

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER 1 AMURO

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHIMAKI KUORI

機動戦士ガンダム

ハイ・ストリーマー 1 アムロ篇



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MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM HIGH-STREAMER

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 1

CUNNINGHAM SHAW

CHAPTER-A

1

The humanoid machine tottered in the air and then descended.

"Ah! A missile?!"

The woman in the cockpit kicked the control bar, frantically bringing the machine under control as the residential area below loomed on her monitor. Part of the machine touched an antenna standing on the roof of a house.

A flash sparked out from the thrusters on the main body of the humanoid machine. It rose barely. The antennae on the slate roofs of the nearby houses blew off as it finally overcame inertia and began an all-out ascent.

But shortly after that, a wire-guided missile followed the machine again with sharp accuracy. The humanoid unit's manipulator swung widely as a streak of light ran from part of its hand-like assembly. With the missile's guide wire severed, the agile flier seemed to have shaken it off. The humanoid machine took off into the sky.

"I don't have many places to land, do I?"

The woman in the cockpit let the machine she controlled lilt sideways to pick up a little altitude while she watched the wake of the missile.

The light of another missile appeared with a flash to her upper right.

"What?!"

Breaking away from the residential block, she flew into an area of mountains and forests and continued on, hiding herself in the treetops before setting down in a corner. The cockpit's main monitor camera panned, searching for the enemy, displaying the surrounding landscape.

"Insurgents, just as I thought... How dare they attack from the city? Don't they understand their situation?" she murmured, confirming the surrounding grove completely hid her machine. She removed her helmet and opened the hatch behind the main cockpit monitor. The console panel slid up, and a step appeared in the opening. Wearing only a pilot suit, she stooped down and exited the machine.

"..."

She surveyed her surroundings, her hand grasping the opened hatch, her demeanor not fierce but cautious. The explosion from the missile earlier had produced a strong breeze.

"Is there a hole in the colony wall?"

She pulled out a cable fixed to the lip of the hatch and descended six meters to the ground below.

"It can't be..."

That type of wire-guided missile was designed without the explosive power to cause that kind of accident on the ground or in the sky of a colony. In fact, it is a universal law.

Her high-performance pilot suit fits the form of her body's contours, and beneath her helmet, the woman's hair is cut very short. Nevertheless, she carried herself with a certain feminine suppleness. Her face's shape is quite pretty, though if her hair grew long, it'd give her a heavy visage. A bandanna is tied around her forehead, betraying a bit of bad taste. Then again, fashion changes through every era, and even she won't wear a bandanna forever.

Her name is Cunningham Shaw. Only 20 years old, she is the pilot of the humanoid machine called a mobile suit. Some situations in this world force people to pilot mobile suits even though they're only as old as she is.

"It'd be nice to think the talk of Char is true..." Cunningham muttered. "But are they wrong?"

Char Aznable. The question of the truth of his return raised the possibility the rumor was the work of EGUM, an anti-Federation government movement with no connection to Char.

"You're late, Lieutenant."

Cunningham looked toward the sky. She could see the dim light between the trees but the town that should have been above it couldn't be seen. Around her, small birds scared by her mobile suit's landing finally started chirping again.

Girururu...

The sound of a nuclear fusion engine's tremendous power grew lower.

"Hm?"

Recognizing the sound and shape of the machine passing the treetops, Cunningham opened a compartment near the ankle of her mobile suit. She drew out a pistol, popped a signal flare into it, raised it to the sky, and fired.

A short time later, another mobile suit of the same type carefully landed next to Cunningham's machine.

The trees rustled.

2

"Everything alright? There doesn't seem to be any damage to your suit." Using the same style cable she'd used, the other pilot descended to the ground.

"Huh?! CUNNINGHAM, GET DOWN!!!" The man bellowed, dropping the cable.

Bratatata! A barrage of bullets raced towards Cunningham and the man who'd jumped down. He turned toward the sound of the gunfire through the ferns and trees.

As the flashes of fire retreated, visible in the man's profile lingered a gentleness like that of a young boy, though his awareness was vividly sharp in his expression. Drawing his gun, he slipped from tree trunk to tree trunk.

Cunningham had taken cover behind her mobile suit's foot. Emerging, she spotted the shadow of someone running from the direction of the gunfire.

"Think you can escape, do you!" Anger fueled by fending off the wire-guided missile was also part of this.

With a searing hiss, a signal flare whizzed between the trees, its amber glow expanding with a bang.

"Ah!"

It seemed to have been a woman's voice.

"This way!"

A man rushed into the smoke filled with gunfire.

"Guh?!"

Although he clutched his shoulder, he instantly fell into a staggered stance.

A loud report cracked from the heavy magnum in the man's hand. Pain seared his arm.

He heard a low, groaning "ahh" from across the smoke and from another direction, even more light machine gun fire. Ignoring it, the man leaped through the fumes.

Once the fight started, he seemed to have a tendency to always push forward.

"You there! Don't move!" resounded his voice in the amber smoke. "I can see you. Your friend best not move either. Toss your spare cartridges!" Pushed by the wind, the smoke slipped between the trees.

Cunningham put away her flare gun and drew her pistol.

"Lieutenant!" The man standing in the smoke gestured toward the trees where she was with his left hand.

"Wha?"

Cunningham broke into a run. The amber fumes disappeared with the wind, brushing the tree trunks. She found the shadow of the person standing several meters in front of the man.

"My back, right."

Cunningham ran toward his rear as instructed. Between the ferns, she found a man groaning, a machine gun belt twisted around his wrist.

"Lieutenant! He can't resist!" she said, kicking away his gun.

"Good. Now what to do with them?"

The insurgent standing in front of the man shouted at once. "Take me to Londo Bell or wherever! Just know, I won't spill a word about the organization!"

"Really?"

Cunningham was at a loss for words.

"It's good you have some fight in ya, but I still don't plan on rushing this, Missy." the man retorted.

"Alyona Paige! I'm Alyona Paige!" A girl, wearing a worn-out man's suit and a dirty silk scarf tucked under her thick sweater, shouted. Apparently, she didn't like being addressed as "missy."

"Sorry, I didn't know your name or your age for that matter so I had to say it... Alyona Paige?" The man responded with a bitter smile. He seemed to be accustomed to these types of disputes.

"Lieutenant! Your wound!"

Cunningham noticed blood was oozing from the left shoulder of his pilot suit.

"It's just a scratch."

"But..." Cunningham thought back to when he called for her. He'd held up his left hand. She realized what a feat that was.

"To be expected of a veteran, right Lieutenant Amuro?" Cunningham asked.

"Amuro?!" When the two in front of the young woman heard that name, they spat in his direction. Though Amuro barely turned his face, Cunningham moved swiftly.

With a crack, Cunningham hit Alyona hard in the cheek and she staggered, allowing her to snatch the machine gun from her hand. She followed up with a swing of her leg, sweeping the girl off her feet and knocking her down in the ferns.

"Enough, Cunningham!"

"But Lieutenant!"

"Alyona, there's a little something called common courtesy you give people."

"Can you really blame us for spitting at Londo Bell?! Besides, you're Amuro! You're Amuro Ray, aren't you?!"

Alyona screamed, her face red.

3

"Zedda, I'm heading out. The rest is in your hands."

"Please do, Captain." The man called Zedda bowed his head courteously, as an Easterner would, to the younger man before him.

Though Zedda Mandira had only one eye, its insight was sharp like no other.

"Tell me, is there something you'd like to say?" the young man referred to as the "Captain" asked from outside the door. He hadn't missed the moment when Zedda swallowed his words as he bowed.

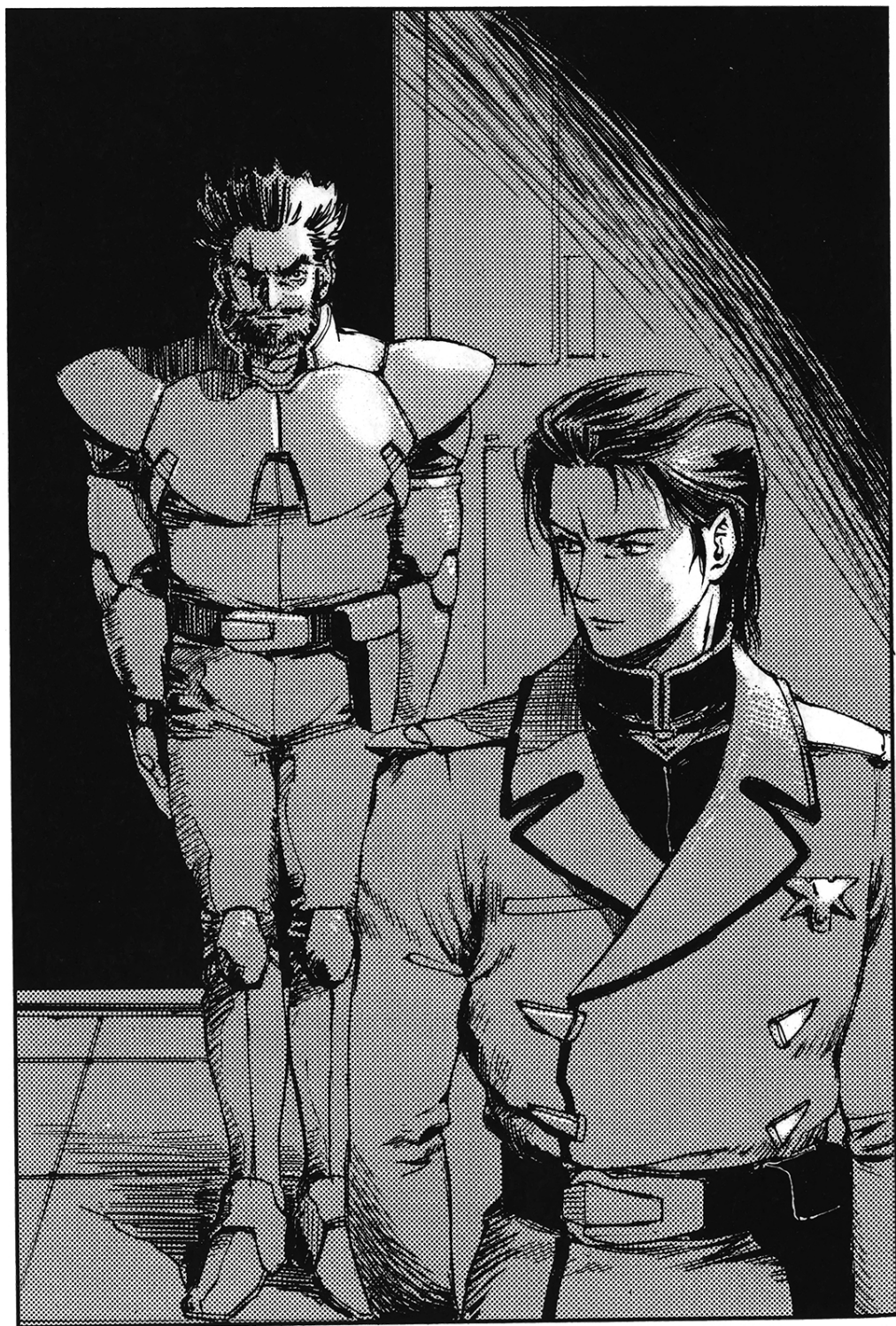
This young man...

Once, there was a man known as the "Red Comet Char" in the Zeon forces that emerged on Side 3. He piloted a red Zaku mobile suit and earned his nickname by destroying Earth Federation vessels.

After Zeon's defeat, there were rumors that he had left the Earth Sphere.

That man was Char Aznable, also known as Casval Rem Deikun. And, there was a man who'd fought with Amuro Ray when the anti-Earth Federation organization AEUG gained power in the Federation government. He'd been known as Quattro Bajeeena, a young Caucasian officer with striking blonde hair.

The young man standing before Zedda Mandira was just like the man with three names. However, his hair was black-tinged with red, and his skin



appeared as if an Easterner's sunburned.

"What more is there to say?"

"Zedda, the moment you lowered your head, you thought of something. Let's hear it."

"Sir... If Londo Bell's Amuro Ray has infiltrated for reconnaissance, would you crush him?" Zedda hesitated, wondering if it was acceptable to say.

"Hm... But what can a guerilla accomplish?"

"Well, I'm not satisfied with things as they are now."

"Then do as you like. However, this isn't something I knew about, understood?"

"Haha... Even if I am slain, I'd be content if you, Captain, were to remember me."

"A rather gracious thing to say."

"I don't believe the words Sieg Zeon to be those of the Zabis. I am merely glad to have been able to accompany you as I have. What's more, is your resolve to inherit the name of Zeon Deikun..."

"Mm. However true, you're to tell no one."

"Of course."

The young man called Captain may very well be Char. When Zedda answered with a grin, the man had already turned away from him.

The faint sound of the door closing was the only sound cutting the mood, but the door closed quietly, the short click of the mechanism the only sound.

"Hahaha! As expected of the Captain. That's what I like about you! Guahahahaha!"

Zedda laughed heartily, opening his mouth wide. His burly shoulders rocked up and down. His head was covered with stiff, straight hair, which appeared to stretch taut when he laughed. His cheeks, chin, and the area below his nose were also covered in stiff, brown hairs like those on his head.

4

The Ra Zaim, a space cruiser, was adrift in a sea of ethereal clouds - a spectacle not governed by earthly gravity. The edges of these clouds bore a faint greenish hue, a haunting reflection of the Earth's surface, making the cruiser seem like an oasis in the void.

Sunlight, unimpeded by any planetary atmosphere, bathed it from all angles, bathing the cruiser in a soft, otherworldly luminescence.

With a whirling sound from their thrusters, two mobile suits piloted by Lieutenant Amuro and Cunningham Shaw approach the Ra Zaim. It's an odd sight to behold. These objects defy any concept of aircraft as they soar.

Their shoulders pulsed with light as they aligned themselves behind the cruiser. Responding in kind, the cruiser signaled back. The mobile suits slowed, drawing nearer, and executed a pinpoint landing.

"Unit 3's landed! Cunningham's Jeddah Unit 5 following suit!"

"Unit 5 shows battle scars! Mechanics to the deck!"

The deck conductor's command echoed through the ship's corridors, prompting the mechanics into swift action. Their movements seemed light, as they were not wearing normal suits.

As the elevator descended, Unit 3 was shepherded into the ship's mobile suit deck. The reverberation of Unit 5's landing resonated through the cruiser.

"Security, report to Unit 3's cockpit! We're taking the prisoner into custody!"

On cue, armed guards ascended towards the cockpit, maneuvering through the zero-gravity zone.

The hatch of Unit 3's cockpit opened, and Amuro poked his head out.

"Lieutenant!"

"Don't be rough. She's a civilian."

"A woman, huh?"

A guard peered into the cockpit, his rifle ominously reaching inside.

"Out with you!"

"Fire away! I'd rather see this cockpit stained with blood and shattered monitors than surrender!" Alyona Paige defiantly spat out from her cramped position beside the seat, her wrists shackled.

"You little bitch!"

The youngest of the guards, spurred by her defiance, crawled into the cockpit, grabbing Alyona by her hair.

"Ouch!"

Alyona's legs target the guard's lower body, thrashing wildly.

"Ugh!"

The young security guard clutched his groin, bending his upper body and floating.

"Ya little shit!"

Another guard, older and grizzled, attempted to strike Alyona with his rifle butt, but was interrupted.

"Enough!"

Amuro supported his body with one hand and kicked the guard's rifle.

"Lieutenant!"

"I gave you explicit orders!"

Pushing the guards aside, Amuro turned to Alyona.

"Listen, Alyona. If you continue to resist, you'll face execution. That's military law. I won't be able to stop it. Now, out with you."

"...!?"

A moment of silence passed as Alyona stared at Amuro, her shackled hands held protectively across her chest.

"I... I understand, Lieutenant."

Her attempt to sit up was thwarted by the zero gravity, her body drifting aimlessly. Amuro quickly caught her, guiding her towards the cockpit's opening.

"Are you not used to this?"

"This place is still under construction, you know. We don't have the luxury of wandering around the colony's center like this."

Alyona pursed her lips.

"Get down."

With a gentle push, Amuro guided her down toward the lower deck.

"I'll talk to her after the standard interrogation is over."

"Yes, sir!"

The young guard, now recovered from his injury, followed Alyona's descent.

"I understand you're upset, but..."

Amuro sighed heavily, watching as the guards escorted a disheveled Alyona away.

"Mestemar! Report!" Amuro's voice cut through the hangar's hum, finding the officer absorbed in a wall panel's data on the cat deck.

"Can't say for sure, but Sweetwater is a refugee colony. Everything here smells off," Mestemar answered without looking away.

"And who sanctioned the migration during the construction?" Amuro's tone was sharp.

"The answer's simple, Lieutenant. The fat cats in the Earth Federation government!"

"Is this really the time for jokes?" Amuro wasn't amused. "When will the Sweetwater administration officials finally show up?"

Amuro turned on the monitor connected to the bridge, his voice rising in question.

"Soon enough," answered Macias Testa, captain of the Ra Zaim, his tone nonchalant through the monitor.

Amuro merely grunted, turning his attention to Cunningham, who had joined him. "What can a kid like her do, anyway?"

"Well, if we hold her hostage..."

"That's not like you, Captain. But it opens the door for a rescue operation by the resistance."

"The EGUM resistance has a mobile suit?"

Mestemar interjected.

"It's plausible, isn't it? The colony is undergoing massive construction. Modifying an industrial-use Petit MS would be a simple task."

"Likely. But we've only been in Sweetwater for two hours."

"I did come under a wired missile attack from the surface, after all."

"For Londo Bell, this colony is uncharted territory."

"It took too long for Londo Bell to get organized," Amuro grumbled.

"That's Earth Federation government for you, Lieutenant."

Cunningham bristled at Mestemar's nonchalance. "How can you be so casual?!"

"I'm an Earth Federation soldier. I'm used to it."

"Is the paycheck all you care about?"

Cunningham was about to grab Mestemar's collar when alarms blared. "Unidentified aircraft approaching! Mobile suit, unidentified!"

"Here?"

"What kind of colony is this?!"

Without another word, Amuro and Cunningham darted towards their only just landed Jeddah. Other pilots scrambled towards the fourth and sixth units, manned by Joe Sei and Olyan Blumquift, respectively.

These four machines were the sole mobile suits of the Ra Zaim.

5

The mobile suits up on the deck, Cunningham's included, had not yet been returned to their maintenance positions. Launching directly was her only option. Propelled by the force of compressed gas towards the flight line, the suit would then detach with the aid of its tail nozzle.

Cunningham signaled for launch, helmet be damned.

"Gah!"

Though the G-force was considerable, the seat's shock absorbers did their part in mitigating its effects. Still, it was far from a pleasant experience. As the launch force began to dissipate, she maneuvered her craft to pivot around the Ra Zaim, taking up position at its rear.

Simultaneously, Amuro's mobile suit, the third unit, and others had disembarked the ship.

"I can't see a blasted thing!"

Cunningham's frustration peaked as she received data from the ship, but it was all but useless. The colony, of the closed variety, was a restrictive space to navigate, even without Minovsky particles wreaking havoc on radar systems. Nerves were frayed.

"Where did the enemy attack info come from?!"

"Surveillance camera, front, code...!"

"Got it!"

The computer had deciphered the enemy's location from the 360-degree camera feed. Now, it was up to Cunningham to spot them with her own eyes.

"If they use guided missiles..."

The Ra Zaim, hovering precariously in the colony's airspace, was unable to move freely. If a sniper were to focus, it could be shot down with ease.

"Where is it?!"

Despite their imperfect designs, mobile suits and ships boasted considerable stealth capabilities, constructed from specific materials and coated with a specialized paint. Visual confrontation was the only option for both sides. Their allied mobile suits appeared to be deployed in every possible direction.

"...!?"

A hidden adversary sent a shudder through Cunningham's body. Indeed, this marked her first foray into anti-mobile suit combat.

"What should I do?!"

Words of weakness, never spoken during training, escaped her lips. The peculiar clouds of the colony swirled like a thick mist, obscuring her vision. A feeling of utter blindness enveloped her.

"Lieutenant!"

Unspoken, Cunningham scanned her surroundings.

"...?"

She felt something akin to pressure, but her focus remained on locating the enemy. She dismissed the feeling.

Then, *BAM*

"Oof"

Struck from behind, Cunningham was wrenched from her seat. The vacuum Velcro fastener securing her pilot suit and seat proved no match for the force. An airbag deployed in front, but her very bones creaked in protest.

"Damn it all!"

In an attempt to quell her mounting fear, Cunningham let out a roar, spinning her machine.

Sections of the panoramic monitor lit up with damage indicators flashing like warning flares.

"What the...?!"

Her machine's leg appeared to have suffered damage from the knee down, yet no enemy was indicated on the monitor. This alarming development unnerved Cunningham. If a machine hadn't been input into the computer, it wouldn't be displayed.

Suddenly, an unfamiliar machine slid onto the front monitor.

"What...?"

The sight of an enemy mobile suit appearing without firing startled Cunningham. Had it fired, she would have been a goner.

"I'm utterly useless!"

A wave of despair washed over her.

Crack! The jarring sound of her suit's frame breaking filled the cockpit. Concurrently, her machine shuddered.

The computer display finally revealed that part of the enemy's machine (whose identity was still a mystery) had collided with Cunningham's unit.

In response, Cunningham kicked her Jeddah's leg and swung both manipulators.

But, her reluctance to damage the beam rifle in her right hand seemed to diminish the force of her attack.

Thud! The elbow of her manipulator made contact with the enemy's machine, the recoil snapping back. She couldn't land a fatal blow. Riding the momentum of the returning manipulator, Cunningham opened all apogee motors to full.

Snap!

The damaged leg broke off from the knee down, and Cunningham's Jeddah began to descend.

Finally, on a small monitor displaying the rear view, she was able to capture the full image of the enemy's machine. It had the mass of a combat mobile suit, but it held a more mechanized silhouette compared to the Earth Federation's models.

"Is it coming for me?!"

This feeling, she recognized. Cunningham manipulated the arm levers, each equipped with a case that enveloped all her fingers. These, in conjunction with a spherical control board, operated the mobile suit's limbs.

Swoosh! The monitor was engulfed in a blinding flash.

A beam had just missed her.

Breee!

It seemed the particles that produced the beam had hit her machine.

Breee!

The cockpit vibrated subtly.

The mobile suit's maximum output was restrained the moment it entered the colony. Yet, without a pause, the ground rushed into view.

"Damn it!"

Reluctantly, she rotated the machine 180 degrees to confront her enemy. Cunningham caught sight of the black machine descending in a straight line.

"?!"

Cunningham let loose a shot from her Jeddah's rifle, but the enemy machine seemed to anticipate this and evaded, continuing its descent.

"Ah!"

She fired a rapid succession of shots with the rifle and raised her shield, only for it to be swept aside with a resonating crash. The enemy machine's manipulator had wrenched it off and, with its momentum, collided with Cunningham's Jeddah.

The two machines plummeted, entwined.

"Lieutenant!"

Cunningham screamed, her gaze locked onto the 'face' of the enemy machine, now looming larger.

"Is this what it's like when a man attacks?!"

For a fleeting moment, Cunningham's mind wandered elsewhere.

Boom! Crash! The two machines, still locked together, crashed onto the rooftop of a building on the artificial ground. Then, in the blink of an eye, the attacking machine began its ascent.

"Ah..."

The machine skimmed low over the residential block before rapidly ascending toward the industrial district. It was a swift, deft maneuver.

"...?"

Amuro saw the black machine in flight just moments later.

"Is that it?"

Even with the knowledge that this was the enemy, Amuro found himself unable to attack. He had to ascertain the status of Cunningham, their fifth suit.

"Did she crash into the residential block? Cunningham!"

This was a disaster for Amuro's unit, the Londo Bell forces. Quickly, Amuro relayed the situation to the Ra Zaim and descended into the residential area where Cunningham had gone down.

Utilizing the fire extinguisher built into the Jeddah's fingers, he battled the encroaching flames while managing the crowd converging around Cunningham's downed machine.

"Cunningham, report!"

"I'm... I'm fine, my apologies!"

"No, the fault lies with me for leaving you alone. I'm sorry."

As Amuro worked, he couldn't help but notice the behavior of the people gathering under the Jeddah's feet, and he ordered Joe and Olyan's Jeddahs to descend as well.

"Earth Federation Forces, get out!"

A voice blared out from an unseen speaker.

"We know the Londo Bell is just the Earth Federation's puppet!"

As more voices of dissent began to rise, Amuro felt a chill.

"This is not good..."

Amuro hoisted Cunningham onto the "hand" of his Jeddah and brought her into the cockpit.

"People have died! Three people!"

"Why should innocent people have to die!"

"Lieutenant..."

Cunningham's face was ashen.

"It's slander. Don't let it affect you. There will always be people like that..."

"But... I don't think they're lying..."

Amuro couldn't deny the truth in Cunningham's words. He could hear the wailing sirens of patrol cars and ambulances in the distance.

"If you've secured Cunningham, Lieutenant, please return."

Olyan's voice broke through the cacophony, informing him that a launch from the Ra Zaim was en route to recover Cunningham's Jeddah.

"I-I'm sorry!"

"Go back! Go back! Mobile suits, go back!"

"Murderers!"

The crowd's resentment was palpable, their voices filled with loathing and blame.

From the launch, about twenty security soldiers descended, forming a wall around Cunningham's Jeddah.

"Please!"

Amuro secured Cunningham behind his own seat and ascended toward the Ra Zaim amid a rising chorus of shouts.

"Waaaaah!"

The cries of condemnation and insults echoed in Amuro's ears.

"Lieutenant..."

Cunningham was weeping, that much Amuro knew. He also knew that there was no comfort he could offer her. So, in silence, he landed on the Ra Zaim.

The deck crew and mechanics worked in tense silence, recovering the Jeddah amidst the citizens' hostile shouts. All the while, the security team held a fragile stand-off with the residents, fingers poised on the triggers.

The Ra Zaim was thrust into a crisis that demanded swift resolution. The situation at hand was more pressing than the pursuit and elimination of a single enemy mobile suit. If they failed to manage the fallout, their welcome at Sweetwater would be swiftly rescinded.

"It seems that five citizens ended up dead..."

Captain Macias Testa delivered the grim news to Amuro with a sour expression.

"I... I'm sorry. I made a mistake."

"Yes... Include that in your combat report. Understood?"

"Yes. The enemy here... although they're not exactly 'enemies,' they're the anti-Earth Federation government movement, EGUM. They're crafty, aren't they?"

"You mean their possession of mobile suits?"

"Yes, but after watching the movements of Cunningham's Jeddah, they determined it was easy to deal with, so they deliberately crashed it into the residential area without engaging in a firefight..."

"Hmm... So, their strategy is to involve the citizens of Sweetwater in the EGUM's cause?"

"It's sickening. That was the intent of the machine that attacked..."

"Call it cunning or clever; the enemy certainly knows what they're doing."

Macias sighed, running a hand through his hair. His demeanor was one of pure exhaustion, devoid of a soldier's typical zeal for battle.

"They're here!"

"...? Here?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Who?"

"The officials dispatched to Sweetwater!"

Captain Macias' face twisted into a deeper grimace as he rose from his seat. Amuro followed closely behind.

Meanwhile, Cunningham Shaw was alone in her quarters, a shroud of despair hanging heavily over her.

"I was a fool for ignoring that initial sensation..." she mused, lost in her own self-reproach.

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HIGH-STREAMER: 1

ALYONA ESCAPES

CHAPTER-B

1

"Why in the world did you engage in mobile suit combat inside the colony?" he asked, his voice dripping with both frustration and incredulity, "This is a colony where anti-Earth Federation forces are gathered. You have no idea how much effort we put into keeping public sentiment under control!"

"You insolent little--!" Captain Macias snapped at the young official whose audacity seemed to eclipse his sense of the situation.

"We came here to search for the one responsible! Are you implying this mess is not a consequence of your bureaucratic complacency?"

"Just think about it. This colony houses refugees who have lost their loved ones in the war. The military's actions would only stir up their traumas. Besides, allowing a military vessel inside the colony..."

"It was you who granted us the docking clearance!" Macias slammed his hand onto the table with such force that he momentarily levitated from his seat.

"Wasn't it *your* job to sniff out the fact that the resistance had combat-ready mobile suits in advance?"

Silence. A thick, almost suffocating silence ensued. The young bureaucrats remained mum, unable to retort to Amuro's words, who, despite the pain of a torn shoulder, held his ground with surprising resilience.

"In any case, let's head to the government office. I want to speak with the person in charge."

Captain Macias was clearly seething.

"If the mysterious mobile suit infiltrated the industrial block, the solution is simple. We seal off all the hatches leading to it, ensuring no heavy suit enters the colony."

James Stronger, a young official at the Sweetwater government office, rang the Colony Public Corporation, securing a promise for increased surveillance.

"That will do. This ensures at least a measure of safety, correct?"

Yet, Captain Macias couldn't resist a touch of sarcasm. "But, isn't it rather strange that your superior would think a low-ranking man like yourself could handle a greeting when Londo Bell arrives in a warship?"

"Apologies!"

James felt the sting of being belittled for his rank. "I guess my promotion has been slow because I'm not the sort to flatter."

"Ah! You're quite the righteous man."

"That's one way to put it. I take things seriously."

"Captain... We're going down to Sweetwater, right?"

Amuro prodded the captain.

"I know. The lieutenant is just like you. So earnest he doesn't climb ranks."
Macias introduced Amuro to James.

"Lieutenant Amuro?"

"That's right."

"I'm James Stronger, but please call me Jim. I've heard rumors about you. It's an honor to meet you."

"Thank you. Show the captain around."

"Of course!"

"Jim. Even Londo Bell is short on manpower; hence we rely on a pilot like Lieutenant Amuro for matters concerning the ship. Don't you find it pathetic? This is the current reality of the Earth Federation Space Force."

"We're in the same boat."

"Shall we go?"

The captain, entrusting the aftermath to Amuro and the ship's Executive Officer Kimeron, descended into Sweetwater accompanied by a few officers.

After seeing them off, Amuro went down to the mobile suit deck on the starboard side. The mechanics there intensely worked on attaching a right leg to Cunningham Shaw's mobile suit, Jeddah Unit 5.

"These greenhorns..."

Amuro considered their movements to be those of a group of amateurs. This was their first time undertaking such extensive repairs onboard the ship. Their inefficient movements were too painful to watch.

"Will it be done today?"

"Sir! We'll have it ready for testing by tomorrow," the chief mechanic, Bergmaon Offer, replied with confidence.

"I'm counting on you. We don't know when that mobile suit will emerge."

"We understand! We'll pull an all-nighter and get it done."

"Get it done. Now..."

Amuro, realizing everyone was under too much pressure, decided to visit the Cunningham's quarters, who he had been worried about.

"Cunni...? She's not here?"

Amuro searched the pilots' mess and the officers' lounge, but Cunningham was nowhere to be found. Amuro's intuition was hardly ever correct in such situations. He thought that perhaps his talents were dormant, reserving themselves for more critical moments. However, he was not aware of this himself.

"They call someone like me a Newtype in this world."

Newtype.

The term was generally used to refer to someone with precognitive abilities, but a more dangerous interpretation could mean a psychic. Unfortunately, Amuro showed no signs of either.

"If I had such abilities, I'd be much more prominent."

Amuro had piloted the early mobile suit, the Gundam, during his high school days, but he didn't just stumble upon the task. He had experience operating general industrial mobile machines and was good at checking their

performance. As for the Gundam, he was able to handle it because he had stolen and deciphered the basic blueprints from his father's computer, who was one of its designers.

However, knowing something from blueprints and actually using it are two completely different things. That he was able to do it was a testament to his intuition, but it also could be attributed to exceptional strength in a crisis. In Amuro's case, that crisis happened to take place in the cockpit of a mobile suit.

And so, Amuro blossomed his talent as the pilot of the Gundam and solidified his reputation as a Newtype. When the results or achievements are remarkable, people tend to come up with various concepts to justify why these abilities have emerged and discuss them.

The best example might be the label of "genius." However, Amuro did not agree with the interpretation that geniuses are people with innate abilities, as commonly assumed by society. He believed that the essence of genius is the ability to concentrate and persist in one's efforts. But in general, the term "genius" brands a person as being "exceptionally gifted." While geniuses are revered, they are also allowed to have odd habits because of their "genius" status, but at the same time, they are often isolated from social spheres.

In Amuro's case, the sad reality of bearing the evaluation of being a Newtype also put him in unfavorable situations. He was regarded with suspicion by the top echelons of the military.

Superiors dislike having subordinates who possess the power of foresight. Because if a subordinate with insight casts doubt on their abilities or points out their lack of skills, it troubles the one in charge. Before making use of a subordinate's abilities, unease breeds suspicion among those at the top. Even when someone with abilities is at the top, they often leave the organization and form another one because they are not appreciated at the speed at which their abilities are demonstrated.

In such cases, there's no need to hire someone more capable than oneself, and therefore one doesn't encounter individuals with higher abilities, and there's no opportunity to promote someone with greater skills.

This is the principle of the relationship between an organization and individuals.

In that case, the abilities of those who remain at the top of an organization, like the military, which doesn't face the risk of bankruptcy, are self-evident. It could be said that it was only natural for an officer like Amuro, who stayed in the military to make the most of himself within the existing system and was evaluated as a Newtype, to draw the short straw.

2

"Cunnin..."

Amuro's gaze found Cunningham Shaw, her form adrift just beyond the skylight on the upper deck of Ra Cailum. She had allowed herself to float free, tethered only by a thin rope.

"Lieutenant..."

Cunningham turned towards him, a wry smile gracing her features. Amuro watched her from behind the glass, his eyes wide, bird-like.

"Zero gravity... it has its drawbacks. Even suicide by jumping isn't an option since there's no falling," she observed.

Amuro tugged at the rope attached to Cunningham's waist, "That's true. Plus, it looks like you don't have any tools to cut the rope."

Cunningham allowed Amuro to reel her in.

"Strangely liberating," she commented, finally grounding herself against the ship's armor, the soles of her boots making contact. She peered down at Amuro.

"Can you see the ground from up here?"

Through the window above Cunningham, glimpses of the colony's ground broke through the roiling clouds.

"Yes. The clouds move so fast."

Cunningham, too, raised her gaze, her eyes drinking in the earthy brown sprawl above. The landscape, devoid of much greenery, was laid out approximately 1500 meters above—a stark reminder it was a developing colony.

Usually, adapting to the disconcerting perspective of viewing ground above one's head demanded time. Yet, for trained pilots, it morphed into a thrilling experience. The illusion of a stationary somersault was strangely satisfying. But this pseudo-somersaulting sensation was a vestige of Earth-bound existence, ill-fitting within the expansive void of space.

"Do you still have memories of living on Earth? Even when looking at an imitation ground, it feels reassuring..."

"Of course. Humans aren't creatures meant to float eternally. A part of us yearns for the solidity of the ground."

He preferred her this way—without the bandana, dressed casually.

"A longing deeply ingrained in us, Cunnin..."

She seemed taken aback, momentarily flustered. "Huh? Uh...yeah..."

With hands planted firmly on her hips, Cunningham cast her gaze down at Amuro. He, looking up, felt he was privy to her rare, vulnerable moments.

"The first battle is just like that."

"But you always seem so assured, so... formidable in combat."

"Didn't I tell you? I almost wet myself."

"But you defeated the Zeon's Zaku, didn't you?"

"A lucky break, really. The enemy isn't one to let rookies walk away unscathed."

"But, I heard from Bergman that you made it difficult for them during the recovery of the Jeddah afterward, Lieutenant."

"Protest from the residents? I knew that the mysterious mobile suit attacked us to let us hear that."

Cunningham squatted down to get a better look at Amuro.

"I really caused a lot of trouble."

"Cunnin."

From below, Amuro reached out, gently grasping Cunningham's hand resting on her knee. Her grip was firm—muscles sculpted from karate practice, yet undeniably feminine.

"But it's okay. I know the phrase 'failure is the mother of success.'"

"Fair enough, Cunnin. I'm going to see that girl. Care to join me?"

"...?"

"I think it's necessary for you to meet and learn from various people."

"Is that an order from my superior?"

"It's also advice from an elder. I'm not saying you can't think for yourself, but at your age, experience is the best teacher—more so than your own introspection."

"A touch harsh, don't you think?"

"Well, yeah, I'm your superior."

"I'm not particularly fond of your tone, Lieutenant..."

"In that case, lend a hand. I have an idea."

"Yes, sir."

Cunningham hooked her toes under the skylight frame and allowed her body to sink toward Amuro. To aid her descent, he grasped her hand, pulling her down gently. As she drifted closer, he found himself looking into her determined eyes.

"You also felt something when that mysterious machine attacked, didn't you?"

"Yes... I was actually thinking about that. Before the attack, I did sense something heavy. Or rather, I could say it felt as if the armor of the mobile suit had disappeared....."

"You have a sense for it too. If you hone that sense, you can become a better pilot than I am."

While pushing Cunningham's body forward in the sick bay, Amuro noticed the thinness of her back muscles. He had a suspicion that she might have some kind of chronic disease. Of course, all physical examinations for pilots have been checked, but Amuro's concerns went beyond that.

"Really?"

Cunningham, looking back over her shoulder, had a look of dependency in her eyes. That was a good sign. Not to condone her kindness, but a straight-laced personality's firmness can narrow a person, while the ability to flexibly respond expands a person's capabilities. Kindness can be a factor that nurtures that flexibility.

"When you feel secure inside the cockpit, you don't feel anything outside. It's the same when relying on electronic equipment. Don't forget that, and continue the training to perceive your own location with your own senses, and anyone can become a Newtype."

Amuro grabbed the lift grip on the wall of the ship's corridor. Cunningham followed, grabbing the lift grip on the opposite side. The lift grip, which

moves along a rail embedded in the wall, is used for people to move in zero-gravity zones. If one needs to go the opposite direction, they would use the lift grips on the ceiling or floor. Of course, when not in use, it's stored in the wall.

"So philosophically, it's about accurately perceiving existence?"

"Yes, if you can do that, anyone can anticipate the next situation and come up with ways to deal with it."

"I understand the theory, but..."

As Amuro looked at Cunningham saying that, the lift grip signaled the end of its block. Letting go, inertia carried the body forward. In that gap, they would lower their legs and switch to a walking motion using the sole tape or magnets in their shoes.

"Walking in zero gravity is a new ability for humans too."

"You often say, Lieutenant, for someone who can ride a bike, it's just a vehicle. But for someone who's never seen a bike, they can't imagine it just from explanations."

"Did I say that? Cunni...ah!? Does it bother you when I call you Cunnin?"

"Eh? No!!"

"Then, when I call you Cunnin, would you stop calling me Lieutenant?"

"You're sure?"

"Yes, I am."

"Is...is Amuro okay?"

"Why not?"

"Well, I'm not quite used to it. Military style feels more reassuring."

"Get used to it. It's for your own good."

"...?"

"Training to expand your sensibility."

"Yes! I will train, Amuro..."

"Good." Amuro looked at Cunningham's blushing profile and realized that he himself was getting carried away.

3

"I'd always dismissed resistance as a mere artifact of history until I encountered her. Suddenly, it seemed all too real," Lieutenant JG Mestemar Dillon mused, an ironic smile twisting his features after questioning Alyona Paige.

"And what makes you say that?" Amuro posed, peering past Mestemar's broad shoulder at Alyona, who sat with her back against the wall.

"She invoked her right to remain silent, that's it. She gave her real name, so we know where she lives and where she's originally from."

"So the interrogation yielded nothing?" Cunningham chimed in.

"She's from a colony that was wiped out in the early days of the One Year War. If that's her childhood experience, it's no wonder she has an aversion

to war and ran to the resistance. She doesn't respond to even the simplest questions for confirmation, like 'yes' or 'no.'"

"You're going too easy on her," Amuro suggested, "Why not resort to some good old-fashioned torture to get her talking?"

This prompted a disbelieving glance from both Mestemar and Cunningham.

"Torture?"

"What do you mean?" Mestemar asked, his face a picture of incredulity.

"You don't know? That's exactly the problem I've been pointing out. You think a one-size-fits-all approach right out of the manual will solve everything. That's why they pay you, isn't it?"

Mestemar knitted his brows noticeably.

"Lieutenant, you really seem to despise yourself. I believe in faithfully executing what I've been taught."

"I get that. But the problem is, you're oblivious to the fact that it's a problem. No matter where you look in your manual, there won't be a section on torture."

Amuro waved his hand to silence Mestemar, then stepped forward to face Alyona.

"What do you think, Alyona?"

"About what?"

Alyona's response startled Mestemar.

"That's the first time she's given a different reply..."

"That's how it is."

Cunningham sidled up next to Amuro, and both faced Alyona.

"Alyona, during the recent battle, one of our mobile suits inadvertently crashed into a residential district. Our chief financial officer is currently dealing with the civilian fallout."

"Fallout? What kind of fallout?"

"What would you do in our shoes? The military, citing Londo Bell's budgetary shortfalls, will only offer compensation as per the regulations, right?"

"Of course. Engaging in combat itself is the error here."

"That may be so, but we were provoked into combat by your comrades' mobile suits."

"You spout lies! That can't be true!"

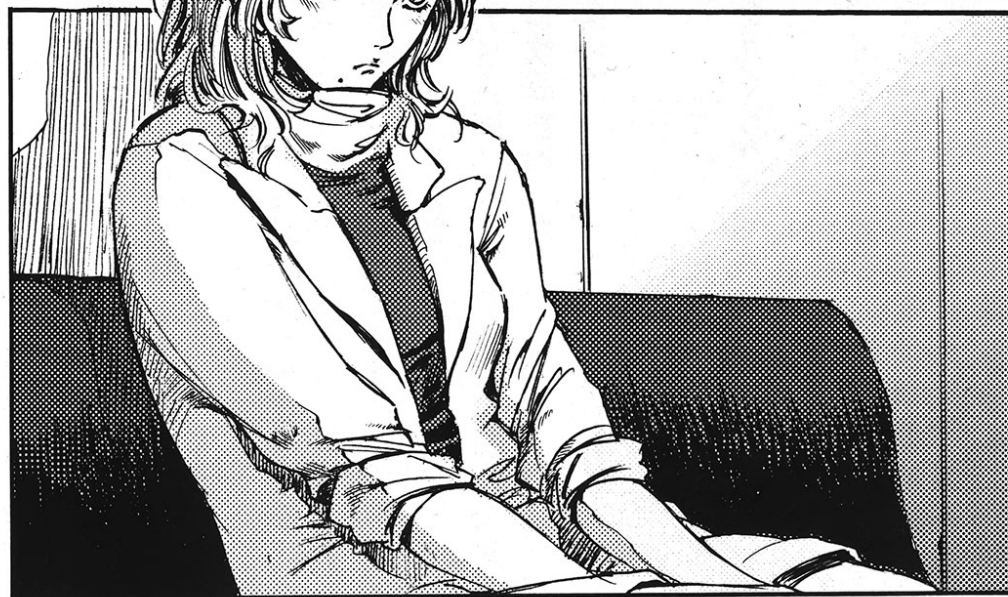
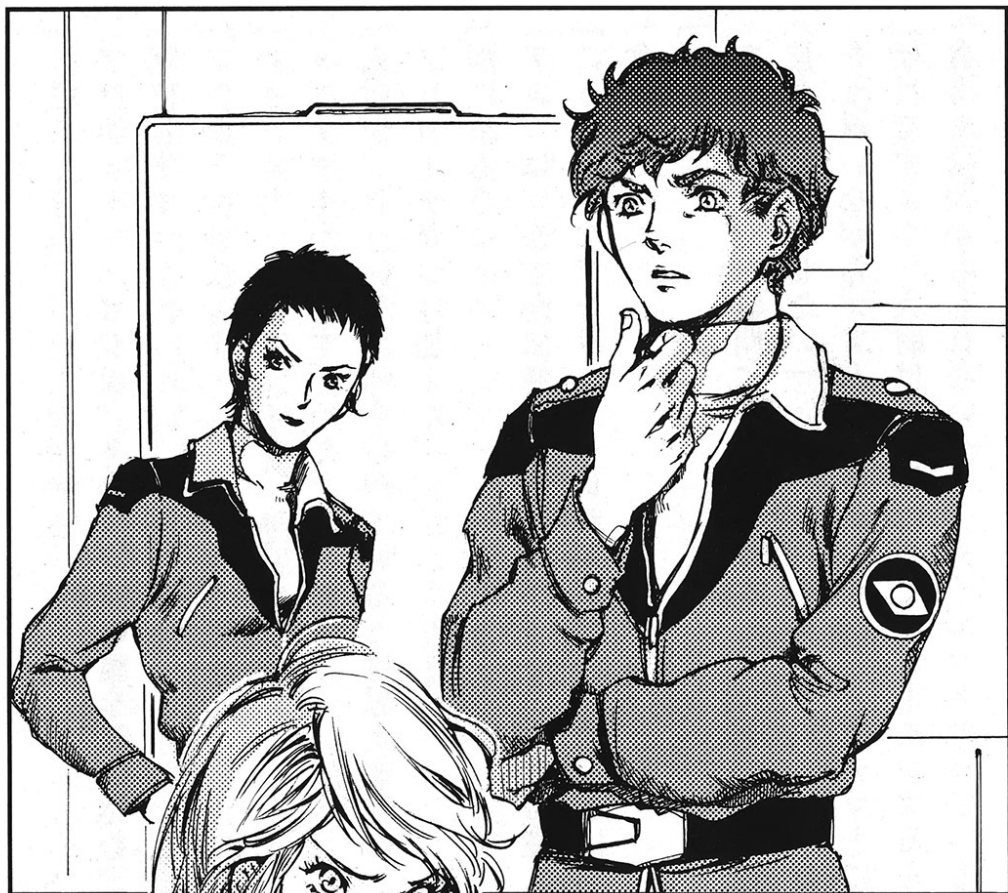
Alyona's rebuttal was visceral, unfiltered. Cunningham, momentarily abandoning her characteristic cool, shot back, "That's not a lie! We were assaulted by a machine that even surpassed our mobile suits in performance!"

"It must belong to some other organization."

"If that's what you think, then spill what you know about this 'other' organization!"

Alyona's lips pursed into a tight frown, a hint of anger evident in her jawline.

"Resorting to silence again, huh?"



Ignoring Amuro's call, Alyona ruffled her grimy short hair and shot back, "What exactly is this 'torture'?"

"You've seen those drama shows, right? They rip your nails out, sear your flesh with a red-hot rod, then patch you up only to elicit a confession."

Alyona squinted at him suspiciously.

"They do have truth serums, yet some individuals fancy torture. They derive some perverse entertainment watching the victim squirm in agony. When the victim's a woman, their eagerness to induce suffering, to derive... pleasure from it, and extract a confession intensifies."

"That's... profoundly twisted."

"You think so?"

"Are you implying you'd resort to it, Lieutenant?" This time it was Cunningham who asked.

"If need be, absolutely. Who put you up to attack our mobile suits? Where's your base of operations? How did you come by those weapons? If you don't answer everything, I'll coerce the truth from you, even if it demands torture."

After a long, hard look at Amuro, Alyona declared, "I elect to remain silent."

"Is that so?"

Amuro let out a deep sigh, while Mestemar merely shrugged in resignation.

"I never thought you were into such stuff, Lieutenant," Alyona added.

"Don't get cheeky," Amuro warned, barely hiding his irritation yet finding some pleasure in this interaction.

"Girls like you wouldn't join the resistance otherwise. Have you eaten?"

"Huh?"

Both Cunningham and Mestemar were visibly thrown off guard by his sudden change of subject.

"I'd like to eat with her," Amuro winked at Cunningham and Mestemar as he said this.

"Oh, no! You're going to strip her naked and torture her, aren't you, Lieutenant?"

"A meal can be an instrument of torture too. For a diet-conscious girl. Or forcing pork upon a vegetarian..."

"Hahaha..." Alyona managed a bitter laugh.

"Lieutenant!"

"Let's all eat together, shall we?"

4

"Essentially, we used guns to keep the citizens at bay and pulled out the mobile suit," Amuro explained the situation of Cunningham's Jeddah detention to Alyona. Sitting next to Alyona was Cunningham. Their strategic discussion unfolded in one corner of the pilots' mess hall. Mestemar,

however, had not joined them for the meal; he was busy convening the pilots in the briefing room.

"Mobile suits are military assets. They belong to the taxpayers, and in effect, to us. We need them for survival," Amuro rationalized.

"If there were no problems from the beginning, we wouldn't need any possessions."

"That's true, but we can't live without colonies."

"Why not return to Earth, then?"

"Right. Even Earth is just another possession."

"Don't equate Earth, colonies, and mobile suits," Alyona argued.

While Alyona listened to Amuro's points, she ate fiercely, and when she retorted, she would talk while flinging food.

"Don't get ahead of yourself!" Cunningham hit Alyona's head from the side.

"I'll sue for abuse!"

"I'll really pull off your nails!"

"Cunnin..."

"Sir..."

"Alyona, considering your background, I understand why you oppose war unconditionally. But we didn't enlist in the military out of fondness. The military is part of the solution for unemployment," Amuro argued.

"That's pure propaganda spewed by the Earth Federation government," Alyona countered.

"So, should we promote industries that create anything and everything as a measure against unemployment?"

"Is that derision I detect? We should only produce what's essential for living."

"Ever considered that if we only produce essentials to counter unemployment, the prices of these goods would shoot up?"

"If we have plenty of necessities, they'll become cheaper."

"That's archaic economic theory. If we produced only cheap goods, the wages of those producing them would be insufficient to sustain a living."

"If everything becomes cheaper, there won't be any problems."

"But not everything can be made cheaper. Even electricity and air come at a price."

"We should make the Colony Public Corporation the people's property."

"Who would be responsible for colony maintenance then? Our survival hinges on preserving our living environment. If all space-dwelling humans were to return to Earth, it would tank the economy straight to hell. But I can't claim to be an economic expert."

"Don't conveniently sidestep what you don't comprehend."

"But following your logic, colonists would end up laboring only to augment Earth-dwellers' luxury. If they have to work, some would prefer to do so on Earth."

"What if some can return to Earth while others are left behind? A new disparity would emerge."

"There are rumors that Char, Char Deikun, is preparing to purge those still on Earth."

"Char Deikun? That's a new name to me."

"The former Char Aznable, Casval Deikun. He's thinking of exterminating those who exploit the Spacenoids to create an Earth Sphere for those living in space. You, the Earth Federation Forces, are the obstacle to that. That's why we're fighting."

"Why don't you think about reforming from within the system?"

"Lieutenant..."

Cunningham stood and motioned Amuro to join her.

"What is it?"

"There's no point in wasting time on a child. We need to get ready."

"You think so? This is my first time hearing him referred to as Char Deikun. So, it means Char has become a charismatic figure in the resistance movement."

"I get that, but what of it?"

"This sort of intel is what becomes important when we fight in the future."

"But... As you say, sir! Lieutenant, I'll go check on my Jeddah."

Feeling that she had spoken too much in the middle of the operation, Cunningham returned to her military duties.

"Oh, feeling better now?"

"Thank you."

With that, Cunningham left the pilots' mess.

"You two get along well, don't you?"

"Is that what you say to adults you just met?"

"Do you genuinely think we've just met?"

"Eh?"

"I've seen you in person before, Lieutenant."

"...?"

"People don't exhibit many patterns. So sometimes, you meet someone who reminds you of someone you've met before. When that happens..."

"You're thinking about something different than what I meant."

"Back on Side 1, when I waved to you, you waved back to me from the cockpit of your mobile suit. I was in a facility then, so I was dirty and not what you'd call cute..."

"I believe you. And to add to that, you're cute. No, you've become alot prettier."

"Yes, I've made an effort to be cute. It's advantageous for women. But recently, I feel like I've become a bit arrogant due to focusing on intelligence."

"That's a fair self-assessment. If you accept criticism and strive to improve, you'll become a wonderful woman."

"Will you propose to me then?"

"...?"

"Hehe... Don't you think it's cute that I can dabble in wordplay too?"

"Ah, we need to unearth more sophisticated words."

"It's challenging, isn't it? Once sarcasm creeps in..."

"Well, we can't exactly go for a walk. How about you return to the study room?"

"Before that, I'd like to go to the restroom, and, um, do you have those?"

"Have what?"

"You know, *those*."

"Oh... I'll call someone from the medical team."

5

Creating an opportunity to catch Alyona off guard as she entered the restroom was not a difficult task. Amuro called Cunningham to come and pretended to head to the briefing room. They did this right in front of the restroom.

There was only one female soldier from the medical office stationed outside the restroom, and Alyona had even been asked to answer a phone call midway. That was all it took for her to attempt an escape. Using the hang glider they had ready on the mobile suit deck, she descended towards Sweetwater.

Hang gliding was a popular sport in the colony, so even though the wings were attached to the open hatch of the mobile suit deck, it didn't feel out of place to Alyona.

"She's got fire in her, that one," Amuro chuckled, a wry smile playing on his lips.

"Lieutenant, I'm going with you," As Amuro boarded the flying saucer, Cunningham also jumped in.

"I was supposed to be the only one tailing her!"

"Change of plans, yeah?"

"Kimeron, take care of things. It's risky without the captain, but can you handle it?"

"Leave it to me. Be careful!"

The flying saucer carrying Amuro and Cunningham was more sophisticated than the hang glider and was also equipped with an apogee motor. They were going to track Alyona and follow her actions. Of course, her tattered jacket and the hang glider were equipped with transmitters.

The clouds, even if artificial, had an ethereal quality to them. They hung heavily in the air, aiding in the covert pursuit.

Although it looked different from what they had seen in the South Pacific on Earth, and it didn't have the same scope, the fantastic presence of the clouds freed their minds.

"She's a good girl..."

"You've taken a liking to her, haven't you, Lieutenant?" Cunningham teased from the rear of the tandem seat.

"Huh?"

"Oh, Amuro..."

"I like her. When you left earlier, I felt like I missed my chance. But you know, I know plenty of girls like her. I understand their risks. So, it might seem like I'm attracted to her, but it's not just that. I can see the unfortunate future she might face."

"Not as a Newtype, but as a type of person?"

"Yeah, you got it. That's why I hope to be a source of inspiration for her and help her avoid an unfortunate future..."

As Amuro said that, he stumbled upon the question, "Are the people I care about falling into unhappiness one after another?"

"Amuro?"

Cunningham emanated an inquisitive aura from behind.

"...?"

Cunningham wore a gentle face.

"You're worried, aren't you? That your own past might have made others unhappy..."

"Yeah..."

Amuro twisted his upper body and kissed Cunningham's chin.

"Signs of self-awareness, huh..."

"Everyone has that kind of past. There's no such thing as a completely pure and innocent life..."

Cunningham's hand patted Amuro's shoulder over the seat.

"...!?"

Amuro abruptly stomped on the pedal, sending them into a steep descent. Alyona's glider, seemingly caught in turbulence, had begun to descend.

"Will she be alright?"

"She's a novice."

"Yeah, being strong-willed won't save her from the resistance."

Skipping over one cloud, they spotted Alyona's glider nearby. The tattered clothes she wore fluttered energetically. They skimmed past her and broke off pursuit, not wanting to be seen as following her.

Amuro's flying saucer had no identification marks whatsoever.

"...!?"

Alyona confirmed that their aircraft had moved far away before descending even further.

"You won't lose sight of her, will you?"

"I think we'll be fine."

Amuro looked at the scenery on both sides and plunged into a cloud, taking a breath before emerging from it.

"There she is!"

Amuro pointed towards the right in the distance, where Alyona's glider was gliding over a region with several marshlands.

"She will land before that forest ahead."

It happened as Amuro had predicted.

"That girl is too focused on landing and won't have time to look back. We'll land first."

Amuro landed after clearing just three marshes.

In the distance, about 800 meters away, they could see a forest. Alyona's glider disappeared just before it.

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 1

PERFORMANCE

CHAPTER-C

1

Alyona Paige emerged awkwardly from under the wing of a glider embedded in the grass. A shiver of unease rippled through her as she dusted off her blazer, her gaze darting over her shoulder. Nothing. She dismissed it, a product of the lingering adrenaline from her daring escape, and plunged into the cover of the forest.

Often, people tend to dismiss vague sensations, sensations that they later remember with a feeling of, "I knew it back then!" When these feelings are recalled, it means that they were sensing something tangible at the moment. However, these inklings are often ignored, as individuals are typically focused on what lies directly before them - their immediate wants and needs. The ability to interpret these sensations could enhance one's intuitive abilities. Yet, these subtle perceptions are commonly ignored, particularly among the educated.

Education trains individuals to concentrate intensely on what interests them or what they must do at a particular moment. In the absence of education, societal norms direct these actions. For Alyona, her exhilaration from escaping the perceived enemy ship overwhelmed her, preventing her from realizing the possibility of being followed, despite sensing it.

Of course, people also have a propensity for paranoia, imagining threats where none exist. Differentiating between genuine intuition and groundless fear can indeed be a challenge, a challenge rooted in societal teachings to suppress intuitive thoughts. However, if individuals understood that these sensations could offer alternate perspectives on their actions and embraced this understanding, it would undoubtedly broaden their abilities.

But amidst all this mental dance, Alyona found herself swallowed by the thick, towering pines of the forest.

"Ah...?"

She stumbled once again over haphazardly strewn waste, the once-refreshing smell of pine now marred by the stench of decay. A tumble into a pile of discarded appliances could result in severe injuries. The paths had become an unrecognizable amalgamation of overgrown weeds and discarded detritus.

"It's utterly revolting!" Alyona's protest punctuates her flight through the woods. This 'forest,' a dense congregation of trees sown half a century ago, had expanded so luxuriantly as to resemble more a woodland.

These artificially orchestrated patches of green, a staple in space colonies, were vital for sustaining the air circulation needed for human life within these isolated cosmic cells. More than just life-support systems, they

pacified the innate human yearning for Earth's untouched vistas, lest they lose their sanity in the cold void of the cosmos.

"Damn it...!"

Alyona's breath hitched. The world seemed too heavy, too real.

"Even though I wasn't in zero gravity for that long, my body isn't acclimating to the inertial gravity!"

She would not forget the sickening discomfort of her captivity aboard Londo Bell's ship until she adjusted to the colony's manufactured gravity.

Alyona resolved, her mind teeming with the demands of her part-time job and, recently, the anti-Earth Federation government activism. She found solace in keeping herself occupied, an antidote to her aversion to solitude. After a long hiatus since her elementary school days, she had returned to gliding, a sport typical of the colony.

"Damn it!"

Her stomach under the unremoved sweater was sweaty, which she found nauseating. Her mounting irritation, however, was an effective anchor to reality; the elation of escape faded, replaced by the pragmatic reality of her situation.

"Contact the organization. Ask about Kimberly. I hope she's not dead," she reminded herself.

The thought of her comrade Kimberly, gravely injured in an encounter with Amuro and Cunningham, weighed heavily on her mind.

"I must brace myself for the self-criticism session..."

This daunting ritual involved a frank confession of one's failures, a candid admission of mistakes, and a readiness to accept the verdict of one's peers.

"Your failure is rooted deep within you! Excavate these negative elements from your psyche, or be doomed to repeat them! Be ruthier in your self-criticism!"

She would be admonished by her comrades. The organization saw this as a form of self-discipline, a trial that Alyona was prepared to withstand.

"I have to throw away the trash in my apartment and scrub down the toilet and the shower..."

Having managed to escape, she naturally thought that she wouldn't be punished for doing these chores. Alyona was part of the anti-Earth Federation government movement EGUM, which had tasks like opposing the entry of Earth Federation government military ships and monitoring them. She was mobilized for these preparations for the past few days and had neglected her home despite her concerns.

2

"Such towering trees," Cunningham Shaw marveled, trailing Alyona through the vast expanse of the woods.

"This Sweetwater colony, it's a patchwork of old space colonies, Amuro began, his eyes never straying from Alyona's silhouette ghosting between the trees.

"This section, it's supposed to have been part of Side 4 during the One Year War. Facing the sun is a closed colony developed by Zeon, patched together to increase capacity."

Explaining these well-known facts had an affirming effect on Amuro; it was almost as if his words were constructing the history of Sweetwater.

Sweetwater existed in an entirely different airspace from the crowded cluster of colonies of Side 1 and Side 2 on either side of the moon. Although on the moon's orbit, it was a solitary colony erected in a region opposite the moon. Once, there were smaller colonies for construction preparations. But with the rapid increase of refugees caused by the space wars, partially destroyed colonies were gathered, and thus Sweetwater was created. The refugees were those who had lost their kin.

Yet, the inhabitants of space—Spacenoids—rejected the idea of such a creation near their homes. Sweetwater was unique; it blended sun-facing closed and open colonies using mirrors to utilize sunlight.

The colonies' differing diameters caused inertia distortion at their connecting points—an issue rectified by permanently functioning apogee motors or rocket engines. In confirming this process, Amuro understood that the colony had become a place encompassing a myriad of factors.

"It's no coincidence...," Amuro murmured. "Deliberately constructing a new place that brings together various races, where many ideologies clash... It's like an old Earth belief about restless spirits, a place of unrest. This colony embodies that sense."

"What do you mean?"

"Conditions ripe for the rise of anti-Earth Federation movements and Neo Zeon movements."

"I see... That's like fortune-telling, right? But what I don't get is why the trees from the destroyed colonies are still standing?"

"Even the old Zeon forces took on the task of preserving the trees of destroyed colonies. They knew, like all should, that plants hold as much worth as humans."

"But wasn't Gihren Zabi of the old Zeon a dictator?"

"He sure was."

"Are Earth's forests like this?"

"Yes, I've seen them. Even in Europe on Earth, they've exhausted the forests and reforested upon entering the modern age. Humans realize the importance of nature only after they've destroyed it. In that sense, humans are both foolish and magnificent..."

"Are you saying this cycle is the history of humanity?"

"Sadly, yes."

"We've reached the town..."

Beyond Alyona's figure, the shadow of the buildings started to appear between the trees. Exiting the forest and walking further into the town for

about twenty minutes, Alyona moved into a poorer district. But even so, because the residential district was built like a ring around the minimum necessary park, the impression of being crowded wasn't as intense. Amuro and Cunningham could tail Alyona without her noticing, thanks to this district's layout.

"Are there many people of Indian descent?"

"I guess 'Asian' would be the right term for the inhabitants," Amuro noted, surveying the weary faces of the townsfolk.

Cunningham grew anxious as she noticed Amuro's concern. Many districts were filled with parks turned into dumping grounds.

"Get lost!"

One was liable to be spat at just by brushing shoulders in this town.

"In a place like this?"

"This is an even lower-class town than where your mobile suit crashed."

"Even among refugees, there are class distinctions? Strange, isn't it?"

"Those eager to advance or indifferent to change drive the extremes, so class divisions inevitably form."

"Get out of the way!"

The voice was far off, but a bustling noise followed. Stones started to rain down.

"Amuro!"

"Run!"

A few stones were hurled towards them. Amuro shielded Cunningham's back as they ran towards a corner of the park.

"Town guys are coming!" a youthful voice cackled, taunting them with further insults and stones.

Amuro, alert, spared a thought for Alyona, worrying if their skirmish would alert her. Alyona, however, seemed oblivious to the boys' clamor, a sight all too common here.

"What a town!" Cunningham breathed, eyeing the surroundings.

"It's poor."

"But why throw stones at us, total strangers?"

"In a town like this, it should be easier to spot EGUM's movements," Amuro stated, positioning himself behind a tree, keeping an eye on Alyona's progression towards a brick apartment facing the park.

"So, that apartment is EGUM's base?"

"Cunningham."

"Did I say something strange?"

"Aren't you being a bit too optimistic?"

"...?"

"Do you really believe Alyona would lead us straight to EGUM's base just because the town is like this?"

"Oh, I see!"

Cunningham admitted, nodding at her lapse in judgment without an ounce of embarrassment.

3

When they said 'brick,' they weren't talking about your standard quarry stone but plastic molds. Lighter, durable, and easy to build, the imitation is nothing short of convincing.

Amuro knocked on the locked door.

"Who's there?"

From the door next to the apartment's entrance, the vigilant eyes of an elderly caretaker woman peeked through.

"Does one Alyona Paige reside here?" Amuro inquired, a niggling suspicion that this vigilant caretaker might give away their presence to Alyona.

"Indeed, and what business have you with her? Who are you to ask?"

A sardonic smile grazed Amuro's lips, "You're quite the gossip, aren't you? I'd ask for your discretion, but I suspect that's a tall order."

"You have a whiff of the military about you, but you're an investigator, aren't you?" The idea lit a spark in Amuro's mind, causing an even broader smile to emerge.

"Indeed, we are—private detectives. A suitor wishes to know more about Alyona. Could you possibly keep our secret?"

"Oh! Alyona's a good girl... Come in and have some tea, dear."

"I have a partner with me. Is that alright?"

The old woman glanced at Cunningham standing a few paces away, "Feel free to bring her along. The girl's a good one," she repeated.

Cunningham stepped closer, a murmur for Amuro's ears only, "What's this about?"

Amuro leaned in, his reply barely a breath, "We're playing detective. Just go along with it."

"Oh!"

The caretaker's apartment, a quintessential downtown affair, had a living room window that allowed her to spy on the entrance and observe the comings and goings of people.

"Impossible..."

Amuro thought about eavesdropping on Alyona's phone call.

"Alyona was alone in an orphanage, the poor girl. And now she's been forced to live here in this Sweetwater refugee-only space colony... it's all very confusing... I don't know why people have to live in space and lead these weightless lives..."

"..."

Amuro thought there was a kernel of truth to the old woman's words.

"Ma'am..."

"Call me Cathy Kalizsak. Just Cathy."

"Where are you from, Cathy?"

"Poland. Poland was a lovely place."

Cunningham nudged Amuro's elbow as the old woman began speaking about Poland.

"Sorry."

Amuro apologized to Cunningham for his faux pas, but the old woman continued sharing her tales of Poland, ignoring the two's mood.

"I beg your pardon, Cathy. We're having some trouble contacting EGUM due to our line of work."

"EGUM?"

Cunningham interjected, shifting the conversation with a question that pricked Cathy's curiosity. It hit the mark, and even Amuro noticed. The woman, cautious yet interested, took the bait.

"Yes, the Earth Federation Government's warships are still here, aren't they? Shouldn't we at least attend their meetings?"

"Seems like the locals are partial to the Earth Federation Government."

"That's what irks me. Do you understand what it's like to be silenced, unable to voice your dissent because of your job?" Amuro played along.

"I'm planning to go to Uncle Sam's. That way, I can meet young people... I've never been to Earth's Poland, but there are places like that where people live."

When Cathy veered the conversation back towards Poland, Amuro took the opportunity to rise.

"Thank you, Cathy."

"Eh?"

"Alyona Paige just left. We have to follow. We need to investigate her daily activities."

"But she wouldn't get into any trouble! Have some tea before you go."

"But still..."

"We really must be going. Thank you," Cunningham interjected, a quick smile and a hurried goodbye marking their exit.

"She's gone?"

Amuro looked left and right down the road. A car zoomed away from the park diagonally across.

"Is that her?"

"She was in the car."

"Damn!"

No taxis or cars to borrow were in sight, and dropping the Earth Federation Forces' name in this colony would not be a wise move.

"Reality proves to be a harsh mistress!" Amuro spat out.

"Is it, though?" Cunningham replied, her tone light.

"Uncle Sam's?"

"Considering the atmosphere of this town, it might not be an EGUM hideout per se, but it's likely we could get close to them there."

"That seems probable."

Having ensured they were safe from the earlier encountered delinquent group, Amuro ducked into a public telephone booth across the park.

"Damn!"



Rain began to fall, and the idea of fitting two people into the tight confines of the booth seemed laughable.

"We're about to get wet..." Cunningham grumbled, sticking her head into the booth.

"The Ra Zaim, please."

Amuro decided to take the military route as the phone company was unlikely to yield the required address.

"Uncle Sam's address? Understood..."

It took about two minutes for the information to come through. In the meantime, the rain had turned into a downpour. Cunningham shuffled into the booth, displacing Amuro.

"Got it, pass it to the captain. We're going to make contact at this address. If we don't return by tonight, assume we're gone."

"Is it that dangerous?"

"We won't know unless we go."

With curt words, Amuro hung up the phone. Cunningham pulled out a portable display from her jacket pocket.

"The address is..."

"Megelenberg 5A."

"Hmm..."

After punching in the address, Cunningham shared the map displayed on the monitor.

"It's about a kilometer away, give or take. So..."

Rain blurred the view outside the telephone booth's glass.

"We'll manage to avoid trouble here, but..."

"We're going to be soaked. Our casual clothes aren't waterproof, after all..."

"Yeah..."

In the end, the stifling heat in the booth was too much to bear, and they braved the rain, sprinting through the unfamiliar terrain. Thanks to Cunningham's innate sense of direction, they only took a wrong turn once before arriving at 'Uncle Sam's.'

"Drenched to the bone!"

"In this part of town, it might be better this way," Amuro mused as they entered a pub that seemed torn from the pages of an old novel.

4

"Something strong, neat. You?"

Amuro purposely spoke rudely to Cunningham, who was wringing a soaked handkerchief.

"The same!"

"Then this is your pleasure, ain't it?"

Any trace of their military demeanor had dissolved in the rain. The barkeep, a sagging figure of a man, uncorked a bottle of whiskey and set glasses on the counter.

"Kingdom, eh?"

Amuro caught himself before admiring the well-branded whiskey aloud. He couldn't afford any slip-ups that would mark him as an outsider. He needed to blend in, be ordinary.

Yet, the vile taste of the whiskey that he casually sipped had him recoiling instinctively. A dead giveaway had the owner been watching. But he was too taken with Cunningham, her rain-soaked clothes revealing more than they concealed, saving Amuro from suspicion.

"Water, please."

"Ah, right..."

The owner muttered an apology and ducked behind the counter. Seizing the opportunity, Amuro leaned in to Cunningham.

"This stuff is practically painted thinner. But play along, yeah?"

"Hahaha...!"

Cunningham brushed off his remark with light laughter.

"Seen a fair share of the tough times, have you?"

"Where'd you hail from?" The owner grumbled, setting down a glass of water with a clunk.

"Side 1. Oldest colony, hard to dodge conscription, and there was only civil service work. That's why we came here, where there's colony work."

"Is that so? We still have plenty of colony repair work going around. Are you an engineer?"

"In construction mobile suits, yeah."

"You got that scholar's look about you. Living around here?"

"Plan to. City's not my scene."

"Not if you're dodging the draft."

"Even with a green card, they dig into your past."

Amuro felt that telling the whole truth was difficult, so he was telling about half-truths. A green card--a residence permit--proves a certain social status. If you have this in Sweetwater, there's nothing to fear. Given the demeanor of Amuro and Cunningham now, it's unlikely they would pass as refugees.

"This place... once you get used to it, it's pretty good."

The owner, having prepared visas for a customer in the back, turned away from Amuro and Cunningham.

"I'd wager. Lots of Earth-detractors around here, aren't there?"

"That's not true. We love the Earth. It's the Earth Federation government we dislike. They say if you infiltrate the Earth Federation government's administrative office, you can live on Earth freely, don't they?"

The owner's voice echoed from behind the counter.

"But military service doesn't exactly come with a free pass. Rather than flee, might as well help reform Neo Zeon."

"Enough with that talk already!"

Cunningham, who had been downing her whiskey, interrupted Amuro.

"Truth's truth, ain't it? The ones who are odd are the Earthnoids who think they can control those living in space while living on Earth themselves."

"Careful with that. Talking like that around strangers, you'll get yourself stabbed! This isn't a high-class area!"

Cunningham's calculated rowdiness wasn't what set Amuro's heart pounding—it was the implications of her words.

Amuro had his reservations about Earth-dwellers and the Earth Federation Government, but he believed in gradual reform from within. Nevertheless, even the Londo Bell to which Amuro belongs, is a part of the Earth Federation Forces.

If someone malicious overheard his anti-Federation stance, it could spiral out of control. Cunningham was no blabbermouth, but there were no guarantees.

The Neo Zeon that Amuro mentioned is a movement trying to overthrow the Federation government more radically by organizing a military, as opposed to EGUM's simple anti-Earth Federation government movement for ordinary citizens. However, the Federation Forces had yet to ascertain where this actual entity was hiding.

Londo Bell was an organization tasked with hunting down remnants of the old antagonistic Zeon and Haman forces that the Earth Federation Forces had once confronted, assigned so-called dirty work. Other units were only maintaining the long-standing military organization for unemployment measures.

The reason the Ra Zaim was dispatched to Sweetwater this time is to get an actual handle on the situation, but that is a hidden purpose. Officially, it was under the pretext of suppressing the nonexistent internal disputes between colonies.

Even if it's a performance, comments that touch upon or suggest these facts are dangerous.

5

Indeed, "Neo Zeon" was a term the Earth Federation government wished never to hear. The lingering memory of the Principality of Zeon in Side 3, a collection of colonies on the dark side of the moon, declaring a war of independence against Earth, was still not forgotten. However, Zeon, being a dictatorship, met its downfall as a result of the war, but their advocacy left a nightmare for the high-ranking officials of the Earth Federation government.

And now, the rumor of Neo Zeon, meant a new Zeon.

It was a movement that needed to be eradicated, much like hunting down the remnants of the old regime. But the Ra Zaim had seen anti-Earth Federation government movements among the civilians in Sweetwater.

Those movements were connected with Neo Zeon.

"Madam!" The shopkeeper's interjection cut through Amuro and Cunningham's conversation like a blade.

"...?"

A scowl hardened the barkeep's face as he wrestled with Cunningham's moniker.

"As the lady points out, these folks around here..."

"Sir!"

Amuro was swift to cut in, trusting his gut reaction, a trait he often relied on, in stark contrast to Alyona's reluctance. Even when the course ahead seemed uncertain, he had faith in his ability to navigate it if he faced it head-on. So, without hesitation, he said,

"We're not married yet. A tad early for 'madam,' don't you think?"

"Well, that's unfortunate. But, madam, discussions like this are serious here. This establishment isn't the den of hooligans you might perceive."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to badmouth the town. It's just that, with your mention of Neo Zeon and a Federation ship docked in the harbor, spies could be lurking in the shadows. Even in a place like this."

Cunningham's response was a cocktail of half-truths, with the unmentioned detail being they were the spies.

"Well, I guarantee these folks around here would never snitch to the Federation government's rats," the shop owner insisted adamantly.

"I don't want to part ways with the people I've become friendly with!"

Her proclamation, underscored by a masterful performance, seemed to sway the shopkeeper who was leaning on the counter. After a long gaze into Cunningham's eyes, he turned to Amuro.

"You're causing trouble for the girl?"

"She's had a tough life. Cunni..."

"Is that so? Cunni, huh... a good girl. The folks around here may be rough around the edges, but they're good-hearted. They wouldn't sell out your man."

"Really?"

As Cunningham's words washed over him, Amuro marveled at her convincing act. He simultaneously questioned the veracity of her words. Her background mirrored a refugee's tale. She'd enlisted in a foreign division of the Earth Federation Forces, Londo Bell, enduring the harshest of conditions in her pursuit of a better life.

"That's why she can act so convincingly."

Her desperation echoed in her ability to pilot a mobile suit.

"Why the glum face?"

The question caught Amuro off guard, voiced by a newcomer who pushed open the door with a thud.

"Any of you guys good with mobile suits? Any takers?"

The shopkeeper asked the man. Amuro watched the man make his way towards the back of the shop.

"Handle a mobile suit? Are you asking for a pilot or a mechanic?"

"Well, which can you do, you?"

"Huh?"

The shopkeeper's gaze held Amuro in its grip.

"More of a pilot, though I can handle maintenance."

"He says he can do both, Zedda."

The shopkeeper addressed a burly man at the counter. Zedda Mandira, the man behind the black mobile suit that attacked the Ra Zaim. A man who was told by a person like Char Aznable to do as he pleases.

The giant man, his left eye sparkling, asked Amuro, "What's your name?"

"H-Hayato Kobayashi..."

Amuro's response was reflexive, a spur-of-the-moment fabrication. A pang of regret flashed through him for not preparing a pseudonym, but it was too late.

"Complicated name."

Zedda's face, lined with coarse hair, twisted slightly but he accepted the offered glass and emptied it in a single swig.

"Taking on that warship isn't going to be easy."

"But the demonstration is going well."

"Yeah, that battleship will be out by tomorrow."

"That makes things less fun."

"It's our job to make it fun. The Captain said I could do as I pleased."

A grin spread across Zedda's face.

"Hey, newbie! Think you can procure a heavy mobile suit from the colony construction site? If you can, I might be inclined to trust you."

His gaze bounced between Amuro and Cunningham.

"Can't do it, can you?"

"Well, I can."

This was a lie. But in his haste to cover up his lie, he let more words spill out.

"Is this an order from the Captain?"

As he spoke, the gleam in Zedda's eye shone brightly.

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MOBILE SUIT
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HIGH-STREAMER: 1

ALYONA PAIGE

CHAPTER-D

1

"Did you just say Captain?!"

Zedda Mandira turned sharply, an eerie glow emanating from his left eye as he faced Amuro, his face contorting with rage.

"..."

Amuro had been rattled, having unintentionally used the name Hayato Kobayashi as his alias. That must've made him slip the word "Captain." As Amuro twisted his upper body, the hand of Cunningham sitting behind him gripped his elbow.

"What did you mean by 'Captain'? Explain."

"I... I just wanted to talk about the military," Amuro stuttered, a pathetic lie escaping his lips.

"Don't fuck with me!"

With a swift movement, Zedda Mandira's massive fist flew, an inevitable retaliation when one was visibly losing their ground.

Thud! Amuro's body flew, crashing onto the floor and toppling over a table.

"Restrain that woman!"

Before Zedda could even finish his sentence, men from the corner of the room were rushing towards them, following the owner's command. Some blocked the entrance, while others restrained Cunningham; their coordinated movements revealed their familiarity with brawls.

Amuro's vision was filled with the boots supporting Zedda's hulking frame.

"The word 'Captain' has a special meaning in this bar. And you, an outsider, wouldn't know!"

As the last words rang out, the tip of a boot swung violently towards him.

"Argh!"

Amuro's body hit a table leg.

"Which rat hole are you from? No need to tell me. I already know! One of the Earth Federation mongrels, right?!"

Several more kicks targeted Amuro's abdomen with ruthless precision.

"Probably from the Londo Bell, too!"

"Ugh!"

The raw power of Zedda's muscular body easily crumpled his arm guard, almost breaking his ribs.

"...Inciting the citizens, that black mobile suit appearing! You think we'd just stand by?!"

"Heh! Hehehe! You spilled it, sewer rat!"

Zedda's hand seized Amuro's hair, lifting him up. Amuro wanted to counter with a punch or a kick, but he knew it wouldn't match up.

"Grr...!"

Behind Zedda, Cunningham's arms were pinned by several men.

Seeing the defeated look in Amuro's eyes, Zedda ceased his assault.

"Now, you said you're familiar with piloting, right, General?"

Holding Amuro's hair such that he was almost tiptoeing, Zedda continued, "Did I not just ask you if you can procure a mobile suit for me?"

"Yeah..."

Cunningham, her mouth covered by the men, shook her head in denial.

"Now, bring me the mobile suit from the ship currently docked at our Sweetwater colony. Understand?" Zedda said.

"..."

Amuro hesitated, saying nothing.

"Hey!" In a fit of rage, Zedda shook Amuro's head violently.

"Hnnngh!"

Zedda released him. Amuro's heels touched the floor, and he steadied himself.

"Hah! You truly are a pilot, aren't you? And quite a skilled one at that."

The ability Amuro possessed to maintain balance during the intense movements of a mobile suit wasn't commonplace.

"If you procure the mobile suit from the Ra Zaim for me, I'll release the lady."

Amuro straightened, finally finding his calm.

"How can I trust you with Cunningham's safety? There's always the option to abandon her, as I can't trust you anyway."

"Don't be so menacing," Zedda laughed, but he seemed to realize that Amuro's threats weren't empty words.

"Idiot! It's just a bluff, Zedda!" The tavern owner shouted, his face turning beet red.

"So you have that kind of comrade too?"

Zedda smirked.

"That's why I can't trust you with Cunningham's safety. I'd rather just ignore her."

Zedda's gaze darted. "Is Cunningham okay with you speaking for her like that?"

"War is about killing each other. In killing, there's no such thing as 'cruel methods.'"

"So, should I kill you right here?"

"Maybe. If you kill me, the Earth Federation government will retaliate without hesitation. Your freedom here would only be temporary. If that's okay with you, then go ahead and kill me. I'll resist with all my might, prolonging my death, causing more trouble for the future."

"That's a tall tale. I can kill you instantly," Zedda said, pulling out a handgun from his pocket.

"Regardless, the outcome remains the same after my death."

"I get it now. Amuro Ray..."

The men in the tavern stirred at the mention of the name.

"Amuro?"

"That Newtype pilot?"

Murmurs rose.

"I was reassured seeing a familiar face, thinking perhaps we've met somewhere before. But I didn't realize that familiarity was from photographs or on television. With such a commonplace face, I struggled to recall the name," Zedda mused. He returned his gun to his pocket and moved back to the counter. "The woman stays. It's a trade – her for the mobile suit. I assure you of her safety, given your reputation. I don't want any more complications."

"I see..."

"I might trust what you've said, but I don't think you're as cold as you seem. Right, Cunni?"

"It's Cunningham," she retorted, pushing away the hands restraining her, defiantly addressing Zedda.

2

The place where Cunningham had been detained was the basement of a building at the back of the bar.

"Amuro will be back in a little while. Just sit tight," the men who shoved Cunningham into the room muttered before leaving.

"..."

Cunningham looked up at the window, barred with iron grates. The road could be seen from the dry area, and she could tell that men were keeping watch along its stretch. Shouting from the window would likely only result in being conveniently guarded.

"...?"

With a dignified resolve, Cunningham decided to wait to rendezvous with Amuro. Doing so afforded her the luxury of surveying the basement.

"You're--?"

In one corner of the room, an overflowing mattress cushion was directly placed on the floor. Alyona Paige was curled up on it.

"..."

Alyona's vacant eyes were gazing up at Cunningham.

"What happened?"

Half of Alyona's face was marred with a purplish bruise, and there was a lump forming above her eye - signs of being struck.

"It doesn't concern you."

"You came back here, ready to be lynched?"

"It's called accountability. I messed up, so it's only right."

"Why would you..."

"To resist is futile. To maintain the organization, the discipline must be strict, or it cannot function."

Alyona spat out, with blood mingled in her saliva.

"I couldn't protect my comrades from you all. So, facing accountability is my due, isn't it?"

"Isn't this just binding people through violence?"

"It's not like that!"

She seemed to have exerted too much force. Alyona groaned, laying sideways and curling into herself.

The mattress cushion squeaked. Perhaps she couldn't shake off the nauseating sensation after the brutal beating.

"Would you like some water? It might help a bit."

"Don't mock me!"

Alyona, who looked up over her shoulder, had trembling eyes.

"...since you all came...does it mean... you were tailing me? Being unable to shake you off means I'll be punished...again..."

As she said this, tears streamed down Alyona's face. It seemed it was not the fear of violent punishment that was terrifying but the truth, the shame of receiving it, that pained her.

"Alyona Paige..."

Cunningham was at a loss for words. To make such a young girl endure all this and resist the Earth Federation government—such power must reside with the EGUM. The realization deeply shook Cunningham.

"Are we really... the bad ones...?"

Overwhelmed, Cunningham sank to the cold concrete floor.

"Tell me about Zedda Mandira. What kind of man is he?"

Cunningham asked this, and after she seemed to forget about the question, Alyona murmured,

"Do you know Deikun?"

"Zeon Deikun?"

Cunningham seemed to have gotten the response wrong. Again, a long moment of sullen silence passed.

"It's Deikun. In the old Eastern languages, it means tycoon."

"Eh...?"

"It means a wise man in the heavens. Zeon Deikun took his name from that."

"Heaven?"

"Heaven... yes."

Alyona said angrily and closed her mouth.

"A person in heaven..."

Cunningham looked up at the approaching dusk outside the window.

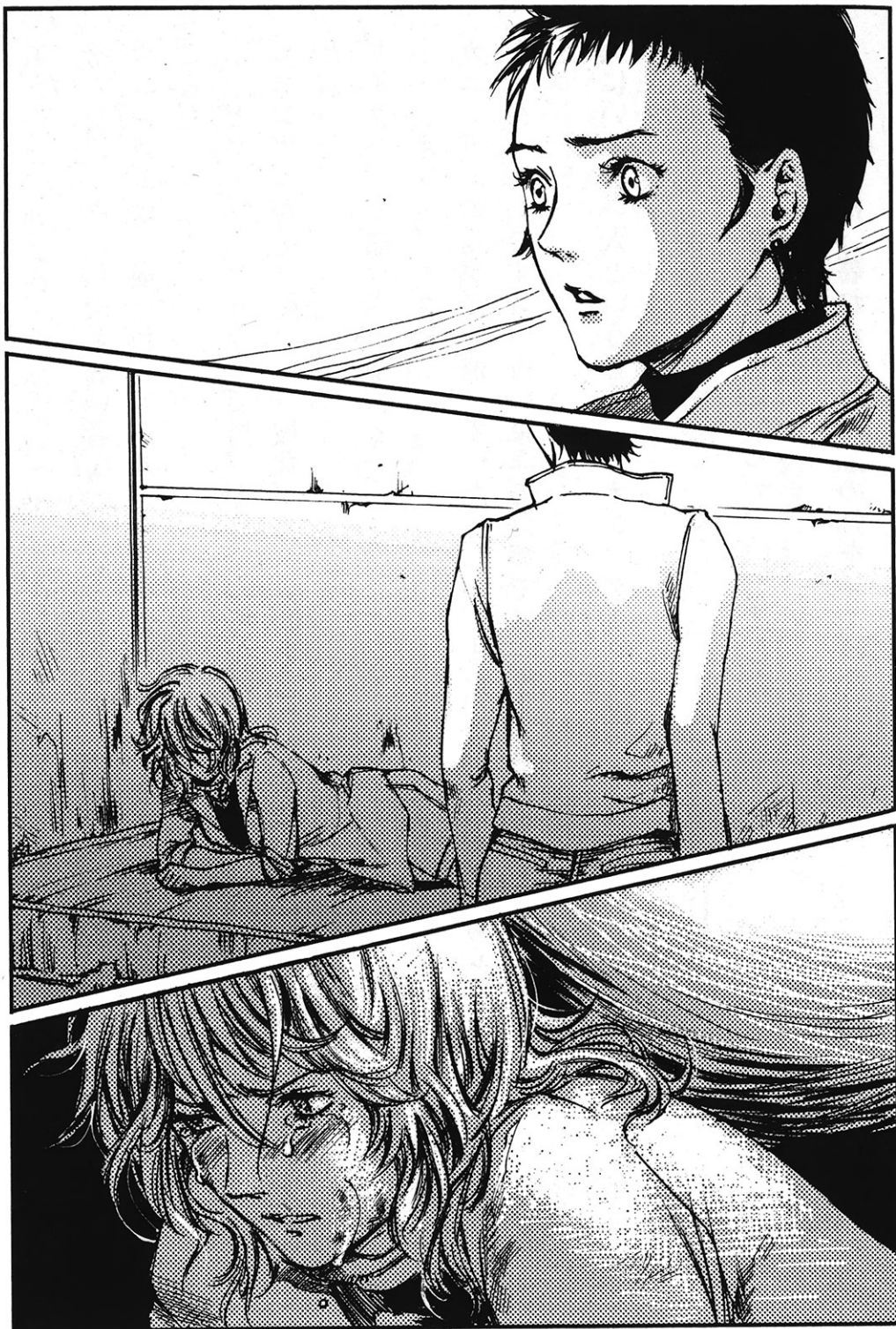
"...The man known as the Red Comet, Char Aznable, is the child of that Zeon Deikun. Zedda Mandira believes in the meaning of that name and is thinking about creating a world for the Spacenoids."

"So your organization is directly connected with Char?"

"I didn't say that!"

Once again, silence engulfed the room.

"Char Aznable... He's still alive then. Otherwise, a name like Neo Zeon wouldn't have surfaced. Where there's smoke, there's fire..."



Cunningham sighed.

Even while enduring the pain engulfing her entire body, Alyona thought to herself, "She doesn't understand anything. These Earth Federation soldiers..."

She didn't want to bother speaking. Yet, something weighed on her mind.

"Why did this woman come here?"

After becoming a target for punishment, her comrades turn cold. They tell you nothing.

"When they threw this woman in, their gaze upon me was cold... are they considering the next punishment, perhaps?"

Even though she had put on a brave face for Cunningham just a moment ago, remembering the humiliation of being beaten by several comrades in front of Zedda, and loudly repeating her mistakes was once again haunting Alyona. That revulsion still made her entire body tremble.

"Why were you captured?"

While glaring at the wall, Alyona asked. A throbbing pain was above her right eye.

"Huh?"

Cunningham looked down at the small body on the mattress cushion.

3

As dusk settled heavily outside, the door swung open.

"It's time."

At the greeting from the two men, Cunningham rose.

"The girl seems feverish."

"Alyona? She'll be fine. A rough night might do her good!"

"If EGUM is resorting to torture, the organization seems fragile, doesn't it?"

"Damn straight!"

The younger men were clearly agitated. To put it kindly, people who get involved in these resistance movements are on edge, neurotic. They know their deeds are tainted, yet they'd commit brutalities if it seems logically justifiable.

"My apologies."

"Spies like you should stay out of our business."

"I get it."

As Cunningham gave Alyona a surreptitious signal, she made a show of stumbling out of the room.

"Sorry..."

"Hey..."

Seizing that brief lapse, Cunningham pulled back on the almost-closed door, dragging one of the men inside.

"Ugh!"

In that instant, Alyona lunged out while Cunningham delivered a swift kick between the legs of the man in the hallway. Shielding herself with the door from the man now sprawled inside, she attempted to draw her gun but was too slow.

"Can't beat that move...!"

Alyona marveled at Cunningham's prowess. By then, Cunningham had secured a gun and was bolting up the stairs.

"Which way?"

"Left!"

Heeding Alyona's voice, Cunningham dashed off, guarding her right.

"Why are you even here?"

"You said it earlier, didn't you? Joining a group voluntarily is one thing, but stealing military mobile suits? That's not activism!"

"Holding a gun isn't exactly civic duty either!"

After rounding a couple of corners, the two caught their breaths. Alyona spat out vehemently.

"You sick?"

"No, I'm fine."

Lifting her pale face, she pointed.

"Over there!"

Alyona sprinted further.

"Can we borrow one?"

"Huh? Alyona?"

Stores with a corner featuring several rental electric cars, known as elec-cars, were only found in impoverished neighborhoods. This is proof that the people are making a living from these vehicles alone. Inserting a credit card into the parking lock bar allowed anyone to access the system to drive them. Just as they were about to zoom off in one, a young man behind the counter yelled.

"Alyona! No can do! Can't lend one to you!"

The once affable storekeeper now wore a strained expression.

"Sorry!"

Over Alyona's shoulder, Cunningham noticed the man grabbing a phone.

"They're faster than expected... Quite an efficient outfit..."

"Where were you planning to hand over the mobile suit to Zedda?"

"Huh? Oh, Fontainebleau. But first, I need to alert the ship about my escape."

"Understood. Got cash?"

"Sorry, mind lending me your card?"

"That's why I didn't want to get involved."

Alyona's driving was reckless. The elec-car sped across the slick roads, still wet from the rain.

"Over there!"

"Hmm..."

Borrowing Alyona's card, Cunningham darted into the public phone booth.

"This is urgent! I need to be connected to Ra Zaim!"

Through a call rerouted by Sweetwater's Public Relations Office, she got through to Ra Zaim.

"Captain, it's Cunningham! I've escaped!"

"You, of all people!"

As ever, Captain Macias' roaring voice was unmistakable.

"Good! So, you've shaken off the pursuers?"

"Most likely. We should be safe for now."

"Alright. We'll make our move as well. Find a safe place to lay low. We'll send someone for you later."

"Much appreciated!"

Cunningham hung up and dashed back to Alyona's electric car.

"Can you head to Fontainebleau?"

"There's a risk they might catch up with us."

"If you don't want to, you can drop me here. Just give me your bank account number; I'll repay the debt later."

"It's alright."

Alyona powered up the electric car.

The forest they approached was deeper than where Amuro and Cunningham had landed, closer to the industrial block. The colony's industrial blocks typically faced the sun. The meadows and forests in front of the towering mountains at the colony's axial center were reserved for grazing and tourism purposes. But come night, these places became a haunt for unsavory characters. People avoided the area at night, especially on Sweetwater, which had been hastily built for refugee accommodation.

"Sure about this?"

While checking the remaining bullets in the stolen pistol, Cunningham glanced at Alyona.

"About what?"

"You assisting me like this."

"For someone to go to the lengths of taking hostages just for a mobile suit, it's unusual for Zedda Mandira. It's never been this way before."

"Maybe they changed because of our arrival?"

"It's possible, but these violent tendencies are militant. Even EGUM was just a civic group until recently."

"You think Char could be behind it?"

"Char? There's no Char in this colony. And rumors about him being alive are dubious at best."

"But Zedda believes in Char, right? Hates the Zabi version of Zeon but thinks a Zeon formed by the successor of Zeon Deikun might be a paradise for refugees?"

"Yes, that's the belief... That faith manifests through Char. If Char's the child of Zeon Deikun, he becomes a beacon of hope for the oppressed. He could be the perfect charismatic figure... Even if Char himself isn't present, for those people, he exists. And... it can drive a resistance movement. That's the power of charisma."

"That's a pretty twisted way to see it."

"People rarely see things straightforwardly."

Suddenly, a metallic sound, echoing like trees shaking, reverberated through the darkness of the forest.

"It's a Jeddah!"

"Amuro's?"

"Most likely..."

Cunningham instinctively looked up, even though she couldn't see anything above.

"Watch out!"

In a panic, Cunningham grabbed Alyona's arm. She had been looking upwards while driving.

4

The Jeddah started its descent.

"Nobody's around?"

While checking on Amuro's Jeddah, Zedda reached out through his transceiver to confirm with his hidden allies. Several responses followed in quick succession.

"To think Amuro Ray came alone... Even at this hour, they can't seem to unscramble their critical Earth Federation military comms!"

Accompanied by a few men, Zedda stood at the edge of the forest, his gaze sharp.

"Cunningham's escape has changed the situation."

"He still showed up on time. We don't know about Cunningham."

Zedda wasn't easily convinced that Cunningham and Alyona had escaped so easily. They might even be captured at this very moment.

"Are you still going to call it a Jeddah when it becomes yours? It's not a bad mobile suit, I must say."

"Well, yes, but..."

With a gentle thud, Amuro's Jeddah touched down. Cautiously, Amuro opened the cockpit's hatch. The Ra Zaim should be following behind him, but the comms had been blocked since he left the ship.

"Alright!" Zedda exclaimed, heading towards a targeted bush. Hidden beneath was a jumping tool, prepared as soon as he heard of Cunningham's escape.

"Excellent work, Amuro Ray!"

"Cunningham? Where is she?"

"We have her. I'll bring Cunningham out from the forest if you step away." Zedda gestured towards the woods. Shadows moved as a torch illuminated them.

"I can't see Cunningham!"

"Amuro! I'm here!" A voice unmistakably belonging to Cunningham rang out.

Zedda smirked mischievously, "Keep your engine idling. Don't shut it off!"

"Understood."

Descending from his cockpit, Amuro's pilot suit rustled.

Seizing the opportunity, Zedda launched himself onto the hidden jumping tool and turned the starter key.

"You!" It was Amuro's voice.

In a split second, Zedda looked up. Amuro, supposed to have descended, was propelled upwards, thanks to a small thruster attached to his waist.

"Damn!"

"Where's Cunningham?!" Amuro's voice seethed with rage.

In response, Zedda accelerated his jumping tool, quickly ascending to close the gap with Amuro.

"You heard her, didn't you?"

"That was a synthesized voice!"

Just then, Amuro positioned himself in front of Zedda's cockpit, his handgun gleaming.

Reacting swiftly, Zedda veered his jumping tool, dodging a series of gunshots. The echoing sounds of bullets whizzing past engulfed him.

"This might be it!" Zedda's jumping tool brushed past the treetops, plunging into the canopy.

Amuro folded his suit's thrusters, settling into the cockpit seat. He ran a sensor sweep on the panoramic monitor, zooming in on the last known location of Zedda and any sign of human presence.

"I was careless!" Beyond the trees, a mobile suit lurched forward. The place where Cunningham's voice had come from was now empty. The silhouette of the black, mysterious mobile suit loomed. Its engines roared to life, and beams shot out from its three firing ports almost immediately.

Amuro's Jeddah instinctively dodged.

"He's fast," Amuro whispered, his voice tinged with fear.

"Is retreat the only option?" Amuro wondered, determined to find Cunningham. Everything he'd said to Zedda was true, as were his current thoughts.

Suddenly, Amuro accelerated, ascending towards the opposite "river" from the colony's center. Inside the colony, excessive speed could easily lead to a crash against the walls, making it more challenging than piloting in space.

The black mobile suit was rapidly closing in.

"He's a pro!" Amuro felt the chill of genuine fear for the first time in a while. That battlefield sensation - a savage intent piercing through the armor of the mobile suit straight into his heart and mind.

Following this sensation would lead him to the enemy. In a way, this could be likened to the heightened awareness of a Newtype. However, to Amuro, it was more akin to the "killing intent" sensed by master swordsmen. It wasn't Newtype-like or some supernatural ESP; it was raw and visceral. With its crescent-wing-like heat radiators, the black mobile suit loomed larger in his sight.

"It's clearly a combat mobile suit, isn't it!"

Amuro couldn't help but conclude that the colony administrative ambassadors dispatched by the Earth Federation government were inept.

"How can they not even monitor civilians possessing such things!"

Even Zedda's small beam rifle, if it were to directly hit the colony's inner wall, could cause irreparable damage. The firepower remained formidable despite being lowered. Any attack aside from a direct hit on an enemy's machine was forbidden.

The two mobile suits danced throughout the colony, weaving through its vastness, with Zedda's dark mobile suit skimming past forests and swiftly pivoting almost ninety degrees to tail Amuro closely.

A sudden crash! Part of the colony's simulated mountainside crumbled, causing a landslide. The terrifying rumbling shook Alyona and Cunningham's elec-car.

"Over there!"

Emerging from the forest, the elec-car highlighted a sight of billowing dust and sparks. Another flash, casting a bright glow over the expanding smoke.

"Won't the colony collapse?"

"No, the roaring is approaching from a different direction."

"Mobile suits!"

"It's Joe and Olyan!"

Cunningham wondered if there was a way to signal their position to the trailing Ra Zaim. Suddenly, two mobile suits zipped right above their heads.

A bright flare burst beyond the veil of dust, revealing a terrifying motion of the landslide that the two mobile suits broke through.

"Ra Zaim?"

"...?"

The massive body of Ra Zaim, with all its lights extinguished, appeared above the forest.

"Right!"

In a moment of clarity, Cunningham signaled Alyona to shine the elec-car's headlight towards the Ra Zaim's direction, flashing it in the ancient Morse code: three short, three long, and three short bursts. An SOS. A call for rescue, an age-old signal still used today.

Seeing the enemy numbers increase to three, Zedda became frantic.

"We can't let that woman escape!"

Cursing, Zedda directed his mobile suit toward the colony's central axis.

"Not even a single shot landed!"

The black mobile suit neared the center core leading to the industrial block. "Hmph! Cowards! Bet they won't shoot inside the colony!"

On his side monitors, rear-view screens displayed. The chasing trio tore through the smoke, but as Zedda closed in on one of the pathways into the industrial block, he darted into a minuscule hatch. Such hatches weren't intended for unauthorized mobile suits.

Yet, it was open. As the black mobile suit vanished, the hatch began to close. By the time the three chasing mobile suits reached it, there was no room to slip in.

"Back off, Olyan!"

Amuro yelled over the radio to the leading sixth machine. As the sixth unit tried to reverse, a beam stretched from the nearly shut hatch. The unit staggered but seemed to dodge a direct hit.

"Open the hatch!"

While issuing orders to assess Olyan's damage, Amuro neared a section of the center core responsible for hatch management. He yelled at a control room window, "Open the hatch!"

Movement inside was evident.

"...?"

A silhouette approached the window, saying something. Amuro opened his cockpit hatch, leaning out.

"Open the hatch marked 23!"

"What?"

The control room worker seemed startled, probably by the mobile suit and the approaching Ra Zaim.

"We're chasing a black mobile suit! Why did you obstruct us?"

The distance between Jeddah's hatch and the control room was only a few meters.

"I don't know!"

The worker, hand cupped to his ear, leaned out, "Number 23, right? It's currently malfunctioning. We are testing it!"

Furious, Amuro gritted out, "Any other hatch will do. Just open it!"

"Do you have clearance?"

The man sounded irritatingly nonchalant. Amuro was overcome with the urge to fly out and punch him.

"All of them... they're all in on it," Amuro thought, his heart sinking in despair.

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 1

MOBILE FIGHT

CHAPTER-E

1

Captain Macias Testa made the call for the Ra Zaim to depart.

"It's clear now that neither the Sweetwater administration nor the police are taking action. Mobilizing the military is straightforward, but it'll ignite a public outcry of refugee mistreatment throughout all colonies, risking public condemnation of the military's very existence. I've read the situation. Now, it's up to Earth Federation in Lhasa. Soldiers don't meddle in politics."

"So, it was a mistake to bring the ship into the colony, Lieutenant Commander?"

Amuro Ray asked coolly.

"You agreed to it too!"

The words weren't harsh, but Captain Macias showed signs of growing irritation.

"Are you going to report this?"

"To where?"

"To the Londo Bell offices."

"Hmph. And who's above them? The Earth Federation government in Lhasa. What's the point of reporting? We can only do what's within our scope, even if it means ignoring some directives, right?"

"So we rebel?"

"No. I'm hoping for an ideal internal reform. If it becomes a rebellion or revolution, it's madness."

"Hmm?"

Captain Macias looked genuinely surprised.

Amuro sensed his intentions: perhaps he wanted a damning statement against the Earth Federation to report to Lhasa.

"Throughout history, rapid reforms often seem like intellectual idealism running amok, and it's the ordinary people who become the guinea pigs. That's my take."

"Seriously?"

"Yes. I despise the simplistic application of ideals to reality."

"Even for a Newtype?"

Amuro took on Macias's sarcasm head-on, "Especially because I'm a Newtype. There are things that can't be achieved unless all of humanity becomes a Newtype."

"Harsh..."

Macias retorted, screwing up his face.

"That's how it is. It's tough to endure sometimes. But, that's why I get why the officials assigned to Sweetwater only doing the administrative duties handed down from Lhasa without considering the feelings of the people

living there. They just want to complete their tenure without mishaps, without getting axed. But they're unaware that this is creating a reality that only fuels anti-Earth Federation government sentiments. They are stagnant in their perspective, oblivious to the evolving circumstances. How do you view the existence of these inept adults who remain oblivious to this gap?"

"Inept adults, huh? So, are you saying that chaotic places like Sweetwater are created by Earth?"

Amuro didn't get irritated with Captain Macias's evasive tactic. He had long accepted that adults can be this way.

"The current state might've been shaped by the refugees, but its foundation was laid by the Earth Federation. But remember, Amuro Ray, you're a part of the Earth Federation's military. As a member, you have to abide by their policies, or you're essentially stealing your salary."

The captain shifted topics again.

Amuro felt like looking up to the skies in exasperation.

"I do reflect, but I'm powerless."

"You? The proclaimed Newtype?"

"At birth, I was a prodigy. As a child, I was quite gifted, but when I became an adult, I just became a regular person."

Amuro deliberately ignored the previous remark, but Captain Macias effortlessly transitioned into his pragmatic duties.

"Shall we launch?"

"Huh? Oh, yes, go ahead."

The colony's cylinder had large airlocks on either end. The side facing the sun was an industrial block harnessing solar energy, while the opposite was the dock.

The Ra Zaim entered the colossal airlock, sealing off the inner hatch to prevent air leakage from the colony before opening the outer hatch to the vacuum of space. As it exposed itself to the void, a small machine approached, a civilian mini mobile suit commonly referred to as a Petit-Mobile.

The Petit-Mobile, signaling its docking request, landed on the catapult deck. Cunningham Shaw greeted it nearby and reported to Amuro on the bridge.

"Alyona Paige?"

"Yes, she's lively and chipper as can be. What's her game?"

Amuro was puzzled by Cunningham's somewhat annoyed report, but upon seeing Alyona's carefree demeanor on the mobile suit deck, he understood the "lively" remark.

"What's the matter?"

"Please take me wherever this ship is headed."

"Trying to smuggle yourself out?"

"It's impressive how you made it this far."

Cunningham smirked, trying to maintain composure.

"The checks for entering and leaving this colony are rather lax. It's all about money... and those who come here often have nowhere to return to, so no one really tries to leave."

"So people here like the way this colony operates?"

"Well, yes. Organizations like EGUM emerge here..."

"I see..."

"That's why, upon hearing of Ra Zaim's departure, the colony's residents are celebrating, throwing a festival."

"A festival?"

Cunningham glanced at Alyona.

"Yes... there are many places giving out free coffee and beer today."

"Typical!"

Cunningham's thoughts drifted to the opposing chants of residents when they retrieved her crashed Jeddah.

"Alyona, let's go up to the bridge."

Amuro thought he needed to discuss Alyona's situation with the captain.

"You'll permit her to leave the colony?"

Cunningham asked.

"Shouldn't we?"

"No, it's just..."

As she answered, Cunningham couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy as she looked at Alyona, whom Amuro had embraced.

"Yesterday's enemy, huh?" She mused faintly.

2

"Londo Bell has a base in Londenion on Side 1, right?"

"Yes..."

"I was born on Side 1. That's one of the reasons I wanted to be on this ship," she said.

"Which colony?"

"Lucie Colony."

"Hmm..."

Suddenly, the entire ship shuddered.

"Ah!"

Alyona's body slid against the wall, crashing into Amuro's back. Twisting slightly, Amuro caught her, noticing her surprisingly slender waist.

"I'm sorry."

"We must have accelerated. In zero gravity, you have to stabilize yourself... Don't you have a magnet suit?"

"Well, despite being a Spacenoid, I've never really experienced zero gravity."

"You probably just forgot. You must have traveled from one colony to another."

"Well, maybe."

The two entered the officer's area using the lift grip.

"Her again... Bit brave of her to return to the ship she was interrogated on," Captain Macias said.

"Did you come to spy?" Lieutenant JG Mestemar sneered.

"You can think what you want," Alyona retorted with poise.

Captain Macias remarked, "Honestly, there's nothing worth spying on here. Yet, rumors in EGUM suggested the Earth Federation Forces have incredible resources."

"My apologies."

"No worries..."

As they conversed, Amuro was called into the next room by Mestemar.

"Full body scans seem clear," he mentioned, showing a few body scan images.

"Good physique," Mestemar smirked.

"You would think," Amuro replied, intently studying the images, especially of the neck and brain.

"Physically, she appears to be natural..."

"Makes sense."

Finally, the two men dismissed their suspicion of her being an infiltrator. While the concept of Cyber-Newtype was not new, ensuring an unknown individual was not biologically modified before trusting them had become common sense. However, the checks against psychological conditioning remained insufficient. When Amuro returned to Alyona's room, Captain Macias explained the asylum application process to a young officer.

"Do you have a sponsor in Londenion?"

"Yes."

"The name and address?"

"I don't know the address, but it's Amuro Ray."

"Hey!" Captain Macias turned to Amuro.

"Alyona, I don't qualify for this."

"Why not? If I hadn't met you, I wouldn't have boarded this ship. So, you are responsible."

"Captain..."

"Sort it out between you two."

"Is your wife the nagging kind?" she teased.

"Unfortunately, I'm single."

"Then there's no issue in us living together, right?"

"Missy, we're processing asylum papers. The sponsor's details matter. In this case, living with a sponsor is important."

Captain Macias handed over the document for processing and left.

"Typical," Amuro muttered, reminding him of Cunningham. He presented his ID to the young officer.

"By the way... Alyona, Zedda?"

"Yes?"

"What was Zedda Mandira planning to do with Cunningham? Capture her and take his mobile suit?"

"I don't know his exact plans, but Zedda wanted to bolster his transport ship's firepower."

"A ship?"

"Yes. Zedda holds a transport license. Smuggling seemed to be quite profitable. He'd go to other Side's colonies, wait outside without entering, and procure contraband."

"A ship... If he has a license, he must have connections... He'd have plenty of chances to gather intel on our firepower. Good tip, Alyona."

Amuro stood up, "Stay put until we reach Londo Bell. Otherwise, it's solitary for you, which won't be pleasant."

He gave her shoulder a light pat before exiting.

3

"I hear you're going to sponsor her?"

Cunningham, who had been floating along with decent momentum, stopped abruptly in front of Amuro as though she'd collided with him.

"It's just a formality."

"But still..."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing..." Cunningham hesitated, not wanting Amuro to see her growing frustration.

"I'm a calm, rational woman," she told herself. "No, men and women are the same. I won't accept that women get carried away by their emotions."

Yet, she couldn't deny her increased nervousness since the mobile suit battles.

"So, what's the word?" she tried to sound detached, even business-like.

"She gave me some intel. That Zedda guy, he's coming."

"Don't tell me you trust her?"

"I hope my gut is wrong on this one," Amuro spoke, transferring to the next lift grip. "Wait in the briefing room!"

"Right! Fill me in on the details."

"Will do!"

Hearing Amuro's spirited voice lifted Cunningham's mood. However, the reminder that it was Alyona who shared this intelligence weighed on her heart.

"Why is he drawn to her? I've heard he had a woman in his past. Someone named Lalah, and they lived together."

The name of that woman slipped her mind.

"It was a name like Londo Bell..."

This was not firsthand information from Amuro, but a known tale among the pilots. There were exaggerated stories about him – him having multiple wives on Earth, or how just the proximity of a mobile suit piloted by him caused numerous Zeon mobile suits to be destroyed, including the Zeong.

Among such stories, Cunningham had discreetly verified with Amuro and had come to believe that during a showdown with a Zeon Newtype pilot named Lalah Sune, Amuro had felt the fear of her death simultaneously.

"Oh, that's who it was, Beltorchika Irma."

It seemed that he had indeed lived with that woman.

The mobile suit deck was silent, with only three machines, Amuro's Jeddah No. 3, Joe Sei's Jeddah No. 4, and Olyan Blumquift's Jeddah No. 6, were on the dimly lit deck. Cunningham's Jeddah No. 5, which was undergoing repair, was in the next deck over.

"Cunningham!" A seemingly worry-free Joe Sei called out, floating in.

"You're suiting up too?"

"The Lieutenant told me to."

"You're joking."

"What were you doing?"

"Just some good old athletic training!"

"Where's Olyan?"

"He was about to hit the showers, seemed annoyed. Are you piloting the third unit, Cunningham?"

"That's the plan. Any objections?"

As the two entered the normal suit room, the room's intercom buzzed.

"You're late!" The operation officer's voice bellowed from the small monitor.

"Understood!"

Hierarchy and timing mattered little in this context. In the military, it's often a battle of who's louder.

"You realize this airspace is classified as top-level danger?"

"Understood!"

"Never apologize." Because if you do, they'll take advantage, and when you've let your guard down, that's when they'll strike. There's no logic like *"That's rude, it shouldn't be like that."* In the military where life and death are at stake, they teach us that this is the way to toughen up.

"Give me a sit-rep!"

That's how they demand an update on the ship's current status. Only pilots can address the bridge this way. If the ship doesn't allow this, pilots on escort might not fully protect the ship. So, they have no choice but to grant this level of privilege.

"Unknown! But be on standby in your pilot suits!"

"Roger that!"

Cunningham began to don her pilot suit as she overheard Joe's exchange. Technological advancements improved the suits' performance to the point where one could wear them alone. Especially the development of solid oxygen condensation tech significantly reduced the size of the life support backpack, making it remarkably user-friendly.

"If only they found a way for us to survive without helmets," mused the pilots and, more or less, all of humanity.

While a vacuum is an absolute zero-pressure environment, the issue of one atmosphere wasn't severe when considering underwater pressures. With the current super-oxygen solidifiers and magnetic field barriers, it's possible to fill a human-sized space with one atmosphere of oxygen and nitrogen. The challenge is maintaining it over time and regulating temperature. Even for a few seconds, a small space could rapidly heat to over 300° in direct sunlight or plummet below -200° in the shadow. The temperature range a naked human can endure is barely 50°. It was far from being a practical technology.

"Can't confirm!"

"No, shadows approaching! There's a lot of them!"

"Ships?"

"Too small!"

As these voices echoed from the intercom in the suit room, both Joe and Olyan had finished donning their suits.

"Did the radar pick them up?"

"Yes!"

"That means no Minovsky particles! They're definitely mines!"

The bridge erupted in chaos.

"Could it be..."

"Civilians have weapons?"

"Very possible."

"But Amuro, there were no reports of this."

"Mestemar, why are you so convinced that reports and computer data reflect the truth?"

"Accumulated data is more reliable than a single human's judgment."

"Humans often act on simple intuition, which ironically can't be computed in many cases."

"Bio-computers are more human-like."

"They must have their quirks, right? Individual traits can't grasp the whole picture."

"The mines are Mitsubi K74 models!"

"See? Computers are amazing!"

"What's the use of knowing that? There was no data on mines being scattered around Sweetwater, was there?"

"I get it... We'll lay down strafing fire while retreating, but if we spot the enemy, we'll engage."

"Got it! Mobile suit unit, prepare to launch! Cunningham, stay on standby!"

Amuro, from his commander's seat, bellowed into the monitor aimed at the briefing room.

"The computer suggests it might be guerrillas."

"I'm aware!"

Captain Macias, always by the book, yelled back at the crew member who dutifully reported, "All hands! Suit up!"

4

Behind the Ra Zaim, the colony's cylinder was still at a distance that showcased its enormity. The airspace near this colony was considered an absolute no-fly zone. Unlike the psychology of Earth's inhabitants, space noids believed that colonies were like their own Earth. Earlier history showed instances of colonies being dropped or destroyed, and those responsible were undoubtedly consumed by madness. Those who dared harm the colonies were destined to fall. This was the ethical code of those in the space age.

There were two types of colonies: the open type which used mirrors to direct sunlight inward, and the closed type that converted solar heat into an artificial sun to sustain the living spaces within. Yet, Sweetwater had a peculiar structure that combined both types. While it seemed more synthetic when viewed from a distance, it was unmistakably a colony. No Spacenoid would dare consider firing a mega particle cannon in this adjacent airspace.

"Are we clear?"

Captain Macias repeatedly ensured that all of the Ra Zaim's cannons faced away from the colony.

"We're clear!"

The crew responded diligently, targeting the area from where mines were being deployed.

"Distance!"

"Good!"

"Bearing! No ships around!"

"Strafing fire! Cover all angles! Open fire!"

Bagoom!

The cannons of the Ra Zaim opened in unison, firing their first battle shots. But the enemy remained unknown, a fact that deeply irritated Captain Macias. Through the standard bridge windows, bursts of fireballs came into view as mines exploded. It was a beautiful sight, but it only aggravated the captain further.

"Who's the enemy? Neo Zeon?"

Macias spat out the detested name.

"Amuro! Report!"

Macias called the normal suit room via a small monitor on his armrest.

"The enemy's hiding behind the colony."

"How can you be sure? Isn't this just harassment from the EGUM?"

"Why are you being so optimistic? I'll give you credit for that, but just deal with the situation!"

"Understood! Full speed retreat!"

"Release the Minovsky particles!"

"Ah, right!"

"Such amateurs..."

Amuro mumbled, disappointedly recalling how inexperienced Captain Macias truly was.

Armies without real combat experience were merely playing war games, enjoying make-believe fights as long as no one got seriously injured. When an army becomes like this, they inevitably recruit those who've fallen through the cracks of society, so you can easily guess the level of their abilities. Moreover, once these types of groups realize they can survive within the organization, they start behaving more like co-operatives, irrespective of their original goals.

In the age of the Universal Century, even though there are a few exceptions in the Earth Sphere, conflicts between nations on Earth have virtually disappeared. Yet, the reason the military persisted was due to this cooperative mindset and the perspective of it as an employment opportunity. And since these groups wield power, they've birthed new reasons for conflict, like rebellions stemming from military dissatisfaction against civilians. From this viewpoint, the rise of the Zabi family is nothing more than a revolt borne from such military frustrations.

The inability to dismantle these armies, even with the understanding of their root causes, isn't solely a problem of the Earth Federation government. It's because humanity hasn't found a clear answer to the proposition of living without working. In today's world, a mere 150 million people are enough to feed 20 billion and run the colonies. But the question remains about how the remaining 19.9 billion will live without doing anything. This essentially raises the question: Can one lead a complete life without doing anything in a world of absolute peace?

Even if one wishes to live for others, if no one needs help, such an aspiration becomes nonsensical. Some might then suggest living for self-improvement, but in a state of complete peace, with everything one could desire, such self-improvement becomes redundant.

If that pursuit of a better life is seen as nothing but "desire", it's clear that desire needs to be eradicated. Yet, without desire, there's no ambition. Still, humans don't let go; they constantly seek self-improvement, driven by something they want or some dissatisfaction with reality.

The notion that people wouldn't have grievances in a world of absolute peace is naive. People would become indolent. Indolence breeds apathy, and apathy invites illness and death. This isn't a natural death; hence, it's not a peaceful life. A peaceful life is one upheld by a natural death. A world where such a death can be achieved would truly be the ultimate utopia. Yet, humanity knows that such an ideal is unrealistic and not something to pursue, as such wisdom only breeds misery. People treasure wisdom as that which saves them from a heart that cannot be freed from greed.

In essence, humans possess a societal and intellectual mechanism preventing them from achieving absolute peace. Especially in terms of desire, it's like a black hole from which there's no escape. As a result, by merely multiplying, humanity continues to compound internal problems. As the number of people increases, so do desires, leading to more conflicts.

Currently, these conflicts manifest as tensions between the Earth Federation government and the refugees.

To eradicate this root cause, we must annihilate the "desire" that has morphed into the ambition for betterment, but this is a bleak prospect. Conflicts will persist at every level - nations, races, economies, organizations, families, and individuals. But the naive next question arises - is that life? Unless humanity evolves into Newtypes, who can willingly follow a life of absolute peace leading to death, people will continue to mobilize armies, toy with military force, and be manipulated by economics.

5

"Amuro!"

"It's fine! Just wait, Cunni!"

"But even I can--"

"One cannot fight with feelings alone. The enemy will definitely show themselves! Watch carefully for the next battle!"

Pushing away Cunningham's normal suit, Amuro slid into the cockpit of the third unit.

"You need a break, Cunni," saying this gently, Amuro closed the hatch.

"Mobile suits, third unit, launching!"

"Are you really going to engage in mobile suit combat?"

Cunningham was hung up on Amuro using the word "war." Amuro's Zeta moved forward and onto the catapult deck right in front of her.

"Unit 3, moving out!"

"You're clear!"

"What's the meaning of this?"

The captain broke in.

"I want to see the airspace with my own eyes!"

Boom!

A heavy gravitational force hit; Amuro watched as the armor of the Ra Zaim on both sides retreated. His body adjusted to the G-forces as his arms manipulated the grips, twisting the machine backward.

"They're here! Zaim! Evade!"

The proximity allowed for radio contact.

"Where?"

"The colony!"

The beam seemed to be fired by the colony. Three beams grazed the Ra Zaim, with one obliterating its port side.

"Good shot!"

It was a precise shot, taken from behind the shelter of the colony.

"Tch!"

Amuro sensed it was Zedda. He quickly approached the northern side of the colony. From its ridgeline, a single ship was seen rising. Using the colony as a shield rendered warships helpless against attacks.

"They know their stuff!"

Without waiting for Joe Sei and Olyan Blumquift's Jeddah, Amuro approached the vessel overhead.

"If they fire again, we'll retaliate."

Before he could finish that thought, three more beams shot out from near the bow of the ship, a transport vessel at that.

"They knew I was coming."

That was Amuro's excuse. It takes significant training for a novice to silently observe an approaching mobile suit.

"Sorry, but here I go!"

A direct hit against the vessel with the colony as a backdrop was the only option. Being too close to the colony during a direct hit wasn't ideal.

"But..."

Amuro aimed his beam rifle at what seemed like a gun turret on the ship's bow. At the same time, he didn't miss the shadow skimming the colony's surface.

"Fire!"

As he fired the beam rifle and twisted the machine, a beam just skimmed past him—the same kind he saw on the colony.

"A black mobile suit!"

With a click of his tongue, Amuro tried to position himself beneath the machine, using the colony as a backdrop. The wall of the colony loomed closer in the darkness. Details of the colony wall became visible, multiple streaks of light reflecting off the outer wall.

Feeling the weight and gravitational pull of the colony, Amuro calculated his distance from it, igniting the Jeddah's apogee motor. The colony wall raced across the rear-view monitor in front of him.

THUMP!

Suddenly, a beam column pierced the colony wall within his view.

"It's him!"

Even knowing that the man named Zedda Mandira wouldn't care about such things, such behavior was inexcusable.

"Tch!"

Without slowing down, Amuro propelled the Jeddah upward. The colony gradually receded behind him.

For a shocking moment, he spotted the shadow of the enemy, backlit by the sun... and fired a beam at where it was heading.

ZAP!

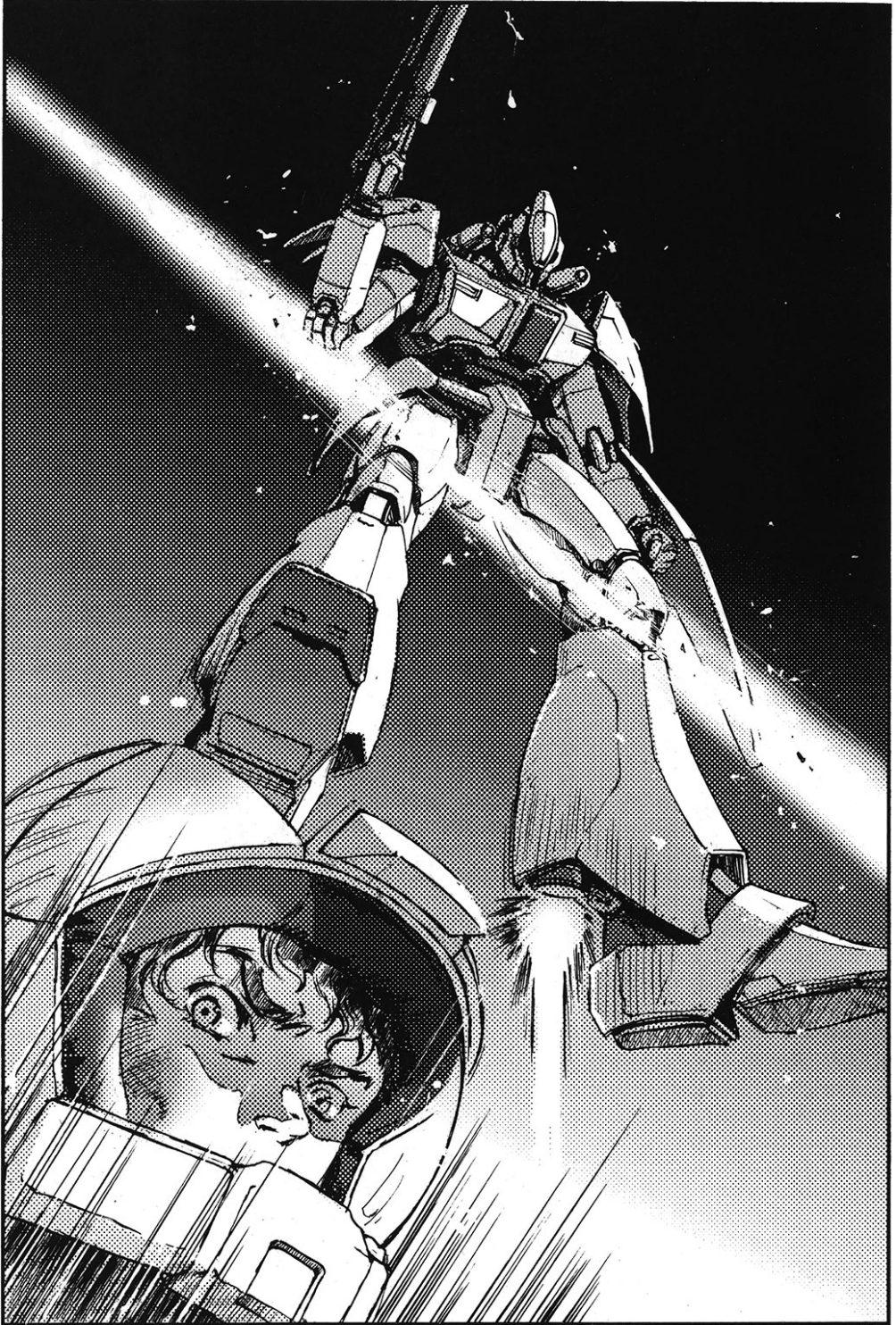
A flash, slightly brighter than a star, indicated a non-fatal hit.

Amuro once again approached the colony, locating Zedda's transport ship.

Though the bow should've been damaged from the previous attack, it seemed one of the beam guns was still operational. The transport ship, now beginning its retreat from the colony, had picked up considerable speed.

Amuro closed in.

"Lieutenant!"



Amid the noise caused by Minovsky particles, he received a transmission resembling Joe's distressed voice.

"...!"

While delivering a direct hit to the remaining gun port of the transport ship, Amuro steered towards the colony's sunward direction.

A massive fireball erupted in the distance.

"They're here!"

Glancing at his rear-view multi-monitor, Amuro acknowledged the approaching black mobile suit.

THUMP!

A missile launched from below the Jeddah's backpack.

"One will hit the colony," Amuro realized.

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 1

CROSS TIME

CHAPTER-F

1

Amuro Ray's Jeddah Unit 3 unleashed a barrage of small missiles towards the looming black mobile suit trailing him. However, the pilot of the black mobile suit, Zedda Mandira, was no stranger to such tactics.

"Hmph!"

With a deft maneuver, the black mobile suit skimmed along the colony's outer walls, dodging the barrage effortlessly. His nature was seemingly crafted for combat, yet one missile, as if guided by fate, ricocheted off the colony's exterior—a play straight out of Amuro's book. Without detonation, it caromed off the structure, barely missing Zedda, leaving him visibly shaken.

"What the hell?!"

Zedda's agitation caused the black mobile suit to move away from the colony, a move that Amuro couldn't predict. The beam rifle on Amuro's mobile suit, aimed at its rear, stitched a futile line, trying to chase after it.

"Damn!"

Amuro tried to distance himself from the colony. While most Spacenoids avoid fighting near colonies, both Zedda and Amuro were the types to forget conventional wisdom when in the heat of combat, although their personalities were polar opposites.

From his extensive combat experience, Amuro understood that he had to seize the initiative, even using the colony as a shield if necessary. He accepted that some minimal damage was unavoidable if it meant victory, and failure would prevent rebuilding the colony. His over-reliance on this strategy was a byproduct of his confidence, often leaving less-experienced pilots unable to adapt promptly.

Zedda Mandira lived his life to the fullest, leveraging his fierce temperament. He lacked the restraint of common sense, indifferent to the idea of using the colony as a shield, even if it meant the deaths of millions within. It was only after migrating to Sweetwater and encountering the enigmatic Char Aznable that any semblance of caution or intellect had tempered his spirit. Char, who dreamt of rebuilding Neo Zeon, the memory of Zeon Deikun's enduring legacy heavy upon him. In Char's shadow, Zedda found a reprieve from his self-destructive past, another soul wearied by the epoch of space wars.

For in battle, a sound mind borders on madness, the only state that can summon the reflexes to confront life-or-death stakes. Calm combat is but a theory, untenable without overwhelming force. Yet, this very struggle may also dig one's grave, illustrating the paradox birthed by the spear and shield dichotomy—a compulsion towards war that obliterates common sense and convention.

The missile's failure to explode upon hitting the colony was a mere fluke, a common enough occurrence due to maintenance failures, often costing soldiers their lives. A grim reality.

"Crafty!"

Zedda Mandira bit the bait that the bouncing missile was part of Londo Bell's mobile suit's plan. This caution inadvertently honed Zedda into a formidable pilot.

"What the—?!"

Zedda, clutching his machine's head, accelerated after Amuro's retreating Jeddah. Zedda knew that he couldn't stand a chance against two mobile suits, especially with the support of EGUM and the modified attack vessel.

"Letting him get away was a huge mistake! If only he hadn't shown up!"

That was Zedda's regret. For now, he had to focus on taking down the Jeddah before him.

"That skill—that's the notorious Amuro Ray! A Newtype in a mobile suit!"

Zedda became certain that the boyish man he'd met at a Sweetwater pub, rumored to be a Newtype, was behind the controls of the Jeddah before him. The primary reason Zedda decided to attack the Ra Zaim as he left Sweetwater was to challenge this Newtype and validate his capabilities.

"What sort of man troubles the Captain?"

It was a burning question, set against a historical backdrop of Zedda's, Spacenoid's, frustration—only the privileged few lived on Earth, exiling the masses to space. For those born in space colonies, setting foot on Earth was nearly impossible. This historical injustice fueled the rebellion in space-bred individuals, particularly against forces like Londo Bell, who hunted remnants of the old Principality of Zeon and Titans, seen as nothing more than shields for Earth's clinging bureaucrats, deeply loathed by all.

Zedda's black suit shimmered as its radiator fins caught the sun's rays. These evaporating metal particles created a glow that inadvertently gave away his position to Amuro, a misfortune for Zedda.

Pasheew!

The Jeddah's beam rifle fired, accelerating heavy metal particles into a beam, heading straight for Zedda's projected path.

BASHOOM!

A fiery explosion ensued, obliterating another of Zedda's radiator fins. Although the hit didn't threaten the pilot's life, the psychological impact was profound.

"How dare he?!"

Zedda's defiant scream in the confines of his cockpit was a desperate attempt to fend off fear. With a frantic spin, rotating the suit upright, Zedda tried to catch the trail of Amuro on the forward monitor.

"Damn!!!"

A massive flash erupted from the left rear. It seemed his allied ship, which had been using the colony as a shield while firing at the Ra Zaim, had taken a direct hit.

"That bastard!"

To curse the enemy is also to curse one's own inadequacy. With the entire frame of his suit groaning under strain, Zedda closed in on the enemy mobile suit that seemed to hang suspended in midair.

2

In this game of death, intuition was the compass by which one predicted the enemy's gambit. Yet, for the fiery-tempered Zedda, such nuances were inconsequential.

"Hmph!"

Without easing off the throttle, Zedda activated a mechanism on his dark mobile suit's left manipulator, what one might call its "hand," releasing a rubber-like object. It rapidly inflated into a humanoid shape, darting erratically in every direction—a dummy propelled by a small explosive charge.

As Zedda maneuvered in tandem with the dummy's movement, he closed in on Amuro's Jeddah. From an attacker's perspective, even knowing it was a dummy, distinguishing between the two was nearly impossible and quite unsettling.

That momentary confusion was typically the opening an opponent would exploit.

Even with radar identification, if one possessed stealth capabilities and the dummy was designed to reflect radar signals, differentiation was essentially impossible. One had to rely solely on instinct to target what they believed to be the real deal.

While there were methods to check for life signs, if the machine emitted thermal cycles similar to humans, detection became challenging. There were methods to sense a person's presence directly, like a psycho-communicator, which caught something close to their psycho and brain waves.

Yet, these psycommu devices, while able to detect human presence, were merely antennas. Identifying those signals depended entirely on human sensitivity—a vulnerability, or conversely, the utmost advantage.

Only pilots evaluated as Newtypes, like Amuro, could operate them. Yet, within the current ranks of Londo Bell, not a single mobile suit was equipped with a psycommu. Until a few years ago, the Gundams, Z Gundam, and ZZ were now secrets tucked away under the Earth Federation Space Force jurisdiction.

The reasons ran deep, and the higher-ups in the military and government would never discuss their existence, especially from Amuro's position. Hence, the Jeddah piloted by Amuro was a rather standard mobile suit, forcing him to rely on sheer instinct.

Locked onto the zigzagging glow on the Jeddah's monitor, Amuro's mind roared, "There!"

No cry escaped his lips; the scream of his will surged into the beam rifle he wielded. With a flash, the barrel spat out light. Normally a coherent beam,

the shot fractured into countless luminous pellets, sowing themselves into the space Zedda's mobile suit occupied.

To put it dramatically, Amuro utilized the beam as if it were buckshot. It was an approach Zedda hadn't anticipated. The evasive zigzag pattern he had intended to save him only led to another hit.

"Ah!"

Even the unflappable Zedda paled, sensing the enemy as an impending "wall." The beam grazed what would be his machine's flank, searing through the armor, the blast's aftermath blowing off the main nozzle on the backpack unit—a critical blow to mobility.

"Shit!"

Zedda was visibly shaken.

Then, he felt an approaching pressure, but not from the front.

"Minor nuisance!"

Frustration gnawed at him, knowing his machine's movements were now severely limited.

Beams converged from left and right; the next strike would surely be a direct hit. Recognizing this, Zedda contemplated activating the self-destruct mechanism. Hesitation must have clouded his vigilance, for by the time he noticed, the Jeddah's "face" loomed before him.

"What the...?!"

He couldn't fathom how he had allowed the enemy to get so close without noticing. It wasn't like him to overlook a mobile suit approaching head-on.

His suit experienced a profound vibration, not caused by a beam or missile but by something rather ordinary. Feeling such a vibration in combat was eerie.

"What's going on?" Zedda muttered.

"I know you can hear me! Open the hatch!"

A voice echoed through Zedda's helmet headphones.

It was a form of communication possible when mobile suits touched, called "skin touch chat," using the machine itself to convey sound.

"You might self-destruct, but it won't defeat our suits!"

The voice was demanding.

Infuriated, Zedda retorted, "Watch me!"

"Then prove it!"

Amid the exchanged challenges, Zedda's monitor was filled with the image of the enemy mobile suit's shield. An enemy that had anticipated even Zedda's possible self-destruction wasn't to be underestimated.

Zedda felt the sting of defeat.

"Fine. I'll open the hatch."

Curious about the adversary's next move, he questioned, "Who sent you to attack?"

Beyond his opened hatch, the enemy's mobile suit revealed its pilot, leaning out brandishing a handgun.

"You know how active the anti-Earth Federation government citizen movement is, don't you?"

Zedda replied sarcastically, considering if he could win in a gunfight.

3

"Where is Char?!"

The abrupt query crackled through Zedda's normal suit headset, startling him profoundly.

"Char? What's that supposed to mean?"

He retorted but knew immediately there was a pause before he responded—a telltale sign. Lies were transparent here.

"It's what you said at the pub! Your mobile suit is well-crafted, too well-made for a civilian factory. It's not the work of one man alone. Where is Char!"

"Don't jest with me! I was military, too. I have my connections!"

From both sides, Zedda could feel his mobile suit's arms being restrained by two Jeddah.

Snap!

Zedda's black mobile suit's beam rifle was destroyed.

"Hmph! Do as you wish! Or else, I'll use the self-destruct!"

Zedda was deadly serious. He didn't want to inadvertently bring harm to Char Aznable, especially with Londo Bell so easily piercing through to his core. But...

"Ugh!"

"Keep those hands where I can see them!"

The youthful voice held power. Matching the escalating intensity of the voice, a pilot suit rapidly approached, planting its foot on the hatch of Zedda's mobile suit.

"I'll use the beam saber!"

In the man's left hand was a handle reminiscent of the beam sabers used by mobile suits. The pistol in his right was standard issue, yet against a spacesuit or normal suit, it could be deadly. Still, a cut wrist from the beam saber's intense heat would seal the breached outer skin of a normal suit, maintaining its integrity. To be in such a suit at that moment would be torture, a fate worse than death.

The pilot before Zedda clearly had this in mind.

Despite the fragile appearance in a normal suit, the aura exuding from the pilot's entire being was not to be underestimated.

"Amuro Ray...?"

When they had met in the pub, Zedda hadn't sensed this strength in Amuro, but now it was clear that Amuro had been acting then. The face now visible beyond the visor was undoubtedly that of the man who had dashed into the pub drenched from the rain, showing a surprising skill with the beam saber.

"So you're looking for the whereabouts of Char Aznable?"

Zedda realized the tables had turned in his favor.

"You do realize that even if you're concerned about this 'Char' fellow, the anti-Federation movements won't cease, right?"

"You misunderstand, Zedda Mandira. I simply want to see the face of the man who scavenges scraps like a pig from the shadows. That's why I stay with Londo Bell; they have the legs to chase after such swine."

"You dare call Captain Char a pig?"

"Only a select few refer to him as 'Captain', as you yourself pointed out. So, where is Char?"

"I don't know! Why would the Captain inform every soldier of his whereabouts?!"

"So that's how it is. One last question. Where has the Island One at Sweetwater moved?"

"The asteroid belt, perhaps?"

At Zedda's reply, Amuro extended the beam saber's length by two meters.

"I'm not joking around!"

The tip of the beam barely singed Zedda's helmet.

"Go on. Do it, *Newtype*."

At Zedda's composed retort, Amuro deactivated the beam saber.

Amuro's demeanor suddenly changed. Zedda could see Amuro shouting at him, but couldn't hear the words. Amuro had cut off the comm link. In a swift motion, Amuro kicked off the hatch and floated back into his own mobile suit. Zedda was so startled by the swift change that he forgot to draw his gun.

"Evacuate the ship! Hurry!"

A code beeped in Amuro's ear. The ship's captain was issuing a direct order. Directing Joe Sei and Olyan Blumquift to disable the apogee motor of the black mobile suit, Amuro began his retreat.

Left stranded in his black mobile suit, Zedda Mandira angrily slammed his helmet, waiting for a rescue that might never come.

4

The Island Type One was essentially a base colony designed to house approximately ten thousand construction workers involved in the construction and inspection of the current cylindrical colonies. Once these cylindrical colonies were complete, they were disassembled, and their materials repurposed for subsequent colonies.

However, there were exceptions. Some remained, serving as stationary observation posts outside the Moon's orbit or as emergency evacuation colonies. These smaller colonies were colloquially called "Water Islands." The issue was some of these Water Islands had gone missing.

Since the Principality of Zeon's space war, space around Earth had become heavily polluted, and in the lunar orbit, the Lagrange Points (points

of gravitational balance between the Moon and Earth) were called "shoal zones," making it impossible for conventional spacecraft to navigate. Similar zones existed outside the Moon's orbit as well. Unfortunately, the Londo Bell, having a limited fleet, lacked the capability to explore such areas.

The Earth Federation Space Force's vessels, mostly stationed at various colonies or within the orbit of several smaller asteroids, were reluctant to leave their posts. On the surface, the reason was the fear of civil unrest, but the actual reason was simpler: the sheer inconvenience was the deterrent. All that the members of the Space Force truly desired was to get paid without incident.

For them, the Londo Bell was an active unit established to maintain peace and carry out garrison missions. Despite no real civil war, the continued existence of such a military seemed to satiate some primal human combat instinct. Yet, the Earth Federation government only maintained this military force as a form of unemployment solution, targeting the space-dwelling population. This force's existence was purely a result of indolence; it rarely functioned practically.

"Strange signatures. Seems like a fleet," Amuro remarked as he dodged the damaged deck of the Ra Zaim, entering directly through the bridge hatch. Captain Macias gave him a worried look.

"Any IFF codes?"

"Do you expect them to actually respond?"

"Aliens from Jupiter then?"

"Probably."

"Backed by EGUM?"

"I doubt it..."

"What's the damage to this ship?"

"You've seen it from outside. It's not good."

"Indeed..."

Amuro knew that radar data could only provide so much. "I want to scout ahead..."

"Send out a Base Jabber?"

"If it's possible. Can you?"

"Don't assume we've only one hatch on the mobile suit deck."

"Right. I recall Cunningham being frustrated she couldn't launch. Let me pilot the Base Jabber."

"You can't handle it on your own?"

"Come on now!"

Ignoring the captain, Amuro returned to his Jeddah. Moments later, a Base Jabber RS5 equipped with Jeddah's supply gear launched, carefully avoiding the damaged sections of the Ra Zaim's deck. Amuro attached the Jeddah to the deck of the Base Jabber, securing it with manipulators. The Base Jabber, essentially the legs used for long-distance mobile suit incursions, could be controlled directly from the suit. But, typically, it operated using its own core for launching.

"Let's move!"

The voice from the Base Jabber's control core wasn't Cunningham's, leaving Amuro baffled.

"Alyona Paige! Isn't Cunningham there?"

"You must be joking, Amuro. You think Alyona can handle the controls?" Cunningham's raspy voice chimed in, providing Amuro some relief.

With Amuro's Jeddah aboard, the Base Jabber swiftly departed from the Ra Zaim, heading straight for the area where the unidentified fleet was reported to be.

5

"Quess..."

Christina uttered with a weary sigh, hands sifting through day-unwashed hair, her voice trailing into the growing dusk.

"Yes?"

Quess, still cradling both knees, lifted her innocent eyes in response. Regrettably for Christina, even after a week-long fast that had left her far from fully recovered, she felt obligated to respond to the girl's inquiries.

"You came here seeking the truth, didn't you?"

"That's obvious, isn't it?"

"Then stop asking such trivial questions. It's okay to have questions, but to always assume there's an answer? Haven't I always told you that's a mistake?"

"But I hate not understanding myself. I thought maybe a post-fast Christina would have the answers..."

"You might not want to hear this, but I'm only twenty-seven. Far younger than Buddha was when he sought enlightenment. 'Who am I?' is a question you can only answer for yourself."

"I don't like that answer..."

Quess murmured again. But even if she couldn't get a tangible answer from the blonde woman, Quess Paraya didn't seem displeased. Her thin lips bore a hint of a smile, and her dust-coated cheeks shone with a plump glow.

"Quess! Time to eat!"

A man's voice abruptly broke into the conversation between the two women.

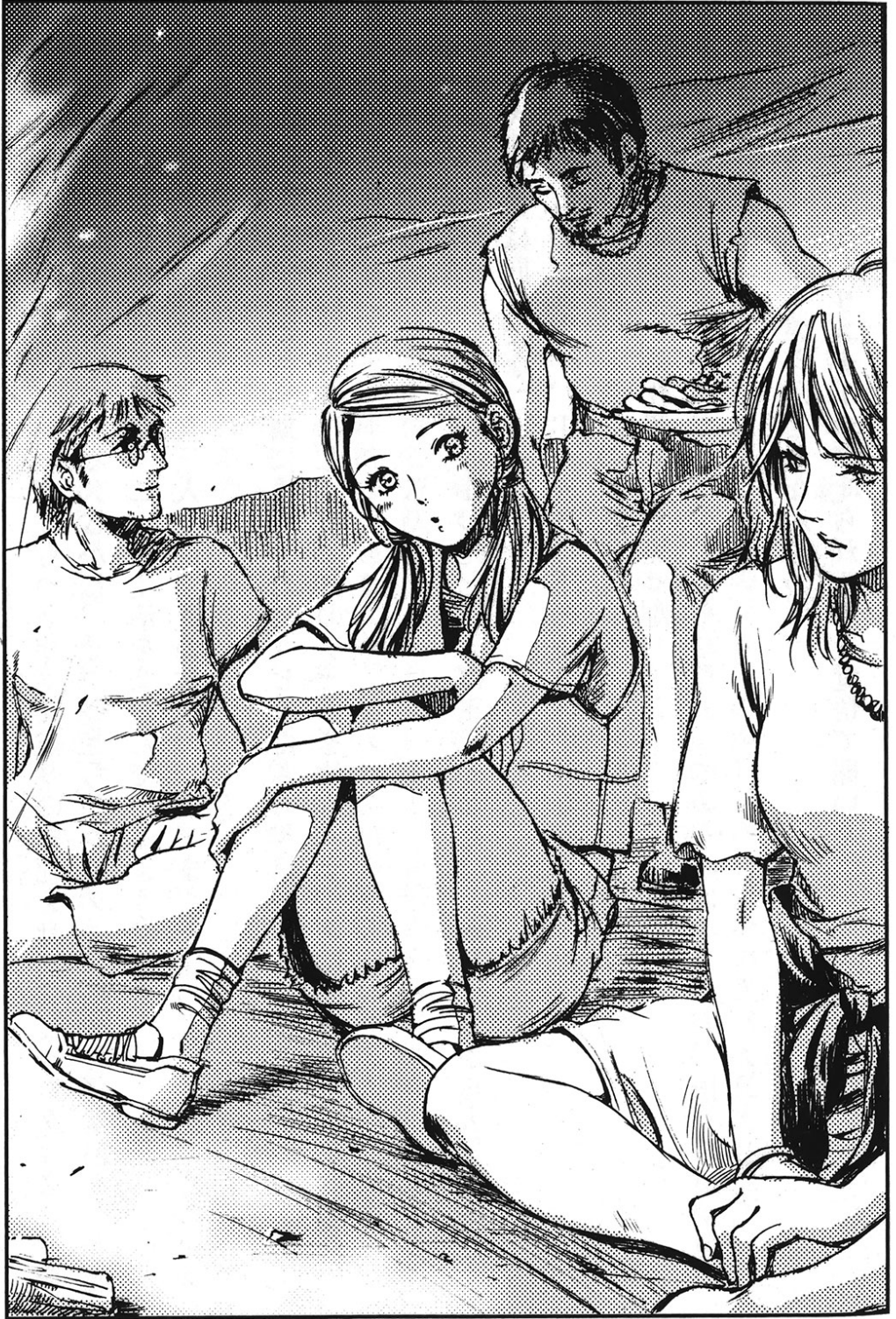
As dusk approached this northern Indian location near Sarnath, a wind that made one forget the heat of the day began to blow.

"Coming!"

Quess sprang up, her attire a crude semblance of jeans, more a pauper's rags than modern dress, yet her movements were quick, devoid of self-pity, and bore an honesty that seemed at home with their austere life.

Around the campfire sat three men and three women; one of the females, young and childlike, was Quess. The others had the appearance of hippies, a trend from the late last century.

They drank chai and ate naan stuffed with some vegetables.



"Look, the stars are out tonight..."

"Yes, if the Earth Federation government was right about one thing, though it doesn't change the outcome when pollution comes from beyond," mused Jeff as he rubbed the hint of a paunch beneath his T-shirt.

"Why haven't you lost weight? You've been living this life for half a year now, haven't you?" Quess teased, a laugh escaping her lips.

"It seems even with frugal meals, I can't shed weight. Maybe my path to enlightenment is still a long way off."

"What exactly is enlightenment?"

Quess asked, readying herself for another rebuke from Christina.

"You do understand what we've taught, don't you?"

Toffler Langeraj, the elder of the group, chimed in.

"To see the light within oneself. The light is the righteous, the revealer of truths. When you see that light, the path to self-liberation unfolds, leading to a state of being that connects to the liberation of all."

"That's enough."

Quess fell silent.

Toffler chuckled, observing Quess's apparent discontent.

"Quess... you see, the path to enlightenment cannot be taught. Not because it's a secret. It's a deeply personal understanding, a unique experience. One must strive to see the light on their own. That's the purpose of discipline: to rid oneself of desires, to cleanse the soul. Only when one is truly purified will the light be visible and the self liberated. That's all words can convey. The rest is a journey of the self. It's about relinquishing karma."

"Karma?"

"It's the state of mind and body controlled by intent. Let it go. Forget. Haven't you yet forgiven your parents?"

"I haven't... that's right."

"That's right. So now, learning is what remains. This serene moment provides us with relaxation. And relaxation often paves the way to enrich the mind. Therefore, it's the perfect time for learning. After the morning hours... Quess. Why can't you forgive your father?"

"He drove away the mother who bore me. She detested sex."

"Do you think that's the only reason?"

"I can't say it's the only one. I never had the chance to truly understand my mother."

"That's true. Then, you should have also made an effort to understand your next mother before fleeing to India."

"Haven't I explained this countless times?"

For Quess, and not just her, this type of "learning" through a question-and-answer style was tormenting. Yet, among this group, this method was deemed a necessary hurdle. "Express your past aloud, over and over. It can lead to catharsis and provide the means to forgive those around you."

"Is that really the case?"

"Yes. Quess, you've come a long way. Remember when you would rage at the mention of your stepmother?"

Christina said with a smile, "You hated her! Saying things like you wanted to kill her."

With a smile, Christina nodded.

"I hate her! I want to kill her!" mimicked Marian, impersonating Quess's past outbursts.

"Mari! Stop making fun of someone's past like that. Your mischief really knows no bounds," Toffler scolded.

Marian pouted in response to the blunt reprimand.

"That's what I mean... Look up to Quess, learn from her. I wish you'd see why I brought her into our fold."

Toffler's words might have been biting, but Quess knew that deep down, he genuinely wished to help Marian. She was being used for that very purpose. But in this group, she didn't mind being utilized this way. It made her feel she truly belonged.

The Earth Federation government, in the aftermath of the space wars, was forced to repeatedly relocate its capital and finally ended up in Lhasa, Tibet. Quess, who had a father working in the military's Joint Staff Headquarters directly under this government organization, had no memory of settling in one place since she was a child. And Quess's birth mother always complained to her father about it. Her mother, who enjoyed socializing and parties, must have been delighted to become a socialite in various places, but as soon as she achieved a decent social status in one location, they would move to the next duty station. This was something she couldn't bear.

As the marital discord grew, it was an eternal pattern that the father sought solace in the company of other women. And now, having moved to Lhasa, he had left Quess' birth mother behind in Naples and was now living with another woman. Quess' father had sought her approval for this new arrangement, but such formalities did nothing to improve their strained relationship.

Thus, Quess ran away, finding sanctuary in India. It wasn't difficult to enter India from Tibet in Lhasa, and the Indian region was open to all Earth's residents. As the Earth Federation government relocated masses of India's population to space, the continent witnessed recurring bloodshed. In atonement and to honor and nurture the variety of religions represented by Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, the Indian subcontinent was designated a Free Zone.

This meant that any Earth dweller, provided they did not engage in development activities, could come and go freely. Consequently, the region became a haven for free spirits like Quess' seniors, as well as outlaws and criminals seeking refuge. Despite this, there was no tightening of restrictions; the Indian subcontinent remained a bastion of freedom.

This was partly due to the laxity of the Earth Federation government but also a testament to the perspective of humanity.

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 1

AGAIN

CHAPTER-G

1

Aboard the Base Jabber RS5, a sleek mobile suit carrier cutting through the vastness of space, Jeddah Unit 3 lay securely nestled. Serving as a platform for extended voyages of mobile suits, the Base Jabber provided more than just transport; it offered a temporary refuge for its pilots, who usually spent their transit within its spacious cockpit.

The autopilot journey would feel like a pleasure cruise if not for the Minovsky particles dispersed in the combat zone. Inside, Amuro Ray, Cunningham Shaw, and Alyona Paige, who had snuck on board like a stowaway, were indulging in a coffee break.

There wasn't a hint of tension, even though they were about to make contact with a mysterious fleet.

"Neo Zeon definitely exists, you know," Alyona stated matter-of-factly, her involvement in the anti-Earth Federation movements in Sweetwater making her unflinching in such declarations.

"Sounds like something straight out of fiction, doesn't it?" retorted Cunningham, always quick to get heated when conversations veered this way.

"That's why I detest military types. You refuse to accept other viewpoints... I mean, it's one thing to disagree, right?" Alyona paused dramatically, sipping her coffee through a straw.

"Hmph! I know what you're going to say next," Cunningham retorted, irritated by the young woman's teasing. Their age difference was barely three years, yet civilian versus military perspectives were worlds apart. The military's slight discipline gave her an air of maturity. After all, the current military, a mere shadow of its former self and now a stopgap for unemployment, still retained some military jargon, though not as much as in the old century. That decisiveness could mask one's age.

"Really? You think so?" Alyona probed.

"I get it. To reject something, you have to at least hear the other side out, but for you, there's no room for discussion," Cunningham grumbled.

"Awe, I'm impressed!" Alyona teased.

"And that pisses me off!" Cunningham protested though she didn't seem to mind being admired.

Amuro, meanwhile, was engrossed in the radar scope's display, paying no attention to their banter.

"Do you know where those small-type colonies used to construct Sweetwater are now? They could house thirty thousand people. Imagine if those planning the Neo Zeon reconstruction gathered there. They could easily build one or two warships."

Amuro inwardly shuddered at Alyona's words. Though aware of the Island Type colonies, his recent years were consumed with establishing Londo Bell and shuttling between Earth and the Sides, leaving no time for such details.

And thanks to the indolent Earth Federation Forces that made organizing the Londo Bell necessary, there were still some small colonies unaccounted for, and it was plausible that Char was using one for a military rebuild. In general, the investigation of Sweetwater was conducted as part of the practical test of the Ra Zaim, which had been loaned to Londo Bell. Alyona had casually mentioned something that had long been a concern of Amuro's.

"Who told you this?" Amuro inquired.

"Zedda Mandira mentioned it," Alyona replied.

"Hm..." Cunningham looked at Amuro questioningly.

"It's true. The official story is the Island 1 Types of colonies were discarded before Sweetwater's construction."

"By whom?"

"The Earth Federation's Space Force General Staff."

"Did anyone actually verify this?"

"Supposedly. Even a computer in Tibet's Lhasa could confirm it. Once accepted, it becomes the truth."

"Does the person who accepted it actually confirm it?"

"I don't know... at some point if it's accepted, it becomes a fact. Computers don't lie. If it's input and accepted, it becomes the truth as far as bureaucrats are concerned. If not acknowledged, no supplies will be provided, so those colonies will eventually die out."

"But what if someone tried to run a colony independently?"

"To the Earth Federation, they'd be aliens from outer space, not Spacenoids."

"Oh, dear..."

"That's bureaucracy for you. No wonder factions like the Titans rebel within the Federation. The relief-oriented military may not have enemies, but they do have weapons. I can see why people with an elite mentality would turn against the government."

"The Gate of Zedan war?"

"Yeah... But I don't know anything about it."

"...?"

Startled by Amuro's tone, Cunningham briefly looked away from her coffee straw.

"Don't ask, please. Cunnin."

"You knew Char was on the move?"

"There were hints in Sweetwater. The officials and citizens were all hostile toward Londo Bell."

"Yeah, because you guys were talking about taking in Char and setting up a Neo Zeon administration, right?"

"Seems like it from the underground publications."

"There, you see!"

"But that's because the Earth Federation government isn't putting any effort into refugee relief."

"And you? What's your role in all this?"

"Me? I just didn't want to fight with you or Amuro..."

"No need to mention me!"

Cunningham floated away, her eyes dancing in zero gravity like her body.

Amuro zoomed in on the fleet shadow captured by the Base Jabber's monitor. It wasn't a real image but an extrapolation from analyzed data represented through computer graphics.

"The computer's analysis seems accurate. This triangular silhouette...?"

"Looks like a stingray. Three ships?"

Alyona chimed in, unburdened by the gravity of the situation. "Exciting, isn't it?"

Cunningham tried to inject sarcasm. "Sure, it's a thrilling first-time experience! Being aboard this thing, encountering a mysterious fleet!"

"Yes, but remember, a mysterious enemy is terrifying. They might have us in their sights and could fire without warning."

2

"Launched from Sweetwater, right...?"

"The Earth Federation's Ra Zaim, perhaps?"

"No doubt about it."

The soldier turned, proudly displaying a computer graphics model on the screen for Char's inspection. By overlaying computer graphics onto images captured by telescopes and further enlarging them, it was possible to display a detailed visualization. In battle, Minovsky particles are spread to disable radar, so if a camera captures the enemy, previously collected data is used to generate a concrete enemy image in computer graphics on the display. If enemy damage can be observed, that too can be displayed, making it a highly effective tool in warfare.

However, when graphic enthusiasts handle it, they create images as detailed as reality, leading to entering battles with images that have gaps from reality under Minovsky particle conditions. Because of this, there have been cases of being shot down. Humans, after all, are prone to trust what they see, disregarding the unseen.

"Limit putting computer graphics on the surveillance display. The model of the Ra Zaim on it is so detailed, it's practically fanatical," Char commented before returning to his seat.

"Captain..."

"Hmm...?"

Char glanced over as Captain Lyle shifted his gaze from the computer keys to him.

"We haven't sent this data over yet," Lyle nodded toward the display Char had been observing.

"Isn't that a violation of protocol?"

The surveillance display was meant to show only images captured by the telescopic camera. Erasing data from the main display was against regulations.

"I'll remove that enthusiast, then we'll stop."

"That graphics nut?"

"He loves creating images."

"Why hire someone like that?"

"I wouldn't know. Aren't you involved in personnel decisions, Captain?"

"That's Horst's domain. I-- What now?"

"A mobile suit launched from the Ra Zaim."

"Is it planning to attack us?"

"Hardly. They know our numbers. It's just one machine."

"Hmm... I see."

Char looked at the sequence of numbers displayed on Captain Lyle's small display.

"All right, let's head out and see. Ready my Sazabi."

"Captain..."

"Keep this between us. Just say it's a test for the Sazabi... You really needed to tell me about this privately?"

"Sir?"

"I'm asking you why you chose to tell me about this privately?"

"Well, it's just one mobile suit, but I thought it was moving strangely. If needed, I wanted to ask you to make an assessment based on your experience. I'd hate for the Rewloola to make a fuss over it. Besides, our crew is still mostly inexperienced...."

As Char listened to Lyle's justifications, he sensed something more—a divine intervention or fate, perhaps, granting him this opportune moment.

"A wise decision. That's why I'm going alone."

"Yes, sir."

Char Aznable, while committing to this moment of opportunity, couldn't help but feel strangely about it.

"If I lose my life here, 'that operation' won't carry itself out automatically. But in that case, it's the will of heaven," he mused.

He had the resolve to accept such an outcome. In recent years, Char had devoted all his effort toward executing that plan, but if it could not be implemented, he would just have to resign himself.

"Amuro Ray..."

If his opponent was Amuro, then such an outcome was inevitable; he was prepared for that.

"If we don't settle this sooner or later, I wouldn't be satisfied."

That had been his sentiment since returning from the asteroid belt and reuniting with Amuro on Earth. Amuro represented both a potential good friend and an irreconcilable enemy; these conflicting feelings coexisted within the man. He was determined not to let their relationship simply fade with time and age into nothing more than a memory, unresolved.

He was uncompromising in his principles.

3

Char and Amuro first met as enemies on opposite sides during the Principality of Zeon's "war for independence." Following Zeon's defeat, Char briefly fled to the asteroid belt but conspired with Haman Karn to raise the flag of Zeon once more.

However, when Char returned to Earth, there was an insurrection by an anti-government element of the Earth Federation Forces called the Titans, so he cooperated with Amuro's group to eliminate them. He did so with the intention of clearing the way for Haman's conquest of Earth and to see the internal condition of the Earth Federation government for himself.

And yet, Haman Karn, a zealous believer in the restoration of Zeon, acted alone. Judging that her independent actions would prolong the turmoil in the Earth Federation government, Char simply observed from the sidelines.

As expected, while the Earth Federation Forces were worn down, they were able to rally together against "Haman's crazy war." Following this, the Earth Federation government proclaimed that all Zeon revivalist elements had been eliminated, greedily embracing tranquility once more and slipping into indolence.

Time had been given to Char.

The remnants of Zeon's Zabi family had infiltrated the Earth Federation government organization and waited for someone like Char to take the lead. In this era where over two-thirds of humanity lived in space colonies beyond the Earth Sphere, the Earth Federation government continued managing humanity from the Earth's surface.

"Captain, where to?"

Nanai Miguel followed Char as he headed to the pilot suit room.

"Reconnaissance."

"Huh?"

The officer Nanai furrowed her well-formed brow. She was a prodigy whom Char had elevated from the ranks of the Newtype Labs to be his tactical officer. Moreover, she was beautiful, but her misfortune was falling in love with Char.

"Didn't I mention the Earth Federation forces showing up when we went to Sweetwater?"

"Yes. The Ra Zaim? Is it Londo Bell?"

"It seems Amuro from that unit came to see me."

"Your usual intuition, Captain?"

Nanai was used to such conversations with Char. That sense might bring her misfortune.

"I suppose."

Nanai helped Char put on his pilot suit, not saying anything in the meantime. She knew that Char wouldn't listen to anything she said.

"Did you just sigh?"

Char offered a wry smile, understanding Nanai's feelings.

"Yes. Why do this? I understand your argument for reconstructing Earth, but why this animosity towards Amuro?"

"I don't hate him, but I want to fight him."

"Because he's like you?"

Nanai also got into her pilot suit. Char just stared at her.

"Hmph. Because he's soft."

"Really? To me, he seems like a good comrade for you."

"That's what pains me... his subservience to the whims of the Earth Federation."

"Really? Amuro Ray could become Prime Minister in the future."

"Still, there's never been a case of humanity implementing internal reform."

Char mused as he fitted Nanai's helmet to her normal suit's backpack.

"Thank you."

At that moment, Nanai lifted her hair, revealing her nape, a gesture Char found endearing. The two sat in the cockpit of the still-in-testing mobile suit "Sazabi." The Sazabi, not yet equipped with an official cockpit core, had a two-seat cockpit core installed in its abdomen, a traditional location for mobile suit cockpits, though the Sazabi's planned cockpit block would be different.

The Sazabi, larger than conventional mobile suits, was launched from the Rewloola. Its temporary cockpit used a 360-degree monitor from another mobile suit, the "Gears Doga." Its performance was adequate, though it displayed a color-altered version of space, a computer-graphic transformation.

Real-time camera feeds were simple to display but could induce a sense of disorientation and space sickness in pilots. The artificially tinted blue space provided comfort, and the monitor's field of view was calibrated to match real-world perspectives, allowing for accurate targeting.

But there was another problem, as instructors always taught trainees, "If you're sniped, it's game over! There's no 'try again' in a mobile suit! This isn't a video game!"

"Switch to actual visual display?"

Thus, Nanai had to ask.

"Yes..."

With Char's nod, Nanai switched the 360-degree monitor, commonly known as the panoramic monitor, to an actual visual display. The narrow game area where the two sat side by side morphed into space itself.

Everything except the seats and the two pilot suits seemed to disappear.

Images from fourteen cameras embedded around the mobile suit were fed into a computer to synthesize a precise 360-degree panoramic image. This level of realism was frightening.

"I love this floating sensation..."

Nanai commented as she leisurely looked around.

Now, the stars shone more accurately than the human eye could see, silently covering the whole sky. The shadowy Earth and Moon were visible to the right; the rest was void.

Of course, when the mobile suit tilted, the stationary stars seemed to move rapidly due to the rapid shift in the camera's field of view. Watching these moving stars on the actual visual display brought a different kind of terror than the floating sensation.

From a rotating colony, the Earth appeared to rotate like a fan blade, a terrifying sight. Thus, the game-like imagery was more reassuring.

This actual visual display made them forget the mobile suit was moving at high speed, calming even their minds.

Only the faint vibration of Sazabi's fusion engine reminded them they were in motion.

"Humanity's full-fledged space migration barely started a century ago. Yet, among Spacenoids, there's a growing generation that sees Earth as just another star."

"Are you saying this indifference makes the Earth Federation government self-righteous?" Nanai queried.

"Yes. That's why I want to remind the Spacenoids of Earth's existence. And in the distant future, when Spacenoids remember Earth as humanity's birthplace, I don't want them to find an Earth tainted by Oldtypes. I want it to be a warm Earth, enveloped by the nature of olden times. For that, the arrogance of those monopolizing Earth is unforgivable, and it's necessary for someone like me to purge them."

"I understand your feelings, sir, but I don't like your current methods," Nanai said, not easily swayed by Char.

"Yet why don't you speak like this to the people of Neo Zeon?"

"Simply because I can't, I couldn't make them understand. They only care about seizing control; they're no different from the Earth Federation government. Wanting power, wanting to gain power, having to maintain power... This thinking stemming from power distorts everything..."

"But nothing can be done without power."

"True. It's because there are those who wield power. To oppose them, we have no choice but to demonstrate strength... It's frustrating that human pettiness makes that necessary. If psychommu were powerful enough to instill humility in all of humanity, there would be no problem..."

"Hah. Maybe if Earth was enveloped in a psycho-frame?" Nanai asked sarcastically.

"Maybe that's just it..."

"So, you're really going ahead with the Earth Freezing Operation?"

"I intend to, yes. To indulge in fanciful tales is the act of the incompetent. So I'm going to purge humanity beneath the stars that shine in space, the fleas who only stare at the ground."

"Fleas? You mean those jumping things?"

"They say they used to be everywhere. Philosophers used to say that humanity was the same kind of ignorant creature."

"But haven't those human fleas driven other animals extinct and are now devouring the entire planet? The fleas themselves were exterminated by man, weren't they?"

"Stupid yet grand, wouldn't you say? It's nothing but proof of humanity's follies."

It wasn't that Nanai didn't understand his grief but felt he was being led too far by his intellect.

"If only he were the type to go crazy over women... then maybe he could be saved, but..."

Imagining such a crude analogy, Nanai realized she lacked that power and blushed slightly.

"What is it? Remembering something funny?"

"N-no, since you don't like women..."

A half-truth.

"That's not true at all. I'm contemplating more serious issues, and then you bring up female problems..."

"No, a thought of my own occurred to me. Then I smiled at my own inabilities."

"Are you sure about that? You're a woman who should have more confidence in yourself, Nanai."

Char said this while enlarging a section of the monitor. The screens, split into dozens of segments, zoomed in on their target.

"An enemy?"

"Most likely..."

The computer graphics showed an enlarged composite image of a Base Jabber and a Jeddah.

"It belongs to the Ra Zaim."

That was Char's conclusion.

4

"An enemy unit?"

"Yes," replied Cunningham, "It's not transmitting any IFF signals. Could it be a decoy?"

As Amuro picked up his helmet, he prepared to move to his Jeddah Unit 3 through the airlock.

"Minovsky particle density is increasing..." Cunningham observed.

"Alyona, gear up in your normal suit, quick."

"R-right!"

Amuro waited until Alyona was suited up before he too donned his pilot suit's helmet.

"Are you going out there?"

"I want to see it for myself..."

"But..."

"Deploy a dummy and wait in this sector."

With that, Amuro closed the airlock hatch and floated through the narrow tube leading to Jeddah's cockpit.

"What's the situation?"

Upon reaching Jeddah's cockpit, he called up to the Base Jabber's cockpit.

"There seems to be movement by a mobile suit, one, maybe two at most."

"So, they're also on a reconnaissance mission? I doubt they're serious about an attack."

"Why?"

"I can't imagine three warships being fully equipped. It's possible those ships are still being outfitted. A mysterious fleet can't be organized that easily..."

"Oh, right...I see what you mean..." Cunningham said, clearly convinced as he hesitated for a moment.

Amuro, catching the shift in her tone, responds with a wry smile,

"It's fine, I'll stop there... don't want you singing my praises or anything."

"Hehe... men sure know a lot, huh?"

"Uh, thanks..."

As the Jeddah's engines neared critical, Amuro zoomed in the visual monitor to maximum, projecting it on the multi-monitor. At maximum magnification, even minor vibrations of the machine were amplified, so still images were impossible. To reproduce the image, the computer intricately subtracted the machine's minor vibrations from the data, a complex yet imperfect representation of reality.

"An unidentified unit is approaching, or it's a dummy."

The image showed several blurry objects, and he couldn't tell which was the real enemy silhouette.

"A new model... if it's him, he would do that..."

Amuro smoothly undocked from the Base Jabber, maneuvering his Jeddah to glide parallel to Cunningham's, maintaining a strategic twenty-kilometer distance.

"...? It's him..."

Amuro distinctly heard a voice calling out to him in his head, "He's come... but why?"

Focusing in the direction of the 'voice,' Amuro accelerated his Jeddah, though calling it a 'voice' wasn't accurate. It was more like an invisible wave piercing Amuro's psyche, prompting him to turn in its direction – akin to sensing a killing intent.

Amuro felt this aura of malice surrounding Jeddah, a sensation he had been able to perceive since his early days in the original Gundam. This ability was what made him an outstanding pilot.

"Today's is a bit different... it's like a will, similar to a killing intent, but much stronger..."

Using all his sensors, even his sixth sense, Amuro stared into the void ahead.

"Is he calling me...?"

As he realized this, Amuro also doubted why the enemy shadow would do such a thing.

A flash of light streaked between the stars.

"A dummy!"

To Amuro, the fleeting nature of the flash betrayed its identity as a mere dummy. Dummies were balloons coated with radar-reactive material to serve as decoys. They came in various forms, from small meteorites to mobile suits and warships, some even equipped with apogee motors for movement. More dangerously, some were armed with mines or beam cannons, making it risky to assume they were harmless. But the zigzag movement of the flashing light convinced Amuro it was a dummy. Opting to trust his visual perception over the elusive, indescribable wave pulsing through his mind proved to be a critical mistake.

Rapidly, the unknown mobile suit closed the distance, stealthily positioning itself behind Amuro's Jeddah.

It was a real mobile suit.

"The computer becomes completely useless with unknown new models!" Amuro cursed, but didn't forget to connect the camera data to the computer.

"Jeddah! Our capabilities are overwhelmingly superior!"

Even under Minovsky particle conditions, radio communication was clear within a few kilometers. The voice Amuro heard amidst the static was Char Aznable's.

Amuro found himself shocked by the unexpected ease of this unexpected reunion.

"Char! You were alive after all!?"

"Hah! As if I'd lose my life in a fight with a woman like Haman Khan!" Char's voice dripped with disdain.

"You're one to talk! Surely you haven't forgotten how you drove the young boy Kamille Bidan to madness!"

"Vulnerability isn't a virtue, Amuro! Look at the masses! Look at the bureaucrats! Do they go mad? No matter what happens, they remain composed and survive! Those who romanticize vulnerability as a virtue, often because of their innate talents, find themselves swallowed by these very masses. That's the harsh reality!"

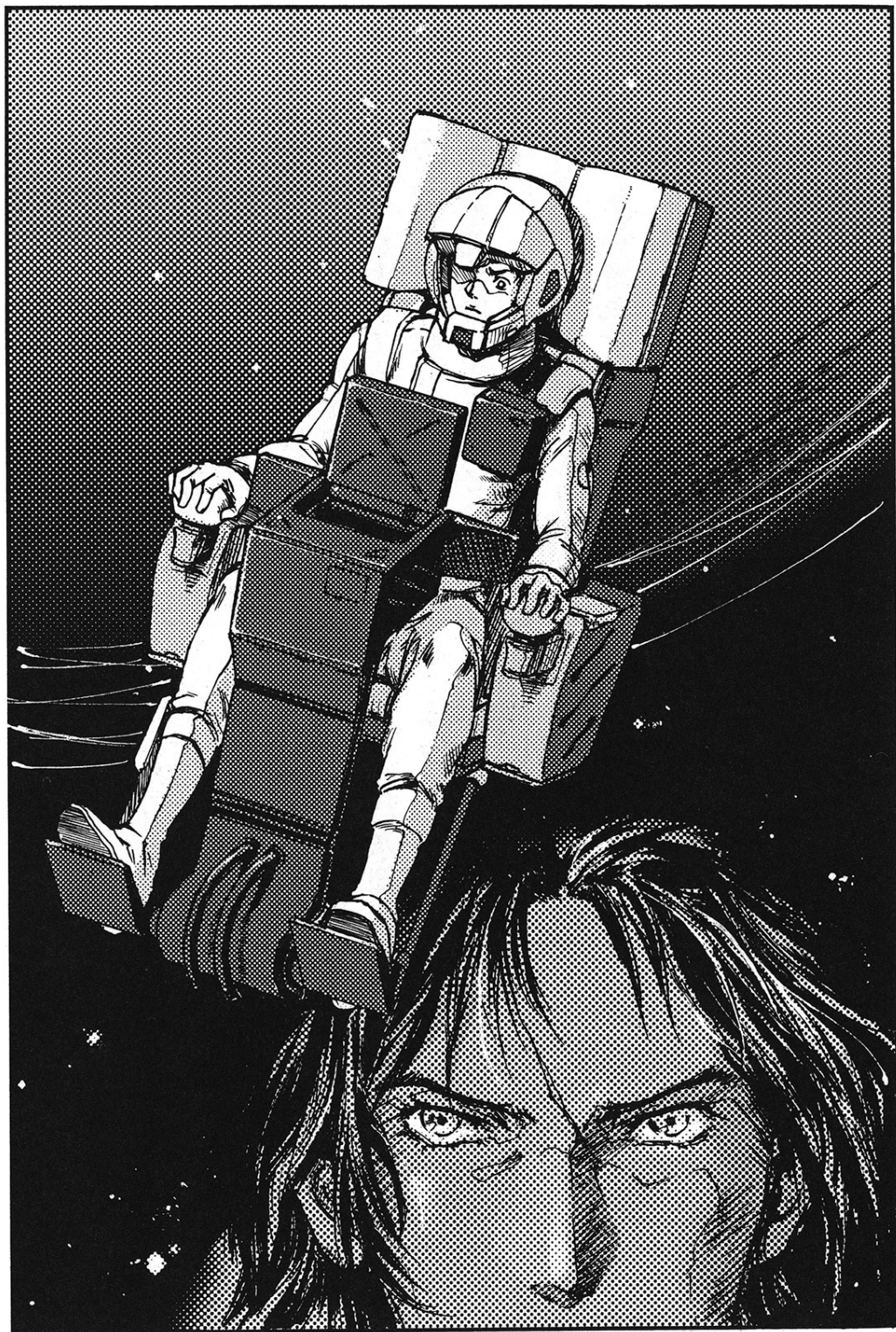
Amuro observed the shape of the mobile suit behind him, realizing he would easily be defeated in a Jeddah. The firepower and output of that red mobile suit were overwhelming.

"Hmph, so is that why you didn't show up until now? Were you hiding so you wouldn't be swallowed up by the masses you're talking about?"

Amuro mocked, trying to shake off the red mobile suit's pilot.

"Say whatever you want. I'm sick of humanity's stupidity. That's why I will destroy Earth."

Speechless, Amuro directed his Jeddah's frame towards the ominous red mobile suit, Sazabi, his mind racing with disbelief.



"What was that?" Amuro asked, his voice a mix of incredulity and rising alarm.

"Eradicate humanity on Earth, including the Earth Federation government. Then, bet on the rebirth of mankind on the Spacenoids."

"You can't be serious!"

"You should understand. Humanity has now entered an age where we must atone for our sins against the Earth and outer space."

"Human beings aren't so arrogant! We die in floods and volcanoes, are battered by typhoons, and felled by slight heat and chill. There's no way such humans could be arrogant towards nature!"

"They've been too scared! So they protect themselves with science and technology that nature does not have, but it's excessive. How long must modern man live to be satisfied? A hundred years? That's just the desire of humans born in the last two or three hundred years! Before that, humans were creatures who couldn't live past fifty. If humanity doesn't shed its arrogance soon, it will even devour the space colonies!"

"So living isn't the truth?"

"Don't change the subject, Amuro! Gihren Zabi of the Principality of Zeon killed five billion, but humanity still outnumbers the population of the old century, doesn't it? Humanity's numbers remain unabated, and their minds remain rigid! This cannot stand!"

"So, you're set on destroying the Earth?" Amuro retorted, his mind racing with disbelief and a tinge of fear.

"Joining you in the fight against the Titans was enlightening. Even if you became a politician and sought internal reform, it would be futile. Right now, you're just scurrying like a rat within the Earth Federation Forces."

This was a critical issue for Amuro. Yet, his reluctance to leave the Earth Federation Government was due to his dream of internal reform. Just as Americans have a history of not wanting to permit handgun possession, humanity cannot shed its delusion that armies are necessary to defend against potential threats.

"I've had enough of Earth's people. I still need some time for that..."

"..."

Amuro remained silent, his heart clinging to the hope that this menacing speaker was not the same Char he had met on Earth.

"Do you have proof that you're Char Aznable, or Casval Daikun?"

"Tune in to the frequency. Look at the monitor!"

On the multi-monitor, Amuro's suspicions were confirmed: the figure was indeed Char.

"No doubt about it..."

"But, it doesn't matter if I'm not Char. My fleet will occupy Sweetwater in a few hours. I'm well aware of the Ra Zaim's capabilities. An attack would be pointless. There's no need to report my announcement to the Federation government. After Sweetwater's occupation, we will formally advise the Federation Government. I felt I should inform you directly, my longtime rival and comrade, out of goodwill."

"That's presumptuous! If you intend to destroy Earth, I will stop you!"

"All the better! A man of such spirit is the only one I can call friend!"

The moment his words ended, the image on the monitor cut out, and the red mobile suit accelerated rapidly, vanishing among the stars.

"..."

Amuro grappled with the surreal nature of this reunion, questioning its reality. But then,

"...? Cunningham! Stop it!"

A sharp yell escaped Amuro as he watched missile trails blaze perilously close by his Jeddah, lighting up the void.

"Why?!"

"We can't stop him!"

Amuro's words were abruptly cut off as four fiery explosions burst forth in the space ahead.

"Were the missiles intercepted?"

Cunningham's astonished voice came through the radio, shaking.

This was Char's declaration of war to Amuro. Amuro had to accept it, but there were things he didn't understand.

"With barely any forces, how does he intend to destroy the Earth?" Amuro mused, his eyes lost in the endless expanse of space, a silent void devoid of any human presence or creation. He found a certain comfort in the realistic images of the visual monitor, lost in the sensation of floating amidst the stars.

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ZEDDA'S ATTACK

CHAPTER-H

1

In another distant corner of the sector, the tranquility of space was abruptly interrupted by a cluster of mobile suits surging ahead.

The Gabool Bergson Type 2 led the formation, a sleek, black mobile suit cutting through the void under the skilled command of Zedda Mandira.

In its wake, others, also enshrouded in black, bore a striking resemblance to the iconic Zaku mobile suits of the Principality of Zeon. However, the performance gap between the Gabool BL2 and its companions was starkly evident as it easily outpaced them in flight.

"Times have changed..." he mused.

Despite his fiery temperament, Zedda was acutely aware of the extraordinary nature of deploying this trio of mobile suits to invade Londenion.

"In the end, we were undone by a single Jeddah..."

The defeat in the airspace above Sweetwater weighed heavily on him, a burden of unbearable shame. This feeling intensified when Char Aznable himself swiftly entered Sweetwater's airspace with his fleet of three ships.

Char's unexpectedly swift action took him by surprise, deviating greatly from what he had anticipated in the briefings.

In the post-battle calm, as he quelled the flames on his ship, Zedda made contact with Char's fleet.

Char's warm welcome stood in stark contrast to his growing introspection, amplifying his self-doubt.

"It's not good to damage the colonies just to make a showy attack."

"Yes, sir..."

Their caution was a luxury they couldn't afford, especially with an adversary like Amuro.

A profound sense of shame engulfed him.

"I couldn't fulfill the promise to revive Zeon. I had no grand plan..."

This sentiment weighed heavily on him.

"I will not invade Sweetwater with force. I will continue negotiations with the Sweetwater administration for a bloodless occupation," Char declared, indicating his intention to buy time for negotiations by anchoring his fleet outside the colony.

Zedda was set on returning to Sweetwater, intent on personally overseeing the pivotal negotiations. However, the populace of Sweetwater surprisingly quickly warmed to Char's fleet, expediting his schedule to declare Sweetwater's occupation to the Earth Federation government. As he anticipated Char's grand arrival in Sweetwater, his eagerness escalated into palpable restlessness. He wanted to embellish his role in officially welcoming

Char, both as a point of pride and a strategic move to gain influence within the Neo Zeon ranks.

Zedda had acquired two Zakus, hobbyist-modified by enthusiasts, and traveled to Londenion in his own vessel. His primary target: a singular entity, the elusive third Jeddah mobile suit.

"Just that one. If it's the rumored Newtype mobile suit, I'll set a trap for it. Then, there's a chance of victory..."

For him, obliterating the Jeddah was more than a mission; it was a testament to his loyalty to Char, a conviction that transcended utilitarianism and defined his very essence. His father's dying plea – a solemn call to honor his debt to Zeon – had evolved into Zedda's unwavering personal doctrine. The fall of Zeon thrust young Zedda onto the arduous path of the vanquished, shaping his future. When he eventually found himself at Sweetwater, amidst refugees and a society rebuilding itself, he felt a sense of belonging and purpose, affirming his decision to work towards Zeon's reconstruction.

EGUM's entry into his life marked a pivotal turn, redirecting his course significantly. EGUM's civic group needed a figurehead, a necessary part of their social expansion. Within this collaboration, he honed his strengths, successfully running a salvage business and mastering the art of leadership. His gratitude extended to Amaran and Krad, skilled pilots of the Zakus that trailed his own.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes, we're fine!"

Communicating via optical Morse code, Zedda magnified the approaching Londenion colony on his monitor. The colony, an open-type structure with its trio of delicate mirrors, seemed implausibly fragile, a precarious sanctuary for its ten million inhabitants.

"If it weren't for these, human survival as a species in this era would be difficult," he thought.

Reflecting on the historical reasons that led to this was also unavoidable. However, he never verbalized such thoughts.

"Strange, isn't it..."

That sentiment was inherent in his words.

Humans, innately perceptive of the world's broader truths, sometimes faltered in understanding specific issues, hindered by their inability to verbalize. They are drawn to ideals, often finding solace and purpose in the doctrines they choose to embrace. For Zedda, it was about people, about Char, and ultimately, about the revival of Zeon. He didn't dwell on the deeper meanings; to him, if a series of words echoed noble ideals and the promise of salvation, he was prepared to stake his life on them.

Such reflections, typical of the ordinary mind, hold more wisdom than one might dismiss as mere foolishness.

And so, disguised by large dummy balloons, the trio of mobile suits stealthily entered Londenion's controlled airspace.

2

"Have a look, Lieutenant!" exclaimed Alyona Paige, thrusting a document into Amuro Ray's hands. As he scanned the contents, his expression shifted to one of astonishment.

"A military service record? Did the captain write this?"

"Why would he?" Cunningham asked, leaning over to peer at the document, a puzzled expression on her face.

"I have no idea. I wouldn't expect someone as upright as him to tell a lie like this..."

"But wouldn't we be in hot water if there's an investigation?"

Even in these times, proof of service on the Ra Zaim could lead to scrutiny of one's background and origins.

"But this should do the trick, right?" Alyona said with a grin, holding up a card she received after relocating to Sweetwater.

"A green card, huh?"

"It's an untraceable origin... Perfect."

"Indeed, the Special Resident Card is foolproof."

"But that also means trouble if things go south," Amuro mused.

"Oh, so the captain isn't a libertarian but a bloodline purist?" Alyona teased.

"Racist!" Cunningham joked.

"No, it's not like that," Amuro chuckled, his gaze lingering on the certificate authored by Captain Macias Testa. It confirmed Alyona's two-year service on the Ra Zaim, longer than the ship's own service life. In other words, it was highly credible and from a skilled technician. With this, even a Sweetwater native could easily secure residency in Londenion.

Now, only securing the down payment for the apartment remained, a sum that Amuro had offered to lend her.

"I'll head to the government office this afternoon," Alyona announced, urging Amuro to accompany her.

"That's fine, but why?" Amuro asked, rising from the table. He left the two behind, making his way to the bustling port block, where the military control area was a hive of activity.

"What's happening?"

"Ra Zaim is departing," an officer explained amidst the commotion. Amuro spotted an agitated Mestemar approaching.

"What's going on?"

"I'm not entirely sure, but the Ra Zaim has received sudden orders to depart."

"To where?"

"Luna II, apparently. It's supposed to be top secret."

Despite his attempt to appear irritated, the officer's barely concealed excitement was evident.

"Lhasa always does this sort of thing! I need to notify the personnel for the move!"

"Eager to leave Londo Bell behind, are we?"

He muttered under his breath, pushing past Mestemar into the briefing room crowded with captains.

"Hey, Lieutenant!" Commander Macias Testa called out, his tone betraying a clear sense of relief at the prospect of leaving Londenion. A transfer to Luna II was a step up for captains.

As the situation unfolded, Amuro pieced together that Captain Testa had authored Alyona's certificate in response to these rapid developments.

"It's still classified, but the Ra Zaim is set to depart."

"Seems like it. So much for secrecy; the whole building's abuzz."

"Officially, it's a military move for additional fitting out. Nothing too secretive."

"But this all seems so abrupt. What's the reason?"

"You've heard the rumors about the Neo Zeon fleet. You were the first contact. That's why. It's to reinforce Londo Bell's strength. A replacement ship will arrive in the meantime."

"Heh... they're reacting surprisingly quick."

"Lhasa isn't all that stupid. The Ra Cailum's coming."

"Well, well, well..."

"Mhm, you'll be transferred to the Ra Cailum."

"Understood!" Amuro replied, snapping off an exaggeratedly crisp salute, but his sarcasm was lost on Captain Testa.

"We'll be taking Cunningham along. She's a specialist with the Jeddah, after all."

"Roger that."

Amuro sighed, looking up at the ceiling.

"That's all. You can go now."

"Stay well!"

"You too! And watch out for Char's moves."

"Ignorant as always," Amuro thought, resisting the urge to punch him.

Those at the top of the hierarchy, detached from reality, arrogantly wielded words as their sole tools of influence. This sham of an absolute democratic system, like the Nomenklatura class born from the hypocrisy of communism or the apartheid of the South African Federation, engineered a society deeply divided into stratified classes. Fear of falling from their risen status silently fortified this class system, identical in the world of economics. The tragedy of modernity lies in the increasingly sophisticated structure of society, which now invents ideologies and manipulates scientific data to perpetuate its class system.

As the Space Age advanced, its reliance on a scientific-technological foundation intensified, spawning a new breed of politician-scientists. Their specialized biases and narrow perspectives further contributed to political turmoil.

Yet, humanity still struggles to find an ideology to sublimate these elements.

3

"Really? That's incredibly sudden. Don't you think it's strange? What's the reason behind it?"

"The actions of the Earth Federation are beyond our comprehension, which makes the EGUM's stance understandable. They represent the desire to resist."

"I'm sorry," said Cunningham.

"Huh? For what?"

"I think I was too harsh on the EGUM. I wanted to crush it without understanding."

"Ha, it's because you're honest, right?"

"Yes, I'm a good girl, aren't I?"

"I agree."

"Hey!"

"Ah!"

Cunningham lunged playfully, but Alyona nimbly dodged, floating up toward the ceiling with a laugh.

"They're even sending me, of all people, from the Ra Zaim to Luna II. It's like they don't consider our abilities."

"No, I believe the personnel decision about you is a well-considered one."

"Really?"

"Yes. Is this your first time going to Luna II?"

"No, I trained there during basic."

"I see. It's not a bad place for a base, is it?"

"It's not, but..." Cunningham sidled closer to Amuro, glancing at the floating duffel bag in front of her.

"...?"

"Amuro Ray..."

Amuro finally realized Alyona had left them alone. The dock around them buzzed with activity, cranes looming overhead and scooters darting back and forth.

"It feels wrong," she confessed, her voice tinged with uncertainty.

"Does it?"

"I feel... like I have to stay together with you..."

"You do?"

"No... you, Amuro..."

"I see... It's not really my place to say, but maybe you've fallen for me... and that's why you're worried?"

During Amuro's presumptuous speech, Cunningham was gazing deeply into his eyes.

"She's fallen in love with me..." Amuro mused, feeling an unexpected pang in his chest. The color in Cunningham's eyes was sincere, reminiscent of Fraw Bow and Beltorchika Irma, women he had once been close to.



"I always end up leaving when they look at me with such eyes..."

That realization was sharply painful.

"Yes, I've fallen in love with you, Amuro."

"Cunningham... you'll end up unhappy," he warned, his voice soft.

"That's not true!" she protested, her arms clinging tightly around Amuro's neck.

"Cunningham..."

"I love you, Lieutenant. Please don't die..."

Breathing in the heady fragrance of her perfume at the nape of her neck, Amuro found his eyes brimming with tears.

"We'll love each other more! So, please..."

"Of course, I can't afford to die. There's too much at stake," Amuro whispered, his voice soft yet resolute, as he gently nibbled on Cunningham's earlobe.

4

"Tracking us for the past two hours?"

At those words, a cacophony of alarms and frantic voices filled the air as the bridge of the departing Ra Zaim plunged into a whirlwind of chaos.

"No way!"

On the brink of his long-awaited escape from Londo Bell, Captain Macias Testa felt his long-nurtured hopes dissolve into bitter despair, cursing the twist of fate that snatched freedom from his grasp.

"What kind of rock are we talking about here?"

"It's a dummy, apparently. The Colony Public Corporation's minesweepers seem to be slacking off."

"I didn't ask for the why!"

Macias's voice, steely and commanding, cut through the bridge's tumult like a knife as he issued rapid-fire orders for the mobile suits' deployment.

"Get the mobile suits waiting at the port into action! We can't leave without an escort!"

"Let's delay the departure. Even if they are enemy ships, they seem few in number, so we can mop them up and depart afterward."

"This is no joke!"

Angry yet restrained, Macias resisted the impulse for an immediate departure, instructing the ship to battle stations instead.

Amuro, the echo of his parting with Cunningham still lingering, moved to ascend to the farewell deck, the silhouette of Alyona accompanying him like a shadow.

"A dummy?"

"That's what they're saying. Please, Lieutenant!"

"Understood!" Amuro said, replacing the deck intercom.

"Alyona, you're better off going back to the hotel. Stay out of this block!"

"But!" The word hung in the air, a lone protest against the inevitable.

"You can go back to civilian life, so you shouldn't be in a military facility."

Under the weight of Amuro's stern command, Alyona's hesitation was brief, her lips pressing together like a silent goodbye before she turned towards the elevator.

"She's a good girl," Amuro mused, watching her leave before he drifted towards the dock where the mobile suits were moored.

"Prepare my Jeddah!"

"But you're off-duty, Lieutenant. The Jeddahs have been taken."

"Of course..." His tone was terse, yet it carried an air of contemplative planning.

As standby pilots moved swiftly towards the mobile suit deck, Amuro inquired in a measured tone, "Don't we have a Base Jabber available?"

"We do, sir?!"

The responding officer's expression was a mix of confusion and surprise, clearly taken aback by the unexpected request.

"Get it ready! Equip it with a hyper bazooka or any effective armament available. Put some half-decent armaments on it!"

"But..."

"Enough with the 'buts'! I've given an order! Do it!"

"But, the mechanics--"

"Paperwork can be dealt with later! Just do it!"

As Amuro began suiting up, the reluctant officer picked up the intercom.

"So that's Lieutenant Amuro in action..."

This casual tone was typical in Londo Bell, famed for its relaxed approach even by Earth Federation Forces standards. Yet, when it came to Amuro, a different tactic often seemed necessary.

"Try to be more concise," Amuro suggested, patting the young officer's shoulder before heading out to the mobile suit deck, flowing towards the dock where the Base Jabber was moored.

"Second team, launch! Third team, move forward!"

These commands for the mobile suits' departure echoed through the helmet headphones of the pilot suit.

"Honestly, I'm not used to war," Amuro lamented, though he knew deep down this was for the best. For Amuro, who had honed his skills amidst the chaos of war, times of peace brought an inevitable lull, a sense of ennui. He recognized this as the rhythm of ordinary life yet pondered whether his struggle to adapt and find solace in the mundane hinted at a deeper malaise within his psyche.

"I can't fall in love because I'm overstimulated. When I'm about to, I run away..."

It was easy to blame bad luck or the times, but there was a part of him that suspected his personality had created the stellar misfortune. His interactions with women like Cunningham and others had hints of abandonment. Fraw Bow, a neighbor on his colony at Side 7 who acted like an older sister, was more a mother figure to him.

There was a time when he considered marrying her, but when the time seemed right for marriage, Amuro deliberately kept his distance.

He had been busy, yes, but it was a lie to say he couldn't see her because the Earth Federation Forces had him practically imprisoned on Earth duty. Subconsciously, he realized he was evading the realities of life with a real woman.

"I thought I was busy back then..."

Afterward, his relationship with Beltorchika Irma, a rebellious girl, and now encounters with women like Cunningham and Alyona, brought clarity to Amuro. He came to understand the psychology behind his avoidance of a deeper connection with women like Frau Bow.

"That woman still lives within me," Amuro realized. It was an epiphany that summed up his tumultuous inner world.

"That woman" wasn't Fraw or Beltorchika. It was another - Lalah Sune.

"Why isn't the equipment ready yet?" Amuro demanded, his impatience evident.

"We're working on it! Three more minutes!" A mechanic yelled back.

Two hyper bazookas were being lowered onto the Base Jabber as several mechanics worked to attach them to the platform mounts.

"Is the sight aligned?"

"Yes, sir! Doing final adjustments!" The mechanic called out, swiftly hopping into the cockpit before Amuro followed suit, igniting the engines with a practiced ease.

"Lieutenant! Sight alignment complete, matching settings," the mechanic called out, using the co-pilot console to set the weapon sights, entering the final adjusted data into Amuro's computer for him to confirm alignment by test firing. Without loading live rounds, they initiated the in-barrel laser electronically, checking for cursor discrepancies on the console panel to make necessary adjustments before finalizing the setup.

"Alright, let's go!" Amuro declared, his tone betraying a hint of irritation at the delay.

"Good hunting, sir!"

"Of course!"

The glow of the Jeddah's tail nozzle appeared beyond the hatch.

"Lieutenant! Path is clear!"

"Launching!"

With a thunderous roar, Amuro's Base Jabber hurtled forward, shooting out into the vastness of space through the harbor block's smallest hatch.

5

"A faint hiss of Minovsky particles buzzed in the headphones—an unmistakable electronic whisper.

"...!"

Overlaying the computed enemy signature with the advancing route of fourteen allied mobile suits provided a crucial reference point—their proximity to the colony. Laser measurement data meshed with prior information, tracing the movements of the mobile suits on the panel.

"...?"

Given the use of dummy asteroids as a decoy, the targets should have moved away from them by now.

"Hmm..."

The leading mobile suits, their tail nozzles flickering light near and far, seemed to search in vain.

"Where are they...?"

Typically, a small enemy force approaching a colony would aim for the port. However, if gas were their weapon, they'd already be clinging to the colony. And yet, the outer walls should be monitored by the Colony Public Corporations's own patrol ships.

"Agricultural core, perhaps?"

The colony comprised more than residential cylinders; it also boasted farm blocks. Arranged in a ring around the colony, each disk—less than a hundred meters across—spun to create artificial gravity, cultivating a variety of crops in their greenhouses.

Amuro steered his Base Jabber along the ring of disks, still ahead of any pursuing mobile suits.

With a deft maneuver past the first mirror, Amuro mused, "Really now... Are they hiding behind these mirrors?"

It was a plausible thought.

"Impressive..."

Amuro's conviction intensified, fueled by the sensation from his entire body that extended from his suit and the Base Jabber's armor into space—a constant reminder of why peacetime eluded him.

"...?"

He rotated the Base Jabber, taking in a 360-degree view. The sight from the cockpit was staggering: the colony's vastness rushing past like the wind, stars blurring into streaks, and the Earth and Moon dominating the view above and below.

"...?"

Circling the farm ring, Amuro pondered.

"Where are they?"

If someone had infiltrated the agricultural core, they might be undetectable now.

"Could be a person infiltrating, not mobile suits. But why the decoy...?"

Amuro requested surveillance of the agricultural core's interior from the control center.

"If our search near the dummy yields nothing, we'll have to comb through the industrial and agricultural blocks next. It seems likely that someone has infiltrated."

"Yet, considering the dummy's size, it could conceal a ship, not just a person!"

"Then, have we found anything away from the dummy?"

"No, no changes on radar in the last thirty minutes!"

"Concentrate on the time before the dummies arrived, not just these thirty minutes!"

Amuro shouted back through the noisy radio. Then, suddenly:

"Whoa!"

The special Velcro fastener linking Amuro's pilot suit to his seat engaged, enhancing adhesion to cushion the impact. For more severe impacts, an airbag would deploy, offering additional protection. His Base Jabber bounced off a giant mirror that had suddenly approached.

"A direct hit?"

Amuro refrained from stabilizing immediately, anticipating the possibility of a second strike. Sometimes, evasion was necessary, but it depended on the situation.

On the console panel, Amuro simultaneously assessed the damage and scanned for enemy presence.

"...?!"

Despite his proximity to Londo Bell, Amuro realized he hadn't been entirely free from complacency or oversight.

"So, it's conventional explosives!"

It wasn't the impact of a mega particle cannon beam.

"...Tch!"

Understanding the enemy's tactics, a surge of anger welled up in Amuro.

"A Zaku in this day and age, really?"

Evading while feeling the mirror's debris strike his machine, Amuro oriented towards the suspected origin of the gunfire—a maneuver beyond the capability of many pilots.

"Over there?"

Aiming at a corner of the agricultural core, tracer rounds flew past.

"Tch!"

Dodging and firing back was easy; the enemy's movements were predictable. But Amuro didn't follow the script. He bypassed the agricultural core and swung the machine around. This time, beams followed his trail.

"As expected!"

Suddenly, a dark shadow flashed into Amuro's view, bearing an uncanny resemblance to a Zaku.

"...!"

His anger subsided.

"Don't come out! You'll die!"

Over the all-range radio, Amuro's voice cut through as he evaded the fireline, swiftly passing the agricultural disks once more.

"That Zaku type, I want to believe it's a dummy, but--!!"

Yet, Amuro felt the presence of a human pilot in its movements. He knew his instincts were absolutely right. This innate intuition was part of what

defined Amuro. Therefore, he doubted the intent of attacking the Londo Bell with a civilian-modified mobile suit.

"Too reckless!"

Zedda Mandira received Amuro's voice amidst the static.

"It's him... no doubt..."

Having been convinced that Amuro would surface in a Jeddah, Zedda had previously disregarded the Base Jabber's movements. He had hidden Amaran and Krad's Zakus at the center hatch of the agricultural core, while his own mobile suit lay concealed beneath the ring of farm disks. But the unique pressure he felt from the Base Jabber, reminiscent of their encounter at Sweetwater, confirmed his suspicions.

And when it returned, Zedda was certain.

"Has he withdrawn, sensing my presence here?"

Zedda then ordered Amaran and Krad to snipe.

"If he manages to evade, then act!"

Zedda, in his Gabool Bergson Type 2, swiftly accelerated behind Amaran and Krad as they emerged from the ring. This was the signal.

Together, the two Zakus and the Gabool initiated their coordinated assault on Amuro. The Zakus advanced while the Gabool retreated, deploying a dummy. From his position, Amuro was unable to detect this maneuver.

Amuro hesitated to shoot down the Zakus.

"Is it them?"

Realizing the defensive nature of the Zakus' movement, Amuro suspected another mobile suit with a beam rifle behind them. But as he tried to overcome the Zakus' barrier, they aggressively moved forward.

"Tch!" Amuro was frustrated. With close-combat weapons like a beam saber, he could have neutralized them without injuring the pilots. Shooting limbs was not an option without significant luck and leeway.

Amuro's breath hitched.

After several crosses with the Zakus, confirming they lacked beam rifles and assessing their skill, Amuro attempted to break through.

Then... Boom!

His Base Jabber took a direct hit from a beam rifle shot, unavoidable in its precision. The emergency core of the high-performance Base Jabber was ejected from the main body.

Amuro was dumbstruck as the black, mysterious mobile suit – the Gabool – approached. In space, such close encounters were rare; a stroke of luck for Zedda Mandira. The cockpit core glided smoothly away, with the exploding Base Jabber's body forming a fiery backdrop.

It became clear then that Amuro was indeed in the emergency core.

"Kuk-Kuk-Hahahaha! While I believe in God, I'm equally convinced this is Captain Char's will!"

Zedda's laughter echoed in madness.

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MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

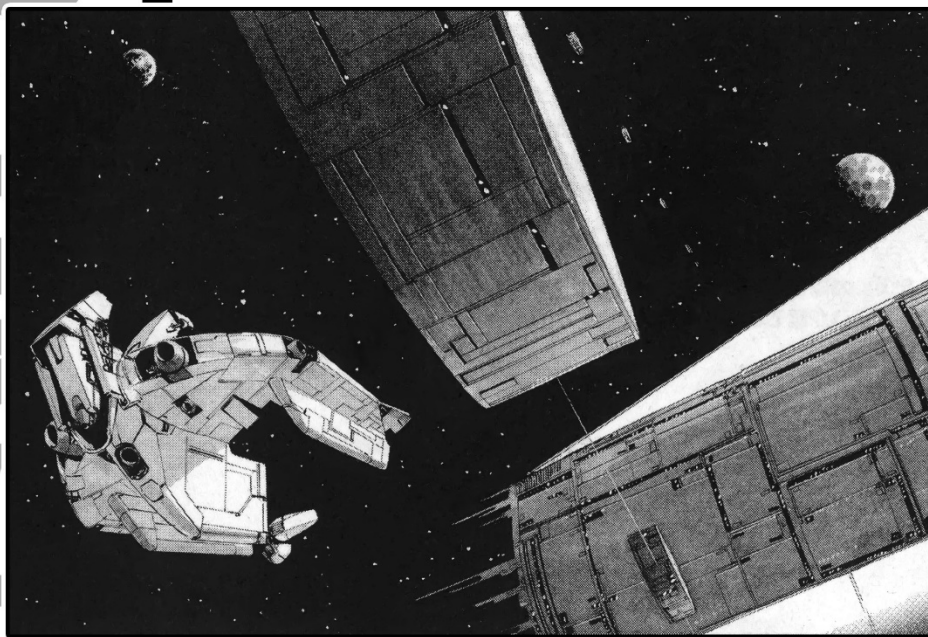
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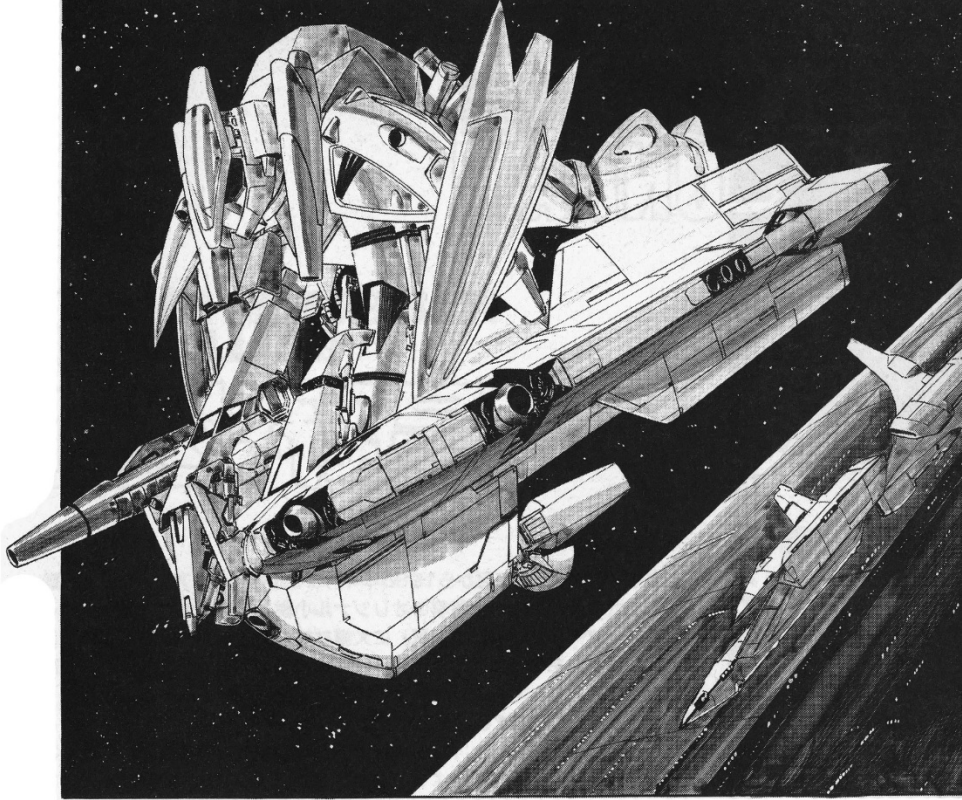
ILLUSTRATION GALLERY **1**

YUKINOBU HOSHINO

This work was originally serialized in our Animage magazine from May 1987 to April 1988 as Yoshiyuki Tomino's original novel, *Mobile Suit Gundam: Hi Streamer: Char's Counterattack*. After substantial revisions, it was published as a novel in the Animage Bunko series. While the title at the time of the paperback release was *Mobile Suit Gundam: Char's Counterattack*, this reissue has reverted to the formal title *High-Streamer*.

The original edition's illustrations were the work of the renowned manga artist Yukinobu Hoshino, famed for his space-themed creations like *2001 Nights*. Let us introduce some of those renowned illustrations from that time, including the original mobile suit designs.

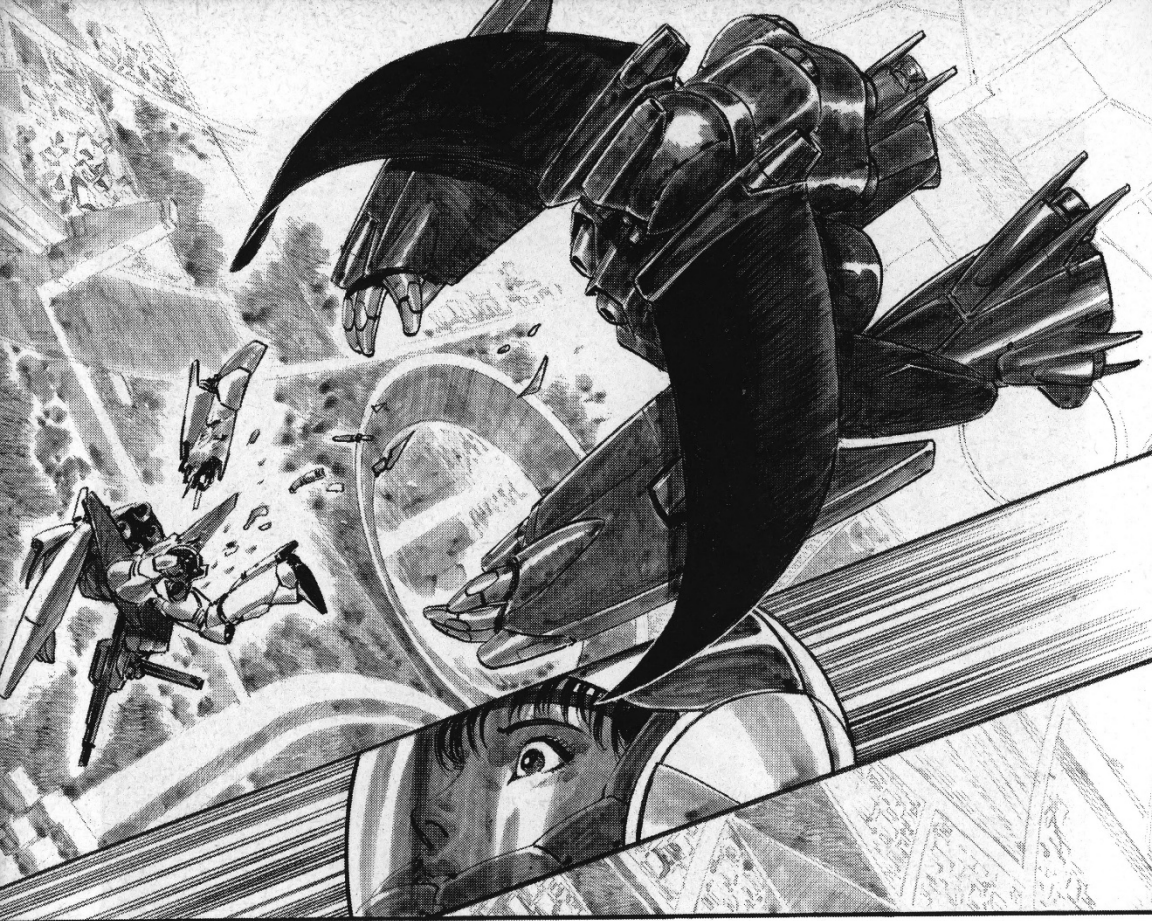


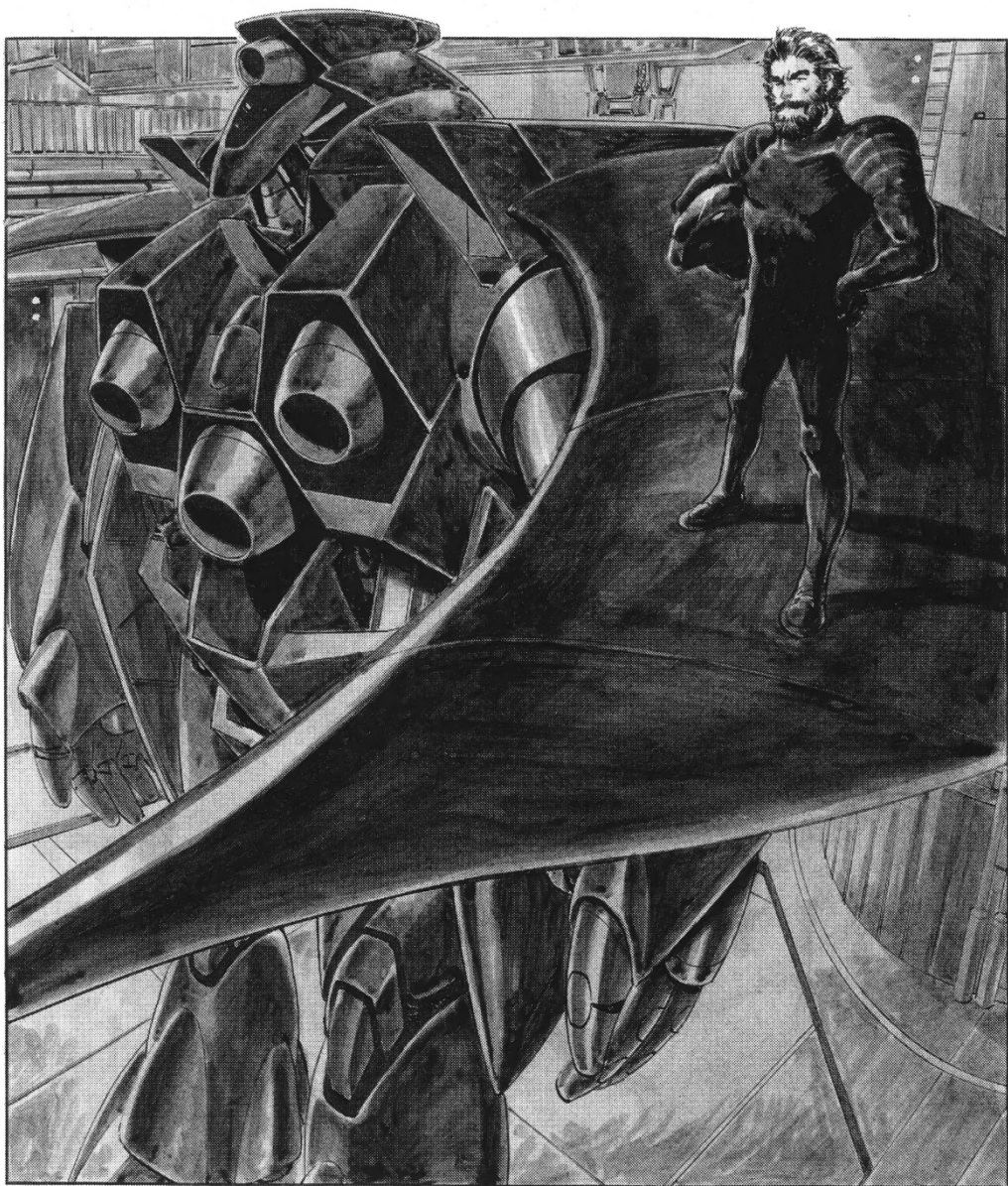


Above: The mobile suit Jeddah, perched atop the Base Jabber R55, stands as an original creation for Amuro's Londo Bell team in this narrative. Chronologically, the Jeddah appears to predate the Jegan by several generations. With gadgets and design elements by Yoshinobu Hoshino, it brings a distinctive flair to the Gundam universe, diverging notably from the conventional series. The illustrations hint that this book is constructed as another story completely.

Above (next page): The mysterious mobile suit that shot down Cunningham's Jeddah. This suit, piloted by Zedda Mandira, is described in the story as having a silhouette similar to the Zaku.

Below (next page): In a dramatic combat scene, Amuro's Jeddah clashes with Zedda's menacing black mobile suit. This one-of-a-kind illustration prominently features the Jeddah's head, offering a rare close-up view.

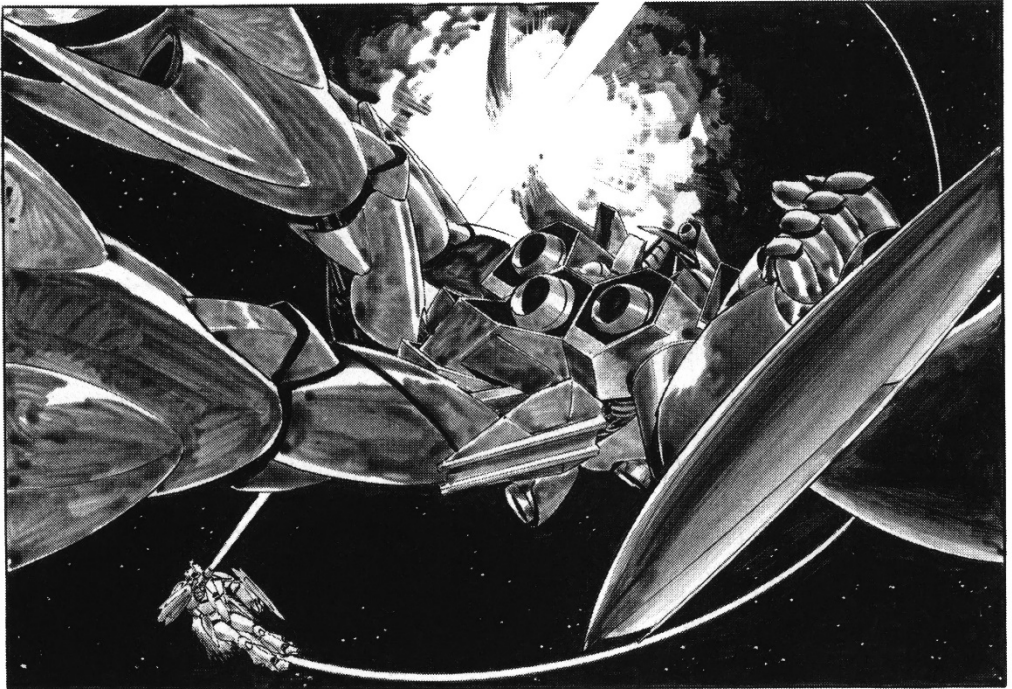


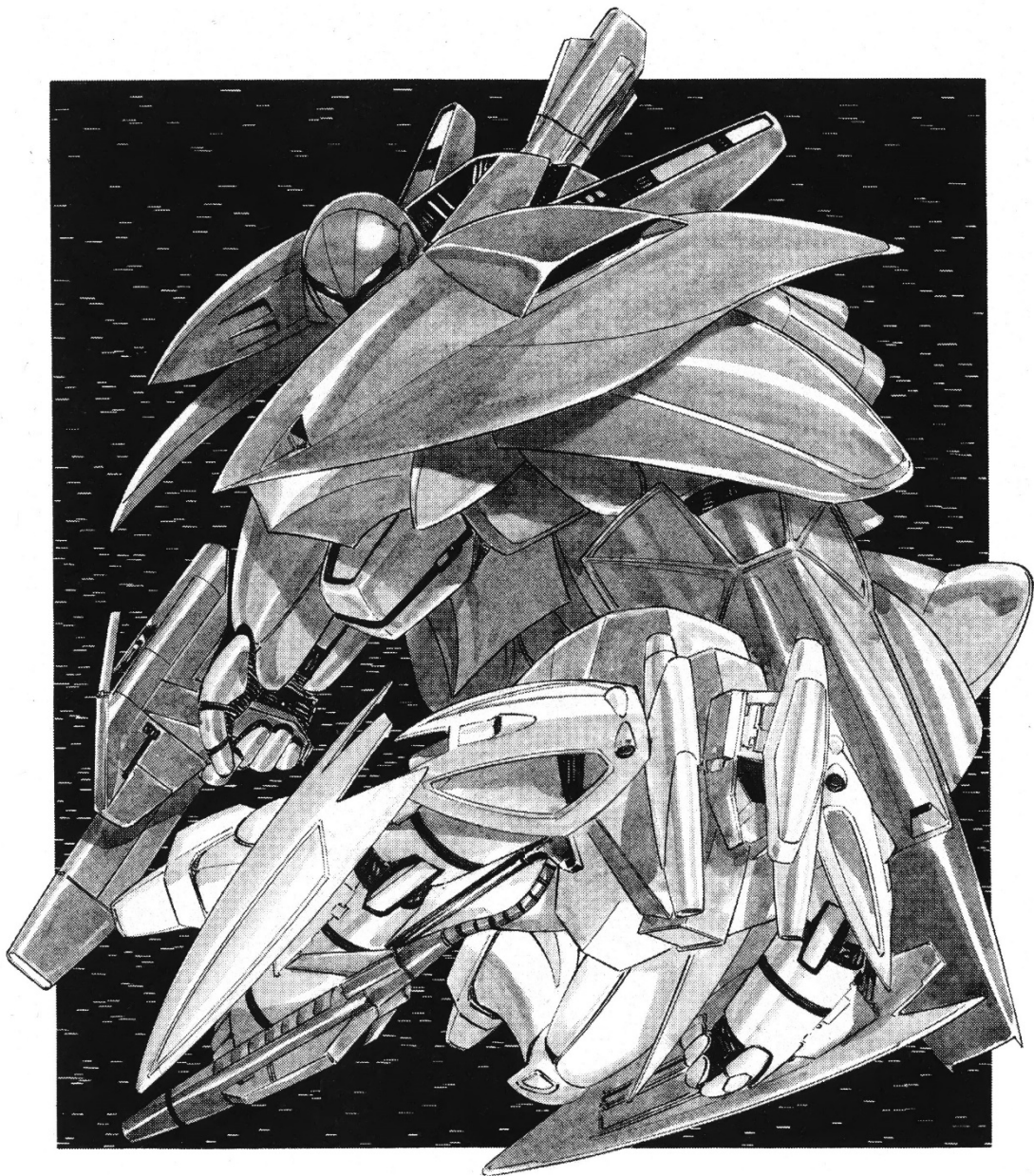


Above: The Gabool Bergson Type 2, a formidable black mobile suit piloted by Zedda Mandira, features a striking design with a massive thruster nozzle on its chest. This aspect is likely a nod to a maneuver described in the text, where the Gabool swiftly ascends after releasing Cunningham's Jeddah Unit 5 onto a civilian structure. Its silhouette, marked by large heat dissipation plates, adds an element of allure. As expected, this suit is an original creation for the novel.

Above (next page): Amuro is depicted advancing towards Zedda, who pilots the immobilized Gabool. The depiction of the hatch's opening mechanism and shape bears a striking resemblance to the Gundam featured in the anime series. Notably, the illustration also subtly differentiates the design of the normal suit, inviting a closer examination of these nuanced details.

Below (next page): The Gabool is captured enduring a strike from the Jeddah's beam on its heat dissipation plate. This unique illustration offers a rare full view of the suit's entire form. Notably, the presence of another massive thruster nozzle on its back, mirroring the one on its chest, implies that the Gabool, despite its formidable appearance, may be designed for high mobility.

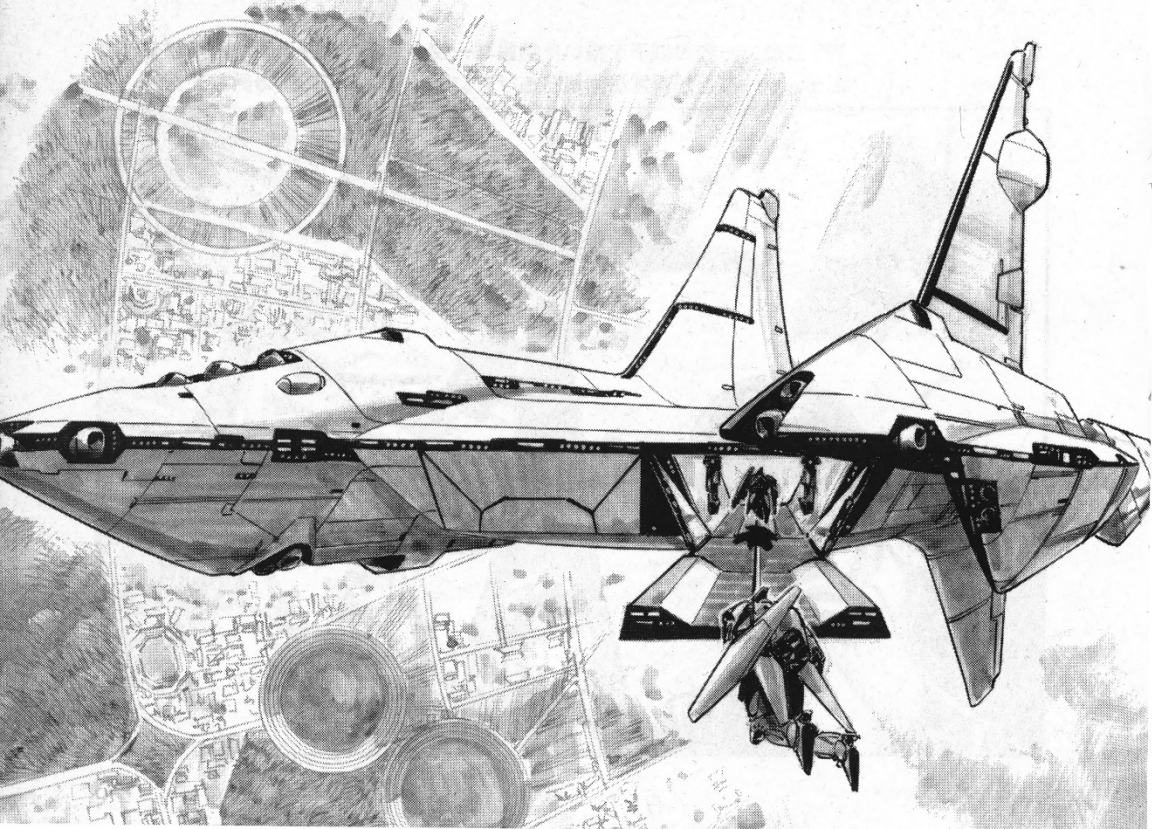
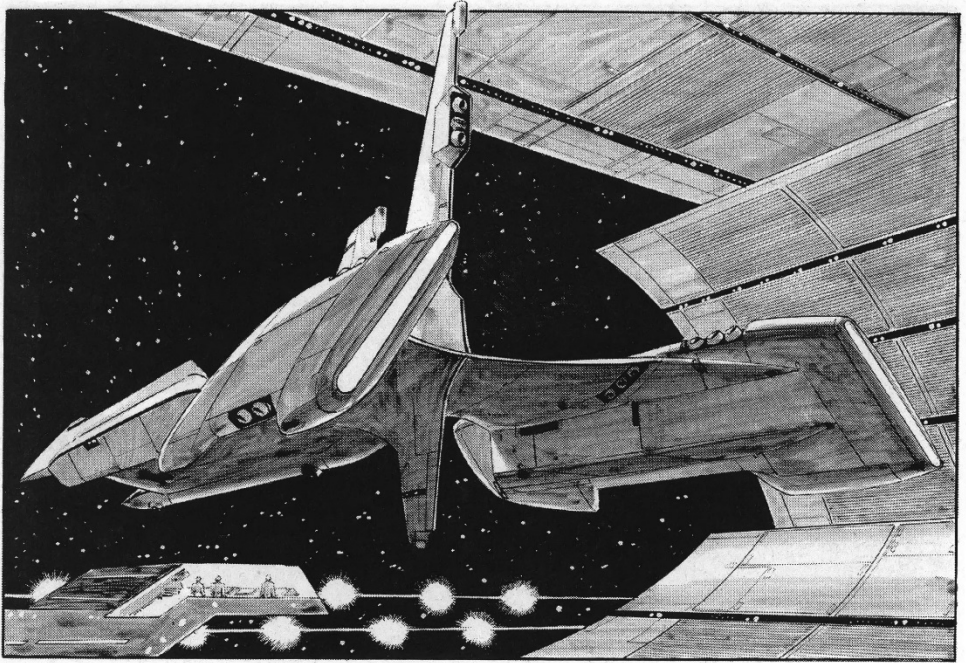


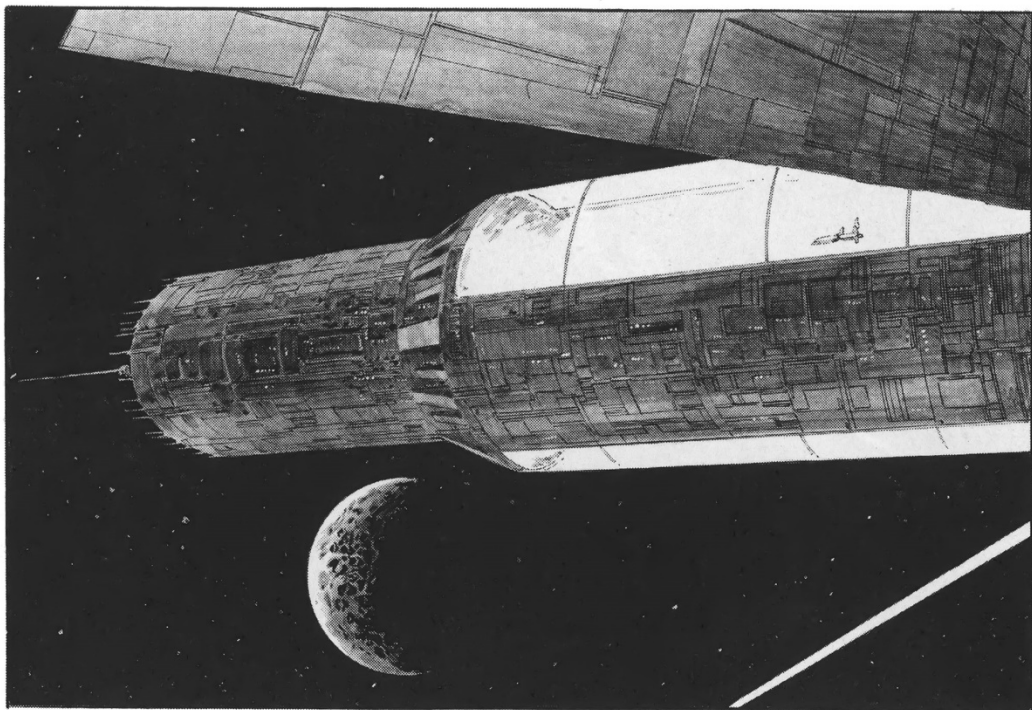


Above: The Sazabi and Jeddah stand in stark contrast, particularly the Sazabi, which diverges significantly from its anime incarnation. The pronounced volume in the shoulder area particularly stands out, making it a design that begs to be rendered in 3D.

Above (next page): The Londo Bell's space cruiser Ra Zaim, an original creation not seen in the anime, presents a rear view that is strikingly sleek. This elegant silhouette is a hallmark of Yoshinobu Hoshino's design work.

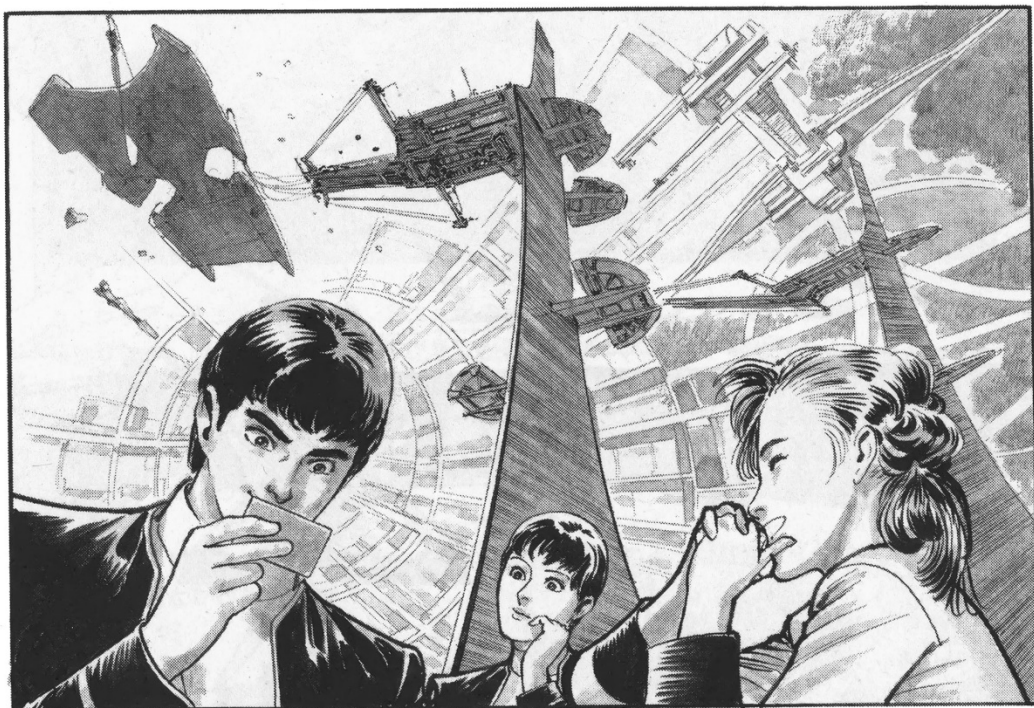
Below (next page): The front view of the Ra Zaim reveals its dual hull-type structure, drawing a reminiscent parallel to the iconic White Base.





Above: A panoramic view hinting at the enormity of the colony from the silhouette of the docked Ra Zaim.

Below: A rare illustration depicting the interior of the colony. The land spreading across the sky and the commuters flitting about create a striking visual effect. Incidentally, the black-haired man is Amuro.





Novel by
Yoshiyuki Tomino

Illustrations by
Yukinobu Hoshino

MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM
CHAR'S COUNTER ATTACK

Vol.1

