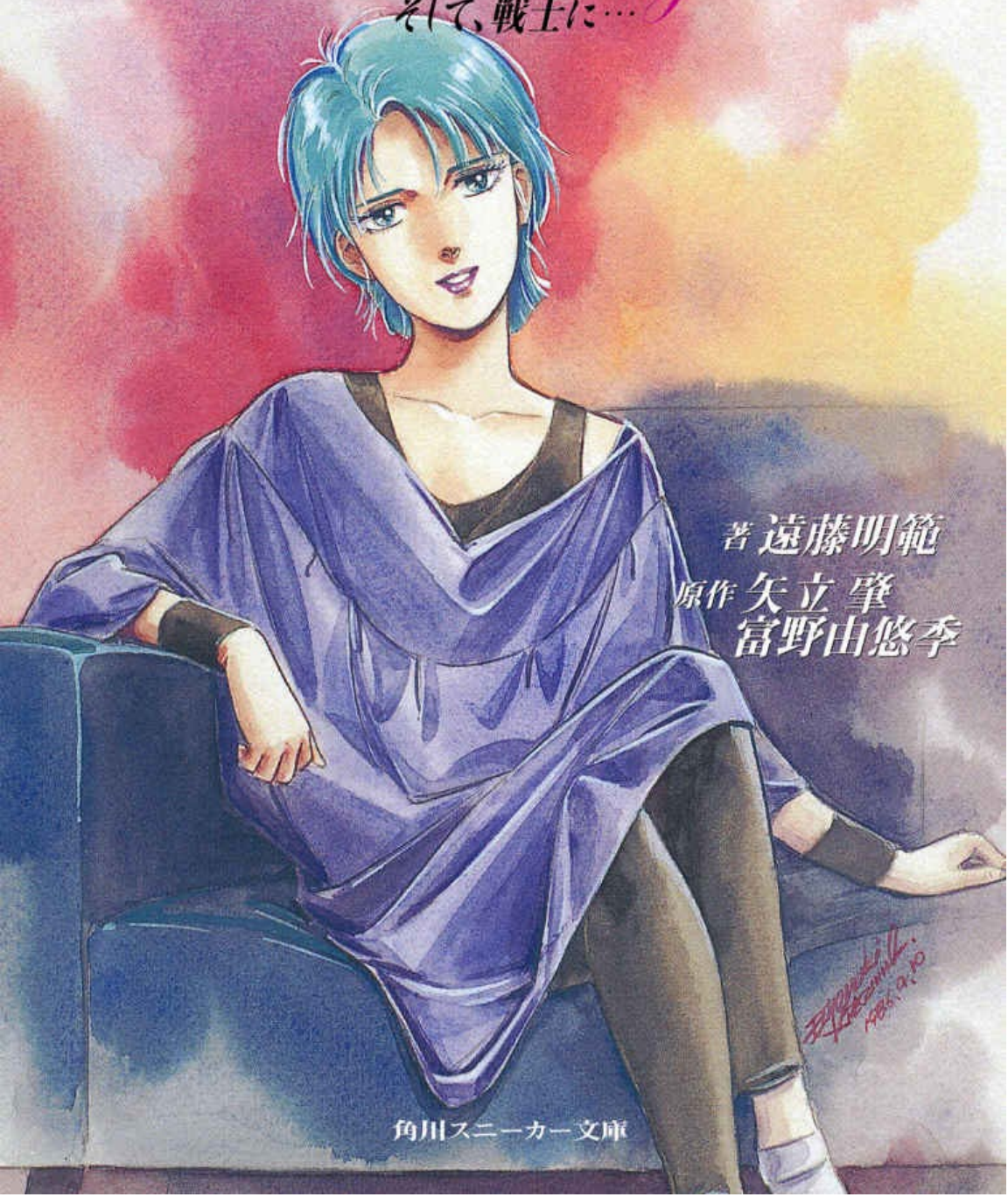


機動戦士Zガンダム

フォウ・ストーリー

Foam's story

そして戦士に…



著 遠藤明範

原作 矢立 肇
富野由悠季

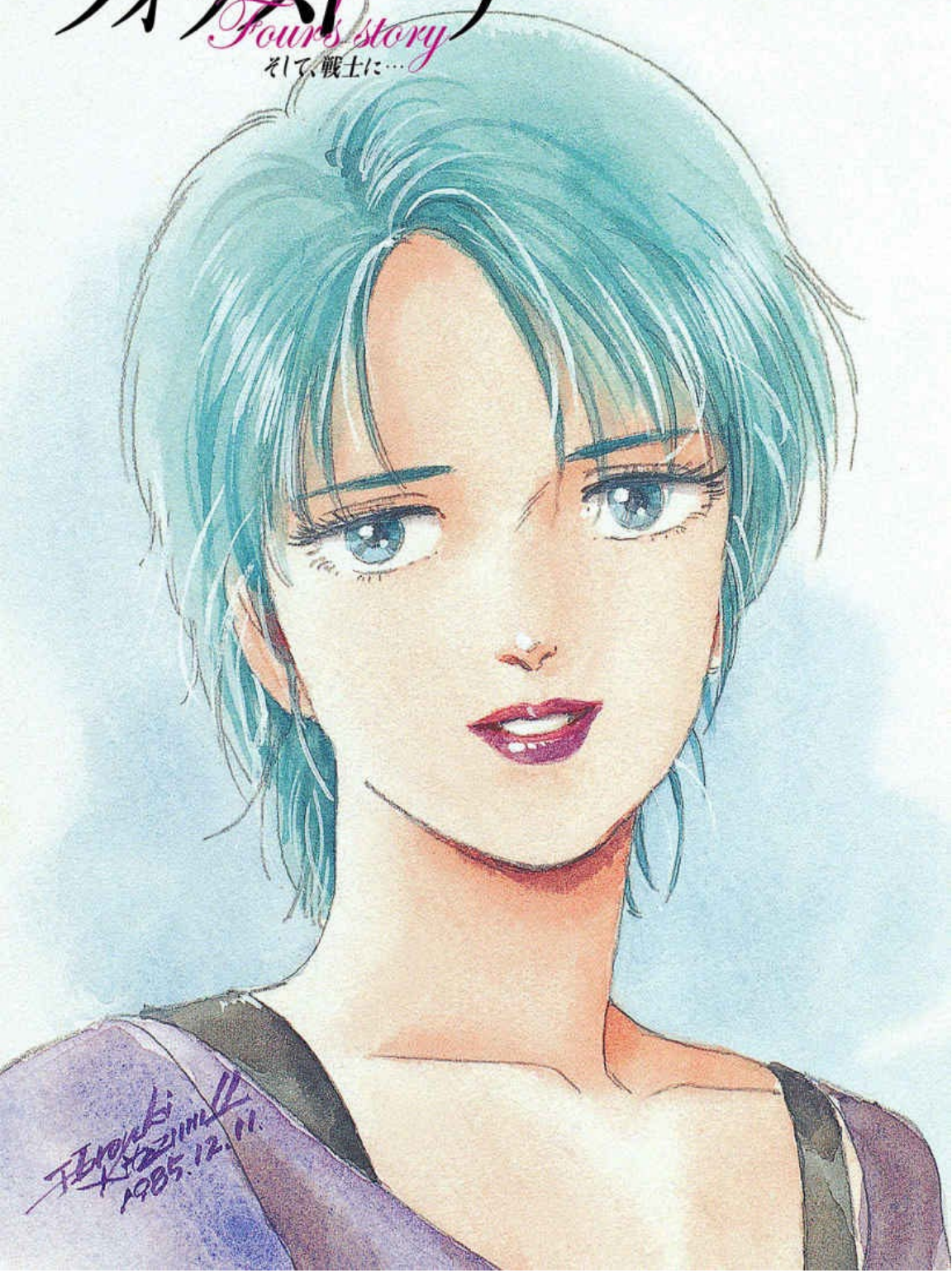
角川スニーカー文庫

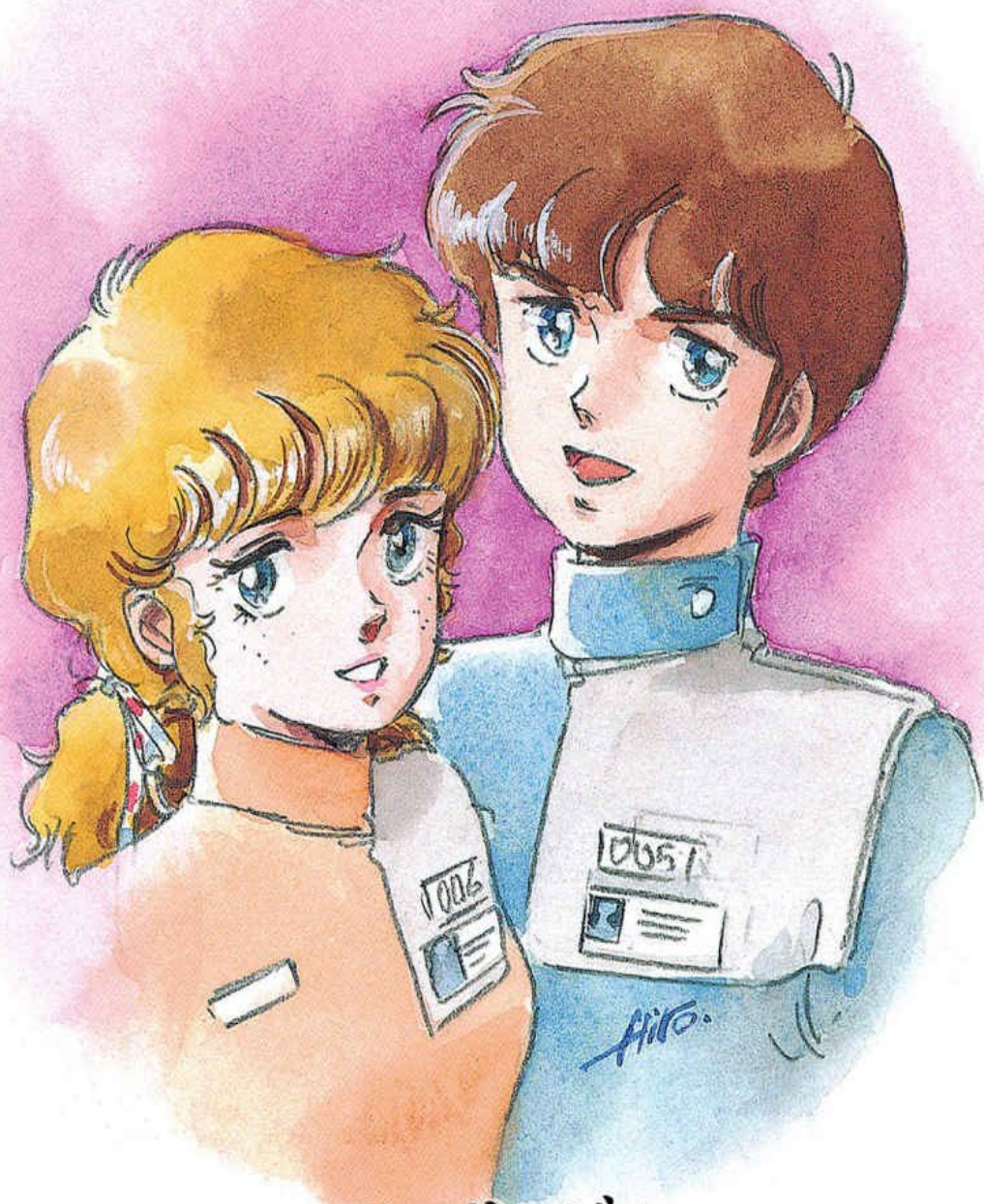
機動戦士Zガンダム

フォウ・ストーリー

Fo's story

そして、戦士に...





アマリ&ジル

Copyright © 1986, 2001 by Akinori Endoh
Copyright © Sotsu and Sunrise

This book is a fan translation.

Support the official release if there ever is one.

Names, characters, organizations, places, events and incidents may differ slightly from official names at the time of translation. Updated versions of this will be made to reflect changes at a future date.

Kadokawa Sneaker Bunko "MOBILE SUIT Z GUNDAM FOUR STORY:
AND AS A SOLDIER..."
Released 1986.02.10

For more information, or to read more Gundam novels and manga :
<http://www.zeonic-republic.net>
<http://www.patreon.com/zeonicscans>

Novel Translation and Book Layout by Zeonic|Scanlations

First Edition: May 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Test Subject Number 004	006
Chapter 2	Loneliness of the Soul.....	014
Chapter 3	Awakening	025
Chapter 4	Sacrifice	034
Chapter 5	Escape	044
Chapter 6	Sortie	051
Afterword		

Chapter.01

Test Subject Number 004

1

The girl was called Kyou.

The young staff member by her side added that it was a nickname from her time at the reformatory and that she herself didn't know her real name.

With her short hair, the girl appeared submissive, but her gaze subtly scanned her surroundings with a sharpness that indicated her instincts were on high alert. It was a testament to the harsh life she had endured.

Dr. Murasame wasn't particularly fond of the Japanese-sounding name "Kyou."

"Can you think of a better name, Namika?"

Namika Cornell, the woman he addressed, was a lead researcher at the institute and enjoyed the doctor's trust. She pushed her silver-framed glasses up and suggested modestly,

"How about Four?"

Four—4. It meant the fourth subject since the Murasame Lab's founding.

"Ah, Four. I like the sound of that."

Though it was just an idea from Namika, Dr. Murasame seemed to like the name Four. At the lab, the doctor's decisions were absolute. From that moment on, the girl's name became Four.

"You can take the surname Murasame. Four Murasame. That's your name from today."

The doctor smiled, but his face only appeared as a twisted, wrinkled mess to the girl.

Dr. Murasame showed his high expectations for her as a subject by giving her his surname, though it mattered little to her.

"Four Murasame... Well, it doesn't matter. I don't know my real name anyway," the girl muttered in her mind.

"Let's introduce Four to her fellow subjects." Dr. Murasame said, pressing the buzzer on his desk intercom. The door to his office opened. Urged on by a junior staff member, a young boy and girl entered the room. They both appeared Caucasian and showed no traces of Eastern heritage like Four. Their nervousness was palpable.

Namika introduced them with professional precision.

The chestnut-haired boy, Subject 005, was Jill Ratokie. He offered a slight nod to Four, who paid him no mind.

The blonde-pigtailed girl, Subject 006, was Amari Garfield. Her attempt at a smile was marred by tension.

Four thought, for some reason, that Amari would look even better with ribbons on her pigtails, but she didn't show further interest in the two.

Seeking distraction, Four glanced out the window, where a half-mast flag on the central pole in the garden caught her attention.

The week before, a subject with a number just before hers had perished during training. The half-mast flag was not a tribute but rather a silent admonition from Dr. Murasame: failure to focus on training could lead to a similar fate.

"What an unpleasant way to do things," Four murmured to herself as she looked at the flag hanging on the pole.

"But there won't be a next half-mast flag for me."

Seeing the pitifully tense Jill and Amari, she couldn't help but think that.

"I'll survive no matter what. There's no way I'm going to die in a place like this."

Four steeled herself with determination. After all, compared to the brutal six years she had experienced, life as a subject was nothing to fear.

Her gaze, cold and unyielding, remained fixed on the half-mast flag.

2

Four and her companions, the now trio of test subjects, were assigned a communal living space. The modest room contained bunk beds on either end, and a large window showcased the research facility's lush garden. A young Japanese woman named Ruiko Osaki guided them to their new quarters, tasked with overseeing their day-to-day needs.

"Please let me know if you need anything or experience any issues. That's what I'm here for," she said with a candid charm, which Four found endearing.

Ruiko wasn't part of the military or research staff; she had been assigned to Murasame Lab as a caretaker.

She patiently detailed the rules and demonstrated the proper use of the various amenities within their shared living space before efficiently providing them with clothing, footwear, and bedding.

"That should cover everything. Don't hesitate to contact me in my room if you have any questions or concerns," she said, poised to exit. However, she paused at the door and turned back to the group. "I almost forgot to mention, you're all a team now, so you must help each other out," she said, grinning warmly before departing.

Four and her companions stood around, looking a bit lost when the previously silent Amari suddenly piped up.

"Let's decide where we're going to sleep."

"Good idea," Jill agreed, sounding relieved.

Thanks to Ruiko, the tension between Amari and Jill had eased.

Seeing their smiling faces, Four felt a twinge of annoyance. She quickly clambered onto the top bunk on the room's left side.

"I'm taking this spot. You two can figure out the rest yourselves," she said.

Amari and Jill exchanged looks, and Jill addressed Four.

"Like Ruiko just said, we're all a team now."

"Are you accusing me of being selfish? You two seem quite carefree. Do you think we're at some sort of summer camp? We're test subjects. Our bodies could be subjected to experimentation, and we might not survive the training. Don't you get that?"

Four's harsh words silenced the two. Although they were already well aware of their situation, it was a reality they didn't want to confront.

The atmosphere in the room grew heavy.

Four realized she might have crossed a line but didn't feel compelled to apologize. She lay on the bed, facing the wall. A slim, paper-sized mirror hung on the pristine surface. Her reflection appeared distorted and grotesque.

Lost in her thoughts, Four reminisced about that fateful day...

During the war between the Principality of Zeon and the Earth Federation – the so-called One Year War – Tokyo, the largest city in the Far East, was destroyed by Zeon's colony drop, and the aftermath reached Four's hometown.

Amid the chaos, her family was torn apart.

When she regained consciousness, Four had lost her memory—whether from physical trauma or psychological damage. Her past had been wiped clean. She didn't know who to search for, nor her own identity.

Four roamed the desolate city without purpose.

One morning, a week later, Four realized that no matter how much she cried, no one would come to her rescue. Finding solace in others was impossible.

That day, Four cut her shoulder-length hair with rusty scissors. Her reflection in the cracked hand mirror looked like a young boy.

Though heartbroken, she refused to cry. Four resolved to forge a life of self-reliance, depending on no one but herself.

The sound of knocking on the door interrupted Four's reverie. Ruiko entered with tea and apple pie for the trio.

"Dr. Murasame sent these as a treat. Please enjoy them together."

"Wow, this looks scrumptious!"

Amari's eyes lit up upon seeing the apple pie on the table. It had been months since they'd enjoyed any sweet treats.

"Four, come down here before the tea gets cold."

Even though Ruiko called out, Four turned away.

She was skeptical of the offering from Dr. Murasame, doubting the sly man would genuinely display such thoughtfulness.

"I'll pass. I don't want to risk it having some kind of drug in it."

Hearing Four's words, Jill and Amari froze, their hands hovering above the pie.

"Test subjects are treated like lab rats. Everybody knows they mix drugs in with the food."

"Four, don't be ridiculous. Dr. Murasame wanted to show appreciation for your hard work and ordered these from a local bakery."

"I'm not naive enough to accept that explanation."

"Four..."

Ruiko walked toward the bunk bed, her expression filled with sorrow. Four's heart skipped a beat when she saw the tears in Ruiko's eyes but she didn't let her emotions show.

"Four, apologize to Ruiko."

Jill spoke up, expressing both her and Amari's sentiments. This display of righteousness irked Four.

"Mind your own business! You're not the boss of me!"

Four snapped and pulled the covers over her head.

"I'm not wrong. People don't have good intentions. Behind every act of kindness, there's always a cruel twist waiting..."

Four's stubbornness held firm. Six years of hardship had armored her heart with distrust.

Ruiko sighed, then offered a resigned smile.

"Four, I'll save your share. If you change your mind, it'll be here."

After Ruiko left, Jill and Amari hesitated for a moment, looking at the tea and apple pie on the table.

"Should we eat?"

"Yeah..."

The pair sat down and reached for the apple pie. Jill discreetly observed Four's behavior. She thought about speaking to Four but decided against it. By then, Four had already drifted off to sleep.

3

As humankind constructed space colonies to serve as a new habitat and ventured from Earth into the vast cosmos, an innovative idea took shape.

To adapt to the vastness of space, humans would evolve.

These evolved humans were called "Newtype."

As space colonization began, traces of Newtype potential were observed among the space migrants. However, it was not until the One Year War that the existence of Newtypes became widely recognized.

In space, these colonies were known as a "Side," and Sides numbered from 1 to 7. A young boy named Amuro Ray, a resident of Side 7, piloted the Earth Federation's mobile suit, the Gundam, and controlled it with ease. From then on, Amuro fought through the One Year War as a pilot for the Earth Federation.

After the war, Amuro was celebrated as a symbol of the Newtype.

Meanwhile, the Principality of Zeon boasted a pilot known as Char Aznable, the "Red Comet," who was also considered a Newtype.

Intrigued by Newtypes, Zeon established the Flanagan Agency and covertly pursued research.

The Flanagan Agency consisted of Dr. Flanagan and several assistants. They succeeded in unlocking the Newtype abilities of a girl named Lalah Sune and built mobile armors equipped with a psycommu system (a remote weapon system controlled via brainwaves) such as the Elmeth and the Braw Bro. After the war, the agency was disbanded, and Dr. Flanagan's assistants scattered.

The Earth Federation was also interested in Newtypes. In the war's aftermath, they founded research centers around the globe to accelerate their lagging Newtype research and assumed control over them. As expected, the key personnel originated from the former Flanagan Agency.

For the researchers, affiliations with Zeon or the Federation were irrelevant; all that mattered were adequate research facilities and funding.

A Newtype research facility was established in the Far East: the Murasame Labs.

After the war, Amuro gained notoriety as a Newtype, and people took a great interest in the existence of Newtypes. In this context, the various Newtype research facilities pressed on with their efforts to decipher the Newtype phenomenon.

Nonetheless, the landscape shifted in a matter of years. Amuro's abstract Newtype theory lost its appeal to the masses. No other Newtypes emerged to follow in his footsteps, and he gradually faded from memory.

Around the same time, the Newtype research facilities faced a significant turning point: the initiation of artificial Newtype creation, or in other words, the development of enhanced humans, the Cyber-Newtype.

If natural Newtypes failed to materialize, human intervention would be employed to create them.

This was a strong demand from the Federation's military leadership. Amuro's achievements during the One Year War left an indelible impression on the military's old guard. As a result, expectations for Cyber-Newtype pilots were high, and the growing anti-Earth Federation movements in the background couldn't be ignored.

Given these circumstances, it became an urgent matter for the Murasame Labs to produce Cyber-Newtype.

All research facilities faced the same problem: gathering test subjects for Cyber-Newtype trials was challenging.

It wasn't just about the numbers. Moreover, they couldn't openly recruit test subjects due to the high risk of failure and fatal accidents. So orphans of war without family ties were the obvious choice.

Four was among the selected test subjects.

Four, who had gotten into trouble with a group of delinquents, had been placed in a reformation facility. That's when a member of the Murasame Labs took an interest in her.

After undergoing various tests and being recognized for her Newtype potential, Four officially became a test subject.

Jill and Amari were test subjects who had joined through different routes.

At the Murasame Labs, these three were the only test subjects currently present. Consequently, their training was incredibly rigorous and demanding.

4

The sprawling expanse of the Murasame Labs boasted verdant lawns and state-of-the-art training facilities. Soldiers and researchers assigned to the institute often found themselves indulging in the amenities, working up a sweat when the urge arose.

For Four and her fellow test subjects, however, the training facilities served a different purpose. As part of their regimen, even the Cyber-Newtype needed to maintain a basic level of physical fitness to function as pilots. To foster this, a specialized training program was devised.

Supervising the test subjects' training was Sergeant Jink Hamil, a robust, average-height Caucasian man who sported a beret that suited him remarkably well.

"I don't believe in Newtypes or Cyber-Newtype for that matter," he declared from the outset. "My mission is to mold you rookies into bona fide mobile suit pilots. Nothing else matters."

Clad in the uniform of the Earth Federation military, Sergeant Jink exuded the air of a battle-hardened soldier. Four didn't think she could ever grow fond of this man, who seemed to emanate the essence of blood and gunpowder.

Sergeant Jink's training was as punishing as his words. During a seemingly innocuous warm-up session, Four found herself vomiting from the intensity of the circuit training – a first for her.

"First, we'll undergo basic training to bolster your physical prowess," Sergeant Jink stated, giving a light smack to the slender chest of the test subject named Jill.

And so, the unyielding training persisted.

*I'm a Federation pilot ace,
Zaku and Dom, they can't keep pace,
But that Red Comet gives me chase.*

Sergeant Jink sang loudly as he ran, and Four and the others followed suit, imitating his song.

*I ride a Gundam, soar the sky
Zaku or Dom won't catch my eye
But that colony laser, I dread
Causes us a bit of trouble ahead*

For Four, the rigors of pilot training proved even more taxing than her Cyber-Newtype program.

However, young bodies recover quickly, and through persistent training, attributes such as power, stamina, and nimbleness gradually flourish.

In no time, Four emerged at the forefront of her peers, her voice rising in cadence with the melodies of their training anthems.

*No easy days in this military grind,
Jaburo today, tomorrow the Moon we'll find,
We'll rise and fall, Earth's pull left behind.*

5

"I struggle to grasp your reasoning, Doctor. While I acknowledge Four's potential, I fail to detect any Newtype attributes in the other two. I'm convinced Jill and Amari's training is unnecessary."

Namika voiced her thoughts as she presented a file of collected data. It was rare for her to speak so candidly to Dr. Murasame.

Dr. Murasame opened a drawer in his desk and took out a letter.

"This is a private message from Loren."

At the mention of Loren's name, Namika's expression soured. She detested the man.

Loren Nakamoto was a young scientist who had once been part of the Murasame Labs. When Namika was promoted to chief a year prior, he resented the notion of serving under her and relocated to the Augusta Labs in North America.

His male ego couldn't stomach the notion of reporting to a woman. So naturally, Namika loathed Loren, especially since he had expressed his feelings quite literally to her face.

Dr. Murasame, having recognized Loren's talent, didn't try to hold him back. Nonetheless, Loren continued to admire Dr. Murasame and occasionally sent letters even after moving to the Augusta Labs.

The letters divulged information about the Augusta Labs. Though the two institutes maintained a close rapport, this amounted to a breach of classified information. Loren's lack of professional discretion was apparent in his casual sharing of such details.

However, the information Loren provided was invaluable to Dr. Murasame.

"According to his letter, Augusta Labs has acquired a subject named Rosamia Badam and is making great strides with her. Rosamia witnessed the colony drop during the One Year War. The memory of that event has remained with her as a trauma. The Augusta Labs saw an opportunity in that. Do you see where this is going, Namika?"

"No..."

"The Augusta Labs succeeded in awakening Rosamia's Newtype abilities by amplifying her traumatic memory of the falling colony. Can't you sense something?"

"I apologize, but could you clarify for me?"

"It concerns Four."

"Four?"

“She has no memory. The One Year War robbed her of that. We’ll use that, just like the Augusta exploited Rosamia’s traumatic memory.”

“Oh, I see...”

Finally, Namika connected the dots.

“We’ll have Jill and Amari play a role in this as well.”

“How so?”

“You’ll see.”

The doctor cut his words short at that point. Namika knew that expecting him to say more would be futile. So, she had no choice but to leave the room.

Chapter.02

Loneliness of the Soul

1

Amari was bedridden with a fever when Four returned to their barracks after three days of solitary confinement.

“Number Four” – that’s what the soldiers liked to call Four. Four hated being called that, which led to a scuffle with one of Sergeant Jink’s subordinates.

Hitting the soldier had been excessive. However, it was undoubtedly an overreaction. Unfortunately, neither Namika’s mediation nor Jink’s leniency could spare her the three days in solitary confinement.

Four had been plagued by unpleasant emotions these past few days. The primary cause was the sensor they were ordered to wear around the clock. It wasn’t even allowed to be removed during bathing. Four felt disheartened, knowing they were under constant surveillance.

As they got used to the training, their daily life became monotonous, which was also distressing.

The culmination of these factors eventually ignited an emotional eruption within Four.

“Mama... Mama...”

Amari muttered in delirium.

Jill, who was attending to her by the bedside, wiped Amari’s neck with a damp towel.

“You’re so kind,” Four remarked from the top bunk, her words laced with sarcasm.

Jill looked up and smiled, oblivious to Four’s true intentions. Four fixed her gaze on the ceiling, her expression rigid. Jill’s smile in such moments was what Four disliked the most.

“These kids... are really something,” Four found it peculiar. Over the months of sharing a room with Jill and Amari, she had always felt this way.

How could Jill and Amari be so naïve? It was astounding that they had survived this long.

War orphans didn’t help each other; it was a constant struggle to stay alive. At least, that’s how it had been for Four. This made the almost angelic innocence of Jill and Amari all the more difficult to comprehend.

Perhaps they had been taken in by a well-equipped orphanage, relying on others to shape their destiny. But, unfortunately, Four thought that kind of naïveté seemed to linger around the pair.

"In the end, they're just pampered children," Four thought, feeling her irritation subside.

"Four, what made you volunteer?" Jill inquired out of the blue.

Four sighed internally, thinking, "Here we go again." Jill was so young and nosy, always attempting to delve into others' private thoughts whenever it suited her.

"I dunno... I had nowhere else to go," Four responded icily, with intent.

It wasn't dishonesty. Four had been tired of wandering and wanted to settle down somewhere, but in the end, nothing suited her.

"Do you believe in Newtypes, Four?"

"I know about Amuro Ray. But I can't relate. I can't imagine people changing just because they go to space."

"I believe in it. If I can become a Newtype through training, I want to try. That's why I volunteered."

"And what would you do as a Newtype?"

"Well... I want to change the world."

"So, you'll become a politician as a Newtype?"

"No, not like that. I doubt politics alone can truly change the world."

"Hmm..."

Four thought this was an unusual sentiment for Jill, not something a child would typically express. Four climbed down the ladder to the floor. Amari was breathing peacefully in her sleep. Her fever appeared to have subsided. As Jill dampened a towel in the washbasin, he remarked:

"Amari believes that if she becomes a Newtype, she'll be able to find the whereabouts of her long-lost family members."

"That sounds more like a psychic than a Newtype. Are Newtypes really that versatile?"

"I don't know... but Amuro Ray said on a TV show that their perception dramatically improves."

"I don't believe in such stories," Four remarked, walking over to the window and drawing the curtains partially open.

Outside the window, a trapezoidal-shaped mountain loomed. The evening rendered it a dark silhouette against the vermilion sky. Four liked that view.

"I don't care if I'm a Newtype or a psychic. I want to make everyone happy with my own power."

Four had a strong aversion to the word "happiness."

"You're still just a child," Four thought, promptly shutting the curtains and trying to leave the room. Noticing this, Jill sprang to his feet and seized Four's arm.

"Ouch!"

"Sorry."

Jill instantly let go of her arm.

"Did I say something that offended you?"

"Not really..."

Four glanced at Amari. Her breathing was calm. Jill studied Four.

"Four... you never open up about yourself. You don't have to if you don't want to. But remember, we're a team."

Four remained silent and reached for the doorknob.

Even if she wanted to share, she knew nothing of her own past. The words were on the tip of her tongue, but she didn't want pity.

If Jill knew her situation, he would probably treat her with kindness. But sometimes, kindness and consideration can wound people. Unfortunately, this boy likely didn't understand that. Not someone who had thrived on the goodwill of others...

As Four opened the door, Amari murmured in a raspy voice.

"Ruiko... big sister..."

It was delirious rambling.

"Amari," Jill sat beside her and placed the damp cloth on her perspiring forehead. Amari called Ruiko's name repeatedly.

"Amari thinks of Ruiko as an older sister."

"Should I fetch her? She's in the kitchen, right?"

"No, we can't. She's on a break. Her little brother is unwell. Ruiko is having a tough time too."

Amari's pale hand wandered through the air as if seeking something from under the covers. Jill firmly grasped that hand.

Amari slowly opened her eyes.

"Jill."

"How are you feeling?"

"Okay... I'm fine."

"I'm glad."

"Hey... even if I fall asleep, will you promise not to let go of my hand?"

"Alright, I won't. So, get some rest now."

"Okay."

Amari closed her eyes. Her breathing soon became steady. Jill, keeping his promise, held her hand and nestled close.

The pair resembled genuine siblings, which stirred envy within Four.

But when she realized the fragility of her own heart, she returned to her usual self.

"I'm going to find Namika. She can give Amari an injection to reduce her fever."

With that, Four left the room without looking back.

2

The endless expanse of the galaxy stretched out before her.

When Four looked down, she could see the Earth's contour gleaming golden as it caught the sun's light.

The sensation of floating in the vast and limitless space exhilarated her. At times like these, she felt an affinity for the cosmos.

Suddenly, with a soft whoosh, the cosmic vista vanished.

"What happened?" Four couldn't help but raise her voice in surprise.

"Apologies, that was our error. Please, continue."

A man's voice came through the helmet's receiver, and once again, the surrounding view returned to the vastness of space.

Four enjoyed mobile suit simulations. Aside from the seat, the supporting arm, and the control panel, nothing obstructed her view. Thanks to the panoramic monitor, she could savor the liberating feeling of her body floating in space.

For some, that floating sensation was disconcerting. It made them feel as if they had been cast adrift in the middle of space.

But Four was different. She felt as though she and the universe had become one.

Even so, it was nothing more than an illusion created by the computer.

Two green Hi-Zack mobile suits approached as if to encircle Four's machine. They were developed by the Earth Federation Forces after the One Year War.

Four, too, was piloting a Hi-Zack.

Each machine reached out, making contact with Four's armor. In real battles, mobile suit pilots would converse like this. Jill's cheerful voice rang through the helmet's receiver.

"Four, are you properly scanning for enemies?"

"Do you have the luxury to worry about others? If you don't back off, you'll be shot down."

"No way, I want us all to stick together."

Amari replied with a sweet, spoiled tone.

Mobile suit simulations were Amari's Achilles' heel. She could never adapt to the floating sensation, no matter how many times she tried. The most pressing issue was her inability to pull the trigger.

It wasn't an ethical issue, like the act of killing people. She was simply terrified. The simulation was meant to help her overcome this fear, but it didn't seem to have any effect on Amari.

"Can someone like her really become a pilot?" Even Four couldn't help but worry.

"Hey, Four. Why are you named Four?"

Amari asked the question, not out of curiosity but as a way to distract herself from her anxiety.

"I don't know. It was just given to me."

"Who gave it to you? Your father?"

"I don't know, and I don't care! I hate this name!"

"Really? I like it, though."

"I think it's a good name too. It has a nice ring to it."

Jill interjected in agreement.

"You would say that, Jill."

"Both of you, just drop it," Four said, visibly irritated, when a rapidly approaching light caught her eye. She quickly focused the monitor to reveal a red Hi-Zack.

The red Hi-Zack fired a volley of beam rifle shots.

"Do you really have time for pointless chatter?!"

Sergeant Zink's voice cut through the noise.

As the red Hi-Zack passed by, it kicked Amari's machine. The impact was felt precisely in Amari's cockpit, a testament to the perfection of the simulation system.

Four's helmet receiver picked up Amari's scream. Her Hi-Zack fired the beam rifle wildly. Panic-stricken, Amari couldn't differentiate between friend and foe.

"Amari, calm down!"

Jill's Hi-Zack, attempting to get closer, was hit and exploded, vanishing into the vacuum of space.

In the simulation, when a training machine is destroyed, its image disappears from space. In the meantime, the pilot goes through post-destruction procedures in the cockpit.

However, Amari became disoriented, believing she had actually destroyed Jill's Hi-Zack.

"I killed Jill! I killed Jill!"

Hearing Amari's sobbing cries, Four turned her machine around.

She tried to approach Amari's machine, but she kept firing her beam rifle.

"Stop it, Amari!"

At that moment, a violent vibration shook Four's cockpit. The red Hi-Zack zipped past her field of vision.

"Sergeant Zink?!"

By the time she fumbled to pull the trigger, it was too late. With a dull sound, the panoramic view monitor went dark – she had been destroyed.

At the same time, Four opened the cockpit hatch and leaped out.

Upon exiting into the hallway, she saw the simulation rooms lined up.

Discarding her helmet, Four opened the door at the very end.

Amari floated in the vastness of space, crying.

"Get out, Amari!"

Four grabbed Amari's arm and pulled her out. She laid her on the sofa, removed her helmet, and loosened her normal suit's collar.

Finally, Sergeant Zink, the crew members, and Jill arrived.

"Four, who told you that you could quit?"

Sergeant Zink glared at Four.

"I didn't intervene because I cared about Amari. I simply stopped her training because it was getting in the way of my own."

"Really now..."

Sergeant Zink removed the black whip from Four's shoulder. Standing next to them, Jill looked at Four with a surprised expression.

"You're quite driven, Four. I'd personally like to challenge you one-on-one. I'm sure there's much I could learn."

It was evident that Sergeant Zink was trying to provoke Four, but Four didn't back down.

"Your humility is admirable. Shall we do this here and now? Or in our mobile suits?"

"Heh... I seem to have been underestimated."

"You're the one who proposed the challenge, Sergeant."

"Understood. We'll settle this another time."

"Yes, sir."

"You've got guts, Four."

"It's all thanks to your training, Sergeant."

In front of the two, Jill could only watch the exchange unfold.

"Well then, Sergeant. Four Murasame. If you'll excuse me, I'll complete my twenty laps around the grounds."

Four saluted with exaggerated formality and turned on her heel.

Sergeant Zink clicked his tongue and watched her go.

Upon reaching the grounds, Four ran without a single thought, determined to keep going.

3

"Four has no memories?"

Jill uttered those words and fell silent while Amari's face tensed up.

Seeing their reactions, it was Ruiko who had brought up the topic that appeared even more surprised.

Amari had been carried from the mobile suit simulation room to the infirmary. Ruiko, who had accompanied her, was engaged in small talk with Jill to help him calm down. That's when the conversation shifted to Four.

Ruiko had assumed the two were aware of the circumstances surrounding Four's memory.

"You didn't know?"

"I hadn't heard anything about that."

"Neither have I."

At that point, Ruiko briefly explained the background of Four's arrival at the Murasame Research Institute. This information was well-known among the staff members.

"I must apologize to Four..."

Jill's face paled, and he stood up from his chair and rushed out of the infirmary.

Amari often shared her life story. Jill, who was usually a listener, occasionally talked about himself as well. However, Four never participated in these conversations. But, of course, that was to be expected. After all, Four had no past to speak of...

"...Oh, how foolish I've been."

Jill cursed himself.

Having finished her punishment run, Four was half-naked, wiping the sweat off her body when Jill entered the room and inadvertently caught sight of her.

"Oh!"

Startled, Four quickly covered her chest with a bath towel.

"Get out!"

"Sorry, sorry!"

Jill hurriedly darted out into the hallway. Then, after a short while, he heard Four's voice through the door, saying it was okay to come in.

Jill cautiously entered the room, finding Four already changed into her usual clothes, gazing out the window at the mountains. Jill stared at her in silence.

Four felt the gaze and turned around.

"I didn't know."

Jill said just that and fell silent.

Four didn't understand what Jill was trying to say. She attempted to ignore Jill and climb up to the top bunk.

"I just found out that you lost your memory."

At Jill's words, Four stopped and climbed back down.

"I feel like I've wronged you, asking about your name and all."

Four realized that was what Jill meant.

"So what? Are you going to show me some pity and shed tears?"

"No, it's just..."

Jill hesitated, which only fueled Four's anger.

"If you have something to say, just spit it out!"

"I want to apologize to you!"

Perhaps startled by Four's intensity, Jill reflexively said that.

Four understood Jill's feelings well. He genuinely wanted to apologize. That's precisely why Four's anger grew.

"Leave me alone! It has nothing to do with you!"

"Four!"

"I don't need any memories!"

"That's a lie."

"What's a lie?"

"Be more honest with yourself, Four!"

"Shut up! I hate you!"

With that, Four stormed out of the room. Amari, who was in the hallway, nearly collided with her and hastily moved against the wall.

"Four?"

By the time Amari called out, Four had already disappeared around the corner.

Jill emerged from the room with a somber expression.

"Where's Four?"

"She went outside, it seems."

"I see..."

Jill bit his lip. The bitterness of her thoughts didn't seem to reach Amari.

4

"Please give me my own room."

Four appealed directly to Dr. Murasame.

"Oh? Why is that?"

Dr. Murasame closed the file he had been reading and placed his reading glasses on the desk.

"I can't stand living with others. I hate it."

Behind Four, Namika sat on a guest sofa, organizing documents. Her hands moved quickly, but every now and then, she shot a sharp glance at Four's back.

"I've always lived alone. I plan to continue doing so."

"Are you planning to fight the war alone as well?"

"Of course, I'll follow military regulations. I'm not that arrogant. I am simply expressing my own beliefs. Besides..."

Four glanced at Namika, who was behind her.

"I am a person undergoing training to become a Newtype. I think it would be better for my training if I were mentally stable. It would save the instructors some trouble as well."

"So, you want to be alone for that reason?"

"Yes."

"Hmm..."

Dr. Murasame swiveled in his black leather chair and crossed his legs. This was his habit when deep in thought.

"It was rather unnatural to have two women and one man together in the first place."

Dr. Murasame changed the subject.

"I didn't put you test subjects in the same room for any ulterior motives. You'll be training together for a long time, so I thought it would be best if you got used to each other. However, it seems that time has passed."

He called Namika over.

"What is it?"

Namika stood next to Four.

"Arrange for Jill to move to a single room."

Upon hearing those words, Four's eyes widened in disbelief.

"Doctor, I'm the one who wants to move to a single room!"

However, Dr. Murasame's attention had already shifted elsewhere.

"Namika, about that experimental report..."

He stood up and headed toward a bookshelf in the corner of the room.

Namika whispered to Four.

"It's useless. The doctor never changes his decisions."

With that, Namika walked over to join Dr. Murasame.

Four stood rooted in place. If Jill moved to a single room, that would mean...

Frustration swelled within her. The only way Four could express her feelings was to strike the desk with her fist before leaving the room.

Dr. Murasame, who had returned to his desk, glanced at the door left ajar.

"I received a report that the three test subjects were getting along well."

"Yes, that was the case..."

"Four is prone to emotional swings. So they are bound to have disagreements from time to time."

"Could it be the result of the drug administration..."

"Don't be foolish."

Dr. Murasame lightly scolded Namika but also thought that perhaps the drug administration cycle was too short. However, he voiced a completely different concern.

"Stop monitoring Jill. Inform the person in charge."

With that, Dr. Murasame chuckled bitterly, realizing that his thoughts were becoming increasingly scattered. He wondered if he, too, was getting old...

"Why is it only Jill moving to a single room?"

"Amari, don't pressure Ruiko. It's a decision made by Dr. Murasame."

"Then I'll go ask the doctor myself!"

"Amari!"

"It's just moving to another building. Our training stays the same."

"No! It's not the same if we're not always together!"

Hearing Amari's cries and Jill and Ruiko's consoling voices, Four, lying in bed, buried her face in the pillow and covered her ears. Still, she could hear Amari's sobbing. Overwhelmed, Four got up.

"Enough already! Can't you see I'm trying to sleep?"

Amari looked at Four with pleading eyes.

"Come with me to the doctor, Four! You want to stay with Jill too, don't you?"

Amari's eyes were filled with sadness, which pained Four. It would have been easier for Four to be blamed than to be looked at with such eyes.

"I already asked the doctor. I told him to move Jill to another room."

Hearing Four's words, Amari's eyes widened in shock, and the room seemed to freeze.

"Why?"

Her voice a mere whisper, Amari asked.

"Why would you say such a thing?"

Four threw off her bedding and jumped to the floor without using the ladder.

"Jill's a softie, you know. So I thought it'd be better for him to sleep alone."

"You're horrible. What's so wrong with us living together happily? Why do you have to interfere? If you don't like it, you should be the one to leave!"

Amari clung to Four and pounded her chest with both fists. She must have relied on Jill a lot, as her distress was extreme.

"Stop it, Amari."

Ruiko grabbed Amari's wrists from behind and pulled her away from Four. Amari collapsed onto the bed, crying.

Jill looked down in pain. It wasn't just being called a softie that hurt; she was shocked to know she had caused the conflict. Four understood this well.

"I hurt everyone."

Over the past few months, Four had been surrounded by human kindness. The only reason she had endured the harsh training was the gentle camaraderie.

The thought of her words and actions hurting these kinds of people was unbearable.

In that sense, Four had become more human. She couldn't have imagined feeling this way when she first met Jill and Amari. Back then, Four could hurt anyone without a second thought.

Desperate to escape the situation, Four bolted from the room.

"Wait, Four."

Ruiko followed.

As for Amari, still sobbing on the bed, Jill couldn't find the right words to comfort her.

5

Four reclined on a bench beneath the wisteria arbor, her gaze meandering between the research institute's buildings. Ordinarily, her beloved mountain would claim that space.

Yet, today, an oppressive shroud of rain clouds obscured her view.

"I wonder if it will rain."

The words escaped her unbidden.

Sensing another's presence, Four cast her eyes sideways and discovered Ruiko standing there.

When had she arrived?

"Four, why did you say such a thing? That you asked the doctor..."

"I was the one who created the problem."

"I know. But you don't have to be the villain all by yourself."

Four traced her fingers over the sensor affixed to her neck. The notion of her emotions being cataloged was maddening. That fury, too, would be documented. Remaining composed was the finest method to irk the chief researcher Namika, Four reasoned.

"We've become too used to it. That's why we complain about something as minor as having separate rooms. At first, we were like lab rats, constantly fearing being dissected on an experiment table. Every day, just being alive was a blessing."

"People change. We can't fault them for that."

"No one casts blame. It is merely self-reproach, I feel."

A corner of the sky faintly brightened, and the rain began to fall gently.

"Poor child."

Ruiko murmured.

Four, distracted by the thunder, missed her words.

"What did you say?"

"You're probably afraid of being happy. That's why you try to destroy it yourself. That's why you're pitiful..."

The rain intensified. The wisteria leaves rustled under the onslaught.

"Are you happy, Ruiko?"

Four inquired, studying her.

"I guess so. My brother isn't starving. That's happiness. But..."

"But, what?"

"Well, perhaps happiness cannot be attained without a measure of sacrifice."

"Some measure of sacrifice?"

Ruiko tilted her face toward the rain-heavy heavens.

"I ponder whether universal happiness could be achieved if humankind evolved by venturing into the cosmos. If such is the case, I'd yearn to travel amongst the stars."

"A Newtype, huh?"

Four, too, peered up at the sodden sky. Beyond that visible realm, several billion souls dwelt. The thought felt peculiar.

The wind picked up.

"It seems like there's a storm coming," Ruiko murmured.

Chapter.03

Awakening

1

The situation was growing increasingly urgent.

The Anti-Earth Federation organization AEUG had launched a surprise attack on Side 7's Green Oasis, plunging them into a de facto state of war with the Earth Federation Forces.

Names like Gundam MK-II and Argama couldn't help but reach the ears of Four and the others. The feeling was that the flames of war were inching ever closer.

With things having reached this point, the Murasame Labs resumed development on their halted prototype mobile suits. By coming under the Titans' umbrella, they had succeeded in securing research funding.

Among the space emigrants – the Spacenoids – a movement to preserve Earth's environment was gaining momentum. The idea was that all of humanity should live in space colonies, allowing Earth's nature to recover.

However, the Earth Federation government, bent on restoring Earth's nature while still living on the planet, saw the Spacenoids advocating for Earth's preservation as rebels. The Titans were formed within the Earth Federation Forces to suppress these rebels.

The Titans, an elite faction within the Earth Federation Forces, rapidly expanded their power, playing a pivotal role in the battle against the AEUG.

Newtype Labs under their control, including the Murasame Labs, had received notice from the Titans that if they didn't produce results, their support would be cut off.

The mobile suit factory adjacent to the Murasame Labs operated day and night at full capacity. The completion of the prototype mobile suit designated MRX-008 was imminent.

This prototype machine was colloquially known as the Psycho Gundam. A fusion of concepts from the Earth Federation's Gundam and the Principality of Zeon's psycommu system, the Psycho Gundam sought to exploit the benefits of both. Yet, it was plagued by a critical issue – an incomplete psycommu system.

In essence, this system extracted and amplified human reflexes electronically for machinery operation. However, the Murasame Labs psycommu system was riddled with flaws. The core interface between humans and machines malfunctioned.

This fatal flaw had already claimed the lives of three test subjects, their amplified thoughts backfiring and causing mental collapse, ultimately leading to their demise.

The invaluable data from that time was being applied to the 8th prototype machine.

2

As Four and the others prepared for their special training, they boarded a military helicopter. Four gazed at the rugged mountains below, a landscape she had always loved.

"I wish we could train in these snowy peaks," she mused, tightening her climbing boots' laces.

Next to her, Jill and Amari sat in silence, bundled in warm clothing. Amari intertwined her arm with Jill's, drawing herself closer. The pair resembled siblings more than lovers. Since their room change, Amari had sought a brotherly connection with Jill, who did not resist.

Four deliberately avoided looking at them, but Jill sensed her strained avoidance.

"Four..."

Amari shot Four a glare as he attempted to speak, and Jill fell silent. Amari smiled in relief and nestled closer. This dynamic had persisted for weeks.

To an outsider, it might have appeared as a lighthearted rivalry between two girls for a boy's attention. But for those involved, it was far from carefree.

Four experienced a sensation like a sediment accumulating in her heart, akin to a dull ache.

The cockpit hatch opened, and Sergeant Jink and Namika entered.

"We'll reach the first drop-off point in 20 minutes. Four, you're up first."

"Come to the back for a sensor check," Namika prompted, and Four stood up.

The exercise was described as cold-weather training. Laden with gear, Four and the others would parachute into one of three predetermined locations while a military helicopter dropped equipment for setting up camp at the central site. Their objective was to navigate the snowy mountains and reach the campsite.

Together, the three would establish a camp. A military helicopter would retrieve them if the weather permitted the following morning. In the event of a blizzard, they would have to descend the mountain on foot.

Amari had asked before the mission if all three had to meet at the rendezvous point, and Sergeant Jink had been clear in his response.

"One or two is fine, but it's easier for all three to set up the tent together."

Each of them was given a map and compass.

The drop-off and rendezvous points were marked on the map. They simply needed to confirm their direction with the compass and trek to the rendezvous point. The journey was estimated to take no more than half a day.

"How about that? Easier than a mobile suit mock battle, right?"

Amari grinned at the comment. On paper, it seemed true. She had envisioned it as a glorified picnic. But the naivety of her fantasy became clear when she glimpsed the towering mountain range through the helicopter window.

The peaks loomed menacingly as if defying humanity. Overwhelmed by the sight, Amari felt like weeping.

"Are we climbing to the top?"

"No way. I'm not reckless enough to kill trainees like that."

The lower mountains at the base of the range would serve as their training ground.

Despite their modest height, the terrain was treacherous. Failure to reach the rendezvous point could mean death by freezing or falling. This was the most physically demanding training they had faced thus far.

Yet, the research institute focused not on the physical challenge but on the mental manifestation of their abilities.

Four descended first at the initial drop-off point.

Her gear was standard for snowy mountains, and with no tent required, her backpack was light.

The rope ladder retracted quickly, and the military helicopter headed to the next drop-off point.

As the snow stirred up by the helicopter's rotors settled, the ridge came into view. A vast blue sky stretched overhead. Four felt reassured.

"I won't get lost like this. All I have to do is climb straight up."

She took out the map and compass for confirmation.

"Amari and Jill won't get lost either."

Four glanced at the ridge where the rendezvous point was once more.

After dropping off all three, the military helicopter descended towards a mountain hut at the foot of the mountain.

In the hut, Sergeant Jink and Namika relaxed.

"I don't handle the cold well," Namika confessed, settling in front of an old-fashioned stove.

"That's tough. It's supposed to get even colder."

"But it's sunny. There's still time before sunset."

"The weather changes quickly around here. This isn't like flatlands."

One of Sergeant Jink's subordinates poured them hot coffee. Namika sipped hers, exhaling white breaths.

"In an emergency, at least Four will come to help, right?"

"That's the plan, but whether we can find Four's location or not..."

"The sensor is accurate."

"Can we rely on it? The Minovsky particles are dense here."

Surprised, Namika stared intently at Sergeant Jink.

"Don't you know, Sergeant?"

"What?"

"The sensor picks up Four's brainwaves. Our system detects them. So, unlike electromagnetic waves, it's not affected by Minovsky particle interference."

"Didn't know such a convenient device existed."

"It's an application of the psycommu system! How can you be part of Murasame Lab without knowing that?"

Sergeant Jink snorted in annoyance and sipped his coffee.

"Anyway, please take care of Four."

With that, Namika stood up and retreated to the back room to check the equipment.

Jink clicked his tongue and watched Namika, bundled in her cold-weather gear, walk away.

3

It was the first time Four learned that the mountain weather could be so fickle.

As clouds gathered over the western peak, the sky quickly became obscured. Snow began to fall, and the ridge was shrouded in haze.

"Is it going to turn into a blizzard?"

Four wondered.

Wind-driven fog swept in, and visibility vanished within minutes. Even looking up, Four couldn't discern the ridge.

She felt the terror of winter mountains keenly. Suddenly, an image flashed through her mind: Amari taking large strides down a snow-covered slope.

She was crying.

"What is this?"

Another image followed.

A figure appearing and disappearing in the blizzard. It was Jill, silently scaling the rocky terrain with patches of bare rock exposed.

"Why can I see Amari and Jill?"

Four stood still in the blizzard.

The images of Amari and Jill alternated like a series of photographs. Four couldn't comprehend their meaning.

"Am I hallucinating?"

As she watched various images, Four had an intuition.

"Amari is going the wrong way!"

She couldn't explain why she felt this, but it seemed nearly certain. Four inadvertently spoke aloud.

"Amari, you're going the wrong way! Turn back!"

Amari stopped crying. She thought she heard a voice among the howl of the wind.

"Who...?"

When she heard it again, she realized it was Four's voice. It didn't seem to be carried by the wind; rather, it directly entered her mind. That description best captured the sensation.

"Is that you, Four? If I keep going down this slope, I'll fall into a crevasse in the snowfield?"

Indeed, that was what Four's voice had warned her of that. However, as if to reject Four's message, Amari continued down the slope. She was annoyed.

"Why can I hear Four's voice? Four just gets in the way of people. I can't trust her."

In her agitation, Amari forgot she was on a slippery icy slope.

The moment she took one step with her foot, she slipped. With a short, sharp cry, Amari slid down the slope, feet first, lying on her back.

Jill, who had been climbing the snowy slope, suddenly stopped. He had heard Amari's cry.

Next, he heard Four's voice.

"Four? I see. Is Amari okay? Got it."

Jill nodded in understanding and resumed walking.

Four's voice was imbued with such warmth and gentleness that it felt entirely natural. As Jill heard her voice, he was momentarily enveloped in a sense of serenity.

As Amari slid perilously down the slope, she spotted a tree trunk jutting from the snow below. Grasping her ice ax firmly, she swung it towards the trunk. The ax's blade bit into the wood and Amari's descent halted abruptly.

Exhaling deeply, Amari steadied herself.

Like Four's thoughts, a fleeting insight flickered through her mind. She sensed that Four was deeply concerned for her well-being.

"Stop interfering! It's your fault I slipped in the first place!"

Amari cursed bitterly as she regained her footing.

Next, an image of Jill resolutely climbing the snowy slope appeared in her thoughts.

"Jill?"

Four's thoughts expanded, reaching out to Amari.

"You're saying Jill would be sad if I died? That can't be true."

Amari knew that Jill was overwhelmed by her presence. Even so, he feigned ignorance.

"It's because I've been forcing kindness on Jill."

Facing the unseen Four, Amari admitted this.

What came to Amari's mind then was a gentle smile from Four.

"A team. You're saying we're a team? Yeah, that's right."

Four nodded earnestly. Before Amari realized it, her animosity towards Four had vanished.

When she looked up, the sky had cleared, revealing the ridge in sharp relief.

"Alright, Four. Let's meet at the rendezvous point."

With those words, Amari set forth, her steps now filled with confidence.

4

Watching Four's psycho-wave printed on the recording paper, Namika danced excitedly.

"Incredible! I've never seen such strong mental waves before!"

"Pushing humans to their limit and drawing out their maximum potential... What a wicked thing to do."

Sergeant Jink murmured, yet he was grinning, evidently relishing the circumstances.

"Out of all the test subjects to date, this result is unparalleled. Four is truly an extraordinary Newtype."

"More like a Cyber-Newtype, right?"

Namika shot Sergeant Jink a withering glare.

"She is a Newtype."

Namika detested the term 'Cyber-Newtype.'

"Four has fully awakened as a Newtype. There's no need to manipulate their memories any longer."

"Memories...?"

"Always scrutinizing people's words... Must you? Just be quiet for a moment."

From then on, Namika's attention shifted to Four's psycho-wave.

"What an insufferable woman, seriously..."

Sergeant Jink muttered in an even lower voice than before.

At the ridge of the rendezvous point, a red marker flag snapped and whipped about in the gusty wind. Upon spotting it, Jill's heart swelled with elation.

"We've made it, Four!"

Jill knew well that they had been able to reach this point thanks to Four's guidance.

"Jill!"

Turning towards the voice, he saw Amari ascending the slope. She twirled her ice axe as a signal.

"Amari!"

Jill took off his backpack to lighten his load and went down the slope to meet Amari.

The two embraced, their faces alight with joy.

"Aren't you tired?"

"I'm fine. Four watched over me. Where is she?"

"It doesn't look like she got here yet."

The pair returned to their bags together, unpacked them, and decided to wait for Four.

Roughly an hour later, Amari furrowed her brow.

"Something's strange."

Jill, who had been tamping down the ground to prepare a spot for their tent, glanced back at her.

"What's the matter?"

"I could hear Four's voice so distinctly until just recently, but since we arrived here, it's gone silent."

"Now that you mention it, you're right."

Four's thoughts that had been whispering to them were now silent. The two hadn't noticed because they had been busy preparing for the night.

The blizzard seemed to intensify. Anxiety gripped them. Then, a barely perceptible thought brushed their minds.

Jill... Amari...

It was the feeble voice of Four.

"Where are you, Four!"

Jill cried out.

Jill... Amari...

The two clearly heard Four's faint voice.

"Four!"

She must be nearby. But where?

Amari sat down on the spot. She resolved to focus her mind and attempt to sense Four's location. Then, closing her eyes, she strained to listen.

Jill also sat down next to Amari and closed his eyes.

"Don't panic. Four's voice will surely reach us. We just need to listen. There's no need to panic."

Jill tried to suppress his racing heart and feel Four's presence.

Snowy gusts swirled around them. How much time had elapsed? Suddenly, Jill shouted.

"There's Four!"

Jill and Amari opened their eyes almost in unison.

The two descended the slope, detecting the faint emanation of Four from a rocky area.

Four lay crumpled in a rocky nook roughly thirty meters below the rendezvous point.

"Hang in there, Four!"

Jill embraced Four, but her body was icy cold, and her face appeared lifeless.

"Is she... dead?"

"She's not dead!"

Jill hoisted Four onto his back. Amari supported her from behind, and together they trudged through knee-deep snow, scaling the slope with Four.

Four had expended her full psychic energy to guide the pair safely and now succumbed to overwhelming exhaustion. Summoning all her strength, she had climbed this far.

Upon realizing that the two had reached the meeting point unscathed, her tension gave way, and she collapsed on the spot.

The protruding rock had sheltered Four's body from the wind and snow, but if the pair hadn't detected her severely weakened psychic waves, she would have succumbed to the cold.

It was the strengthening of the two's psychic abilities that saved Four.

5

As night fell, the blizzard outside intensified, but it was warm and comfortable inside the tent.

Four had recovered her strength entirely.

"Hey, Jill..." Four spoke, sipping Amari's steaming soup.

"Would you mind telling me about your family and your hometown?"

"But, Four..."

"You don't have to worry about me."

"Alright..."

"I wish I had my own memories too. I want to know my past. Who my father and mother were, and how many siblings I had. The house I lived in, my real name..."

Amari observed the two. She didn't mind their conversation excluding her; they felt like a brother and sister to her. Simply being by their side was enough.

Four continued.

"But for now, I want to know about you, Jill."

"I understand, Four."

Jill finished the last of his soup.

"Where should I start..."

For a while, Jill remained silent. Four and Amari waited patiently for him to speak. Finally, he began.

"I lived in a port town called Belfast in Northern Ireland during the One Year War. My parents died in the war... My older sister took care of my younger sister and me. She was kind... She would often hug us, and she smelled like our mother."

Jill played with his empty cup.

"One day, a white warship arrived at the port. My sister said she was going to work, left us some money, and never came back... We waited for her... But she never returned..."

Jill struggled to suppress the emotions swelling within him as he continued to speak.

"When we ran out of money and were evicted from our rented home, my sister and I shined shoes to survive... We had no relatives to rely on. But even shoe shining had its territories, so we couldn't stay in one place for long and kept moving..."

Jill's hand, gripping the cup, quivered. Four knew he was crying.

"One morning, I woke up to find my sister gone. I searched everywhere but couldn't find her. Finally, a girl shining shoes nearby told me an unknown adult had taken her, but that was it..."

Silence enveloped the trio.

Four didn't need to hear the rest to comprehend how Jill had ended up at the Murasame Labs. Everyone took the same measures to survive.

Hearing about Jill's harsh existence, Four realized her own foolishness.

"Jill has persevered through all the challenges life has thrown at him. I didn't even try to understand... How arrogant I was."

It's easy to blame the times or the adults for one's misfortunes. But does that mean one is flawless?

The pretty blonde girl sitting beside her must have endured unspeakable hardships too. Thinking one is special without trying to understand others is the epitome of arrogance.

"Why couldn't I believe in people like Jill?"

The realization brought a bitter sense of regret.

"Did I make you remember painful things?"

"Don't worry about it."

Seeing Jill's smile, Four felt a sense of relief.

"Thank you, Jill. I won't look back anymore. We can make as many memories as we want from now on. So let's make lots of happy memories."

"That's right, Four."

Amari couldn't hold back her tears any longer. Jill gently patted her head.

Four, her eyes brimming with tears, softly took Amari's hand.

The blizzard showed no signs of stopping, even as midnight approached.

Amari was sound asleep in her sleeping bag. Four and Jill had only their legs inside their sleeping bags, leaning their shoulders against each other as they passed the time.

"Hey, Four."

"What is it?"

"You said we can make as many memories as we want from now on, right?"

"Yes."

"Would you like to make those memories... with me?"

"Jill?"

Jill showed a slightly shy smile.

"I want us to be together, always. Even when we're grown-ups."

"Are you serious?"

"Yeah."

"Jill..."

Four buried her face in Jill's chest. She could feel his heartbeat quickening. Knowing his nervousness, Four chuckled.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing, never mind... Listen, Jill. When that time comes, Amari will be with us too. All three of us together."

"Of course."

"I'm happy..."

Four lifted her face and closed her eyes quietly.

"Kiss me..."

Jill gently kissed Four's lips. Then, the two embraced.

Four could feel something like sediment within her heart dissolving away. It was a sensation akin to bliss.

Four was truly happy.

Chapter.04

Sacrifice

1

To be precise, the Psycho Gundam Prototype Unit 8 is a transformable mobile armor. Its massive, boxy frame is painted white. The mechanics called it the “Refrigerator,” and when Four and the others first laid eyes on Unit 8, they couldn’t help but agree with the nickname.

The mobile suit factory, a hive of activity, housed this chilling machine. Last-minute adjustments were underway before the prototype’s test run the following day.

Dr. Murasame was torn. Four was the designated pilot for the test run, but was that really the best choice?

Namika argued that either Jill or Amari should be used for data collection purposes.

“So, you propose we hold Four back for the time being?”

“Yes. We can’t fully trust the psycommu system at this point. If something were to happen to Four...”

“A considerable investment would be wasted.”

“Four is steadily growing as a Newtype. This is a crucial juncture.”

“Yet, expediting the Psycho Gundam’s completion is essential. To do that, we need a pilot with a strong psycho-wave to run tests. Amari and Jill might not be enough.”

“Machines can always be repaired and used again. But Four is a living being.”

“True. The memory manipulation hasn’t been completed yet. In that sense, Four’s capabilities are unpredictable, but the risks are heightened.”

Namika hadn’t felt the necessity for Four’s memory manipulation. She believed that Four had awakened as a Newtype when they rescued Amari and Jill on the snowy mountain. Nonetheless, that detail was irrelevant to their present conversation, and Namika refrained from mentioning it.

“The Titans’ top brass will be here to observe the test run tomorrow. Cancellation isn’t an option.”

“Even so, the Titans are ultimately just a group of amateurs. They wouldn’t be able to tell if the psycommu system is disabled and the Psycho Gundam is operating.”

“That’s a rather harsh thing to say.”

Dr. Murasame chuckled, gazing up at the white Psycho Gundam.

“Let’s hold off on deciding the pilot until tomorrow.”

"Understood."

Namika bowed, a plan forming in her mind, and excused herself from the discussion.

2

"Did you know today is Amari's birthday?"

Jill whispered to Four in the cafeteria.

"Birthday?"

"Ruiko told me about it."

"Amari didn't say anything, though."

Four glanced around the room, searching for Amari. She was standing near the kitchen, waiting for three cups of coffee for dessert.

"She's likely being considerate of you, Four."

"I guess so. I don't even know my own birthday."

Four was surprised at how naturally the words came out.

"You've changed, Four."

Four nodded in agreement.

"But don't say I've become an adult. I'm probably not even twenty years old yet."

"So Amari is turning seventeen, then."

"That means she'd be your older sister, Jill."

The two of them looked at each other and burst into laughter.

Amari, who had brought the coffee, looked at them curiously.

Four and Jill decided to celebrate Amari's birthday during their free time that night. Of course, they would keep it a secret from Amari. Jill would gather party snacks and accessories, so Four decided to find a present for Amari.

But there was no store in the research facility. After much thought, Four came up with the idea of a ribbon hair accessory.

Amari was proud of her blonde hair. Despite Sergeant Zink's repeated suggestions to cut it since it got in the way during training, Amari would braid it into three sections and pin it to her head.

During her free time, she let her hair down, and it suited Amari exceptionally well.

"Any fabric with a beautiful color would be fine. Even scraps will do."

Four explained the situation and asked Ruiko for help.

"I understand."

Ruiko quickly returned with an array of colorful fabric scraps and sewing tools.

"Is this enough?"

"Yes, this helps immensely. Thank you."

Four expressed her gratitude and accepted the materials.

"A birthday party, huh? That sounds nice."

"Ruiko, you should come too. Amari will be delighted."

Ruiko smiled but shook her head.

"I'm sorry, but I have work left to do. Please tell Amari 'happy birthday' for me."

"Of course, I'll pass on the message."

Four smiled brightly and dashed away energetically.

As Ruiko watched her leave, she thought Four's face had softened.

3

With the prototype machine's demonstration scheduled for the following day, afternoon training was called off.

Sergeant Zink and other military personnel were closely monitoring the maintenance of the prototype machine, so Four took advantage of this time to make a ribbon hair accessory. To keep it a secret from Amari, she slipped into an empty lab instead of working in her room.

Meanwhile, Jill snuck into the research facility's warehouse and residential areas, searching for small items to use as decorations. He also gathered leftover snacks from the recreation room. The only thing left was to get food from the kitchen.

Carrying a cardboard box filled with trinkets across the research facility's yard, Jill was stopped by Sergeant Zink, who was standing by the main pole.

"Are you planning to open a small store or something?"

"We're preparing a celebration. Excuse me, Sergeant," Jill replied, attempting to walk past him. But Sergeant Zink stopped him with a muttered remark.

"After the celebration, you'll be attending a funeral. Busy days ahead."

Upon hearing those words, Jill stopped dead in his tracks.

Sergeant Zink grinned.

"By tomorrow, this flag will fly at half-mast."

"Sergeant, what do you mean by that?"

"Curious, are you?"

"Please tell me."

"This is not my opinion. It's what the mechanics are saying, so don't forget that."

Sergeant Zink chuckled and continued.

"You see, that 'refrigerator' is a defective product."

"Defective?"

"It's not ready for market in its current state."

"But wasn't the prototype machine completed?"

"It's all for show. The crucial psycommu system seems to be flawed. The mechanics are grumbling that at this rate, the flag will be at half-mast three or four more times."

"Is that so..."

Jill's face turned pale.

"What about tomorrow's test? What will happen to Four?"

Noticing his concern, Sergeant Zink spoke up.

"Are you worried about Four?"

"Sergeant..."

"I'll let you in on a secret. The pilot for tomorrow's test is still undecided."

"Four won't be piloting it?"

"Director Murasame is having trouble choosing someone, according to the information I've received. I don't know the details, but if you plead with him to grant you the honor of piloting the prototype machine first, the doctor might change his mind."

Jill stared at Sergeant Zink, unmoving. Zink continued, "The data from this test might help perfect the psycommu system. Then, the next pilot won't die. You and Amari might survive as well. You'll owe Four a debt of gratitude for her sacrifice."

Before he could finish, Jill spun around and bolted.

Namika emerged from the shadows of the building.

"Thank you for your help, Sergeant."

"It's part of the job. But even if Jill volunteers for tomorrow's test, what if our crucial director says no?"

"We'll think of another way then."

"Is Four that valuable to you?"

"We've invested a huge amount of money. We can't afford to let her die in vain."

With that, Namika left.

"A woman burning with a sense of duty is something to be afraid of."

As he watched Namika walk away, Sergeant Zink muttered those words.

4

"Why?"

Dr. Murasame spoke without turning around. His gaze remained fixed on the Psycho Gundam, seemingly concerned about the progress of the work.

"Why do you want to pilot this Psycho Gundam?"

Jill hesitated. Then, the words that came out of his mouth were ones he hadn't even thought of.

"I... I don't want to lose to a girl. I don't want to be beaten by a girl."

"Oh...?"

Dr. Murasame finally turned around.

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Sixteen, huh?"

Dr. Murasame recalled something.

When Loren Nakamoto first appeared in front of him with a letter of recommendation, he was also sixteen. However, he was surprised that his inflexible way of thinking was not that of a sixteen-year-old. He wondered why someone his age would have such rigid thoughts.

It was different from the single-mindedness of youth. There was no reckless originality typical of young people. It was probably a matter of temperament. That's why he understood and agreed with the reason he disliked being a direct subordinate to Namika and left the research institute. There are such young people too, he thought.

Was this young man in front of him the same? Was it because of ambition or a misguided expression of self-esteem? In any case, if he was such a young man...

Dr. Murasame decided to make Jill the test pilot for tomorrow's test.

"Alright. It doesn't matter who rides it tomorrow. I'll take your enthusiasm into account."

"Thank you."

Jill bowed deeply.

Dr. Murasame failed to notice the hidden determination within him. Jill was absent from dinner that evening. Even during their free time, Jill didn't come to the room where Four and the others were. Instead, it was Ruiko who came.

Ruiko brought a cardboard box with her. Inside were the small items Jill had collected.

"Where did Jill go?"

Four asked, unable to hide her irritation.

"He didn't come to dinner, and he's not in his room. You should know, Ruiko."

"Apparently, Dr. Murasame instructed him to participate in a special experiment."

"I haven't heard anything about that!"

Four raised her voice. Amari wondered why Four was so agitated. It had been a while since she'd seen Four like this.

"Four, I know this is tough, but let me be clear. You seem to be misunderstanding something. You, Amari, and Jill are all subjects of this research facility. Think about the position of the subjects. No one will consider your convenience."

At Ruiko's unexpectedly harsh words, Four's expression hardened, and she slumped down on the spot.

Ruiko sighed and then gave a faint smile.

"Forgetting that only makes it harder."

Four bit her lip.

Ruiko opened the door. As she was about to leave, she turned to Amari and called out to her.

"Amari, happy birthday."

"Oh..."

Amari's eyes widened, and she looked at Four. Four gave a wry smile.

"Jill and I were planning to surprise you, but..."

Standing up, she took a beautifully wrapped package from under her bedsheet and handed it to Amari.

"Happy birthday. This is a present from Jill and me."

When Amari unwrapped the paper, she found two matching ribbons inside and squealed in delight.

The ribbons, skillfully made from fabric scraps, suited Amari's braided hair well.

"I can't wait to show Jill."

Looking at the ribbons reflected in the mirror, Amari was in a good mood.

Four placed the cardboard box on the bed Jill had been using.

"After I finish test-piloting the Prototype Unit 8 tomorrow, Jill should return from the laboratory. After that, let's have a party together."

Four thought so.

It was true that Jill was in the laboratory. He was being administered a fast-acting drug in preparation for boarding the Prototype Unit 8.

As a side effect, intense pain coursed through his entire body. After enduring the pain, an indescribable sense of exhaustion came over him. He spent the night in that state.

The moment he fell asleep, Jill felt Four's warmth.

5

Four was notified that she would not be piloting Prototype Unit 8.

"Then who will be piloting the prototype?" she asked.

"Isn't it the Titans guys?"

The young employee added they didn't know the details well.

Four was concerned about the absence of Namika and Sergeant Jink, but she refrained from asking about it, thinking it would be deviating from her role as a test subject.

As a human being and as a test subject, she should consider her actions separately. Otherwise, she would be completely drained.

Ruiko's words last night must have contained such meaning implicitly. Four thought her understanding was correct, and so she listened to Ruiko's advice sincerely.

Led by the young employee, Four and Amari went to the training room, which was as cool as ever. Four thought their usual training would begin again. While Four and Amari were in training, the test run of the Psycho Gundam was about to begin in the mobile suit factory next door.

As Dr. Murasame, Namika, Sergeant Jink, and the guest Titans executives watched, Jill, dressed in a normal suit, entered the cockpit of the Psycho Gundam using a crane.

The engine was already ignited. As Jill sat down, a lab staffer quickly connected the cords to his helmet.

"Jill, you can leave your visor open for now."

"Ah, no, I feel more at ease this way."

Jill lied. His face was swollen due to the sudden administration of drugs, and he didn't want anyone to see it.

While the staffer was preparing, Jill looked outside through the panoramic monitor. The factory door was half-open, and there were two

research facility buildings in a row beyond it. The building visible between them should be Jill and the others' dormitory.

Where could Four be now? What kind of training was she doing? Jill zoomed in on the monitor and searched left and right for Four's figure, which shouldn't have been there.

The staffer who had finished the settings patted Jill's shoulder, encouraged him with a "good luck," and left the cockpit.

A voice came through the receiver.

"Jill Ratokie. Begin the test operation of the Psycho Gundam. Close the hatch and raise the output."

It was Dr. Murasame's voice.

"Understood."

Jill looked up at the sky, took a deep breath, and closed the hatch. Then, he pulled the control stick.

An unpleasant sound, like a hum, echoed throughout the factory. It was the sound of a special force field forming around the Psycho Gundam.

The Psycho Gundam slowly ascended, causing a stir among the guests. It rose about three meters and then stopped.

Dr. Murasame nodded in satisfaction and whispered to Namika beside him.

"Remove the limiter on the amplification device."

"What? If we do that, Jill will..."

"It doesn't matter. There's been a change in plans."

"Understood."

Namika relayed Dr. Murasame's instructions via a walkie-talkie to the glass-walled control room near the ceiling of the factory.

Inside the Psycho Gundam's cockpit, Jill was breaking out in a cold sweat.

"Ugh!"

A tingling sensation shot through his entire body. The unimaginable pressure surrounded Jill. The load capacity had long been exceeded. It felt like torture. Thoughts amplified through the psychommu system flowed back and attacked Jill.

"Ugh..."

To distract himself from the pain, Jill gripped the control stick tightly and pushed it in.

The Psycho Gundam suddenly began to move, startling the scientists.

"Jill! We're supposed to test the transformation next! Stop!"

But the Psycho Gundam ignored the command and continued straight ahead.

"Make it stop!"

"Yes, sir!"

Namika shouted into the walkie-talkie.

But in the meantime, the Psycho Gundam had slammed into the half-open door. Violent vibrations shook the factory.

In the cockpit, Jill's face contorted, and he let out a scream.

"Four—!"

6

Four felt a scream that she couldn't identify.

She stopped filling out the work paper and looked up, her noise-canceling receiver still in place. Beyond the buildings visible through the window, black smoke rose. A white object emerged from the smoke.

"The Psycho Gundam?"

Four stood up and removed her receiver.

Amari, who was also filling out work papers, noticed the black smoke and took off her receiver as well.

Just then, the room seemed to shake violently. At least, that's how Four felt. She experienced ringing in her ears and her vision blurred.

She couldn't see Amari, who was supposed to be nearby, and then nausea hit her.

"What is this sensation?!"

Amari appeared terrified, face down on the desk.

Four couldn't take a single step. Desperately, she held back the urge to vomit.

"Is it hatred?"

With both hands covering her mouth, Four looked outside, but she couldn't see the Psycho Gundam.

"No! It's not hatred!"

Four bent over, enduring the nausea, and went to the window. She threw it open, leaned out, and searched for the Psycho Gundam.

"If it's not hatred, then what is it?"

The training lab staff supervisor, who had noticed the noise, rushed into the room. However, the strange atmosphere in the room left them speechless.

Finally, the Psycho Gundam appeared beyond the black smoke, hovering about ten meters above the ground.

The space around it distorted for a moment. Thoughts that had been condensed inside the Psycho Gundam were released again like a raging torrent.

Four was hit directly by the outburst and rolled across the room as if she'd been thrown.

At that moment, she realized.

"It's sorrow! Distorted sorrow is gushing out!"

Four forgot her nausea and stood up.

"Sorrow? Sorrow...? Sorrowful...? Could it be...?"

Four unwittingly spoke aloud.

"Is it Jill...?"

Amari's face snapped up.

"What are you talking about, Four?"

Amari's words didn't reach Four's ears.

Four stared at the Psycho Gundam, enduring the distorted thoughts.

"Four..."

Amari began to speak but then swallowed her words. It looked as if blue flames were erupting from Four's entire body.

It was just a moment and might have been Amari's illusion. However, in that instant, Four saw Jill in the cockpit of the Psycho Gundam.

It wasn't a clairvoyant ability like an esper. She just <knew>. It could be called a kind of "enlightenment." With the interference of the psychommu system removed, Four and Jill could directly sense each other.

"Jill is in there!"

Four ran out of the room.

"Four!"

Amari followed, as if being pulled along by Four. The white Psycho Gundam hovered ominously, emitting a haunting groan.

The Psycho-Comm System's circuits remained intact, short-circuiting without interruption. There was no longer any need for remote operation.

What unfolded was a battle between Jill and the Psycho-Comm System.

In the throes of agonizing pain, Jill refused to shut off a single switch.

If she couldn't master the Psycho Gundam here and now, she feared that the next pilots, Four and Amari, would face the same dangers. Then his decision to volunteer for the mission would be meaningless.

But the Psycho Gundam fiercely resisted being controlled.

"No matter what devilish machine it is... humans created it... There's no way... I can't control it..."

At that moment, the amplified thoughts surged back all at once.

"Guah!"

Overwhelmed by pain, Jill unconsciously initiated the transformation sequence.

Four, having burst out from the building containing the testing facility, saw the Psycho Gundam transforming.

Landing within the fenced-off grounds of the mobile suit factory, the Psycho Gundam became a forty-meter long mobile suit.

"Jill-!"

Four's cry seemed to resonate with the Psycho Gundam, which took a step towards the fence with both arms outstretched. However, it halted its movement there.

"Four? ...Is that you, Four?"

Within Jill's fading consciousness, Jill heard Four's voice. How much strength could he possibly have left? He couldn't even manage to pull the control stick.

"Jill-!"

Four clung to the fence.

The Psycho Gundam appeared to cease functioning, and the outpouring of intense thoughts gradually weakened. This drove Four to a state of anxiety.

"Four!"

Amari, who had followed, sprinted up and clung to the fence beside her.

"Is that really Jill in there? Is it truly him?"

"I can't hear him! I can't hear Jill's voice!"

Four's voice cracked with tears.

"Jill is in there! How did Jill end up in the Psycho Gundam?!"

"I don't know!"

Jill's hand faintly moved, gripping the control stick. His other hand manipulated the control panel.

The panoramic view monitor expanded and as it moved downward, Four and Amari clung to the fence, their images captured.

"You came for me... Four... Amari..."

Mustering her last bit of strength, Jill pulled the control stick with all his might.

The Psycho Gundam buckled at the knee of its outstretched leg and fell backward. At that moment, the three diffuse beam cannons in its abdomen simultaneously fired.

Three rings of light expanded into the sky.

Eventually, the scattered particles, glistening gold in the sunlight, gently rained down.

Slowly, they enveloped the Psycho Gundam and then vanished.

"Jill-!"

Four screamed, but her voice likely never reached Jill's ears.

In his final moments, Jill conveyed his thoughts to Four and Amari.

"Don't grieve for me. This is the path I chose. Four, I want you to etch me into your memory. That way, I'll always be with you. Amari, I couldn't become the good older brother you deserved. I tried..."

But please forgive me. The three of us understood one another. People should be able to understand each other. If they can, there would be no need for mobile suits, and a peaceful world would come. You two will create that world. If you can't do it yourselves, then marry and have children. Your children will carry on your ideals. Their children will do the same.

That's why you must survive. Only by surviving will you see hope. And lastly, Four... People must learn to forgive. How much value can be found in things born of hatred? Please don't forget that..."

Jill's thoughts trailed off there.

"Jill..."

With her face pressed against the fence, Four stared at the white Psycho Gundam in a daze.

Amari collapsed to the ground, sobbing.

Seeing her, Four believed she couldn't cry. But despite her intentions, tears streamed down her cheeks, dampening her face.

"I shouldn't cry..."

Four whispered to herself over and over.

Chapter.05

Escape

1

For the first time in a year, the central pole at Murasame Labs displayed its flag at half-mast, a poignant symbol of mourning.

Four felt despair wash over her like a tidal wave.

"I let Jill die. I couldn't do anything. Yet my enhanced senses allow me to feel sadness much more quickly than ordinary people. It's because I'm an augmented human. What good is a Cyber-Newtype like me?"

Amari's tears had dried up. She whispered, barely audible.

"I want to go back to New Hampshire..."

That land should have been a place where sad memories were buried for Amari. It was where she had lost her beloved family.

But now, with Jill gone, perhaps only her birthplace could offer Amari solace.

"Amari has a home to return to."

It was then that Four made up her mind. She would escape the Murasame Labs and take Amari to New Hampshire.

"Amari..."

Four started to speak but then fell silent.

Something was off. Four's heightened senses drew her attention to a corner of the room.

There was a small protrusion on the border between the wall and the ceiling above the door. It must have been there all along, but she had never noticed it before.

Four sensed a strange "energy" radiating from it.

"Four...?"

Amari looked at her, puzzled.

Four bit her lip and whispered so softly it was almost inaudible.

"A hidden camera."

"Eh?"

Before Amari could respond, Four darted into the hallway.

Ascending the stairs without hesitation, she followed the faint "energy." She knew her destination.

The room was tucked away at the end of the corridor, two floors above their own. Four inhaled deeply to steady herself and slowly opened the door.

Ruiko was there. As she rose from her chair, her face displayed a mix of shock and agitation.

Numerous monitors filled the room, but only one was in use. Their room was displayed on its screen.

"So, that's how it is," Four murmured quietly.

Ruiko sighed and sat back down. She removed her receiver and turned off the recording device on the desk.

Silence hung heavy between them as the two stared at one another.

Finally, Four spoke.

"We're test subjects, after all. It can't be helped, can it?"

That was Four's honest thought. Everyone had their own circumstances...

"This is my job."

Ruiko's voice was hoarse.

"I know. But I have one request. Please, hear me out."

Four's tone carried a tender weight.

"Please, just for tonight, turn off the surveillance monitor."

Ruiko looked at Four, surprised. She didn't understand what the words meant.

"If you do that for me... Please."

"Alright."

Ruiko nodded softly.

"Thank you."

With that, Four left the room.

Ruiko slumped onto the desk and wept, her sobs echoing uncontrollably.

Four descended the stairs and slammed her fist into the wall at the landing. Her shoulders quivered with rage.

Soon, tears welled up in her eyes and spilled over.

Four tilted her head back, trying to keep the tears from falling.

"Jill... I forgave you. I did, just like you said. Can you hear me, Jill?"

Tears streamed down Four's cheeks.

"Jill."

Four crumpled to the floor, sobbing.

There had been too much sadness. She resolved to make this the last time she cried, but the tears flowed without end.

2

The noise from the mobile suit factory continued late into the night, showing no signs of stopping.

In contrast, the research facility was eerily quiet.

It was a moonless night, and dew soaked the grass, with a chilly air lingering in the atmosphere.

Four and Amari, who had slipped out of their dormitory, had come to the back of the building where the training rooms were lined up on the opposite side of the factory.

There were hardly any people passing by there, apart from the soldiers patrolling periodically, and there were no lights in the windows of the buildings.

"Are you really leaving the research facility?"

Amari asked in a whisper. She was wearing a ribbon hair ornament that she had received from Four, but its vibrant colors were indiscernible in the darkness.

"I want to go back to New Hampshire."

"Yeah..."

"From this day forth, we cease to be test subjects. We will reclaim our humanity. This is no place for decent people. That's why we must leave."

Four peeked out from the shadows of the building and surveyed the surroundings.

The patrol soldier who had passed by earlier would return in fifteen minutes. In the meantime...

Four took Amari's hand and, keeping low, crawled toward the wire fence.

She draped the thin blanket she had brought over her shoulder and scaled the fence.

Barbed wire was stretched across the top of the fence. Four grabbed the blanket with one hand and flung it upward, catching it on the barbed wire.

"Amari, quickly now."

Amari followed, climbing the fence as well.

"Get down first."

With Four's help, Amari descended first and quickly dove into a nearby thicket.

Four followed, but there was no time to retrieve the blanket caught in the barbed wire.

They could only hope the patrolling soldiers would overlook it, but such expectations bordered on wishful thinking.

"Amari, let's go."

Four entered the tall grass, which towered as high as her shoulders.

Amari followed, suddenly gasping.

"What's wrong?"

"I should have said something to Ms. Ruiko."

Four stopped and forced a smile.

"She's one of the research facility's people."

"But she wouldn't betray us. She's a good person."

"I suppose."

"I wanted to say goodbye."

Amari looked back at the research facility with regret.

"Let's go. We don't have much time."

Four started walking again.

"Wait, Four!"

The gentle slope was overgrown with vegetation, making it difficult to see far ahead. Nevertheless, the two of them continued through it.

Although they had to head in the opposite direction to reach the city, the area they were in was also easier to evade pursuit.

Once they reached the top of the slope, they faced a downward incline. Beyond that was a dense forest that was said to be impossible to escape once entered.

Four planned to circle around the edge of the forest and reach a coastal town somewhere.

To evade the pursuers, they had to take that much risk.

But if it was Sergeant Jink, he might chase them into the depths of the forest.

Just as Four thought this, a siren sounded from the research facility below. At the same time, lights were turned on in windows, and outdoor lamps were lit.

"They've found us! What do we do, Four?"

"All we can do is run. There's no going back now."

With the sound of the sirens ringing in their ears, the two of them descended into the forest.

As Sergeant Jink and his subordinates boarded the jeep, Namika came running up to them. Her face looked terrible from just waking up, but there was no time to worry about such things.

"Please use this."

Namika handed a small attache case to Sergeant Jink.

"It's a device that detects brainwaves. So if you're close enough, you can find out where Four is."

"That's convenient. I'll borrow it."

"Please bring her back no matter what. I beg you."

"I know. We've invested a huge amount of money in this, after all."

Sergeant Jink motioned to the driver, and the jeep started moving.

"Heh."

Sergeant Jink was excited. Although he pretended to be calm in front of his subordinates, the exhilaration was evident in his words.

"I can't believe she escaped. I knew she was a tough woman, but..."

Sergeant Jink drew his pistol from the holster and removed the magazine.

"Sergeant?"

The subordinate driving the jeep looked puzzled.

"Don't worry. As long as I don't shoot any bullets, she won't die that easily. I'll do whatever I want with her afterward."

Upon hearing those words, fear spread across the subordinate's face.

Sergeant Jink continued to laugh as if he were enjoying himself immensely.

3

The darkness of the night made the atmosphere in the dense forest even more eerie. Yet, Four and Amari kept running through it.

The sounds of the pursuit team around them seemed to be gradually closing in.

"Why...?"

Four was puzzled. Even if all the soldiers and staff from the research facility were mobilized, their numbers were limited. It shouldn't be so easy to find just two people in this vast forest, especially in pitch-black darkness.

However, the encirclement was definitely tightening. Four felt anxious.

"At this rate, we'll be found. I have to do something."

Just then, a flash of light streaked across the sky with the sound of gunfire, followed by an intense beam of light pouring down.

"Damn it! A flare!"

The sounds of birds flapping their wings and the roars of beasts could be heard from various directions.

Amari, frightened, clung to Four.

"I'm scared!"

"Calm down! It'll be over soon."

As the light from the flare faded, darkness enveloped the surroundings once again.

Perhaps realizing that the flares were not particularly effective for searching, no more were fired.

However, the footsteps of the pursuit team were definitely getting closer.

The light from their handheld flashlights occasionally passed by beyond the trees.

"We can't escape like this."

Four pushed Amari into the bushes as tall as herself and crouched down.

"Listen, Amari."

As if sensing something, Amari's expression grew tense.

"At this rate, both of us will be caught. I don't know why, but the pursuers seem to know where we are. I'll be the decoy. That way, at least you can escape."

"No way! You said we'd run away together, Four!"

"You want to go back to New Hampshire, don't you!"

Four spoke firmly, then glanced into the darkness behind her.

"If we continue like this, it's over for both of us, and everything we've done will be in vain."

"But, Four... What about you? If you're taken back to that research facility, they'll experiment on your body. You might end up like Jill!"

"We don't know that I'll be caught. I'll do my best to escape. If I manage to get away, I'll head to the town in New Hampshire where you lived. So..."

"No! I don't want to be apart from Four."

"Amari, there are times when we have to live alone. But you're not alone. Our memories will always be with you. When you're lonely, remember me and Jill. You can always meet us in your memories. You understand, right?"

"Yeah..."

Tears streamed down Amari's downcast eyes.

"You have a place to return to."

"I'll be waiting. I'll wait forever until you come back."

"Promise me you'll treat me to a warm soup again when that time comes."

"Yeah."

With all her might, Amari forced a smile and touched the ribbon in her hair.

"I'll treasure this ribbon that you and Jill gave me."

"It looks great on you."

Four gently touched Amari's blonde hair. It felt as smooth as silk threads.

"Well, I'm going."

"Four..."

"We will survive. That's what Jill said."

Four stood up and began running without looking back.

"Goodbye, Amari. I'll definitely survive. And we'll be happy."

Four screamed in her heart.

Lights intersected, and angry voices could be heard. They gradually surrounded Four's location.

"This is good."

Four pushed through the thickets and advanced deeper into the forest. To attract the attention of the pursuit team, she deliberately stomped her feet and made noise by jumping into the bushes. The pursuit team seemed to be taking the bait.

She reached a spot where the trees were sparser, creating an open space. Looking up, she saw a sky full of stars. It seemed that the sky had cleared up at some point.

Four heard a familiar song from behind her. It was Sergeant Jink's voice.

*I'm a Federation pilot ace,
Zaku and Dom, they can't keep pace,
But that Red Comet gives me chase.*

"Are they mocking me?"

Four frowned.

In that case...

She began to sing as well.

*No easy days in this military grind,
Jaburo today, tomorrow the Moon we'll find,
We'll rise and fall, Earth's pull left behind.*

Pushing through the bushes, Sergeant Jink and several of his subordinates appeared.

A cruel smile played on the lips of Sergeant Jink as he twirled his whip with both hands.

"You've caused us quite a bit of trouble."

Four picked up a thin, dead branch that had fallen at her feet.

"It's time to settle this, Sergeant."

She said, snapping the branch over her knee to create a makeshift weapon.

Four was surprisingly calm and knew she wasn't relying on strength alone. It was a strange feeling.

Her defiant stance must have provoked Sergeant Jink. He quickly removed his holster to lighten his waist and readied his whip.

"Where's Amari?"

"She's dead. Fell into a ravine while trying to escape."

The apparent lie didn't matter to Sergeant Jink at the moment.

"Let's just leave it at that, then."

Before Four could react, Jink closed the distance, his short whip slicing through the air and striking the back of Four's hand, sending her makeshift weapon flying. However, Jink had already discarded his whip and moved to Four's left side.

Four tried to pull her body back at an angle, but Jink's fist landed a decisive blow to her solar plexus before she could react.

The battle ended abruptly, and Four crumbled to the ground.

Sergeant Jink barely seemed out of breath.

It made sense that Four, even with a year of training, couldn't defeat an experienced pilot-turned-instructor. But, of course, Four knew this, and everything had been part of her plan.

Enduring the pain, Four thought of Amari.

"Survive. Be happy, even for my sake... Amari..."

And then, Four lost consciousness.

Chapter.06

Sortie

1

Four, with a smile gracing her face, appeared before Dr. Murasame.

Namika was surprised at her composure.

She should be well aware of how harsh the final stages of training were for a Cyber-Newtype like herself.

Yet, Four remained serene.

As always, Dr. Murasame spoke in his usual tone.

"Over these past two days, our laboratory has lost two subjects. However, your continued presence can be considered a silver lining amidst misfortune."

He rose from his ebony leather chair, approaching Four with purpose.

"The psycommu system can be considered complete, thanks to the invaluable data left behind by Jill. Prototype No. 9, which is currently under construction, will likely be deployed as Murasame Labs' psycommu-equipped mobile armor. The remaining issue is finding a pilot."

"I understand that I am the sole candidate," Four replied.

Dr. Murasame nodded. "In the coming days, you will be subjected to great pain, but I hope you will endure. I believe in your ability to see it through."

"May I ask one thing?"

"Hm? What is it?"

"Has Amari's body been found?"

The doctor walked towards the window, gazing at the flag flying at half-mast on the main pole.

"It seems she fell to the bottom of the valley. In that area, her body would likely never be found. There are many wild beasts there as well."

Four cast her eyes downward and chuckled softly. Then she looked up.

"As a test subject, I will do my utmost to fulfill the duties assigned to me."

"I have high expectations, Four Murasame."

Four left the room, accompanied by a young staffer.

Namika watched her go, tilting her head in confusion.

"I don't understand why she's become so obedient."

"She's probably satisfied with helping Amari escape."

"But... didn't Amari fall to the bottom of the valley and die?"

"Indeed, she did."

A knock interrupted their conversation, and Sergeant Jink entered.

He stood at attention, saluting with precision.

"Let's hear your report."

"Sir, reinforcements proved unnecessary. We discovered her at the forest's edge, and when she resisted, we had no choice but to shoot her. This is the proof."

Sergeant Jink took a white, bloodstained ribbon wrapped in paper from his breast pocket and unfolded it on the desk.

Dr. Murasame regarded the ribbon, emotionless. "Well done."

"You... killed Amari?"

Namika's lips trembled.

At that moment, a muffled thud echoed from behind the door.

Alarmed, Sergeant Jink drew his pistol and cautiously opened it.

Ruiko lay crumpled on the other side, her sobs shaking her shoulders.

2

The imposing, black-painted MRX-009 "Psycho Gundam" towered over Dr. Murasame, who appeared pleased with the sight.

Namika approached a file held tightly at her side.

"How is Four's condition?"

"Yes, the memory manipulation is proceeding smoothly. However..."

"However? What is it?"

"Even without memory manipulation, Four is already a fully developed Newtype."

"I've read your report. But the previous three subjects should have also possessed varying degrees of Newtype abilities. So, why did they die?"

"Ah..."

Namika fumbled for words.

"They lacked a psychological hunger."

"Psychological hunger...?"

"Jill and Amari, who hardly exhibited any Newtype abilities, were included in the training with Four for a reason. Why do you think that was?"

"I am unsure. I have always wanted to ask."

"I intended to influence Four through aspects outside of training. Thus, I had all of their actions monitored even outside of training sessions."

The doctor settled into a metal pipe chair.

"I hoped Four would develop a yearning for her past memories by being influenced by those two. However, events took an unforeseen turn. Four ceased to cling to her past memories."

With that, the doctor smirked.

"If she no longer requires her past memories, exploiting them serves no purpose. If only we could create false memories using drugs, but no such convenient drug exists. I was at a loss when I received that report. Yet, when I learned that Four, Jill, and Amari shared a sibling-like bond, I saw potential."

"What do you mean?"

"Four would cling to her current memories."

"I see..."

"The year she spent with those two is a memory as precious as a gemstone for Four. We shall steal that memory. We cannot take it all away; we must leave a faint trace. Almost remembered, but just out of reach. There is nothing more painful. This will give birth to a yearning for memory. Four will become a constant embodiment of hunger, and her mind will be honed to a razor's edge. Therefore, from now on, only a single phrase will be needed to spur Four into battle: 'Four, do you not desire your memories?' That's all it takes."

"..."

"That is the situation, Namika."

Dr. Murasame cleared his throat and stood up, walking towards the Psycho Gundam.

As she watched him go, Namika completely forgot to hand over the file she held.

3

The day of the Psycho Gundam's deployment had arrived.

Four, clad in a blue normal suit, was led to the hangar by a young staff member.

Upon seeing Four's face, Namika nearly gasped.

Four's expression was resolute as if she were an entirely different person.

"Four, this is the flight plan and the updated sections of the pilot manual. Ensure you review them."

Four brushed away the notebook that was offered to her.

"Four!?"

Four's icy gaze met Namika's.

"I loathe being told what to do. I won't accept orders from anyone. Remember that well."

"..."

Namika wondered if the memory manipulation had led to a transformation in Four's personality.

Sergeant Zink, flanked by his subordinates, bid the two farewell as they boarded the crane.

"I wish you good fortune in battle, Ensign Four Murasame."

Sergeant Zink offered a proper salute.

Even if Four had just been promoted to Ensign that day, it was the appropriate respect to show a superior officer.

Sergeant Zink was indeed a true soldier.

Four merely reciprocated the salute.

Four and Namika used the crane to board the cockpit of the Psycho Gundam.

As Four settled into her seat, she muttered.

"Where are we heading for our sortie?"

"I've been informed it's Hong Kong City."

“Hong Kong, huh...”

Four donned her helmet and activated the instruments.

The Psycho Gundam emitted an eerie groan as it levitated.

The Psycho Gundam left the Murasame Labs and headed out to sea.

There, the Titans’ massive transport aircraft Garuda-class “*Sudori*” awaited.

It was a quiet morning.

The waves of the Pacific Ocean were calm.

Afterword

The TV series *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam* went on air in 1985, making it sixteen years ago. However, I made my debut as an anime scriptwriter the year before, so I have been working in this field for seventeen years.

Seventeen years is enough time for a baby to be born and become a high school student. When I think about it that way, it feels like quite a long time has passed, but I don't feel like that much time has gone by. If I'm honest, it all happened in the blink of an eye. I've been involved with various anime series during that time, but if asked which one left the deepest impression on me, it would undoubtedly be *Zeta Gundam*.

To be honest, when I first started, I wasn't very familiar with anime. I was a big fan of live-action special effects shows as a child, and my interests leaned toward movies when I was a university student. So, it wasn't surprising that a rookie writer like me, who didn't know much about anime, couldn't fully understand the significance of working on a project like "Zeta Gundam."

Episode 17, "Hong Kong City," was my first *Zeta Gundam* script. As you may know, it is the episode where Four Murasame makes her debut. When it aired, I received interview requests from various anime magazines. I thought that anime writers received this many interviews for every episode they wrote. Still, it turned out that *Zeta Gundam* was the only series where I experienced that many interviews. In other words, it wasn't me as a writer who was getting attention, but the anime that attracted the industry's keen interest.

Furthermore, to be completely honest, when I first started writing the script for *Zeta Gundam*, I didn't understand most of its vast settings. I initially thought there was only one space colony per "Side," for instance. It wasn't until later that I was astonished to learn that many space colonies were on each Side.

Additionally, this is something I've written and talked about in various places, but when I first saw the movie version of *Mobile Suit Gundam*, I remember seeing dozens of Gundams filling the screen and thinking that recent robot shows featured many main character robots. Later, I realized those weren't Gundams but mass-produced units called GMs.

At the time, I was writing *Zeta Gundam* with such limited knowledge that it's embarrassing to think about now. But after some intense studying (or so I'd like to call it), I became more familiar with the Gundam world and was impressed by its depth. It was then that I realized how amazing anime could be and changed my perspective.

Zeta Gundam is a memorable work for me in many ways, but the novel *Four's Story* is also unforgettable.

Although I've written many novels now, at that time, I hadn't yet tackled a full-fledged novel. To me, novels were something unreachable. I didn't think I could write one at all.

I received a request from an editor at Tokuma Shoten to write a novel with Four Murasame, a hugely popular character from *Zeta Gundam*, as the protagonist. I decided to give it a try, and that's how *Four's Story* was written. Rather than being proud of being able to write a novel, I found the experience of writing a novel to be fascinating.

My first full-length novel was the novelization of *Mobile Suit Gundam ZZ*. I was chosen to be in charge of it due to Director Tomino's recommendation, and the sample used to decide this was "Four's Story." At the time, the editor in charge was worried about whether a rookie writer could handle a novelization, but after reading *Four's Story*, they thought it would be okay and greenlit the project.

So without *Four's Story*, the novel version of *Mobile Suit Gundam ZZ* might not have been born, and I might not be writing novels like I am today.

As a former staff member, I'm very happy about the recent popularity of *Zeta Gundam*, and I've included some of my memories from that time in the booklet that comes with the DVD box set of the entire series, which is now being released by Bandai.

Given this situation, *Four's Story* has been reissued in the form of a novel, and I've re-read it for the first time in sixteen years.

At that point, I didn't have a clear plan for how to revise it. I read it, thinking I might make major revisions and change some episodes. Although my writing style was not yet solidified, and I even felt embarrassed by its clumsiness, I thought there was no need to change the story at all. It's strange to say this about my work, but something resonates with my heart. So, I decided to make revisions while keeping that in mind.

As a result, I have heavily rewritten the text but have not made any changes to the story itself. If someone reads it for the first time in sixteen years, they should have the same impression as the old work.

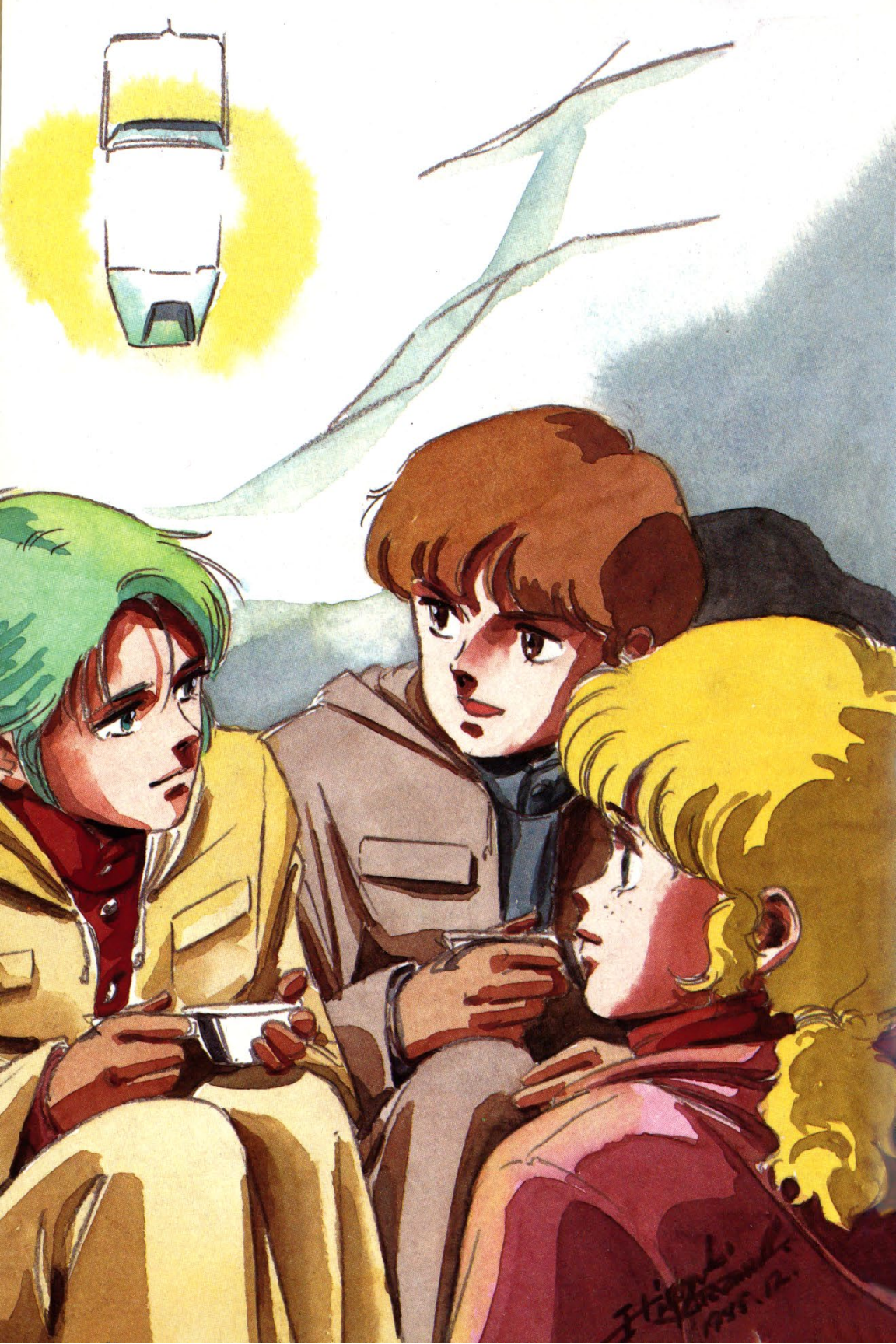
For those reading it for the first time, I hope they will keep in mind Four Murasame's way of life and watch the TV series *Zeta Gundam*. There should be new discoveries to be made.

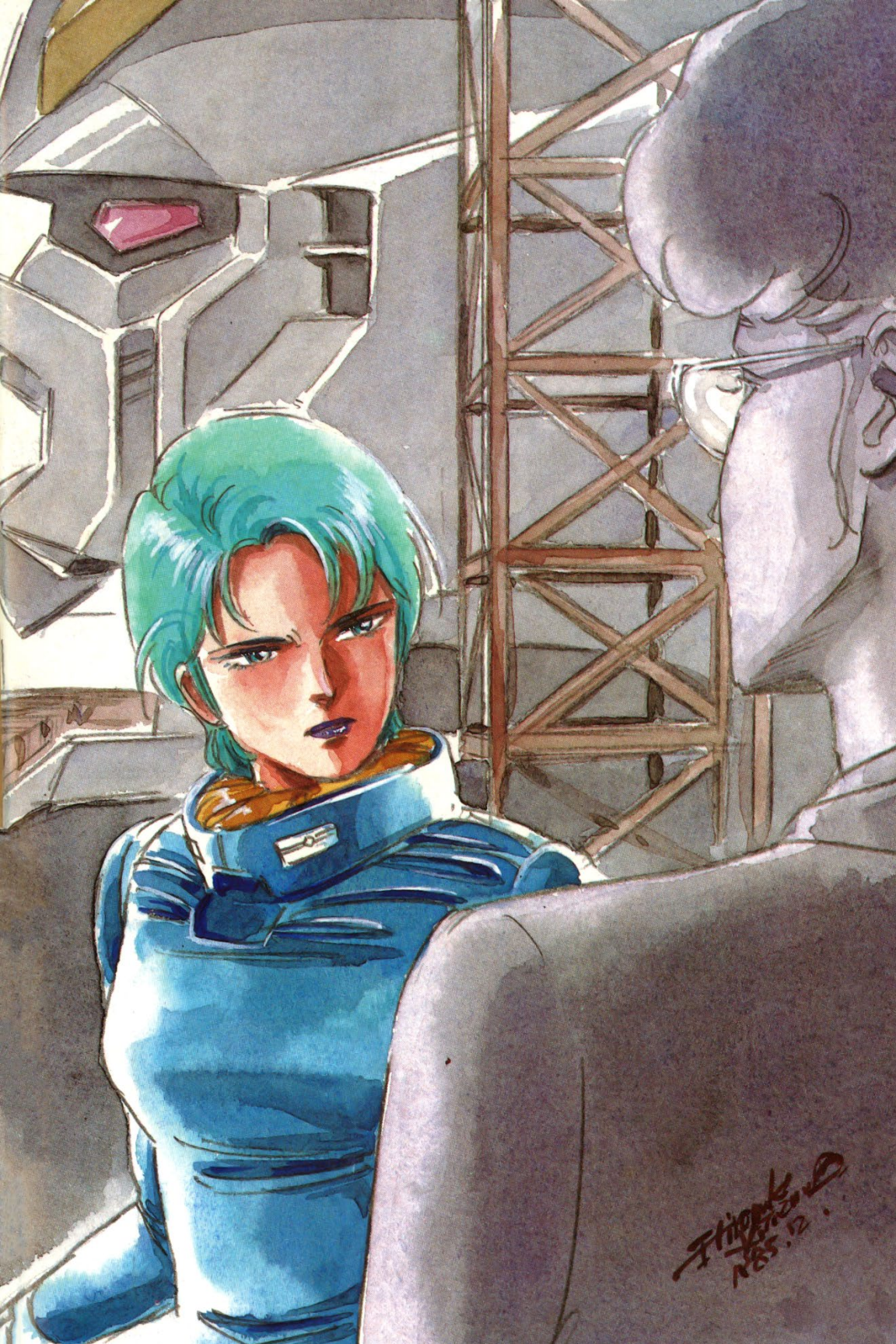
Not just Four, but all the characters in the Gundam series have various backgrounds that give them depth. That depth may be what supports the series' sense of reality.

Even so, the Gundam world is indeed deep. Through this project, I've been reminded of that once again. And now, I'm very proud to have been involved with such a work.

Akinori Endo

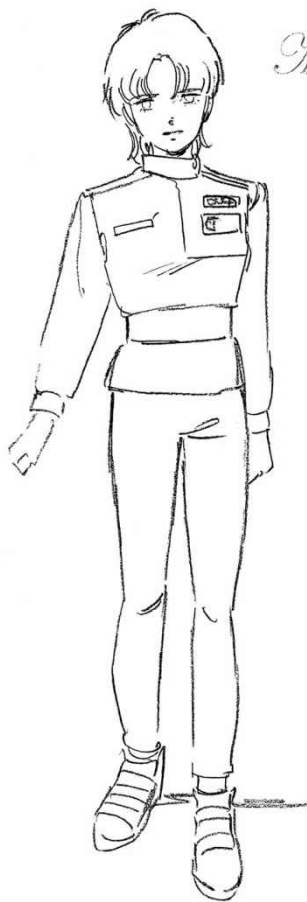
This book is a restructured and revised version of *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam: Four's Story - And as a Soldier...* which was the second supplement in the February 1986 issue of "*Animage*" (Tokuma Shoten), now adapted into a paperback format.





I think
185.12

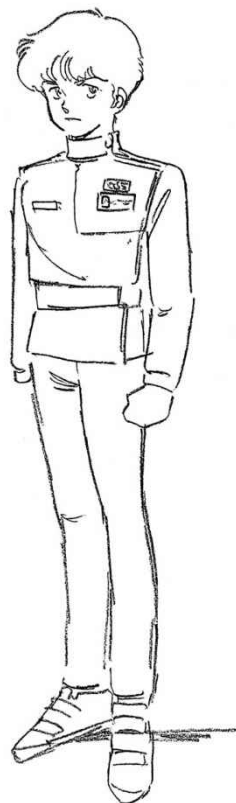
*Main Characters
of This Story*



ムラサメ研究所
被験者番号004
フォウ・ムラサメ



ムラサメ研究所
被験者番号006
アマリ・ガーフィールド



ムラサメ研究所
被験者番号005
ジル・ラトキエ