, sir, why did you join?"

Dan: I heard that the army had the best cheese.
Tsuneo: [Cabon] That answers so much, and explains so little.

> "I wanted an exciting and fulfilling career," I said.

Dan: Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to go count the base's bog roll supply.

> "The only careers in Jamaica are waiting on tables
> with tourists from America or Europe, or farming and fishing."

Rebecca: So how much do you think the author actually knows about Jamaica?

> "It can be exciting at times, sir," he said. "And it can be dull,

Dan: Boy, howdy.

> like it was when we were in the desert a
> few days ago after the battle. And now you know the toll a military career can take.

Rebecca: He categorically does not.

> I can't say for sure that you made the wrong career choice, Lieutenant.

Rick: We can.

> Only you can observe whether this was
> right for you. As for having to kill people, it is a burden we chose to bear, and bear it we must.

Tsuneo: So, in short, you should have thought about that before you enlisted.

> Let's be strong, sir, and hope this war will end. And never forget what we are fighting for.

Rick: To sell plastic toy robots.

> Now please excuse me."

> "Thank you, Master Sergeant," I said, walking away from his office.

Rick: I wonder how long it will take him to realise he's the enlisted officer.

> Along the way, I saw Colonel Kravshera.

> "As you were, Lieutenant," he said.

> "Yes, sir," I replied.

Tsuneo: Well that added a lot
Dan: So much.

> Oooooo

> A few days later, I had the graveyard shift in the battalion office. The battalion was active 24/7,

Rebecca: They tried being a strictly nine-to-five army, but it didn't work out

> which
> meant an officer had to be in charge at all times, and it was my turn. I drank a cup of coffee that had
> been imported from Ghana.

Rick: The coffee had been poured into the cup in Ghana and then sent to him.

> While I would rather have been asleep, my surroundings were more
> comfortable than the men's temporary BOQ. All of us were clad in the more comfortable BDU's, as it
> was Army custom to reserve the service uniforms for day wear on base.

> Staff Sergeant Wing called for me and Jack, who was the officer in charge of the battalion this
> evening.

> "A couple of soldiers from the 18th troop were pulled over by the police in Tangier,"

Dan: They were well over the legal Protoculture limit

> said the staff sergeant. "Sergeant Bakovic was arrested, sirs."

> "You check it out," Jack said to me.

> And so I did.

Tsuneo: Oh when will this mad, whirlwind existence ever cease?

> I ordered Private La Belle to drive me to the police station in Tangier; I rode in this green Toyota
> Avalon that the Army used for a staff car.

Rick: I am amazed by these fantastical high-tech vehicles!

> "Well, sir, at least this breaks the monotony,"

Tsuneo: No comment

> said La Belle as he drove on the road leading to
> downtown Tangier. Looking through the windshield, I can see the streetlights as well as the
> headlights of cars traveling in the other direction.

> It was a few minutes after we left the base that we arrived in downtown Tangier. La Belle was
> looking for a place to park the car near Tangier's police headquarters.

> "I can park here, sir," said the private, pulling up to the curb.

Tsuneo: Intense car parking action!

> I could see the entrance to the Tangier
> Police Headquarters. It has a set of concrete steps leading up to a row of glass doors.

Rebecca: The front of the police station is better described than he is. Take this how you want

> The whole place was well-lit. I saw a uniformed man walk down the steps.

> "Stand guard here," I said. "Wait for my return."

> "Yes, sir," replied La Belle.

Rick: LaBelle is given a job at his level of ability, which is to sit in the car and do nothing.

> I walked up the steps into the lobby of the police headquarters. It looked like a typical lobby of a
> police headquarters,

Rick: And yet, somehow he is surprised.

> with a desk staffed by police officers, wooden benches, a clock mounted on
> the wall. Overhead, a ceiling fan was spinning slowly. Some of the police officers in their blue
> uniforms turned their attention to me, as I was dressed in MARPAT camouflage.

> A short, dark haired lady in a police uniform approached me.

Rebecca: He immediately leered at her.

> "Sergeant Al Badri," she introduced herself. "I am a translator."

> I introduced myself.

> "A few of your soldiers already gave statements. Your Sergeant Bakovic is in a holding cell in the
> headquarters."

> "You speak good English," I noted.

Rebecca [Al Badri] And you’re a presumptuous racist arse

> "Yes. I was in your United Nations Army's military police," she said. "I joined the Tangier police after
> my discharge."

Rick: Which meant she had to give up her cool armour suit and giant police robot.

> Some young men entered the lobby.

Dan: You know, those guys

> "Sir," they said upon seeing me.

> "What happened?" I asked.

> "We were going back to base, with Sergeant Bakovic behind the wheel, sir," said one of the men.
> "He pulled over when we saw the blue and red lights, and they arrested him for drunk driving."

> "I want official reports from you," I said. "This night."

> And so I interviewed each soldier alone in a room the local police provided for me. Corporal Shays,
> Private Nguyen, Private Pacquaio, and Private Cassari all agreed that they had been drinking, and
> that Bakovic was arrested for drunk driving. They did not tell exactly the same story;

Dan: Cassari’s version of events involved him punching a shark

> their stories did not contradict.

> Sergeant Al Badri approached me. "We'll keep Bakovic overnight," she said. "We will notify the local
> prosecutor of this."

> "We will also need copies of your police report," I said.

> "Sure."

Dan: Also I'll need you to come on a date with me to the Officer's Mess

Rebecca [Al Badri]: Get out of my office

> I looked at the four soldiers who rode with Sergeant Bakovic. "You four with me," I said. "Tomorrow
> at 0900, you will report to the troop office. If you are late, you will be in trouble."

> "Yes, sir," they all replied.

> And so we returned to base.

Tsuneo: This is adding so much to the narrative.

> Oooooooo

> The next day, Sergeant Bakovic was in the troop office. Jack ordered everyone except me, Mike,
> Sergeant Avital, and Bakovic to leave the office.

Rick: For very generous values of ‘everyone'

> Jack sat behind a desk while Bakovic stood at attention.

> "Were you driving drunk, Sergeant Bakovic?" asked Jack.

> "I had a few drinks and I was driving; I did not feel drunk, sir," he said.

Dan: He's as sober as the next man. That next man being Nick Nolte, of course.

> "The police report says your blood alcohol level was 0.18. That is above the legal limit, Sergeant.
> You do realize what trouble you are in, right?"

> "Yes, sir."

> "You are subject to prosecution under Moroccan law as well as the UEF Criminal Articles."

Tsuneo: He has broken space robot law.

> "Don't we have immunity, sir?"

> "Not under our SOF with the Kingdom of Morocco. You can be demobilized and turned over to them
> for prosecution."

Tsuneo: So as fascinating as this is-
Dan: -no it's not
Tsuneo: Is this actually adding anything to the story?
Rebecca: Well consider Bakovic's well-developed character
Tsuneo: This is his first appearance
Rebecca: Well there you go.

> "Are you going to let that happen?"

> "That depends, Sergeant. Our SOF requires extradition if they can make a reasonable case, and
> with this report, they can. In the meantime, I am signing an order convening a summary court-
> martial."

> "A summary court-martial, sir?"

> "Yes, for violation of Section 1634 of the UEF Act,"

Rick: Wait, he performed a Bar Mitzvah while wearing a clown costume?
Rebecca: That's 1643
Rick: Oh, never mind then.

> said Jack. He looked through some notes. "You
> will not be entitled to counsel, though you may hire counsel at your own expense. You have the right
> to dismiss the summary court-martial. You are also notified that if you dismiss the summary court-
> martial, a special or general court-martial may be convened instead." Jack signed a piece of paper.
> "Follow me." He led the sergeant to one of the cubicles. "From 0900 to 1700, starting today, this will
> be your duty station. You will not leave unless authorized by any of us here, or if you are required to
> appear before your court-martial. I will not tolerate you leaving your post without authorization."

> "Yes, sir."

> "To your post, Sergeant Bakovic."

> Sergeant Bakovic sat down.

Dan: This fic in a nutshell
Tsuneo: Twenty-eight chapters. Twenty-eight

> "Come with me," Jack said to me.

> I followed him out to the outer stairwell. "When you advance in rank," said the lieutenant, "You will
> have to deal with disciplinary issues. You will have to judge whether to do a 1550,

Rick: Dude, that's like... two 720s
Dan: Dude.

> convene a court-
> martial, or kick it up the chain of command. I figured it was best for Sergeant Bakovic to be court-
> martialed."

Tsuneo: So obviously this is the setup for Bakovic's big redemption arc down the road
Rebecca: Do you really believe that?
Tsuneo: Not in the slightest, no

> I looked out. There were a few clouds in a sky, and soldiers on the streets running errands. "I think I
> could do it, sir," I said.

Rick: He thinks he could fill in paperwork
Dan: Our hero

> Later that day, we saw a news report on a Sony plasma television in the officers' mess. A big bald
> man whom I recognized as United Earth Forces Supreme Commander Anatole Leonard

Dan: Or at the very least, a leg ham in a uniform

> stood
> behind a podium, flanked by generals and admirals of the UEF component services.

> "Good morning," said the supreme commander. "Last evening, the Spacy's First Fleet, assisted by
> air combat wings from the Air Force and Space Marines, launched a major offensive against the
> enemy. We expect this major offensive to be a huge step towards crushing the enemy fleet around
> Earth. We did suffer some losses.

Rick: Horrific, catastrophic losses.
Rebecca: Sacrifices he was willing to make

> I ask everyone on Earth to pray for the families of those killed in this action."

Tsuneo: Cue the one atheist in the room pointing out that he's an athiest

> I put down my slice of pork chop. I had no idea that it happened; the battalion was not even put on
> alert.

> "Maybe this war will be over soon," said Mike.

> "Too bad we won't be part of the action," said Lieutenant Shirogane.

Tsuneo: You already were!
Dan: You call that action?
Tsuneo: Well, no...

> "We all know the battle for Earth will be decided by the Spacy and Air Force," said Jack. "Maybe our
> division will be placed under REFCOM and we will have to land on the enemy's home world."

> Just then a reporter asked, "Have the Expeditionary Forces found the home world of the enemy
> yet?"

> "They have not identified the enemy's home base at this time," said Leonard.

Rebecca: If you replaced Leonard with one of the propaganda vids from Starship Troopers, would anyone notice the difference?

> "All we know is that
> the fall of the Zentraedi has led to splinter factions fighting over the power vacuum that has existed
> for the past eighteen years. Only by taking the fight to the enemy's home, cutting them off from their
> supplies, can we win this war."

Tsuneo: In the meantime, he will continue to throw bodies at the problem

> "Sir," asked another reporter, "what about recalling the fleet for a massive attack against the enemy
> here, to secure Earth?"

> "That is a policy under consideration," said Leonard. "I will consult with the service chiefs and
> Admiral Breetai at REFCOM on this issue. Ultimately, the decision rests with Secretary General
> Moran. Thank you. Please submit further questions to my office in writing."

> "He doesn't seem to be a very warm person," I said.

Rick: Just ask Seloy Deparra about that

> "I've met the supreme commander," said Jack. "He's a sledgehammer in human form. A very good
> sledgehammer, I will admit."

Dan: I mean, look at that dome of his. You could drive nails into boards with that thing.

> "I hope we have other tools than a sledgehammer," said Mike. "If the enemy has a better
> sledgehammer…"

Tsuneo: When all you have is a hammer, every problem begins to look like an army of Bioroids

On that final comment the big screen turned off, converting the world back into prose format. “So that was the series of disjointed statements that comprised the first four chapters of Dire Straights,” Tsuneo considered. “A fic that might yet one day actually start.”

“I mean, we've done slow burn fics before,” Rebecca considered, “Those that take forever to go anywhere, such as Shadow of a Phoenix. However, as slow as those fics were, they at least had something in them.”

“I agree there,” Rick nodded. “This fic is just, well, it's nothing at all.”

“Yeah,” Dan agreed. “I mean, stuff happens but it's all described in the loosest, most broad sense. There's no actual meat on it, just bones. It doesn't help that the fic spends way too much time focusing on boring, trivial stuff that nobody cares about.”

“Intense office administration action!” Rick added.

“Right!” Dan nodded. “And when something does actually happen, well, the fic actually manages to make a space robot battle boring. I'd be impressed if it wasn't so dumb.”

“What's even more impressive is just how bland our lead is,” Rebecca noted. “Like he doesn't have any sort of personality at all. He doesn't even have any informed traits either, like our being reassured that he always does the right thing.”

“Also he doesn't have a name,” Tsuneo added. “Which I know is going to be a problem going forwards.”

“Speaking of, do we have any idea what he looks like?” Rick asked. “Because he hasn't had any description at all do far.”

“I just assume he looks like a generic dumb white guy,” Dan added. “You know, like the protagonist of a James Nguyen movie.”

“Fits, given that the fic kinda has that sort of very dumb, very slow, very bland energy,” Rick agreed.

“And its not like any of the rest of the cast are people either,” Tsuneo added. “They're only marginally better defined than he is in as far as they have names.”

“You know what gets me the most though?” Rebecca asked. “There are another twenty-four chapters of this.”

“Help,” Tsuneo managed.

“Well I can see you're all getting really involved with the fic,” the Voice crashed into the conversation.

“I mean, you could say that,” Dan replied.

“Fantastic,” The Voice beamed. “So you'll be really pleased to know that we'll be covering the next four chapters next time.”

“I'm thrilled,” Tsuneo replied with an utter deadpan.

“But we are done for now, right?” Rick spoke up. “You don't have any more to subject us to right now?”

“No, we're good, thank you,” the Voice finished. “And I will see you all next time.”

“I cannot wait,” Rebecca finished. “Also I am a terrible liar.”

“Well I would love to stay and chat, but I need to get back to the art grind,” Rick admitted as he stood. “I've got no doubt that one guy has an entire Pinterest board dedicated to each element of each of his art pages.”

“So, uh, I dread to ask, but how long can he draw this out for?” Tsuneo added as he and the others also stood.

“Oh, dude only gets two passes on the basic sketch,” Rick shrugged.

“And what are his options if he doesn't like those?” Rebecca asked. “Because this sounds like a real will never be happy kind of a guy”

“Well then maybe he shouldn't have tried to micromanage it in the first place,” Rick finished.

Author’s notes:

Dire Straights is one of those cases where we had to stop and ask ourselves ‘what even is this fic' and ‘why was this even written'? (Although more on that second part to come in future). It's not entertaining, it’s not fun, it’s not in the slightest bit engaging and I cannot even begin to think what sort of joy the author derived from describing the world's most boring man filling in forms and explaining uniform regulations. The fact that the protagonist remains unnamed and undescribed throughout (that's probably not a spoiler) doesn't help any either.

But in many ways, these same traits made it a gift to us. It's a rich vein simply because it is so bland and dry and dull and manages to suck all the life out of what a potentially exciting military action story could be. As we were going through it, we found ourselves being more and more amazed by just how little there was in a fic this long.

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 and register your Jeff.

The Elmer Studios Blog
http://elmerstudios.blogspot.com.au
Elmer Studios MSTings, commentary, random thoughts and other stuff

Elmer Studios!
http://www.heavens-feel.com/elmer/
All of Elmer Studios' Classic MSTings, random DELTA Invasion Episode Generator and other stuff in one spot

---

> and there was a purple medal shaped like a heart. "Here is your Purple Heart