

# MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER **2** QUEST

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機動戦士ガンダム  
ハイ・ストリーマー **2** クエスト篇

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MOBILE SUIT  
**G**UNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 2

RESCUE

CHAPTER-1



# 1

"Ugh!" Amuro Ray gasped, a mix of shock and self-reproach seizing him. He had sensed the blow coming yet was paralyzed by his own helplessness. This moment, however, lasted no more than a tenth of a second - such was the speed of Amuro's racing mind. In that instant, he distinctly saw a black mobile suit approaching from the front window.

"Raaargh!"

Though the cry wasn't real, he heard it as clearly as a beast's roar, driven by the force with which the black mobile suit advanced.

"Damn!"

With a sudden surge, he propelled himself up from his seat, fluidly navigating towards the hatch. During this brief moment, the black mobile suit's manipulator clamped onto the emergency core of his Base Jabber.

"Ah!"

Violent shocks assaulted him from all sides, jolting him erratically within the confines of the cramped cockpit. It took everything he had just to curl his body into a fetal position to avoid any lethal impacts. Even clad head to toe in a protective pilot suit, not all the shock was absorbed.

Amidst this maelstrom, Amuro was consumed by a despairing sense of his own incompetence, trapped in the vice-like grip of Zeddah Mandira's mobile suit, the Gabool BL2 type.

"Uh..."

"There you are, Amuro! I know it's you!"

A familiar voice echoed in his headphones.

"This is just a skin-to-skin talk."

"Tch!"

Finally stabilizing himself, Amuro crawled along the cockpit wall towards the hatch.

"Damn!"

Emergency escape was impossible with the Gabool's fingers clamped onto the hatch's core. Even if he did manage to get out, drifting close to the enemy mobile suit wasn't exactly a safe escape.

Sure, it was difficult for a mobile suit to catch a human-sized object using verniers. But, one swing by a beam saber would be the end.

"But still!"

Amuro weighed his options, concluding his chances of survival were higher outside the cockpit.

Zeddah's voice dripped with malicious glee.

"So ends the glorious era of the Newtype! Amuro, your time is up!"

There was a horrendous screeching sound as the core began to splinter under the relentless strain, its fracturing accompanied by a cacophony of noise and vibration.

"Is this it?"

He finally reached the hatch, reaching for the emergency lever.

*Crack!*

The reinforced plastic shattered, revealing the keel and a glimpse of the black manipulator.

Pieces of plastic pelted his pilot suit.

"Shit!"

A breach in the pilot suit would spell the end. Minor damages could be patched with some adhesive tape, but...

"Nngh!"

Just as Amuro was about to pull the lever, a blinding flash erupted from the window. The cockpit core filled with light.

"Ah, what the?!"

In that blinding flash, his instincts screamed – this was not his end. The pressure felt different. It was a flash directed elsewhere. If it had been aimed at him, if it were an external force coming to end his life, it would resonate directly with his brain at the moment of death. That wasn't the case.

Yet, Amuro's body was once again flung wildly around the cockpit.

"Wah! Nngh!"

He couldn't understand what had happened. Maybe an ally, a Jeddah, had attacked, but for now, he was desperate to still his bouncing body.

"Damn it!"

Cursing himself, he kicked off the wall, drifting towards the hatch.

"Mmmph!"

He felt the pressure around the core lessen – the black mobile suit must have detached. Streaks of beam fire and bursts of flame light raced by and faded to either side of the window.

At last, grasping the emergency lever of the hatch, he yanked it hard. A hiss and a wisp of smoke marked the moment as explosives forcefully ejected the door into the abyss of space.

"...?!"

Amuro leaned out.

Space was spinning rapidly, faster than any view from a roller coaster. Amidst the dizzying whirl of stars, a glimpse of an unfamiliar mobile suit – its silhouette hauntingly familiar yet distinctly alien – flashed by.

"...?"

Not a Jeddah. Yet its colors were not those of the enemy either. It was the Earth Federation's, the successor to the Jeddah, recognizable at a glance.

"But it's not from Londo Bell."

Amuro stared in blank surprise. Overwhelmed by the urge to confirm this new suit, he detached from the spinning core.

## 2

Despite losing control, Amuro found the drifting core offered more safety than floating in space with only a pilot suit. Yet, in a combat zone, the risk of being targeted was real.

Utilizing the verniers integrated into his suit's backpack, he maneuvered away from the core. He sought a more stable and comforting orientation, one aligned with the innate human perception of up and down amidst the disorienting vastness of space. Without the colony of Londenion in sight, a sense of unease lingered.

He adjusted the verniers, setting the combat zone near the colony as his focal point.

"What's going on?" he muttered.

In the void, a fireball blossomed, its fierce glow casting shadows on the tail nozzles of several mobile suits trailing in its wake.

"Hmm?"

Amuro drifted alone in the vastness of space. Yet, he wasn't safe from the nearby combat zone.

"Those Zaku... being toyed with to death..."

Even in such moments, he lamented his powerlessness. If he had the strength, if he could dominate that combat zone, perhaps he could have saved those Zakus.

"If only I had a mobile suit..."

Amuro let out a weary sigh as he recognized the unfamiliar Earth Federation mobile suit that had earlier approached. It was, unmistakably, a derivative of the Jeddah.

"So that's a Jegan..."

It wasn't launched from Londo Bell.

"Is the Ra Cailum here?"

Amuro's gaze moved away from the battlefield, now void of the dramatic fireballs but still aglow with the tail nozzles of various suits. While his view revealed nothing conclusive, the tense and frustrated exchanges of the pilots over the comm clearly belonged to none from Londo Bell.

"Ra Cailum's Jegan squad..."

Returning his gaze to the combat zone, he saw another fireball bloom.

"They're rolling right over them."

The grim fate that befell those three mobile suits weighed heavily on him, filling him with a deep sense of sorrow.

"Why did they come?"

Amuro could guess Zeddah Mandira's intentions. His fierce hostility had prompted such a reckless operation.

Yet, the true purpose behind such actions eluded him. He found himself unable to fully grasp or imagine the depths of Zeddah's past life and motivations. In the end, he could only ponder the emptiness of his antagonistic actions.

"...?"

He thought he heard a familiar voice amid the all-range radio chatter.

"Wishful hearing?"

Scanning his surroundings once more, his eyes caught the distant glow of a ship's lights, previously hidden in the vastness opposite the colony.

"Is that the Ra Cailum?"

With the combat zone at his back, Amuro fired a rescue signal. It was a strobe signal.

After what seemed like an eternity, a Jegan, emerging from the aftermath of combat, approached and secured him, guiding him towards the Ra Cailum.

"We've rescued Lieutenant Amuro Ray!"

"Acknowledged! Bring him immediately to the Ra Cailum's bridge! We're waiting!"

The response from the bridge of Ra Cailum followed the Jegan pilot's report. The voice belonged to Bright Noa, a captain well-known to Amuro.

"Is he alive? The lieutenant?!"

"Yes, sir! Safe and sound!"

"Then let me hear his voice! Lieutenant!"

A smile crept across Amuro's face, unseen within the confines of his helmet.

"Glad to hear you're well, Captain!" he responded with a mix of relief and respect.

"What! At least give me the courtesy of a proper thanks first!"

"Fair enough! I'm grateful and looking forward to seeing the Ra Cailum!"

"Acknowledged!"

Listening to this exchange, Amuro gazed at the approaching Ra Cailum. The realization that old friends were waiting for him, bathed in the warm light of the Ra Cailum's bridge, brought a genuine comfort to his weary heart.

He let out a sigh of relief.

### 3

Zeddah's gambit might have succeeded were it not for the unexpected arrival of the Ra Cailum.

Perhaps this was the fickleness of fate.

The regular yet disorganized forces of Londo Bell presented Zeddah with numerous opportunities for exploitation. In fact, Amuro had been captured by Zeddah without any cover from Londo Bell's Jeddah. This was a command error on the part of Londo Bell's mobile suit unit.

Outnumbered but not outmaneuvered, Zeddah skillfully downed a Jeddah and inflicted damage on several other mobile suits.

However, his Gabool, too, had taken a direct hit, and he too had escaped in just his pilot suit.

At this point, the pilots of Ra Cailum were unreliable. They had failed to locate him, simply content with shooting down enemy suits and returning to the port and the Ra Cailum.

"Amaran! Clark! Find peace!"

Tears of frustration welled in Zeddah's eyes as he drifted towards the gleaming glassy section of Londenion's cylinder.

The glass, lit by reflections from the mirrors, shone brilliantly, obscuring the inside of the cylinder. Drifting into the radiant light, Zeddah eventually made gentle contact with the colony's outer wall.

"If only I had the firepower..."

He turned to survey the battlefield, only to find himself facing the vast, rapidly shifting cosmos.

"Londo Bell and the other ships outside, their mobile suit pilots are inexperienced. It's just him, that Amuro Ray..."

Zeddah peered into the cylinder through the glass, which was actually made of a special plastic, forming a giant "window" that let in sunlight, pieced together in meter and a half squares.

The boundary between the glass and the ground revealed a forest of trees. The opposite ground was obscured by clouds. Zeddah floated along the glass, searching for a hatch into the colony's interior.

There must be a hatch for mechanics to perform repairs on the glass.

Aware that any delay could trigger the colony's outer wall sensors and alert the guards, he quickened his pace.

"There it is!"

Spotting the hatch, he swiftly employed his junk dealer skills to crack its key-lock code with his trusty computer, slipping stealthily into the interior of the Londenion colony.

"Alright! Ra Zaim, set sail!"

Captain Mathias Testa's voice, carrying a mix of cheer and command, rang out clearly.

"What about the mobile suits?"

"Let them exit from the port and collect them!"

"But!"

"What now?!"

"Some of the mobile suits took heavy hits. We may have wounded pilots in need of urgent medical attention at Londo Bell's hospital."

"Head straight for Luna II, then! They're better equipped for treatment!"

As the Ra Zaim departed the port, mobile suits that had sortied were returning one after another.

"What irresponsibility!" Cunningham, covering the damaged mobile suits, joined the Ra Zaim. Her frustration was palpable, fueled by the harrowing realization of how disastrous the battle had unfolded without Lieutenant Amuro's presence.

"What's going on?!"



"They want to get back to Luna II as soon as possible!"

A voice laced with sarcasm crackled through the headphones, blatantly criticizing Captain Mathias' decision.

"Seriously!" As Cunningham made her landing in her Jeddah, she could see the Ra Zaim gearing up to thrust into full speed.

"What's this about?"

"Luna II. Lunaaa..."

Leaving the Jeddah's storage to the deck crew, Cunningham drifted to the mobile suit deck's control room.

"Feels like they don't care about pilots or mobile suits, right?!"

As the control room door slid open, Mestemar stepped in, his expression tense.

"Don't say it, Cunningham..."

"What's going on?"

"Just in time."

Upon seeing Cunningham, Mestemar's tension visibly eased.

"We had a moment there... Lieutenant Amuro was briefly unaccounted for."

"What?"

"But don't worry," he hurried to add, "We've made contact with the Ra Cailum. The Lieutenant was safely recovered."

Mestemar invited Cunningham into the control room and sat at one of the console panels.

"Thankfully, I'm spared from delivering tragic news today, Cunningham," he remarked with a subdued sense of relief.

"Really? The Lieutenant went out in a Jeddah?"

"No, a Base Jabber."

"Ahh, yeah, that figures!"

"Being a woman in love is tough, too."

"Idiot!" Cunningham fought the urge to throw her helmet at him, her frustration tempered by gratitude for the connection to the Ra Cailum.

"Ra Zaim Control Room here, requesting connection to Lieutenant Amuro! Over!"

"Where are they?"

"We're passing on the starboard side."

"Ah, I see them!" Another deck officer pointed out the monitor on the ceiling.

Cunningham's gaze lingered on the elongated hull displayed on the monitor.

"He's on that ship?"

"Seems so... Here, Lieutenant? I'll transfer you."

Mestemar said this as he handed over the cord to Cunningham, who connected it to her helmet and held her breath.

"This is Amuro."

Amuro's waiting voice came through.

Cunningham, lowering her voice, said, "It's Cunningham. Were you on a sortie?"

"Cunningham...?" Amuro's voice held a note of surprise, softened by an underlying chuckle. "Yeah, how was it out there, Cunni?"

"I couldn't do anything, just wandering around..."

"Really? What happened?"

"Huh?"

"This line is for official use."

"I'll transfer you to Mestemar."

In response to Cunningham's words, Mestema muttered, "Idiot."

"Take care of yourself! Where are you now?"

"On the bridge of the Ra Cailum. And you, Cunningham?"

"I'm in the mobile suit deck's control room."

"So, you can't see me? I'm standing in a spot on the bridge where I can see the Ra Zaim."

A realization dawned on Cunningham; Amuro had perceived her unspoken feelings. Tears inexplicably welled in her eyes as she gazed at the monitor.

"Oh, Lieutenant..."

Cunningham unplugged the cord from her helmet and stared at the monitor.

"Uh, Mestemar here! Confirming the survival of the former pilot of the Ra Zaim, Lieutenant Amuro. Any extraneous conversation will be deleted, over!"

Cunningham didn't hear Mestemar's voice.

In the port area of Londenion, two ships passed each other. One ship bore a broad silhouette, echoing the form of a catamaran, while the Ra Cailum cut through space with its slender, sleek hull.

On these two ships, a man and a woman, widening the distance between them.

To claim that their parting ships symbolized their divergent destinies might seem excessive, yet in the tapestry of this tale, it was a poignant truth: Amuro and Cunningham were never destined to meet again.

## 4

Sarnath, India is a city with deep historical roots.

In the bygone era, the ghats along the right bank of the Ganges River, coursing through the city, teemed with people partaking in ritualistic bathing. It was a melting pot of indigenous religions, becoming a cradle of ethnic culture. Though it lacks the vestiges of its former prosperity, the ghats still echoed with the preaching of Brahmins, their words mirroring in the reflective waters of the Ganges alongside the bathers.

Acknowledging the historical significance of certain districts, the Earth Federation government allowed practitioners of traditional faiths uninterrupted access, safeguarding the continuity of age-old religious

customs. Especially in the Indian subcontinent, most of it was designated as such, and even people from space frequently observed the local traditions.

This enduring tableau in India stood as a testament to the enigmatic and enduring presence of religion, a force unyielding even in the face of temporal power. Hence, it became a haven for mysterious hippies like Christina and her group.

While trespassers were arrested and forcibly removed by the Federation government, there was virtually no police structure to control the continent fully after the era of forced migration.

The organizational system had grown lax.

However, when this police structure did spring into action, it carried out 'manhunts.'

Even those with residency rights on Earth could be forced into migration to space colonies, and Spacenoids were subjected to forced labor in remote, small colonies. Though it seemed anachronistic, these frontier colonies had long-term, simple observation tasks or labor tantamount to human experimentation.

Among the most arduous tasks was the capturing of asteroids, which not only populated the asteroid belt but also crossed Earth's orbit with unnerving frequency. When these posed a collision threat, their course was altered, but if they contained valuable mineral resources, mining them became the job.

It was not widely known, but the continuation of such tasks proved that even the Earth Federation government, in managing the colonies, maintained actions based on tradition.

Of course, these jobs were directly managed by private companies in the colonies, and the Federation lacked the flexibility to evade criticism from Char Aznable.

Yet, such contemplations were for another time.

Once a month, Christina's group ventured into the city, engaging in information exchanges with other groups. Their primary pursuit was the rejuvenation of their minds through theological debates, echoing the intellectual rigor of the ancient Brahmins.

The city, resilient and untouched by the ravages of space wars, continued to present its ancient, weathered visage, abuzz as it had always been.

Quess Paraya, who had ventured into Sarnath with Christina, was excited to be in the city after a long time. Having fled from her home, Quess's brush with misanthropy seemed to momentarily fade in the face of the city's bustling energy, offering an unexpected solace. At heart, she was inherently a city girl, not yet mature enough to live away from people out of sheer rebellion.

The southernmost ghat was where Christina and her group usually gathered.

"Quess! Just mimic the others and come into the river."

"Okay..."

Quess placed her backpack under the awning where Christina had settled and descended the stairs. Yet, as she approached the river, the sight of its murky waters and the thought of their slimy texture stirred a flicker of apprehension in her.

"Just about... everyone here looks different from me."

Around her, young men, their origins evidently not from Earth, chanted esoteric scriptures with a joyous fervor, immersing themselves fully in the ritualistic bathing.

Of course, there were genuine Brahmins undergoing strict training, but the city had transformed more into a playground for tourists.

Quess felt a slight resistance to the atmosphere.

"Isn't this a bit strange...?"

Still finding her voice in this new world, Quess grappled silently with her observations, struggling to find the right words to articulate the complex web of her feelings. However, she knew it was best to follow Christina's lead as she still had much to learn.

In fact, after two months in India, Quess had begun to understand that human suffering is a part of the natural order.

"The problem is internalizing that suffering. Our being is nothingness. It is the presence of the self that allows suffering to cling to what should be a body of nothingness. Thus, to become nothing, one must strip away the extraneous elements clinging to the body... that is the purpose of training... the purpose of purification, the Ganges..."

Aided by the glaring sun, Quess stepped into the muddy water, feeling for the submerged steps with her toes, wading in until the water reached her chest. She remained clothed in worn jean shorts and a vest.

Amidst the apparent nonchalance of the hippies' groups, subtle exchanges took place – their information gatherers discreetly made contact under the guise of casual interactions. This was the scene at the Ghats.

Toffler Langeraj, after circling the city, settled beside Christina, subtly displacing a man from another group with whom she was in deep conversation.

"I've heard something unpleasant..."

The elder Toffler, both a spiritual guide and analyst for the group, spoke in a low voice.

"...?"

"We should move on from here soon."

"Why?"

While Christina never questioned Toffler's words, this time, she visibly frowned.

"There's a manhunt underway."

Alerted by the gravity in Toffler's voice, Jeff, Marian, and Frank leaned in closer under the awning, their expressions taut with concern.

"The Hunters are on the move?"

"You're joking? They've been quiet for years!"

Marian retorted sharply.

Jeff, stroking his full beard contemplatively, added, "It's a Federation government thing, what can you expect?"

"They're looking for a kid, but once they start, they tend to go beyond that."

With a deliberate movement, Toffler reached out and grasped Quess's backpack.

## 5

"Quess Air!"

Quess lifted her head at Christina's call. Something about the caress of water on her chapped skin soothed her despite everything. When Quess finally looked up, Christina, having called out several times already, wore an expression of concern so intense it bordered on frightening.

"Yes!"

Churning through the dun flow, Quess angled toward the ghat steps.

"Word is, a Hunter's on the prowl for someone matching your age and description."

"Huh?"

"What's your real story? Where are you from?"

"The truth is--"

"Christina!"

Toffler cut in abruptly, holding out Quess's backpack.

"You are Quess Paraya, aren't you? You gave us a fake name."

"You! You went through my stuff?!"

"I didn't want to, but with Hunters on the move, it's different. Christina, they're after this girl."

"What?! Is that really true?!"

"I see."

Christina's sunburnt nose crinkled in displeasure.

As Quess tried to snatch her backpack, Toffler pressed it into her hands and squatted beside Christina.

"Paraya, it's an uncommon surname, hard to forget. It's because of *the* Paraya."

Toffler's pronunciation carried a hint of the accent associated with the lower echelons of India's caste system.

Christina shivered, an ominous feeling seizing her.

"Adenauer Paraya, someone in the Earth Federation Forces General Staff. I forget his rank, but he's high up."

"So, Quess Paraya is..."

"Yes, Quess. Didn't you say you came from Lhasa in Tibet? I figured some Federation official's kid, but if you're the daughter of Adenauer Paraya, then they have the power to mobilize the Hunters."

"No way!"



Christina spat into the sacred river.

"What are you doing in the sacred water?!"

The bathing youths collectively condemned Christina.

"Sorry... Sorry!"

Christina's apologies uttered in a hasty, unsettled tone, failed to appease the bathing youths.

"Christina..."

Jeff tried to protect her by grabbing her arm. Yet, this dramatic exchange was overshadowed as everyone's attention was abruptly captured by a more pressing development.

"A boat?"

Marian's gaze sharpened as she noticed something unusual.

Following her line of sight, Quess saw a high-speed hydro-wing cutting through the water, rapidly approaching their position.

"Christina!"

Toffler signaled everyone to retreat. The group scrambled up the steps in a frenzy, leaving the bathing youths behind, staring in bewildered shock.

Clinging to Jeff, Quess scrambled up the ghat's steps.

"Stay right there! Move, and we'll shoot you!"

An authoritative voice boomed from the high-speed boat's speaker, its command echoing menacingly across the river.

"What's going on?!"

"Hunters!"

Gunshots rang out, crackling over the water, followed by panicked screams. Each shot sent up a spray, marking its deadly impact.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Pushed by the gunfire, Quess dove into a narrow alley lined with stone walls.

However, the threat wasn't confined to the river; the special police force had already mobilized on land as well.

By this time, the police who had sealed off the area around the city had already formed a cordon around it. Black Hunter cars screeched along the old streets, sealing exits.

From the rooftops, 'manhunt' squads in protective gear intimidated the people. Once deployed, they ruthlessly shipped people off to space. The robust officers, enforcing strict control, chased the citizens, earning them the moniker 'manhunters.'

"Are we sure?!"

"That shorty is Quess Paraya!"

A Hunter's shout pierced the chaos, echoing loudly as he emerged from around a corner, his focus trained on Quess.

"...?!"

Several more hunters appeared.

"Ah!"

"In a desperate act, Jeff hurled his guitar towards the oncoming Hunters, only to see it brutally crushed under their heavy boots.

"Don't resist, or we'll shoot!"

One Hunter fired a warning shot, chipping the stone wall. Another Hunter leaped onto the wall in front of Marian, rifle aimed at Christina in the lead.

"Stop right there! You're under arrest for abducting a minor!"

Quess blocked ahead, plunged into the group of youths.

"Abducting?!"

Christina groaned.

"No way!"

It was Toffler.

Quess looked up at the sound above. Several men in black visors, reflecting the sun, were closing in.

"These people are kind!"

"Quess Paraya!"

The lead visor barked.

"..."

"You are implicated in kidnapping-- "

"That's not true! Ah!"

Marian lunged forward but crumpled under a brutal blow.

"Ah?!"

A Hunter had swung his baton.

"Ridiculous!"

Christina's protest was abruptly silenced by the harsh impact of a baton against her midsection.

"Christina!"

The men's groans were drowned out by the approaching Hunters, their boots and leathery suits rustling.

"Quess Paraya."

Quess felt hands in gloves grip her sides. They were hot, but the men handling her weren't brutal.

"...?"

"Your father is waiting for you."

The Hunter to her left, in a disconcerting contrast, spoke with an unnerving gentleness.

"Wha?! No!"

Those words were more repulsive to Quess than the threat of being shot.

"If you don't come willingly, we'll have a problem."

Despite his gentle voice, the man's grip on Quess was firm.

"Quess?!"

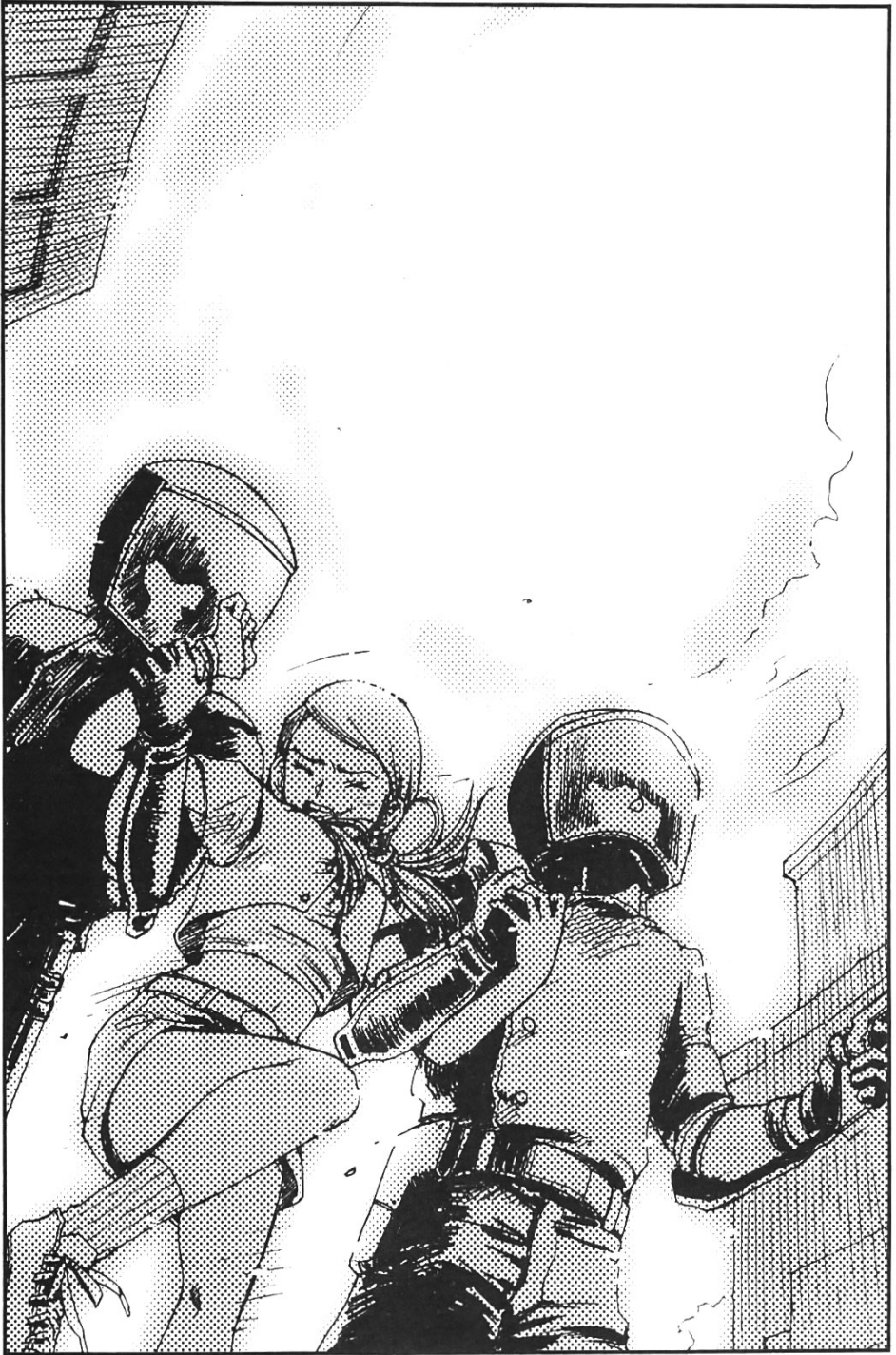
Toffler, seized by another Hunter, thought their treatment was like dealing with animals.

"Don't move!"

A final commanding shout and a vicious blow to the back of his head sent Toffler spiraling into unconsciousness.

"That's horrible!"

Overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness, Quess trembled with a fierce anger, her scream a raw expression of her turmoil.



"Quess Paraya--"

A grating voice, tinged with sweat and annoyance, attempted to stifle Quess's outcries.

"I don't want to!"

All Quess could do was resist as best she could.

機動戦士ガンダム  
MOBILE SUIT  
UNDAM

G

HIGH-STREAMER: 2

WITH BRIGHT NOA

CHAPTER-J



# 1

"Chan Agi, nice to meet you."

Amuro Ray, redirecting his attention from Bright Noa, extended a welcoming hand to the mechanic, whose youthful appearance belied her technical expertise.

Her handshake was gentle yet firm, her fingertips revealing the toughness of a seasoned mechanic.

"Nice to meet you, Lieutenant."

"Likewise."

"She's excellent. Her late arrival was due to some assignments I gave her."

"Sounds tough..."

"Yes, Mr. Bright is quite the demanding captain. He's always pushing us with extra tasks."

"Is that so..."

"She's a truly talented non-commissioned officer."

Observing a flicker of skepticism in Amuro's expression, Bright interjected with added emphasis to underscore Chan's abilities.

"Well, I've no doubt if you selected her."

Amuro's swift, somewhat demurral elicited a knowing shrug and a subtle smile from Chan Agi.

"Don't try buttering me up. As a Newtype, surely you can sense the extent of her abilities?"

Bright's intonation carried a deliberate distortion of the term "Newtype."

People like Amuro Ray, who demonstrated extraordinary talent as mobile suit pilots, were respected yet feared as Newtypes. In times of peace, the latent wariness settled into active resentment of their capabilities. A belief took hold about Newtypes possessing a sort of paranormal insight, precognition, and keen intuitions.

If those attributes reliably indicated promotions within social institutions, there'd be no issue. But life was never so simple. Advancement owed as much to connections or sheer luck. That's life, adding flavor to its unpredictability. Individuals burdened with responsibilities surpassing their abilities often instinctively shielded themselves from those of superior capability. Their cunning and vigor in this regard were remarkable.

This brand of cleverness, in many ways, steered the course of human history – a begrudgingly acceptable facet of societal evolution. The notion of every organization operating at peak efficiency with ideal talent posed a paradox; such a world might be ruthlessly efficient but at the cost of human leisure and creativity, leading to exhaustion rather than fulfillment.

History wouldn't have been built that way. People can't live by efficiency and ideals alone. Lazing around, being idle, and playing are essential. In fact,

civilization might have emerged from a sense of playfulness. Knowing this, people talk about ideals but don't act on them.

They might even deploy a higher tactic of surrounding themselves with the incompetent to ensure their own leisure. This was the way of bureaucracies. In the eyes of the institution, those adept at navigating these internal politics, despite being mediocre in other respects, were often lauded as clever and indispensable.

It wasn't a bad thing.

Thus, when someone capable of truly assessing one's abilities appears, people invest all their energy to reject them. Amuro, too, had endured this kind of backlash from his peers, each instance a bitter pill that shaped his worldview.

In an era with humanity's reach extending into the cosmos, the echoes of the One Year War, ignited by the Principality of Zeon, had faded into history. Post-war, Amuro found himself constrained by the Earth Federation Forces.

Though he received the highest military honors conceivable, Amuro found himself relegated to the role of a guide at an antiquated nuclear base in North America, a stark irony not lost on him.

This obligation persisted until the tides of fate swept him towards the Londo Bell, an emerging unit within the Federation's Space Forces, known colloquially as the "clean-up crew."

This shift was a consequence of the Titans' rebellion and the Neo Zeon resurgence under Haman Karn.

Within the labyrinthine hierarchy of the Federation government or military, a discerning savant existed, one who truly valued and sought out talent.

The arrival of a fleet, purportedly under the command of a figure claiming to be Char Aznable and its subsequent occupation of Sweetwater necessitated a rapid reinforcement of the Londo Bell, consequently cementing Amuro's role within it.

In the theatre of war, Newtypes were recognized as invaluable assets, seen as guardians for the common folk. In contrast, many within the Federation's military ranks had grown distant from the art of war, their service driven more by the need for sustenance than by a call to arms.

The prospect of an assignment to a hectic, scarcely supported unit like the Londo Bell held little appeal for most, preferring the safety of less demanding postings.

This situation prompted Bright Noa to come to Londenion. *The Bright Noa*, the seasoned captain renowned for commanding the space battleship *Argama* during the tumultuous Titans' rebellion, leading the Zeta Gundam unit piloted by Kamille Bidan, and later, alongside Judau Ashta and others, the *Nahal Argama* during the "Haman War."

"I've said it before, haven't I? I don't know anything about telepathy!"

Amuro remarked.

Bright, with a scoff, responded to Amuro's denial.

"Hmph! Chan, you see, this is the sort of man he's become. Hardships have clouded his judgment. Brace yourself."

"Yes... Lieutenant Amuro is just trying to be forthcoming, right?"

Amuro felt an affinity for Chan's approach. Her sensibilities seemed sound. As he walked beside Chan, Amuro was perturbed by his earlier inability to discern her aura, a lapse that left him disconcerted.

"Is it because of Cunningham? Or because I'm burdened with Alyona?" he wondered to himself.

"Hey!"

"Huh?"

Bright opened one of the soundproof doors. Amuro, caught off guard, floated momentarily.

"Heh..."

The sound of Chan trying to stifle her laughter was a light, amusing note in Amuro's ears. He strengthened the magnets in his shoes to anchor himself.

"What's wrong? Distracted?"

"Is it girl troubles or something?"

Her tone was light, reminiscent of a carefree, chatty young woman.

"No... not that. These past few days, I've been too busy overseeing the modifications of the Re-GZ to sleep."

"Ah... let's talk about that inside. Come on."

"Hmm..."

As Amuro followed Chan into the room, her shoulders shook with quiet laughter again.

"What?"

"It's just... You're really bad at lying, Lieutenant, aren't you?"

Glancing back over her shoulder, Chan's eyes danced with a mix of amusement and intrigue, as if she found Amuro's discomfort oddly entertaining.

## 2

"They've equipped us with Jegans, which are decent for mass production units, I suppose. But honestly, they're pretty standard, much like the Jeddah models."

"But they seem to have fairly decent production efficiency from appearances."

"John Bauer in Lhasa, Tibet would thank you for saying that. He pushed for its mass production, after all."

"Hmph, someone like that actually exists in Lhasa?"

Hearing about someone like John Bauer brought Amuro an unexpected sense of relief. It reminded him of the new mobile suits Bright's Ra Cailum had brought from Luna II, an oasis in his otherwise stark life.

"Of course. Otherwise, I wouldn't have gotten even the job for atmospheric orbit with the Garuda."

"Why did the Earth Federation government move to Lhasa, Tibet, of all places?"

"Thank you, sir!" Chan's voice interrupted the conversation, and Amuro watched her petite figure as she entered the room. Her coverall revealed a hint of her curvy bottom.

"Probably because it's closer to the heavens... They think they can manage space from there?"

"Ah... uh, sorry," Amuro stammered, distracted by Chan.

"Nice girl."

"You could say that."

"Pardon?" Chan asked, a carafe of coffee on the table.

"I'm just appreciating your talent more. You're very diligent..."

"You flatter me, sir. The coffee here is delicious. I have a knack for finding these things."

"Aren't all military-frequented hangouts serving the same swill?" Amuro asked, sipping his coffee through a straw.

"Men... or should I say, soldiers, really do think in stereotypes, don't they?" Chan replied, sipping her coffee.

"Which shop is this from?"

"Oh, just a little spot called the McCling Corner, tucked away in the zero-gravity block."

"Where? I didn't catch that."

"That's not important. If you want some, I'll order it for you next time."

"Ah... That sounds like something Earth dwellers would think of," Amuro mused, reassured by Chan's carefree response before turning back to Bright's topic about Lhasa.

"That's how it is. The Federation top brass should get their pampered arses into space to see the state of things. But Char's Sweetwater occupation declaration has them in a tizzy. It's ugly to watch."

"How so?"

"It's hard to believe Char is still alive... But if he is and demands Sweetwater, which is a refugee camp, why not just give it to him? What do you think would happen next if we started that dialogue?"

"I can't begin to imagine..."

"Well bureaucrats come up with gems. Tremendously anal bunch. If acknowledging some rival polity, what might that entail? Let's research old world geopolitics for precedent! And that killed a month easy."

"That's ridiculous."

"Sure, but they did it pseudo-vacationing, so no conclusions whatsoever."

"Really?"

"Sure. I've seen it in Lhasa. Remember your house arrest in America? Can't you imagine?"

"Um... not really."

"You're so oblivious, Amuro, with everything except piloting."

"And mobile suit modification, right? The Re-GZ?"

"Ah, that modified mobile suit? Amuro, don't waste your energy on trivial things."

"I can't help it. The Z Gundam's frame can be easily replicated, and it's ridiculously strong. Plus, I turned the engine core of the mega particle cannon into a backpack, giving it the firepower of a cruiser. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing, but will it be effective as a combat asset?"

"It depends on how it's used."

"Only you could use it. The others wouldn't be able to."

"Kayra Su from the Ra Cailum might manage."

"That little spitfire? Hahaha... maybe."

Chan and Bright continued, discussing names unknown to Amuro.

"But Amuro, The Re-GZ is equipment Lhasa isn't even aware of."

"Yet, I haven't heard any protests from the General Staff Office, until today."

"I understand. I'll file the request. With the current situation, it might even become standard issue. But Chan, we need to make the Re-GZ a bit more user-friendly."

"I've looked into it, and it seems like a hobbyist project. It will take some time to modify."

"Sorry about that."

Amuro bristled at Chan's overly honest reaction.

"I'm just thinking mechanically, optimizing machine performance."

"Here, that's all I could do."

"I acknowledge your effort, but it's futile."

Amuro decided then that he didn't like this girl.

"Chan, you know, some things should remain unspoken."

"Sure thing, Lieutenant."

"And drop the sarcastic 'Lieutenant,' please."

"Should I call you Amuro?"

"We're not exactly regulation military here."

"Aren't we? It sure looks like it."

Chan placed a handheld computer on the table, opening its display.

"This is it."

She pulled up a set of blueprints.

"What's this?"

The blueprint was a concept design of a mobile suit that resembled the Nu Gundam Amuro was thinking about.

"What's the matter?"

Bright leaned in, noticing Amuro's strange reaction.

"What's the matter? This is the design for the Gundam I've been thinking of."

"What do you mean?"

Bright frowned, looking between Amuro and Chan.

"Did you swipe designs straight out of my head, Chan?"

"Of course not..."

Chan looked up at Amuro and chuckled.

"This is a design where I extracted the maximum average values from the previous Gundam models I've worked on and redesigned them using new materials."

"It's yours, but, still...!"

"It makes sense that our ideas are similar. I just adjusted the design to fit the materials."

"So, I lack imagination too, then."

"Hahaha... You're not an artist, Amuro. It's to be expected."

"Well, at least it's not wildly different. I was thinking of building something like this. Incorporate your ideas into it, Chan. Your ideas are still just tinkering from an engineer..."

"I'm confident in my use of materials."

"How about that? Combine it with your idea of the Nu Gundam, and we might get something good."

"Hmm..."

Amuro studied the blueprint intensely, his face nearly touching the display. Chan seemed unperturbed.

"It's still not very pilot-friendly. There's another issue: I want to install a psycommu system and reinforce the exterior."

"I can accommodate pilot feedback."

"Much appreciated, Chan. But what about the budget? And where will it be built?"

"I got Lhasa to approve it when I went to space. It's a gift, so to speak."

"John Bauer's backing you?"

"Yes, having a conscientious staff officer from the logistics department helps. He arranged for the Anaheim Electronics factory on Von Braun."

"Seriously? That giant corporation is known as the merchant of death. There are suspicions they're manufacturing equipment for Neo Zeon."

"I know, but each factory operates on an independent cost-profit basis and maintains strict secrecy. With our deadline, other factories were non-starters."

"I see... But why can't we get the Zeta Gundam? And the Hyaku Shiki wasn't a bad mobile suit either."

"Don't ask for the impossible. The Federation government sees anything named 'Gundam' as equivalent to a nuclear weapon. They're in permanent storage, and not even John Bauer can countermand a cabinet decision let alone knows where they're kept. Only the top officials of the Federation Assembly know. But I'd wager even they've forgotten about them."

"You seem to know a lot."

Weary of Bright's conjectures, Amuro snorted derisively.

"Feel free to dismiss my pet theories, but anyone can see the mindset of those deeply ingrained in the system. Only the parties involved are clueless."

"Prescience or what?"

"History. Read a good historical novel, and you'll understand... Plus, it's faster to build a new mobile suit. Trust in technological innovation and the imagination of the young."

"Got it."

"Now then."

Bright stood up, and Amuro was struck anew by his familiar face.

"Chan, sorry, but can you leave us alone for a while?"

"Of course, Lieutenant."

Bright brought the Ra Cailum to Londenion, and in exchange, the Ra Zaim was moved to Luna II's docks for refitting under the pretext of equipment upgrades. The underlying motives were murky, yet this move served as a stark testament to the Federation Space Forces' adept manipulation of personnel and resources as it suited their strategic games.

### 3

"I couldn't bring myself to ask right after docking, but what happened? With you and Beltorchika Irma, I mean?"

"We split up," came the short reply.

Sitting in a deserted corner of the lobby, Amuro's words were brief.

"I see..." Bright didn't probe further, understanding from Amuro's terse reply that things with her were conclusively over. Yet Amuro continued.

"She's got a keen sense for these things. I never demand anything, but even without words, she must've felt I ask too much from women."

As the words left his mouth, Amuro could feel the heavy weight of his accumulated frustrations starting to lift, like clouds parting after a storm.

For years, he had found solace in new partnerships, new tasks. Yet this cycle of stress only added to his mental burden. Encountering old friends like Bright, Amuro found long-forgotten stories resurfacing.

"Ah, you're demanding in some way. A mother complex, perhaps?" Bright ventured.

"I admit, I try to be patient, but Beltorchika seems to understand that. It only heightens her frustration..."

"More than insightful, she was strong. Heard rumors she's with Karaba, about three years back now, right?"

"About that time, yeah," Amuro mused, recalling the unique scent that was so distinctly Beltorchika. "Now, she's left Karaba, likely in South America..."

Bright, sensing a shift in Amuro's demeanor, ventured a question.

"No letters exchanged?"

"None..."

For Amuro, memories of her were fading like bittersweet mirages in the desert of his mind. He knew, deep down, that staying with her would mean a life of mutual solace, a comfortable dysfunction.

*"That would have been miserable."*





He considered other possibilities, if only to avoid imagining an even harsher finale driving the split - no hatred or disgust between them. Beltorchika understood this, hence the lack of communication since.

The officers' lounge where Amuro and Bright sat was deserted, its silence and artificial gravity bringing a comforting earthliness.

"How's Mirai doing?"

"She's fine... preparing to move from Lhasa. Had enough of Earth. Hathaway and Cheimin are just getting more conservative," Bright replied.

"Well, the Federation Forces General Staff believes you're a Newtype, too, apparently."

"Sad, but true. I did command a Newtype unit. So they don't want a potential threat like me in space. Ridiculous!"

"Lately, I've come to understand 'conservative' all too well. It's like they can't breathe unless they're clinging to outdated ideas."

"Right. Even slight deviations from precedent overload their faculties."

"We've been doing unpredictable jobs since the White Base, surviving. Now I get ridiculed by you guys, called a Daddy... If I went to Lhasa, I'd be branded a Newtype too."

"'Daddy?' I've never heard that. Who said it?"

"Kai Shiden, maybe? I heard you said it too."

"News to me..."

"Don't lie..."

As they spoke, a lightness veiled their words, but underneath lay a current of sadness, stirring up a sea of painful memories.

"Still, we're survivors. I regret poor Hayato's circumstances. I haven't seen Frau Bow, have you?"

"Let's not go there..." Amuro said with a sharp rebuff, looking up at the high lobby ceiling, lit brightly by the sunlight.

"Anyway, Char is serious this time. He's planning to purge top Federation officials."

"Terrorism tactics? Would he resort to such a method?"

"Methodical as he can be, individual targeted strikes would prove cumbersome..."

"More would flee from terror..."

"Yet, establishing a Neo Zeon regime in Sweetwater doesn't suit Char either."

"True..."

"A stubborn man..."

"But, getting the complacent Earth Federation officials involved in war is undesirable."

"Since time immemorial, soldiers fight wars, while those who cause them stay safe, out of harm's way. It's detestable, but true."

"When did this start?"

"When? Modern times, I guess. Think back to the French Revolution," Bright suggested, his tone turning reflective. "It marked the rise of citizen power, but with it, civil conflicts intensified like never before. Ironically,

those who started wars retreated from the battlefield. In the previous era, when monarchs and nobles held power, it was customary for soldiers to engage in battle."

"Not everything is like that."

"True, but the further we move into the space era, the scale and tragedy of wars, especially those born from civilian disputes, only seem to magnify."

"Indeed, and the cost! Military pensions are a prime example. Nations die trying to pay compensation and restitution. Another regime comes in to sweep it all under the rug and starts another war."

"Is this the modern civic society?"

Bright's voice held a note of cynicism.

"Ah, and it drives the economy, which is hellish in its own right."

"Is modernity an age of misery? Has civil society become more malignant compared to the times of monarchies?"

"That's the backlash that led to the Zabi family's dictatorship."

"Right. Dictatorship as a reaction to societal frustrations, but we can't accept that, nor monarchy..."

"Seems like we're waiting for a world of gods to find any real legitimacy in our actions."

"True, but even the idea of a world of gods reeks of divine egotism."

"Eh? Well, yeah, the Greek pantheon frequently drank and cavorted with supple youths of both sexes. They were far from perfect."

"Haha... Exactly... The tales of gods are human desires personified."

"Reforming human nature... the eternal challenge."

"I see it now... Char's plan. It's not just a threat; it's an ultimatum to the Earth Federation's top brass in Lhasa. If intimidation fails... he'll resort to crushing them."

"How?" Bright asked, his brows furrowing in concern.

Amuro's reply was confident, almost resigned.

"That I don't know... but Char will do it."

Amuro was certain of it.

## 4

Humanity's first foray into space habitation began with the colonies of Side 1. Among them, Londenion was one of the earliest established. True to its nickname, it was pioneered mainly by the British, preserving an old Earthly feel more than any other colony.

However, not being a political center, it faced less friction with other Earth Federation Space Forces, making it easier for Amuro and his Londo Bell unit to station there. The module carrying Chan and Amuro, having departed Londenion, was smoothly inertia-bound for Von Braun, the Moon's largest city.

The colony's huge cylinders rotated to create artificial gravity through centrifugal force. This rotation facilitated module launches, propelling them

through space. Although the rotational force of the cylinders sufficed for inter-colony travel, reaching the Moon, a much further destination, required the aid of liquid-fueled rockets as auxiliary propulsion.

"It's beautiful...!"

Von Braun City, facing Earth, was visible from tens of thousands of meters above as a city of light, its artificial glow forming a stunning band against the moon's faintly blue-tinged gray surface.

"Lieutenant! Hey, Amuro?"

"Ah... what?"

Chan gazed out at the sprawling lunar city, her voice tinged with wonder. "Do you think people in the past ever dreamed of building cities on the Moon like this?"

"Probably not. The first human step on the Moon was in the old 20th century, right? Back then, Earth wasn't as polluted, and people believed humanity could live there until the sun died out. It was a time when white madams still employed black maids."

"Don't be so absurd! That was more of a 19th-century thing, wasn't it?"

"Unfortunately, no. Even in the late 20th-century, apartheid was a reality, and Africa still struggled with racial discrimination, albeit different from slavery."

"Really?"

"I was born on Earth. Even as a soldier, I was confined to the American continent. Trust me, I've studied Earth's history more than you."

"Hmm, really?"

Amuro's tone turned somber.

"In South Africa, 80% of the black population was squeezed into 14% of the land, while the 20% white population controlled 86%. The numbers might be off, but the disparity is staggering, isn't it?"

"It's hard to believe."

"Yeah, but there's more. There were instances where the masters wouldn't even hold their own children, leaving them to maids to raise, while they indulged in romantic escapades. Yet, they'd get angry and despair over their children not loving them, wondering why they didn't."

"I don't understand. If parents don't embrace their children, how can a parent-child relationship exist?"

"I've never raised a child, but I agree. Yet, in a problematic social system that becomes the norm, people start believing it's just, and changing it takes time. In a legal state, you have to follow even the bad laws."

"Such a ridiculous notion!"

"Isn't it the same in the current Earth Sphere?"

"Ah! That's why I volunteered for Londo Bell. I see! It makes sense!"

"Right. You're smart, Chan."

"I am."

"The real challenge lies in changing a system entrenched with deep-seated wrongs. It's easier for most to craft a feel-good world than confront the

underlying issues. However, trying to do so without fundamental change is the hardest task of all."

"Why? Someone like you, a Newtype, should be able to do it."

"Newtypes aren't cut out for politics. Politicians are often either shamelessly thick-skinned or too insensitive for the subtleties of nuanced issues."

"Why's that?"

"Mediating mutually opposed perspectives occupies awkward middle grounds not conducive to idealists. Requires a thicker skin I'd say."

"Hmm!"

Chan drew her knees closer, hugging them tightly. In her thoughtful silence, there was a sense of understanding, perhaps even acceptance, of Amuro's grim explanation.

## 5

"Lieutenant Amuro Ray?"

With a rigid demeanor, the man introduced himself as October Saran, the Anaheim Electronics representative for the project.

To an outsider, the trio appeared as mere ordinary tourists. To blend in, Amuro and Chan had deliberately opted for inconspicuous attire, appearing nothing more than an unassuming couple, a coordination courtesy of Chan.

Amuro, a celebrity in his own right, had chosen attire that allowed him to seamlessly dissolve into the crowd.

"It's a bit of a dirty car, but I'll drive you to the factory in mine. Limousines... they just don't feel safe somehow."

"That's fine. Good thinking."

Their journey from the airport's motor pool, longer than anticipated, unfolded without drawing any suspicion. True to October's words, the car interior was cluttered with computers, discs, a tennis racket, and towels - a clear sign that cleaning was not on his list of priorities.

"Let me just clear some space." October muttered, contorting into the backseat to push the trash and belongings behind the seats.

Observing October's haphazard tidying, Amuro felt reassured by the hallmark signs of a genuine engineer's disarray.

"Please, after you."

"Thanks." Amuro took the rear seat first, guiding Chan to the passenger side.

"You might want to crack the window a bit," Amuro whispered.

A peculiar, musty odor lingered in the car.

"Eh? Oh... right."

Amuro and Chan shared a shrug, but such details were lost on an engineer like October.

"Let's go," declared October with an air of confidence as he started the car.

Emerging from the underground airport, they skimmed through Von Braun city's center, heading towards the Anaheim factory in the suburbs. For a moment, the car emerged onto the Moon's surface, where they naturally closed the windows. Thankfully, the odd smell had dissipated.

"We could have taken the underground route, but this car can go outside too. Thought you might enjoy a bit of sightseeing..." October remarked casually, masking his real motive to evade potential followers.

The car sped along a road laid across the grey lunar landscape, under a quiet scene with Earth gleaming like a half-moon on the horizon. For Amuro, whose space ventures were often marred by war, this tranquility was a precious anomaly.

"I hope we make it in time... Char seems to be moving faster than we thought," Amuro mused, recalling his conclusion from a conversation with Bright.

His intuition was proving right.

Space always had a way of stirring something in Amuro.

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NU GUNDAM

CHAPTER-K

# 1

"I confess, the nuances of ladies' attire elude me..."

The police chief, his skin a deep tan, flashed a smile at Quess Paraya even as he signaled to someone outside the door. A woman clad in a sari, silently carrying several garments, strode into the walk-in closet. She, too, was an officer.

Quess, ensconced in the sofa's embrace, lingered over her notepad, her stillness not born of lethargy but a deliberate disinterest in her gilded cage.

Approaching her in slow, measured steps, the chief offered, "If you wish to study something, shall I introduce you to a tutor?"

"You forgot my swimsuit again, didn't you?"

"So I did!"

The chief exaggerated a shrug of his broad shoulders, then checked the lock on the French doors of the living room. It was a ritual he performed with surprising consistency daily.

"Very good, the lock is secure!"

"So it seems..." he replied, ever genial.

"Why can't I take a walk outside the hotel?"

"You know the reasons all too well," he said, a gentle rebuke that cloaked the harsh reality of Quess's three-week confinement within the hotel's luxurious but suffocating embrace. Her only escapes were brief walks at dawn and dusk, swimming in the hotel pool in an unwelcome swimsuit, or mimicking golf in the hotel's modest garden green. Anything beyond that was forbidden. For shopping in the arcade, souvenirs were the only option, as daily necessities had to be requested through the police.

"When will my father arrive?!"

"He is expected to arrive the day after tomorrow. The situation between space and Earth is complicated; it seems he's been quite troubled."

The chief's pleasant expression clouded over for a moment.

"When was this communicated?"

"This morning."

"We could have rented a house instead of staying at the hotel!"

"Your father's fear of losing you overshadows everything else. His instructions were clear — safeguard you at all costs, even if it means sidelining your wishes. Thus, I have no choice but to act as I do."

Quess typed meaningless characters into her notepad. After ensuring the silent departure of the woman in the sari, the chief resumed his affable demeanor, "If you need anything, use that phone..."

"I want to go outside! I want to see Christina!"

"Unfortunately, as they were found innocent, they have been released. I do not know of their whereabouts. This is a free continent, and we do not

interfere with the citizens' movements," the chief said, closing the door behind him.

Quess turned off the notepad's display and, as usual, circled the room. Moving from the living room to the dining area, she poured herself a glass of mineral water from a pot on the table. Then she proceeded from the twin-bedded bedroom through the walk-in closet to the spacious bathroom. In the grandeur of the room, the bathtub appeared almost diminutive, an ironic oasis in a desert of opulence that underscored her isolation.

In the large mirror of the adjoining dressing room, Quess examined her reflection.

"I've lost weight, haven't I..."

In this fleeting moment of solitude, she found a strange contentment, seeing in her reflection not just a matured visage but the echoes of a spirit that had outgrown its past confines in Lhasa, a silent homage to her elusive freedom.

"Still... I need more discipline..."

With an exaggerated sigh, she looked down at the book left open on the makeup table.

"O Brahman, the saints praise the killing of the root of poison, anger. For killing it means there will be no sorrow. Gautama Buddha's answer is ingenious, yet it seems to evade the problem..."

Muttering the passage to herself, Quess returned to the living room. Her disdain for the room, with its colonial-era aesthetics marred by careless craftsmanship, grew as she peered through the French doors.

The hotel's expanse unfurled before her, its gardens and trees weaving shadows that danced like specters in the fading light. To the left, the pool lay deserted, its waters a vibrant oasis of tranquility under a sky muted by the afternoon's glare. In stark contrast to this serenity, three men trudged across the garden, their lawnmowers humming a relentless tune under the unyielding sun.

"Why use people for this?"

The scene struck Quess as painfully anachronistic.

She picked up the living room phone.

"Hello?"

The voice on the other end was a direct line to the Varanasi police.

"Yes, this is Quess. Could I possibly get an English-Hindi dictionary?"

## 2

October Saran's vehicle, carrying Amuro Ray and Chan Agi, weaved through the Anaheim Electronics complex. The flickering lights of street lamps penetrated the car's interior, trailing off into the darkness behind. The industrial sector exuded a stark, functional coldness, a sharp contrast to the vibrant human ingenuity that birthed warships and colonies alike, underscoring the dual nature of their operations.



Slowing down, he navigated the undulating road, twisted through a cranked gate, and overcame two mounds designed to decelerate the vehicle for security checks. Given the moon's one-sixth Earth gravity, careless speeds were perilous. The presence of numerous checkpoints underscored the facility's nature.

Anaheim Electronics openly embraced its controversial stature as a merchant of death, its clandestine influence spanning the Earth Sphere. In an old-world comparison, it wielded power akin to a nation-state, a trend that became pronounced in the latter half of the previous century and had only intensified.

The Von Braun factory, a labyrinth of steel and ambition where Amuro and Chan found themselves, was but a speck in the vast universe of Anaheim's empire. Here, amidst the hum of machinery and the silent strength of untold secrets, the corporation's hand was invisible, yet omnipresent, guiding fates with unseen threads.

October broke the silence with a grim update, "The Earth Federation is officially turning a blind eye to Char's proposal for Sweetwater's occupation."

"The Federation was negotiating with Char, weren't they?"

"Yes, the Sweetwater News on the lobby TV mentioned the Federation's negotiators had left Sweetwater, furious over Char's outrageous demands."

"I wasn't aware..."

Lost in thought, Amuro flicked through data on his handheld computer.

"When negotiations are steered by those unable to see beyond their own emotions, consensus remains an elusive dream."

"Is it that bad?"

"It's pretty bad. They view Earth's dominance as absolute, refusing to acknowledge the autonomy of colony administrations."

Stopping in a corner of the factory district daily, the trio underwent fingerprint and retinal scans for access.

"Good morning," greeted the crisp voices of mechanics as they entered.

Chan headed to the control booth, checking the day's schedule to ensure all departments commenced their tasks accordingly.

"Any issues with the frame's strength after the modifications?"

"The results from last night's strength test should be in," October accessed another computer display.

From the control booth's vantage point at the heart of the assembly plant, they observed the precise orchestration of machines, each component of the Nu Gundam prototype coming to life with meticulous care. Unlike the era of steam engine production, the noise was minimal. The primary operations revolved around metal-free machining and assembly, with tasks involving polishing or hazardous chemical use being robotized within isolated booths.

"Basic assembly can be completed in two more weeks."

"Practically the pace of assembling a plastic model," remarked Amuro.



"With the Z Gundam's design as a foundation, over half of the tools were reusable. Still, this represents a milestone in mobile suit construction history."

"But the real challenge lies with what's ahead, isn't it?"

"Exactly."

Amuro's involvement in Anaheim Electronics began with preparations for the Nu Gundam's construction, which saw a huge push forward by Bright Noa and John Bauer's leadership in Lhasa.

Despite significant debate over incorporating Amuro's suggestions, the project's pace was swift, though its end goal wasn't a completely new mobile suit type.

"So, we're at a good stopping point?"

"Yup!" Chan replied, her energy unabated, continuing her vigil over the Londo Bell as Amuro's departure neared.

Exiting the booth, Amuro looked up at the cranes. His thoughts drifted as he observed the flurry of activity.

*"The intricacies of the materials, the machines' dance, the essence of creation — all of it remains a mystery to me,"* he mused, feeling both in awe and distant from the technological marvels unfolding before him.

Engineers without mobile suit piloting experience mastered these operations, constructing mobile suits based solely on specs, a clear symbol of the technological era.

The main staff, including Amuro, proceeded to a separate meeting room.

As they approached the meeting room, Amuro realized Chan was no longer beside them. He paused and glanced back, with October mirroring his action. Around a corner, they found Chan engaged in a conversation on the phone.

"What's up?"

"Ordering takeout again, isn't she?"

"Hmm."

Amuro chuckled, entering the meeting room.

"Why opt for takeout? The factory's auto-snack machine should be enough, right? Seems cumbersome to get it delivered here."

Takeout was a novel concept for Amuro.

"As long as it's from a licensed shop, there's no issue," October opened a file, calling up a display on the table's terminal.

"Hehehe!"

Chan giggled, entering with a few staff members, having gathered information on coffee shops beyond the hotel and factory. To Amuro, this seemed almost Newtype-like.

"You've never really focused on where to get food, huh? It's easy, even during meetings!"

And so, Chan ensured Amuro's preferred coffee was always within reach, regardless of their location.

The conversation shifted to the technical specifics of their project.

"What about the new material?"

"We've successfully integrated the psycommu system into your design without any interference issues with the psycho-frame."

"But I'm concerned about the psycho-frame's endurance. Yesterday's data only confirms its reliability for ten thousand hours. We need more extensive testing. Are you trying to kill me? And what about the strength doubling?"

"We've confirmed up to eighty-six Gs, though there's some variance in the samples. The upper limit is one hundred twenty Gs?"

"Make sure it's consistent at the maximum. I don't want any discrepancies."

"Got it."

"Really? You sound too nonchalant about it..." Chan interjected.

"It's all about perfecting the placement of the brainwave conversion access chips. We've got this under control. Oh, right. The issue was with the gravity control during imprinting?"

"Yes, we've identified the cause as being in the material preparation stage, so it should be manageable," a young engineer responded to October's query.

"And the testing of that sample? Why isn't it fully functional yet?"

"We've performed tests simulating conditions for two to three mobile suits. It wouldn't be adopted for the Gundam otherwise."

"What? You've produced that much material?"

For the first time since arriving at Anaheim Electronics, Amuro showed doubt.

"Yes, the materials department was confident..."

"But this technology shouldn't be used outside of the military."

"We manage it with the same level of secrecy as nuclear weapons across the company."

"With so many samples, how do you deal with disposal?"

"We have strict protocols for sealing and disposing of them."

"Chan, have the military check on that matter, but it's highly confidential, understood?"

"Yes."

The discussion centered around psycommu, a device that amplifies and transmits brainwaves, and the psycho-frame, a mobile suit frame embedded with chips carrying that capability. Mobile suits equipped with it could directly translate a pilot's intentions into the suit's movements, offering agility beyond physical controls.

Originally, the psycommu's emphasis was on controlling Fin Funnels, akin to brainwave-guided missiles, in the Nu Gundam. Its origins lay in the Zeon Forces Elmeth type, with rudimentary capabilities at the time.

Psycommu technology became somewhat known with the appearance of psycho-type mobile suits, its use accentuated on the battlefield. However, it had the flaw of being unusable by ordinary people without special abilities, as normal use could lead to psychological distress and self-destruction.

Combining the psycommu with the psycho-frame was envisioned to alleviate these issues, potentially allowing even regular pilots to perform

brainwave guidance and, for Newtypes like Amuro, to even read enemy pilots' intentions.

Yet concerns remained about the overwhelming external stimuli affecting the mobile suit's actions. The need for strict control and limitations on this powerful technology was evident, especially with the threat of Char obtaining it, which could disrupt the foundational realities of space mobile suit warfare.

Thus, Amuro was concerned about the technology's origins, though he was told it came from Anaheim Electronics' materials development department. Amuro had designated his designed psychommu as a black box so no one but Chan could tamper with it, but he knew the technology could still leak out.

After the last sip of his now cold coffee, Amuro stood with a resolved air, "Now that we know it works, the only thing left is constructing the machine. I'm counting on you."

"Sir!" October Saran and the engineers saluted Amuro, who pocketed several floppy cards before slipping past Chan into the corridor.

Londo Bell on Londenion awaited him. He couldn't forever be tied to the construction of a single mobile suit.

### 3

"Londo Bell's decision to bolster our defenses was sadly necessary."

"Yes. Char seems to be hellbent on military preparations. It's supposed to be highly confidential, but there have been talks about Sweetwater reaching out to Granada for mobile suit construction."

"And yet October knows this 'highly confidential' matter?"

"That's why I can't trust the secrecy here."

Silence fell between them as they walked to the car and climbed in.

"Why can Char mobilize so quickly?" October inquired as the car hummed to life.

"Because the remnants of Neo Zeon had preserved their organization."

"I can't wrap my head around that," October shook his head, still holding the steering wheel.

"It's not surprising. Not all followers of Neo Zeon are devotees of Char; the Zabi loyalists are still influential, maintaining their power globally. Up to now, Londo Bell has been verifying that, unable to completely eliminate them. For a unit like Londo Bell, checking the reality of every colony is an impossible task."

"I get that, but..." Chan interjected, "Considering colonies are man-made, you'd think we'd understand everything about them."

"Do you know everything inside your desk?"

"Well, no..."

"It's the same concept."

As October's car emerged onto the lunar surface, he posed another question, "Then what's the deal with the Federation government?"

"When people are part of an organization, they tend to become more deceitful and lazy than they perceive themselves to be. Living within a stagnant governmental structure is a testament to that. The Federation government is a symbol of such impotence."

"Sounds like organizational theory. There was also that talk about South Africa..."

"Yeah, I remember, but Char's organization is younger and smaller, allowing individual wills to directly manifest. That's how Char could easily consolidate power around Sweetwater," Amuro mused, sighing at the contrast between their backgrounds and pondering if his ideas for gradual internal reform within established institutions were merely a pipe dream.

"Why is the Federation so inept?"

"Well, consider the colony tax."

"It's quite high, taking an eight percent chunk of one's salary."

"Supposedly, that tax is meant for colony maintenance, but three percent of it ends up with the government. The problem is the colonial administrations could refuse approval if they wished, but as the selection of their highest officials requires Federation approval, the final decision-making power effectively lies with the Earth Federation."

"Is that what politics is?"

"Pretty much. If the remaining Federation Forces were helpful in combating unemployment, that'd be one thing. But in reality, they're more often exploited for the personal gain of Federation bureaucrats. Humanity has yet to overcome its tendency to form organizations..."

Amuro expressed this view, contemplating any possible way to intervene, determined not to resign reform to the realm of dreams.

"Why can't the colonial administrations just assert their independence?"

"A good question. It's because colonies are closed environments. Spacenoids end up forgetting about Earth..."

Amuro knew Chan wasn't really asking about systems or organizations.

"Hmm... It seems being in space doesn't necessarily broaden one's consciousness or intelligence."

"Speaking of closed spaces, there's something you realize living on the moon," October chimed in. "They say the Earth's soil has spiritual power, right? Maybe Spaceoids lost their spiritual sensitivity along with losing their connection to the Earth's soil."

"Really? Haha..."

"You find that amusing?"

Amuro turned to October, surprised, "I didn't expect such a perspective from someone in tech."

"Living on the moon, you start to wonder about the significance of the Earth's soil. The floors in colonies are surrounded by space and feel bottomless. It makes you wonder if living in a colony concentrates one's

consciousness too much within its confines, fostering a fear of being cast into the void."

As they entered a gate leading to Von Braun City, October continued, "At least, that's the feeling I get."

"People haven't changed since the invention of dynamite. If anything, the pretense of absolute democracy, with its insistence on equality while ignoring real disparities, has twisted our civic consciousness."

"There's recognition of gender differences, right?" Chan asked, half-joking.

"But post-One Year War, with reduced populations, the mantra became 'be fruitful and multiply,' allowing women to remain soldiers. It's an era sustained by scarcity."

"Hmm... You dislike someone like me? Too meticulous?"

"I don't prefer it. But I do like your diligence."

"Compliments at the end don't count," Chan retorted as they reached the elevator airlock, leading to a tunnel connecting to Von Braun City. October set the car onto the freeway towards the spacedock, where it would proceed automatically.

"I'm not ready to be a housewife just yet, but at least it's recognized as a legitimate profession now, not one to be demeaned."

"That's a good sentiment," October agreed, offering Pure Tea from the console to both.

"So, did you marry for love?"

Amuro asked, accepting the container.

"Can you tell?"

"Yes..."

Amuro smiled, "But Chan, there was a time when the discourse on women's rights went too far. This mentality carried over to the space colonies, fostering an environment that too readily accepts the idea of ignoring individual capabilities, which, in turn, has been exploited by the system, leading to societal apathy."

"Huh?" Chan missed Amuro's lengthy explanation.

"Sorry, I can't explain it well..."

"Is it just an excuse that the system can't be improved because of incompetent people?"

"That's about right," October agreed, now facing sideways due to the auto-drive.

"So, is that why Char is gleefully attacking the Earth Sphere?"

"Exactly. He sees himself as a vitamin for humanity."

"Interesting perspective!"

"Yes, Char takes being human seriously."

"So, the current Federation Government isn't a threat. They'll be easily defeated."

"Hey, watch what you say around a Federation soldier."

"But you're an ordinary person... And the Nu Gundam construction is separate. It's my chance to show my skills as an engineer. I'll dedicate myself to the build... But I understand your point. Humans have grown arrogant in

space, forgetting the pioneering spirit of their early days in space, becoming as indolent as those who remained on Earth..."

"That's the decadence of the space colony era... Morality is on the decline."

"Sure is..."

"Maybe having to artificially create living environments in space made us forget natural processes, leading to a vivid detachment from our own humanity. So, we're seeing a decline in both sexual and social ethics, not seeking animalistic desires?"

Chan leaned over, locking eyes with Amuro, "Sounds like a college thesis, but I'm inclined to agree."

"Remember that disease, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome? Didn't morals continue declining after prevention and treatment methods were discovered?"

"Yes, a difficult disease that spread in the latter half of the old century. I thought it was God trying to put the brakes on arrogant humankind for overreaching with civilization, but humans just can't seem to understand that the phenomenon of civilization's development itself is an affront to nature."

"That's harsh."

## 4

In the fleeting moments of departure, there were no goodbyes exchanged, save for a silent wave through the glass. Amuro swiftly moved from the departure gate to the module, his journey back to Londo Bell marked by the steady view of the seat back in front of him.

The discomfort of the economy seat, unchanged since the last century, became a test of endurance, perhaps a divine jest to ensure humanity retained some semblance of patience.

Yet, the stark reality that even members of Londo Bell were relegated to the most frugal travel options was a humbling, if not demeaning, experience.

Exiting the port at Londenion was swift for those with light luggage.

"Welcome back," Alyona Paige emerged from the crowd in the bustling lobby.

"How did you know I'd be here?" Amuro asked, surprised.

"I have my ways," Alyona said with a smirk, linking her arm with his.

"It's troubling that intel about Londo Bell can leak so easily to civilians," Amuro noted.

"Well, you'd think that, but Captain Bright mentioned it," Alyona reassured him.

"You met with Bright?"

"Of course, but I wanted to see you... There are things to report, right?"

"Did you tarnish my name?"

"Do you think I did?"

"No."



"Do I need a reason to come see you?"

"It's not that, but..."

"I wanted to celebrate settling into my new apartment. But with Cunningham Shaw and the Ra Zaim gone and you off to the moon, I ended up venting at Captain Bright," Alyona explained.

"Oh, really?"

"Really, really!"

"Captain Bright talks too much!"

"You've known Captain Bright for a long time, haven't you?"

"Something like that..."

"He told me he met a great guy."

"Me?"

"Yes."

Amuro couldn't do much to help Alyona, who was left alone to fend for herself in the new colony, other than being a guarantor when she rented an apartment. He wasn't able to assist her in finding a job.

"Are you heading straight to Londo Bell?"

"Yes, there are urgent matters."

"Not even time for tea?" Alyona pleaded.

"No, sadly."

"Then, please give me a ride to my apartment."

"Where is it?"

"It's not far. Remember the way. I owe you a home-cooked meal. It's the least I can do since I wasn't able to thank you properly before. Please let me do this." Ariona pleaded sincerely, not coyly.

"Ah! That sounds delightful. I've forgotten what home cooking is like..."

The two hailed a taxi and headed towards the East Kensington district, where Alyona's apartment was located. It was a neighborhood with a mix of middle-class apartments and condos, close to downtown—a convenient location for work.

"What kind of job did you find?"

"I'm assisting with magazine editing, thanks to my drawing skills. I'm also studying photography, aiming to become a cameraman," Alyona shared.

"Can you make a living off that?"

"If things get tough, there's always fast food," she joked, her resilience shining through.

"Adulthood is a battle, huh? If you don't work, you can't eat..."

"And breathe. So, I'll keep at it, hoping for a pension someday," Alyona mused, her maturity evident.

"You've changed, haven't you?"

"Me? Not at all," she replied, though her profile seemed a bit more mature.

"Sorry, maybe I'm just tired," Amuro confessed, gripping her hand in a comforting clasp.

"Your skin's still soft... youthful," he noted.

"Really?" Alyona retracted her hand, observing it closely before sighing.

"It's rough. Been through a lot since the EGUM," she remarked.

"Hm..."

Amuro felt an awkward pause.

"Don't worry. I'm just happy to see you," Alyona said, leaning closer, her lips brushing against his cheek, surprising him with their coolness.

Amuro wished he could see into Alyona's closed eyes.

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HIGH-STREAMER: 2

ALYONA'S ROOM

CHAPTER-L

# 1

Amuro Ray and Bright Noa were engaged in a focused discussion across the display desk, surrounded by a few tactical officers. The screen before them was alive with diagrams showcasing the equipment inventory of the Ra Cailum and its three sister ships, as well as the mobile suit deployments. It also provided a detailed account of Londo Bell's resupply activities over recent days.

"The mobile suit squadron seems to be progressing well in their training."

The supply status for the four ships, while not ideal, was manageable.

"That's only considering our immediate resources. We're still short on numbers," the conversation deepened into the logistics, hinting at underlying concerns.

Bright shifted the display.

"This is a simulation based on Char's movements."

The screen shifted to reveal various battle prediction zones and their strategic implications.

"Planning for a localized conflict?"

The data unfurled, showing several potential theaters of war.

"This simulation suggests that Char is setting up for a war he'll lose in a year. Too convenient a prediction, wouldn't you say?"

"If Char is gearing up at Sweetwater, this assumption holds."

"Within that frame, yes. But there are other angles to consider."

"Consider this: it includes the possibility of war breaking out in six months. That is, if Char is using any of the missing Island One types as supply bases, that could expedite Char's timeline for engagement."

"Still sounds too conventional," Amuro argued, standing up.

"Is the Re-GZ's retrofit complete?"

"Of course. Lieutenant Kayra Su is conducting the familiarization tests."

"A pilot that young is a risk," Amuro frowned and left the meeting room.

"What's the matter?" Bright followed him out, a hint of concern in his tone.

"Isn't it obvious? Everyone's on edge. Char's made his move, visible in public for the past month. How can you not see the danger?"

"I do see it, but we can't directly attack Sweetwater. It's like the colony's residents are being held hostage. Besides, the Earth Federation government doesn't even recognize this as a state of war. It's Londo Bell that's being accused of warmongering."

"Excuses from those who can't take decisive action," Amuro reflected, his mind drifting to past discussions with Chan and October on the moon. Reality, after all, is but a collective of people caught up in the facts before them.

"This way!" Bright beckoned Amuro towards the factory floor where the mobile suits were being tested.

There, the Re-GZ, equipped with a massive backpack, looked a size larger than a standard mobile suit. More than a backpack, it resembled a lift crane suspending the Re-GZ's body, a more accurate depiction of its docking state.

"Kayra!" Bright called out her name through the platform intercom. After a moment, a slender woman emerged from the Re-GZ's cockpit.

"I'd like to introduce Captain Amuro... Amuro!"

"Amuro? As in the Newtype?"

"He's unaware of it. Let's keep it that way," Bright whispered, a hint of protectiveness in his voice.

"Oh, shy, is he?"

"Right?"

Kayra was a friendly pilot. Her attire of tights and a jumper was hardly what one would expect from a pilot, potentially questioning her suitability for the role.

"The modifications are impressive. Chan must have given good directions. I'm Amuro, nice to meet you."

"I'm Kayra. Delighted to make your acquaintance," she replied with an antiquated greeting, prompting Amuro to reassess her.

"How is it handling?"

"Heavy, but the mega particle cannon packs a significant punch. It can perform diversionary tactics solo."

"Really..."

"It's comparable to a cruiser."

"You've got good sense. We might make a good team. But, do you dislike me?"

"Hard to say. We've just met... I'm not one to trust instincts."

"A candid response, Kayra."

"Sorry..." She blushed, inadvertently sticking out her tongue.

"Hahaha!"

"Sorry, I try to be careful, but it slips out..."

"Kayra!" A shout came from below the Re-GZ, and when Amuro looked in that direction, he saw a mechanic and couldn't help but raise his voice.

"Astonage?!"

"Ah, Amuro! Welcome back to the battlefield!"

"Don't jinx it! We're not always at war," Amuro retorted.

Observing their exchange, Kayra whispered to Bright, "He's more approachable than I thought, isn't he?"

"He sure is," Bright felt reassured by Kera's words, confident that Amuro would get along with the other pilots of the Ra Cailum.

Amuro was so engrossed in assessing the current state of the Ra Cailum that he lost track of time, a fact Bright Noa took into consideration with a kind nudge.

"Amuro, it's time. You have a promise with Alyona, right?"

"Is it that late already?"

"She's been feeling left out. Go spend some time with her. You're like a guardian to her."

"Guess I've reached that age, huh?" Amuro mused, finally putting away the mobile suit squadron's formation board and turning his thoughts to a different reality.

"Can't be helped. She's been quite persistent in keeping tabs on you."

"Sounds like her. Energetic girl. She even got Captain Mathias Testa of the Ra Zyme to write her a military service certificate."

"So I heard. She's a good girl. What's your plan?"

"Play the father figure role, I suppose."

"I'd tease you about your age, but..."

"Touche. She's a sweet girl, and I want to take care of her. Desire is one thing, but action is another," Amuro acknowledged, feeling the weight of his own words.

"With hesitation comes age. Time tends to offer resolution. Embracing a normal life isn't a bad choice."

"I'm beginning to see that..."

After freshening up, Amuro donned a jacket and hailed an elec-car, heading straight to Alyona's apartment.

"Is this what having a place to return to feels like?" he mused.

Along the way, he picked up a bouquet and a cake.

"Welcome!" Alyona Page greeted him, removing her apron.

"These are for you. A small token for the invitation!"

"Oh, you shouldn't have!" She pecked him on the cheek, unwrapping the bouquet with a cheer.

"Oh, dear. I haven't bought a vase yet!"

"It's fine. Any empty bottle will do, right? We can go buy one later."

"Good idea!"

Alyona fetched an empty soft drink bottle from beside the refrigerator and handed it to Amuro.

"Would you mind washing this in the bathroom?" she asked.

"Sure thing," he replied, taking the bottle to the bathroom. As he entered, he noted the minimal space, neatly placed cosmetic bottles, and a guest towel folded on the bathtub's edge.

"She's doing her best..." He felt a pang in his heart at her small acts of thoughtfulness.

A towering stack of tissue papers above the dryer caught his eye, making him smile—a quirky detail that mirrored Alyona's character.

"She is quite organized."

Returning with the flower-filled bottle, he found the table set, transforming the room, cluttered with a bed, sofa set, and table, into a

semblance of a home—a concept foreign to Amuro, left only to his imagination.

"I planned to clean the whole place after cooking, but I couldn't manage," she confessed.

"It looks clean enough."

"Not really!"

Alyona had prepared vegetable soup, potato croquettes, a layered bake of potatoes and beef in beer, and curry-flavored pilaf—all homemade.

"This is my first time cooking so much. Is it to your liking?"

Career women often rely on ready-made meals, and frugal ones like Alyona typically subsist on cheap snacks.

"No flattery from me. It's delicious, though some items are overcooked."

"Forgive me!" Alyona exclaimed, her eyes twinkling with a playful challenge.

"Guess what was the hardest part today?"

"Finding the right ingredients?"

"No, no. Seasoning the new frying pan was the toughest."

"Why use such a thing?"

"I wanted to cook with real fire, not electricity!"

"I can tell you focused and put effort into cooking. You must be exhausted."

"Yes, a bit," she admitted, her cheeks flushed from the wine and the warmth of the kitchen. She rested her chin on her hand.

Amuro, familiar with the distraction cooking offered during his time in America, knew the commitment reflected in the taste.

"Now I can see how a day can fly by just by tending to a child, waiting for a husband, and cleaning—a typical housewife's day."

"Being a housewife has its professional aspects, a crucial element in being a family's pillar."

"Women know this without being told, but I'm not confident I can do it."

"You can, Alyona. With any man..."

"Really...?" Her tipsy eyes briefly glanced at the ceiling.

Observing her graceful neck, Amuro felt enveloped in tranquility, enjoying the moment.

"Shall we go for a walk?"

"That sounds good. Let's clean up first," Amuro suggested, rising to start.

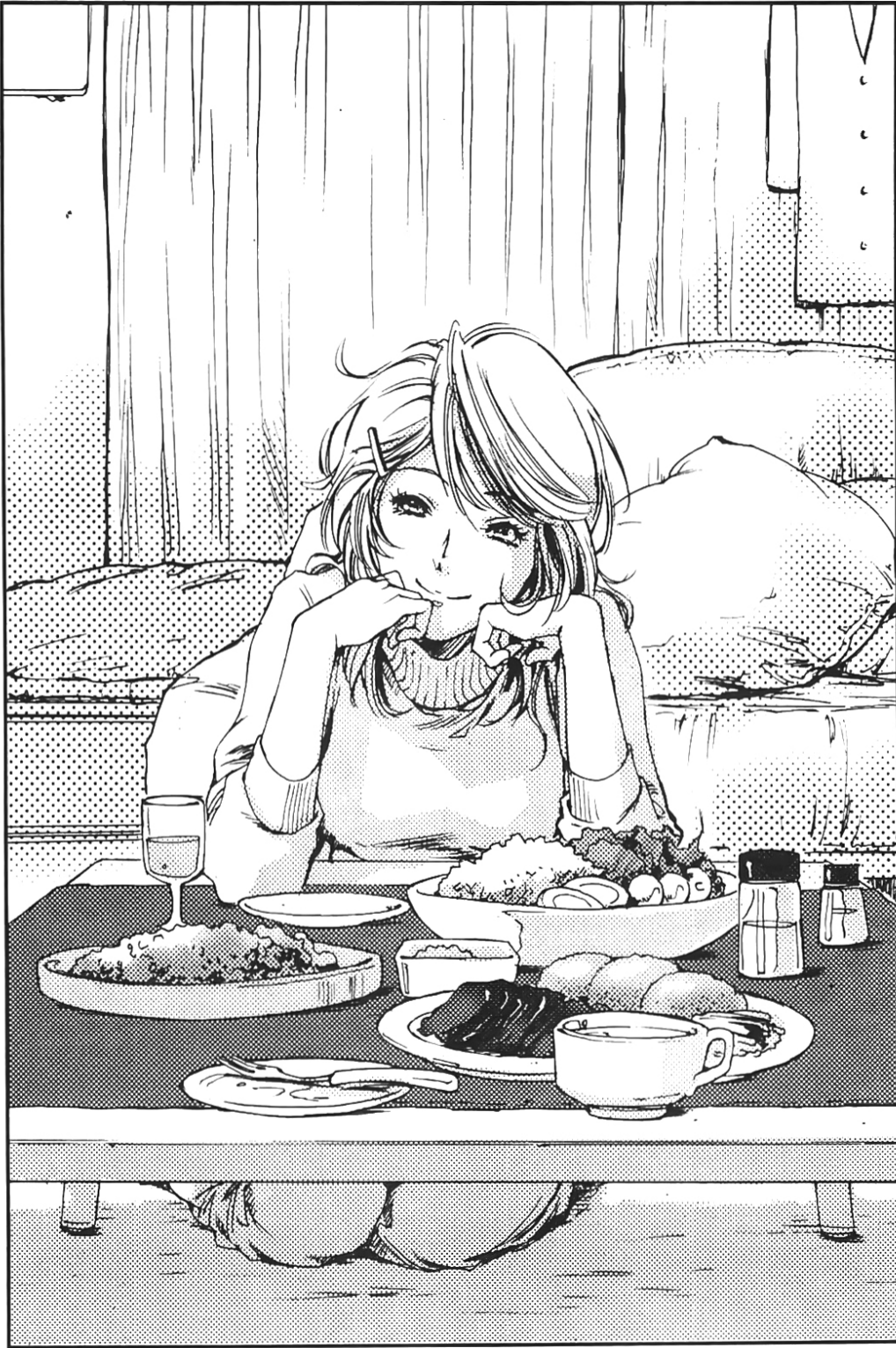
"It's okay!" Though she protested, Alyona seemed pleased that Amuro offered to help and joined in. His dishwashing skills, honed during his American days, were evident.

Suddenly, Alyona's movements ceased, and the room fell silent. Peering over his shoulder, Amuro found no sign of her.

"Really now..." He chuckled, finishing the dishes and peeking into the corner where the sofa set lay, finding Alyona sprawled on the sofa.

"You'll catch a cold." He gently lifted her, tucking her into bed.

"Rest now..."





Lacking the means to lock the door from outside, Amuro left it unlocked. Nor did he feel like turning on the TV to bring the outside world flooding into the room.

Dimming the room and leaving only the stand light on, he sank into the sofa, warmed by Alyona's presence, flipping through magazines in the rack. The printed words, a visual relief from computer screens, resonated softly with Amuro, reflecting the interests and ideals of a girl in the serene moment.

### 3

Amuro couldn't pinpoint the moment he slipped into Alyona's bed. He remembered it, yes, but the details were fuzzy—a blur that was somehow just fine, given the permissive nature of the night. Nestling his nose against the curve of Alyona's back had its discomforts, especially when the shrill of the phone broke the silence.

Alyona's stirring brought relief to Amuro's constrained breaths. Through the haze of sleep, he watched her slender legs carry her towards the phone.

"Lieutenant Amuro?" Alyona's voice snapped him to full alertness.

"Who is it?"

"It's Londo Bell."

"A summons?" Amuro's intuition was spot on.

"What time is it?"

"Just past four... Do you need something to eat before you go?"

"No... But you should get some more rest."

"I can't. I woke up too early... couldn't get back to sleep." Alyona, donning a shirt, flicked on the kitchen lights.

"I'll take a quick shower."

"Go ahead."

With some time before he had to return, Amuro decided to stay in the room as long as possible.

"Is it a real operation?"

"Shouldn't be...not that kind of situation."

"But it's an unsettling call."

"The military lacks finesse," Amuro acknowledged Alyona's intuition but wasn't ready to admit it outright.

"It's probably just a drill. Bright's fond of those."

"The captain, right?" They sat in silence for a moment, sharing a simple breakfast.

"So... I'll be back tonight?"

"Will you come here?"

"If that's what you want..."

Embracing him in his jacket, she held on tightly.

"Then love me tonight?"

"Thank you... for saying that."

Amuro returned to Londo Bell, changing into his uniform before heading to the docks, piecing together snippets of conversations from the officers, realizing Char had outmaneuvered them.

At the docks, Amuro ascended directly to the Ra Cailum's bridge.

"Have we detected a fleet from Sweetwater?"

"Lieutenant!" The executive officer, Meran, turned around.

"Is Bright moving us closer to Earth's orbit?"

"Not that close," Bright, looking well-rested, responded.

"Lieutenant, your operation orders." An officer handed Amuro documents and a data card.

"Unknown fleet's course? This is the predicted path?"

"They're heading towards Fifth Luna."

"Why are we so sure?"

"There are other possibilities, but they wouldn't dare enter Earth's atmosphere," Bright said, burger in hand.

"Understood. I'll brief accordingly."

"Is Kera at the dock?"

"Yes, all hands will be aboard in five minutes."

"Stand by for departure."

Amuro moved through the ship, past young, tense crew members, dumping his gear in his quarters before descending to the briefing room.

He was the first to arrive, greeted by the duty officer.

"What's going on, Lieutenant?"

The young officer, with sleep cleared from his face, asked as he took a seat in front of me.

"Nothing to worry about. Get too worked up now, and you'll collapse when it counts."

"Are we heading into war?"

"Perhaps."

That was all Amuro could offer, preferring not to speculate.

"Come on! Make some coffee! We can't have everyone tense."

"Right!"

As Amuro loaded the data card and scanned new information, only the departure time was confirmed. The fleet included three ships.

"Can't we deploy another?"

While inputting this question to the bridge, he noticed the pilots' anxious faces.

"Get used to it," Amuro muttered to himself, recognizing the absurdity of his own over-familiarity with combat.

"Fifth Luna..." He realized the significance—Fifth Luna was an asteroid used for space colony construction, sourced from the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter to save costs.

"If Char's fleet is near an asteroid, there's a simple strategy," Amuro thought, reviewing a clip from a Sweetwater newsletter on another monitor.

"Here's your coffee."

"Thanks."

Amuro sipped his coffee, skimming through the headlines with a practiced eye.

"So, Char has been hinting at an attack on Earth to the Federation representatives... The only ones who didn't believe him were the Federation itself... I see... I had also been convinced that war meant only mobilizing mobile suits or fleet battles."

He tapped the display in front of him, a realization dawning.

"So this was an option..." Amuro reflected on his recent encounter with Char in the airspace of Sweetwater, now convinced that Char's words were no bluff.

"And speaking of which..."

He remembered Cunningham Shaw wasn't here, a pang of regret hitting him.

"I was preoccupied with meeting Alyona... It's a shame she's not here. The pain of knowing someone on the battlefield is all too real."

Just then, Kera Su burst into the room, her flamboyant pants pushing through the crowd of men, her makeup-free face oddly radiant against her bold words.

"What's all this early morning fuss about?"

"Kera, you're here?" Amuro greeted her.

"Sorry about this."

"No worries. What's the situation?"

"The enemy moves at their convenience, not ours," Amuro explained.

"I get that, but a little greeting wouldn't have hurt," Kera half-joked, earning the focused attention of the other pilots.

"Just kidding. Now, orders are orders. Wake up with some coffee!" Amuro commanded, lightening the mood.

"Alright!" The room's atmosphere shifted as the Ra Cailum's engines rumbled, the ship edging closer to critical engagement, vibrating the very space they were in.

## 4

"Are you bringing her along too?" Quess blurted out, her tone laced with disbelief.

"There's no need to phrase it like that," her father, Adenauer Paraya, responded, a mix of exasperation and resignation in his voice. "These are trying times, Quess. I'm not acting on a whim here. Can you just come along without making a fuss? I promise, this time we'll really try to make it work as a family. That's why I've bought a new place on Londenion."

"Londenion?" Quess echoed, curiosity piqued.

"It's a colony in Side 1," her father explained, sensing her budding interest.

"So, we're heading to space?" The notion sparked excitement in Quess.

"I'm not asking for your approval, but I assure you, Londenion offers us a chance at a safer life. Can't you see that?"

"Safe life? What does that even mean when she's around?" Quess countered, skepticism painting her words.

"It's not about her," her father tried to clarify, urgency creeping into his voice. "We need to pack up; our flight options are limited."

"What's the rush?" Quess prodded for more clarity.

"Let's just say it's complicated. Military stuff. Just hang tight until we get to Londenion, okay? Then you'll have all the freedom you want," Adenauer pleaded, his rugged face softening.

Quess, despite her frustration, began to gather her things, her mind swirling with mixed feelings.

"You disappear, then show up yesterday and rush me. No wonder I can't stand this," she muttered under her breath.

Yet the thought of leaving the hotel, of any change, was a silver lining for her.

"Once we're past this phase, we'll settle down. We'll have time to talk, just you and me. I promise," Adenauer assured her, attempting to mend bridges.

"And what about her? Will you leave that woman?" Quess couldn't help but ask.

"Let's not call Kathy 'that woman,' okay? She's not without her merits," her father defended.

"Oh, her 'merits' as a woman?" Quess couldn't hide her disdain.

"Quess..." Adenauer sighed, wiping away a bead of sweat, "We're heading to Delhi's airport, then taking the Oriental Express to Hong Kong. We need to catch that shuttle today, no matter what."

"Why not take a military shuttle? Or an orbital flight by the military?" Quess challenged.

"It's not that simple," Adenauer offered her a glimpse of his usually concealed general's resolve.

"So, you left her in Lhasa?"

"No, she's waiting in Delhi," he confessed.

"And she's coming with us?!" Quess's voice rose, a mix of anger and disbelief.

"We can't leave her in Lhasa," Adenauer reiterated, his plea evident in his eyes.

Quess sensed the depth of the situation then; it wasn't just about family tensions. There were larger forces at play, adult problems she was just beginning to comprehend.

## 5

The Ra Cailum, flanked by three allied ships, was cruising at full speed. The moon hung in silence. Earth, small and seemingly asleep, lay ahead. Yet, the fleet was anything but dormant. A supply ship, strobing lights flickering, was

closing in for a rendezvous, while maintenance mobile suits zipped back and forth, signaling a hive of human activity. On the decks of each vessel, the bustle of mobile suits and mechanics was visible, with the rearmost ship aglow with the sparks of welding for armament installation.

This flurry of activity revealed the state of the Londo Bell fleet—not fully prepared for sortie but far from the tranquility one might associate with space.

"We can't just sit around worrying about what the rest of the Earth Federation Forces fleets are doing!" one voice exclaimed.

"Come on, captain, fighting a war all by ourselves, just to die in vain? No thank you," retorted Vice Captain Meran, his face pinched with concern.

"Fine, you want me to be blunt about it? Their fleet's only four ships strong, just like ours. We can take them," someone interjected confidently.

"Are you serious?"

"Think about it. Char's fleet was still in the midst of outfitting when they entered Sweetwater. That puts us in a stronger position, combat-wise."

"But what about the new mobile suits the enemy reportedly has?"

"Look, we've got the Re-GZ. That's equivalent to a whole cruiser's firepower."

"But still..."

"Enough! Do you think I'm that naïve?" Captain Bright finally bellowed, silencing the bridge. His outburst was part of a performance, a necessity to stir the crew into seriousness in an era where war seemed an alien concept. If not shaken up, these soldiers, accustomed to peacetime, wouldn't face reality until thrown into battle. Bright planned to drill them in mobile suit deployment and combat formations once Amuro's briefing was over.

But Bright wasn't fighting for the detached Earth Federation officials who hadn't seen war firsthand. He was already contemplating an exit strategy.

"However, it's all up to Char..."

Amuro, sharing Bright's sentiment, found himself raising his voice to his subordinates.

"Listen, don't just throw around arguments about how we can avoid fighting!"

"But Commander! It's unthinkable that Char could prepare enough mobile suits and ships for war!"

"That's a lack of imagination on your part! Wars can be waged without full military preparedness."

"That's absurd!"

Even Kera Su chuckled at the notion.

"Let me spell it out. Char could obtain Earth Federation's nuclear arsenal and target Earth."

"Nonsense!"

"Confident, aren't we? But can you guarantee the Earth Federation has absolute control over their nukes?"

"Is that so?"

"Has anyone assured us there are no Neo Zeon sympathizers within the Earth Federation's Space Forces?"

Silence fell at Amuro's questioning.

"Moreover, there's a tactic involving hurling lunar rocks at Earth. Our intel that the enemy is heading towards Fifth Luna lends credence to this theory."

The pilots murmured among themselves.

"Then none of this concerns us Spacenoids! Why should we go to war?"

"True, Lieutenant Conquest. And it's that mindset that allows the rise of dictators like Char."

"I have no desire for dictatorship!"

"We know that! But remember, the space colonies exist because of Earth. Without it, they can't physically sustain themselves. We need to thwart Char's plans, not just to prevent Earth's contamination but for our own survival."

"What are the odds he'll hit a colony with Fifth Luna?"

Kera, somewhat convinced, raised her hand to ask.

"If Char plans to exhaust Fifth Luna's nuclear pulse engines, it would be easy to send it hurtling towards Side 1. Add a few nuclear bombs for thrust, and it could reach Side 2 in half the time."

"So, dropping it on Earth would be even simpler?"

"Exactly. Char isn't planning a straightforward fleet battle or mobile suit skirmish. But it's still war, and after..."

"If Neo Zeon's regime is recognized in Sweetwater, isn't that enough?"

"Don't joke!" another pilot shouted.

"Now we're going to mimic the Zabi family's antics for 'Spacenoid freedom?'"

"This could turn into a religious war!"

"What are you on about? Where's the religion in this?"

"It's there! Char's charisma could spark a movement akin to ancient divine monarchies. Isn't that religion?"

"Ridiculous! We won't stand for it!"

"If it's just politics, I refuse to join the war!"

Amidst the cacophony, Amuro downed his cold coffee.

"Silence! This isn't a university festival debate. Save it for after work. The military pays you not for cooperative living but for your service in wartime. Refuse to fight, and you'll face a court-martial. We're already deployed and under wartime protocols. Any refusal to participate is desertion in the face of the enemy. Be aware of that!"

Amuro felt a tinge of nausea delivering this ultimatum—an era too accustomed to lip service was ill-prepared for the brutal realities of war.

"You've heard the situation. Stand by on level two combat alert! We'll continue training until we reach the battlefield. Stay alert! That's all."

"Attention! Dismissed!"

The pilots saluted Amuro, albeit reluctantly, as the briefing adjourned.

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SECOND CONTACT

CHAPTER-M

# 1

In the sprawling expanse of Delhi's international airport, gone were the vestiges of its past. It felt desolate, not for lack of structure but for lack of souls.

Thanks to the Police Chief of Varanasi escorting Adenauer Paraya and family all the way here, he was able to observe the unsightly spectacle of the family dynamics of someone with the Earth Federation Space Force Central Agency. It provided the chief and his officers with a bit of a welcome distraction. Adenauer's wife, a woman named Katherine, supposedly his lawful spouse, had locked horns with Quess Paraya in a spectacular verbal clash the moment they met in the VIP lounge.

"Ugh, no way! Traveling with this woman, of all people!"

"I told you to just deal with it!"

To his credit, Adenauer tried to stand firm in front of Katherine when it came to Quess.

"Oh, come on!"

Quess seemed to feel revulsion just from looking at the woman's face. Understandably so, given that she was the reason her real mother had been driven out.

"I know this is hard for you, but remember, Quess, I'm trying to be a mother to you. Can't you appreciate the struggles a parent goes through?"

"Hmph! And what exactly have you done?!"

"It was I who asked the police to search for you. Your father was being overly considerate of me, so I insisted such concern was unnecessary. And yet, here you are, still speaking to me that way in front of everyone. Have you no shame?!"

Her lofty speech was so impeccable it left others speechless. But for a child, it stung.

"Shouldn't we be going now?"

"Ah, right!"

Adenauer took Katherine's bag and, while urging Quess along, nodded to the police officers before chasing after Katherine.

Quess trudged behind, each step heavy with reluctance, as she sought to maximize the distance between herself and the couple ahead.

"Being confined in a hotel must be dreadful," the chief mused, feeling a tinge of pity for Quess, who now seemed helplessly entangled in familial obligations. During their time together, he'd grown fond of the girl.

"Take care of yourself. There's always a silver lining," he whispered to Quess, who, without turning, replied softly, "Thank you." The chief responded with a gentle pat on the shoulder.



Adenauer put his arm around Katherine's waist as they headed through a side door by the departure area toward the boarding gate for their air carrier. The Adenauers had a free pass for departure checks since the air carrier awaiting them was chartered by the Earth Federation government.

Quess figured if she could just endure the hour-long flight to Hong Kong, she'd find a way to escape from the woman in front of her. That's why she was going along with her father for now. But seeing her father's intimate gesture towards that woman ignited a surge of rage within her.

"Well then!"

"Have a safe trip, Vice Minister Adenauer."

After exchanging final greetings with the police officers and seeing them off, the Adenauer family ascended the slim silhouette of the supersonic carrier's boarding ramp.

"What's the deal with them?" an officer joked.

"Isn't it obvious? Some bigwig Earth Federation official and his family. Guess they figure taking the wife and delinquent kid to space will fix her wandering eye and straighten the kid out, huh?"

"Ah...!"

Once the family disappeared inside, the officers laughed without restraint.

"The problem is the man. He just doesn't get it at all."

The chief spoke in a crude gangster-like manner, making his subordinates laugh again.

The fact that there were no other passengers on board the air carrier besides Adenauer's family showed how important a mission he'd been tasked with, but you wouldn't know it from the domestic drama he was mired in.

"I can't believe after fleeing all the way to India, I ended up on the same flight as this woman!"

Quess deliberately chose the last row, her voice loud and clear, ensuring Katherine couldn't miss her pointed words.

"A war is starting. That's why I'm going to space..."

The instant Adenauer turned to address Quess, Katherine jumped to her feet shouting.

"Going to space?! You never mentioned that! You promised a safe haven, not there!"

"And that's why we're going to space, Kath."

"You said somewhere safe on Earth! That's what you told me!"

"I never said that."

Overwhelmed and seeking escape, Quess's gaze turned to the window, where the terminal's mundanity contrasted sharply with the cabin's tension. She could see the chief and his officers chatting and laughing merrily.

She wondered how they could seem so carefree.

"Listen, this is top secret, but Char has already mobilized his forces. My mission is to go to space for negotiations to avoid getting too deeply embroiled in the war and to meet with Char."

"But doesn't the Federation have the Space Forces and Londo Bell? Shouldn't you leave the fighting to people like that?"

"Thanks to the folks in Lhasa being complacent, the Space Force's chain of command is in disarray. At this point, they can't mount a sufficient counterattack."

"And why does that mean I have to go to space?" The two voices from behind the seats reverberated throughout the cabin. A realization dawned on Quess, and she stood up.

"Hey! Londo Bell has that Newtype, Amuro Ray, don't they?" From beyond the seats, Katherine stood with a vein bulging in her forehead.

"You be quiet! Newtypes and their supposed innovation only exist in comic books!"

"Anyone can see that, looking at you!"

As if on cue, the Orient Express-style aircraft began to taxi.

"Oh!"

The aircraft's sudden movement sent Katherine reeling, her indignation interrupted by the abrupt lurch.

"You just don't get it, huh? Hey! If there's a war on now, as you say, hasn't the news been talking about Char starting a war for a while now? Why couldn't they stop it?"

Leaning into the aisle, Quess asked over Adenauer's shoulder. The man's shoulder trembled as he turned to face her. The air carrier had just taken off.

"The Federation government didn't believe Zeon's Char was still alive. So they never imagined an operation like this would be carried out."

Quess's expression morphed into one of utter disbelief, her mind racing to piece together the fragmented truths.

"But weren't there negotiations? Char's been all over the news. How could they not foresee his actions?"

"There was speculation he was an impostor. Cloning isn't out of the question."

"No way..."

Quess tried to recall her father supposedly working for the government, but even so, the man's story was hard to follow.

"But you know... There are ten billion people living in outer space. People like you all just don't get it because you're looking up at them from Earth. It's crazy."

That's what Quess called her father.

"Some philosophy you picked up while training in India?"

For the first time, Adenauer showed a fatherly smile.

"That's not it."

A wave of disgruntlement washed over Quess, a mix of teenage rebellion and deep-seated family strife coloring her mood.

"But still, it's ridiculous to think someone could organize a military force through individual effort."

Quess couldn't see her father as anything but a foolish adult.

In fact, high above the air carrier ferrying this dysfunctional family, the first shots of war had already been fired.

## 2

Meanwhile, high above Earth's atmosphere, flashes of light could be seen emanating from behind what appeared to be an asteroid.

It was Fifth Luna, one of the small asteroids ferried in from the asteroid belt. In the surrounding airspace, dozens of mobile suits were entangled in a fierce firefight. The fact that the mobile suits could engage each other with beam rifles meant they were at fairly close range.

Char's forces, the Geara Doga unit, were defending Fifth Luna while the Jegan unit from the Ra Cailum tried to break through their defensive perimeter.

"Fifth Luna is the only target! Ignore the mobile suits!"

"But Lieutenant Amuro!"

Before he could even respond, the Jegan pilot who had called out to Amuro was shot down by a Geara Doga, disintegrating in a ring of white light. As the luminous ring from the destroyed Jegan faded, three more pilots, undeterred, hurtled their Jegans toward Fifth Luna in a bold, almost reckless charge.

"Heading straight for Fifth Luna?!"

Keyra Su, the lieutenant piloting the lead Jegan of the formation, witnessed a flash streak across the nuclear pulse engine of Fifth Luna dead ahead.

"Lieutenant Amuro! Fifth Luna has begun descending to Earth! We failed to stop it!" she cried out, her message barely slicing through the chaos before her squadron was swarmed by a volley of beams. Though Keyra evaded destruction, her followers were not as fortunate, succumbing to the relentless onslaught.

"We were too late..."

From the Ra Cailum's combat bridge, Bright watched, his expression a mask of grim determination, as the ominous glow from Fifth Luna's nuclear engines intensified.

There may be various reasons and justifications for going to war. But the reality was that Char had acted swiftly, leading to this outcome.

"If only we had nukes, we could blow that Fifth Luna to smithereens with one shot!" Bright ground his teeth in frustration.

Of course, when the Ra Cailum had Fifth Luna in range, they unleashed a barrage of missiles and mega particle cannons. However, those attacks were mostly thwarted by Char's fleet, led by the Rewloola, which had arrived at Fifth Luna first.

Their dwindling option—to dispatch mobile suits in a desperate bid to neutralize the nuclear nozzles, thwarting Fifth Luna's descent—hung by a

thread. But even that had to be done within the next minute or so, or Fifth Luna would simply be pulled down by Earth's gravity.

This calculated ruthlessness was quintessentially Char.

He surely wouldn't allow Fifth Luna to completely burn up before reaching the surface by letting it free fall.

"We were too slow..."

"It seems so..."

Even the executive officer Meran groaned.

"Now, our only hope is for Lieutenant Amuro's Re-GZ to make a difference in these final seconds. There's a chance, but..."

Meran tried to offer some reassurance as he typed at his computer console.

Bright watched Meran's calculations flicker on the screen, the impending impact point of Fifth Luna crystallizing before them, and felt a deep, hollow void where once there had been relentless drive and purpose.

The light of Fifth Luna's nuclear pulse illuminated Char's Rewloola floating nearby.

On its combat bridge, crew members were shouting excitedly as they continued observing Fifth Luna's launch trajectory, just as Meran was doing.

"Entry angle of Fifth, check. Speed, check."

"Confirmed, it will definitely hit the target at Lhasa!"

"What about the deceleration nukes' timing devices?!"

"They're working on it! Reports from the Gatherers indicate no issues!"

"Demolitions team, return to ship on the double! Rewloola is pulling back!"

Nanai Miguel breathed a sigh of relief at the reports. She, too, had been given a junior tactical officer position and wanted to ensure the job was done right. However, they couldn't truly withdraw just yet.

"Captain Char is still on the mobile suit deck, isn't he?"

"Yeah. Is he launching?"

Nanai gave a curt nod to Captain Lyle's question.

"The Captain himself said he wanted to use this as a test run for the Sazabi..."

Nanai picked up the intercom handset on her armrest and pressed the call button.

"The pilots' reference to the Supreme Commander as 'Captain' undermines the chain of command. It's crucial they maintain the formal hierarchy, especially in battle," Captain Lyle's grumble carried a mix of relief and residual stress, reflecting his weariness as the battle's intensity seemed to ebb.

"It can't be helped when the Captain himself wants to remain a pilot, right?"

"What is it?"

Nanai hastily covered the receiver, but it seemed Char had already picked up.

"Ah, Nanai here. Captain Gyunei Guss's sector is in a deadlock. I think we need to offer support."

On the small monitor by her armrest, Char's Sazabi was shown standing on the mobile suit deck, his yellow pilot suit flowing towards the cockpit.

"We've done what's required to send Fifth Luna to Earth?"

"Proceeding smoothly."

"Then it's time to signal a full withdrawal. I had planned to do some aerial recon afterward, but..."

As Char settled into the dome-shaped cockpit on Sazabi's head, he pulled up Nanai on the multi-monitor console panel.

"Withdrawal orders have been issued, but we can't disrupt comms by dispersing Minovsky particles to cover the mobile suits' retreat."

"So Gyunei is in danger because of that?"

"Yes! It seems he circled around to the front of Fifth Luna and we've lost contact."

Nanai's muffled voice made Char envision a certain situation.

Unlike regular pilots, Gyunei Guss was an enhanced pilot trained to use psycommu.

Nanai, while officially the director of the Newtype Labs that trained such individuals, found herself thrust into the role of a tactical officer, a testament to Neo Zeon's dire need for skilled personnel amidst the conflict.

If Gyunei had been out of contact for over a minute, Char figured something must have happened.

The only Earth Federation force that could've noticed and deployed against the Fifth Luna drop operation was the Londo Bell fleet. And in that Londo Bell was Amuro Ray, whom Char had just recently encountered again. If there was an enemy giving Gyunei trouble, Char could only imagine it was Amuro. Conversely, the fact that Gyunei had kept Amuro from approaching both the Rewloola and Fifth Luna was worthy of commendation.

"Understood. We'll back up Gyunei's Jagd-Doga and bring him in! Sazabi, launching!"

As the launch signal on the Rewloola's mobile suit deck turned green, the Sazabi, with its imposing and sleek red frame, burst forward with a surge of power. The scene was also projected on the main display of the combat bridge.

"I had hoped to avoid sending out the Captain, but was Gyunei's enhancement lacking?"

Nanai raised her normal suit visor, doubting the adequacy of her own work. But she still had duties to fulfill as a tactical officer.

"Coordinate the mobile suit teams to form a layered point defense, synchronizing their movements with the main force's strategic withdrawal to maximize our defensive posture."

As she requested the next set of orders from the captain, Nanai began inputting the positions of each ship into the 3D monitor.

"The Londo Bell fleet seems to be pursuing Fifth Luna as it descends. But the real issue is the laser attacks from Side 2, right Captain?"

The 3D monitor between the captain and Nanai's seats displayed Axis in lunar orbit, showing the positional relationships between each colony and

Fifth Luna. Using a laser pointer, Nanai drew predicted lines from Side 2 to Fifth Luna, extrapolating their movements.

"Attacks from Side 2 will remain possible for another thirty minutes."

"That long? Really?"

As Captain Lyle sighed in exasperation, the officer in front, Lieutenant Kwandolo chimed in.

"We have spies from Neo Zeon infiltrated in Side 2 as well. We can suppress the beam attacks themselves."

"Don't count on what you can't see!"

Nanai, irritated by the lieutenant's nonchalance, flung her laser pointer at his helmet.

"Establish a defensive line with the mobile suit forces!"

As he gave the order, Captain Lyle sensed that Nanai was somewhat emboldened by having Char's backing. But he was the type of man to calculate that staying on Nanai's good side would curry favor with Char as well.

### 3

Char's Sazabi approached Fifth Luna, trading places with the retreating allied mobile suits.

"Over there?!"

Sensing a strong presence through the Sazabi's psycho-frame, Char executed a swift pivot, realigning his mobile suit toward the source.

In the airspace directly ahead of Fifth Luna's Earth-bound trajectory, Amuro's Re-GZ once again spat out several mega particle beam blasts. Each shot sent the mobile suit reeling backwards.

"Damn it! We couldn't stop Fifth Luna?!"

Inside the rattling cockpit, Amuro clenched his jaw, his frustration mounting over his perceived sluggishness.

Moreover, thanks to the enemy's strange mobile suit, Amuro was now struggling, unable to penetrate towards Fifth Luna's nozzles.

The Re-GZ's attacks were linear, and this provided an opening for the enemy to exploit. Amuro weighed the decision to detach the Re-GZ's binder for agility against the risk of losing his best shot at the nuclear nozzles.

Amuro's mind raced, realizing Char had likely anticipated that the Nu Gundam would arrive too late to intervene, a strategic foresight that now narrowed his own options. And the mobile suit before him was equipped with a psycommu.

He spotted a shadow racing across Fifth Luna's surface, glinting in the Earthlight. At the same time, he sensed those homing missiles incoming once more. The incoming threat was a cluster of funnels, sophisticated brainwave-controlled missiles impervious to interference from Minovsky particles or chaff.



Amuro fired his mega particle cannon in a dispersal pattern to intercept them. The missiles exploded in a brilliant flash.

"Damn it!"

With the window of opportunity rapidly closing, Amuro made a decisive judgment: it was crucial, now more than ever, to neutralize the immediate threat of the opposing mobile suit.

Dodging another deadly barrage of funnels, Amuro made a split-second decision, dropping altitude and jettisoning the Re-GZ's binder, the mobile suit skidding across Fifth Luna's rugged terrain in a tactical gamble.

In that instant, Gyunei Guss in the cockpit of the Jagd Doga - Amuro's current foe - caught sight of that binder. His keen intuition and sharp eyes led his attention to wander to that extraneous object.

Seizing that opening, a beam shot out from the Re-GZ's beam rifle on the surface.

"Wha-?!"

That narrow beam made Gyunei even more apprehensive. But that beam was intercepted by another coming from a different direction. An interference flash exploded where they met.

"What the?!"

Amuro realized this phenomenon was abnormal.

Gyunei looked towards the origin of the beam that had created a wall of light to shield him. From that corner of space, both of them saw Char's red mobile suit, the Sazabi, streaking in like a meteor.

"Gyunei, you idiot! Didn't Nanai enhance you?!"

Not missing the faint glow of the tail nozzles barely visible on Fifth Luna's surface, Char accelerated the Sazabi straight ahead. The Sazabi moved as if an extension of Char's will. That was the level of performance it possessed.

"More reinforcements?!"

With strategic foresight, Amuro released a slew of dummies from the Re-GZ, creating a deceptive cloud of targets as he initiated his calculated retreat. He, too, had the ability to discern a pilot's skill from the Sazabi's movements. That power was a kind of Newtype ability.

The dummies released by the Re-GZ employed a mix of designs - some with apogee motors for erratic movement, some simple balloons, and some rigged with explosives. Gyunei's Jagd Doga tried to easily break through the dummies. But as it made contact with one, the mobile suit's knee was engulfed in a blinding flash.

"Crap!"

Gyunei's machine struck Fifth Luna's surface with a forceful impact, dropping to one knee. He grasped the rocky surface with the remaining foot's claws to stabilize. It wasn't catastrophic damage, but everything below the left knee was gone.

"Ugh...!" Gyunei gasped for breath. Beyond his display, the darkness of the gigantic Earth and half of the daylight side loomed ever closer.

In a stark juxtaposition against the looming Fifth Luna, Char's Sazabi and Amuro's Re-GZ squared off.



"Huh? Minovsky particles have thinned out?!"

Gyunei pressed a hand to his normal suit's headphones. Old habits die hard, even when not wearing a normal suit.

"Why are you crashing this to Earth?! It will trigger global cooling and make the planet uninhabitable!"

It was the enemy pilot's voice.

"To eradicate those living carefree lives on Earth! Blame the Earth Federation government for not believing the ultimatum!"

Contrary to that calm explanation, Char's Sazabi closed in ferociously on the retreating Re-GZ and brandished its beam saber.

"Gah-?!"

Before Gyunei could even catch his breath, the two mobile suits circled around to the opposite side of Fifth Luna, out of view. It appeared that way due to the asteroid's miniscule size.

Struggling with his unit's weakened main thrusters, Gyunei coaxed the Jagd Doga forward.

"Oh?!"

From his vantage point, Gyunei observed the Re-GZ's tactical gambit, hugging the craggy surface as it daringly encroached upon the Sazabi's range.

"How can you think any single person has the right to purge humanity?!"

The enemy pilot's voice blared through Gyunei's headphones again.

"It is I, Char Aznable, who intends to conduct the purge, Amuro!"

Despite the heavy Minovsky particle interference, Gyunei learned the enemy's name.

"I knew it... a Newtype..."

As Char's voice drowned Gyunei out, the two mobile suits clashed beam sabers, the blades sparking. The sabers' intersecting particle streams formed a massive ring enveloping both machines. The Re-GZ was visibly straining. It was gradually being pushed back by the Sazabi.

"No individual has the right to purge humanity!"

"And fools have no right to pollute and destroy the Earth! That's why I will purge them."

"That's just your ego talking!"

"You know full well the Earth cannot sustain this! How can you say that?!"

The Sazabi shoved the Re-GZ and slashed. But the Re-GZ evaded even that fierce assault.

Gyunei could scarcely believe his eyes.

The enemy's whitish mobile suit looked like it possessed no capability to symbolize power, yet it dodged the Sazabi's overwhelming might.

"So that's... how a mobile suit moves when piloted by a Newtype?!"

Gyunei watched in awe, rooted in place. He couldn't risk carelessly providing support and damaging Char's Sazabi.

"Heh! A mobile suit like that is no match. This is the first real combat for my Sazabi as well."

As the Sazabi pursued the Re-GZ skimming the surface, it became evident that Char was holding back, his strikes more a test than a true attempt to destroy.

"And yet, despite the overwhelming difference in power..."

A surge of frustration overwhelmed Gyunei, his mind screaming, "Captain, why aren't you using the beam rifle?!"

However, Char's words continued, unconcerned by Gyunei's silent outburst.

"Humanity must now pay the price for polluting the Earth!"

Gasping for air, Gyunei suddenly realized that Char might be trying to persuade Amuro with those words.

"But Captain! It's no use! Amuro will never side with us!"

Gyunei's mind screamed, fully sensing the white mobile suit pilot's determination from the current battle.

Amuro harbored more than enough resentment and resolve not to go along with Char.

"Captain! The Federation Forces will never understand your ideals! It's past time to withdraw!"

Gyunei pondered the complex past shared by Char and Amuro, worrying that Char's potential lingering sentiments could cloud his judgment.

"Haaah!"

Once the combatants disengaged, Gyunei seized the moment to unleash a rapid barrage from the Jagd Doga's beam rifle, hoping to tilt the balance. But that ultimately made Char's threatening movements go soft.

"Tch!"

"Is this all you've got?"

Char's tongue click was laden with a mix of reprimand and reluctant acknowledgment, critiquing Gyunei's well-intentioned but naïve intervention.

That momentary 'opening' from Char allowed Amuro to counterattack Gyunei. The Re-GZ's beam rifle wasn't a direct hit, but it rattled the Jagd Doga's frame.

"Oh, for... kids are such a pain!"

Seeing an excuse to retreat, Char moved the Sazabi closer to the Jagd Doga.

"Gyunei! Fall back!"

Slamming his machine into Gyunei's, Char wrapped the Sazabi's arm around the Jagd Doga's.

"Haaah!"

Utilizing the rugged landscape, Amuro maneuvered the staggering Re-GZ behind a jagged structure, seizing the moment to initiate a strategic retreat. The beam saber duel had impaired the Re-GZ's manipulators.

He also understood Char's sentiment.

"Damn that Char, talking as if he knows I'm building the Nu Gundam!"

This meant Char was already envisioning the next stage of battle.

"Dropping Fifth Luna on Earth isn't enough to satisfy you?!"

With a grim assessment of his dwindling options, Amuro made a tactical retreat. Char, covering Gyunei, observed that motion as well.

"Hmph...! There's no point in defeating an Amuro limited to a machine like that."

While feeling slightly suffocated by the deplorable thoughts running through his own mind, Char, too, began to retreat.

"Captain! Never mind me!"

Gyunei's agitated young voice rang out over Char's headphones.

"We're returning to the ship."

"But-!"

Char pulled the Jagd Doga back, ignoring Gyunei's state of mind.

"I can make it back on my own!"

"Impossible. Not the way you look! Don't trust the computer readouts!"

The Sazabi lifted up the Jagd Doga and accelerated away.

"Captain... I'm so sorry."

After a while, Gyunei's voice finally sounded calmer.

"For letting the Londo Bell mobile suit get away... because of me..."

"No, it's fine. It seems I haven't mastered this Sazabi yet, either."

That was just an excuse from Char.

"I'll make Amuro wait. I'm going to execute the next part of the operation. Until then, they should have the Nu Gundam ready, too."

No matter how repugnant the concept, it's what kept Char going. Since reuniting with Amuro over the Sweetwater zone, that feeling had flared up intensely, and Char couldn't help but fixate on it.

With that, Char kicked the Sazabi into maximum acceleration and soared toward the airspace where the fleet had begun to withdraw.

## 4

Spanning the azure waters between the islands, the colossal shuttle rails emerged like a metallic spine, clearly visible even from the bustling heart of old Hong Kong city.

The passenger center was located on the island at the starting point of the rails, where the shuttle Ten-Lu was waiting. The departure lobby wasn't as crowded as what one would typically call an airport, so the exchange between Mirai Yashima and the man at the counter could be heard throughout the lounge.

"But this is a valid ticket! I even have a letter of recommendation."

"I understand, but... it's like I've explained already, circumstances have changed. Are you ready, sir?!"

The man at the counter glanced behind the Yashima parent and child towards the center of the lobby, where the Adenauer family was having yet another confrontation.

They had just arrived by helicopter from Hong Kong Airport, and here, Katherine and Quess were about to reach a decisive rupture.

"Wait, please!"

Katherine, with no concern for Adenauer's situation, declared, "Forget it! I'd rather freeze to death on Earth than go with this girl!"

"Good idea!"

It was a bitter exchange, and the emotional disconnect was such that no matter what was said, it didn't seem like it would lead to reconciliation.

"In response to Quess's provocations, Katherine's hand flew up, intent on a slap. Quess, with a dancer's grace, evaded and seized Katherine's wrist, sinking her teeth in a burst of unrestrained anger.

"Aaargh!"

Katherine let out an animal-like scream. Witnessing this scene were Bright's two children, Hathaway Noah and his younger sister Cheimin.

"Big brother?"

Cheimin instinctively clung to her brother's arm.

"Yeah, I know..."

Gently, Hathaway guided Cheimin's gaze toward the counter, diverting her attention from the escalating confrontation, a protective gesture from a brother to his sister.

"Darling! You're bleeding!"

"Quess!"

Adenauer's groan was tinged with embarrassment as he cast anxious glances around, acutely aware of the scrutinizing eyes piercing through the tension of the moment.

His behavior had a decisive effect on Katherine.

"Ugh, I'm done! With this girl and with you!"

With a hand likely slick with blood, Katherine clutched her suitcase with a defiance that belied her pain and turned her back.

"Darling!"

As Adenauer tried to chase after her with lingering attachment, Quess grabbed his arm.

"You don't have time, right? You have important work to do, don't you?"

"Ah...? Oh...!"

Even at a time like this, Adenauer was oblivious to his daughter's mocking smile.

"Let's go! To space..."

"Yeah... right..."

Since the two of them had turned towards the counter, Hathaway hurriedly looked up at Mirai.

Mirai's persistence at the counter, her voice firm and unwavering, "Here it is. A letter of recommendation from the Earth Federation government! It's genuine, isn't it?"

From beside Mirai, Adenauer addressed the man at the counter, "You there! Two tickets will do."

To Hathaway, Mirai's vexed back looked large.

"Yes, sir. Two tickets."

As Hathaway shifted his gaze from Adenauer, Quess's figure leaped into his line of sight.

It was as if she had been waiting. Moreover, her white teeth gleamed as if unaware she had just bitten her own mother.

"...?"

Hathaway averted his gaze, wondering what kind of girl she was.

"Mister!"

While receiving the boarding tickets from the man at the counter, Adenauer tried to separate him from Mirai.

"That customer's recommendation letter... who is it from?"

Adenauer whispered to the man.

"Eh? Oh, it's from Mr. John Bauer of the Federation government."

"Hmm, let one of them on board?"

"Sir?"

"We jumped the line with my political privileges. Besides, I owe Bauer a favor."

Adenauer patted the man's shoulder and swiftly moved away from the counter.

The reason he showed such consideration was that Adenauer himself wanted to calm down. The calculation that performing a small kindness might lift his spirits a little made Adenauer act gently.

"Let's hurry!"

Adenauer took the suitcase belt from Quess's waiting hand and headed for the escalator.

"Politicians are all the same... Ah, ma'am, we can take one of you. I'll put two on the next shuttle?"

The man at the counter said, feeling somewhat relieved of his guilt.

"But you don't know when the next flight will be, right?"

"Well, according to the news, war's broken out..."

"Then I'm going to send him."

Mirai took out one ticket and handed it to the man.

"Hathaway Noa? Destination is Londenion, right?"

"Yes... His father is stationed there."

"Mom!"

"Here. The shuttle will be departing soon!"

As the man at the counter held out the boarding ticket to Hathaway, he had no choice but to accept it.

"But..."

"You're a big boy now. If anything, you're almost too old to experience space for the first time."

Mirai stated firmly.

"O-okay... But what about you and Cheimin?"

"Don't worry, this war won't last very long. As this man says, we can catch up to you soon, right?"

The man at the counter turned away, but having overheard the entire conversation between parent and child, he flashed an obliging smile.

"You sure?"

"Of course."

With a firm embrace that pulled Cheimin close, Mirai offered a deep nod.

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MOBILE SUIT

**G**UNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 2

FALL ATTACK

CHAPTER-N

# 1

As the Ra Cailum's fleet, maintaining close proximity to the descending Fifth Luna, began retrieving and accommodating the retreating mobile suit units one after another, the gun turrets persisted in their barrage, targeting the enemy's missiles.

The Rewloola's fleet maintained a threatening presence, preventing Ra Cailum's fleet from establishing a foothold on Fifth Luna.

Amidst the chaos, Amuro deftly maneuvered his damaged Re-GZ's backpack into the catapult deck, guiding the unit alongside the bridge of Ra Cailum with precision.

As the Re-GZ's manipulator brushed against the side of the bridge, Amuro's normal suit emerged from the cockpit like a flowing stream.

Another normal suit surfaced from below, tapping Amuro's feet as he reached the airlock before the bridge.

"...?"

"I'm taking the Re-GZ for a checkup!"

"Thanks, Chief Hanan."

"Great work out there."

Acknowledging the normal-suited figure, Amuro opened the airlock with a swift motion.

Against the backdrop of Earth's night side, another explosion blossomed like a fleeting flower.

"Side 2 hasn't started their attack yet?!"

Amuro's voice echoed through the still-deserted bridge as he exited the airlock. A seat rose from the combat bridge below, revealing the ship's captain, Bright Noa.

"I know, they're slow."

"You don't think Side 1 will assist our Londo Bell unit?"

"That's a possibility. They believe we are nothing more than Earth's lapdogs."

"Incoming! Heat source approaching!"

An operator's cry pierced the air from the combat bridge below.

"?!"

Amuro's gaze darted over Earth's horizon through the front window of the main bridge. Several laser beams, like threads of light, raced from the upper left towards Fifth Luna. The polluted airspace transformed the laser light into eerie, tangible lines.

As the beams reached Fifth Luna, they morphed into dazzling rings of light upon impact.

A direct hit. Yet, from the opposite side of the impact, another flash erupted, signaling Fifth Luna's orbit correction nuclear explosion.



"Quite the elaborate scheme... Char."

"Yeah..."

"The number of laser attacks from Side 2 seems inadequate, doesn't it?"

"What's the situation?!"

Bright's voice boomed, demanding answers from the combat bridge below.

"Sir! They've started course correction with the thrusters on Fifth Luna! It's continuing its descent toward Earth!"

"Don't we know what's happening on Side 2?"

"We can't. Direct observation is impossible!"

"Tch!"

Bright's frustration manifested in a sharp tongue click, but it did little to alter the dire circumstances. The pollution in the combat zone rendered direct observation a futile endeavor.

"Captain, has an evacuation warning for Fifth Luna's impending fall been issued to Earth?"

"To those in Lhasa, Tibet? Those on Earth are probably under the impression that we'll manage something out here. But the bigger question is, did the ones who had the intel run away first without telling anyone?"

"That's exactly why Char has the upper hand."

Amuro's remark, though unpleasant to acknowledge, rang true. Bright could only remain silent, his lips pressed together in grim resignation.

"And another thing, Bright. Char needed a lot of energy to propel Fifth Luna. So how'd he get all that nuclear power?"

"From the Federation government, I presume?"

Bright spat out the words, his tone dripping with bitterness. As if to validate Bright's assertion, there was a deafening BAGOOM followed by a blossom of light in front of them.

"Hard ascent now! What's the status of Char's fleet?!"

As Bright barked orders, several operators scrambled from the combat bridge, manning the console panels on the main bridge with urgency.

"It looks like he's planning to go around the Earth once, then break away back in the direction of Sweetwater."

"Is Char truly that predictable?"

Amuro's voice was laced with disbelief as he yelled at Methis, who had taken a seat before him.

"Huh?"

"Nevermind! Hm? Their beams are thinning out."

Amuro's attention was drawn to the diminishing intensity of the laser light assaulting Fifth Luna.

The origin of the lasers was the outermost colonies of Side 2. Nestled in a corner of the industrial block of one such colony, three formidable gun turrets stood armed and ready.

Suddenly, one of the laser gun turrets erupted in a fiery blaze from its base—an internal explosion that sent shockwaves rippling through the colony.

Inside, near the turret, rebel soldiers clad in normal suits engaged in a fierce firefight with the turret's guard troops, their battle reverberating through the corridors.

"Hail Neo Zeon!"

The rebel soldiers, their voices united in a fervent battle cry, unleashed the launchers mounted on their shoulders. The projectiles hurtled through the air, striking the ceiling mere meters above and detonating in a blinding explosion that consumed another turret. The soldier who fired the fateful shot met an instant, sacrificial end.

In a fleeting moment, the three laser-emitting turrets lay in ruins, and countless lives were extinguished in the relentless explosions. Fifth Luna's main body vanished beyond Earth's horizon, and a further onslaught of intercepting missiles formed an impenetrable wall, impeding the advance of Ra Cailum's fleet.

## 2

The shuttle Tian Lu rested upon the rails like a majestic beast, its form bathed in the warm glow of the setting sun as it awaited departure before the passenger center building. Its elegant grandeur evoked the image of a colossal whale, commanding the attention of all who gazed upon it.

Mirai and Cheimin stood in the lobby of the passenger center, their eyes transfixed by the shuttle's allure.

Inside the shuttle's cockpit, Adenauer Paraya felt a restless energy coursing through his veins.

He exchanged brief, uneasy dialogues with his crew.

"Here you are, sir."

"Ah, thank you."

Adenauer stood sandwiched between two crew members, taking a slip of paper from the captain.

He glanced at the finally received code.

"Thirteen," he muttered, slipping the paper into his pocket.

"Is everything in order?"

"It is, sir..."

Adenauer's nod was terse, a small gesture to the captain who had turned expectantly towards him.

"The control tower has given us clearance for takeoff. However, Vice Minister, our course will take us close to an asteroid."

"As long as we don't collide with it."

"Just as you said, Vice Minister. It seems a war has begun."

"That's why I told you to depart before it starts!"

"But we are a civilian operation," the captain reminded him. "We must minimize risks--"

"Even so, if Neo Zeon occupies Earth, there won't be any civilian operations left at all," Adenauer argued, a hard edge to his voice.

"I understand, sir. We will take off, but please be prepared for any eventuality."

"As long as we get to Londenion on time!"

With those commanding words, Adenauer opened the cockpit door and exited.

"Let's suit up in our normal suits. No telling what might happen," the captain remarked to the co-pilot, his gaze lingering suspiciously on the door through which Adenauer had disappeared.

In the lobby connecting the cockpit to the cabin, Adenauer paused, the weight of his thoughts bearing down upon him. He slapped his cheeks with both hands, trying to dispel the tension that had settled in his features.

"Damn you, Char!" he muttered under his breath. "You really went through with the asteroid drop..."

It was his responsibility to have foreseen this strategy, to have considered the military's response. Yet, he had failed to do so. The Earth Federation government's top brass had a habit of not dwelling on such mistakes.

As he entered the cabin, his thoughts were consumed by the impending meeting with Char in Londenion. The final, nail-biting negotiations that could determine the fate of so many. The coded telegram he had received moments ago in the cockpit—"Directive Version Thirteen, Lhasa"—was a last-resort order from the Earth Federation government.

To accomplish this, he needed to make contact with Char more reliably than ever before.

However, that telegram was not sent from Lhasa but from the Earth Federation government on the move.

In other words, the VIPs in Lhasa had already left the city quite some time ago. Despite not believing Char's declaration, their instinct to flee was superior to that of rats.

"If Char planned the Fifth Luna drop while having scheduled negotiations on Londenion, he's really playing hardball..."

Although feeling betrayed by Char, Adenauer entered the cabin without realizing his own foolishness.

"?!"

A flicker of surprise crossed Adenauer's face as he noticed an unfamiliar boy occupying the aisle seat next to his own.

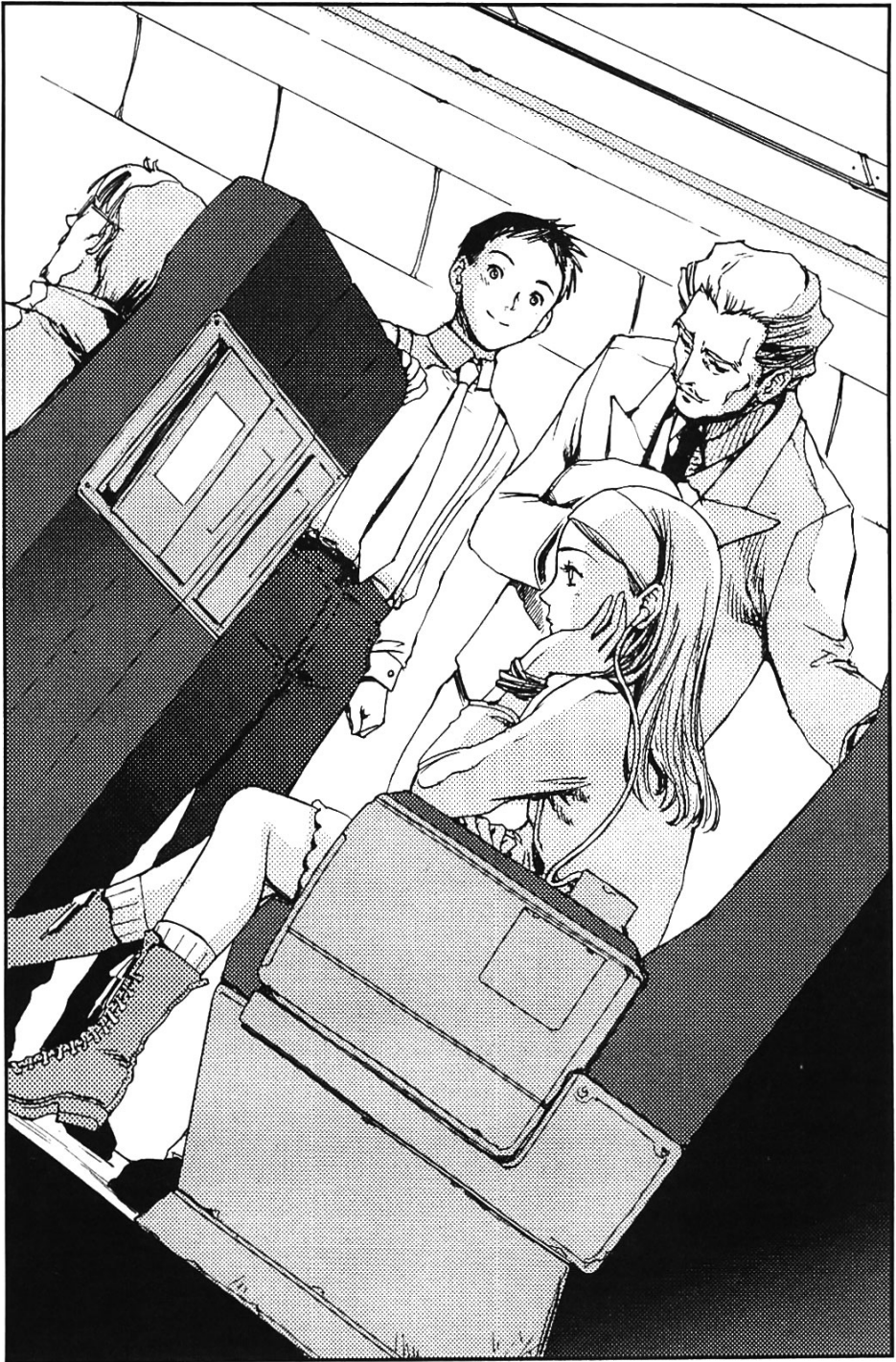
"Ah... one of the family members I gave my seat to..."

The boy's well-defined features and youthful energy stood out in the confined space of the shuttle.

"Excuse me," Adenauer said, addressing the boy.

The boy, Hathaway Noa, swiftly stood up and stepped into the aisle, his movements agile and precise.

"Oh, sorry!" he said, making way for Adenauer.



"Thank you."

Adenauer sat down between Quess and Hathaway and whispered into the ear of Quess, who was engrossed in the television attached to each seat.

"We'll be leaving soon."

"I see," Quess replied, her eyes never leaving the screen. An interview with Char from a week prior played out before them.

"This girl is...?"

Adenauer furrowed his brow but put the earphones to his ear.

It appeared to be an excerpt from a news interview.

"If the independence of Neo Zeon is not recognized, we will do what it takes until it is. That is also the wish of the people of Sweetwater. The Earth Federation government is troubled because they don't understand their true intentions."

"..."

Listening to it now, even Adenauer could tell that Char had been completely serious.

"The intelligence bureau said it would take Char two or three years to prepare his forces, but..."

As Adenauer accessed the information files on his computer, a report caught his eye.

"A report from Londo Bell..."

A growing suspicion took root in Adenauer's mind. Perhaps Londo Bell had been providing the most accurate information all along.

"However, those Newtypes in Londo Bell are after our positions... We can't let our guard down around those who only think about using military achievements for promotion..."

As such thoughts raced through Adenauer's mind, the vibrations from the booster engines carrying the shuttle began to shake his body.

"Mama!"

Cheimin clung to Mirai's arm, her eyes wide with wonder as she gazed at the brilliant flashes emanating from the tail nozzles of the enormous boosters. The shuttle, like a whale breaching the surface of the ocean, began to glide along the rails that stretched toward the heavens.

### 3

The Ra Cailum's fleet gradually withdrew from Earth's orbit, the stalemate with the pursuing Rewloola fleet likely to persist for some time. Caught in Earth's gravitational pull, they were powerless to prevent Fifth Luna's impending descent.

Amuro removed his helmet and secured himself in a seat behind the bridge, his mind racing with the implications of their predicament.

"So, rebels siding with Char have even infiltrated Side 2, huh?"

"It appears so. There's no shortage of Spacenoids who oppose the Federation."

"Yeah... Honestly, what was the point of everything we've done up until now?"

A moment of empathy followed.

"I feel for you. It hasn't been easy for Londo Bell..."

"Thank you."

Amuro suppressed his irritation in an attempt to shed the layers of accumulated emotional fatigue.

"Lieutenant..."

Claire Thrune, a bridge NCO, offered him a tea pod, a small gesture of comfort amidst the chaos.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome..."

It was tea infused with a stimulant used during combat, a bitter brew to sharpen the senses.

"You're not tired?"

"Just scared, staying put helps."

"Same here..."

Amuro flashed a smile at her honest words, a brief moment of levity in the face of uncertainty.

Their exchange was cut short by an alert.

"One of the enemy ships appears to be breaking formation. Possibility of a second wave of attacks!"

"Amuro, thoughts?"

Bright turned around, catching sight of Amuro patting Claire's bottom, a fleeting distraction from the gravity of their situation.

"Hm, when do you think they'll make their move?"

"They'll likely emerge from Earth's shadow on the Sweetwater course, probably in about twenty minutes."

"But they should be out of ammunition. It's likely just a diversion to scatter our formation."

"I concur," Bright gave a thumbs up, letting out a sigh of relief. "Claire, bring me some of that tea!"

"Right away, Captain!" she responded in a buoyant tone.

Amuro then excused himself from the bridge, driven by a need to see the pilots in person, a duty that couldn't be overlooked.

Inside the shuttle Tian Lu, having detached its first stage, the G-forces intensified due to the reduced weight, but it was not unbearable. Akin to an amusement park roller coaster, yet for unaccustomed passengers, this time was fraught with fear. The cabin retained an eerie silence, tension thick in the air.

Suddenly...

"Ah! No!"

Quess Paraya, seated by the window on the other side of Adenauer, stood up abruptly, her voice trembling with terror.

"What's wrong?"

Adenauer asked, reaching out to her, his eyes wide with shock as he took in the intensity of her fear, a glimpse of the fate that awaited them.

"A fireball!"

Quess's voice was low, but it struck Hathaway's ears like a thunderbolt, a premonition of impending doom.

"Huh?"

Hathaway thought he saw Quess's hair fluttering in an unseen wind behind Adenauer's back, a surreal sight amidst the growing chaos.

"..."

Adenauer's back tensed, the weight of their fate bearing down upon him.

"Captain! Move more to the right!"

Quess shouted, making a desperate gesture as if to climb over the seat in front of her, a futile attempt to escape the inevitable.

"Ah?!"

Hathaway saw a light run across Quess's profile, a spark of something otherworldly. A glow emanated from between her forehead and nose, flickering and flying forward, a manifestation of her fear and desperation.

"It's here!"

At that moment, the two crew members in the Tian Lu's cockpit spotted a crimson point of light directly ahead, a harbinger of the catastrophe that awaited them.

"This far north?!"

The captain groaned, the realization of their predicament sinking in like a lead weight in his gut.

Fifth Luna, plummeting through the thin atmospheric layer, burned with the heat of friction. A blinding white flash exploded from the front of the object, a nuclear detonation meant to slow its descent.

Yet, the main body of Fifth Luna appeared as a seething mass of red light, hurtling towards the Tian Lu with terrifying speed. Fragments of the asteroid scattered like meteors, grazing past the shuttle's left and right sides, a rain of destruction that threatened to engulf them all.

"Ugh?!"

Even the protection of their normal suits would be futile against a direct impact. The cockpit crew members prayed to whatever gods might hear them, but within the span of a few blinks, the colossal mass of Fifth Luna revealed the roiling details of its molten surface, a vision of hell itself.

Every apogee motor on the Tian Lu's left side fired in a desperate attempt to escape the monstrous red demon that pursued them, a frantic bid for survival against impossible odds.

From the shuttle's cabin, passengers witnessed the preceding meteor stream, their imaginations running wild with the horrors that might befall them.

"We've flown into a meteor stream!"

"Kyaa!"

Screams of terror filled the cabin, mingling with the eerie vibrations of the aircraft, a symphony of despair that threatened to overwhelm them all.

"More to the right... It's coming!"

"Stay seated!"

Quess clung to the seat in front of her, her face ashen, yet still, she screamed, a primal cry of defiance against the encroaching darkness. Hathaway tried to calm her, a futile gesture in the face of annihilation.

He was only able to do so because Adenauer had shrunk into himself, but Hathaway hadn't noticed, too focused on the horror that awaited them.

"They're everywhere!"

The captain and co-pilot, their normal suits drenched in cold sweat, ducked their heads as the approaching molten mass flowed to the left, a momentary reprieve in the face of certain doom.

*Whoosh!*

As Fifth Luna positioned itself to the left, the Tian Lu shuddered violently, a mere plaything in the hands of fate.

"Ow!"

Quess, standing in the cabin, was thrown into the air, her body slamming against the ceiling with a sickening thud.

"Quess!"

Hathaway called out her name, a name he had overheard, and caught her as she fell, pulling her close in a desperate embrace, a final act of comfort in the face of oblivion.

"Oh?"

Quess had felt a connection with Hathaway from the moment he sat down, a kindred spirit in this nightmare, and so she let him hold her, a small solace in the midst of chaos.

But then, she noticed her father's shrunken form, a pitiful sight that filled her with a sudden rage.

"...?!"

Perched on Hathaway's lap, Quess looked down at Adenauer, his head buried between the seats, hands covering his head in a futile attempt at self-preservation.

"God... please save us!"

Adenauer whispered those words like a mantra, a desperate plea to an uncaring universe.

Quess, filled with disgust at her father's cowardice, spat on his back, a final act of defiance against the man who had failed her.

That entire ordeal went unseen by Hathaway as he struggled to support her body amidst the violent shaking, too focused on the horror that awaited them all.

Sometime later, in a corner of the evening sky over Tibet, the reddened form of Fifth Luna appeared, a harbinger of doom witnessed by those fleeing the rumors of the Federation's collapse. It hurtled towards Lhasa, a crimson meteor that spelled the end of all things.



On an unpaved road, a boy in a Land Cruiser, one of dozens of vehicles, spotted the approaching catastrophe. The man driving the car laughed, a booming sound that echoed in the gathering darkness.

"The rumors were true, but we're safe!"

"Is that the meteor Char dropped?!"

"That's right, no doubt about it!"

"So that's why the Federation building was deserted."

The woman in the passenger seat, heavy with child, spoke with a voice tinged with fear and resignation.

"If we head south, we'll find a place to settle."

The man gripping the wheel looked back at the two families in the rear seats, his laughter a mockery of their plight.

By the time Fifth Luna, breaking through the clouds, dyed the Potala Palace red with the light of its passing, people still fled in confusion through the streets of Lhasa, a testament to the Federation's inaction.

The deserted city was assaulted by an overwhelming roar and a rain of meteors, the sound of Fifth Luna's fall becoming a cascading series of sonic booms that slammed into the mountain range with terrifying force.

The peaks shuddered, and just before the red mass of molten rock struck Lhasa directly, it transformed into a colossal explosion, a final act of destruction that shook the very foundations of the earth.

*Boom!*

The supersonic shockwave reached critical mass, expanding outward in a wave of devastation that consumed all in its path. The explosion, akin to a nuclear blast, blew the core of Fifth Luna apart, gouging the earth and spreading in all directions as a gigantic fireball, a hellish inferno that threatened to engulf the world.

It morphed into a massive earthquake, a blistering wind that scattered the very clouds, and engulfed the line of cars fleeing beyond the mountain, a final cruel twist of fate.

"Ah!"

"Get down!"

But before the cars could stop, small meteors impacted nearby, shaking the ground with their impact. A section of the mountain wall on the Lhasa side crumbled, pouring forth a searing wind that choked the lungs and seared the flesh.

The debris born from that destruction rained down, severing the line of cars, a final insult to those who sought to escape the coming apocalypse.

And then, relentlessly increasing rocks and rising dust obscured everything, a choking cloud of despair that blotted out the very sky.

Only the vivid flames of the cars, consumed by the cataclysm, stood out amidst the terrible rumbling of the earth, a final testament to the folly of man in the face of nature's unleashed fury.

## 4

"Cancel the first alert status!" Bright commanded from the captain's seat, his eyes fixed on the small display showing Amuro and the others.

"Char, that bastard, seems to be heading towards the Moon or Side 1..."

"Roger that! Dismissing the pilots!" Amuro responded without waiting for an acknowledgment, as Bright switched off Amuro's display and opened another.

Bright had unbuttoned his jacket, revealing a dirty T-shirt beneath. Despite the presence of a dedicated female officer on the bridge, he paid no heed to his disheveled appearance. The large display on the ceiling showed a web of projected routes and contingencies in case Char's fleet didn't return to Sweetwater.

"Considering our available forces, we have no choice but to return..." Bright grumbled, taking a sip of his now-cold coffee, the bitter taste lingering on his tongue.

"I don't think they'll return to Sweetwater immediately, but they probably don't intend to attack Londenion either."

Amuro emerged onto the bridge.

"As long as we maintain the appearance of pursuit, the enemy can't resupply either."

"Hmm," Amuro replied, grabbing Bright's half-finished coffee cup and taking a sip.

"Hey, that's mine!"

"Captain... I'm going to Von Braun. I need to borrow a Geta."

"Chan is already there, right? Leave it to her. We don't know when Char will make his move..."

"I'll hurry back. I might be able to use the Nu Gundam. Have them attach boosters to the Geta."

"Roger that!" The reply came from Meunier Thuhigg, seated at the front console panel.

"I'm the captain here!!!" Bright exclaimed.

"Roger that!" Amuro responded, a hint of amusement in his tone. With a powerful kick off the floor, he opened the door behind him and floated through.

"Amuro!" Bright chased after him, grabbing the lift grip in the corridor.

"There's still a possibility of a second wave, you know?!"

"I understand your concern, but the Re-GZ is unusable. At this rate, we'll be playing right into Char's hands. Even I can't be of any use."

"I get it, but..."

"That red mobile suit was incredible. It was as if a Cyber-Newtype or a Newtype was piloting it, with a different base output."

"Yeah..."

The two of them floated into the elevator, releasing their grip on the lift.

"I'm telling you this because it's you, Bright. That red mobile suit was piloted by Char."

"Hm..."

"He let me go. I know the reason. He gave me time. Otherwise, I would have been shot down at Fifth Luna."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah..."

"He's reading our moves."

"That's why there won't be a second wave."

"At least not against the Ra Cailum?"

Bright's face showed that he understood Char's intentions, but then he looked puzzled.

"But what about the movement of his fleet? It looks like they're heading towards the Moon."

"Or perhaps Side 1? I don't know the reason, but I'm certain they won't make a move now. In the meantime, I'll bring the Nu Gundam from the Moon."

"If it's completed, that is?"

"It is. Chan is the girl you introduced to me, Bright."

"Right."

Shortly after, a single Base Jabber with boosters attached left the Ra Cailum fleet, its platform empty.

Taking a course that bypassed Char's fleet, it grazed the shoal zone where Side 4 once was and descended towards the Moon via the shortest route. During his trip, Amuro had a dream.

"Hehe... hehehe..."

It was a dream of Lalah Sune gliding amidst a flash of light.

"What are you looking at? I'm still flying..."

Even in the dream, Lalah Sune didn't respond to Amuro's question. When he opened his eyes, Amuro found himself gazing at the rows of lights at Von Braun on the lunar surface.

"Judging by the looks of it, work seems to be behind schedule, doesn't it?" Amuro remarked as he floated down to the feet of the Nu Gundam undergoing maintenance, glancing back at Chan Agi and October Saran.

"Can you tell?" October asked.

"Of course," Amuro replied.

"But you know, Lieutenant, we're actually ahead of the initial schedule," October pointed out. Chan shrugged her shoulders.

"That's a technician's perspective. For me, it's only complete when it's fully armed. We still have a long way to go until then."

"Really? I want to board it and return to the fleet right now," Amuro said.

"You can't be serious! We've only installed the engine and test-fired it three times!" Chan exclaimed.

"That's good enough. The rest can be broken in during actual combat," Amuro declared, using the work platform as a foothold to float up to the top of the machine. The one-sixth gravity of the Moon was convenient at times like this.

"Please spare me. I don't want to see you die a meaningless death, Lieutenant," October pleaded, operating the crane to ascend while screaming.

"Any issues in the meantime?" Amuro asked, grabbing onto the armor plate from the Gundam's knee to thigh and climbing further up. The finish seemed quite satisfactory.

"Tested up to 110% output. I'd like to push it another 20%. There are a few problems with the magnetic coating," Chan reported.

"Good, good!" Amuro said.

"But you know, Amuro? This factory seems to be subject to interference from Neo Zeon, and October hears strange rumors, which delays the work," Chan explained.

"What do you mean?" Amuro asked.

"Ah! Watch out above you!" Chan pointed.

Amuro nearly bumped his head on the hatch in front of the cockpit, hastily grabbing the edge of the nozzle on the Gundam's chest to climb onto the deck in front of the cockpit. Chan and October brought the crane they were riding close to him.

Amuro climbed into the cockpit, reaching over the seat to remove the display panel at the back.

"That's the psycommu receiver pack. It fits nicely, doesn't it?" Chan remarked.

"Yeah... If it can receive brainwaves amplified by the psycommu, it'll speed up reaction time. So, what were those rumors about?" Amuro inquired.

"It's about the psycho-frame... Apparently, the idea came from outside," Chan revealed.

"Outside? What do you mean? Is there another idea man?"

"Well..."

Amuro finished inspecting the interior of the cockpit and entered the briefing room, bringing October along.

"I heard that even the development department doesn't know the source of the psycho-frame idea. Isn't that strange?" Amuro mused, standing in front of a display showing enlarged photographs of metal particles. October had a solemn expression.

"It's not all of it. Some ideas were incorporated from other departments," October explained.

"So, you're saying the psycho-frame idea could also be used by Char? I heard they tested a considerable amount of samples. What's the story?" Amuro pressed.

"That's why it's strange. No one knows the full scope of the psycho-frame development project. It's not uncommon for on-site personnel to be assigned piecemeal tasks in such developments, so there's that aspect, but..." October's words rang true.

"A dangerous idea, and we don't know how it was developed. However, there must be someone controlling the development somewhere," Amuro said, sensing something stirring. However, if the psycho-frame posed no practical issues, Amuro had no choice but to use it as is.

"We don't know where they obtained the method to mix psycommu chips and metal composition without compromising the frame's strength. It's a technical issue, but..." October trailed off.

"Where in the Nu Gundam is the psycho-frame used?" Amuro asked.

October brought up a cross-sectional diagram of the Gundam on another display.

"Around the cockpit. This allows us to enhance the capability of the psycommu reception. It makes controlling Funnels easier, and you, Lieutenant, should be able to utilize it even further," October explained.

"I'm not a Newtype; that's why this is installed. I can't imagine any other way to use it," Amuro said.

"You're too modest, Lieutenant."

"Is there any issue with practical use?"

"Well..."

"But as a problem for Anaheim Electronics, it's not amusing, Chan," Amuro remarked.

"I'm sorry. I can't conduct an internal investigation of the factory system," Chan apologized.

"That's understandable... Let's hurry with the work," Amuro said.

"Yes... October, please send us samples for continued frame testing even after we return to the unit," Chan requested.

"I'll include spare frames," October assured.

"We need separate ones for long-term testing," Chan added.

"Understood. Lieutenant, we need another three days for a full combat equip," October said.

"Unacceptable," Amuro refused.

"Not good enough!" Chan agreed.

"But! I want to hand it over with confidence," October insisted.

"Right now, we're at war," Amuro declared, informing October that he would take the Nu Gundam that very night.

機動戦士ガンダム  
MOBILE SUIT  
**G**UNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 2

DIVERSION

CHAPTER-0

# 1

Char fleet of four ships sliced through the inky void near the moon. At this moment, suspended in the silence of space, every soldier aboard hung on Char's every word as his speech reverberated through the halls.

"The operation to drop Fifth Luna marks the first major battle of the Neo Zeon fleet. It has given me the opportunity to observe you in action. I'm impressed."

Char's holographic visage, ethereal yet commanding in his billowing cloak, hovered at the center of the Rewloola's mobile suit deck, a phantom surrounded by slumbering metal giants. The scene played out in unison across the other ships.

"Yet Fifth Luna's demise alone will not cleanse the Earth of its impurities. We concluded our mission today with diversionary operations..."

Gyunei Guss drifted through the assembled mechanics, an untethered specter unfettered by the tension saturating the air.

"...against the pursuing Londo Bell unit. The plan's simple, but I urge you to execute it flawlessly and return to the warm embrace of Sweetwater unscathed. Godspeed!"

Bathed in the incandescent glow of the holographic cameras, Char's salute signaled an abrupt extinguishing of the lights, leaving only the afterimage of his resolve.

"That was first-rate," Kaisers M. Bayer lauded with a tempered golf clap, standing askance to Char.

"I feel like a total clown," Char scoffed, shrugging off his cloak and tossing it aside to Nanai Miguel with a flourish.

Horst Harnel, an imposing figure to the left, joined the pilots arrayed behind him, echoing the applause, their admiration palpable.

"Ah, but we mustn't neglect crafting your image as Neo Zeon's indomitable leader. You're far too eager to shed the mantle and leap back into the pilot's seat, Captain. It's a headache for us on the political side."

Nods of assent rippled through the pilots at Kaisers' observation.

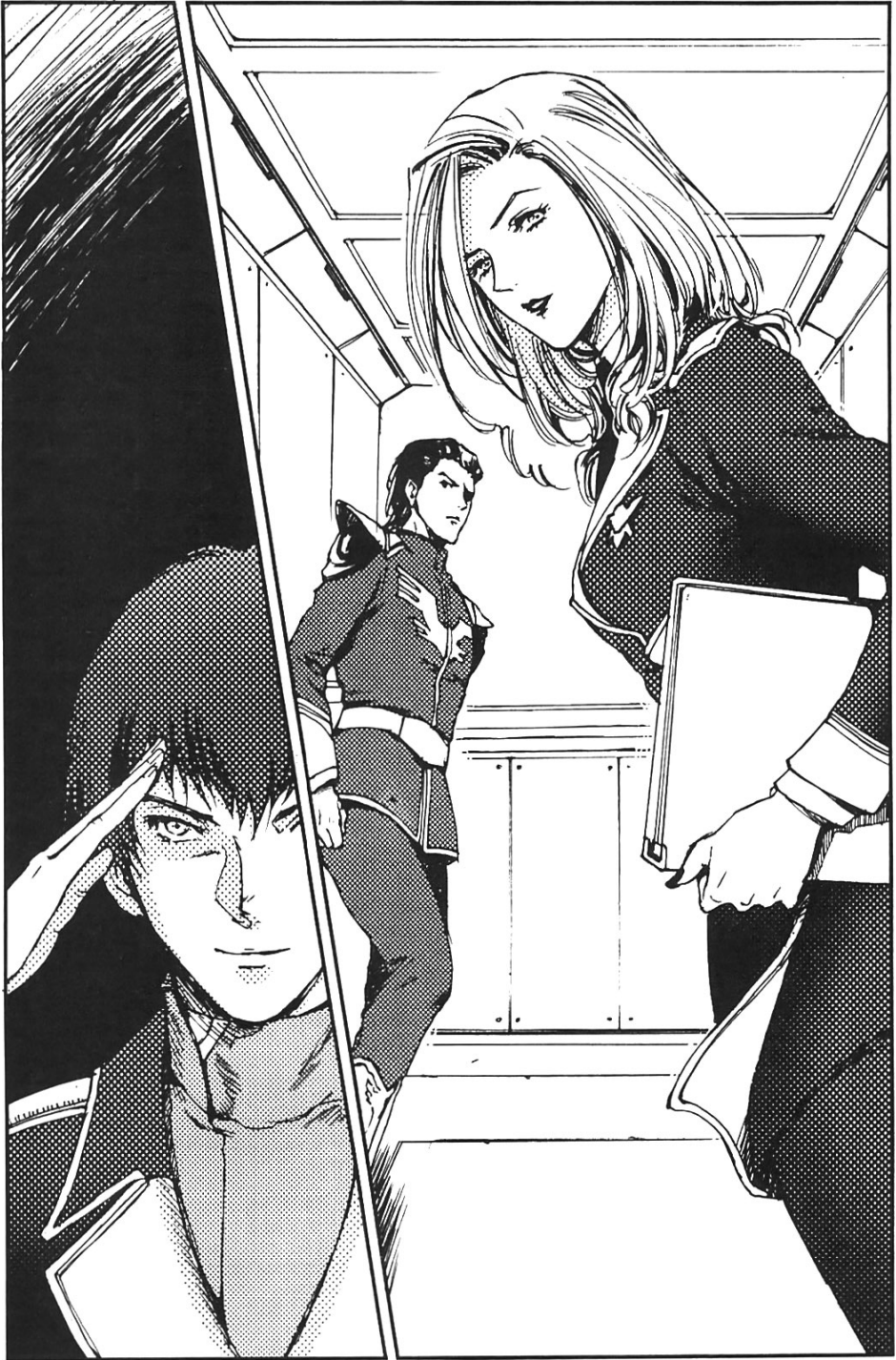
"The people have long awaited a leader of this caliber."

"It's a necessary evil," the pilots remarked with a touch of informality, their bond with Char apparent in their demeanor.

"You have the luxury of simplicity," Char departed the briefing room with a wry grin, a sardonic specter trailed by Kaisers, Horst, and Nanai.

"Captain!" The voice pierced the air, drawing Char's gaze to the right where Gyunei glided towards him on the lift grip, a sense of urgency about him.

"Your tardiness is noted!"





"A thousand apologies! I was helping modify the Jagd Doga, and I didn't even get a chance to apologize for the Fifth Luna op--"

"Your enhancements at the Newtype Lab came at a premium. We can't afford to squander such an investment." Char seized the lift grip, propelling himself towards the elevator with unwavering purpose.

Nanai, acknowledging Gyunei's salute with a subtle nod, assuaged his concerns.

"Pay it no mind. Just hurry and suit up!"

"At once, ma'am! I mean, Strategy Officer!"

His words trailed off as his eyes lingered on Nanai's retreating figure, shadowing Char with an enigmatic allure.

"She's utterly immune to flattery. Typical fickle woman!"

"Lieutenant Nanai, is Gyunei fit to go with us?" Kaisers inquired as Nanai crossed the threshold into Char's private quarters behind him.

"Yes... He's becoming neurotic, but his capabilities as a guard remain unquestionable. The serene environment of the colony should serve to stabilize his psyche. For the sake of his future development, I strongly recommend his participation."

"Pray tell, what's going on?" Horst probed, his attaché case snapping shut with an air of finality.

"Following the Fifth Luna operation, Gyunei's psychological evaluation unveiled a troubling certainty in his own invincibility. Portents of misgivings towards the Captain have surfaced, born from a delusion stemming from his ego."

Nanai's succinct report carried an undercurrent of concern that did not escape Horst's keen perception.

"Maybe we've enhanced him too much?" Kaisers mused, his large belly pointing up as he reclined in his chair, a curious affectation in the absence of gravity's influence.

"Psychological imprinting remains our primary focus. As for augmenting reflexes through pharmaceutical or biotechnological means..."

"He's just young. Horst, it's time we left."

Char emerged from the adjacent room, his civilian attire a stark contrast to his earlier grandeur.

"Captain, I trust you've given this due consideration. You are the sovereign of Neo Zeon, after all..."

"A fact I remain acutely aware of, hence why I'm going along with this political theater, isn't it? Nanai, I'm counting on you to handle the diversion."

"Understood, sir."

Char's arm snaked around Nanai's waist in a fleeting embrace as he departed.

## 2

"Hmm, they're on the move again?"

"Affirmative," Meran reported from the sub-bridge. "It seems two ships have turned to face our fleet head-on. This time, it looks like they mean business. The second wave..."

Bright nodded, Meran's assessment matching the shifting formations of the enemy fleet on the screen.

"This is the space between the moon and Side 1! What the hell is Char thinking?"

The looming presence of the moon filled the forward view. Bright's brow furrowed as he considered the implications.

"Anaheim should be tracking our movements, correct? Get Amuro on the line!"

"Yes, sir!" Meran responded crisply.

As the bridge crew rushed to their battle stations, Bright's focus was already shifting.

"Amuro!"

In the Anaheim Electronics factory, a flurry of activity surrounded the Nu Gundam as technicians conducted final checks with practiced urgency. Chan leaped from a descending crane, propelling herself towards the Gundam's open cockpit.

"What is it?"

Amuro's voice came from behind the cockpit seat.

"It's from the Ra Cailum." Chan thrust the printout in front of Amuro, who was holding a bulky receiver.

"Char's second wave is coming?"

"Came through on the laser link just now."

"They're telling me to return to the Londo Bell with the Gundam."

Amuro removed the receiver.

"All right, checks are complete. Green across the board!"

"You're going out there? That's insane!" Chan's eyes widened in disbelief at Amuro's resolve.

"It's fully operational, and the beam rifle is functional. I'm going!"

"Go where exactly?"

"Where else? The Ra Cailum. There has to be a way!"

Amuro brushed past Chan and opened a comm channel.

"October, I need the Gundam ready for launch."

On the monitor, October Saran's face registered shock.

"Have you lost your mind?"

"Bill it to the Londo Bell or the Earth Federation Forces, I don't care. Just make it happen."

"You can't be serious!"

Amuro cut off October's angry voice.

"Sorry. But I need a mass driver rail and some kind of booster."

"F-Fine, but give me twenty or thirty minutes!"

"We'll get ready on our end."

"I'm coming with you."

"Huh?"

"The Ra Cailum crew isn't familiar with the Nu's systems. You need me."

"Understood, Chan."

"There's barely room for one! The acceleration forces alone could kill her!"

On the wall display, October looked flustered.

"We'll manage with the aux seat. It should dampen the worst of it."

"This is madness," October insisted.

"We don't have a choice. Find us that seat and fast."

"This is absolutely ridiculous!"

Amuro deftly manipulated the Nu Gundam's controls, locking a beam rifle and shield into the mobile suit's grip. It wasn't ideal, but it would have to suffice.

"First time arming this thing, though," Amuro muttered.

"Yeah, you're right..." Chan sighed, floating by the block in front of the Nu Gundam as she looked up at its armed form. She knew this haste was just part of how Amuro operated as a pilot.

Amuro exited the cockpit, barking orders to the mechanics to check the electrical systems, and then floated after Chan.

The Rewloola and its two accompanying ships appeared to be heading toward the moon, but behind them, the detached third and fourth ships had turned their bows to face the Ra Cailum.

On their catapult decks, Geara Dogas riding on launch sleds were being pulled out one after another. In the space ahead, over a dozen Geara Dogas were already moving at a leisurely pace.

"Come on, mobile suits are for close combat, not playing decoy. Don't they get that?" Rezin Schnyder, the Geara Doga squad leader on the fourth ship, grumbled over the open comm.

"Get in launch position, Rezin!" It was the voice of the deck conductor standing in the launch control room protruding from the front of the catapult deck.

"Roger that!"

Rezin's Geara Doga jerked to a halt on the launch sled, locked into position.

"Here we go!"

The Geara Doga's thrusters flared to life, the launch sled's boosters igniting in tandem.

Tick! Tick! Clang!

The deck chief's console lit up green. The catapult fired, the launch sled roaring down the rail. Rezin's Geara Doga, riding the sled, hurtled into open space, a plume of exhaust in its wake.

"Tch! Once I'm on the battlefield, I'll do as I please!" Rezin growled.

Freed from the launch G's, her eyes gleamed with fierce anticipation as she snapped a salute to the ships behind her.

As if chasing after Rezin, more mobile suits launched from the third ship, their thruster flares stitching the void.

"All right, let's do this!" Rezin shouted. She brought her Geara Doga, swooping over the units launched ahead of her. Her wingmen moved into formation and latched onto the launch sled.

For long-range assaults, Shackles were the key - the mobile suits would ride them into the combat zone, then detach. These machines were commonly called "sleds" because of how the mobile suits looked riding them, though few these days knew where the term came from.

Around the same time, the Nu Gundam that had left the Anaheim factory on the outskirts of Von Braun City made repeated jumps of several dozen degrees toward the mineral mining site.

These jumps were part of the calibration process.

In front of Amuro's usual seat, the mechanics had rigged up a makeshift auxiliary seat where Chan now sat in her normal suit, looking almost comically small. It was just a frame of pipes and canvas, the kind of seat used in construction when a proper seat wasn't available. They'd secured it as best they could with some small shock absorbers at four points.

"I can't guarantee its strength," were October's parting words.

The arm rakers for piloting were located in front of the seat's armrests, so they didn't interfere with the controls for the time being, but Amuro couldn't see the console panels.

"You doing okay?" Amuro asked.

"Yeah, as long as I don't move around too much."

The mineral mining site had mass driver rails for launching mineral resources to each colony. Linear catapults, basically.

"There it is."

"Yeah. October really came through for us, didn't he? Even got us some booster rockets for all his griping."

"That's our October, all right."

The booster bed clamped to the mass driver rail had solid-fuel rockets attached to each side. The design looked almost laughably retro.

"You read me? Release the boosters after thirteen seconds. It's all manual release, no automatic cutoffs." October's voice crackled over the comm from the control room overlooking the rails.

"Copy that," Amuro replied.

"Think you can handle it?"

"What do you think I'm here for?"

"Right, right. Ace pilot and all that."

"Flattery will get you nowhere. Strap in. This acceleration is going to hit like an old Earth rocket launch."

"How bad are we talking?"

"Figure about eight G's."

"Eight?! October, you make sure to send our samples back! And get the rest of the V Gundam's gear to the Londo Bell!"

"Will do. Synchronizing countdown to zero... mark."

"Got it... ready on this end."

Amuro synced his suit chronometer to mission control's base time.

He heard Chan let out a slow, tense breath over the comm.

"Okay, here we go! Countdown is 3, 2, 1, zero!"

With a deep rumble, the booster bed engaged, starting to accelerate down the rail.

"Lieutenant, booster separation is at T-plus 43 seconds. A millisecond too late, and we'll ride this thing clear out of the system," Chan warned.

"I'm on it."

The booster bed picked up speed, hurtling down the rail. Reaching the midpoint, its engines kicked into high gear with a burst of blue-white flame. Roaring forward now, it shot down the rail, tilting up towards the stars, and then it was free, blazing a path into the void.

"Hnnngh!" Chan tensed against the brutal acceleration, her slight frame sinking deep into the aux seat's spartan cushioning. The seat joints creaked alarmingly - if they failed, Chan would slam into Amuro with bone-crushing force.

'Hold together,' Amuro prayed silently.

Through the thick glass, October stared at the long fiery trail left by the boosters, his expression pensive, almost wistful.

"Chief?" A young technician approached hesitantly. "What do you think?"

October glanced over.

"About the lieutenant? I get the sense he's really pushing the limits of what a human can do. You wouldn't happen to know anything about where the idea for the psycho-frame casting process originated, would you? Like, which department it came from?"

"No idea. But... now that you mention it, there were those rumors going around about the Granada facility. Supposedly, Neo Zeon's developing some new mobile suits out there."

"Granada?" October frowned. "All the way on the far side of the Moon?"

"Yeah, but you know how rumors are. Could be nothing. Still... it makes you wonder if there's a connection."

"Hmm." In truth, October knew little about the kind of high-level rumors that circulated at the upper echelons of Anaheim.

"Might be worth looking into," he mused. "Just to be safe..."

He glanced out the observation port again, but the fiery trail of the Nu Gundam had already faded against the stars.

### 3

Standard protocol dictated that if mobile suits were confirmed to have launched from the Rewloola's fleet, they would be intercepted by the fleet's gunfire.

But in an age where technology that polluted space had advanced so far, tracking and destroying mobile suits in motion was a daunting challenge.

"Enemy mobile suit squadron confirmed! Prepare to intercept!"

By the time the order echoed through the comms, deploying their own mobile suits to engage the enemy in close combat was the only viable option left.

The Jegan squadron launching from the Ra Cailum's fleet without the use of launch sleds was a clear sign that the fleet had entered the mobile suits' combat zone. Despite the urgency of the situation, Kayra Su of the Ra Cailum took a moment to lean out of her cockpit. She positioned her mobile suit on the catapult deck and glanced at the Re-GZ undergoing maintenance nearby.

"Astonaige, no chance of deploying the Re-GZ?"

"Don't be ridiculous! That thing's not gonna be combat-ready anytime soon!" came the exasperated reply.

"Copy that!"

Kayra couldn't help but grin at the sight of the usually unflappable Astonaige crew getting so worked up. Somehow, his agitation helped her find her own sense of calm as she settled into Jegan's cockpit.

Beyond the launch bay, the trails of the preceding Jegans could already be seen, fading one by one into the starry expanse.

"Don't get cocky! The Londo Bell fleet won't go down that easily!"

With a final, defiant gesture, she launched her Jegan into the fray, her helmet visor still open.

"Be careful out there!"

"I will, thanks."

With those words to Nanai, Char descended from the airlock of the Rewloola's sub-bridge at the bottom of the ship to the waiting launch.

Nanai Miguel and Kaisers Buyer saw him off.

Once Horst and Char had disappeared, Gyunei was the last to enter the airlock and attempt to close the door.

"Gyunei, I'm counting on you. Protect the Captain at all costs and prove your worth." Nanai's tone shifted to that of the Newtype Labs director.

"Yes, ma'am! Strategy Officer!"

Gyunei closed the airlock door. Then, he boarded the moored launch by passing through a tube from the airlock.

Inside the launch, Horst gestured towards the cabin.

"Right this way, sir."

But Char waved off the invitation, instead taking a seat in the center row on the left. The launch was a small craft, with seating for no more than fifteen and a rear container housing a single mobile suit.

Surprisingly, the launch's exterior bore the markings of a civilian company - not a disguise, but a legitimate registration with a private transport firm.

"Mobile suits will be engaging the enemy in a matter of minutes," the captain reported, his voice sounding almost casual.

"Understood. We're ready to go here, too."

Horst, seeming to have finally found a measure of ease, called out to Gyunei with a note of amusement in his voice.

"Well now, Gyunei, that look rather suits you!"

"Just following orders, sir..."

"Adapting to new attire is part of your training," Horst said, his tone turning serious.

"It builds character and flexibility."

Gyunei was wearing a jersey jacket with leather pads on the shoulders and elbows, something he wouldn't normally wear, along with knickerbockers. Combined with the leather flight cap from the Hizack's cockpit in the container, he looked the part of a vintage aviation enthusiast. The visibility of his socks under the knickerbockers, however, left Gyunei feeling somewhat exposed and uncomfortable.

"Launch, prepare for release!"

"Ready! Acknowledged!"

At the sound of the cockpit's call, Gyunei took his seat in the very back. He wasn't particularly enthusiastic about this mission.

Nanai believed that working in close proximity to Char would lead to proper recognition of Gyunei's abilities, but he knew that was merely a pretext.

'With my enhancements, I should make for a better guard than any normal human, right, Ms. Nanai?' he thought to himself as the launch shuddered, disengaging from the Rewloola's restraints.

In a matter of moments, they were drifting free, the launch setting course for the right ridge of the moon.

## 4

"This operation is just for show! Do what you need to, and don't get yourself hurt!"

Rezin Schnyder heard her wingman's voice, but she didn't think it was out of line. This time, their job was simple: dazzle the enemy and keep them from noticing Char's launch heading for Side 1.

But Rezin had other ideas.

"Not a chance! This is our shot to cut down their numbers!"

Rezin's Geara Doga detached from the launch sled, three more falling in behind her.

Minutes later, Rezin's squadron intercepted a group of Jegans launched from the Ra Cailum's fleet. Rezin drew them in, dodging beam rifle fire as she unleashed a barrage from her shield missiles and hip-mounted launchers, taking out two Jegans.

All without breaking formation.

"I'm aiming for the fleet, you know!"

That childlike determination was probably what kept her from getting shot down. Rezin's team charged headlong through the combat zone.

"Here they come!"

Rezin's display lit up, tracing the line of fire between her and the Ra Cailum's fleet.

"Perfect!"

"A mobile suit unit has broken through our defenses!"

On the heels of Bright's warning, Meran barked, "Intercept them! Lay down suppressing fire!"

By the time the Ra Cailum's barrage erupted, missiles were already slamming into its bow, erupting in gouts of flame.

"Ungh!"

The cramped combat bridge shuddered like a coffin.

"Keep it up! Stay on me!"

Rezin rocketed towards the Ra Cailum, heedless of the wall of anti-air fire.

"Ah!"

Amuro remembered detaching the boosters amidst the crushing G-forces. But after that, nothing. He must have blacked out. Chan's seat loomed over him in his field of vision. She was still out cold. Amuro brought up the nav display and confirmed his position.

"The moon, Earth, Arcturus, Capella, Vega, the sun... So we're here?"

He homed in on the Ra Cailum's fleet, correcting for the discrepancy with his own location. Zooming in on the front monitor, he should have had a perfect telephoto view.

"No doubt about it, but...?"

Rings of light, but even with image correction, the blurred feed from the mech's vibration resolved into nothing but haze.

"Chan!"

Amuro pressed his helmet to hers, whispering.

"You okay?"

"What...? Oh!"

Chan's shoulders trembled.

"Where are we?"

"I've got eyes on the fleet."

"Right... I'll get behind you."

"Thanks. No sudden moves, okay? Secure your seat on the shock absorbers."

"Got it..."



Chan unclipped her harness and got to work, detaching the aux seat.

"Can we make it in time?"

"It's going to be close. Let's just hope they're still in one piece when we get there..."

Chan wrestled the makeshift seat into place behind Amuro, locking it down on the shock absorbers.

"Brace for acceleration."

"R-Right!"

After making sure Chan was seated in the makeshift seat, Amuro ignited the Nu's main engines.

For the first time, the Nu Gundam's thrusters roared to life in the void.

Around that same time, not far from the combat zone, the shuttle Tian Lu drifted with Earth at its back, its hull being patched up by two figures in normal suits.

"What's that flash?"

One of them straightened up, pointing in one direction. The maintenance man who had been crouching also turned his body to face that way.

"Is that a battle?"

The officer hurried towards the cockpit. As he passed the cabin window, he caught a glimpse of Quess's face pressed against the glass.

"Captain! Hard evade, now! Dead ahead, that light!"

"Evade? With what? The damn apogee motor is toast! You want to evade, then fix the damn thing!"

"This is serious!"

Still shouting, the officer whirled to head back, only to see the maintenance guy flailing as he tumbled away into space.

"What's happening?"

"Mobile suit!"

The maintenance guy's scream was cut short as a Geara Doga whipped around from behind the shuttle.

"Lord help us, there's no mercy out here!"

The officer's panicked cry was understandable.

The distant explosions lacked punch; the beams zipping past looked more like fireworks than a battle on the front lines. The dazzling lights dulled the senses.

But when the mobile suit juke, the Tian Lu had drifted close enough to catch the edge of the blast. One stray shot, that's all it would take. But the view couldn't have been more different from the Ra Cailum's, staring down the barrel of the oncoming firestorm.

Another hit.

"The hell are the Jegans doing out there?"

Bright's shout rang out, raw and ragged. Meran was barking orders, his voice cracking with the strain.

"Tighten up that barrage!"

"Huh?"

On the chaotic display, Bright spotted Kayra's Jegan slicing in to engage the enemy mobile suit.

"Kayra, break off! You're in the line of friendly fire!"

"Lieutenant's not here to bail us out this time. I'm all you've got!"

Kayra's voice in the mad crackle of overlapping comms. Bright cursed himself. He should have ordered Amuro back to the fleet.

"Looks like they're in trouble. But can we close the gap in time?"

Amuro couldn't tear his eyes from the deadly crisscross of beams, waiting for the magnified image to resolve into something recognizable.

The Nu Gundam was racing towards the combat zone at top speed.

"Where are we headed?"

"The corridor right in front of the Ra Cailum."

Silence stretched out.

"Picking up some enemy drive flares..."

In a battle with clear lines drawn, the defenders versus the attackers, once you learned to read the enemy's exhaust patterns, it was easy to tell friend from foe.

"Let's try something..."

Amuro squeezed off a single max-power blast from the beam rifle.

"Think it'll reach?"

The searing lance speared the combat zone, then dissipated.

But to the enemy's sharpest eyes, that high-output beam's lingering afterimage should plant the seed of doubt. Reinforcements, inbound from an unexpected vector.

"I guess that's too much to ask for..."

The distance was still too great.

"Incoming!"

Kayra swore. Two Geara Dogas, closing fast in tight formation. A shiver ran up her spine. Mobile suit tactics 101: attack in pairs. To pull that off right under the nose of an allied ship, these enemies were no ordinary pilots.

Nowhere to run. Her own vessel at her back, spitting flak in all directions.

No room to maneuver. Kayra's Jegan dodged a shot from Rezin's wingman, only to plunge straight into the Ra Cailum's curtain of friendly fire.

"Gaah!"

Flinching from the near miss, Kayra realized she was in an impossible spot. A killing field with no way to fight back.

"Heh heh... Let's see them shoot each other to pieces!"

Rezin cackled at the Jegan's clumsy dodge, backing away to line up one last head-on barrage.

But then...

"Hmm...?"

Vwhoosh!

A diffuse beam, arcing in from an entirely different vector.

"Reinforcements? Allies?"

Turning around, Rezin magnified her rear monitor. There, civilian shuttle markings flared against the darkness.

"What's a civvie ship doing out here?"

Another beam, more intense than the first, lanced past the shuttle.

Rezin's Geara Doga jinked aside just in time.

"Damn it! Enemy reinforcements?"

She kicked her thrusters, angling for a view of the Ra Cailum off her port side.

"Not from the fleet, so then where--?"

Rezin knew she should save the Geara Doga's dwindling beam rifle charge, but another diffuse blast was already incoming.

"Tch!"

She dodged, teeth clenched.

The blips of her squadron were already peeling away from the Ra Cailum's airspace. Rezin was alone on the field.

"Screw this!"

She wrenched into a hard reverse burn.

"What's a civvie shuttle doing in the middle of a combat zone? And those beams, coming from somewhere past it!"

Rezin maxed out her long-range optics, trying to trace the incoming fire to its source.

"What the... A white mobile suit?"

There, dwarfed by the distant bulk of the shuttle. The unmistakable silhouette.

The image was a jittering mess, but the range was close enough to pick out details.

"Was that a mega particle cannon?"

Inside the Tian Lu's cabin, passengers who hadn't even been given normal suits to wear were huddled between the floor and the seats. But amidst them, Hathaway and Quess were staring at Adenauer, who was pounding on the door leading to the cockpit.

"Fire a civilian distress flare, Captain!"

Adenauer's desperation had nothing to do with duty. Just a man scared witless, determined to save his own skin.

Quess and Hathaway couldn't muster any sympathy.

"That's it! Distress flares!"

The captain fumbled for the launch controls, cursing, "This is all your fault, you know!" as he slapped the firing stud.

The shuttle spat a stream of flares, then shuddered as a stray beam slammed into its wing. The whole ship bucked and heaved.

"Damn it! Five seconds early, but we're pulling out!"

Rezin punched out three blips on her squad channel - the signal to withdraw - then flung her Geara Doga into a tight retrograde arc. That decisive instinct was what made her an ace.

"That beam from past the shuttle... And that mobile suit..."

Rezin's eyes fixed on her cockpit monitors even as she barked retreat orders to her squad.

'That looked an awful lot like a Gundam...'

Tracking the fading flares of Rezin's team with his main camera, Amuro brought the Nu Gundam swooping in above the shuttle's dorsal hull.

"How'd you get us here so fast?"

"Those pilots bugged out quick. Maybe a little too quick..."

Amuro was still talking to Chan as he magnified the shuttle on his main display.

"Any idea what ship that is?"

"Not a clue..."

Two normal-suited figures, flailing helplessly at the end of a tether like fish on a line.

In the shuttle's passenger compartment, Quess pressed her face to the viewport, peering up at the impossible white shape looming above them.

"It's a... a white mobile suit!"

"What?"

Hathaway scrambled across Quess's lap to get a better look.

"Looks kind of like a Gundam, but different. Definitely a new model."

"How do you know so much about this stuff?"

Quess couldn't take her eyes off Hathaway as she replied. He was absolutely riveted by the spectacle unfolding beyond the canopy.

"..."

Slowly, hesitantly, she reached out to brush her fingertips against his back.

"I've never seen that one before. It's not in any of the reference books..."

Hathaway was too enraptured to even notice her touch.

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MOBILE SUIT  
**G**UNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 2

LONDENION

CHAPTER-P

# 1

As the shuttle Tian Lu docked with the lower deck of the Ra Cailum, passengers began to disembark, their voices filled with a mix of excitement and trepidation. Amuro, focused on his task, finally secured the Nu Gundam next to the bridge, its imposing presence a testament to his skill as a pilot.

Chief Hanna, one of the ship's reliable mechanics, emerged from the mobile suit deck, her eyes widening as she took in the sight of the Nu Gundam.

"So, this is the Nu Gundam!" she exclaimed, her voice filled with awe.

Amuro, not one for small talk, simply nodded.

"Get the details from Chan."

"Yes, sir! Great work!"

"You too, Hanna!"

As Chan floated out to join Hanna, the two began circling the Gundam, their movements precise and purposeful as they prepared the ropes to tow the mobile suit to the catapult deck.

Bright, his face a mask of displeasure, approached Amuro with purpose.

"Cutting it a bit close there, don't you think?"

Amuro sighed, the weight of his responsibilities evident in his posture.

"Couldn't do a damn thing. Sorry... What's on your mind?"

"We've got some troublesome passengers. Here's the manifest."

"Hm?"

Amuro took the passenger list, his eyes scanning the names.

"Adenauer Paraya? The Vice Chief of Staff of the Space Forces?"

"Odd for a big shot like him to be on the run," Bright mused, his brow furrowed in thought.

"You're telling me..." Amuro, his fatigue palpable, shook his head. "Look, I'm spent. Mind if I catch some Z's?"

"Permission granted."

As Amuro handed back the list, a name caught his eye.

"Hathaway Noa? Bright, isn't that your son?" "Ah...?"

"Huh?"

"He's on board."

Bright, taken aback, grabbed the manifest.

"That can't be right..." he muttered, double-checking.

"No sign of Mirai and Cheimin, though."

"The passengers are being guided to the officers' mess," Claire Sloan helpfully informed Bright.

"Right!" Bright squared his shoulders, determination setting in.

Amuro patted his friend's shoulder, a gesture of support. "Go on."

"Meran! I'm heading down."

"Go ahead!"

As Bright descended the lift, Amuro watched him go, a wry smile on his face. Seeing the strength of a father's love in Bright's actions, he felt a twinge of envy, followed by a rueful chuckle.

"I don't even want kids..."

"Just relax. Grab on and go with the flow," an uncharacteristically casual voice echoed in the corridor as Bright descended the lift grip. The crew was guiding the shuttle passengers to the mess hall.

"Hathaway!" Bright's voice cut sharply through the muted sounds of the corridor. He spotted his son among the drifting passengers quicker than he'd anticipated. At his call, Hathaway, just about to slip into the mess hall, halted and tried to dodge behind a young woman.

Bright's eyes flickered with recognition—could it be Cheimin? But her stern expression suggested otherwise. His gaze returned to Hathaway.

"Dad?!" Hathaway exclaimed, his body awkwardly twisting in the weightless environment, bouncing off the ceiling before tumbling into Bright's waiting arms.

"Hey! Why are you here?"

"Dad! I had no clue you were the captain of this ship!"

"Where are your mom and Cheimin?"

"Huh? Oh, they only let one of us on the shuttle."

"I'm sorry to interrupt the heartfelt reunion, but you're the captain, correct...?"

"Huh?"

Bright steadied Hathaway and turned toward the brusque voice. It was Adenauer Paraya, with the stern-faced girl just behind him.

"Oh, he's the one who got me on the shuttle."

"Oh... You must be the Vice Minister."

"That's correct. You'll need to redirect this ship to Londenion. I'm on a special mission," Paraya extended a folder. "Here are the documents."

Bright took the folder, his sense of duty warring with his desire to speak with his son. Reviewing the orders, he made a decision.

"Hathaway, head to the mess hall. We'll have a proper chat later, and you can fill me in on the details."

"S-sure!"

Hathaway replied and floated towards where the stern-faced girl was.

"He's my dad."

Hathaway's words stirred Bright, but he had the responsibilities of a top space force official to attend to.

"Understood, sir. Chief, let's head to the bridge."

"Mm! Quess, wait in the mess!"

As Adenauer called out to the girl behind him, Bright realized she was his daughter. By then, however, the girl beside Hathaway had turned her back.

## 2

Amuro's eyelids twitched and spasmed as he lay cocooned in his zero-gravity sleeping bag, lost in the throes of a vivid dream. In his mind's eye, he saw his own silhouette swaying in a torrent of flashing lights, juxtaposed against the image of a swan beyond the blinding illumination.

"I know it's you, Lalah!" Amuro's voice rang out with intense conviction, causing the swan to flinch, its movement deliberate and filled with intent. As if responding to his call, the swan's form began to shift and change, its feathers rustling like the pages of a book until it transformed into the ethereal image of Lalah Sune.

"You're still there, aren't you? Don't think you can keep both Char and me for yourself!"

Amuro's words carried a sharp edge, cutting through the spectral quiet.

Lalah turned away sharply, her form dissolving into a somber shadow against the dreamscape luminescence.

"It would be torture if one's consciousness lasted forever. But I'd still like to watch over both of you."

"That's selfish!"

"I was but a wisp between you two in my lifetime!"

Lalah's voice, now a mournful echo, seemed to float between them, laden with a tragic truth.

"Then, let Char be the one to refute it!"

"But he's pure..."

Lalah's words, her plea-like cry, grated on Amuro's ears, igniting a fierce response.

"Pure?!"

He jolted awake with a start, his own shouting voice still ringing in his ears.

"Ah?"

The pale green light of the night lamp cast faint shadows across the room, outlining the shapes of familiar objects. Amuro sighed heavily, rubbing his face with his hands.

"Damn it... I've started having the same dream again, like a recurring nightmare..."

Unzipping his sleeping bag, Amuro floated his half-naked body towards the shower room, his mind still reeling from the vivid dream. The zero-gravity shower opened the suction port on the floor and released a cascade of water from the showerhead above, engulfing Amuro in a torrent of cleansing droplets.

"Damn it all!" He scrubbed his head vigorously as if trying to wash away the lingering memories.

The truth was, the memory of Lalah wasn't painful in itself. It was the unsettling feeling that their connection, their bond, might have been nothing more than an illusion, a trick of the mind.



She had been his enemy, a pilot of Zeon's mobile armor, encountered on the battlefield when he first stepped into the Gundam prototype. Yet, even then, she had spoken to him, reaching out across the distance that separated them. Her first words had been seared into his memory:

"Why did you come so late?! If you had come earlier, I wouldn't have had to fall in love with Char!"

It wasn't his imagination. When he realized the truth of their connection, he had believed that their minds had become one, their wills intertwined. But reality had a cruel way of ignoring such sensory phenomena, and the tragic outcome had left him reeling.

So, all Amuro could do was try to convince himself, "That's all it was, nothing more!"

He had tried to forget, to move on. But now, with Char's reappearance, the memories of Lalah were running rampant, refusing to be ignored.

"Lieutenant!" A female voice crackled through the speaker on the wall monitor, pulling him back to the present.

"What is it?!" Amuro responded, his voice unintentionally harsh.

"Ah, um... It's Chan, sir. If it's alright with you, could you come down to the mobile suit deck? There's something we need to discuss."

"Huh? Oh, yeah, sure."

The sound of Chan's voice, a tether to reality, was both an intrusion on Amuro's memories and a welcome distraction. She was supposed to be a positive presence in his life, a reminder of the here and now.

"I'll... I'll be right there!"

"O-okay!"

Chan stepped away from the intercom outside Amuro's room and floated across the corridor, stopping herself by attaching the magnetic soles of her shoes to the opposite wall. She let out a heavy sigh, her mind racing.

"I wonder what's wrong? He sounded so... intense, so cold..."

She hadn't had a moment to breathe while adjusting the Nu Gundam, and now, with Astonaige as the chief and the crew wanting Amuro's input, they had reached a natural stopping point.

As Chan contemplated the tasks that lay ahead, a wave of drowsiness washed over her, and she found herself nodding off, her body curling into a ball as she floated in the middle of the narrow corridor.

The soft hiss of the door opening stirred Chan from her slumber, and she opened her eyes to find Amuro standing before her, a look of concern etched on his face.

"Chan..."

"Huh? No! I'm so sorry for falling asleep like that, I didn't mean to..."

Amuro gently pushed Chan's knees down, guiding her feet back to the floor and helping her regain her balance.

"No, it's my fault for keeping you waiting."

### 3

On the display, the Geara Doga danced gracefully through a barrage of beams, retaliating with its own deadly assault. The blinding light filled the screen, followed by a thunderous explosion that reverberated through the cockpit.

"I'm hit!" Quess groaned, slamming her fist against the Jegan's arm raker in frustration, her body sinking into the pilot's seat.

"Tough luck," Astonaige remarked, deft fingers flicking a switch on the console to replace the image on the Jegan's display.

"They're too big! The controls aren't right for my hands!" Quess glared daggers at the offending control system, her annoyance palpable.

The arm raker, a spherical apparatus mounted in front of the armrest, served as the mobile suit's control stick. Its upper surface was dotted with finger holes, each one housing an array of buttons and switches.

Manipulating the entire unit along various axes granted the pilot intricate control over the mobile suit's upper body and manipulators, far surpassing the precision of a simple control bar. Leg movement could also be directed through the arm raker, while foot pedals regulated power output.

"They'd be right if you wore a normal suit," Astonaige suggested, his tone matter-of-fact.

"But...!"

Quess shot to her feet, frustration radiating from her petite frame.

"My turn! Let me give it a shot!"

Hathaway's eager face popped through the cockpit hatch. Quess, seizing the opportunity, floated up from the seat and drifted onto the crane platform, trading places with the enthusiastic boy.

"But Captain, it's amazing. You've already come up with a simulation using data from the last battle," Quess remarked to Bright and Adenauer, who were waiting in front of the cockpit.

"It's a military secret, so don't go telling others about it," Adenauer, acutely aware of the curious gazes around them, reached out to give Quess a casual pat on the shoulder. She deftly avoided the gesture, using the handrail to pivot her body away from his touch.

"I think she's got good instincts," Bright praised, his words reaching Quess's ears and eliciting a small smile.

Adenauer's comment, however, struck a different chord.

"I had no idea she had any interest in this."

Quess's smile evaporated, replaced by a sudden surge of anger. "I can't stand it! That kind of parent! How could he possibly understand if he won't even try to live with me?!" The words begged to be screamed, but she swallowed them back, letting her body drift aimlessly. If she let loose, her father would undoubtedly dismiss her outburst as another one of her irrational fits. So, she bottled up her frustration and allowed herself to float away.

Up ahead, mechanics bustled about, tending to the Re-GZ and other tasks. Amuro, clad in a work jumpsuit, called out to her as he drifted past. "Quess Paraya! Don't go that way unless you want to be drenched in oil!"

"Huh? Oh!" Quess, snapping out of her thoughts, realized she was about to enter a restricted area.

"G-Got it!" But to change course, she needed something to latch onto.

"Chan!" Amuro's voice rang out.

"Yes, Amuro?" The mechanic responded promptly.

"Grab that girl!"

On Amuro's command, a crane descended swiftly, stopping mere inches from Quess.

"Redirect yourself here!" Chan instructed from the crane's controls.

Quess, feeling an inexplicable aversion to the woman's stern demeanor, ignored her and grabbed the crane's arm, using it to rotate her body ninety degrees. She floated towards the catwalk deck.

Amuro ascended from below, passing Quess on his way up.

"...?!" Quess flashed him a faint smile. "Amuro Ray?"

"That's me," he confirmed with a nod.

"I see..." By the time the words left her lips, Amuro had already grasped the handrail of Chan's crane.

"So that's the famous Newtype..." Quess mused, watching him go.

"You'll get in the way. Come back," Adenauer called out to Quess as he and Bright drifted by.

"You go ahead!" Quess snapped, her patience wearing thin.

"He just means well, right?" Hathaway's gentle admonishment floated up from below.

"No, it's nothing like that! He's just a parent who only acts nice in front of others!" Quess's anger flared once more.

"But you know, he does care about you, Quess."

"Of course he does. But once we reach Londenion, who knows? He'll just find another woman. He's a lecher, plain and simple."

Hathaway, sensing Quess's growing agitation, quickly changed the subject.

"Hey, guess what? I shot down two enemies!"

"Huh?"

"In the simulator."

"Cool! That's how many I got!"

"You too?"

Quess took Hathaway's hand, and together they drifted into the catwalk deck along the mobile suit hangar's wall.

"Hey, that was Amuro, wasn't it?" Quess asked, glancing back at the receding figure.

"Yeah, did you talk to him?" Hathaway watched as Amuro and Chan floated away on the crane, disappearing into the hangar's depths.

"Mhmm! But you know, I didn't sense anything special about him."

"What do you mean? Like, Newtype-wise?"

"Exactly. He's not your average guy, but at best, he's probably just a language."

"Who's said that?"

"A friend from India."

"Huh. But get this—the first time he ever sat in a mobile suit, he piloted the Gundam like a pro and took out a Zeon Zaku!"

"Seriously?"

"Just by sitting in the cockpit, he totally understood the Gundam circuits and everything."

"What...?" Quess feigned surprise, her exaggerated reaction a mask to hide her own secret.

If Hathaway's description was the measure of a Newtype, then Quess had been experiencing such abilities her entire life. But something about the term "Newtype" felt significant, so she held her tongue.

"What is it?" Hathaway prodded, curiosity shining in his eyes.

"Hmm. So that's what they call a Newtype."

"That's right. As humans adapt to living in space—the zero-G, the lack of up and down—we start to develop new abilities. And when those abilities evolve even further, to the point of being almost psychic? That's a Newtype."

"Huh. That's a bit different from what Christina told me back in India..."

The more Hathaway emphasized the specialness of Newtypes, the more Quess realized that her own innate experiences aligned with those very traits. She'd always been acutely attuned to her parents' emotional states, even predicting the outcome of their marriage months in advance. It was a source of constant frustration, her childish attempts to force them to get along.

But Quess had assumed everyone shared such experiences.

The same held true for her immediate understanding of the mobile suit's inner workings. Just like Amuro, she could intuitively grasp the Jegan's structure, the only missing piece being its operation. But Quess had no doubt that with a little basic instruction, she could pilot it with ease.

Such things had always seemed like common sense to her. Now, faced with the realization that her experiences were unique, Quess found herself reluctant to share her own story.

"Christina told me that Newtypes are people who can flawlessly understand the existence of things and people... That they can sense those existences, no matter the distance between them. They can grasp the very essence of being."

"That makes sense! Back when humans only lived on Earth, they weren't using even half of their cerebral cortex, right? But when they went into space, people started using the other half, so it's only natural that abilities like telepathy and precognition would increase. Otherwise, with the vast distances between Earth and the colonies, the very concept of family might start to break down..."

Quess found herself captivated by Hathaway's passionate explanation.

"Does your family understand each other like that?" she asked, peering intently into his face.

Hathaway laughed and leaned back as if dazzled by her gaze.

"Well, my old man's always on my case, but yeah, I guess we do."

"Must be nice. My family was all together on Earth, but now..."

Quess trailed off, a bitter edge to her voice. Suddenly tired of Hathaway's carefree expression, she kicked off from the floor and propelled herself towards the airlock, leaving him behind.

## 4

The sleek launch carrying Char and his entourage glided through the vast expanse of Side 1's airspace, its destination the open-type colony of Londenon. As the vessel approached the port's guiding lights, the co-pilot flashed a triumphant grin, his pearly whites gleaming in the artificial light.

"The codes provided by the Federal government worked like a charm," he crowed. "We'll be able to dock without any issues."

The captain shook his head, a wry smile playing on his lips. "All thanks to the company we set up five years ago."

"The port management is also run by public servants. They're pretty casual with their information."

Char, dressed in a crisp white shirt, chimed in.

"No, Captain. As our skipper says, it's thanks to our groundwork behind the scenes."

"I'm aware, Horst. I'm consistently impressed by both your and Kaizas' skills."

With a sigh of relief, Char retreated to the cabin, his mind already on the next phase of their plan.

"Looks like customs and immigration won't be a problem either," Horst remarked, satisfaction coloring his tone.

"And our accommodations?" Char inquired, his mood noticeably lighter. "Did they arrange a suitable place for us?"

"Indeed. Perhaps we should have brought Nanai along."

Horst clapped his hands, amused by Char's relaxed demeanor.

"Is that how it appears?"

"No, no, that's not what I meant..."

Once they successfully navigated this hurdle, transporting the launch from the port to the factory block would be simple. The lack of inspections was a welcome relief, a testament to the careful planning and misdirection that had gone into this operation. But even with their clever disguise, avoiding a thorough examination of the containers' contents was always preferable.

But not everyone on board shared in the lighthearted mood. In the rear of the cabin, Gyunei Gas sat in brooding silence, his jaw clenched tight and his eyes smoldering with barely contained rage.

"I can't stand their incessant chatter," he muttered under his breath. The relationship between Char and Nanai was a bitter pill he couldn't seem to swallow, no matter how hard he tried. Yet, given his current position, he found himself at their mercy, powerless to change the situation that grated on his nerves like nails on a chalkboard.

Meanwhile, the Ra Cailum's fleet had managed to keep pace with Char's launch, reaching the airspace near Londenion without delay.

Quess, driven by the irresistible urge to see Amuro once more, opened the airlock of the mobile suit deck.

"There he is!" Her gaze locked onto Amuro's figure, drifting towards the Re-GZ.

Hathaway's explanation of Amuro's abilities had left her unsatisfied, a gnawing hunger in the pit of her stomach. She wanted—no, needed—to meet him in person, to see if she could sense something directly from him, to bask in his presence. There was also a premonition that this might be her last chance, that she may never lay eyes on him again, a thought that filled her with a desperate sense of urgency.

Sliding along the catwalk's handrail with catlike grace, Quess maneuvered herself in Amuro's direction.

"Amuro!" A voice called out from below.

As Quess peered down into the mobile suit deck, she spotted Chan ascending towards her.

"It's that woman again. Calling out to him with such a syrupy voice!"

Chan's body rotated vertically as she rose, her eyes meeting Quess's at the same height, just a few meters apart.

"You?! Civilians aren't allowed in this area," Chan admonished, her tone stern.

"But I've been here before!" Quess retorted sharply, irked by Chan's condescending tone.

"Just because you're the Vice Minister's daughter doesn't mean—?!"

Mid-sentence, Chan's eyes widened in surprise, her words dying on her lips. She grabbed onto the Jegan's knee behind her, halting her ascent, as Quess climbed over the handrail, approaching her position with a predatory glint in her eye.

"What about you? Why are you here?" Quess demanded.

"Huh...?"

For a moment, the question made no sense to Chan.

"I'm a mechanic on this ship," she explained, her voice even.

"That's not what I'm asking. I want to know about your relationship with Amuro!"

"Relationship? He's a senior officer who I respect, nothing more."

"First name basis, huh? That's no way to talk to a superior! Your response is strange! I'm asking about the deeper stuff—like, what's he like as a man, or if there's something more between you two!"



Quess's words poured out in a torrent. Chan found herself trapped under the Jegan's manipulator, Quess's intense gaze pinning her in place.

"Hey, what exactly are you implying by asking me such things?!"

"Are you really that dense? This is why I hate adults! Are you trying to get in my way?!"

"Get in your way?"

Chan was genuinely struggling to follow Quess's logic.

"I studied in India. About how humanity can become Newtypes and feel for each other. That's why I was interested in Amuro, but you're interfering with my attempts to get close to him!"

"What does that have to do with your interest in Amuro--?"

"You're getting in my way!"

Isn't it rude to make such assumptions when we've just met, Miss Paraya?"

"How dare you! You're the one being rude!"

Quess's eyes trembled, and it looked as if tears were welling up.

"...?!"

Chan head spun, trying to make sense of the situation.

"What is wrong with this girl...?"

Before Chan's thoughts could progress any further, Quess's tear-filled eyes flashed with anger.

"You should leave this ship!" she declared, her voice trembling.

"That's... not possible, you know?"

Chan found it strange how the tears that had accumulated in Quess's eyes scattered in an instant.

"Everyone outside of India is trying to get in my way!"

Quess swung her arm, wiping away her tears, causing her body to tilt unsteadily in the air.

"Stop that!"

As those words were spoken, Hathaway's body drifted over, catching Quess in his arms.

"Quess... You were told that civilians aren't allowed in here, right?"

"Oh, shut up!"

Quess wrenched herself free from Hathaway's grasp, the momentum sending her body spiraling downward.

Placing his hand on the Jegan's manipulator, Hathaway pushed his body downward.

"I'm sorry, Chan," he apologized.

"It's... it's okay..."

As Chan watched Hathaway chase after Quess, she let out a sigh.

"I see..."

Chan was not unfamiliar with the rumors surrounding the Adenauer family. So, once Quess calmed down, her outburst wouldn't be entirely incomprehensible.

"But... to possess such an intense longing to sense Newtypes... It must be mentally draining..."



Not long ago, Chane herself had been in a similar place, an age where emotions ran rampant, where controlling the tempest within seemed an impossible feat. She saw a reflection of her past self in Quess.

## 5

Through the windows of the Ra Cailum's bridge, the approaching port of Londenion came into view.

"About Char..." Amuro began, a mischievous glint in his eye. "Do you think he'll go through with his plan to freeze the Earth?"

He already knew Bright's thoughts on the matter, but he couldn't resist stirring the pot a little. As he pondered the difference between a man with children and a bachelor, Bright's response came as no surprise.

"Hm... In order to send Earth into a total Ice Age, he has to crash another asteroid into the planet, which is impossible. The Federation manages all the rocks within lunar orbit... So, if they can just get the Federation to recognize Sweetwater as Neo Zeon territory..."

"Is that why Adenauer Paraya came up to space? To negotiate?"

"Yeah, the Federation bigwigs will accept Char's demands as long as they can still live on Earth."

Amuro had to admit that there was a kernel of truth to that line of thinking.

"But Char fought alongside us against the anti-Federation rebels. That's when he saw firsthand how rotten the people left on Earth truly are."

"I know," Bright acknowledged. "Char proved his worth in the fight against the Titans, the anti-Earth Federation faction within the Federation Forces."

"And at the same time, he ended up crossing swords with Haman Karn, a woman consumed by the Zabi family's grudge. Char couldn't stand how the Earth Sphere was drowning in human resentment. He feels it's time to settle everything... To put an end to it all."

"Everything...?"

"Hey, look!" Amuro's voice cut through the tension, his chin gesturing towards the viewpoint.

Guidance lights had begun to extend from Londenion's port. Through the windows near the Ra Cailum's hatches, the lights of the space colony's walls stretched out in orderly rows.

"Quess! Cheer up! You gotta see this view!"

"Leave me alone!"

Quess shot back, clinging to the ceiling as if it were her only anchor.

"You've never seen a colony before, right?" Hathaway pressed, undeterred by her icy demeanor.

His words seemed to have an effect, softening Quess's heart ever so slightly. She patted her face with both hands as if trying to regain her composure before drifting over to Hathaway's side.

"Don't waste your breath arguing with the military. It'll only leave you feeling empty inside."

"Hmph..." Quess snorted, unable to find the words to express her appreciation for his attempt to comfort her. Instead, she turned her gaze towards the window, her eyes widening at the sight before her.

In the depths of the port block, a colossal wall rotated slowly, countless lights arranged in neat patterns spinning along with it, a dizzying display of human achievement.

"...?!"

It was the first time Quess had laid eyes on such an enormous structure.

"This is a colony?!"

A faint sense of realization stirred deep within her heart.

"You know... Seeing something like this, you'd think humans could revolutionize themselves... So why don't they change...?"

Quess lamented.

"I know what you mean. It's like when the Zabi family declared independence at the colony on the far side of the moon."

"Yeah, I know! Side 3's Principality of Zeon launched a war of independence against the Earth Federation, right? The One Year War, the Zeon War..."

"And the one who fought for Zeon back then was the Red Comet, Char, the current leader of Neo Zeon."

"I see... Oh, right! But Zeon lost to the Federation, didn't they?"

"True, but because of that, after returning from the asteroid belt, Char fought alongside Amuro and my dad against the rebels in the Federation Forces."

"In the Gryps War?"

"Mm-hmm. And now he's trying to freeze the Earth."

"I get it. People on Earth are stubborn, but they'll replace their spouses in a heartbeat. But Char's different. He's thinking about changing the entire Earth, all of humanity."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Char is someone who practices philosophy in reality, trying to put it into action. That's why... I see... He's a Newtype. That's it!"

"Well, being the son of Zeon Deikun, he might have talent..."

Quess seemed unaware of those circumstances.

"Who? Who's Deikun?"

"Char's father, Zeon Deikun. He was assassinated by the Zabi family, and they just used the name Zeon for their own benefit."

"I see, I see. So that's why Char joined the Zeon Forces, to get revenge on the Zabi family..."

Quess let go of the window and placed both hands on Hathaway's shoulders to keep from drifting.

"It makes sense that Char wants to do something about the people who are so attached to Earth. Deikun was the first to declare independence for Spacenoids, right?"

Hathaway fell silent at Quess's words.

"What's wrong?"

"You seem to know everything, don't you?"

"Huh? But this is all stuff I've read in newspapers and seen on TV, right?"

"It's impressive how you've pieced everything together, but I'm not sure.

Do you think that gives him the right to plunge Earth into a freeze?"

Hathaway asked, taking a breath.

"Uh... Umm... I don't know about that!"

Quess shook her head vigorously, her long hair tied on both sides, swaying and brushing against Hathaway's face.

A sleek limousine pulled up to the Londo Bell pier in Londenion, its occupants gazing up at the moored Ra Cailum. A slender man with glasses emerged from the passenger seat, his eyes fixed on the imposing vessel before him.

"The Ra Cailum made it just in time for the talks," he murmured, a hint of satisfaction in his voice.

He stood before the lift grip gangway extending from the Ra Cailum, his posture straight and his expression unreadable.

"I'm relieved you got us here in time. Thanks to that, Earth can be saved."

"The shuttle attack was also a message to you, wishing you well in the negotiations. It's thanks to Char's consideration that we were able to arrive on time."

Bright said to Adenauer as he released his handshake.

"Negotiations? With whom? Where?"

"You give orders to the Space Forces from Lhasa. I can't imagine you came out here for sightseeing."

As expected, Adenauer fell silent, but as he lightly lowered his soft cap, he said, "No one must know I'm here, until the Federation government makes an official announcement."

"Yes, sir!"

Adenauer pushed Quess in front of him and used the lift grip on the gangway to drift towards the pier.

"Welcome, sir. I'm Cameron Bloom from the Londenion Audit Bureau."

The bespectacled man's introduction was smooth, almost rehearsed.

"Hm!" Adenauer nodded in acknowledgment, but his body language spoke of a desire to keep his distance. He drifted into the limousine as if to avoid further conversation.

Cameron closed the limousine door and moved to the passenger seat, his gaze lingering on the Ra Cailum's deck.

"Captain Bright Noa, huh? I wonder if he's being a good husband to Mirai."

The murmur that escaped his lips was tinged with a hint of bitterness, a reminder of the embarrassing memory of his previous encounter with Bright.

He had once been engaged to Mirai Yashima, the woman who had chosen Bright over him, a fact that still stung after all these years.