
Episode 501 – So much yet so little

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.

Mark and Jill were both wearing suits and sitting behind a desk. Above them was a cheaply made banner reading 'Totally Real Genom Human Resources Department.' Christina was sitting before them, wearing a labcoat. Rex was standing off to one side, holding a handicam.

"Thank you for taking the time to see us, Doctor Shikato," Mark began.

"And thank you for seeing me," Christina replied.

"So we'll start with the basics," Jill continued. "Why do you want to work for Genom?"

"Well Genom is a giant cartoonishly evil megacorporation that is involved in all sorts of things," Christina explained. "I feel that Genom would be a company that would be able to support the work that I do while also allowing for further research into the subject without any concerns for ethics or accountability."

"Now looking at your resume Doctor Shikato, your area of expertise is cryogenics," Mark continued. "Specifically, the very niche field of cryogenics revival."

"That's me," Christina nodded. "If you ever need somebody revived from cryogenic sleep then I am your girl."

"Now this is a somewhat niche specialty," Jill noted. "How did you get into this role?"

"When I was young I was fascinated by the urban legends that had grown up around Walt Disney," Christina explained. "That made me want to be the person that would revive him and maybe find a cure for having your head cut off. So I worked hard and studied hard, focusing on cryogenics revival until I finally made it as a professional and a leader in my field," Christina nodded. "It turns out they were all just urban legends, but now I had a very specialty doctorate that had very little actual application, so there you go."

"I see," Mark considered. "Where would you say you are placed within your peers?"

"I consider myself a leader in the field," Christina said. "Admittedly that is a very small field."

"And what would you say is your career plan?"

"Look for an eccentric billionaire dying of an exotic disease who puts me on a permanent retainer," she offered. "If he's revived within my lifetime, it's a bonus."

"And how many revivals would you say that you've ever performed in your professional career?" Jill asked.

"Theoretical or actual?"

"Actual."

"Approximately zero," Christina nodded. "Which is why I feel that Genom would be a good match for my skills."

"And what would you say your success rate with revivals is?" Mark continued.

"One hundred percent," she confidently replied. "I have never had a failed revival."

"Because you have never actually performed one."

"Exactly," she nodded.

"So, Doctor Shikato, what would you see your duties at Genom as being?" Jill asked.

"I would assume that I had a modern cryogenics lab, a staff of assistants and access to top flight emergency medical response team," Christina explained. "My job would be on permanent standby in the off-chance that somebody needed to be revived from cryogenic hibernation."

"And what other roles would this facility have?" Mark added.

"Oh, none at all," Christina nodded. "Cryogenic revival is a very specialised field."

Mark and Jill leaned in and quietly whispered to each other before Jill continued. "Doctor Shikato, Genom is a massive corporation with numerous divisions that cover numerous fields. Killer robots, transhumanist conspiracy, bulldozing orphanages and urban development, public relations and damage control, guns and baby needs and so on represent our largest divisions. Cryogenic revival represents a very, very low priority on this list."

"You represent a singularly niche specialty in a tiny fringe field with very little practical application," Mark continued. "One that we cannot foresee any use for, either within our current operations, the foreseeable future or at any point in time and space."

"Furthermore, your outlined needs will require Genom to make considerable investment in equipment, facilities, personnel and procedures to support a role that we may likely never, ever need," Jill added.

"All of which is to say that we would be pleased to offer you a position within our company," Mark finished.

"I'm honoured to accept this offer," Christina cheerfully replied.

"One final question; are you able to start immediately?" Jill asked.

"Well, it's not like I'm doing anything else with my life," Christina finished.

"And scene!" Rex finished. "Great work there guys."

"That was fun," Christina nodded. "We should do it more often."

"Yeah, but that also means doing more fic reviews," Jill countered. "Which has its own problems."

"Awww and I thought we were getting along," the Voice cut into the conversation. "I'd be disappointed if I was still capable of human emotions."

"You're so nice, Voice," Mark replied.

"I try," the Voice beamed her voice dripping with insincerity. "But you know what? It's totally worth it for all the joy that you bring me."

"You're also a terrible liar," Jill noted.

"This is also true," the Voice admitted. "But you know what else is true? Today you'll have another two chapters of Bubblegum Force in all its eighties big hair glory."

"So, uh, what happens this time?" Rex asked. "Because I admit that I'm looking forward to more of Rabby's toolshed project."

"You are?" Jill asked.

"Oh yeah. Gotta respect a good toolshed project," Rex nodded. "Means she's using her toolshed for something other than storing a rusting home gym like most people. You can do some great stuff with a good toolshed project."

"Speaking from experience?" Christina asked.

"After that whole debacle with the stolen prototype and the other one with the hippopotamus I had a lot of time on my hands," he admitted.

"You lead a fascinating life, and I am not sure if I am being sincere or not," Jill admitted.

"It's got all kinds of things in it," the Voice commented. "Some of them might be interesting. Some are not. Some may even possibly move the story forward. I'll let you decide which is which."

"That's not helping," Mark noted.

"I'm not a helpful person," the Voice admitted. "I may not even be a person, so there is that."

"Well, she has you there," Rex noted as he took his place on the couch.

"It's true," Mark admitted it as he and the others joined Rex. "Not sure if I actually like it though."

"I don't," Jill considered as the big screen turned on, converting the world over to script format. "Then again, I don't really like most things, so..."

> Bubblegum Force Episode 2
> Storm Gathering
> By nebulart@solnoid.nl

> Mackie and Rabby had been busy all night,

Jill: But not how Mackie had wanted.

> collecting materials, raiding junkyards in the Fault, collecting materials.

Mark: They collected materials and they collected materials

> Very early in the morning, Lufy woke to the sound of metal on metal,

Rex: Great, Mackie's watching Boomer porn again.

> like a whole pile of junk being dumped on a floor.

Christina: Even though they're not even married, Lufy is already considering a divorce

> Initially, she decided to get back to sleep, but when some tool began making a loud buzzing
> and screaming sound,

Jill: I'm just saying that running a power tools before eight in the morning should not only be an offence, but it should be punishable by public execution

> she jumped out, got dressed,

Rex: For once.

> and angrily stepped down the stairs. "What the hell is going on here ??!!"

Mark: That's what we've been wondering since the fic started

> Before her eyes, a gigantic load of parts and materials spread over the
> floor, while somebody was busy removing another steel sheet that covered the outside door.

Rex: Making you wonder why somebody put it there in the first place

Mark: And yet, that's the least of my questions about this place

> "Are you two nuts ? I was asleep!"
> Rabby stuck her head from behind a pile, walked over to Lufy.
> "Did we wake you ?"
> "Like hell you did. What is all this junk ?"

Rex: Hey, if you can think of a cheaper way to get aluminium siding then I'm open to it

> "These are some of the materials we need."

Mark: So to summarise, they are building supertech war robots out of junk in a run-down garage

Christina: Yes

Mark: I have very many questions

> Not knowing what to say next, Lufy pointed at the person working at the door. "Who the hell is
> that ??"

Jill: A typical response to Mackie.

> "That's Sylia's kid brother, Mackie."
> Rabby lowered her voice, poked Lufy in her side. "He looks an awful lot like Patty."

Rex: Only, you know, without boobs.

Jill: And not pregnant or dead.

Rex: That too

> "Really ?"
> "Yeah, wait till he's finished."

Mark: Yeah, then he'll... Really look like Patty?

> "No way." Lufy yawned.
> "I'm off to bed again. Good luck with your junk."
> "Materials."
> "Junk." Rabby stuck out her tongue, Lufy grinned, yawned,

Rex: Sleep deprivation and power tools are a great combination. Trust me on this

> and turned to the stairs.

Mark: Well that was pointless, but at least it wasn't funny at all.

> After Lufy had left for her room, Rabby started poking around in the pile of parts they had
> brought in. Pulling out some electronics, Rabby checked them over, shaking her head. Primitive.

Rex: Not a single interocitor among them.

> But, that's what she had to work with. With a loud 'clunk', another sheet fell into the workshop.
> Mackie swept his brow. Boy, this was heavy work. Well, at least he knew for who he did it.

Mark [Mackie]: Your name's Sandy right?

Christina [Rabby]: It's Rabby

Mark [Mackie]: Crys. Got it.

> Checking

> around the workshop, he saw her picking up miscellaneous parts, sorting materials on function and
> use.

Mark: Rabby is the type who leaves a huge mess behind and claims that it's her 'system'

> "I'll help you."

Rex: [Mackie] Or just watch you sweat, that's good too

> Rabby shook her head, her arms full of junk. "Won't be needed. Well...there is something you can
> do for me."

> "I'll do it!"

Christina: When he was breaking into Fort Knox while dressed as a nun he began to regret saying that

> She toppled all the junk she had in her arms in his. "Throw this away, will you ?"

Jill: Coincidentally, it's all the stuff that Mackie found.

> A bit

> disappointed, Mackie brought the junk outside and threw it in an alley, adding to the huge stack of
> junked car parts already there.

Jill: It's already looking like an average Kentucky lawn

> Sylia paced restlessly through her apartment, thinking. Fargo had contacted her, told her he had a
> job for the Knight Sabers.

Rex: They need to move a piano from one room to another.

> The word was out that Genom had a hit out for an exec of a rival

> compnay, and that exec had contacted Fargo (not directly, of course) with a plea for protection.

> Great. Another guard job. Well, she thought. At least he pays 10 million yen up front, with
> another 10 at the end thrown in.

Mark: Yay for side-quests

> In two weeks time, the exec would be out of Genom's reach, safe

> in the USA at the head office of his corp.

Jill: In the meantime, he's holed up in a Shibuya love hotel.

> But 14 days of constant surveillance .. the team would love this.

> "Two whole weeks, all day, all night watching ?" Priss looked dismayed.

> Sylia nodded.

Christina: We just said that. Didn't you read the narration?

> "Aw, come on, cut me some slack. My boss is ready to fire me if I drop out on one more gig at Hot
> Legs."

> "Did I say I expected you to sit there and watch all the time ?"

> "You obviously have a plan."

> "Of course."

> Priss smiled. "Hope this won't be another McLaren Special."

Rex: At least let it be a LM or a P1

> A painful look slid over Sylia's face. Yes, that had been a blow in their face, their client abducted
> from under their eyes. "Don't worry. I've got that covered this time."

Mark: [Priss] You've rigged the client to blow, haven't you.

Christina: [Sylia] I mean...

> Besides, we're not up against a company that specializes in subtlety."
> "Let me guess: Genom."

Mark: Wait, it's Genom? This comes out of nowhere!

Jill: I am shocked I say. Shocked

> Sylia abently nodded.

Christina: The evil company was indeed being evil

> "Which means boomers, most probably Bu-55c type."
> Priss cracked her knuckles. Finally another shot at boomers.

> Rabby dragged herself up the stairs, stumbled to her room, fell on her bed and slept straight away.
> Having worked almost all night made her feel miserable.

Jill: Working with Mackie, doubly so.

> But at least she knew what she had and what she still needed.

Mark: What she was going to do with an inflatable bouncy castle was another matter.

> Falling asleep, she dreamt of her friends from the Starleaf,

Jill: Except Pony. She knows what she did.

> finding comfort in the dream she, Patty and Rummy had shared aboard the Blossom.

Rex: Was it the one about having a tea party with a dinosaur? Because that one gets me every time

> Still tired and sleepy, Luffy got out of bed to make a pot of coffee and to have some breakfast.
> Glancing in Rabby's room, she saw how her friend was fast asleep, a smile over her face. Luffy
> wondered what Rabby was dreaming, then set course for the kitchen.

Christina: Set course for the kitchen

Mark: Beep boop, course laid in

Christina: Engage, maximum warp

Mark: Whoosh

> About an hour later, Rabby entered the kitchen, eyes half closed from sleep.

Christina: Wow, another great night's sleep.

> Luffy poured her
> a big mug of coffee and pushed it towards her. She accepted the mug, took a swig.
> "Ugh, what is this stuff?"
> "Coffee."

Rex: Future coffee, made from only the best soy-lent green

> "This stuff is strong enough to break the mug."
> "Oops."

Jill: She's only just discovered coffee. Give her some slack

> "Never mind. At least it will wake me up."

Christina: Bubblegum Force. Come for the cultural clash of incompatible societies, stay for the domestic banality.

> Rabby yawned, stretched her back and limbs.
> "How did it go last night ?"
> "Fine. I've got about 70% of all the stuff I need."

Mark: By weight or volume?

> "What about the rest ?"

Jill [Rabby]: So Lufy, have you ever broken into a nuclear reactor before?

> "Pops." Lufy grinned.

Rex: Pops has apparently become a never-ending supply of parts

> Mackie came up to his sister's apartment after having been working all day at Rabby's workshop,

Jill: Rabby didn't pay him or anything, but she didn't kick him out either so he'll call that a win.

> installing a new armored garage door.

Christina: Doomsday bunker isn't going to prep itself.

> Stepping in, he heard how the team was discussing another assignment, then decided the
> should know about it too.

Mark: That's why Sylia keeps changing the locks without telling him.

> They'd probably drag him into it anyway.

Jill: You feel like he wouldn't really oppose the idea either

> "Where have you been all day, Mackie ?"
> His sister looked worried.

Jill: Her typical reaction to Mackie

> "Installing a garage door."
> "Where ?"
> "In the Fault, at the apartment."

Mark [Mackie]: I definitely wasn't licking factory second Nendoroids again

> "Why didn't you tell me ?"
> "I forgot."

Christina: [Sylia] If anything happens to you, I want to make sure it's on my schedule.

> Priss smiled wickedly. "Didn't you learn to tell responsible people where you are ?"

Rex: Mackie needs adult supervision at all times.

> Mackie snapped his head around. "I'm old enough to manage on my own!"

Jill: Mackie's life goal is to be hit by a truck

Rex: So he'll be transported to a magical world full of waifus?

Jill: I mean, that would also help

> "That's enough, you two. Mackie, next time you go out, leave a note. Priss, this is none of your business."

Christina: Priss is so glad she's an only child

> Mackie dropped in a chair. "So, what's up ?"

> "Guard job. We are working in pairs, and yes, you're bound to draw a slot too."

> Mackie groaned and covered his face with a pillow. "I don't think I heard that."

> "I think you did."

Mark: Mackie's response to important work is 'la la la, I'm not listening.'

> Sylia thought for a moment. "Priss and I will take first shift, Linna and Nene, you are up next."

Jill: Splitting them into the A and B teams.

> Take a good rest before you get to the job, you'll need it. Each team will do a 12-hour surveillance job."

> Everyone in the room nodded, except Mackie.

> "Where do I come in ?"

Jill: Through the doggy flap, usually.

> "Priss has her gigs to do, Nene can't slack off on her AD Police job. You're the stand-in."

Mark: Mackie's life in a nutshell

> "Great."

> "Enough talk. Let's get to work."

Christina: [Sylia] And while you're at it, be sure not to interact with the A-Plot

Mark: Wait, there's an A-Plot?

Christina: I am beginning to wonder

> Late in the afternoon, Rabby came up to the apartment, dropped in a kitchen chair and sighed deeply.

> "Anything wrong ?"

> "I have this big problem."

> Lufy looked at her. "Problem ?"

Jill [Rabby]: My entire civilization is dead and as a result of a war that was built on a foundation of lies, everyone I ever knew and loved has been gone for millions of years, I'm stuck in this backwards and primitive strange new world surrounded by an entirely alien culture and my earrings don't go with anything I own. You?

> "I can build the entire chassis, armored and armed,

Christina: [Lufy] Okay, but where did you get the missiles from?

Jill: [Rabby] For the sake of our friendship I won't answer that.

> but it won't move an inch."

> "Why's that ?"

> "No powerplant.

Rex: Things you probably should have thought of before you started this

> Or at least, no powerplant that is compact and powerful enough to drive these suits."

Mark: [Rabby] Best I can do is a really long extension cord.

> Rabby supported her chin with both her hands, leaning on the table. "Guess we'll have to scratch it."

> "There must be a way. Have you asked Pops ?"

Christina: [Lufy] He has access to fissile material, right?

> "I want to keep this secret."

Mark: She knows that as soon as she tells him he'll try to take over the project. Happens every time

> Rabby thought for a moment. "On the other hand, he's helped us into here, and he sure has

> powerful friends.

Christina: He's buddies with the Justice League

> Why not give it a whirl." Before Lufy could respond, Rabby was gone.

Rex: [Lufy] Well I feel valued.

> "Doctor Raven ?"

> Looking up from his work, he saw Rabby standing in the workshop, feeling a bit lost. "Yes ? What

> can I do for you ?"

Jill: [Rabby] Which way's the can?

> "I.. I have a question."

> "Well, tell me so I can answer it."

Jill [Rabby]: Where do babies come from?

> Rabby explained what she was working on, and what she needed. After she had finished,

> Raven paced through his workshop. "I am sorry, I cannot deliver you the materials you need for that

> project.

Mark: He seems remarkably okay with helping them build a death robot.

> Not because I don't want to, but simply because I don't have them."

Rex: He just sold his last Flux Capacitor. Sorry.

> Rabby looked defeated.

> "However, there is someone who can help you." She looked up, eyes bright. "Sylia can help you. I

> don't know if she is willing to,

Jill: I'm sure she'll have no problems with virtual strangers running around using high-tech suits.

> but she is the only one I know of that has such technology in this city, apart from Genom."

Christina: Genom's cornered the market on pre-made self-saucing puddings

> At the mention of the name Genom, a dark, cold and emotionless expression slid like a cloud

> over her face. "I have a little difference to settle with Genom,

Mark: [Rabby] Ever since they brought me back to life and basically let me go.

> so I don't think they'll help me."
> "In that case, turn to Sylia."

Mark: He said, conspicuously not asking for any details

> The phone rang in the apartment. "Mackie Stingray speaking."
> "Hi Mackie, Rabby here, is your sister in?"

Rex: Nobody wants to talk to Mackie.

> "No, she isn't. She's out for business. Can I take a message?"
> "Sure! Can you ask her to come over to our place if she has time? I have some things to ask from her."
> "Okay, will do."
> "Thanks... bye!"
> Click, connection broken. Mackie jotted down a note, then wondered what Rabby was up to.

Jill: Bubblegum Force!

> Quincy had summoned the security exec to his office, being displeased with the proceedings
> concerning the USSD patients. He was looking out the tall armorglass window overlooking the city

Rex: He can see all the way from the neon hacker district to the dystopian shanties on the fringes

> when the exec quietly entered the office, bowing respectfully to his boss. "What exactly
> happened?", Quincy informed.

Mark: I hope it wasn't anything like him being killed off-screen by a sexbot

Jill: That would be dumb

Mark: You're right. Silly me.

> The security exec suppressed his fear, knowing that being summoned to this office made or
> broke your career.

Rex: Last guy to come in here was fired just because his tie clashed with the decor

> "Sir, a week ago we received a message from USSD to.."
> "I know all that. I gave the order to acquire those assets for Genom. What I want to know is where
> things went wrong."

Christina: So somebody decided to write a Bubblegum Crisis/Gall Force crossover fic...

> Quincy turned from the window, his black, stone cold eyes

Rex: Lifeless eyes, black eyes, like a doll's eyes.

> searing into the soul of the exec.
> "The two patients recovered faster than expected, and managed to overwhelm the two guards
> assigned to check on them.

Jill: [Executive] Really, we could have tried harder. Like, a lot harder.

> They escaped the building, stole a pair of motorcycles and busted out a gate onto the highway.

Mark: Apparently their entire security force had their backs turned at once

> We pursued with four cars, but lost them down in the Fault."

Christina: They failed to notice the giant hole in the ground

> Shaking his head, Quincy pointed his cane at the exec. "You realize you are responsible for
> this fiasco ?"

Jill: [Executive] I am? Because I thought I could push it downhill.

> "Yessir."

> "Very well. Have you made any move to recover those assets ?"

Christina: Mostly they've just sat on their arses so far.

> "Yessir. I have leaned on our police informer to track them down,

Jill: He's putting far more faith in the ADP than is justified

> and three squads of camouflaged

> Bu-55c boomers have been put onto the street in the vicinity of the Fault to look out for them."

Rex: That should be enough to cover the entire post-apocalyptic slum district, right?

> The exec quietly noted to himself Quincy had said 'assets', not 'persons'. "How much time ?"

> "A week, two weeks. Maybe a month. I cannot say for sure."

Mark: He's really not good at this

> Quincy sat down in his chair, folded his hands and closed his eyes. "Very well. Track those
> two down before they can make any contact with either the police or worse, the Knight Sabers."

Mark [Executive]: I mean, that's what I was doing already. We were taking the appropriate steps to locate and recover the fugitives and already have plans in motion to-

Rex [Quincy]: Who's in charge here?

Mark [Executive]: You are, sir

Rex [Quincy]: Who's the head of the gigantic, cartoonishly evil megacorporation?

Mark [Executive]: You are, sir

Rex [Quincy]: Who's wearing the front of his shirt open to show how ripped he is despite being in his sixties?

Mark [Executive]: You are, sir

Rex [Quincy]: So shut up and do the thing you were already doing.

> The exec nodded. "What must we do once we find them ?"

> "Bring them back to the Tower - alive."

Jill: [Executive] Oh, alive! Really? I had no idea you'd want them alive.

[Pause]

Christina: [Quincy] Wait, are you being sarcastic?

Jill: [Executive] Honestly, I can't tell either.

> "It will be done."

> "You had better. That will be all."

Jill: This has been two idiots negotiating

> The exec quickly retreated from the office. Outside, he wiped his brow. That had been close.

> Very close.

Rex: He almost had to do his job.

> He'd better turn up the heat on Garter.

Mark: Smash cut to Garter passed out at his desk with an empty Krispy Kreme box

> Priss was sitting in her undersuit, ready to mount up should anything happen to the exec they were
> supposed to protect,

Rex: In his room, the exec was trying to unjam a toaster with a fork

> Sylia was monitoring him through the hotel camera network and the trace
> device they had given him.

Mark: Meanwhile, Shogo Yahagi was snooping on the room next to his

> While Sylia had all the fun of switching through camera's, observing the tracer signal and
> staying awake,

Jill: Sylia is easily amused

> Priss was bored to hell, finally ending up playing with a piece of cable she had found
> in the deserted apartment.

Christina: I feel like a laser pointer would keep her entertained for hours

> Knotting up the cable part, then pulling it straight again proved entertaining for ten minutes.

Mark: This is legitimately how I feel reading this fanfic.

> She tossed the cable away, dropped backwards onto the blanket, and sighed. Nothing was going to
> happen anyway.

Rex: She was going to spend hours scrolling on her phone, but then she remembered that it was the future of the eighties and the internet hadn't been invented yet

> Rabby was staring out the window, into the dilapidated neighbourhood that had sprung up in the
> Fault,

Mark: She turned her back for five minutes and there it was

> up to the skyline of MegaTokyo, dominated by the broad cone shaped Genom Tower.

Rex: Wait, that's just Sludge Vohaul's citadel. Never mind.

> As she stared out into this mad world, a sudden sad feeling overtook her, and she realized
> she was alone, very alone.

Christina: [Lufy] Don't worry, I'm here.

Jill: [Rabby] All alone in this alien world.

Christine: [Lufy] Hello? Fellow survivor here?

Jill: [Rabby] Where nobody understands me.

> Footsteps behind her. Lufy appeared next to her, looked out the window
> as well. Slowly, the sad feeling changed into grief, memories of all those left behind, all those who
> died in a senseless and pointless war.

Jill: And she's not even in the bathroom

> She noticed a tear streaking down her cheek. She didn't care.

Rex [High pitched kid]: I don't care

> Lufy put a hand on her shoulder. "Are you OK ?"
> "No.. I.. I.."
> Rabby turned around, hugged Lufy tight, buried her head in Lufy's shoulder, and cried.
> For a moment, Lufy's first thought was to push Rabby away from her, but then she suddenly felt
> how much her friend needed her support. Friend. Lufy noted she never had any friends. Yes, flight
> buddies for one mission.

Mark: Wingmen who snapped towels at her in the locker room.

> Then, something Rabby had said aboard the Starleaf came back to her.

Christina [Rabby]: Is moon dust poisonous?

> About that everyone who went out to fight with her never returned.

Jill: And she considered backing away slowly

> A dark mood fell over her as well, but she refrained from crying. "Rabby. whatever happens,
> whatever Fate has in store for us,

Rex: Gall Force: New Era

Jill: Well screw that then

> I won't let you down, never.

Rex: She's never going to give her up, she's never-

Jill: No

> I'll be there. Promised."

Mark: [Lufy] Until I run off to die pointlessly in a futile war. For the third time.

> She felt how Rabby hugged her tighter, nodding, her head still on her shoulder.
> Deep inside her, Rabby felt something.

Christina: Food poisoning.

> A soft, tingling sensation triggered by feeling Lufy
> close to her, Lufy's body against hers. No, she thought. This isn't right. Or is it ?

Mark: No, it will never be right

> She looked up at her friend.

Jill: In a purely Witch from Mercury sense of the word

> "Really promised ?" Lufy nodded.
> Rabby still held onto Lufy, then her face brightened. A smile played over her face.
> "I promise I'll never let you down either. Whatever happens." Lufy had felt a strange sensation inside
> her too. She had felt it aboard the Starleaf,

Jill: [Lufy] Crap, the spoooge monster got me, didn't it?

> and now, now they were together again. The sensation
> had grown stronger the moment Rabby had hugged her. She thoroughly wondered what it was.

Christina: Well nothing for it but for her to take another long shower and then walk around naked. It's what she does best

> Sean was sweating at his desk, cursing the telephone on it.

Rex [Sean]: Infernal speaking machine!

> They had turned up the heat on him. Time to do a bit of computer hacking.

Mark: Time to type in some fake Linux commands, click a mouse and say that he's in

> Maybe civil records could tell him something.

Jill: They told him that nobody loves him and that he will never amount to anything

> Breaking into the archive computer was a snap. He'd done it so many times he even installed
> a trapdoor program to let him in.

Rex: It occasionally called him Bert and asked him to feed it.

> Entering a quick description for the both of them gave him 2547
> possible matches. By specifying hair color and eye color, 1972 dropped out, with one definite match.

Rex: Given Lufy's hair, I'd be worried if there were more

> He saved the match to his own files, then had the computer display only those files entered in the
> last year.

Jill: Really, he could have done this at any time. Genom should rethink keeping him on a retainer.

> His selection was narrowed down to 17 possibilities.

Mark: Strangely, three of them were dogs

> He narrowed the time frame again,
> down to the last three months, the selection shrunk to 3. Then he matched the addresses of the
> saved file to the selection. Bingo.

Christina: -was his name-o.

Mark: See? Dog

> Nene's terminal beeped at her repeatedly. She saw that someone had matched the Notify
> with two files from civil records.

Mark: Wait, they registered the addresses of the literal illegal aliens they're protecting? They are so bad at this.

> Quickly entering a few commands, she saw how Garter had
> collected the files, and was preparing to upload them to a Genom gateway computer. "Oh no you're
> not," she mumbled. A few keystrokes later, she managed to crash Sean's terminal, quickly altering
> the addresses in the two files to an adress on the other side of the city.

Jill: Yeah, eat it innocent bystanders

> "What the..." Sean saw his terminal blink a few times, go black, static and then come up.
> He checked all his files. Good. Just a fluke.

Rex [Sean]: Well my terminal just blacked out while I was in the middle of an illegal search. Nothing to worry out at all.

> Routing his data through five public computers to a Genom Gateway,

Mark: The Genom webpage. Add your name to our mailing list for a discount on your first killbot!

> he copied the two files into their computer. There. He wondered how he would
> look with sergeant stripes.

Jill: Well how does he look now?

Christina: Like that, but without sergeant stripes

Jill: Well okay then

> Nene leant back in her chair, sighing. She hoped she had been in time. Otherwise, there'd be
> a lot of trouble. She had better notify Sylia.

Rex: [Sylia] Computer, eggplant, boggle eyes, poo emoji. The hell does this mean?

> Near the end of the shift, Nene and Linna came in, Linna in her hardsuit. Priss waved from her
> comfortable position, lying on the mattress, being bored.

Christina: [Priss] This is what they pay me for, folks.

> Nene updated Sylia on what had happened, and gave her a note from Mackie.

Jill [Sylia]: It reads "Help, I've locked myself in the supply cupboard again."

> Finally, when she and Linna had been installed,

Mark: Then downloaded a day zero patch.

> Priss and Sylia packed up and left.

Rex: Hey, good idea. Do you reckon we could read this in shifts, too?

Mark: Sadly, no.

> After dropping Priss off at her trailer, and returning the hardsuit to the storage area, she set
> course for the Fault. She was very curious why Rabby had to talk to her.

Rex: Turns out that Rabby had also locked herself in a supply cupboard

Jill: As long as she's not in the same one as Mackie, she'll be fine

> It was late in the evening when Sylia curiously entered the girl's apartment, seeing Lufy asleep, light
> from another room. Walking in, she saw Rabby sitting at a drawing board, sketching.

Christina: [Rabby] What are you doing here?

Jill: [Sylia] Oh, I kept some keys so I could let myself in. Don't mind the surveillance cameras.

Christina: [Rabby] The what now?

> "You wanted to speak me ?"

> Rabby started, turned around, then sighed. "You scared the living daylights out of me, sneaking up
> on me."

Rex: Look, Sylia, maybe if you entered through the door rather than sneaking in through the roof...

> Sylia gestured to the drawing board. "What are you working on ?"

> "Something to get back at Genom."

> Looking over the plans, Sylia had to marvel at the design.

Christina [Sylia]: This is a catapult with a pile of free bird seed in front of it.

Jill [Rabby]: All right, you got me. I'm trying to catch the roadrunner.

> Sleek, heavily armored and armed, blindingly fast.

Jill: Sylia was getting all hot and bothered

> "I don't get it, where do I fit in ?"
> "Pops.. ah.. Doc Raven said you could help me."

Rex: [Rabby] Said he needed a good laugh while he was at it.

> Sylia lapsed into thinking for a few seconds. "Why do you want to get back at Genom
> anyway?"

Mark: I mean, they're the giant evil megacorporation who do stupidly evil things. That might have something to do with it

> "Don't like their attitude."

Rex: Stupid Genom. Think they're so smart and so cool.

> "I sense there is something more to it."

Christina: Genom cut her off at the buffet

> "I don't like being hunted. I'd rather reverse the roles."

Jill: I mean, they know where Genom is, so that's a good start.

> Nodding, Sylia continued thinking. Recruit these two into the Sabers ? They'd make an excellent
> addition.

Mark: I'm kind of surprised she hasn't tried to recruit the two ancient astronauts already

Jill: I think they're well and truly qualified for the job. Plus on top of that, they aren't going to have many social commitments

> Especially with this equipment. "You still haven't told me why you need my help with that."
> "I've got the frame, weapons and armor worked out. There's just one thing."
> "That is ?"
> "Power source. I can't find any power source small and powerful enough to drive this."

Rex: She tried using a wound-up rubber band, but that didn't work so well.

> She made a decision. "I can help you. But, under one condition."

Christina: Sylia needs a plus one for the Mega-Tokyo small business owners' association dinner and nobody else will go.

> "That being ?"
> "I run an organization opposing Genom, specifically their boomer production and development."

Mark: People for the ethical treatment of Killer Robots

> I want you two to join in. Know well that once you join, there is no way out anymore."

Jill: Upside is that you have nothing to lose

> For a second, Rabby wanted to say no. Then she reconsidered. Was being bound to this
> woman and her organization such a bad thing ?

Christina: Depends; how well do you actually know her?

> Hell, it was better than taking on Genom on their own.

Mark: Just her against an entire giant evil corporation. Seems like a good plan.

> "I'd have to discuss this with Lufy,

Christina: Genuinely surprised she remembered that.

> but if she agrees, count me in."

> "Count me in, too."

Rex: Well that was easy

> Sylia and Rabby looked at the door. "You two shouldn't talk so loud. I woke up because of it."

> Lufy ruffled her hair, then yawned.

Rex: [Sylia] Didn't... bother getting dressed, did you?

> Rabby smiled, looked at Sylia. "Seems to me you just got two new members."

Christina [Sylia]: Great. So you'll be spending a lot of time with Mackie...

Jill [Rabby]: Is it too late to change my mind?

Christina [Sylia]: Nope. Once you're in, you're in for life.

> Sean was sweating hard.

Rex [Sean]: Man, they need to fix the aircon in this place

> Genom had quietly raided the adress from his files, found an empty apartment.

Mark: On the upside, it was on the market and affordably priced.

> What should he do ? Disappear ? Yeah, that was a good idea. But.. where should he run ?

Mark: I hear Bermuda's good this time of year.

> Genom was everywhere. And where they were not, they had spies and operatives. What would be

> the last place they'd look ? Of course; The AD Police.

Jill: He's a police officer who's trying to vanish so he's going to join another branch of the police.

Brilliant plan there.

Mark: He really is not very smart

Jill: He is not

> He'd apply for ADP duty, becoming another faceless boomer hunter.

Rex: He would be dead in minutes. That would show them.

> Nervously, he dropped

> his application letter in the station mailbox. He knew he would be admitted. ADP always had a

> personnel problem, with an average 5 to 10 casualties per call. Right now, he wasn't afraid to die

> anymore.

Jill: And to save his life he's going to join the high casualty robot fighter team

Mark: He really is not their best.

> Nene was discussing boyfriends with Linna,

Christina [Nene]: I don't have one

Jill [Linna]: I can't even keep one

> not paying too much attention to the hotel camera's and the tracer signal.

Rex: Guy can take care of himself, right?

> She missed the goon squad getting out of a car, walking into the hotel.

Mark: And this is why you don't team up the stupid people

> By the time

> Nene noticed what was going on, it was too late. Linna was already suiting up by the time Nene had

> dove for the portable telephone to warn Sylia.

Rex: And wondering who they can blame for this

> Sylia took the call in the apartment, nodded a few times. "I'm on my way."

> "Problems ?"

Jill: Well, I mean, we're reading this

> "We have a current assignment, and things are about to go awry."

Rex: [Rabby] This is because you relied on Nene, isn't it?

Christina: [Sylia] Yeah...

> "Anything we can do to help ?"

Mark: Um, maybe send reinforcements?

Christina: You may be on to something there

> "Yes. Keep quiet and stay here."

> Rabby shrugged and went back to her drawing board.

Jill [Rabby]: Doomsday weapons aren't going to build themselves

> Five minutes after the call, the exec

> was escorted out the building by two large men, shoved into a car outside the building.

Rex: Thank you for the little things. At least they didn't ram-raid the lobby.

> When Linna

> finally intercepted, a rear door opened and a body tumbled out. Stopping at the body, Linna

> recognized the exec. Shit.

Mark: No, Linna. This is entirely on you

> The four-girl team reported back to base, gathered in Sylia's apartment.

Christina: Wait, that's it?

Rex: I kind of expected more for all the buildup.

> Sylia paced back and forth behind Nene and Linna, shaking her head.

Mark: On the upside, at least it wasn't Mackie's shift.

> Finally, she stopped. "I had expected much more professionalism from you two."

Jill: From them? Really?

> Both hung their heads in shame. "Anyway,

Mark: Moving on immediately from that unmitigated disaster...

> you will all be relieved to hear we have two new members."

Christina: The timing on this is conspicuous. Almost as if she's trying to bury the pair of them

> "Sylia, have you recruited.."

Rex: ...John McAllister and Mara Dunvar?

Christina: Wrong space aliens.

Rex: Aaawww...

> "..those two, yes."

> "Why ?"

Jill: Because we need to have a plot eventually.

> "Rabby asked for my help, wanted to strike out at Genom. Since I thought that wouldn't be very
> prudent, I offered my help in return for them joining the Knight Sabers Organization. They agreed."

Mark: Most of this fic consists of recapping previous conversations from this fic.

Christina: Ah, but the recaps are getting closer in time to the original conversation as the fic progresses.

Mark: Eventually we'll have a line that's just recapping itself.

> The team was stunned.

Mark: Wait, she's going to recruit the two outsiders who have combat experience and a grudge against Genom? This comes out of nowhere!

> Since they had agreed to join, Sylia had provided Rabby with materials and support to build the two
> suits,

Christina: Or she could use her own facilities to –

Rex: Nope! Garage is fine!

> exacting the promise from them both that they would never act on their own without checking
> in with the rest of the team, especially with Sylia.

Jill: So don't do what Priss always does. Got it.

> Rabby was sitting on the roof of the apartment building when Lufy joined her, dropping down
> in a lazy chair, admiring the sunset.

Christina: One presumably huge timeskip later.

> "Don't you feel bored ?", Lufy informed.

Jill: Yes, yes we do.

> "Me ? Bored ? With that project down in the workshop. No way.

Rex: Can it even be a mancave if she's a woman?

> What about you then ?"

> "I'm bored to hell. I'm even considering applying for a job."

Mark: Luffy is living the NEET dream.

> "Nobody is going to stop you. What did you have in mind ?"

> "Saw an ad today. AD Police is looking for 'copter pilots."

Christina: Lufy is also the master of terrible life choices

Rex: Gall Force seems to bear this out

- > "You're going to apply ?"
- > "I did." Lufy allowed herself a broad smile.

Christina: [Rabby] And when were you going to tell me?

Jill: [Lufy] I'm telling you now!

- > "How are you going to combine it with the work for Sylia ?"
- > "Nene told me she'd take care of that, if I got hired."

Jill: Nene can get you out of attack helicopter duty

- > The security exec paced through his office. Garter had disappeared, for the moment, at least. His
- > other informers were clueless, just like the undercover squads at the Fault. Damn. He picked up the
- > phone. "Find Garter. I have a score to settle with him."

Rex: There are no better uses of your time, I'm sure.

- > More boomers left for the city.

Mark: New plan. Flood Mega-Tokyo with Boomers until they find something

Christina: Brilliant plan there

- > The AD Police application office was almost empty when Lufy walked in,

Jill: This is a busy day by ADP standards

- > and dropped on a couch somewhere in a corner. Bored,

All: NO!

- > she looked around in the bland reception area, the only decoration
- > being a few potted plants, a corny recruitment poster for ADP and a few magazines on a glass top
- > table.

Rex: I feel like there should be some exceedingly bland narrator telling us every detail of this room. Like, if there was a TV there, they'd need to point out what brand and model it was.

- > Since nobody came, she searched through the magazines, finding something about
- > aerospace developments.

Mark: The latest breakthroughs in ornithopter technology

- > A quick look made her shake her head. These guys couldn't even reach
- > the outer edge of their own solar system, let alone interstellar travel.

Rex: I mean at that point they're basically just cavemen building rockets from sticks and mammoth hides

- > Well, she was stuck here. Better make the best of it.

Christina: Nothing for it but to build a hyperdrive in their basement.

Jill: I'm sure that's what Rabby's doing next.

- > A young uniformed woman walked into the reception area. "Lufy Starleaf ?

Jill: She said with an entirely straight face

- > This way please."

> While walking into the building, Lufy suppressed a smile. So now the good old Starleaf would live
> forever as her last name.

Rex: The ship she was on for a few days tops

Christina: I guess it made an impact on her

> They arrived at a little office. the woman guided Lufy in. One desk and two
> chairs adorned it, one chair was occupied by a large, slightly overweight man. He nodded her to the
> other chair.

Christina: Wait, didn't we just do this skit?

> When she was seated, he looked her over, made a few notes on his noteblock, then began
> asking.
> "Full name."
> "Lufy Starleaf."
> "Age."
> "Twenty one."

Mark: Intense data entry action!

> "Adress."
> "Faultline Apartments, number 27."

Rex: Their hobo squat has a formal address

> "Parental status."

Rex: [Lufy] Uh, what are parents? I was grown in a tank.

> Silence for a few seconds. "Dead."
> "Cause."

Jill: A failed attempt at building flatpack furniture

> "Car crash."
> "Why do you want to work for AD Police,

Rex: [Lufy] I have given up on the will to live.

> don't give me that shit about the glamour of kicking a boomer's ass."

Mark: Career guidance said it was either this or septic tank repairs, so here she is

> "I'm a pilot. Don't wanna be on the ground if I can help it."

Rex: And that's why she's clinging to the ceiling

> "What have you flown so far ?"
> "Fighters."

Jill: This is the opposite of giving yourself a low-key, discrete background

Mark: Somewhere, Sylia sighs to herself and begins faking more documents

> "Bear in mind that patrol choppers are no fighters."

Rex: [Lufy] I mean, they do the spinny instead of the flappy. How hard can it be?

> "I know. But anything beats being on the ground."

Rex: Flossing her teeth, filling in a tax return, climbing the Matterhorn... anything

> The recruiter grinned. "Very well, miss Starleaf. I'll be in touch with you, but right now I'm giving you a 90% chance of scoring this job.

Christina: They have very low standards

> You see, all I have so far are three upstart hotshots
> who'd love nothing more than smear a boomer all over the street.

Rex: I mean, of course I gave them the job.

> Trouble is that the boomers will smear them over the street.

Jill: You're really doing a great job of selling her on this

> Combat experience ?"
> "What ?"
> "Do you have combat experience ?"
> "Yep."

Mark: Not going to ask for any details or proof of her claims?

> "Good. That'll be all."

Rex: I'd do a background check or something, but frankly we need warm bodies.

> Luffy got up, walked out the door of the office and returned home.

Christina: Without leaving them with any contact details either.

Jill: This has been two idiots negotiating

> Down in the workshop, both suits began to take shape.

Christina: Pumpkin shaped, unfortunately.

> Rabby, Sylia and Mackie worked together, putting system after system in.

Jill: And Sylia definitely wasn't lacing them with trackers and kill switches at all.

> When the suits were armed, Sylia saw that Rabby hauled a large
> energy projector to the suits, intending it as a handheld weapon. "You're not thinking of shooting
> with that, are you ?"

Rex: Shooting people with a gun? What a radical idea

> "I was, why ?"
> Sylia shook her head. "This isn't an all-out war, you know. You have to fight on a limited scale.
> That weapon looks like it will blow holes in armored walls."

Christina: But will it punch through Bomer armour like some kind of delicious sugary desert.

> Rabby smiled. "It does. But .. what do you suggest then ?"
> "Use something less powerful, or take a wider variety in weapons."

Jill: Isn't it always the way? Somebody comes into the project and then tries to completely take it over.

> A few nods later, a quick modification was made to the plans.

Mark: More guns it is

> Late in the evening, the phone rang. Lufy took it. She spoke on the phone for a few minutes, then
> hung up.

Rex: Action and adventure! Bubblegum Force!

> The door to the workshop slammed into the wall. Three heads snapped around.
> "Lufy, are you out of your mind ?"
> "No. Just got hired as a pilot!"

Rex: Scrooge McDuck had a sudden job opening

> "You got the job ? Cool!"
> Sylia looked confused.
> "Where did you get yourself hired ?"

Jill: [Sylia] I mean I know, because I'm monitoring your communications, but I'm not going to admit that.

> "ADP, as a 'copter pilot."

Mark: There have been more dangerous pilot jobs, but they were in the Imperial Japanese Navy

> A sour look passed over Sylia's face. Rabby noticed. "What's wrong with that ?"

Rex: [Sylia] Do you realise what's the odds of her getting shot down?

Jill: [Rabby] Yeah, it happens all the time to her.

> "Dangerous job. Very dangerous."
> "What's an Attacker's life without danger ?"

Jill: It's the difference between 'dangerous' and 'pants-crappingly stupid'

> Lufy smiled. It had been her first squadron's motto. She
> was the only survivor of of it, in many ways.

Christina: I think you're only proving the point there

> Well, maybe not the only survivor of the Stardust War.

> It had all happened so dramatically,

Rex: A woman screamed, a shot rang out and a pirate ship appeared on the horizon

> the Traverser ramming the Paranoid flagship, planet cannons
> continuously firing, ships and fighters, and most of all, Solnoids and Paranooids dying.

Jill: Took a few planets with them, because why not?

> At the edge of
> the battlezone, outside the outermost planet's orbit, a damaged combat shuttle had fired a little
> object towards Terra.

Mark: Nothing important. They were just dumping their garbage.

> Four Solnoids silently watched the battle end in stardust. "What now, Shildy ? Do we wait until we
> die as well ?"

Jill: I mean, didn't you all die anyway?

Christina: Again, it wasn't very clear

> Amy nervously shifted in her chair. Shildy just stared out the cockpit,

Rex: Duuuuuuh

> stunned by the immense

> drama that had unfolded before her eyes, Lufy's last words resounding in her ears over and over

> again.

Jill [Lufy]: Don't forget to take out the trash

> Finally, Catty spoke. "We will head for Terra as well."

> "But.. we'll be long dead by the time we reach the system." Amy blinked.

> Catty shook her head. "No, you won't be."

> "How ?"

> She took the three of them down into the shuttle, opening a room in the center of the craft. Eight

> cryostatic tanks lined the walls.

Mark: By the way, we had these all along

Christina: Isn't that convenient?

> "You propose us to..."

> "...rest in these tanks until we get there. I will control the craft."

Rex: [Spea] What if I want to die with my people instead?

Jill: [Catty] Shut up, Spea. Nobody asked you.

> Catty smiled.

> "Being an android has its advantages."

Jill: For starters, you never need to go to the bathroom. Just ask Rabby

> A small shuttlecraft followed floating wreckage from Sigma Narse, heading for distant Terra.

Christina: While Lufy's trajectory took her from the same battle to the same planet purely by coincidence.

Rex: You kind of get the feeling this fic wasn't planned out properly.

> Night fell over MegaTokyo. A special night.

Rex: The night before Shrove Tuesday?

> Lufy was staring blankly out the window of ADP tower,

Jill: She's moved up in the world, she's gone from staring blankly out the window of her apartment.

> having drawn night shift this time. High above Terra, a battered shuttlecraft prepared for

> atmospheric entry. It chose a long stretched island next to a large continent, its present day name

> being Japan.

Christina: [Flat] Oh my. What an amazing coincidence.

> A long, bright streak shot through the sky.

>Smiling, Lufy recalled Terran superstition that a falling star brought luck and granted a wish.

Jill [Lufy]: I want even bigger hair

> She

> closed her eyes, and wished for her friends. Wishful thinking. They were dead, died in the Stardust

> War.

Mark: Lufy being unaware of the blatant setup moments before.

- > A radio report woke her up, some alien object had crashed outside the city. They were to
- > investigate the matter.

Rex: Sure, assign it to the robot killing cops and not the previously established international space agency. Makes sense.

- > Alien object ?

Christina: Don't these sorts of things usually come down in rural Kansas?

- > She pressed her lips together, took her flight helmet and
- > headed for the chopper pad. Three officers hopped in. "Head for the crash site. Faster than this
- > crate can."

Jill: Faster than the laws of physics allow. Got it.

- > "Roger."
- > Smoothly, she lifted the ducted rotor craft off the pad, headed for
- > the crash site. She pushed the throttle handles full forward, stretching the jet engines at the back to
- > their limits, and a bit beyond. Twenty minutes later, they were over the crash site. Lufy almost let go
- > of the controls. She had to put the three behind her out cold.

Jill: And figure out somewhere to hide the bodies.

- > That below her was a goddamn Solnoid assault shuttle!

Rex: Well what of the odds? I didn't see that coming at all!

Mark: Even with the overly long and forced setup?

Rex: You never know

- > It looked like it had made a hard, yet decent landing, quite an achievement
- > considering its age and state.

Christina: It's a vintage model spaceship

- > "What's the matter with you, put us down!"

Jill [Lufy]: Fine. You're ugly, stuck in a dead-end job and nobody will ever truly love you

- > "Uh.. okay sir."

- > Quincy paced through his office. The chatter on the ADP radio sounding through the room. The
- > security exec was standing at attention behind him. "Are you sure this object is of the same origin as
- > two moon wrecks ?"

Rex: Good thing they have an expert on ancient moon aliens on hand

- > "Ninety percent confirmed, sir. The markings on the hull are remarkably alike."
- > "Add this to Genom's inventory."

Mark: [Executive] Should we secure it first, or...

Jill: [Quincy] No need, I'm sure nothing untoward could happen to it in the meantime.

- > "Yessir."
- > "Oh, by the way; do not fail me again."

Mark: Quincy is living the bad boss dream

> The exec paled. "No sir."
> "You may go."

Rex: [Executive] Great, because I've been busting for... Oh, right.

> Gently, Lufy lowered the shuttle to the ground, down to 5 meters. Then she cut power by 75%,
> dropped the craft onto the ground, hard.

Rex: And she sticks the landing

> One officer bumped his head, out for a few mins.

Christina: [Lufy] Totally meant to do that.

> The
> second one fell with his head next to the pilot seat, an elbow later he wouldn't wake up for a few
> either.
> The third one hung onto the support. "What's the matter with you ?!!"

Christina: To be fair, this is her first day on the job. Or maybe she's been at it for months. We can't tell.

> "Uh, sorry sir. I thought I was only 3 feet off the ground. The altimeter seems to have
> malfunctioned."

Jill: Look, this is an ADP craft. Just be happy it didn't explode into flames

> "Alright then. Get out of that seat and help me explore the site."

Rex: Yeah, those two will be fine, or something.

> Sean nervously commanded the pilot, who unbuckled and turned to him. "YOU!"

Jill: Them!

Mark: It!

Rex: The incredibly strange creatures that stopped living and became mixed-up zombies!

> He stared straight in Lufy's eyes, the unmistakable star tattoo on her cheek, and when she took off
> her helm, the unique green lock in her hair.

Jill: This has been ridiculous coincidence theatre.

> He scrambled for his gun. A sudden haymaker from
> Lufy's hand stopped him. "Five minutes", she mumbled.

Christina: This is Garter's life in a nutshell

> She jumped out of the 'copter, headed for the shuttle cockpit. While trying to get in, a loud
> click sounded behind her. Hands up, she slowly turned around. Shit. One of the cops must have
> woken up. "Lufy ? Is that really you ?"
> A familiar face emerged from behind the gun. "Shildy!"

Mark: And absolutely not Rabby wearing a wig at all.

> "Lufy!"

Rex: And she opened fire.

> A few big hugs and joyous moments later, Lufy got nervous.

Jill [Shildy]: So, how about that transhumanist conspiracy, huh?

> "We gotta get out of here. Anything left on board you wanna take ?"

Mark: Like Spea and Amy?

Christina: Well besides that

> Shildy nodded.

> "Get it, fast! I'll take care of those cops."

Rex: Still wasn't the shortest career in the ADP ever.

> Slipping in her 'copter she banged one of them who was starting to wake up over the head with the
> butt of Sean's gun, tossed Sean and his gun out of the 'copter, helped the four of them in, and lifted
> off.

Rex: The four nonspecific entities

> Then she called in. "This is Helios 7 to base, Helios 7 to base, do you copy ?"

> "Helios 7, this is base. Go ahead."

> "Base, one officer insisted he stayed behind and that we should leave, over."

> "Helios 7, return and pick him up."

> "No can do, base. He threatened to fire if we did."

Mark: You might want to lead with that next time

> "Roger, Helios 7.

Rex: [Dispatch] This sounds entirely plausible and I have no further questions.

> Return to base. We're putting out a salvage team."

> "Roger. Returning to base."

> Smiling, Lufy turned around.

Mark: [Shildy] Wow, people on this planet are really dumb.

> "Keep those cops out cold. I'll get you to a safe dropoff."

Christina: I'm assuming that Lufy isn't planning to hang around with the ADP given that she just beat up another officer and abandoned the others on the ground

Jill: I mean, this is the ADP. I imagine stuff like this happens all the time

> "Sir, an ADP helicopter has dropped off an officer at the wreck. They are preparing to move a

> salvage crew to the wreck. What should we do ?"

> "Down that chopper, kill the cop. Get our own crew there before ADP."

Mark [Executive]: Sir, given the situation, shouldn't we consider that there might be personnel or materials from the shuttle that might be in there and that by shooting it down we might risk losing these irreplaceable assets?

Rex [Quincy]: Who's in charge here?

Mark [Exec]: You are, sir

Rex [Quincy]: Who's almost certainly a robot duplicate?

Mark [Exec]: You are, sir

Rex [Quincy]: Who's got the really big forehead?

Mark [Exec]: You have, sir

Rex [Quincy]: So shut up and do it already,

> Two unmarked gunships lifted off from a Genom industrial park, followed a few minutes later
> by three heavy salvage choppers.

Jill: Their fleet of black helicopters, for purely peaceful purposes

> First thing Lufy noted was tracer fire coming in from another chopper.

Mark: [Lufy] Huh. Well, you're going to get some of that.

> Then the loud pinging of impacting bullets sounded through the craft.

Jill: And true to form, it immediately exploded, killing everyone onboard.

> "Shit! Buckle up and hold on tight!" The smaller

> gunships had superior armament, the ADP copter had better maneuverability and speed. And four

> .50 miniguns with AP grenades.

Rex: You know, the little things

> One gunship blundered into her sights. She mashed the fire button,

> holing it with hundreds of shells. The gunship dropped from the sky, a fiery wreck.

Mark: I regret my lack of situational awareness!

> Tracer fire from behind. His wingman slipped behind her, and while she tried every maneuver

> in the book and forbidden by the book

Christina: Even the ones that are marked not safe for work

> short of a loop,

Rex: Helicopters do not work that way! Good night!

> she couldn't get him off her tail. The distance

> between her and the gunship had grown, the ADP craft outspeeding its opponent. The Genom crew,

> a Bu-33G boomer grinned evilly.

Rex: It may be an evil murder robot, but it still can enjoy itself

> They had blundered into missile range. Good. Two heatseekers

> lanced on flame to the ADP chopper.

Jill: So glad you crossed interstellar space and survived the extinction of your species to die minutes after landing.

> "Missiles!"

Rex: [Lufy] Well, its been nice knowing you, everyone who isn't Amy.

> Checking her position, she saw the Fault was only a little bit further. "Hang on tight, we're going in

> for a crash landing!"

Mark: [Shildy] They haven't even hit us.

Jill: [Lufy] I'm crashing anyway!

> Steering the craft down hard, she hoped she could get close to the ground

> before those missiles nailed her. Hooking into the Fault, one missile lost her and detonated in a

> deserted apartment building.

Christina [Shildy]: You knew that building was abandoned, right?

Jill [Lufy]: Um... sure?

> The other missile followed her trail like a bloodhound, getting closer and closer.

Mark: The missile smelled snosages.

- > Smoke billowed from holes in the ADP craft, being near the end.
- > Knuckles white, fully concentrated and determined, Lufy steered the chopper down, to rooftop
- > altitude, speeding forwards. Closer... closer... NOW!
- > She yanked back the rotor handle, jumping up into the sky, vectoring slightly sideways, killing her
- > forward speed. The missile impacted in a building, detonating.

Christina [Shildy]: And that one?

Jill [Lufy]: Uhhh... don't think too hard about it

- > Chunks of masonry damaged the rotor and the craft, violently shaking it.

Mark: Turns out there was a piece of the chopper she hadn't broken yet.

- > "Going down!" Smoking, with several rotorblades bent or broken,

Rex: Several?

Christina: It's okay, she's got spares.

- > the patrol chopper crashed. The gunship pilot saw the craft go down. Mission
- > accomplished.

Mark: With the accompanying level of assumption too!

- > Coughing, Lufy emerged from the chopper wreckage, checking on her friends. "Everyone okay ?"

Christina: We're just assuming that Spea and Amy are here, right?

Mark: I mean, why not?

- > When nobody complained or screamed, she assumed they were.

Jill: Lufy is the very model of concern

- > One by one, they got out of the 'copter, duffel bags slung over their shoulder.

Mark: Oh, we had those, by the way.

- > "What about those cops ?"
- > "Let's get them out of there, before this thing blows."

Jill: No, you're way too late for that

- > The duffel bags dropped onto the ground, and the two cops were dragged behind a rocky
- > outcropping. "Let's move!" They had just cleared the crash site when a thunderous explosion
- > marked the demise of the craft. Ammunition cooked off in the blast, sending whistling bullets
- > everywhere.

Christina [Shildy]: Those cops are alright, aren't they?

Jill [Lufy]: I mean... Maybe?

- > "My boss will love me for this", Lufy commented.
- > "Thought so. Where do we go now ?"
- > "My place. It's just a mile from here."

Rex: Her home is convenient to the crash site and other transport links

- > "WHAT ??!!"

Mark: My review of the fic so far.

> "One of our craft was shot down over the Fault by an unmarked gunship. Further, when we arrived
> at the crash site, we found a dead officer and the wreckage was gone."

Jill: By ADP standards, this is fine

> The lieutenant paced through his office.
> "Get Leon and Daley in here. Those are the only two crazy enough to investigate this.

Christina: Leon and Daley are an eighties buddy cop movie waiting to happen

> Down to the bone."
> "But sir... upstairs has closed the investigation and..."

Jill: Wow, corruption works fast around here.

> "Get those two in here - 5 minutes ago! By the way, any report on the pilot of our chopper ?"

Rex: Not that it matters, but...

> "Uh.. yessir, she called us, with a short recap of what happened,"
> "Good. Redirect that salvage crew to the Fault. Have them recover the wreck of our own craft
> instead."

Mark: We paid for call-out, might as well have them do something.

> The lieutenant had gotten up from his desk chair, paced through the office. At the other side of the
> desk, a bored Leon McNichol and a nervous Daley Wong waited

Rex: Being earnestly surprised that it had taken them this long to appear

> for the boss to start shouting at them.

Christina: See? They even have an angry shouty chief

> "I have a job for you two. Even if I told you this case is closed, you'd still try to investigate it,
> so I'm handing it to you."

Jill: "Try" is the operative word for those two.

> Leon and Daley wondered what would come next. "Last night, an
> unidentified object crashed in the countryside north of the city.

Rex: Totally a weather balloon. Definitely not anything else

> An ADP officer investigating the site
> was killed, and the chopper that put him there was shot down by an unmarked gunship.

Mark: In case you missed it the first few times, here it is again

> This
> morning, I get to hear that the crash was from a new shuttle type from SDPC, and that I should hold
> my hands off. Get on it."
> He paced through the office, thinking.
> "As this case is officially closed, I place you two on two weeks of paid leave, with a strict order not to
> indulge in any police work, both overt and covert. I hope I made myself clear."
> "Yessir. Thanks."

Rex [Leon]: Time to goof off, get drunk and hit on Priss

Mark [Chief]: God damn it!

> When the two had left the office, the lieutenant smiled. Leon and Daley were his two
> wildcards. All he needed to do was play them right. And this was the perfect case for them.

Jill: You are also setting your standard very, very low

> Now to see what they would dig up this time.

> ----

> Bubblegum Force Episode 3
> Boiling Point

Rex: Bring your fanfic to the boil then stir

> By nebulart@solnoid.nl

> The apartment's front door slammed open, and five persons ran in,

Jill: They're far more eager to read the fic than we are

> the last throwing the door back in it's frame.

Rex: [Shildy] Stupid thing came off

> Lufy dropped with her back against the front door. Safe. For now.

Christina: Save for that nagging doubt that she had forgotten to feed the cat

> Rabby was busy in the workshop when Lufy showed up, still in her police uniform.

Mark: I wonder how much you could get for a used ADP uniform

Rex: Depends on if you can get the bloodstains out

> "Rabby, Sylia, Mackie, I would like you to meet some friends of mine."

Christina: Stick Bernard, Shogo Yahagi, Ital del Labard and Super Boomer Car X

> "Are you out of your mind ? Bringing people down here and..."

Jill: Well, it's not like you've made any effort to keep your secret thus far

> Rabby's voice trailed to nothing when Shildy, Spea, Amy and Catty

Jill [Rabby]: Don't know you, don't know you, don't know you and oh crap you again.

> stepped into the room.

> Especially seeing Catty clearly shocked her, after what had happened on the Starleaf.

Rex: When Catty completely destroyed the toilet

Jill: She'd know

> Grabbing a chair, she sat down, her legs unable to support her.

Mark: [Rabby] Hold on. I'm going to have a cardiac arrest.

> "You ???! But... how ? Last I remember seeing you was when.. when..."

Jill [Catty]: Yeah, it happens to me a lot

> Lufy had walked up to Rabby, put a hand on her shoulder. "That's a long story.

Mark: Just your basic transhumanist conspiracy. No big deal.

> Later. Right now, please take care of these people.

Christina: [Rabby] Me? What about you?

Rex: [Lufy] I'm going out for a beer.

> Can we get them something to eat ?"

> She shot a mischievous glance at her four friends. "I guess they'll be hungry after 2 million years."

Rex: [Rabby Well, we've got brown lettuce, refried hash, something that might have once been pasta sauce and a mysterious package that was in the back of the fridge when we moved in. Take your pick.

> Smiling broadly, the security exec was admitted to Quincy's office. As usual, Quincy was looking out
> the window, over MegaTokyo.

Christina: Out over to the lawless wastelands beyond its boundaries. I just assume they have some

> Five minutes later, the exec's confidence had eroded enough to become nervous.

Rex: Also he needed to pee

> Then, the chairman turned around. "You had urgent news for me ?"

Jill: Which is why he had you wait five minutes.

> "Yes, chairman. We have safely recovered the wreck, shot down the police chopper and killed the
> officer at the crash site."

Mark: True, he was planning the company picnic, but you know...

> "Good. Where is the wreck now ?"

Rex: [Executive] We lost it.

> "We have moved it to Aerospace Research on Genom Island in the bay."

Rex: It's being stored next to Firefox

> "Good, very good. Anything else ?"

Mark: [Executive] I mean, I've got this rash on my -

> "We had a little luck at the crash site."

> "Oh ?"

> "The police officer at the site was none other than our old associate Sean Garter."

Jill: This is the first time in Sean's life that anyone has been pleased to see him

> "Well, well. That indeed is good news. Any leads to the correct address of the assets we are looking
> for?"

> "I have five people checking the civil databases for their records,

Christina: [Executive] And put out a Craigslist ad.

> but I get the feeling someone is protecting them."

> Quincy nodded. "That was to be expected. But who ?"

Rex: Batman

Mark: I wouldn't rule it out

> "I have no idea sir. But we're on it."

> "Very good. That will be all."

Jill: [Quincy] And get that rash checked out.

> The Old Man turned back to the window.

Christina: Wondering how much it would cost to put Genom advertisements on the side of Mount Fuji

Jill: He strikes me as the type

> "Unbelievable."

> "But true nonetheless."

Rex: Elephants are the only mammals with four knees.

> The eight of them were sitting around the dining table in the apartment.

Christina: The suddenly very cramped apartment.

> Catty and Shildy had quickly recounted the story of the Stardust, supported by Lufy.

Mark: So remember. War is hell and brings nothing but destruction and totally sweet spaceship battles

> Finally, Shildy extended her hand to Lufy, who looked surprised at the gesture.

Rex: Human interaction confuses Lufy.

> "Well Lufy, we've met again."

Christina: It took a while for the fact to sink in

> A broad smile appeared on Lufy's face. "Yes, we meet again." She took the hand, and solidly

> gripped it. Amy's eyes shot from person to person, finally coming to rest on Sylia.

Rex: [Lufy] Wait, when did you get here?

> "What's going to happen to us ?" She glanced sideways to Catty.

Jill: Blame Catty is actually a fair plan

> Sylia let out a deep sigh. Oh well. If she could arrange two identities, why not another four.

Mark: You get the feeling that Sylia keeps a whole pile off fake identities on hand for whatever reason.

> She got up. "You'll all have to stay here for a while.

Rex: [Sylia] I don't know, sleep on the floor or something.

> I'll arrange for papers and such. But keep your

> heads down, all of you. Lufy, you'd better report back to the police station."

Christina: Wasn't she last seen on board the helicopter? Wouldn't the fact that she was the only person to come back alive be a little suspicious?

Jill: I mean, this is the ADP. They probably stopped asking questions long ago

> Lufy nodded, winked and left.

> "Mackie, Rabby, why don't you continue working. I have something to discuss with these people."

Jill: Wow, Rabby just got 'need to know'd.'

Rex: What about Mackie?

Jill: What about him?

> Finally, Sylia seated herself in one of the chairs, looked at the four people at the other side of the
> table, examining each in turn.

Rex: The cast of Destruction, just in case you've forgotten.

> One was a little girl, perhaps only four and a half foot tall, wearing glasses and her hair bound
> up in a ponytail. She looked a bit unsure into this new world. Sylia wondered how she got involved,
> she only looked like a child.

Mark: She looked like a child and she looked like a child

> Next to her was a girl with curly brown hair, brown eyes and an average figure, nothing really
> outstanding,

Rex: Spea in a nutshell

> except for her fingers, which she nervously flexed.

> Another small girl, a little more mature than the first one, lavender hair, amber eyes. She was
> completely calm, and seemed to absorb her environment, studying it into detail.

Jill: She assumed the occasional 'beep, boop' noises were perfectly natural.

> Last in the row was a tall girl, long black hair, brilliant blue eyes. She had a typical act-now
> stance, looking like she was ready to take decisions, and bear responsibility for them.

Jill: [Sylia] Hello, Rabby in a wig. I mean, Shildy.

> Sylia nodded, and smiled. "I haven't introduced myself.

Mark: [Sylia] Probably should have done that before you put your life in my hands, but oh well.

> I'm Sylia Stingray." Ponytail introduced herself as Amy, Average as Spea,

Rex: Spea. They had another seat on the ship

> Lavender as Catty and the last one introduced herself as Shildy.

Christina: The closest thing to a responsible adult.

> Then the stories broke loose. Of DAMIA. Of the Stardust.

Jill: Of attack ships on fire on Orion's arm, of the Tannhauser gate...

> Of how they had saved all the Solnoid knowledge, and sent it for Terra's moon.

Rex: And to think, Gary Newmann just had his first day at Genom

> Then, Catty told of her decision to head for Terra, and of their journey there in cryostatic.

> When Sylia left for her apartment, she was reeling again.

Mark: The Ancient Astronauts guy was right all along. Who knew?

> She still couldn't handle the mind boggling

> fact that these people actually preceded humans in the universe, and that they had seeded, created
> Terra.

Christina: I mean, she knew all this from the first pass, but still.

> She couldn't admit these four into the Knight Sabers as well, she knew.

Rex: They don't have enough space in the van, for starters.

> There'd be a riot if she did.

Jill: A very small riot given that there's only six of them

> Six was already too much and...well, there might be a solution, she thought.

Christina: Time to establish a Knight Sabers franchise across town

> Genom held another one of its infamous board meetings,

Rex: The last one had ended in a cattle stampede

> where the fate of the company,

> MegaTokyo and Japan usually was bound to include some Genom influenced changes.

Mark: Genom's board meetings affect Genom? What a shock!

> "Gentlemen, we are at a point where we have gained enough control over the city to fully ignore

> both the regular and the AD Police.

Jill: [Quincy] I mean, we pretty much did already, but now it's policy.

> I suggest on a course of action that reflects this situation. Any proposals?"

Rex: We could park in disabled parking spots and nobody could stop us!

Mark [Quincy]: Any other ideas?

> Quincy leant on his cane, looking to each executive in turn. Finally, one of them got up.

> "Chairman, I think we can best exploit our advantage by placing all Genom owned areas of the city

> under corporate control, including our own overt and covert security forces.

Jill: Paul Blart, cyberpunk dystopian mall cop

> "That's a start. Anything else ?"

> Another exec got up. "Chairman, if we are to use our own security forces, we could use the Bu-55c

> model.

Rex: That's your solution to everything, Trevor. Covert security? 55c. Gardening? 55c. Heck, you sent my grandmother a 55c as a Christmas present,

Mark: Did she like it?

Rex: That's beside the point.

> Loyalty and obedience insured. Besides, that would benefit boomer production, which is at

> an all-time low at this point."

Christina: The bottom's really fallen out of the murderbot market

Jill: It's all Genom's fault. They flooded the market with product and just assumed the demand would be there. Now they can't even give away killer androids.

> "Chairman, I must object. The Bu-55c, although very fit for this duty, is still illegal.

Mark: Damn those strict Boomer leash laws

> And I fear our hold on the Government is not tight enough to keep their eyes shut forever."
> Quincy nodded. "We will put Bu-55c's as corporate guards in our areas. In a neat, policelike
> uniform, fully camouflaged.

Rex: Make them approachable murderbots.

> Nobody will ever suspect they are dealing with boomers instead of humans."

Jill: They'd be dull, lifeless and have every chance of flipping out and killing everyone. So really not that much different to a regular cop

> "Chairman, if word was to get out that.."
> "Silent! Word will only get out if any one of you doesn't shut up!"

Mark [Exec]: Sir, I'm just saying that putting Boomers with their well documented propensity to go rogue and attack people in a discrete, sensitive and high-profile role could be a massive potential risk and-

Rex [Quincy]: Who's in charge here?

Mark [Exec]: You are, sir

Rex [Quincy]: Who has the best fake tan in the room?

Mark [Exec]: You do, sir

Rex [Quincy]: Who's going to seem to be a key plot point but actually turn out to be more of a background character and not even be mentioned in Crash?

Mark [Exec]: You are, sir

Rex [Quincy]: So belt up.

> Quincy looked hard at each executive in turn. "And you all know what happens then."

Mark: [Exec] Uh, we get bonuses?

Rex: [Quincy] No, you do not get bonuses!

> The meeting was closed.

> "What ???! Genom is placing this area under corporate guard ? You gotta be kidding!" Priss had her
> fists balled, ready to strike.
> "Unfortunately, I'm not. The mayor has authorized Genom Security personnel as deputy police
> officers

Christina: In what could only be described as a 'no way this could possibly end badly for anyone' move

> and.." Mad like hell, Priss walked off, needing something to take her anger out on.

Jill: For once, she was happy to see Mackie.

> An old bucket fitted the bill nicely. A hard punt and a sore foot later,

Jill: Usually it's Priss' friends who kick the bucket

> it disappeared over the edge into the canal.
> Getting into her trailer, Priss thought about the future.

Mark: Priss strikes me as the kind of person who would be legitimately surprised to reach 30.

> Placed under corporate guard. What a
> way to say there'd be boomers all over this area without public protests.

Mark: Smash cut to furies dancing in front of the Boomers

> She assembled her band, told them what was going to happen, told them her solution.

Rex: Flee the country, got it.

> That

> night, the large truck pulled away from the area, over secondary roads to the Fault Area, parking

> two blocks away from Lufy's apartment, and one block away from Raven's.

Rex: It's convenient to the dystopian slum district

> Leon and Daley started their investigation at the bottom;

Jill: Insert joke here.

> the crash site. While looking around they

> picked up scraps of metal, which presumably would be from the crashed craft.

Mark: Leon's years at the beach with a metal detector were finally paying off

> After a while, they had gathered enough,

Rex: Both being expert metallurgists, they had all they needed.

> and left, before SDPC, or their master Genom, could sit up and take notice.

Christina: They clearly weren't too fussed about securing the area

> Then, on to the lab. "I'm telling you Leon, there's no way SDPC could have made this."

> "Are you absolutely sure ?" The scientist nodded.

Jill: I mean, for starters it's stamped with Genom branding.

> "I started with a molecular breakdown on one of the fragments, but there are trace elements in it

> that do not even exist on Earth.

Rex: It was built on an unobtainium frame

> Then, using elements known to me, I dated the material."

> "How old is it ?"

> "Two to three million years."

> "Are you sure about that ?"

Mark: [Scientist] Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realise you were the expert with the degree. Next time, I'll consult the beat cops.

> The scientist nodded. "Added to that, whatever crashed there must be an alien object, since

> we couldn't possibly manufacture this alloy."

> "Not even SDPC ?"

Jill: [Scientist] Did I effing stutter?

> "Definitely not SDPC.

Rex: SDPC's still grappling with unexplained spontaneous disassemblies.

> The only thing they can do is waste lots of money on deep space boomer experiments."

Mark: SDPC had managed to put a Boomer on Mars. It immediately went crazy and attacked the first rock it saw

> Leon knew enough. Someone was hiding the truth.

Christina: Also, apparently there are aliens on Earth, but he seems pretty chill with that.
Jill: *Everyone* does.

> And he guessed the truth could be found in Genom Tower, in the chairman's office.

Rex: With no basis whatsoever.

> One point for the AD Police.

Rex [Leon]: Yeah! ADP one, Genom about four thousand or so. But we're in there, baby!

> One night, Lufy had patrol duty, only two officers assigned to her.

Christina: Nobody having asked any questions about the helicopter crash

> She saw them coming, got out of the restroom and got in her craft,

Jill: Naturally, the restrooms lead straight to the hangar.

> powering up the engines. She heard them get in, take their seats.
> But the door didn't close. She turned around.
> "Any one of you close the door, please ?"
> "Since when does ADP have female chopper pilots ?"
> "At least since I was hired.

Rex: Well you won that one

> Now close that door."
> "How about... a dinner tonight ?"
> "No can do. I have duty."

Christina: She's scheduled to get killed in a boomer rampage tonight. But her weekend's open

> Lufy got up and closed the door, got back to her seat. Grinning, she sat down. That guy
> deserved to get what he asked for.

Rex: A dinner date.

> Yanking the lift handle up, she slammed the forward throttle to
> full, jumping the chopper off the pad, tumbling Leon backwards into the craft.

Jill: Hijinks!

Mark: I'd wonder why the author didn't identify them earlier rather than dancing around it.

Jill: For the hijinks, obviously

> "Told you to get seated and hold on tight."
> Leon sighed. Daley winked. Lufy laughed. "Where to ?"

Rex: The patrol duty you were assigned to?

Mark: With two detectives onboard, naturally.

Rex: Naturally.

> "Genom Industrial Area, Harbourside."

Rex: They're going to a dingy waterfront bar filled with grizzled boomers

> "Roger."

> With the arrival of four others, Rabby had suggested they build six instead of two suits.

Rex: But she needs more black titanium scrap and nuclear material.

> Sylia had agreed, saying she had to re-evaluate their role in the Knight Sabers.

Mark: All while regretting her choices

> Also, Rabby had begun to tailor the suits to everyone's personal requests. Lufy got a bigger
> gun and higher speed, Rabby took a standard model, Catty asked for better sensor equipment,

Jill [Catty]: I need to be better able to gather information and manipulate the fleshy ones towards my goals

Christina [Rabby]: What was that?

Jill [Catty]: Nothing. Beep boop

> Spea and Shildy went for the 'Lufy model',

Rex: Ie, we couldn't think of anything for them.

> and Amy declined on a suit, saying she rather stayed
> back at base to monitor them. So there'd only be five suits.

Christina [Raby]: Yeah, nice of you to tell me before I started work

> As the investigation progressed, Leon and Daley found out what had happened,

Rex: So two million years ago, the Solanoids were in an endless war...

> at least, the approximate course of events; An alien craft had crashed,

Christina: Which was the premise of the last BGC fic we read too

Mark: At least that one was shorter

> Genom had sent out a pair of gunships
> and a team of salvage choppers, had recovered the craft, shot down Lufy

Mark: Did they think to ask her about it?

Jill: I imagine it never once crossed their minds

> and killed the police officer at the wreck.

Jill: A fairly typical day for the ADP.

> But, where had they taken the wreck ? To the most logical place of all:

Rex: The Hard Rock Cafe in Times Square

> Genom Aerospace.

Rex: That was my second pick

> Of course. So logical no policeman would ever look there.

Jill: This plan failed because Leon is dumb

> But, how to get in there. Genom Aerospace was a secretive, total locked down company,

Rex: Even their company picnics were heavily guarded.

> even more so now they were developing a new type of aircraft. Yah, sure. Well, they'd find a way.

Mark: Smash cut to Leon and Daley dressed up as sexy lady boomers

> In her downtime between shifts, Lufy found something to do;

Christina: She'd really gotten into macramé

> bike racing, preferably on the highway, and preferably against Priss.

Mark: After that, she was going to take on that Kaneda guy

Rex: And his bike from Akira?

> The two of them were close in terms of daring,

Jill: They had measured their daring levels

> but Priss had the better bike,

Christina: And an ample supply of Blue Shells

> and usually ended up outracing Lufy.

Mark: Be sure to tell us about these developments instead of showing us.

> One evening, an off night for Lufy,

Rex: They didn't need her helicopter to be blown up today

> they drove down to the construction site of the new GPCC, over the crater of the old center.

Jill: Priss has got some serious tagging to do.

> Arclights set the huge concrete and steel skeleton in an unnatural, cold light, sparks from

> welding equipment flying everywhere. Lufy indicated the building.

> "What's that ?"

> "The new GPCC; Genom Production Control Center."

Christina: [Lufy] Wow. You pick the best date spots.

> "What happened to the old one ?"

> "Destroyed. By a laser satellite.

Jill: She said rather matter of factually

Christina: You live in a cyberpunk dystopia and that will happen

> That was last year.

Mark: [Priss] But everyone's so over it.

> Ever since, they're busy rebuilding the center,

> but they're going to make it bigger and better than before.

Rex: And it's going to have a new food court and more bathrooms

> Typically Genom."

> Lufy cracked her knuckles.

> "You know, I really would love to get a crack at them."

Mark: In place of her actual personality, Lufy has settled on 'just like Priss in every way'.

> "Me too. I've moved because of them.

Jill: She moved to a different slum. But it's not the same!

> Placing city areas under 'corporate guard.'. Nice way to say
> boomers are going to patrol your neighbourhood."

Christina: The friendly, public face of mechanised oppression

> "Nothing you can do against it ?"

Christina: Like send them a strongly-worded letter?

> "Like what ? Beat one up ?"

Jill: Sure. Yeah. Beat up one security robot. That'll solve anything.

> "Yeah. Like that."

> "Need I remind you a boomer can tear the limbs from a human without exerting himself ?"

Rex: But what if you could punch through one like it was made out of pudding?

> "Oops. Forgot.

Mark: She forgot that killer robots were killer robots.

> Well, then we do it my way!"

> "Your way ?"

> Lufy draped her arm over Priss' shoulders. "Look, you got a hardsuit, right ? I got a struggle
> suit.

Jill: The struggle suit is real

> Bit bigger, bit more heavily armed and armored, but nevertheless.

Rex: [Lufy] Basically better than yours in every way, is what I'm saying.

Mark: [Priss] Yeah I get it!

> Think you can handle a few boomers then ?"

Jill: And what will that solve?

Christina: I dunno, it'll raise their insurance premiums?

> "Definitely. But Sylia would never agree to such an action.

Mark: Because that's always stopped Priss in the past.

> It's against the rules, doing solo actions."

Rex: If you're in the Knight Sabers you can't be a Solo Man.

> "What rules ? Rules of Boomer Engagement ?"

> "No. The ten rules of the Knight Sabers."

Mark: Particularly rule six, which forbids members from doing guest spots on podcasts

> "Rules are there to be broken."

> "Where did you get that wisdom from?"

Christina [Lufy]: Box of fortune cookies. Want one?

> Priss knew Lufy was about to get her into trouble. What the hell. She wanted to get back at
> Genom for their 'corporate guard' stunt.

Mark: How dare they shift jurisdictional boundaries!

> "Lufy's Rules for Combat Survival.

Jill: One, never be the slowest member of your team

> Got more of them. Those are about the only rules I adhere to.

Rex: Lufy is hell on board game night

> All other rules are there to be broken, bent or ignored."
> Priss didn't know. It sure sounded like fun. But the scars from her last solo action hadn't
> healed yet.

Christina: That orbital death ray really stung.

> "What's the matter, not sure if you want to ?"
> "Yeah sorta. I could get into a lot of trouble."

Mark: We all know what's going to happen. Priss will go off on a solo vengeance trip, Sylia will approve it anyway and Priss will get a cool upgrade out of the deal.

> "Not with me around."
> "That's what I'm afraid of. When ?"

Mark: I can fit a blood-soaked vengeance trip in on the weekend

Christina: Can't be Saturday. I have to take the kids to soccer

> "Well, I'm off-duty tonight and tomorrow."
> "Okay. Tonight ?"
> "Tonight. I'll try and get the others to join in."

Jill: Never bring friends along on your one-man revenge trip. It's only going to make things complicated

> "Others ?"
> "Don't you know ?"
> "What ?"

Mark: Seriously, does nobody read the briefings?

Jill: Is that a familiar feeling?

Mark: Yeah...

> Lufy smiled broadly. "One night, I saw a falling star, wished for my friends.

Rex: [Lufy] So a meteor landed on my house.

> And what do you
> think, the falling star turned out to be a Solnoid assault shuttle, crew in cryostatic, those being four
> very good friends of mine."
> "Cool.

Christina [Lufy]: There are four other survivors of our ancient doomed interstellar civilization

Jill [Priss]: Cool

> Think you can get them to join ?"
> "Think so."

Rex: [Lufy] Amy's got book club, but I'm sure she can skip out.

> "Okay. Tonight at 11, at the edge of the Fault. Okay ?"
> "Deal."

> When Lufy entered the dining room wearing a broad smile on her face, Rabby had more than
> enough reasons to be suspicious.

Rex: At least this time she couldn't smell anything burning

> "Lufy, you are up to something, and I can tell now I don't like it."
> "Don't worry. You don't have to get involved."

Mark: [Lufy] You can sit it out like you have the rest of this chapter.

> But you'll miss all the fun."
> "What fun ?"
> "Boomer bashing."

Jill: You haven't thought this through in the slightest, have you?

> "Have you cleared that with Sylia ?"
> "'course not. Who do you think I am ?"

Rex: Score?

Mark: No

Rex: Dia?

Mark: No!

> "The most irresponsible, hot-headed and luckiest Attacker of the entire Solnoid force."

Jill: [Lufy] You forgot good-looking.

> "Thank you for the compliment. You gonna come along ?"

Mark: They have room in their blood soaked rampage for a plus one

> "Who's going ?"
> "Me and Priss."
> Rabby sighed. "No."

Christina: She already knows how this is going to work out

> "Okay. But don't tell Sylia, deal ?"
> Shaking her head, Rabby agreed.

Rex: For no adequately explored reason.

> She sensed that there was going to be a huge mess when those two were ready.

Mark: [Rabby] Maybe it's time to explore separate accommodations.

> "Anyone else you want to drag along in that mess you're about to make ?"
> "Yes. Shildy, Spea and Catty."

Jill: Hey killer robot, wanna go fight killer robots?

> "I was afraid you'd say that. Go ahead. But I know nothing when things go very, very wrong."

Jill: Rabby went on record as saying 'I have no recollection of those events' forty-seven times.

> "Thanks. See you!"

> When Lufy was gone, Rabby sat down, considering if she'd call Sylia or not. Lufy was -as
> usual- breaking the rules.

Rex: I bet Lufy also drinks straight from the carton

> She picked up the phone, dialled a number.

> "Sylia Stingray."

> "Sylia, this is Rabby, I.. Lufy is up to something. Not that anyone can stop her right now."

Christina: You didn't even try

> "What is she up to ?"

> "She was talking about boomer-bashing and.."

> "I'll be right down there."

> Click, connection broken.

Jill: It's not the first time Sylia's had to have this conversation with Priss, and it won't be the last.

> Walking down to the workshop, Rabby reminded herself to prepare the suits for combat. The whole
> situation was about to blow up. In their faces.

Jill: Their insane vengeance trip was going to blow up in their faces, so nothing to do but make sure they have to tools they need for it

> An hour later, around nine, Sylia came in the

> apartment. Lufy was upstairs, trying to convince Spea, Catty and Shildy of the fun of boomer-
> bashing,

Jill [Lufy]: So we get to smash robots and stomp on them and make them explode and-
Christina [Catty]: I'm right here you know

> when Sylia came in, and told her the action was cancelled.

Rex: [Lufy] Nobody asked you, mum.

> Lufy folded her arms, grumbled. "It's not fair. I wanna get back at those bastards."

Mark: Bearing in mind that this is the same Lufy that had an emotional breakdown over seeing the body of a wrecked combat robot

> Sylia shook her head, sighed.

> "Don't worry; you'll get your chance soon enough, if my information is correct."

Christina: She slipped a boomer some RAM chips for insider info.

> Puzzled, Lufy looked

> at Sylia. "Genom has put up the idea of placing whole areas of the city under corporate guard.

Jill: They wanted their own corrupt incompetent police

> Knowing Genom, their security forces will probably consist of boomers, both 3-3-C and 55c
> models."

Rex: With the odd ED-209 thrown in for good measure

> Luffy grinned, rubbed her hands. "When do we get a go at them ?"
> "Not yet. They have to make the first move."

Jill: [Sylia] We've just got to wait for them to start their own murderous rampage.

> "If your opponent plays hard, play harder."

Christina: This sounds like the setup for a sports movie
Mark: Maybe something you'd say during the training montage

> Sylia looked at Luffy, puzzled.
> She grinned. "Luffy's Rules for Combat Survival."

Jill: Coming from the woman who dies a lot. Just saying.

> "Sounds like you have more. Care to share them with me ?"

Christina: [Sylia] I'm sure you are a true font of wisdom.

> "Yup. Rule number two: All the other rules are there to be bent, broken or ignored."

Rex: Including that one?
Mark: Are you trying to make this difficult?

> Shaking her head, Shildy smiled. "Two million years, and you haven't changed a bit."

Christina [Shildy]: Also I am here now

> Sensing
> the situation was about to get out of hand again, Sylia interfered. "As long as you all stick around
> here discussing combat rules, fine. But I have a feeling somebody out in the city is about to despise
> Genom enough to undertake action against a corporate guard.

Jill: Yeah, and she's standing right there.

> Then, the city is about to blow up.

Rex: So in short, Mega Tokyo is about to explode

> When that happens, I'm going to need all of you, so you'd better get rest while you can."
> Everyone except Luffy nodded. "Luffy ?"
> "Ah well, okay. As long as I get something to shoot at, fine."

Mark: Meanwhile at St. Puppy's Hospital for Adorable Cancer Orphans...

> Next morning, Luffy reported for duty, checked in and went down to the shooting range.

Mark: [Cop] Wait, hang on, you've got a patrol to – Ah, never mind.

> Picking up a pair of pistols and ear protectors, she walked to an empty booth, checking the guns
> were loaded.

Rex: It's the little things that trip you up

> She eyeballed the range to the target, then used the controls to put it at the end of the
> range, out to the maximum. "I never knew pilots were good shots."

Jill [Luffy]: We go through the same basic training as you do, dickwad

> A grinning Leon appeared behind her.

Christina: Luffy's still figuring out this whole 'men' thing, but so far Leon and Mackie have not been good examples.

Mark: What about Doc Raven?

Christina: I think he's more of a scenery fixture.

> "I bet you won't be able to score a single hit on that target from this range."

Jill: Ah, Leon. Your blatant misogyny is so charming.

> Smiling, Luffy

> put on the ear protectors, picked up both guns. She concentrated for a moment, then lifted the guns,

> and emptied the clips into the target. Still smiling, she brought the target to the booth.

Rex: [Leon] You didn't have to land so many between the legs.

> Two ragged

> holes, one in the heart circle, one in the head circle adorned the target.

> Daley laughed from a distance.

> "One lost bet, Leon."

Mark: You'd think he'd be used to this by now. Losing, I mean

> "Luck. You'll never repeat that performance."

Christina: Do we really need to take time out from this fic to humiliate Leon?

Jill: Being fair, is there ever a bad time for that?

> Smiling, Luffy replaced the target, put it back on maximum range, reloaded the pistols, fired

> again. Same result.

Rex: Conveniently reused animation.

> Wickedly grinning, she pulled the empty clips from the guns.

> "Well hotshot, seems this measly pilot just outshot you. 'twas fun,

Christina: Demonstrably not true.

> see you all later."

> She deposited the weapons at the desk, went up to the chopper pilot rec room for a coffee

> and sandwich, leaving a stunned Leon and Daley behind.

Rex: Also, wah-wah

> MegaTokyo had become onimously quiet - silence before the storm. Boomer crimes toned down to

> a low level,

Jill: They were down to only one massacre a week

> making ADP and the regular police very curious - what was going on in Genom Tower?

Mark: Cut to Quincy building a card tower

> In this period of relative calm, Catty asked Sylia to arrange for a trip to the moon for her, saying she

> had some business there.

Christina: [Sylia] Sure. Of course. Just a quick jaunt to the moon. What could be more normal?

> Curious as ever, Sylia inquired what, the response being "got to pick up something."

Rex: Catty missed her package delivery and it got rerouted. So now she needs to go out of her way to collect it

> Shildy and Spea waved Catty off at MegaTokyo Spaceport,

Jill: Wait, Sylia actually did it? Alright then...

> both wondering what she had to do on Terra's satellite.

Jill: I am sure that whatever a killer robot agent of a transhumanist conspiracy is up to on the moon can only be entirely wholesome and above board

> Driving home from the spaceport, Shildy snapped her fingers. "I know why

> Catty is off to the moon." Puzzled, Spea looked at her.

> "Oh ? Why ?"

> "The capsule."

Rex: Capsule!

Mark: Capsule!

> "That I didn't think of that before."

Jill: I'm sure the writer didn't forget about it either.

Christina: Gosh no, why would you think that?

> "Hope she recovers it."

Jill: It would be awful if our desperate last message to humanity reached humanity.

> "Definitely. But.. how would she know where to look ?"

> "She knows where to look; she aimed the thing."

Christina: And what's the yawning gap of interstellar space between friends?

> "Heh. Forgot. I mean, 2 million years..."

Rex: Time flies when you're locked in an eternal war.

> Spea's voice trailed off into the distance, her eyes locked onto infinity.

Jill: [Spea] Well, I've had my lines. That's it for me.

> Downtown Megatokyo, Central Highway 2, Lower Deck.

Mark: Right outside a McBurger Kong.

> Rush hour had turned the long strip of raised asphalt into a chaotic traffic jam,

Christina: Rush hour: The slowest part of the day.

> claxons honking and drivers agitated. In the middle of this

> mess, a truck driver nervously tried to stay calm, looking over his shoulder every ten seconds to the

> tanker trailer his lorry was pulling. 40,000 litres of highly combustible methalcol car fuel.

Rex: Doo de doo just driving a tanker full of highly explosive and combustible fuel through the city known for its killer robot rampages. Nothing can go wrong with this.

> Honking his horn every so often, he managed to get his vehicle out of the jam, onto a ramp off

> the highway. Lighting another cigarette,

Jill: This seems like a wise move

- > the driver recounted what the loaders had said what would
- > happen if the tank trailer ruptured, and one single spark was to join in the fun. Boom. Big, big boom.

Rex: He needs to be reminded what fuel does.

- > Hands shaking, he brought the lighter to his cigarette, a honking claxon making him look
- > backwards. He dropped the lighter. Oh well, he thought. I'll look for it once I turn into the Fault.

Mark: I foresee a long and happy life for this man

Christina: He's a walking workplace safety short

- > Fate would have it differently. While turning down into the Fault, crossing under the highway
- > bridge, the nervous driver reached down for his lighter, losing his attention for the road and his
- > steering wheel, slewing the wheel off right. The truck made a sharp turn, through the railing,

Mark: He drives as well as the Boomers do

- > the quick way down. The spectacular way down.

Rex: That right turn on gaping chasm drive gets them every time

- > The driver felt he was flying, grabbed his lighter and looked out.

Jill: Huh. It's not the abject disaster I thought it would be. Still an abject disaster, but a different one.

- > S H I T !!! Throwing open the door, he jumped. He was going to die anyway, but rather a
- > broken neck than being roasted alive. A dead tree saved his life,

Jill: Good news, you're alive. Bad news, whatever happens next is entirely your fault

- > the truck continuing to fall.
- > Scrambling for the relative safety of a ridge, the driver coiled and waited for the inevitable.

Mark: [Driver] I hope this won't effect my performance review!

- > Rabby was making the last preparation for an operational check

Christina [Rabby]: This is a very delicate operation. I'm sure glad that nothing unexpected is going to interrupt me

- > when a huge explosion echoed
- > through the Fault, followed by the pattering of things on the roof. Racing up the stairs, three steps at
- > a time, she shot for the nearest window. She gasped at the sight.

Rex: Two dogs doing it

- > A towering pillar of fire and smoke, easily 1000 feet high, towered into the sky,

Rex: Oh and that too, I guess

- > a bridge over it swaying, then crashing down into the
- > Fault. Her eyes widened. Damn! If anyone survived then... then... damn!

Jill: Rabby's brain locked up.

- > She HAD to help! But how? The suits!

Mark: Isn't it nice that she had a squad of war robots on standby for something like this?

> Pulling Spea and Shildy off their rooms, Rabby gave a scramble signal,

Rex: For a Scramble War, if you will.

Christina: I will not.

> and off they went.

> Shildy finished dressing for the suit, the skintight coverall feeling pleasant against her skin.

Jill: Settle down, Shildy

> She moved her arms and legs a bit to feel the suit, marvelling at the tight fit. "You're sure you want to do this ?"

Jill: [Shildy] I mean, we could just stay in bed and let people burn.

> "We've got to help. If what Sylia said is true, then we are here to help people."

Christina: She built a squad of combat mecha for purely peaceful purposes

> "Just wanted to be sure."

> "Don't worry. Let's scramble!"

> "Miss, are you sure you want to do this ?" Catty nodded. She had business outside the moonbase.

Rex: She was going to play golf

> "If you get lost, there's no way we can get you back in her in time; you'll suffocate!"

> "Don't worry. I won't get lost."

> "Others have said that before and.."

Christina: Wait, how often do they lose tourists out there?

> She put her hand on his shoulder. "Believe me; I won't get lost. I have a good sense of direction."

Rex: She can detect magnetic north by smell

> "Allright then."

Mark: But here's a liability waiver just to be sure

> She slipped into the moonsuit, checked the oxygen feeds and fittings. The worried tech helped her
> in the suit.

Rex: [Tech] You uh, forgot to turn on the oxygen.

Jill: [Catty] Oh yes. Tee hee.

> "Your small size didn't make it easy to find a suit for you."

Christina: Okay, now he's just nagging

> Catty smiled. "Stop worrying, nothing will happen."

> "If you say so.... but I'm still not convinced."

> "How much time do I have ?"

> "Three hours total. So, after 90 minutes you will have to return." She nodded.

> "Okay. Anything else ?"

> "Yes; don't go further out than 80 minutes; that will give you twenty spare minutes to find the way
> back to the base."

Rex: As long as some dumbarse doesn't depressurise the base as a part of a get rich quick scheme, she'll be fine

Mark: Yeah that would be stupid

> "Got it. See you in a few hours."

Christina: [Tech] You know, I really should send a guide or something with her... Nah, she'll be fine.

> She walked off into the airlock. The heavy door closed behind her, and soon, air hissed out.
> The seals on the suit slowly inflated, until the indicator on the airlock showed zero pressure. She
> rechecked the suit, making sure she had hand manipulation and foot movement.

Mark: And that she hadn't put her suit on upside-down again

> Both okay. Keying her mike, she called in. "Suit's fine. I'm going out."

Rex: [Catty] Tell my wife I love her very much, beep boop.

> "Have fun watching stars."

Christina: [Tech] I lose more tourists that way.

> Catty smiled at her excuse. She had posed as an astronomer wanting a clear sight at some
> special stars from the moon surface,

Jill: Special stars, which she obviously couldn't see from anywhere else.

> away from any human structures. She was carrying a
> zero-pressure suitcase holding a telescope, or at least, that's how it looked.

Jill: Not to sound like I'm splitting hairs and all, but you'd think that a moonbase would have better facilities for astronomy than a dinky handled telescope

> In reality, it was a disguise for a small storage compartment.

Mark: Which absolutely nobody inspected whatsoever.

> Hopping over a few moondunes,
> she caught her bearings, bringing her own internal navigation system up in her eyesight.

Rex: Unfortunately, it was currently trying to direct her to a shoe shop in Richmond, Virginia

> The
> indicator for the capsule blinked to her left. Turning left, she hopped over a small hill, past a flag. So
> here man had set foot on the moon first.

Jill: You just know that would be a massive tourist trap by now.

> Continuing her long steps over the surface, she switched to
> her own android life support systems. The capsule was two hours out,

Mark: The tech would be worried, but he forgot about her the moment she stepped outside.

> and she didn't need the oxygen. Right now, breathing was unnecessary, and it hindered her.

Mark: Breathing is so inconvenient

> Back at the base, the tech kept looking at his watch. She was 50 minutes out. Out of
> commlink range if anything happened.

Rex: And they regularly let tourists do this, right?

- > Catty made a longer jump, using a bit of her android strength
- > to clear a larger hill, then the suit's maneuver thrusters to get her down on the surface again. 70
- > minutes out, 50 to go.

Jill: Thrill as Catty walks in real time!

- > One and three quarter hours later, the tech began to get worried. Would she have lost track of
- > time while stargazing ? No, she was a scientist. Did everything by the book.

Jill: You don't know very many scientists, do you?

- > Catty had disregarded the half-time signal, shutting the oxygen feed completely down. 15
- > minutes.
- > The tech was pacing through the compartment, carefully. 1/6G was tricky to pace in.

Rex: You just need a lot of headroom.

- > Catty saw the indicator in her eyesight burn continuously at a place before her feet.

Mark: [Catty] So the quest object should be here... Wait, am I tracking the right quest?

- > She knelt, and
- > started digging. One foot of moondust down, she retrieved a small, cylinder shaped object.

Christina: Why she went to the moon for a can of Pringles was another matter

- > The
- > capsule. Opening her suitcase, she pulled off the lenscap of her telescope, and screwed out the
- > lens, placing the capsule inside it, then remounted the lens and cap. Time to return.

Jill: [Catty] I'm sure my extended absence didn't throw anyone into a panic.

- > She was gone three and a half hours now "Moonbase 7, Stargazer reporting."
- > "Stargazer, how's your oxygen ?"

Jill: [Catty] Oh wait, I guess it didn't.

- > "Low. But I'll make it. If you sit still you don't use that much, over."

Rex [Technician]: Well she's gone well over her air supply and still needs to make it back but I see nothing wrong with this at all.

- > "Got that, Stargazer. Need a pickup ?"
- > "Base 7, I'll be okay - just get that lock open."
- > Three hours and fiftyseven minutes later, Catty was back in a pressurized environment.
- > "I had given up on you, thought you'd be dead."

Mark: Boy are the search and rescue crews going to be embarrassed

- > "As I said; sitting still and gazing doesn't use much oxygen."

Rex: You're uh, you're sticking with that excuse, are you?

- > "True. Caught a few nice sights ?"
- > "Oh yes, definitely. How do I get back to the spaceport ?"

Jill: [Tech] Perfect sense of direction, my keister.

> The tech pointed out the way, then turned to refilling her oxygen tank. It was 95% full.

Rex: Again, wah-wah

> Going down to Terra on the shuttle,

Mark: Say, wasn't there just a huge explosion in MegaTokyo?

Jill: Eh, something like that.

> Catty ran a few selftests, checking her information gathering abilities and backlog files.

Christina: Catching up on two million years of unread email

> While rerunning her moon expedition, she noted she had made an error;

Rex: She forgot to get Spea a souvenir.

> he had forgotten to vent most of the oxygen in her tank. Oh well. Didn't matter now.

Jill: Meanwhile the technician's having a breakdown

> She had the capsule, and was away from the moon.

> Down in MegaTokyo, four sleek, strong

Jill: Firm, rugged and virile

> struggle suits descended on the disaster scene, trying to

> save any survivors. Screams from a car half-buried under a piece of highway. Shildy and Spea lifted

> the block off, while Rabby dragged the car away, tore out the door, and carefully lifted out the

> passengers and heavily wounded driver.

> Ambulances had rushed to the scene, didn't ask to who these suits belonged, just thanked

> god they were here and helped.

Mark: Thank god this squad of unmarked heavily armed combat suits were here

Rex: I feel relieved already

> All the time, a Bu-55c boomer was watching the situation, relaying the footage to Genom

> Tower, to the Chairman's office.

Jill: A massive disaster has struck the city, and they didn't cause it for once.

> A truck, its rear smashed by a roadpillar, the driver trapped. A suit

> activated a laser cutter and burned off the roof, gently lifting the driver out, taking him to the

> medtechs.

Christina: I feel safe in your arms, killer robot

> As night fell, arclights shone down on the disaster area, ADP K-12s joined in.

Jill: The ADP were here to make the situation worse. It's what they do.

> The four suits

> disappeared, not leaving a trace. Just burned a signature in a rock wall, permitted by Sylia.

> Knight Sabers.

Rex: Along with an invoice.

> Quincy's fist smashed down on the desk. "So those accursed Knight Sabers have a few new tricks

> up their sleeves."

Mark: [Quincy] Their new suits make them even more marketable!

- > Respectfully bowing before his boss, the exec answered.
- > "So do we, sir."
- > Calming down,

Jill: Awww...

- > Quincy seated himself again.
- > "Like what ?"

Rex: I can pull a rabbit out of my hat, for starters

- > "Although Combat Boomer production and export is forbidden,

Mark: Should have just outsourced Boomer production to Vietnam like everyone else

- > that has not stopped us from developing them, along with new types of combat suits."

Jill: Yes, that's nice. I'm pretty sure Quincy is aware of what happens inside his own company with his key product lines

- > "Where are you heading ? Get to the point!"
- > "We have developed a more powerful ground-based version of the Doberman space combat boomer, as well as a highly advanced and powerful infantry powersuit."

Rex: [Quincy] Okay, and when were you planning to bring that up?

Mark: [Executive] Next budget meeting, sir.

- > "And what do you intend to do with them ?"

Mark: I'm imagining that it's not going to be community theatre

Christina: Well you never know...

- > "I believe we have some demolition to do in Area 17."

Jill: As long as it's not Area 88. If I have to listen to that Shin Kazama whining any more, I swear...

- > Area 17 was a thorn in Genom's eyes. Owned by the people who lived there, defended by
- > them. It was a virtual fortress, as Genom tried low trick upon low trick to gain control over the area

Rex: Leaving bags of flaming dog poo on people's doorsteps, toilet papering their lawn... you name it

- > to turn it into another industrial park.

Jill: Why is it always an industrial park? That's your answer to everything, isn't it? Why can't you make a stadium or something, jeez.

- > "And the Knight Sabers will have to react."
- > "When ?"
- > "Three weeks. At this moment, we only have one prototype boomer, who's AI is too unstable to be of
- > any use,

Mark: Genom immediately approves it for sale

- > and one prototype suit with a few flaws.

Rex: [Executive] It snapped the test pilot's spine when he tried to use it. We fired him for

incompetence.

Jill: [Quincy] Good work.

> In three weeks, I can build a decent force out of that."

> "Good. Do not fail me."

> "I will lead the assault myself."

Christina: I'm sorry, I can't hear you over the hubris

> Quincy nodded. Yes, he had the heart of a Genom employee.

Jill: The guy who worked at Genom was indeed a Genom employee

> Now to make sure his

> ambitions would not infringe upon his position as the chairman of Corporate Genom. Definitely.

Rex: Time to promote him sideways into an administrative role with no real power. Hahaha!

> At MegaTokyo Spaceport Arrival Terminal, Sylia was waiting. A small lady, holding a briefcase in one

> hand and a duffel bag in the other came out of the crowd towards her, smiling.

Christina: Can we use context clues to deduce she's picking up Catty?

Rex: I was going to say she was collecting Lina Inverse myself.

[Pause]

Christina: That would be a much better crossover.

Rex: Oh yes.

> Sylia guided her through the crowd of the terminal, into her car. Once in the car, Sylia looked

> at her. "You still haven't told me why you had to go to the moon."

Jill: I mean, do you really need an excuse to go to the moon?

> "Stargazing."

Rex: Catty read that it would take two million years for light from another galaxy to get to Earth and wanted to see if it was true

> "Sorry to say so, but I think that wasn't why you were going there."

> "True."

> "Mind telling me the real reason ?"

> "Sure. Start driving and I'll start talking."

Mark: Sure, this sounds like a good conversation for a commute

> On the way from the terminal building onto the highway, Catty opened the briefcase, pulled

> out the moondust covered telescope,

Rex: Is moon dust poisonous?

> removing cap and lens, and removed a cylinder from the innards of the telescope. "What's that ?"

> "Hold on."

Mark: [Catty] And keep your eyes on the road.

> She flipped open a hatch and extracted a gold colored object.

Jill [Sylia]: You went to the moon for a souvenir lighter?

Christina [Catty]: In retrospect this was not a good plan

- > "This is a Solnoid data chip. We used
- > it to store information, lots of it. This specific one contains all our knowledge."

Rex: Ever wondered what the Solanoids put on their pizza? Now you'll know

- > Sylia pulled over at a road restaurant. "You mean to say .."
- > "Yes. Everything we knew is on this chip. But as stands now, you will never gain this knowledge,
- > since you do not have the equipment to read it. I do."

Jill: [Sylia] Did you recover a drive or something from your craft?

Christina: [Catty] Eh, how to put this...

- > Confused, Sylia looked at her. "Who, or rather, what are you ?"

Rex [Hoarse]: I'm Batman

Jill: if she came out with that then this would be the best fanfic ever

- > "Later." Catty looked back "Someone is following us."
- > "Not for long."

Mark: Turns out there are drawbacks to driving an incredibly distinctive vintage car

- > Sylia pulled away from the restaurant, so did the anonymous car behind them.

Christina: It's so anonymous, we're not even going to bother describing it.

- > Back on the highway,
- > she put the pedal to the metal, and zoomed off into the traffic, leaving the other car far behind.

Rex: Well I tried.

- > The wreck was laid out before them on the floor of one of the hangars at the recovery section.
- > The chief tech walked around it, head shaking. "What's wrong ?"

Rex: So for starters, I have this rash...

- > "I've never seen any craft like this before."

Mark: Mate, it's an e-bike. Get with it.

- > Climbing inside, he found the controls thoroughly smashed and destroyed,

Jill: Just like my last boyfriend. [Pause] What?

- > so nobody would ever
- > have any use for them, nor be able to learn anything from them.

Mark: But they had learned that they were controls.

Christina: Damn, outsmarted

- > Deeper in the shuttle, one room
- > remained solidly locked. "Sir, we've tried everything. Laser burners, thermal lances, boomer
- > weapons, everything.

Rex: Cat photos, potted plants, cereal mascots... everything

- > This thing won't open. The controls are destroyed, and power is out
- > throughout the craft. We've tried X-raying the room, comes up blank. Whoever built this, must have

> designed that room to be completely safe and proof against everything.

Christina: It's made of Deus Ex Machina.

> SpaceTech says it's solid enough to withstand re-entry alone, without the shuttle."

> Chief Tech Masano waved it off. "Get this wreck out of here into Storage.

Christina: Put it in the same room as the Ark of the Covenant

> We'll deal with it later.

Jill: Let's just put aside the most important discovery in human history.

> Right now, we have three new prototypes to test. Let us spend time on that."

Mark: As a shift chief he has the authority to make these decisions

> They walked out the hangar, closing the door, shutting off the light.

> This project wasn't interesting anymore.

Rex: The two-million-year-old wreck of an alien spaceship wasn't interesting?

Jill: They had a short attention span

> To them.

> Leon and Daley, on a paid leave holiday, were.

Christina: Although they really didn't have anything better to do right now

> Through a powerful pair of binos, they saw the chief

> tech and a few others walk from a building, the chief tech gesturing and obviously very angry.

Rex: Looks like Leon's last performance review.

> "Wish we could hear what is going on there."

> "Yeah, sure. Just be glad we can see it."

> "Hmmm. I wonder what's in that building they just left."

Rex: I'm going to bet its unwanted furniture and rusty gym equipment

> "So do I..... a wreck, maybe ?"

> "Could be, could be not. Only one way to find out."

Mark: I assume they mean that they're going to ask politely

> Leon pulled a black nylon bag from a locker and began unpacking it. A lowlight camera.

> Wiring. Videoscreen. Power plugs.

Jill: Watch out, Leon's about to show off his custom AV setup. Any moment he's going to start lecturing

about how VHS is more 'intense'.

> "You mean to say...."

Rex: [Leon] Yep, we're going to forget about this and watch Netflix.

> "We'll anchor here, or rather, there, at that building and set up this camera. We'll take turns

> watching.

Mark: [Leon] I'm sure absolutely nobody will spot a pair of experts like us.

> Sooner or later, they've got to get whatever is in there out. We tape it, and if it is what I think it is,

Mark: Genom's secret cheesecake recipe

> we've got Genom in a very embarrassing situation."

> "If we live to tell the tale."

Jill: [Daley] Ha ha ha, we're going to die horribly.

> Leon laughed, pulled out two more nylon bags. "This ought to insure our survival."

> A pair of anti-boomer rifles appeared. A proven model.

Mark: No, Leon doesn't have adequacy issues. Why do you ask?

> While on the way to the Fault, Catty had replaced the chip in the capsule, wanting to be absolutely

> sure nothing happened to it.

Jill: After flashing it around in a moving car.

> She turned the capsule over and over in her hands, closed her eyes. She called up the logs

> from the Stardust War. One image in special.

Rex: The last ham roll she'd ever eaten

> The sight of the Paranoid flagship appearing before

> them, so close its main weapons missed the shuttle. That had been a scary moment.

Jill: If I recall they rammed that ship and it exploded

Christina: Maybe they walked it off

> They had survived that, launched the capsule, and themselves, into deep space.

Rex: [Catty] Now that I think about it, I'm not sure why we bothered launching the capsule separately if we knew we were going to survive. [Pause] Oh, well.

> Opening her eyes, she noticed she was still turning the capsule over and over in her hands.

Christina: Muttering something about a 'precious...'

> Sylia took another road into the Fault, the normal one being closed due to a disaster; a tanker truck

> had exploded, destroying the highway bridge, burying the road under concrete slabs and debris.

Jill: Nothing important and certainly not anything we're going to waste the reader's time on.

> But this road was equally good.

Mark: Road closed due to horrific disaster. Please take an alternative route

> While winding down into the Fault, Sylia noted Catty was distant. She was holding the

> capsule like a treasure of gold, her eyes locked onto infinity. There was definitely something very

> strange about this little girl.

Rex: Maybe she's a century old psychic schoolgirl who has been recruited into a sinister conspiracy to make contact with an alien intelligence and is being guarded by a zombie cyborg

Jill: That is the dumbest thing you've ever said

Rex: I'm sorry, I don't know what I was thinking.

> The front door opened, and Catty walked in, followed by Sylia. Checking the bedrooms found

> everyone but Rabby.

Jill: [Catty] I randomly walk into your bedrooms and watch you sleep, beep boop.

Christina: I mean... Catty.

Jill: Well, yeah.

> Shildy had fallen asleep in her undersuit, Spea snuggled in beside her. Lufy was lying on the bed,
> tossing and turning. Amy had gone to bed early, being the youngest, she was fast asleep.

Mark: It's an emergency situation, but she's still not allowed to stay up past her bedtime.

> Down in the equipment bay, they found Rabby, who had fallen asleep over a test console.

Rex: None of the suits had blown up, so she was fine.

> They took her to bed, then sat down at the dining table. Sylia looked Catty over, once more. "I
> suspect you are not what you seem."

Jill: Takes one to know one, huh Sylia?

> Catty nodded. "Correct."

> "Then, would you mind telling me what or who you are ?"

Mark: Probably not, given how free they've been with information up until now.

> Putting the capsule down on the table, Catty got up. "I am Catty. An exact android copy of Captain
> Catty Nova Nebulart, head of Solnoid Central Intelligence.

Jill: Just a lot younger, for some reason.

Rex: Catty Nebulart has a lot to answer for.

> I, and hundreds of others, were created under the terms of Mission 21,

Christina: That sounds more like the name of a real estate firm or a company that distributed direct to
video films

> a secret plan to make sure one race, a third race, would survive the
> Stardust War between the Solnoid and the Paranoid."

Jill: Well that doesn't sound ominous at all.

Mark: God no

> "You mean to say you are an..."

> "...android, yes.

Rex: Sylia shot her on general principals.

> But totally unlike the helproids or cyborg soldiers every Solnoid was familiar with.

Christina: The common or garden killer robot

> The latest technology we had at that point was used to build me

Rex: She's up to date with MS-DOS 3.31.

> and all the other copies. Under the

> skin, I am an android, but over my android body, there is real Solnoid tissue."

Rex: Do you have any idea how creepy that sounds?

> "Sort of a fusion between an android and a Solnoid, so to speak."

> "Correct.

Jill: [Catty] I'm basically a Terminator, beep boop.

> Next to that, we were all programmed with a very advanced AI, no sorry. That is not the
> correct term."
> She cast down her eyes, lowered her voice. "Captain Nebulart's memory and mind was
> downloaded to function as a base.

Rex: A *lot* to answer for.

> All we did was add information to that, which we regularly
> relayed to Mission 21 headquarters. Just before the Stardust War ended, the original Captain
> Nebulart updated my memories once more, with her latest memories and experiences.

Christina [Sylia]: So then...

Jill [Catty]: Pink with little blue bears

Christina [Sylia]: I did wonder

> All I am is just an embodiment of her. I do make errors, I do have emotions."

Mark: Catty has serious design flaws.

> She faltered for a moment. "And I can cry."

Rex: But does she dream of electric sheep?

> She suppressed her tears to deal with the matter at hand.
> "Let's deal with this datachip first."

Jill: It's not that Sylia doesn't care about Catty's emotions, she's just figuring out how to use them to destroy her.

> That night, Leon was at the videoscreen, observing the Genom factory, having zoomed onto the
> mystery hangar. Around midnight, Leon poked Daley.

Rex [Leon]: Your turn to put the cat out

> "Look at this." Arclights went on, and a large, strange shaped object was removed from the hangar.

Mark: [Daley] But is it cake?

> "Now that does not look like another prototype to me, does it ?"
> "Definitely not. I wonder what it is."
> "Looks like some sort of shuttle.

Christina: The space agency has a shuttle? What a surprise!

> Hey, look at that wing. There's a marker on it." Leon zoomed in.

Christina: [Leon] Mars Base. Should have known.

> A yellow triangle surrounded by a thick black border cut off at the corners, forming an uneven
> hexagon. "I've never seen that before."

Rex: Then again, he's not very good at geometry.

> "Neither have I."
> They watched how it was transported away to another part of the island. At the end of the
> show, Leon stopped the VCR, pulled out the tape.

Jill: Visual media... of the future!

> "Seems we've got some pretty damning evidence here."

Rex: They saw... An object!

> "Looks like it."

> "Let's get back to work."

> "Good idea."

Christina: [Daley] Oh wait. We don't do any work.

> Boy, was Genom in for a surprise.

Mark: I'm sure that Quincy's reaction will be very restrained and nuanced.

On that last comment, the big screen switched off, reverting the world back to prose format. "And that was the series of alien petroglyphs that comprised the second and third chapters of Bubblegum Force," Mark considered. "In which a remarkably high number of things actually occurred and yet it feels so very dull."

"I think the core of the problem is this," Christina considered. "It raises all these ideas then leaves them under-developed while then goes back to its functional mundanity without a moment's hesitation."

"We're reading fic about ancient astronauts in a cyberpunk dystopia and yet it's Rabby's pet project that gets the lion's share of the attention," Jill noted. "No offence, Rex."

"None taken," he shrugged. "Though I think that Rabby by spending all her time in her shed is doing a better job of hiding than Lufy is."

"That one does get me," Mark admitted. "Because Lufy's idea of lying low is to join the ADP-"

"Who accept her without question," Christina noted, "Especially given what she apparently put on her resume."

"Well yes," Mark agreed. "What I'm trying to say here is that Lufy is doing a terrible job of keeping a low profile given all she did in these two chapters. Her goal seems to be to draw as much attention to herself as possible."

"So, she's like the other members of your team," Jill noted.

"Very true," Mark sighed.

"However, my biggest concern going forward is the addition of the Destruction cast," Christina noted.

"I thought this fic was going to focus on just Rabby and Lufy and whatever they were doing. But now there's four more members of the cast and I have no idea what they're meant to be doing."

"And let's be blunt here it's not like Spea and Amy were exactly the most developed characters to begin with," Jill added.

"See, I was thinking about that," Rex spoke up. "See, I was thinking that maybe they were added because the author wanted to bring in Catty but had no idea how to do it without bringing in the rest of the Stardust cast."

"That would make a lot of sense," Christina nodded. "Because Catty would potentially add a lot to the story. Especially given the setup of her collecting the capsule from the moon."

"While leaving us saddled with three more characters that they don't really have a use for otherwise," Jill considered. "Which I just know is going to become a deadweight going forwards."

"Although I don't think we're going to see any more of tanker truck driver," Mark noted. "A pity as the guy was basically a living fire safety short."

"He definitely was shaking hands with danger," Jill smirked.

"I can feel the rage slowly seeping in," the Voice considered as she crashed into the conversation. "Which means that the fanfic is working."

"You really do enjoy it, don't you?" Mark asked.

"What can I say? I find my fun where I can. And this fic is not only giving me a lot of fun but also promising me even more to come."

"Thrilling," Jill sighed. "You know, I liked you more when you were just very vaguely malicious rather than revelling in it."

"I thought it would be more fun to actually cut loose and be the real me for once," the Voice explained. "Or at least as real as a disembodied voice can be."

"Are we good for now though?" Rex asked.

"We are," the Voice explained. "But just consider this; we're still only at the halfway point of the fic. Something to let dwell in your heads until next time. Toodles."

"God she's an arse," Jill sighed. "And I should know."

"So Mark," Christina cut in, as much to stop Jill as anything else. "I was thinking about the security job that the Knight Sabers were hired for in this last chapter. It reminded me of the stories you've told me about your team."

"Let me guess; because Linna and Nene screwed up in an elementary and unprofessional way?" He replied.

"Well, yes," Christina admitted.

"No, that's entirely fair," he sighed. "The funny thing is, there's another character in this fic that reminded me of them too."

"Let me guess, the tanker truck driver," Christina offered.

"Exactly."

Author's notes:

Bubblegum Force is one of those strange fics that has a lot going on in it and yet still manages to develop very few of them. It jumps from scene to scene without really giving much depth to what it's actually doing and seems to be unable to focus on anything at one time. The Knight Sabers being hired to protect the executive is a good example as it adds nothing to the fic and could be easily removed without affecting the narrative in the slightest.

And yes, as you might have guessed, the addition of more characters is going to serve to clutter the fic and add in some more subplots that won't go anywhere. And where it ends up going will genuinely surprise you largely because it has nothing to do with anything at all.

Next time we go to school

Bubblegum Crisis created by Artmic/Youmex

Gall Force created by Artmic

Bubblegum Force written by Cpt. C. Nebulart

Rex Brandtiger and Jill Vader created by Rick R.
Mark Grayson and Christina McCade created by Zogster

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

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> the driver recounted what the loaders had said what would
> happen if the tank trailer ruptured, and one single spark was to join in the fun. Boom. Big, big boom.
> Hands shaking, he brought the lighter to his cigarette