

機動戦士

ガンダム

ダブルオーピー

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

A.D. 2292-2302
GUNDAM MAISTERS
ANOTHER STORY
[VOLUME ONE]

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GUNDAM MAISTERS
Raido Resonance
Chall Acustica
Marlene Vlady

GNV-001
GUNDAM ASTRAY



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MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

[VOLUME ONE]

—A.D.2292—

1ST SEASON

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1st SEASON

Prologue

Beneath the cloak of night, the massive structure, a modern marvel masquerading as ancient architecture, stood solemn and imposing. It was the Union Institute of Human History, reminiscent of a library or museum in its stately facade. Lights still blazed within, rooms awash with a bright glow, even as darkness enveloped the world outside.

"Hey, Grave, burning the midnight oil again?" a voice called out in the hall.

Inside, a room lined with meticulously organized papers and documents, relics of a bygone era, predominantly non-digital, books and photographs made of actual paper. A rare sight in these modern times. Yet, despite the sheer volume, there was no sense of disorder; everything was arranged with precision, reflecting the character of its occupant, the man known as Grave.

Grave moved with an effortless grace, a man fully aware of his surroundings, navigating through the documents with ease.

"Didn't you hear me?" the colleague prodded again.

"Sorry, I heard you," Grave responded, pausing his work and lifting his gaze from the paperwork. His long, black hair, unusual for a man, swayed gently. Centered on his face were glasses with dark lenses, behind which intelligent eyes sparkled.

His face bore an androgynous quality, but the glimpses of his body through the mountains of papers revealed a lean, muscular frame.

"Sorry about that. I'm just a few seconds away from finishing up here. Breaking my concentration now would mean a few minutes to get back into the groove. Apologies for the inconvenience."

Grave's apology was sincere, rare for someone to apologize so earnestly for such a trivial matter.

"You're always like this," the colleague said with a chuckle, forgiving him. He knew Grave meant no harm; it was he who had interrupted Grave's deep focus.

"But man, you still prefer paper to digital?"

"I'm studying history. Naturally, many of my sources are old," Grave explained. "Digitalization might strip away the essence of these documents, which could be problematic."

"That's so you," his colleague remarked. "Was there something you needed?"

"No, just thought if you were wrapping up, we could grab some food. But you seem busy and will probably dive into report writing once you're done sorting. Let's plan for another time."

"Sorry I can't join you. I want to finish this report on the African region today."

Rejected, the man didn't feel upset. Grave was straightforward and honest. His explanations were genuine, not excuses. In a partner, this might be dull, but in a colleague, it was refreshing clarity.

"I know you love your work."

He didn't say 'good luck.' Grave always gave his best. "Take it easy, though."

"Yeah."

"I'll head out then."

"Thanks for your hard work."

As the man departed, Grave returned his focus to the documents. The "Union Institute of Human History," a private facility, was indeed funded by the Union. Their goal is to unify fragmented human histories into a singular narrative, recognizing Earth as one 'human habitat.' This project, mainly led by the relatively history-young United States, sought to share global history, fulfilling a desire for a long and ancient past. This also aligned with the ideology of the Union as a global police force, intervening in conflicts worldwide.

But such hidden agendas were of no concern to Grave. As his colleague noted, Grave loved his job, not just history but everything related to humanity. It had been this way since he could remember, for reasons unknown.

"There might be no reason at all," he mused, preparing to work on his report.

Then, suddenly, it happened.

A current, like electricity, coursed through his mind. No pain, no discomfort, no sense of wrongness. Just a quiet voice flowing through the narrow, straight channel formed by the current.

"Registration number 07362-AW641, human name Grave Violento
Transitioning to new mission. Data download... 90% complete. Connecting..."

Moments later, Grave realized he was not human.

"I am an Innovade. Created to understand humanity for Veda... and now, to gather humans for Celestial Being, a Gundam Meister, to partake in armed interventions..."

With this newfound understanding of his existence, Grave stood to embrace his new mission.

Then he paused, sat back down, and resumed his report. It wouldn't take long; the paperwork was organized. He had a new purpose, but leaving this report unfinished would inconvenience others.

"Just a little longer..."

He spent what he knew would be his most enjoyable hours at the job, then parted with it forever.

The next morning, those who visited Grave's lab found a neatly arranged room and a perfectly completed report.

Nearly two centuries ago, a man dreamt of eternal peace and the evolution of humankind. Aeolia Schenberg, an eminent scientist, believed fervently in the feasibility of his vision. Yet, he knew too the immense timescale required for its realization. His sole apprehension was that the folly of humanity might lead to its extinction before his dream could be achieved.

To secure the fruition of this dream, Aeolia gathered like-minded allies to launch a monumental project. At its heart was an entity designed to perpetuate their will: "Veda," a quantum computing system named for "knowledge." This colossal computer, intertwined with a global network, was not of flesh and blood but was tasked with the eternal mission of bringing their dream to life, working tirelessly towards this singular goal.

Veda, an intelligence embodying "knowledge," was fundamentally different from humans, almost incapable of comprehending the very beings it was meant to protect. To bridge this gap, Aeolia and his colleagues engineered artificial humans based on human genetics to live among humanity and continuously upload to Veda the essence of "what it means to be human."

These beings, possessing abilities echoing the anticipated evolved humans, the "Innovators," were named "Innovades." Many lived unaware of their true nature, while a select few, cognizant of their identity, undertook special missions from Veda. These selected Innovades, surpassing ordinary humans, were closer to the ideal Innovators.

Grave was initially placed in human society as one of these unaware beings, only later to be assigned a new mission. Such beings were rare.

"In my case, to act as a scout for personnel, was it necessary to accumulate human experiences... to understand humanity more deeply?" Grave pondered, analyzing his situation with newfound clarity.

Veda planned to intervene militarily in conflicts using mobile suits called "Gundams" as a critical element of their plan. A private armed organization known as Celestial Being. The mobile suits it possessed, known as Gundams, would have a significant impact on the world. The world would likely unite to confront this new threat, resulting in intense resistance. The pilots of these Gundams, known as "Gundam Meisters," needed to be physically and ideologically compatible with the organization.

Finding suitable candidates for Gundam Meisters was Grave's task. His first step was to select Meisters responsible for development, some of whom might also partake directly in armed interventions.

"A person who can fight against the world for the world..." Grave mused. It was a challenging criterion, but he could envision the type of individual needed.

The list of candidates prepared by Veda was extensive, yet no issue for him. He would meticulously review each one, meet them in person to confirm his assessments, and then advise Veda on the final decision.

"Direct verification and decision-making based on the data." This approach was not fundamentally different from his past work.

The first person Grave was to scout was in prison, a woman facing the death penalty for committing mass murder. Normally, a death row inmate would be excluded from consideration. But Grave saw potential in her, a sentiment echoed by Veda.

Using Veda's vast network capabilities, Grave inserted himself into her prison visitation schedule. It was crucial he meet her in person before making a final decision. Veda had the ability to infiltrate any network easily and manipulate data, so it arranged the meeting.

"The real challenge starts now," Grave thought to himself. The woman had rejected all visitors to date, resolute in accepting her fate, even denying meetings with her lawyer.

"She's even refused religious counsel..." Grave noted. Despite being responsible for numerous deaths and facing her own imminent death, she showed no inclination toward seeking religious solace. This, Grave considered favorable. He wasn't against religion, but her attitude suggested she was a pragmatist. Someone who, when presented with the opportunity to change reality, might respond positively.

"Why is she on death row?" Grave wondered. To him, her impending execution seemed an egregious injustice.

If he successfully recruited her as a Meister, it would save her from death, a fate Grave hoped to avert.

Grave sent her a letter, a crucial key for their meeting. It was succinct, containing a single phrase: "Eradication of Tragedy."

On the day of the visit, Grave waited in the prison visitation room. A reinforced glass barrier separated them, but they could still converse face-to-face. The woman initiated the conversation.

"What does this mean?" she asked, referring to Grave's letter.

"It means exactly what it says. Your life can be dedicated to 'that' if you so choose," Grave replied.

She pondered his words.

"Let's hear it then."

At that moment, Grave was convinced she would join their cause.

He spoke of the organization Celestial Being and their need for her to be a test pilot for a mobile weapon known as "Gundam."

The conversation was recorded, but Veda would ensure no evidence remained. In fact, no record of Grave's visit would exist.

As they talked, Grave realized the woman before him was exceptionally kind, almost to a dangerous extent for the organization. She could potentially betray them out of compassion. A fact only apparent through direct interaction.

The moment Grave realized this, Veda would too. Veda would likely take measures to prevent her betrayal. It was a necessary precaution.

Recruiting her was not only a mission, it was saving her life. Grave sincerely hoped that his action would lead to her happiness.

After explaining, Grave sought her final decision.

"If it stops the tragedy, then yes."

Her words carried a strong resolve. Thus, Marlene Vlady became part of their ranks.

The next candidate Grave met was a man who not only possessed skills as a Meister but also had a flair for mechanics. Veda had been developing the mobile weapon Gundam, infusing it with centuries of advanced technology stored within its database and the latest technological advancements from the world's data networks. The organization, following its founder Aeolia's ethos, always involved human technicians in its projects as he didn't like the idea of everything being solely managed by Veda, even if it meant inefficiency.

This man was renowned for developing workloaders. The AEU's had once tried to recruit him as a developer for their mobile suits, coveting his talent during their development of a new model. But he had declined.

"Building weapons that create conflict isn't really my thing..." he had said with an awkward smile, a sentiment Grave had seen for himself in footage downloaded by Veda from surveillance cameras.

The man, not conventionally handsome, exuded a human charm that was evident to Grave but beyond Veda's understanding.

Grave knew he was about to offer the man a job in "weapon development" he had previously rejected. Under normal circumstances, refusal would be expected. But Grave had an ace up his sleeve.

To entice him, he prepared a photograph for the occasion and secured an appointment at the man's factory.

Utilizing Veda, Grave effortlessly arranged the meeting.

"So, you're the one wanting to meet me," the man said.

"Sorry to take your time, but I assure you it's worth it."

"But seriously, how did you manage to squeeze into my schedule, though?"

Grave hesitated momentarily.

"It's okay, you don't have to hide it. You used some trick, right?"

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, I was initially avoiding this meeting, sensing it might be troublesome. But every 'unavoidable appointment' I set up as an excuse somehow fell through. Business deals were canceled, and a trip got unilaterally called off. Too convenient to be mere coincidence."

"I see."

It seemed Veda had overreached. But it wasn't necessarily a mistake. Typically, no one would suspect interference in such matters, attributing it to fate or dismissing it as chance.

The man's intuition, likely honed by his technical acumen and mechanical sense, had picked up on it.

"Your train of thought isn't off."

"As I thought. But how did you do it?"

"I can't answer that now. Maybe after I've explained everything."

"Okay, let's hear it."

"First, look at this."

Grave showed him the prepared photograph. The man's eyes lit up instantly.

"What is this?!"

His mechanic's intuition kicked in, recognizing and voicing what it was.

"A mobile suit, but not just any. It's from the future, isn't it?"

The photo was of the 0 Gundam, a top-secret asset of the organization.

Grave explained about the Gundam and the organization's plans for armed intervention.

"So, what do you say?"

"Of course, I'm in. Helping stop conflicts, right? I'll do anything, pilot or otherwise. And who would pass up the chance to work on a machine like this!"

His enthusiastic consent brought a lightness to Grave's heart. The man, Ruido Resonance, had a charm that could sway people's hearts. Grave felt a sense of pride in recruiting him.

The girl Grave approached next was a high school student who had impressively secured the runner-up position in a workloader piloting competition. Amidst the intensifying construction of the orbital elevator, her skills were highly regarded, both for operating work loaders at the construction site and potentially piloting mobile suits to defend (or destroy) the elevator.

Despite her prowess, she hadn't been approached with offers. Human nature often judges on the basis of superiority rather than individual talent, leading scouts to flock to the winner, overlooking her achievement. Veda, however, assessed human capabilities differently. It recognized her potential as a Gundam Meister.

Grave agreed with Veda's assessment. Reviewing her files, he learned that she had been forced to compete with an unfamiliar unit due to a last-minute rule change, preventing her from using her usual machine, the Xiaoshou mobile armor developed by the Human Reform League for space operations. This machine had been classified as a weapon, which violated the competition's regulations. This determination had been made shortly before the competition due to active lobbying by her rivals.

Grave approached her after school.

"Y-Yes, can I help you?" she asked, her eyes gleaming with an unidentifiable emotion. Grave, despite his experience living among humans, found himself at a loss, having rarely interacted with young women.

Confused, he decided to address his feelings directly. "Looking at your expression, I sense something unfamiliar stirring within me..."

"I understand. I feel the same!" she exclaimed, identifying the feeling as "love."

Love? Grave had no such self-awareness. He quickly consulted Veda using his neural quantum waves to see if there was another explanation for "love." Finding none that matched his current state, he brushed the thought aside. The priority was the recruitment.

Grave invited her to a nearby café to explain more about the organization.

"Yes! Thank you for inviting me!" she replied, her face alight with a youthful, infatuated smile.

As Grave started explaining the organization's goals at the café, the girl, momentarily lost in a dreamlike state, was brought back to reality. After listening intently, she considered his words and then agreed to join.

At that moment, the fate of the girl, who would come to be known as Chall Acustica, took a significant turn.

File No.1

Gundam Astraea

Celestial Being, a private armed organization, bore an ideal riddled with contradictions: the eradication of conflict through armed force. Destined to battle against the world, they would, in due course, effect significant change. Yet, initially, their existence eluded the world's notice. It would take some more time for them to firmly etch themselves into people's minds.

The year was A.D. 2292, a full fifteen years before Celestial Being would erupt onto the world stage, engulfing it in a massive storm.

In the heart of a colony, near an airlock in a zero-gravity block, stood a young man and a girl, even younger than him. They had just met, knowing each other only through sparse descriptions of names and ages in brief documents. This was their first face-to-face meeting.

"So, this is Chall Acustica..."

The girl standing before the man, Ruido, seemed almost crushed by anxiety, her large eyes glistening with unease.

"No wonder..."

She was just sixteen, a tender age to be part of a secret armed organization. According to the documents Ruido had perused, she had excelled in power loader competitions during her school years. Clearly, the organization's governing computer, Veda, had taken note of her skills. Even in zero gravity, Chall controlled her body with stability, an ability not easily mastered without extensive training in space.

"Welcome to Celestial Being," Ruido said, extending his hand slowly, mindful not to startle her.

"Thank you," she replied, taking his hand without hesitation, her grip surprisingly firm.

"She'll be fine."

Ruido was certain of it. Veda must have seen something beyond her skills to have chosen her. He himself had been selected in the same manner and was now a contributing member of the organization. If he, who was not exceptionally talented, could do it, there was no reason she couldn't.

"Yes, just like that time..."

When he was scouted by the organization, the agent who came to fetch him had said with confidence, "You'll be fine." Ruido thought he should extend the same belief to this girl.

"My name is Ruido Resonance, a Gundam Meister of Celestial Being."
"Gundam... Meister?"

"Yes. And starting today, you too are a Gundam Meister."

"Right!"

For the first time, a smile appeared on Chall's face.

Floating in Lagrange Point 3, the space colony Krung Thep, aptly named "City of Angels" in Thai, served a pivotal role. Constructed by Celestial Being, this colony was designed primarily for the development of their mobile weapon, the Gundam. At its center was a cylindrical residential area with a diameter of one kilometer and a length of five hundred meters, capped with a large mirror-like structure that resembled an umbrella. Despite its relatively modest size for a human-inhabited colony, it functioned effectively as a "bridge to space" in an era where space development was still nascent. Of course, it also had ample facilities for Gundam development.

Currently, only a few space colonies exist. The Union owned the most, furthering construction in Lagrange Point 1 by bringing in resource asteroids, the most convenient location between Earth and the moon, prime real estate in space. Conversely, Krung Thep's position in Lagrange Point 3, the farthest from the moon, rendered it isolated, an ideal trait for a "secret organization's base."

The completion of the under-construction orbital elevator promised to be a watershed moment, heralding a new era in space development. The elevator was not just a means to facilitate space development but also a realization of mankind's long-held dream of a permanent energy supply system, "solar power generation." Ironically, this dream system was now a new source of conflict.

The Solar War, a conflict between the proponents and opponents of the orbital elevator, erupted. The dream system, in reality, widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Large national coalitions like the Union, Human Reform League, and AEU were growing ever larger. Meanwhile, Middle Eastern countries, facing an economic crisis due to the depletion of fossil fuels, could not partake in these benefits.

Thus, conflicts arose.

Humanity was still fighting, as it had been since time immemorial. The only ones who could stop it were Celestial Being and their Gundams, envisioned by Aeolia Schenberg. To eradicate conflict permanently, the development of Gundams needed to be completed as soon as possible.

Among those resonating with Aeolia's vision was Gundam Meister Ruido Resonance. That's why he responded to Veda's call and chose the path of a Gundam Meister. All for the eradication of conflict...

"Behold the first unit of the second-generation Gundam, the GNY-001 Astraea."

Ruido first brought Chall to the factory area of Krung Thep. He wanted to show her the Gundam as soon as possible, hoping she would draw courage and strength from it, just as he had.

Chall uttered in awe, "This is... a Gundam...?"

Where Ruido gestured, a towering mobile suit stood, its predominantly white frame setting it apart from the bulky units of the Human Reform League and the slender designs of the Union and AEU machines. Chall found it eerily human-like. In the center of the machine was a circular part housing the GN Drive that made the Gundam what it was.

"Astraea..."

Chall tried saying the name, feeling an unexpected warmth from the name of a weapon.

"Do you like it? It's named after the goddess of justice. Ever seen the 'Justice' card in tarot? The woman holding a sword in one hand and scales in the other?"

Chall nodded silently, her gaze fixed on Astraea. Ruido murmured his approval and continued, "I don't know who decided it, but the other second-generation Gundams are also named after tarot cards."

Chall turned to Ruido abruptly, her eyes and mouth wide open.

"Does that mean there will be twenty-two Gundams?"

"Huh?"

Ruido didn't understand at first.

"Because there are twenty-two tarot cards..."

"Hah, hahaha!"

Ruido couldn't help laughing. Chall looked embarrassed.

Twenty-two Gundams to match the tarot cards. A great display of imagination. Indeed, with such firepower, the realization of their ideals would be easier, and it could even be said that it should be expected. But...

"No, no. Besides this one, there's the first-generation O Gundam, but that's it. There are less than ten second-generation Gundams planned, and there are only five GN Drives in existence right now."

"Oh, I see."

The GN Drive was a mobile weapon engine unit exclusively possessed by the organization. It could create GN particles, a type of photon, from nothing, realizing a perpetual motion machine unheard of in existing science and technology, providing power for the machine and enabling the use of beam weapons.

Such a powerful device was produced in extremely limited numbers. The organization was more concerned about it falling into enemy hands than enhancing its own arsenal. If this technology were to leak, conflicts around the world would become even more intense.

"Sorry to get your hopes up. But 'Astraea' is a good name, right? We're trying to eradicate conflict with force, and we know how contradictory that is. So, at least, let's give the Gundams names that sound like they're on the side of justice."

"Yes," Chall replied with a smile. But despite her expression, Ruido felt her spirits dip.

"Of course... She has just joined an audacious organization poised to challenge the world with merely a handful of Gundams. Gundams are strong and cool, but with that comes heavy responsibility and numerous enemies."

Ruido himself was reminded of the difficult situation they were in. It was easy to forget in the day-to-day, and dwelling too much on it was dangerous, but...

"Oh right, let me introduce you to the other Gundam Meister."

They had comrades. There was no more powerful support to dispel negative feelings.

Ruido added that the other person was a woman, but she was far from ordinary. In fact, that description was an understatement. To be blunt, she was "abnormal."

Her beauty was striking, marked by a perfectly sculpted face that bore an expression of both strong will and keen intellect. However, her situation shattered all of that. Enclosed in a room ringed with thick iron bars, she was handcuffed, and around her neck, a collar served as a chilling final touch. Though it had no chain, the collar, flickering with light, was clearly an explosive device for dangerous criminals, ready to blow her carotid artery in case of escape. It was a declaration that she had no human rights.

Chall knew from the documents she had received that there was a woman among her new companions, but she had never imagined this.

"Meet Marlene Vlady. Marlene, this is Chall Acustica, our newest member."

Ruido introduced them as casually as if they were high school classmates.

"..."

Marlene didn't respond or even look at Chall.

"Seems like someone's in a mood today, eh?"

Ruido continued the conversation as if unaware of all the restraints. Overwhelmed by the disconnect, Chall blurted out her question.

"Mr. Ruido, um... why is Ms. Marlene... like that?"

A sharp glare shot from Marlene to Chall.

"Want to know about me? Young lady?"

"Uh, no, I..."

"Don't be shy. We're going to be together for a long time. As you can see, I'm restrained. There aren't many reasons for a person to be restrained, right?"

Marlene paused as if waiting for Chall's response, but Chall, overwhelmed, couldn't muster a reply.

After a brief silence, Marlene continued, "I'm a criminal, devoid of human rights. You might be a Gundam Meister, but I'm different. I'm just a part to make the Gundam move, nothing more."

Chall was frozen. Ruido searched for words to lighten the atmosphere but found none. Marlene's words were stark truths. Chall would soon learn that Marlene was confined to this room, permitted to leave only for Gundam testing. In essence, she was living as a mere part of the Gundam.

"Why am I even here?" Chall wondered. The foolishness of her idealism, of coming here to end wars, cursed her. Secret organizations always have their dark sides. *"The agent who recruited me... swayed by his subtle charm... How foolish of me."*

She hadn't met that agent again since then. Maybe he was an elite pretty boy scout used specifically to trick silly girls like herself.

As these thoughts darkened her mood, Ruido's tactless voice broke in, "What's wrong, shy around strangers?"

She shot back a glare suffused with criticism, but he seemed not to grasp her intent at all.

"What will happen to me now... Can I really work with these people?"

The excitement she felt upon seeing the Astraera had vanished. The meeting of the three Gundam Meisters felt like a heavy, cold premonition of their shared destiny.

File No.2

Gundam Meister 874

Constructed in the Lagrange 3 point, the Space Colony Krung Thep, named after the "City of Angels," remained a well-kept secret. Humanity's venture into space, marked by the construction of the orbital elevator, was a monumental undertaking still in its infancy. The completion of the elevator would not only solve energy problems but also remove barriers to space development. Yet, that time had not come. The gaze of the world had yet to shift towards the stars, a reality Celestial Being leveraged to clandestinely build this developmental colony in space.

Krung Thep served as a vast factory, housing all the facilities necessary for developing the mobile weapon known as Gundam.

Beyond Krung Thep's confines, against a backdrop of glittering stars, a solitary mobile suit soared. Its thrusters blazed, casting a brilliance that rivaled the stars themselves.

The GNY-002, known as Gundam Sadalsuud after the Tarot's Star (the water-drawing goddess), stood out with its array of sensors adorning its frame.

The Sadalsuud, with its all-direction data collection, repeatedly tested its agility in movement and precision in stopping. The pilot, known as "Gundam Meister 874," was unique among Meisters for being referred to by a code number rather than a pseudonym.

In the cockpit of Sadalsuud, an eerie silence prevailed, as though it was devoid of life. Only the elapsed mission time flickering in the corner of the main monitor asserted its presence.

"121 hours."

This indicated that over five days had passed since the mission's commencement, an abnormal duration. The operational limit of a typical mobile suit was thought to be a mere several hours. Beyond a day, a human inside could not endure.

However, this test transcended the ordinary, operating on an entirely different level.

Nevertheless, the test persisted. Unwavering, Meister 874 continued the relentless trials without pause.

Ruido and Chall were busy maintaining the Astraea in the hangar.

"This is my favorite part of the job," Ruido said with a wide grin, skillfully handling the tools. Originally a mechanic before becoming a pilot, he had outstanding piloting skills that caught Veda's attention. His fascination with

the enigmatic giant robots called Gundams led him to join the organization, though he never intended to become a pilot. His casual reference to the mobile suits as 'giant robots' was a perfect encapsulation of Ruido's unpretentious character.

"As much as I love piloting, I couldn't imagine intervening in conflicts and fighting," Ruido casually mentioned to Chall.

Chall shared his sentiment. She sympathized with the ideal of eradicating conflicts from the world, but the thought of personally fighting in a mobile suit? The answer was a resolute 'No'. She had responded to the organization's call because of her interest in developing mobile suits to realize this ideal, not for combat duties. She felt it irresponsible, but crafting superior machines for those in combat seemed like her best contribution.

Thinking of those destined to fight, Chall's heart ached with a pang of selfishness, yet she felt powerless to contribute more at that moment.

"By the way, why was Ms. Marlene chosen as a Gundam Meister?" Chall suddenly asked, pausing her work, the question had been on her mind for a while now.

"Her piloting skills are exceptional," Ruido explained. "She's fearless, as if she doesn't care about damaging the machine. That's what allows her to push beyond limits. To a mechanic, she's a nightmare who wrecks the suits, but considering what we're trying to do with the Gundams, maybe that's necessary. She might be more suitable for a Meister than we are."

Chall nodded, understanding but feeling a sense of dissonance.

"But..."

"But what?"

"What about the ideals?"

This was the point that troubled Chall. Welcoming someone who might not share Celestial Being's ideals seemed dangerous. She was exempt from maintenance tasks like the ones the two were carrying out. She had been a death row inmate in the past, accused of mass murder.

As Chall learned more about her, Marlene was confined to a cell-like room with handcuffs and an explosive collar. She avoided death by becoming a Meister, but her continued restraint suggested a danger. Was she someone who didn't share their ideals and only became a Meister to escape death?

"I don't know," Ruido shrugged. "Marlene doesn't talk much to me. Seems she doesn't like me much. I'm glad you're here, Chall. Maybe she'll open up more to another woman."

Unaware that Marlene actually disliked his insensitivity and constant chatter, Ruido was oblivious to the complexities of human relationships, especially among women.

Chall bristled internally at Ruido's assumption.

"Does he really believe that we'll become instant friends just because we're both women?" she thought.

Marlene's exemption from maintenance tasks, underscored by the iron bars, handcuffs, and explosive collar, spoke volumes of the danger she was

perceived to represent. Even with these restraints, the organization didn't want to give her too much freedom.

"It was probably wrong of me to ask Ruido," she thought to herself, realizing she might have misunderstood the situation. She changed the subject.

"Speaking of Meisters, we're meeting another one today, right?"

Referring to the information she received upon arrival, Chall knew there were four Gundam Meisters, including herself. She had been at Krung Thep for nearly a week and hadn't met the last one yet, known only by a code number and as a woman.

"Gundam Meister 874?" Ruido asked.

"Yes."

"You might meet her, or you might not."

His answer was frustratingly vague.

"But I heard she's returning from a mission today," Chall pressed.

Ruido explained that Meister 874 was testing the Sadalsuud on a week-long mission, a duration unheard of for normal mobile suits. This model, which prioritized sensor capabilities, was designed to handle extended surveillance missions. Fueled by the almost limitless power of the GN Drive, the Gundam required no refueling, but the pilot's life support, water, food, oxygen, couldn't be sustained indefinitely. The mental strain of being confined in a cockpit for a week was also a concern. Chall couldn't even begin to imagine how these issues were resolved.

As they discussed this, a buzzer sounded in the hangar, signaling that the suit was opening the colony's hatch.

"The Sadalsuud is returning," Ruido noted.

"So, she'll come into this hangar?"

"Yes, but we need to leave."

Chall didn't understand what Ruido was getting at. A flicker of thought made her feel that it might be related to concerns about the air, but there were airtight barriers between the external hatch and the hangar, so there shouldn't be a risk of an air leak.

"Why?"

"Meister 874 doesn't like being seen getting out of the Gundam."

"Huh?"

As Chall tried to question further, Ruido forcibly ushered her out of the hangar. Left with no choice, Chall exited.

"Well, after a whole week stuck in the cockpit she probably hasn't bathed..., and she might not want to meet people right away..."

This rationale was the only way Chall could make sense of the situation.

After waiting for a full hour, Ruido and Chall took the opportunity to shower in their respective rooms, washing off the grease and grime from their work on the Astraea. Chall was particularly meticulous about her appearance, opting for her cherished high school uniform, complete with its

signature red ribbon. She thought it would be a straightforward way to present her background.

"Hey, you're late," Ruido greeted Chall as she entered the meeting room, already there.

"Sorry, I took a while getting reaAAHH!" Chall exclaimed, her voice leapt up an octave in surprise, taken aback by Ruido's outfit.

"Surprising. He's usually not this fashion-forward," she thought to herself.

He was stylishly dressed in a black rider's suit with red accents and a striking red scarf, a stark contrast to his usual attire. Though the outfit could have seemed narcissistic on others, Ruido wore it effortlessly, exuding a natural ease.

"Still, judging by his mechanic overalls and pilot suits, I'd have never imagined him in getup like this. And yet..."

Chall, noticing her red ribbon matched his scarf, felt a twinge of something she couldn't quite place.

"Hm? Whatcha starin' for, somethin' on me?" Even the obtuse Ruido noticed Chall's gaze. Flustered, she changed the subject.

"Ms. Marlene won't be joining us then?"

"She already knows Meister 874, being an original member," Ruido explained, hinting at something more. Chall felt a pang of regret for her thoughtless question.

"It's almost time to meet Meister 874," Ruido noted, checking the time. Known for their punctuality, the mysterious Meister 874 was soon to appear on the meeting room's monitor.

A young girl, even younger than Chall, appeared on the screen. She wore a different school uniform but, like Chall, adorned with a red ribbon. Her youthful face seemed barely out of her teens.

Chall felt an uncomfortable stir within her but refused to acknowledge it as jealousy.

"Ruido Resonance, this must be Chall Acustica?" the girl spoke with a voice even younger than her appearance, but her tone was more mature than Ruido's. Yet, it lacked emotion, as if reading from a script.

"Yup."

"Chall Acustica, I am Gundam Meister 874. Welcome to Krung Thep. Let's work together for the ideals of Celestial Being," she said formally.

"Right..." Chall replied, somewhat bewildered.

"What's her deal?" she wondered silently.

"Then, excuse me," the girl said, and the monitor went blank.

"Wait, just a moment!" Chall called out in vain.

"What was that?"

With a piercing glare, Chall directed the torrent of questions swirling in her mind towards Ruido. Making no attempt to hide his vexed expression, Ruido fielded them.

"Yeah, it's weird right? But, Meister 874 never meets in person, only via monitor."

"That's clearly odd," Chall protested.

"Sure is. Maybe she has a contagious disease and doesn't want to infect us...?" Ruido speculated.

"As if! There's no way!" Chall's frustration erupted.

"What's wrong with the people here? None of them are normal!"

The sense that she had blundered into an unbelievable place intensified.

In her mind, she screamed for help, holding back the urge to vocalize her distress. She knew that giving voice to her feelings might make them unbearable.

File No.3

Astraea Weapons

Celestial Being, an organization committed to the eradication of conflict through overwhelming force, must possess absolute military power. Consequently, at the Factory Colony Krung Thep, the development of Gundams continues relentlessly.

Today's agenda involves testing new weapons on the GN-001 Astraea: the GN Launcher and the Proto GN Sword. These weapons, larger than standard armaments, are not typically suited for a versatile unit like Astraea. Data gathered from these tests will contribute to the development of specialized weaponry for specific Gundam models.

Ruido, the Gundam Meister for the Astraea, is tasked with conducting these tests, which take place both inside Krung Thep's facilities and in the outer space region around the colony. Given the high versatility and diverse operational environments anticipated for mobile suits, it's crucial to conduct tests across a wide range of conditions.

However, due to Celestial Being's clandestine nature, priority is given to space-based testing. Bringing Gundams down to Earth for trials poses significant risks of exposure. As a workaround, Krung Thep houses testing areas that replicate terrestrial environments, which are also actively utilized.

For the Proto GN Sword, preliminary testing in the colony's simulated terrestrial environment has already identified several issues.

"This thing is too heavy. You'd have to be really skilled to use it without the suit getting tossed around," Ruido commented about the Proto GN Sword. His technical expertise shone through as he added, "A melee-focused Gundam would be more suited for this sword. Its weight can be advantageous in close combat. Plus, there are plans to develop such a unit, so this might not be a significant issue after all."

Plans for the Proto GN Sword also include an integrated gun function, which would reduce the Gundam's overall weapon load when operational. As this feature remains under development, its successful integration is expected to lead to the removal of the 'Proto' prefix from the weapon's name.

"Alright, time to get started," Ruido declared, gearing up to board the Astraea for the upcoming GN Launcher test in space. He began changing into his normal suit in the locker room near the hangar.

"Hm?"

He noticed Chall was there.

"What's up? Got somethin' for me?"

He knew she hadn't come by to sneak a peek at him changing. She must have some purpose for being there. Chall must have had a compelling reason to risk the potential for misunderstanding by seeking out a man who was changing.

"Or could it be she doesn't actually see me as a 'man' at all? Such that she felt it mattered none if I was changing..." Ruido thought to himself. Even if he was changing, it shouldn't be that significant.

Though Chall wore a look like she intended to say something, it took a while for her to finally open her mouth.

"Um...please do your best."

"Huh? Yeah."

It wasn't anything to come all this way just to say. She might have reason if he were heading out for actual combat with unknown chances of "coming back alive."

(So there must be a different motive altogether)

Ruido sensed there was more to her words. While he often admitted to his own lack of perceptiveness, this time he felt he understood what Chall was trying to convey.

"If I were in her shoes..." Pondering like that gave him the answer.

"Chall, you want to pilot the Gundam, don't you?"

Chall's expression of surprise confirmed his guess. "Bingo. Right now, the only second-generation Gundams operational are Astraea and Sadalsuud. Your Plutone hasn't been activated yet. I understand you're eager to pilot a Gundam."

Chall quickly corrected him, "It's not just that. Since arriving, I haven't really done any meaningful work. I feel useless and it's frustrating..."

Ruido realized Chall's reasons were different yet similar to his initial assumption.

"She's much purer than I am. I might not be the 'world-saving hero,' but she..."

Ruido, slightly embarrassed by his presumption to understand a young girl's thoughts, recognized the multifaceted nature of human emotions, especially those of someone much younger and of a different gender.

"If human evolution has any potential left, it must lie in the development of communication skills. With better understanding, conflicts might cease to exist, regardless of whether someone was a high school girl or a genuine extraterrestrial," Ruido mused internally.

"How about this: Chall, I want you to handle the GN Launcher test on the Astraea."

"Really? Can I?"

Her face lit up with a smile, very different from her earlier expression of surprise.

"I'll have to get clearance from Veda, but I see no reason why it wouldn't be approved. We need to test the Astraea's armaments in different

configurations anyway. I'm left-handed, you're right-handed. Let's test switching the equipment accordingly. You can start."

"Yes!" Chall's response was the most enthusiastic Ruido had heard from her yet. The newfound sense of purpose and excitement emanating from her were unmistakable.

The Astraea hovered in the space near Krung Thep, the GN Launcher mounted on its right shoulder and the Proto GN Sword grasped in its left hand. Typically, mobile suits prioritize ranged combat over melee, hence the standard configuration is to equip guns on the right for right-handed use and swords on the left. This standard does not apply to melee-specialized or custom units.

"GN Drive and Launcher link confirmed," Chall briskly prepared for the test in Astraea's cockpit. The focus today was the GN Launcher, a weapon of immense destructive power that had only been tested with limited output inside the colony. The upcoming space firing trial would be the first to test its full power. The Proto GN Sword was also equipped, but primarily to assess the suit's balance during shooting; it wasn't intended for use in this test.

"Chall, are you ready?" Ruido monitored the test from inside the colony.

"Ye-yeah, ngh, no problems!" Chall replied, slightly flustered and stumbling over her words.

"Astraea has been adjusted according to your personal data; it's your machine now. Use it to its fullest," Ruido encouraged.

"Thank you!" Chall felt a surge of responsibility, knowing Astraea was technically Ruido's. She was determined not to damage it.

"Here goes, Astraea," she whispered to the machine, smiling as she realized she was mimicking Ruido.

"Treat your suit as a friend, believe in it and it'll respond."

It was one of his mantras. A spontaneous, almost childish chuckle escaped her, washing away the mounting tension from her frame.

Chall aimed the GN Launcher at a selected asteroid target, a sturdy, unmined one. There was no worry about missing a stationary target.

"Particle charge in the GN Launcher reaching critical... 7 percent more."

The GN Launcher, designed to receive GN particles directly from the GN Drive, possessed immense power but required time to charge, making it a weapon not readily fireable. Future improvements were planned, but eliminating the charge time entirely wasn't feasible.

"...3, 2, 1, critical! Firing now!"

Chall's finger pressed the trigger.

Ksssssh!

At that instant, a blinding light enveloped Chall, immersing her in a brilliant glow.

"What, what?!" she exclaimed in surprise and alarm.

"An explosion?" Ruido exclaimed, his voice laced with alarm as he monitored Astraea's test from Krung Thep.

On the visuals, GN particles were seen erupting not just from the muzzle, but from various parts of the GN Launcher.

"Was it an overload?!" It seemed that the internal GN particle density may have critically surpassed containment thresholds, blasting out through every crack in the launcher.

"But..." Normally, such an incident would be catastrophic for a regular mobile suit, but not for a Gundam, unless the weapon exploded with extreme ferocity. The cockpit and the pilot's safety in a Gundam were designed to withstand significant damage.

Still, Ruido couldn't help but worry about Chall, who was conducting the test in his stead.

It was no longer a matter of logic.

On the monitor, Astraea seemed undamaged, even the GN Launcher appeared intact externally. Whether it could fire again was another question.

"Uwaaaaah!"

Through the communication channel, Chall's scream pierced the air, underscored by a cacophony of loud bangs.

It was soon apparent that the destroyed asteroid had fragmented into countless pieces, bombarding Astraea. While this was an expected outcome and the Gundam's E-Carbon armor could easily withstand such impacts, Chall was clearly panicked.

"Calm down, Chall, it's just debris!" Ruido tried to reassure her, but her responses were unintelligible screams of panic.

"Astraea. GN Drive shows no abnormalities. Emergency level low,"

The communication screen was suddenly interrupted by Gundam Meister 874.

Suddenly, Marlene's voice joined the commotion, "What's happening to that poor girl?" Her tone carried a mix of concern and curiosity.

It seemed Chall had triggered an emergency signal, alerting all Gundam Meisters. The protocol was to first secure the GN Drive, followed by the rescue of the Meister. Both were invaluable assets to the organization.

"An accident? The poor thing. Ruido, put that girl in the Gundam? You even lied about being 'left-handed' huh? You're not ambidextrous, you know. But it seems to have backfired on you. But since I'm confined to quarters, go get that dummy to help you out, missy."

Having said her piece Marlene blinked off the monitor.

"I've gotta do it myself?"

What Marlene said wasn't wrong. Ruido was responsible for the situation. He made up an excuse about being left-handed to put Chall in the Gundam. Although he wasn't ambidextrous, it seemed to have backfired on him. But he had no choice now. He had to go rescue Chall.

"Meister 874, lend me Sadalsuud. I'm going out there. Hang on, Chall!"

"Yes? Oh, right, Mr. Ruido..."

Upon finally managing a coherent response, it was evident that Chall's panic had begun to ebb away.

"Are you sure you're okay now?"

"I-- What happened to the Astraera? I can't see anything outside. Did the cameras die?"

The cameras were sturdy enough not to break from mere debris collisions. Likely the earlier GN particle exposure from the launcher caused issues instead.

"Anyway, I'm coming to get you with the Sadalsuud. Wait there."

"Wait, Ruido, I can return on my own. It seems not all sensors are dead. I can manage on my own."

"Don't be stubborn 'bout it."

"I said I'm fine!"

With that Chall severed the connection. Ruido was left puzzled by her reaction.

"Is she trying to take responsibility for returning the Astraera?" he wondered aloud.

Meanwhile, Chall sat dejectedly in Astraera's cockpit. Not only was she upset about panicking, but she also felt ashamed for failing to complete her task. Yet, what pained her most in that moment were the uncontrollable tears streaming down her face.

"I promised myself I absolutely wouldn't cry when I came here..."

If it had been tears of regret, she could have endured it. However, conversing with Ruido and feeling his kindness had stirred a warm, unexpected happiness within her. She couldn't stop the tears from flowing.

Back in her school days, she had been a romantic, and perhaps she hadn't matured since then, but she realized, her feelings for Ruido were distinctly different from those simple, youthful infatuations.

"What is this feeling? Tell me, Astraera," Chall asked through her tears, but the silent goddess offered no answers.

File No.4

Gundam Plutone

In the vastness of space, two Gundams faced each other, maintaining a safe distance. Both machines, predominantly white, stood out starkly against the black expanse of the cosmos. One was the Astraea, named after the goddess of justice and the first of the second-generation Gundams of Celestial Being. The other was the recently rolled out Plutone, the fourth unit of the second generation, named after one of the images in the Tarot card "Judgment", Pluto, the ruler of the underworld. The card symbolized "resurrection," a concept reflected in Plutone's system designed to safely eject the cockpit and solar furnace. However, the name also hinted at a secret function known only to Veda, the organization's AI.

Additionally, Plutone was equipped with another critical feature, the GN Field, a defense system using GN particles. Its trial was about to commence.

"GN-004 Plutone in position and ready. How's the GNY-001 Astraea's preparation?" Plutone's pilot, Marlene Vlady, communicated with the Astraea. Though Chall Acustica was the designated pilot for Plutone, Marlene was at the controls for this test.

"We're all set here, Marlene," replied Ruido from inside Astraea's cockpit, feeling intensely tense. Sweat broke out across his body, but his pilot suit made it impossible to wipe it away.

"Dammit, I hate this feeling. Even if it's just a test, shooting at a comrade's machine isn't easy."

"Stop fussing and do what needs doing. You may be an idiot, but I know you're a top-notch pilot. Besides, it's not like there's a real person on this end," Marlene reassured him, hinting at her peculiar status. As a criminal always confined and deprived of freedom, her only allowed activity was piloting the Gundam. She often referred to herself as just "a part of the Gundam," essentially dehumanizing herself.

While partially true, this fact offered little consolation to Ruido, who was adamant about not wanting to shoot a person.

"Get too anxious, and things are bound to go south. Buck up, buddy, no choice but to go through with it!" Ruido steeled himself, thinking, "If I'm nervous as the shooter, it won't inspire confidence in the one being shot at. Gotta keep my cool to prevent accidents!"

"Here goes, goddess Astraea," he muttered, reaffirming his belief that trust in his machine would be reciprocated.

He carefully aimed the targeting reticle with unwavering determination and slowly squeezed the trigger.

Watching the test of the Plutone from inside Krung Thep, Chall felt a mix of emotions.

"I should be the one piloting it," she thought sadly, staring at her Gundam Plutone undergoing its first space test, piloted not by her but by Marlene. The decision came from Veda, the computer that governs the organization, and had chosen her as a Meister. Its decisions were usually impeccable, yet Chall couldn't help doubting that decision.

"Why am I not the one out there?"

She was disappointed about not piloting Plutone, feeling ineffective in the organization, and, most of all, missing the chance to be in space with Ruido.

Chall had looked forward to showing off her Gundam to Ruido, the mech enthusiast. She quickly corrected her train of thought, wary of where it might lead. Her friends used to call this a "love spiral", linking everything to romantic feelings and getting increasingly entangled in them.

"But this is different! I'm not jealous of Marlene. She's just following orders," Chall said aloud, trying to convince herself. But her words felt hollow.

"I'm being ridiculous," she sighed, genuinely upset. Deep down, all she wanted was to pilot her own Gundam, the Plutone.

Following Chall's test, the GN Launcher on the Astraea underwent modifications. The biggest issue of GN particles leaking during firing was reduced by adjusting compression rates. It wasn't a complete fix, but it prevented significant damage to the suit. A complete redesign of the GN Launcher would be needed to fully contain the leakage, likely resulting in a larger weapon, possibly even an entirely different one. Upcoming third-generation Gundams, including artillery and fleet combat models, might incorporate this new weapon.

In the upcoming test with the Plutone, the Astraea's GN Launcher was set to fire at fifty percent output, still exceptionally powerful compared to conventional weapons. Currently, no mobile suits other than Gundams were equipped with beam weapons, but their eventual spread was inevitable. Ongoing research was being conducted in various countries. The Gundams of Celestial Being, with their goal of "eradicating conflict through force," needed to be prepared to face enemies equipped with beams in the future.

Plutone's experiment with the GN Field, an external defense system, had been suspended after preliminary tests showed instability. Instead, the secondary plan of a GN Composite Armor was rapidly promoted for adoption. This system generated a GN Field between two layers of armor, offering a stable and high-level defense. Its only drawback was the inability to cover the entire suit, leaving parts like camera eyes and sensors unprotected.

Equipped with a large composite sensor on its chest, the Plutone was set to have a beam fired at its chest area, where the sensor was located, in this test.

Zugyuuun!

The beam from Astraea's GN Launcher raced towards its target with precision, validating Marlene's faith in Ruido's exceptional craftsmanship. The beam hit the target point without a fraction of deviation.

Simultaneously, a violent jolt ran through Plutone. Marlene, caught off-guard, was nearly flung from her cockpit seat. The cockpits of Gundams didn't have seatbelts; instead, the pilot suits naturally adhered to the seats, designed to detach easily during slow movements and cling firmly under sudden jolts. But this test's impact exceeded expectations, nearly causing Marlene to lose consciousness. She fiercely clung to her senses, her pride not allowing her to faint during a mere test.

"This seat needs a redesign, maybe a connection to the pilot suit with a plug or something..." she thought, diligently noting down the improvement for future reference. Failing to do so would undermine her qualifications as a test pilot.

Next, she checked for damage to the mobile suit. A large hole gaped in the outermost layer of the composite armor where the beam had struck, but the inner layers were unscathed. The GN Field had effectively shielded the internals.

Ruido, in the Astraea, also observed the hole in the composite armor as well. The area where the beam had hit shimmered, revealing a portion of the GN Field usually concealed within the armor.

"Quite impressive," Ruido murmured.

His words carried multiple layers of admiration: for the Gundam as a marvel of engineering, the technological prowess of Celestial Being, and Marlene's resilience in withstanding the attack.

The two Gundams, Astraea and Plutone, returned to Krung Thep after completing their test. The GN Field's glow faded from the gaping hole in Plutone's armor, not due to the solar furnace shutting down, once activated, a solar furnace rarely stops, but because the suit had switched to a power conservation mode. Equipped with a large GN Condenser at its waist, Plutone stored excess GN particles generated by the solar furnace when not in active use, ensuring significant power during operations.

The Meisters disembarked from their machines. Simultaneously, Plutone's leg joints retracted, lowering its overall height as it entered sleep mode, cutting off power to its active joints. This feature was unique to Plutone and absent in other Gundams.

"Welcome back, and well done," greeted Chall, the first to meet Ruido and Marlene upon their return.

"Thanks," Ruido replied with a smile. Marlene, however, offered an unexpected apology.

"Sorry, young lady."

For a moment, Chall thought Marlene was apologizing for taking Ruido into space with her.

"How silly of me. That's not it at all. What a romantic spiral this is," Chall chided herself for her girlish thoughts.

"Why apologize?" she asked outright.

"I damaged your machine," Marlene replied.

Chall was surprised; though she knew and was prepared for the test's risks, the reality of her beloved Plutone being damaged still shocked her.

"No need to apologize," she insisted.

"I know, but..." Marlene trailed off, her kindness making Chall feel an instant fondness for her. Chall didn't know Marlene's past, but this tenderness didn't seem characteristic of a villain.

"Is this her true nature?" Chall wondered.

"Don't worry, I'll repair it soon, make it look brand new. I'm more confident in that than in combat," Ruido chimed in.

"Thanks. You'll be piloting Plutone next, Chall. It's your turn now," Marlene said, addressing Chall by her name for the first time.

Chall realized then that Marlene had taken the risk of the dangerous test on her behalf.

"I mustn't wallow in petty concerns," Chall resolved. "Next test, I'll perform better, not to trouble you, Ruido."

"Sure," Ruido responded, nodding agreeably.

But then he added, "I wonder if I can shoot at Chall seriously. I even hesitated with Marlene. Might not be a real test if I hold back."

Chall felt her blood boil. "What do you mean? I'm a Meister, too."

"I mean, you're a young girl, and..."

"So, being young means I'm less skilled? More prone to accidents?"

"No, no, Veda chose you, so I trust your skills."

"So you still see me as just a girl!"

In a flash, her hand struck out.

The slap echoed through the hangar, silencing everyone. Then, an urgent alarm shattered the stillness, followed by the voice of Gundam Meister 874.

"Everyone, a ship is approaching Krung Thep. This is an emergency."

It was the signal of the events that were about to unfold. And this incident would deeply shake the three young people who were active as Gundam Meisters, mentally and emotionally, for a long time to come.

File No.5

Crisis of Krung Thep

A tense situation unfolds in Krung Thep, a space colony established for Gundam development by Celestial Being. Krung Thep, meaning "City of Angels," located at Lagrange Point 3, the furthest from the moon, was ostensibly a civilian industrial colony. It was publicly involved in producing space-exclusive products and researching new materials, financed by various corporations, most of which were unaware of the colony's clandestine Gundam development. This front face actually functions.

A Chinese conglomerate with economic ties to the Human Reform League oversaw and managed the colony's operations. Most contributing companies were content with the benefits they received from their investments, oblivious to the hidden agenda. The leader of this Chinese conglomerate was one of Celestial Being's agents.

Space development was not yet in full swing at this time, and few approached Krung Thep except for ships collecting industrial products or delivering raw materials. Military presence had been nonexistent until now.

Celestial Being had been extremely cautious with their space tests, ensuring their organization's secrecy. Meticulous planning and careful operations had kept the colony's secrets well-guarded. But now, that secrecy was at risk.

"Everyone, there's a ship approaching Krung Thep. We have an emergency," announced Gundam Meister 874. The other Meisters had just completed the Plutone's test.

"I'll head out in the GNY-002 Sadalsuud for reconnaissance. GNY-001 Astraea, prepare for interception," Meister 874 directed, already prepared for solo deployment in her specialized Sadalsuud, a Gundam with enhanced sensor capabilities, crucial for initial responses in emergencies.

After Meister 874's transmission ended, Ruido, Chall, and Marlene sprang into action. Ruido grumbled, "Of all times, right after a live test..."

He had just returned from Astraea's test with Marlene's Plutone. A back-to-back deployment was challenging.

"I'll go out in the Astraea," Chall declared firmly, reasoning it was her turn since Ruido and Marlene had just returned from their sortie.

The Plutone, her custom mobile suit, was damaged from the assault test, rendering it unsuitable for combat, but the Astraea was still available. Even though it was Ruido's suit, Chall had piloted it before.

Ruido, however, immediately rejected her offer.

"No."

"He's looking out for me." Chall, realizing Ruido's concerns, started to protest but was gently interrupted.

"Did you hear Meister 874? 'Prepare Astraea for interception.' Do you understand what that means? It's about engaging in combat, potentially killing."

A cold realization washed over Chall, the stark reality of taking a life, her 'first kill,' something she hadn't truly considered. She was driven by a personal desire to prove herself without realizing that would lead to killing someone.

"Do you get it now? Honestly, not even I know if I can take a life myself, let alone with the Gundam. But, at least I knew this day would come," Ruido explained. "I'm going out there."

"Okay..."

Chall nodded silently, her naivety painfully clear as Ruido left to embark on Astraea.

Marlene placed a comforting hand on Chall's shoulder. "Don't worry. He's just checking his own resolve. I was actually planning to go out in Astraea myself, but I've faced death before... But when I saw him make that decision... I'll let him save face this time."

These words were not only directed at Chall but were also words Marlene spoke to herself. Marlene was aware that her heart was drawn toward Ruido, yet she was trying to mask it with a different pretext.

Chall understood Marlene's feelings well, having herself been in a similar position until recently.

"Anyway, don't dwell on it. Let's believe in him," Marlene said.

"Yes," Chall nodded in agreement.

"Marlene and Ruido are both kind."

Nevertheless, Gundam Meisters had to confront death. The contradiction was saddening. The contradiction was terrifying. But they had to prepare themselves for it. Eventually, she, too, would have to stand in that place.

"Transferring the approaching ship's data now."

Ruido, already in space aboard the Astraea, received this message from Meister 874.

Gundam communications primarily use visual signals. If another Gundam is in sight, its armor vibrates minutely, conveying information. The vibration patterns served as encryption information. Even in conventional military forces, there were standardized methods for visual signals using flashing light parts (as long as the machine had components capable of emitting light, this could be done without special preparations; hence, it was inconceivable for machines operating in space not to have lights).

In contrast, Gundam's visual communication capability allowed for a vast amount of information to be transmitted. Originally designed to circumvent communication disruption by GN particles on the battlefield, it was based on basic technology dating back hundreds of years.

"Data transfer complete."

Ruido verbalized each step of the process, being extra cautious for his first battle.

"Analyzing data now."

The received data sent a chill down his spine.

"The Human Reform League... a warship!"

He had been prepared, yet the thought of the upcoming engagement unsettled him. Facing a military opponent meant combat was inevitable. At least Chall was spared from this ordeal.

"Oh, I better not think like that, or Chall will scold me again for treating her like 'just a girl.'"

He remembered the recent slap on his cheek, its faint pain reminding him of his resolve.

"Alright, let's do this!"

In this era, the Human Reform League had yet to deploy space-capable mobile suits. Their main mobile suit, the MSJ-04 Fanton, was ground-based. The only available option was the MAJ-S08 Xiaoshou, a mobile armor with massive arms, designed for labor rather than combat, despite being armed with smoothbore guns.

Though a warship would be armed, a Gundam's superior mobility almost guaranteed an advantage in space combat. Having removed the clavicle antennas on either shoulder, the Astraea was currently equipped with double GN Launchers, an unconventional setup that restricted some of its movements. However, considering the warship's likely thick armor, the increased firepower from two GN Launchers was a tactical advantage. Taking down the enemy in a single strike wouldn't afford them a chance to retaliate.

After weighing all the factors, Ruido opted for the Double GN Launcher.

"GN particle compression rate, within prescribed limits."

Astraea was ready to fire at any moment.

"Transferring information from Veda."

Another transmission from Meister 874.

According to Veda, the target ship housed deserters from the Human Reform League, likely aiming to seize Krung Thep for ransom or as a getaway to a third country. Veda had been aware of their desertion but couldn't predict their approach to Krung Thep due to limited space monitoring facilities.

Ruido quickly shook off the suspicion that Veda might have orchestrated this for the Gundams' combat experience.

"Now is not the time for such thoughts."

Veda's suggested course of action was clear: "Eliminate the target."

The battle ended almost too easily.

Ruido scattered GN particles, stealthily approaching and pulling the trigger. The target ship, likely caught in sudden radar and communication

failures, met death before responding. They likely didn't even have time to comprehend what was happening.

"Target elimination confirmed."

A communication comes from Meister 874. In an almost emotionless voice, she informs that she will begin activities to analyze the debris and erase signs of battle. Astraea is prompted to return.

The GN Drive could produce infinite power, but there was a limit to the amount of particles it could generate at a time. Hence, GN Condensers were installed throughout the suit.

The GN Launchers had drained Astraea's particle stock. Consecutive deployments had strained it further.

"Acknowledged. Astraea returning."

Leaving Sadalsuud in space, Ruido headed back to Krung Thep, feeling a dizziness he had never experienced before.

"Weak, aren't I..."

Thoughts plagued him:

"How many souls were on that ship? Did they leave families behind? Lovers? What dreams drove their actions?"

A multitude of emotions flooded him.

"Damn it, I have to put on a smile!"

He couldn't show this face to Chall or Marlene. Showing his mental struggle would impact their future deployments. Despite Chall's protest, Ruido couldn't abandon his "male pride." He would face any anger rather than lose that part of himself.

"Never thought making a smile would be this hard."

Marlene often chided him for his constant grinning. Yet now, that grin eluded him as if he'd forgotten the very shape of it.

"This is tough."

Inside Astraea's cockpit, Ruido was left to grapple with his torment.

"Hey, I've finished the mission."

Ruido returned, feigning his usual liveliness.

"Welcome back."

Chall was the only one there to greet him. Marlene had been taken back to her cell-like room as soon as the mission was over.

"Uh..."

"Don't worry about it."

Ruido cut her off before she could speak further.

"Honestly, I'm pretty tired. Back-to-back sorties do that. I'm going to rest up now if you don't mind."

"Of course, you should. Get plenty of rest."

"Yeah, I will."

With that, Ruido quickly headed to his room, unable to keep up the facade any longer.

Alone at last, he slumped into a chair, head bowed, lost in his thoughts.

Someone else was watching this.

They were also observing Chall, unable to focus on anything because of her concern for him, and Marlene, staring into space.

"The impact of this battle on them..."

Meister 874, monitoring the three Meisters through the colony's surveillance cameras connected to Veda, pondered.

"Is this the limit of human capacity, or is this emotional turmoil actually an aspect of human superiority?"

Veda lacked an innate understanding of human nature. To grasp it, agents living within human society, leading human lives, and providing live information were needed. Veda had agents among the Gundam Meisters for this very purpose.

"I must continue to observe humanity."

Meister 874 came to this conclusion, driven by her obligation and the inevitability it entailed.

File No.6

Ground Battle

A shuttle belonging to a certain venture corporation pierced the atmosphere for re-entry. It had completed developmental experiments with new materials in space and was now returning to Earth. However, this was merely the official story. In reality, the shuttle's container housed two Gundams, and aboard were the Gundam Meisters of Celestial Being.

As planned, the shuttle descended on the venture corporation's grounds located in the south of the Eurasian continent, adhering to its scheduled time and course.

"Back on Earth..." a solitary murmur escaped from Chall as the shuttle moved towards the hangar. Her words were laden with mixed feelings: a trace of nostalgia, an absence of expectation, and an undercurrent of fear. Under Veda's directive, Gundam development, now at a space milestone, shifted its focus to Earth.

This news had initially taken Chall aback. Somehow, she had always assumed the development would continue indefinitely at Krung Thep. It made sense, upon reflection. Gundams were designed for universal operation, not just in space. Testing them on Earth was crucial to avoid unforeseen complications in real combat.

"Ah, Earth's gravity feels nice," Ruido commented casually next to Chall.

"How can he be so carefree when I'm feeling so conflicted?" Chall thought to herself.

Chall's thoughts wandered to Marlene, isolated in a separate, caged-off room. She pondered how the other Meister felt.

"I can't believe they arranged for something like this even on the shuttle!" Chall had complained, but Marlene herself was indifferent toward it, responding simply with an, "I don't mind," leaving Chall with nothing more to say.

This terrestrial test was particularly significant for Marlene as it would initiate the trial runs of her Gundam, the GNY-003 Abulhool, equipped with transformation capabilities for flight mode, hence why its development was placed on the surface. When there were exciting prospects ahead, some level of inconvenience could be tolerated.

"I wonder how she feels about it," Chall pondered about the other Meister, Gundam Meister 874. She was in the shuttle's cockpit, having been the only one assigned to pilot it by Veda.

"Chall, how's it feel to be back on Earth?" Ruido asked with a smile.

"Doesn't he realize I have mixed feelings about this?" Chall wondered.

"I'm not sure," Chall replied, her tone colder than intended.

"It's not his fault he doesn't understand. I don't even understand my own feelings." she mused.

Earth was a nostalgic homeland. That much was true. Before joining Celestial Being, like most people in this era, Chall had lived on Earth. The limited number of colonies meant most people still lived on Earth. Of course, this would change with the completion of the orbital elevators, bringing space closer to everyone.

"Yes, Earth is my homeland. But Earth is vast. I mustn't forget that!"

She thought, realizing the place they had landed bore no resemblance to her hometown. It was impossible to feel nostalgic here.

Yet, her current feelings were more complex than just that.

"Really, what is this all about!" Chall couldn't help but exclaim aloud.

"Ah, sorry, did I do something wrong?" Ruido quickly apologized.

"No, it's not you,"

"Then what is it?"

Chall had no answer.

Unable to articulate her feelings, she continued stewing silently in her state of discontent.

Days later, Chall and the team boarded a large transport plane for their test mission. They were carrying the *Astraea*, but unfortunately, Chall's *Plutone* was not included. This clearly indicated that today's test was centered around the *Astraea*. Just before departure, Meister 874 appeared on the monitor, announcing, "We will pass near the Human Reform League's orbital elevator on our way to the destination."

As a Union native, Chall felt a twinge of fear approaching the Human Reform League's elevator, but she quickly dismissed this as irrational. It was just an emotional vestige of her past affiliations. As a Meister of Celestial Being, in a sense, the whole Earth was enemy territory for her.

As the flight, tinged with a slight tension, neared its end, Chall spotted a colossal structure through the window. It was the Human Reform League's orbital elevator, *Tenchu*. Though supposedly incomplete, the column-like elevator stretched sleekly from the sea into space, appearing finished.

"Why does humanity build such wonders and still choose to fight?" Ruido mused, his gaze fixed on the elevator, his expression tinged with melancholy.

"This elevator was one of *Aeolia Schenberg's* proposals, right? Maybe he hoped that building it would unite the world. If that happened, things like *Gundams* would become unnecessary," Chall pondered. But even with the construction of the orbital elevator, the world did not unite.

The immense project had indeed restructured the world, consolidating hundreds of nations into three major powers: the Union, the AEU, and the Human Reform League, with the rest of the world falling outside these blocs.

"Isn't it good that hundreds of nations have merged into three?" Chall said, then realized he was trying to encourage Ruido.

"Was I cold to the carefree Ruido on the shuttle because I was in a confused state?" she wondered, feeling puzzled by her own behavior, sensing another bout of uncertainty approaching.

"Maybe old man Aeolia proposed the orbital elevator to create a foundation for unifying the world to some extent?"

"Don't you think that's overthinking things a bit?" Chall replied, almost dismissively, while pretending not to notice the small seed of doubt about the plans and organization growing within her.

The issue merited deep thought, yet her mind, clouded and unsettled, resisted such contemplation. After all, the psyche can be incredibly unstable.

The transport plane carrying the team gradually distanced itself from the elevator. Chall wanted to look longer but knew better than to ask for more.

The transport plane's destination was a battlefield.

Though the battle had concluded, its immense scale was evident in the extensive ruins. Destroyed and reduced to rubble, the city now hosted only a few Human Reform League mobile suits standing sentinel amid the debris. It seemed that this city, not far from the orbital elevator, harbored a base for terrorists opposed to the elevator's construction.

The number of innocent civilians who might have been caught in the crossfire was unknown, but one thing was certain: there were no survivors left in the city.

"Gundam Meisters, please standby inside the aircraft," came Meister 874's voice over the intercom as soon as they arrived.

"I will sortie in the GNY-001 Astraea," she announced. Astraea was originally Ruido's unit, and it was unprecedented for another Meister to pilot it if he was able to.

"Wait a minute, what are you planning to do with my Astraea?!" Ruido raised his voice, his frustration hanging in the air as he spoke to the absent Meister 874.

"My mission is straightforward: to annihilate all of the Human Reform League's MSJ-06 Fantons in this region. There are four in a squad here," Meister 874 explained calmly.

"Wha--" Ruido found his words trapped in his throat, the harsh reality of battle choking his voice.

He had just recently experienced his first combat in space. The reality of battle, of death, was fresh in his mind, making Meister 874's calm demeanor about combat all the more disconcerting.

"Wait! I understand the need for combat, but why not me?"

"The decision is Veda's. Ruido, in your current state, you are not deemed suitable for terrestrial combat," Meister 874 stated before cutting off the conversation and deploying in the Astraea.

The ensuing battle was one-sided. The Human Reform League's main mobile suits, the Fantons, though heavily armored, were designed to counter conventional weaponry. Against the particle beams of the Astraea, their

armor was as good as non-existent. The GN particles spread by Astraea jammed communications, preventing any call for reinforcements.

"Mission complete," Meister 874 reported, her voice devoid of emotion, in stark contrast to Ruido's reaction after his first battle.

The four Fantons in the city were silenced in just thirty-six seconds.

After the battle, the three Gundam Meisters, Ruido, Chall, and Marlene, stood amidst the ruins. Following Veda's instructions, even Marlene had come to the city.

Stepping outside, the burnt stench hit their nostrils hard. The city was a vista of total destruction, evoking not just sorrow but frustration. They believed Gundams were meant to prevent such devastation. Yet, as they had just witnessed, fighting with Gundams was an undeniable act of war, and the enemy would certainly die.

Battle is battle.

Destruction is destruction.

This was far from what Chall had sought.

"It's time to go," Ruido spoke up.

They had to leave before the Human Reform League's reconnaissance teams arrived, which wouldn't be long after the loss of communication from their mobile suit unit. The remains of the Fantons destroyed by the Astraea had been obliterated to erase any trace of particle beam usage. Once they left, there would be no evidence that Gundams had ever been there.

"Let's go," Ruido urged, and Chall began to walk back to the transport plane, his steps heavy.

"Marlene, we need to move!" Ruido called out to her, standing a short distance away.

But Marlene didn't move. Ruido left Chall behind and approached her.

"What's wrong?" he asked softly.

Marlene turned to him silently, clutching a child's burnt teddy bear. Chall, who had started towards the transport, noticed the two hadn't returned and reluctantly turned back to join them.

He heard Marlene's words, "War... it's always the same, no matter where it happens. The powerless are always caught up... and just die."

For a moment, her voice caught. Chall thought she might cry, but her cheeks were dry.

"To eradicate conflict with Gundams... that's a noble idea... I'll do it. No matter what tragedy occurs, as long as in the end, Gundams can truly end war!"

Chall's knowledge of Marlene's past was limited, shrouded in the secrecy mandated by their code as Gundam Meisters. She knew only that she was a criminal, responsible for numerous deaths. But to her, that was just information.

In her interactions, and now, standing before her, the Marlene she knew bore no resemblance to such a past.

Chall found herself wondering if she could endure tragedies like Marlene and continue the fight. To pilot a Gundam, to transcend the deaths of others to eradicate conflicts?

For now, she couldn't find an answer.

File No.7

Ian Vashti

"All for the Innovators," Gundam Meister 874 murmured internally.

She was neither immature humanity nor a mere imitation. For her creators, everything in the world, including her existence, missions, and purpose, existed. She delved deeper into thought.

"What is a human, if not an Innovator?" This was the existential question ingrained in her since her creation.

Meister 874, not human, had been functioning for a considerable time. She possessed a lifespan far exceeding human limits, akin to immortality. Her thought processes were also faster than any human's.

In living beings, the speed of thought usually varies with lifespan: longer-lived species thought slower, while shorter-lived ones thought faster. She, however, defied this rule, possessing both a lifespan and thought speed surpassing humans.

"Am I not human... is that why I can't understand humans?" In reality, she was created to mimic humans, to better understand them. Yet, mimicry meant she was not exactly the same, fundamentally different.

The entity that created her, Veda, understood this well. Her role had been passed on to others, siblings closer to humanity than she. They were Innovades, with bodies like humans, able to integrate more deeply into human society. Some, unaware of their non-human nature, unknowingly fed their experiences back to Veda as data.

One such being, Grave Violento, understood humans better and had recruited Ruido, Chall, and Marlene, in compliance with Veda's missions.

"My current role is to assess humans as potential Gundam Meisters," she reflected. Her role had evolved over the many years, but understanding humans remained crucial. The development of Gundams was progressing, but without suitable operators, Aeolia's plan would not advance. In this, the role of the Meisters was significant.

Currently, two plans were under consideration for Gundam Meisters: one involving humans becoming Meisters, the other involving non-human entities, the Innovades.

Veda had yet to decide on which to adopt.

"Humans are unlikely to be chosen," Meister 874 thought, not out of conviction, intuition, or deduction, but as a result of pure calculation. However, the decision was not hers to make.

Regardless of who was chosen, her actions and observations as an active Gundam Meister would be a significant guide. More data was needed. Contact and observation of humans beyond the current Meisters were necessary.

"Considering this, the recent incident falls within acceptable parameters," she concluded.

Seeking confirmation, Meister 874 replayed the recent event in her mind, scrutinizing each detail.

The AEU, one of the three superpower blocs that emerged in the world following the construction of the three orbital elevators, is comprised primarily of European nations. Their elevator project lagged behind, hampered by various factors, including its location in Africa, a region under indirect control but still foreign territory, and the lack of a central European authority, with decisions requiring a consensus among the member states (even now, in the AEU, national interests often prevailed over collective benefits).

For Celestial Being, dedicated to eradicating conflict, it was imperative that the AEU smoothly complete its elevator. A failure, leading to the fragmentation of European nations, would greatly hinder their plans.

"I will gather data on the AEU's orbital elevator," declared Gundam Meister 874, a statement met with no doubts, as all understood its necessity.

Her emotionless demeanor on the monitor quashed any thoughts of dissent.

"We'll collect data on the undersea power cables, difficult to monitor from space," she continued. The AEU's elevator, situated in Africa, extended cables underwater to Europe for power transmission.

Meister 874 detailed the mission: "I'll use the GNY-002 Sadalsuud for data collection. Ruido, please support with the GNY-001 Astraea."

"Understood," Ruido responded more loudly than usual, his voice betraying a hint of excitement, a state humans would describe as 'energetic.'

"Really, don't get too excited," Marlene interjected promptly.

A second or two after Ruido's statement, Meister 874 noticed Marlene's quick response to him and Chall's aborted attempt to speak following Marlene's interjection. The reasons behind Marlene's swift response and Chall's subsequent silence were unclear to Meister 874, but she noted the facts.

"But the Astraea doesn't have underwater weaponry. Wouldn't the Sadalsuud be better suited for underwater combat?" Ruido, with his mechanical expertise, raised a valid concern.

"We've confirmed the deployment of AEU's new mobile suits in the mission area," she informed. Ruido's pulse quickened, a mixture of excitement and fear shimmering in his eyes at the prospect of encountering new models.

"The units are designated AEU-05 Hellion. Like the AEU-04, they're designed for aerial combat but more advanced. In case we engage these units, I will require your Astraea's support."

"Aerial combat... It's doable with GN particle-based control, but..." Ruido began to voice his thoughts.

"Can't my Gundam, the Abulhool, be deployed?" Marlene inquired. Her GNY-003 Abulhool, designed for aerial combat, was ideal for this mission. However...

"Unfortunately, it's still undergoing final adjustments," Meister 874 replied. A shadow of disappointment crossed Marlene's face.

Why was she disappointed? Perhaps Marlene wanted to replace Ruido in the mission, either to gain combat experience or due to concerns about his combat skills.

"Don't worry, with the Astraea, I can handle aerial fights too. Besides, we're not guaranteed to engage in battle. Trust me and the Astraea," Ruido reassured her with a smile.

"You're such an idiot... Where does all this confidence come from?" Marlene retorted.

"Still, we have no choice but to rely on Ruido," Chall said, her voice laden with emphasis.

"Well, I guess we don't have much of a choice not to," Marlene finally agreed, echoing Chall.

Why they agreed, despite initial opposition, was a phenomenon Meister 874 had observed before but never fully understood. The motivations behind their consensus remained elusive to her.

"So this is how it ends up!"

Erupting from the sea in a burst of glittering GN particles, Ruido's Astraea soared into the air, its speed unbroken. Awaiting it were four of AEU's new model Hellions, as Meister 874 had mentioned, appearing at first glance as mere fighter jets. Yet these were not mere fighter jets but agile, full-fledged mobile suits.

The Astraea, while capable of 'standing' in mid-air thanks to GN particles, lacked such agility. Close combat was out of the question; Ruido opted for a ranged battle with his beam rifle.

"Hit them!" he shouted. The beams, although fast, couldn't match the speed of the Hellions, shooting off uselessly into the blue sky.

"Not giving up yet!"

Minutes later, he managed to destroy all enemy units, firing thrice their number in shots. The battle had dragged on for far too long. While GN Particle interference should have prevented data on the Gundam from leaking from the Hellion squadron, he felt uneasy.

"Still..." Ruido was troubled, not by his poor combat performance but for another reason entirely. He had taken lives again, his conscience registering the weight of this second occurrence. More disturbingly, he wasn't as shocked as before at having taken lives.

"Have I become a proficient killer now?" he pondered, a grim reality for someone pledged to eradicate conflict.

It was then Meister 874's Sadalsuud transmitted an urgent message. "An approaching ship has been detected. Preparing to attack."

"Wait!" Ruido screamed, unable to bear more killing. "Just wait..."

Meister 874 halted her attack. Ruido's unprecedented reaction, born of her desire to "understand humans," prompted her to stop. The approaching vessel was an AEU small craft carrying two people: AEU engineer Ian Vashti and Doctors Without Borders' Joyce Moreno.

Ruido and the others escorted them to a small South African port town. Normally, having seen the Gundam, there should be no choice but to eliminate them. However, Ruido vehemently opposed this, and Marlene and Chall concurred. Veda's directive prioritized confidentiality, but when they conveyed their refusal, a second option was provided.

"Why not join Celestial Being in eradicating conflict?" Ruido asked, almost laughing at his own words, recalling how more eloquently he had been recruited. If total strangers approached him with that line, there was no way he'd agree to follow them.

"What are you people?" Moreno asked, his voice laced with understandable perplexity.

Ian, however, was different. "We've just managed to create something capable of aerial combat, and you guys effortlessly surpass it... That mobile suit from earlier, what was it?"

Hesitant at first, Ruido realized there was no point in hiding the name since Ian had seen it.

"It's a Gundam."

"Gun... dam?"

At that moment, Ian's eyes seemed to sparkle.

File No.8

Joyce Moreno

In this era, the orbital elevators were still under construction, but space development had already begun. Few colonies were completed, including those owned by the Union and Celestial Being's colony Krung Thep; only a handful were operational. It was the workers, laboring in the harshness of space, who supported this development, enduring heavy labor in space for meager wages.

The task of transporting colossal asteroids from the vicinity of Jupiter and Mars to Earth, to obtain resources for the construction of the orbital elevator and colonies, was as critical as it was incredibly grueling. Once embarked, workers could not return for years, regardless of what happened, until the job was done. These spacecraft, tragically apt in their moniker space slaver ships, were a grim testament to the harshness faced by their crews.

Marlene Vlady was once one of these space workers.

Then, the incident later known as the "Mars Tragedy" occurred.

On that day, an infectious disease, presumably caused by a mutated virus, broke out on a spacecraft working near Mars. The disease, inflaming the lungs, caused severe respiratory distress to all the workers on board. Distress signals were sent to nearby spacecraft and Earth, but help... never came.

"Is there no one with a heart in this sector of space?" Marlene cried out, clutching her burning chest with each breath.

But she was fortunate to even be able to scream. Her shipmates could only suffer in silence, writhing in agony.

"If only I could stop breathing... to escape this pain!"

Around her, faces contorted in torment, each silently screaming a plea for relief, hauntingly clear to Marlene.

She could only witness the suffering of her family, her comrades, powerless to do anything but watch.

"Salvation will come soon," she whispered to the suffering, her voice hollow, both she and they knowing the untruth in her words.

Slowly, despair wrapped its dark embrace around her heart, eroding her hope.

Days later, a man appeared on the ship where Marlene was stranded, coming to offer assistance. He was one of the laborers from a newly arrived spacecraft in this sector of space. He had come despite the risks, ignoring the protests of his own crewmates. The risks were considerable; he might also be infected with the disease. But the man, as someone who worked in space, couldn't abandon fellow human beings.

The man's name was Robark Stad. Born into the working class, he had chosen a life in space, bringing his family with him.

"To leave a more livable space for my children," that was his wish. He had a son with the same name as himself, who had just been born. His dream was a world where mutual aid was the norm, all for the sake of his newborn son.

But the moment Robark entered the stricken ship, he realized he was too late. Only one survivor remained: Marlene. The others had perished, though not all succumbed to the disease itself.

Marlene, the sole survivor rescued from the spaceship, was convicted of murder. During her trial, neither the disease outbreak on the spacecraft nor the desperate situation of being left without help were considered.

The Union corporation responsible for the spacecraft's management, shifted all blame to Marlene to protect itself. They sustained her life with advanced technology, ensuring she bore the full blame.

Marlene was prepared to atone for her sins with her life. The undercurrents of manipulation and intent behind the trial were irrelevant to her. She simply wanted to act in accordance with her conscience.

Yet, learning of Robark Stad's death, the man who had saved her, shattered her resolve. His death, all too common in the perilous realm of space, plunged Marlene into a deep emotional turmoil.

"How can I, who should have died, live, while a man like Robark dies? This world is wrong."

What could those who survived do? Shouldn't the living change the world?

"I'll live. I'll use this life to change the world, not as myself, but as a tool for that sole purpose... But how?"

A single person's actions are limited, especially for someone like her, awaiting execution.

That was until a letter arrived.

"Eliminate the Tragedy."

That was all the letter said.

Marlene decided to follow this lead. The sender requested a meeting, and she met the man.

"I'm Grave Violento, a messenger from Veda," he began, explaining to Marlene in detail about Celestial Being and Gundam.

She couldn't help but feel a strong sense of destiny as she listened.

She decided to join the organization.

But what awaited her was not the status of a Gundam Meister, but rather treatment as a mere part of the machinery that operates Gundam. Veda forced her into a collar embedded with explosives, a stark reminder that disobedience meant death.

Marlene had no complaints.

Her life was already dedicated to atonement. If this was the path to fulfilling her purpose, what more did she need?

And so, Marlene's story continues.

Several weeks had passed since the Meisters descended to Earth. Now, Marlene's custom Gundam, designated GNY-003 Abulhool, finally completed its final adjustments and was ready for delivery. This Gundam, tailored for aerial combat, featured a transformation mechanism.

"Your mission from Veda..." Meister 874 relayed the operation in a monotone voice to the members in the meeting room.

"An AEU Hellion squad is preparing to deploy. Marlene Vlady, you're to use GNY-003 Abulhool to monitor their actions."

The members, including Marlene, Ruido, Chall, as well as Ian, a mechanic who recently joined after witnessing a Gundam, and Moreno, a doctor, focused on the displayed monitor.

"Why do we know about an AEU operation in advance?" Ian's astonishment was understandable, given his recent AEU background. Veda was connected to global networks, instantly accessing all kinds of information.

"This is..." Moreno, next to Ian, noticed something while reviewing the mission details.

"What is it?" Marlene inquired.

"There's a village," Moreno explained. "It harbors guerrillas opposing the orbital elevator construction. A while back, they had a disease outbreak and requested medical aid from Doctors Without Borders. I've been there."

Moreno added that the village wasn't just inhabited by combatants; their families lived there too. If the Hellion squad attacked, civilians would inevitably suffer.

"So, if the Hellion squad attacks the village, I want you to stop them. Your Gundam should be capable."

Marlene's silence seemed to dismiss Moreno's concern as irrelevant to the mission.

Moreno persisted, urging her to avoid conflict in the village. Initially, Marlene ignored him, but eventually snapped.

"The mission follows Veda's plan. 'I'm here to observe. Engaging in combat risks the Gundam being seen, and that means eliminating witnesses, villagers included."

"But I saw the Gundam and I'm alive," protested Moreno.

"Your survival is an exception. We can't make everyone who sees it an ally. Don't talk to me anymore... Besides, I already hate doctors!"

"Why?"

"Who likes doctors anyway?"

Ian interjected softly, which Moreno ignored, continuing to gaze at Marlene.

"I don't want to talk about it. I know it's just misplaced resentment..."

Moreno bowed suddenly, and Marlene recoiled, visibly taken aback.

"I don't know what happened, nor will I ask. But if some doctor wronged you, I apologize on behalf of my profession, even if it might not be something that can be resolved by an apology."

"Why would you do that?"

"Being a doctor is about dealing with life. If resentment is involved, it often ties to life and death. An apology might not suffice, but I can't help but offer it."

Observing the exchange, Chall felt there was more to their interaction. She whispered to Ruido, "Don't you think Marlene is being deliberately cold to Moreno?"

"Why?"

"It's bluff-love."

"Bluff-love??"

Ruido had never heard the term, briefly mistaking it for some kind of strategy or game. Chall clarified, "It's when someone acts tough towards the person they actually like. They seem combative, but in reality, they're just too shy to show their affection. That's bluff-love."

"Hmm, really?" Ruido seemed unconvinced, but Chall confidently added, "That's definitely it."

The mission with the Abulhool went smoothly. Thanks to GN particles, the Abulhool had superior aerial combat capabilities against the Hellions, and its radar-jamming effect rendered the enemy's search capabilities useless. Undetected, it shadowed the Hellion squad, while Ruido and the others remained on standby near the village for emergencies.

As the Hellion squad began approaching the target village, the Abulhool, maintaining a distance to avoid disrupting their communications, suddenly closed in. This move risked alerting the Hellions to its presence. Plunging into engagement range, Marlene unleashed the GN Vulcans from the Abulhool's head, rapidly downing the Hellions.

The GN Vulcan was a relatively weak weapon, but the lightly armored Hellions couldn't withstand it. The battle was one-sided.

Unexpectedly, a heavily-damaged Hellion headed towards the guerrilla village, threatening significant collateral damage. Marlene made a split-second decision, positioning Abulhool between the kamikaze Hellion and the village.

"You shall not pass!" she declared.

The Hellion collided with the Abulhool, exploding on impact. Abulhool, with its advanced control systems, avoided crashing but was not unscathed. The exterior's visible damage hinted at Marlene's injuries inside.

She landed Abulhool somehow, and Ruido's team rushed to her. Marlene, emerging from the cockpit, was severely wounded.

"Let me tend to her!" Moreno insisted, rushing to Marlene's side, as Ruido, Chall, and Ian watched, feeling helpless.

Marlene's thoughts turned inward, "How foolish I am..." she mused. She couldn't protect the guerrilla village indefinitely. Even if she defeated this squad, another would soon follow. To break this cycle, she realized that she must intervene in the conflict and change the world. This fight, she realized, was meaningless, possibly even endangering the lives she sought to protect by exposing the Gundam.

"I am truly... foolish..." Her weak voice spilled out with her blood, tasting of bitter iron.

Ruido, watching Marlene's treatment from a distance, realized a harsh truth about the bomb on her neck.

"It's there to bind Marlene's overly compassionate heart, so she doesn't undermine orders for compassion's sake..." he thought with certainty.

File No.9

Birth and Death

The Observers were, as their name implies, entities tasked with overseeing the Celestial Being organization. At this point, the organization had yet to intervene in conflicts and remained a hidden entity to the world. Their primary focus was on the development of the mobile suits equipped with solar furnaces, known as Gundams.

These Observers were now scrutinizing the development process of the Gundams. Should they identify any significant errors that could jeopardize the organization's existence, they were empowered to immediately advise Veda to halt or modify the mission plan. They were the only entities with the power to veto Veda's decisions. Aeolia Schenberg, while entrusting the governance of the organization to the computer system Veda, also ensured that humans of the era monitored it.

Veda, devoid of human emotions, did not attempt to conceal information from the Observers, even if it was potentially disadvantageous. There was no deceit or evasion in its operations.

However, even Observers didn't have access to all of Veda's information. Critical data, like the design details of the solar furnaces, remained inaccessible to them. This restriction was necessary, as unrestricted access might tempt some Observers to betray the organization for personal gain. They were only permitted to view data essential for assessing the direction of the organization.

The Observers received new data, indicating that the development of the second-generation Gundams on Earth was complete and that they were about to enter preliminary tests for conflict intervention.

"It's finally beginning," an Observer remarked thoughtfully, reflecting on the time it took to reach this stage, a journey that spanned generations, with the role being passed down through their family.

Successful tests would pave the way for the organization's move to full-scale armed intervention. The Gundams were about to reveal themselves to the world.

"To think that I would witness this in my lifetime..." they mused. Their late father had strongly desired to see this day, but it was not to be. Even in their younger years, they had doubted it possible.

"It seems the plan is progressing faster than anticipated."

The reasons were unclear, and it might necessitate further investigation and consultation with other Observers.

For now, they basked in the anticipation of witnessing Celestial Being's sensational debut on the world stage.

Ruido was surprisingly calm, a fact that startled him somewhat.

"What's happening to me?" he wondered.

At that moment, he was in the cockpit of the Gundam Astraea, situated right in the midst of a battlefield. The enemy was still at a distance, allowing his thoughts to drift. His thoughts drifted unconsciously to the events leading up to his deployment.

"We will conduct a preliminary test for conflict intervention," Meister 874 had announced in the meeting room, conveying Veda's orders to the gathered Meisters. "Your adversary will be an AEU unit, the AEU-05 Hellions. Normally, this mission would call for Abulhool due to the enemy's aerial combat prowess, but due to Marlene Vlady's injuries, Ruido Resonance in the Astraea is requested to deploy."

"Understood," Ruido had responded.

Until then, Ruido, though a mobile suit pilot, had been reluctant to engage in combat. But this time, he felt no hesitation in deploying, especially as he was substituting for Marlene.

He thought of Marlene, whose gentle heart seemed out of place on the battlefield.

"I don't want her to have to fight," he wished. If he fought well, he could fulfill this desire.

But just then, a warning alarm snapped him back to reality. The E-Sensor had detected something: the Hellion unit. Unlike the Celestial Being's Abulhool, which could transform in mid-mission, the Hellions transformed on the base from mobile suits to aircraft but still boasted exceptional aerial combat capabilities.

"Sorry, but I'll take the initiative," Ruido muttered, pushing forward the Astraea's controls. GN particles surged from the suit's three thrusters, propelling it skywards.

In an instant, he was above the Hellion squad, firing his GN beam rifle.

"Zubyoon! Zubyoon! Zubyoon!"

Three successive shots were fired, each finding its target. The Hellions, despite their aircraft-like agility, couldn't dodge the light-speed beams. Moreover, the GN particles scattered across the battlefield disabled their radars and communications. The enemy pilots likely didn't even realize what hit them before being shot down.

"Sorry," Ruido murmured, a soft apology to the vanquished. He believed in intervention for lasting peace and justice and was resolved to fight for Marlene this time. There was no hesitation, no regret. But still, there was no thrill of battle, no exaltation like a war story hero might feel.

"Still, I have to do it. I know. I'm a Gundam Meister who believes in the principles of Celestial Being!" he shouted, more to himself than anyone else, as he fired off another beam.

In midair, the Astraea was an unstable entity. Despite being controlled by GN particles, its human-like form was not aerodynamically sound. It was almost as if it were forced into the air by sheer brute force.

Then, the enemy retaliated. A 180mm smoothbore gun from the Hellion's nose fired.

"Damn," Ruido grunted, clumsily dodging and losing balance. He decided to bring the Astraea down to the ground temporarily.

"Don't be pathetic, Ruido. Don't falter just because they're fighting back," he scolded himself, looking up as the Hellion flew overhead.

Their appearance was like airplanes with arms grafted on, he noted. To the Hellion pilots, the Gundam must have been a shock, embodying technology hundreds of years ahead, evident in its more human-like form.

The beam rifle Ruido had just used was another example. While Gundams wielded beam weapons, the Hellions were equipped with projectile-based smoothbore guns. AEU was developing linear guns with electrical acceleration for rapid fire, but these were not yet operational.

"The Gundam's armor is superior!" Even a direct hit from a smoothbore gun wouldn't scratch it, though the impact would surely be felt by the pilot inside. Better to dodge avoidable attacks, but he couldn't afford to hold back.

"Once more!" Ruido called out as the Astraea took to the skies again.

Exhausted from his mission, Ruido returned to find Marlene waiting for him.

"Sorry to bother you when you're tired. I just really wanted to thank you," Marlene said.

"It's our job, isn't it? But yeah, being thanked by you, Marlene, does make me feel pretty good. It eases the fatigue," Ruido replied, massaging his stiff muscles and smiling.

"We need tough Meisters for the full-scale armed intervention that follows us. I'll suggest it to Veda," he continued.

"What are you talking about? You came back safely. That's all that matters," Marlene insisted.

"Thanks for saying that. It means a lot to me."

"Stop it. I just said it without thinking..."

"You know, the things we say without thinking often reveal our deepest truths."

"What do you mean?"

"It's from Dostoevsky's 'The Brothers Karamazov.' Maybe I didn't get the words exactly right."

"I never pegged you as the literary type. Getting the details half-assed like that is just like you, though."

"Didn't I tell you? Well, it's okay. We have plenty of time to learn about each other."

Hearing Ruido, Marlene suddenly felt rather embarrassed.

"It sounds like a proposal. He doesn't realize what he's saying... I can't take any more of this."

With that thought, she quickly decided to make her exit.

"Anyway, I'm sorry for causing you trouble in my place. Would've gone smoother if I deployed."

"It's okay. Besides..." Ruido searched for words. "You know I love machines, right? There's nothing more enjoyable for me than being in one."

Exhausted as he was, Ruido was putting on a brave face. Marlene understood him better than he thought. His weariness ran deeper than physical strain, touching the edges of his mind.

He had killed. The fact corroded at him.

"You're really bad at lying." Marlene teased.

"Maybe you're right," Ruido admitted easily and continued, "But I'm glad I could go in your place for this mission. Really."

Ruido gaze lingered on Marlene.

"Why say that? I'm just..."

"I'm bad at lying, so I'll say it honestly. I care about you."

"Of course you do. You care about your teammates. I'm one of them."

Marlene looked away, feeling she might confess her own feelings if she kept meeting his gaze.

Then Ruido said something she never expected.

"It's because it's you, Marlene. I love you."

"Wha--!"

She understood perfectly. He had confessed his love. Joy welled up inside her, accompanied by tears.

"I vowed not to cry after that tragedy... so why these tears now?"

But she knew these were not tears of sadness.

Elsewhere, Ian found Chall in a corner of the maintenance facility, curled up in a ball.

"Hey, what's wrong, missy?"

He approached her out of reflex but quickly realized she was crying and was out of his depth. He was confident with machines, not with understanding women's hearts.

"Did something happen?"

Initially unwilling to respond, Chall remained silent as Ian likewise avoided pressing her. Just standing by, ready to give space if requested. But leaving her alone here felt wrong, so he lingered nearby.

Eventually, Chall spoke.

"I'm a terrible person. Why can't I just be happy for them?"

An Observer, satisfied with the data from the preliminary test of armed intervention, pondered. The data showed the Gundams performed well, and the Meisters suffered no physical damage. Emotional trauma, however, was not recorded.

"Veda, lacking emotion, can't understand the human heart" is a common teaching among the Observers. "That's why human Observers have veto power."

"What did the Meisters feel and think about the intervention?" they wondered, contemplating the unrecorded emotional responses of those involved.

File No.10

Chall Acustica

"Chall, I have something I want to talk to you about," Ruido suddenly addressed Chall one day. Weeks had passed since the official completion of the second-generation Gundam development. Now, the project had moved on to designing the third-generation Gundams, intended for actual armed interventions. Ian, the mechanic, was busier than ever, but conversely, the Gundam Meisters, like Ruido, found themselves with an abundance of downtime.

Though skilled in mechanics himself, Ruido had willingly deferred to Ian's expertise since his arrival. It was truly fortunate to have Ian as part of the team. Ruido sometimes wondered if Veda had orchestrated their meeting with Ian from the beginning.

"I had decided to wait until the Gundam development was finished. And now that it's done, well, it's time for... you know, that thing," Ruido struggled to get to the point, circling around it hesitantly.

As Chall listened, she felt a wave of affection. Despite his age, Ruido's hesitance struck her as endearingly cute. She decided to throw him a lifeline.

"So, you're finally going to marry Marlene. Congratulations, Ruido," she said.

"Ah... Yes," Ruido replied, a mix of surprise and relief on his face. He didn't truly understand how Chall felt about him. Relationships, especially those involving women, were Ruido's weakest area. Yet, he was acutely aware that marrying Marlene would bring significant changes to the bonds formed among the Meisters.

"You have the kindness to understand that... that's why I..."

Chall's heart swelled with genuine joy for their marriage, even as a hint of sadness lingered in its corners; the news of their relationship had initially brought her down. But now, she felt genuinely happy for them, as if it were her own joy.

"Thank you," she said unconsciously to Ruido.

"What do you mean, 'thank you'? I haven't done anything to deserve thanks from you," Ruido responded.

"That's true," Chall admitted, not fully understanding why she had said it. She was simply overjoyed.

Joyful for Ruido marrying Marlene, for their happiness, and that Ruido had shared this news with her... seeing Ruido's happy smile.

"What about the wedding?" Chall asked.

Ruido looked genuinely shocked. "A wedding?"

"Yes, you'll invite me, won't you?"

"Hey, we're members of a secret armed organization that picks fights all over the world. We're not in a position to have something as cozy as a wedding. I bet Marlene would say she doesn't want it."

"No way!" Chall exclaimed. "Absolutely not!"

For women, weddings are incredibly significant. No doubt, Marlene would say she didn't want one. That's her true nature, not mere politeness.

But she would undoubtedly be thrilled if it happened.

"We must have it. I know a great place. Let's do it there. Invite all our close friends. Of course, we can't invite relatives or friends outside the organization..."

Chall's mind was already brimming with wedding plans. Delight filled her at the thought of contributing to the happiness of the couple she cherished deeply.

The location chosen by Chall was a serendipitous discovery she made during a mission. Tucked away on the outskirts of the Human Reform League territories, it was a secluded mountain area rarely visited by anyone. As far as the eye could see, rows of cherry blossom trees stretched out before them.

That day, the cherry blossoms were in full bloom, their petals dancing in the pleasant breeze, covering every space. Nature thrived beautifully, independent of human existence, in a space untouched by conflict. For the Gundam Meisters, accustomed to living in the midst of conflict, this serene realm offered a fitting contrast for their wedding.

Chall, Ruido, and Marlene were there, along with a few other close members. Ian and Moreno couldn't make it due to work commitments. Gundam Meister 874, not usually one to join, surprisingly offered to help when approached.

"I'll take you to the location. I'll arrange a small aircraft," she said through the monitor, as always.

Permission to use the organization's small aircraft was granted by Veda, thanks to Meister 874's negotiation. Upon arrival, Meister 874 informed them she would stay inside the boat, monitoring from afar.

"Understood. Having you pilot for us is a big help. Thank you," Ruido expressed his gratitude, to which Meister 874 responded without a change in expression.

"No need for thanks. As a Meister, it's preferable for me to facilitate harmonious relationships among us."

Her unemotional response was characteristic of Meister 874, not perceived as out of place or ill-intended by anyone. She had spent considerable time with the Meisters, becoming an integral part of their circle.

"Ruido, Marlene..." Meister 874 continued, "Congratulations on your marriage."

A fleeting semblance of a smile flickered across Meister 874's usually impassive face.

"Thank you," Ruido and Marlene responded with beaming smiles.

"Shall we begin?" they said, leaving Meister 874 on board, stepping into the world of blossoming cherries.

There was no formal ceremony. No church, no wedding dress. Just a cherry blossom canopy and a single, ruined building.

Belonging to a secret organization, their actions were heavily restricted. This outing, not related to a mission, was an exception. No preparations for a wedding could be made in advance.

"What are we going to do to start?"

Marlene, the bride-to-be, hadn't been informed about what would happen here. She had only been told it was "like a wedding."

"Marlene, given the circumstances, I couldn't prepare something fitting like a ring. But I want to show my feelings in my way," Ruido approached her.

Marlene, unsure of what to expect, braced herself for something embarrassing. She doubted he was enough of a sap to kiss her instead of rings, and she considered making a witty remark to deflect, but words eluded her as she saw an unfamiliar seriousness in Ruido's approaching figure.

"He's actually quite a man when he's serious."

As she thought of turning this observation into a joke, Ruido's hand touched Marlene's neck, where a collar, an explosive device installed by Veda to prevent betrayal, was fastened.

Ruido quietly removed the collar.

"Eh?" Marlene gasped.

"I've got permission from Veda. You're free now. I can't give you a ring, but instead, I'll remove the one that's been binding you."

Veda, emotionless, wouldn't risk the organization for love or romance. The condition was clear: remove Marlene from the Gundam Meisters.

"Why would you do something so reckless... What value does a former Meister like me have?"

Marlene was happy, but she also felt a sense of rebellion. She didn't want someone else to decide how she should live her life.

"I shouldn't have decided this on my own... I want you to live as yourself, Marlene. If you choose to return as a Meister, that's your decision. But first, reclaim your identity beyond that role."

Marlene often referred to herself as a mere part of the Gundam. Ruido's clumsy approach was his way of affirming her individuality.

"And I have a request. As the person you are, will you marry me?"

Marlene couldn't respond immediately. She came for this purpose; her heart had already decided, but words failed her. Her tears, however, spoke volumes.

"I'll live with this man. I must not leave my feelings ambiguous. I must answer them clearly."

With effort, she finally spoke, "Yes, my Ruido, I will."

At that moment, Ruido embraced her tightly. Cherry blossoms swirled around them in a beautiful cascade, tinged with a touch of melancholy for Chall.

"It's just like..." Chall felt something beautifully scatter within her heart. Not unpleasantly, for she could confidently say that their happiness was also her greatest joy.

Several years later, the third-generation Gundams had completed their design phase and were entering final assembly. Ruido and Marlene had welcomed a daughter into their lives, a girl with two names: her true name and one within the organization. Born into the organization, she was named Feldt Grace by Ruido, Marlene, and Chall after much discussion. Initially reluctant, Chall had joined in naming her at their insistence.

Feldt was raised in the organization's care facility, a common practice within the vast Celestial Being. Some members had even entrusted their entire families to the organization. As the child of Gundam Meisters, Feldt was raised within the organization but not for soldiering. She received a basic education and could choose her future, albeit with some restrictions.

Marlene, having retired from active duty as a Meister, stayed on Veda's roster as a reserve, ready to return if called upon.

"If something happens, I will fight," she declared.

However, her daily routine now revolved around spending time with Feldt and watching her grow, a sentiment shared by Chall.

With the third-generation Gundams still in production and no role for Meisters yet, Ruido was the exception. Being a mechanic, he worked daily at the factory with Ian on the development of the new Gundam.

"I doubt I'd be much help with parenting anyway," Ruido joked, adding, "With two mothers like you and Chall, what role is there for me?"

Marlene chuckled, playfully teasing that Chall showed more parental instincts towards Feldt than Ruido. Chall, feeling warmly accepted by this family, didn't know what to say.

Despite making comments about avoiding parenting, Ruido tried to spend as much time as possible with Feldt when he could.

"The new Gundam is going to be amazing," he'd say to young Feldt, who barely understood him. Chall often smiled wryly at these scenes, aware that sharing too much could breach confidentiality when Feldt was older, and that's when simply being an "overprotective parent" wouldn't cut it.

"Listen, Feldt. There's a super-duper secret about Nadleeh! It's actually got hair!" Ruido continued, oblivious to Chall's concerns. He continued to hold his daughter and talk to her fervently.

"Chall..." Marlene suddenly turned serious. "Do you plan to continue as a Meister after the armed interventions start?"

Originally scouted for Gundam development, Chall wasn't expected to participate in armed interventions. However, staying with the organization

meant inevitably piloting a Gundam and engaging in combat, equating to taking lives.

"Do you remember the day Ruido first saw combat in the Astraea?" Marlene asked.

"I do," Chall replied, knowing there was no way she could forget. On that day, after defeating the enemy and returning to Krung Thep, Ruido had tried to maintain his usual cheerfulness in front of her. However, the fact that he had taken a life had taken a toll on his heart. It was evident even to Chall.

"Do you think you're stronger than Ruido?"

Chall couldn't claim to be. She knew she wasn't strong, and yet...

"I just think it's irresponsible to create a Gundam and then leave everything to someone else," she started. Marlene fixed her with a sharp gaze, and Chall unconsciously voiced her true feelings.

"Ruido plans to become a Meister for the third-generation Gundams, and that's why I want to pilot a Gundam too..."

As she trailed off, Marlene suddenly pulled her in close and hugged her tightly.

"You don't need to say any more. You're such a kind-hearted girl. You were thinking of protecting Ruido on the battlefield in my place, weren't you? But that's my role. If I ever think he's in danger, I'll step in."

"But, Marlene, what about Feldt?"

"What, are you implying I wouldn't be able to save Ruido?"

"I didn't say that. But..."

As Marlene tightened her embrace, Chall felt the steady beat of Marlene's heart against her own.

"Chall, follow your own path. Fighting is different. You don't need to fight for Ruido, for me, or for Feldt. We know you're kind. Your path is different."

"Different path," Chall echoed.

"You can contribute to peace without fighting. Live, survive, and witness a world where conflicts have been eradicated."

Chall couldn't find the words to respond. She understood she was not cut out for the harsh realities of combat. Marlene called it "kindness," but in the context of the organization, it was simply "weakness."

"Oh look, Feldt, your two moms are hugging. What's going on you two?" Noticing them, Ruido called out jokingly, dispelling the heavy atmosphere in an instant.

"It's nothing. More importantly, don't overdo the doting dad bit; it's embarrassing," Marlene retorted lightly.

"What's wrong with enjoying peace while we can?" Ruido smiled back.

Chall admired Ruido's resolve. He knew they lived in a world of endless strife. And that he would have to kill people when he fought. He even understood he might die himself in battle...

Yet even if it meant he couldn't see his family's smiles anymore, he was resolved to dedicate himself to ending conflict and bringing happiness to all mankind. That's why, for now, before military intervention began, he was spending every possible moment living in peace with his family.

"Ruido is amazing."

Chall thought to herself, knowing full well she didn't have that level of determination.

"If it was just us who got to be happy... how nice would that be?"

If she could think that way, life would be so much easier.

"I just hope this temporary peace lasts as long as possible," Chall couldn't help but wish from the bottom of her heart.

Yet, these days of tranquility were abruptly shattered by an incident, a harsh reminder of the lingering turmoil in their world.

A terrorist attack against the Human Reform League's orbital elevator. The Meisters received this intel two days before the actual attack was set to occur.

"Seems like a significant number of mobile suits will be deployed."

"This isn't just terrorism. It's war."

Ruido and Marlene's expressions were grave, and the reason was clear. Faced with such a large-scale terror plot, Veda had decided not to intervene.

"Knowing this in advance, shouldn't we intervene? Isn't that our duty?"

Anger tinged Chall's voice, directed at Veda. The decision not to intervene in the terror plot baffled them.

Certainly, it was too soon for Celestial Being to step into the limelight. Aeolia's plan called for waiting until the completion of the third-generation Gundams. However, the consequences of inaction could be devastating, with so many lives at stake.

"The thought of just standing by during such a massive conflict makes a mockery of our goal to eradicate war through force."

As Chall spoke, her tone grew more intense. She knew it wasn't the others' fault, but...

"Veda seems to think this incident won't significantly impact the plan," Ruido finally said. Veda derived everything from calculations. It judged that this terrorist attack, which involved dozens of Hellions seized by terrorists and intended to be crashed into the orbital elevator, would not significantly alter the overall plan. The worst-case scenario, the collapse of the elevator, seemed unlikely, given that AEU's were suspected of backing the attack.

If this prediction was accurate, the elevator wouldn't suffer catastrophic damage. The elevator was secured by both high and low orbital rings, enhancing the strength of the three elevators. If one fell, it would significantly impact the others, including the AEU. Thus, it seemed unlikely that the terror plot aimed to completely destroy the elevator.

The use of relatively new models in large numbers by the AEU, who had reasons to hinder other factions' elevator developments, was a key basis for this decision. The AEU was lagging in orbital elevator development, and this gap could widen in future space endeavors. So, they planned to delay the Human Reform League's elevator completion through terror.

"But still..." Chall countered. This was all based on the premise that the AEU was involved. Considering the number of Hellions, the AEU's involvement seemed likely, but what if it was wrong? Even if Veda's prediction was accurate, unintended serious damage to the elevator during combat was possible. If the elevator fell, the debris could cause catastrophic damage, potentially leading to humanity's extinction.

"We have the power to stop this now, and doing nothing is unacceptable."

Chall's words echoed the sentiments of the other Meisters.

"There's a way," Ruido finally spoke up. "We just have to ensure our organization and the existence of the Gundams remain unknown."

Veda feared early exposure of their organization to the world, which would require major plan revisions. Veda wasn't opposed to stopping the terror.

"How about this?" Ruido began explaining.

During combat, the GN particles emitted by the Gundams would prevent external information leakage, as proven in previous test interventions. The issue was the wreckage of the downed enemy units. If they used equipment like beam rifles or beam sabers, not typically found on current models, traces left on the wreckage could indirectly reveal the existence of the Gundams. So far, the limited number of enemies and the secrecy of their handling had allowed them to deal with the wreckage discreetly. But now, the number of enemies was too large, and freedom of action within the Human Reform League's territory was limited.

"The Plutone will be key to the mission." The plan was to lure enemy units to the brink and then trigger an overload in the GN Condensers on Plutone's waist. These condensers were exceptionally large, storing a vast amount of particles.

GN particles, usually harmless, contained high energy. Releasing them in large quantities could disrupt enemy machine computer systems, rendering them inoperable. The traces left on computers, unlike those from beam weapons, were nearly impossible to analyze.

If successful, they might prevent the terrorist attack without causing any casualties.

"Isn't that dangerous? Chall will be right in the thick of it," Marlene expressed her concern.

"There's a core fighter in the Plutone. Chall will escape in it when it goes berserk," Ruido added, noting that the Gundam type had GN particle shielding.

"Still, we don't fully understand the effects of GN particles on the human body under special circumstances. It's not entirely risk-free."

While the Plutone lured the enemy, Astraea would support with the Proto GN Sword, a physical blade. After the enemies were neutralized, Chall would return in the core fighter and recombine with the Plutone for retrieval. At that point, the Plutone's main body would be depleted of GN particles, but it could still move if combined with the core fighter's solar furnace.

The plan reflected Ruido's mechanical expertise.

"I'll do it. Please, let me do this."

Chall was deeply committed to this mission.

"With this, even I, who am weak, can fight for the eradication of conflict."

Chall doubted she could execute the mission without fatalities. Yet, this mission, fraught with risk, felt like a calling she couldn't ignore.

"I'm thinking of retiring as a Meister after this. So, I ask for your cooperation."

She shared her thoughts, which she had been contemplating for days. She lacked Ruido's resolve. As Marlene said, she wasn't cut out to be a Meister.

"I feel like I've finally found a mission I can do. Let's do it!"

Ruido nodded vigorously in response to Chall's words.

"Now that it's settled, let's bring in Meister 874."

"Wait, what?"

Chall and Marlene were surprised.

"She's one of us too. Let's have her deploy in the Sadalsuud for battlefield data collection and emergency unit retrieval," Ruido said matter-of-factly. He knew Meister 874 wasn't just any Meister, and likely Veda would learn about it too. But still, asking for her cooperation as a 'comrade' was very much like him.

"Right, let's do that. Then... I'll also deploy."

"That's--"

Ruido hesitated at Marlene's words.

"Marlene, what if something happens to you? What about Feldt?"

"Chall, if something happens to you, Feldt would be devastated. She's a kind girl, strongly inheriting her father's traits. I'm joining, too. No one's being left out. The Abulhool can use the standard missile pods mounted on the wings."

Marlene's resolve was unmistakable, allowing no room for argument.

"Alright then. Let's involve Ian and Moreno too!" Ruido declared, his smile belying the gravity of the situation as if he were inviting them to a picnic.

Immediately discussing the plan, mechanic Ian, a former AEU mechanic knowledgeable about the Hellions, endorsed it. He had played a part in the Hellions' development.

"Though it pains me to target the flying machines I helped create... against the Gundams, they stand no chance. Don't worry. I'll make sure the Gundams are in perfect condition for the mission!"

However, Moreno, the doctor, was the only one opposed.

"The effects of GM particles on the human body are completely unknown. It could be fatal for everyone present."

Even so, Moreno knew he couldn't change Chall and the others' determination.

"Go. But come back alive. As long as you're alive, I'll take care of you!"

Before and after deployment, Chall and her team had a strong ally in Moreno. Lastly, they shared the plan with Gundam Meister 874.

Upon hearing Ruido's explanation, she immediately responded from the monitor.

"Veda has approved the mission. We can proceed with the plan."

For them, ready to proceed with the mission even against Veda's orders, this was the best news possible.

The Human Reform League's orbital elevator was constructed atop an artificial island at sea. This location was one of the factors that led the rival AEU to evolve their units into flight-capable models. Similarly, the Union, also possessing flight-capable models, needed them for quick troop deployments as the world's police.

The Human Reform League stationed numerous Fanton units for the elevator's defense. The Fanton, capable of holding their own against the Middle Eastern military's sea-based mobile armors, a primary adversary in the "Solar War", were powerless against the Hellions approaching from above. They could only fire blindly into the air, their mobile suit superiority rendered ineffective.

"Damn it, they're breaking through our final defense line!" shouted a Fanton pilot of the Human Reform League. Then, something unbelievable happened, a sensor blackout. Even the external camera feed was gone.

"What's happening?"

Comms were also cut off. The pilot thought it was a malfunction and began checking various systems in the cockpit. Fortunately, they didn't try to exit the unit to assess the situation; if they had, they would have witnessed the fast-approaching battle between the mobile suits and Hellions and become a target himself.

Zgyuun!

The Proto GN Sword cleaved through the air, slicing a Hellion in half. It happened in the instant all sensors became inoperable.

"Only target those in the path of the mission. Ignore the rest!" Ruido, in the cockpit of the Astraea, shouted.

"Got it." Marlene, piloting the Abulhool, hit a leading Hellion with a missile. The Astraea and Abulhool were fighting to buy a few seconds for the Plutone to reach the point of GN Condenser overload.

The mission's total duration was less than a minute. They had to move Plutone to the conflict's epicenter before the sensor disruption from the GN particles subsided.

Chall pushed Plutone to its limits. Ignoring the disoriented Hellion units, they only needed to evade enemies obstructing their path, Astraea and Abulhool took care of them.

A clear path opened before the Plutone.

"We've reached the designated point!" Chall immediately triggered the GN Condenser's overload. Plutone, an experimental unit with a large waist-mounted condenser, filled the cockpit with warning alarms. In a few seconds, the condenser would release its particles outside.

"Core Fighter, eject!" Chall pulled the lever, but nothing happened.

"Malfunction!" She thought, maintaining her composure desperately. She tried the Core Fighter start-up again. Still no response.

The cockpit's alarm grew louder. The monitor showed GN particle levels in the condenser exceeding expectations, risking an explosion.

"Why?" She checked the basic systems, no anomalies. It seemed unlikely Ian's maintenance was flawed.

The only possibility was interference from a higher control system.

"Could it be Veda?" But Veda had approved the mission. Shaking her head to clear it, Chall knew now wasn't the time to seek culprits. If she didn't escape, what she feared most would happen.

"What's wrong?" Ruido's *Astraea* approached, along with Marlene's *Abulhool*.

"Don't come closer!" Chall's worst fear was involving them. But they couldn't be entangled in this.

"The escape system isn't working... Use the *Astrea's* saber to cut the unit open!"

The *Astraea* drew its beam saber from its waist, a weapon not supposed to be equipped by mobile suits of this era. If seen, it could reveal the existence of the Gundams.

But Ruido couldn't worry about that now.

"It's okay. We'll make sure to bring you back alive, Chall. You have to survive." Marlene's *Abulhool* extended its manipulator, equipped with a built-in beam saber.

"Stop, get away!" The monitor showed almost no time left before the condenser released its particles.

"We're Gundam Meisters! We can do this."

"Yes, Chall, we ca--" Marlene's words were cut off. A shockwave and explosion rocked the cockpit, sweeping away Chall's consciousness.

A bright flash emitted from *Plutone* enveloped the sky in an instant.

Then, a badly damaged fighter emerged from the center of light, *Plutone's* Core Fighter. Sensing the Meister was incapacitated, it automatically followed a preset escape course.

"Core Fighter ejection confirmed," said Gundam Meister 874, piloting the *Sadalsuud* on the ground. She continued collecting data for Veda.

"Terrorist Hellion forces and Human Reform League units rendered nonfunctional from GN particle exposure. Confirming the success of the anti-terrorist mission."

Already, the swirling particle vortex bled away as emitted GN particles decayed into mundane photons.

Meister 874 aimed *Sadalsuud's* enhanced sensors toward the *Plutone's* location.

"Gundam *Astraea*, Gundam *Abulhool*, Gundam *Plutone* confirmed. No significant damage to the units. Regarding the Meisters..."

She hesitated, surprised at her own reaction.

"No life signs from the Meisters."

Just stating the fact felt incredibly difficult. Why that was so perplexing to Meister 874, she couldn't understand. But introspection had to wait; the mission had taken an unexpected turn. There was much to do quickly.

Veda sent word to deploy the first-generation Gundam, the 0 Gundam, for the recovery of the three units.

The response was remarkably swift as if someone had anticipated this outcome...

"Where am I...?"

As Chall's eyes fluttered open in a hospital room, she saw Ian and Moreno peering anxiously at her.

"You're awake..." Ian's eyes brimmed with tears.

Chall winced in pain, managing to croak out a, "What happened?"

The pain triggered her memory of the mission, the one to prevent the terrorist attack. The Plutone's GN Condenser went into overload, but the Core Fighter's ejection system failed. And then, Ruido and Marlene had approached to save her...

Terrifying memories resurfaced.

"The others...?" Chall asked, her voice trembling as she gazed at the two. She had survived; surely, they had too. Such a horrific outcome was unthinkable.

Ian struggled to speak, "I'm sorry, I should have noticed during maintenance. I never imagined..."

He bowed deeply, his quivering voice betraying his anguish.

Moreno interjected, "Don't blame Ian. We checked the unit afterward, and there were no faults. His maintenance was flawless."

"The others..." Chall repeated, her mind going numb, desperate for answers. Neither of their explanations registered. Her only concern was for her friends.

"The others..." she repeats again as Moreno gently hands her something. It was Marlene's hairpin, with scratches here and there.

"They... they were exposed to a massive amount of GN particles. It was almost instant..." Moreno's voice was heavy with grief, "We should've foreseen the toxic potential of GN Particles under specific conditions..."

They're gone. Dead. That's the reality.

"Both of them looked peaceful, no injuries or anything as if they were just sleeping," Moreno added softly as Chall stared at the hairpin, tears flowing uncontrollably. It seemed like the tears would never stop, no matter how much she cried.

Days later, Chall felt as if her heart had been hollowed out, matching the number of tears she had shed. Ian explained what happened after the accident.

The three Gundams were recovered by Meister 874's Sadalsuud and the O Gundam, with their solar furnaces intact. Who piloted the O Gundam remained a mystery.

Chall had managed to escape in the Core Fighter, but not without being exposed to high concentrations of GN particles for a brief period. According to Moreno's diagnosis, this exposure caused a slow mutation in her cells. It wasn't immediately life-threatening, but long-term treatment was necessary. She also suffered significant damage to her left eye during the Core Fighter's escape.

The mission to prevent the terrorist attack on the Human Reform League's orbital elevator was a success. Now, political maneuverings between the AEU and the Human Reform League had begun.

To Chall, none of this held any meaning. The happiness of the people she knew was shattered. "Why did I alone survive?" She wondered how young Feldt would cope with this reality.

"Chall, you must live," Marlene's final words echoed in her mind. Why had Marlene urged her to live? What was she supposed to do with her life now? The answers were not easy to come by. However, there was one thing she couldn't do, waste the sacrifice of those two. Marlene had once told Chall to "live your own way."

Chall had received the personal effects of Ruido and Marlene a few days earlier, Ruido's favorite black rider suit and Marlene's hairpin. Holding these, Chall stepped outside the base. Inside, no answers were found, but the outside world greeted her with a gentle breeze, incongruent with the conflicts happening elsewhere.

"What should I do? Tell me," she asked the silent mementos.

There were no answers, but holding them, Chall felt a newfound strength welling up inside her. It was as if Ruido and Marlene were telling her, "How long do you plan on doing this? Stand up and take action."

"I may not know what to do, but I have to do something," Chall realized, feeling a strong resolve within her that she had previously seen in Ruido.

"I'll watch over Celestial Being's future and see the world they wanted to change," she resolved. Her expression had changed, now focused on a distant future.

Living on to carry their will, Chall committed to eradicating conflict through combat, unsure if Ruido and Marlene would have approved. But they had instilled in her the determination to fight. She would continue the fight with the Gundams they had all built together for a future where conflicts were eliminated. For the sake of the future Feldt was left with...

"I promise I'll see this world change," she vowed. Aeolia's ideology had transformed into something greater within her.

The story of the second-generation Gundam Meisters, Ruido, Marlene, and Chall, had come to an end. But the prelude of Celestial Being was just beginning, with the narrative shifting to Grave, responsible for scouting Meisters.

1st SEASON

Epilogue

In Krung Thep, tucked away from other facilities, lay a secluded room. Dim lighting cast an otherworldly glow across the room. The only source of brightness was a monitor embedded in the wall, where Meister 874 could be seen.

"A significant change in the plan is required," Meister 874 announced.

"Indeed," responded a man seated opposite the monitor, Grave Violento by name. He was an Innovade, created to scout for Gundam Meisters.

The plan Meister 874 referred to involved recruiting humans as Gundam Meisters, Ruido, Marlene, and Chall, even by force, if necessary. Veda, the decision-making entity, hadn't yet resolved whether Gundam Meisters should be human or Innovade. This wasn't indecision, Veda, devoid of human emotions, was incapable of such a feeling. It was merely compiling information until a decisive moment necessitated a choice. Both plans, for human and Innovade Meisters, were progressing in tandem, with several Innovade Meisters already operational. Plans to transform Meister 874 into an Innovade Meister were also underway.

"That incident was regrettable." Grave said, a reference to the loss of two Meisters and the severe injury of the third, rendering her incapable of further service. For Grave, who had personally scouted them, the loss was a profound shock. Perhaps this tragedy could have been avoided had he not brought them into the organization.

"Does this mean Meisters will now exclusively be Innovades?" Meister 874 inquired, having already surmised that human Meisters were unlikely to be recruited. Humans were too gentle, she had concluded.

"Losing experienced Meisters is a significant loss, but Veda has entrusted us with a new mission," Grave spoke, revealing little about the mission due to the confidentiality within the organization. Aware of this, Meister 874 refrained from probing further. Yet, from Grave's tone, she inferred that the plan to recruit human Meisters was still ongoing.

"There's movement among the Innovade Meisters too. They're making recommendations to Veda based on their experiences," Grave continued.

"Ribbons Almark, too?" she asked.

"Of course, he's included."

"What about the agents and engineers?"

"As of now, there's no talk of replacing those roles with Innovades."

"I see," Meister 874 expressed relief. If the organization decided to exclude humans entirely, those like Ian and Moreno, privy to its secrets, could face elimination. She wished to prevent that.

"They joined the organization under unusual circumstances," Grave explained. "I've conducted follow-up investigations and confirmed they're suitable members. You can rest assured."

Grave's explanation, already known to Meister 874 through her link to Veda, still brought her comfort. Grave's human-like explanations stirred a semblance of warmth in her, drawing her closer to humanity. Conversations with Grave often stirred such emotions, especially after the tragedy.

"The development of machines to support the third-generation Gundams is starting, and it seems humans will be recruited as test pilots," Grave revealed.

"Did you scout this person too?"

"No. I don't know who it is, but there was a recommendation, and Veda made the selection."

The organization always sought exceptional talent, valuing not just data but also personal recommendations. Grave's role as a scout stemmed from this need.

"Either way, the organization is undergoing a significant transformation. Together, we remain dedicated to Aeolia's ideals," they both acknowledged, etching these words into their core.



機動戦士

FINAL OOP

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

[VOLUME ONE]

—A.D.2302—

2ND SEASON CHAPTER.01

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2nd SEASON

Prologue

Aeolia Schenberg's grand design was "the eradication of conflict through armed intervention."

Hidden beneath this manifesto was a more profound intent: not for humanity to venture into the cosmos in its current primitive state, but to evolve into "Innovators," beings of revolutionary change, ready to step onto a new stage. It was a push towards a peaceful encounter with unknown intelligent entities, to coexist in newfound harmony.

"For the coming dialogues."

Embedded in that phrase, spoken as the 'purpose of the plan' within the organization, was that kind of meaning.

Veda, the entity overseeing the plan, was neither hasty nor afraid of mistakes.

The sole absolute was reaching the final goal. The path taken mattered not, whether it was circuitous or straight. Any detour was never seen as an issue.

Thus, suggestions from those involved in the organization, if deemed "worth trying," were actively adopted. Veda would only reject a proposal for two reasons.

One, if it was clearly detrimental to the plan's interests.

The other, if it threatened the survival of humanity as a species. Acts like mass genocide fell into this category. It wasn't about humanitarian concerns. The loss of a large number of humans meant a narrowing of the genetic pool of the species, thereby limiting the possibilities for human evolution. This was unacceptable. In other words, Veda showed no interest in the loss of a few human lives for the advancement of the plan...

It wasn't cruelty.

Veda, after all, lacked a heart.

It was but a machine, acting solely for its purpose.

Thus, Veda remained oblivious to the fact that the Innovades, created and used to understand humans, were driven by emotions just like humans.

And that those driven by emotion, regardless of logic, could destroy everything...

In the vastness of space, two figures raced, leaving a trail of glittering particles that shimmered like stardust, signaling that these shadows were more than human. They piloted special mobile suits: Gundams.

These humanoid weapons, commonly referred to as mobile suits, represented a particular breed of their kind.

"GN-XXX Gundam Rasiel, thrusters stable within prescribed limits, particle control without issue," reported a man in a controlled voice from the cockpit of one of the Gundams, its shoulders adorned with large particle verniers.

His name was Grave Violento, a Gundam Meister of Celestial Being.

His appearance was obscured by his normal suit, but beneath it, he had uncharacteristically long hair for a pilot and often wore dark sunglasses, making his expressions even more inscrutable.

He was not human.

Grave was an Innovade, created by Veda to resemble humans, a secret known to few within the organization.

As a Gundam Meister, Grave was also entrusted with scouting potential Meisters, a special role. Initially focused on scouting, he simultaneously took on the duties of a Meister with the completion of the Rasiel. Naturally endowed with both skill sets, he effortlessly fulfilled both roles.

Presently, as a Meister, he was conducting a test flight of his beloved Rasiel.

Accompanying him in this test was another Gundam, the GN-000 or O Gundam, the first mobile weapon produced by the organization.

The pilot of O Gundam, also non-human, had different directives from Veda. It was rare for them to operate together, and this joint mission was an unforeseen deviation from their usual tasks.

"Checklist cleared. Proceeding to final test at the designated point," Grave announced, steering the Rasiel away from the colony Krung Thep, with the O Gundam maintaining a fixed distance behind.

"The Rasiel seems to be performing well," came a soft voice over the comm from the O Gundam.

"Yeah."

"Don't worry. I can hand this solar furnace over with peace of mind."

To power a Gundam, a special engine unit was essential. The GN Drive, also known as a solar furnace, was rare, with only five in existence, all owned by the organization.

Of the third-generation Gundams planned for deployment, five were in line. Following tests to match the units with the drives, the drive from O Gundam, a first-generation unit, was chosen to be installed in the Rasiel.

Currently, Rasiel's final test was underway, supported by the O Gundam. The other third-generation Gundams, though complete, were not yet ready for testing. In contrast, the O Gundam, having been tested in actual combat, was a reliable machine.

For this test, the Rasiel was equipped with another Gundam's drive. This would likely be the last time the O Gundam and Rasiel, sharing a single drive, would be activated simultaneously.

"Entering final acceleration test."

Brighter light burst forth from Rasiel's shoulder verniers. Inside the speeding Rasiel, Grave relished the flight alongside O Gundam.

"The eradication of conflict through military force." This was the mission of the organization known as Celestial Being, with their ultimate weapon: the mobile suit Gundam. The year was A.D. 2302. The long-standing solar power generation conflict had ended, and the world had converged into three super-state groups, each sustained by one of the three orbital elevators, providing abundant energy to their respective territories.

However, this development significantly exhausted regions outside their influence.

In the interim, Celestial Being utilized real-world data from their second-generation Gundams to complete five third-generation models: the close-combat GN-001 Exia, the long-range GN-002 Dynames, the aerially adaptable GN-003 Kyrios, the GN-Drive targeted GN-004 Nadleeh, and the final unit, the GN-XXX Rasiel. The latter, a special Gundam developed under Veda's direction, was shrouded in secrecy, its details known only to a select few within the organization.

"Hey, how did it go?" Ian Vashti, the mechanic, greeted Grave upon his return from testing the Rasiel.

"No problems," Grave replied curtly.

"Come on, there are so many black boxes in this thing even I, who built it, don't know about. I can't guarantee top maintenance without at least some feedback."

"What do you want to know?"

Ian jumped at Grave's response. "The particle verniers on the shoulders. How did they affect mobility?"

Ian, originally a mechanic from AEU, had suggested this system for Rasiel. His design of the Hellion, a humanoid mobile suit, had unexpectedly high maneuverability due to its main engines being concentrated in the upper body. Rasiel benefited from this knowledge, achieving superior performance under GN particle control.

"It shows high performance. An excellent system," Grave evaluated.

"That's good to hear," Ian smiled, seemingly more interested in praise than data.

"What's up, something interesting?" A young man with a smile approached them.

Hixar Fermi.

He was a pilot of experimental weapons designed to enhance Gundam capabilities, not scouted by Grave but selected through recommendation. His skills were moderate, but as a morale booster, he was unparalleled. His presence alone lightened the mood, a talent Veda alone couldn't have identified.

"Let me in on it, Gravey."

"We were discussing the particle verniers installed on Rasiel's shoulders," Grave answered seriously.

"That's it? How is that interesting?" Hixar's face fell in disappointment, to which Ian laughed loudly.

"To a mechanic, this is what's interesting!"

"Oh come on, such a geek."

"I have a report to make to Veda. Excuse me," Grave excused himself from the gathering.

"Wait up. Let's talk about girls, that'll surely liven things up, Gravey."

Ignoring Hixar's suggestion, Grave started to walk away.

"Come on, don't ignore me. Ian, you like talking about girls, right? Let's keep Grave here and see him smile."

Ian dramatically shook his head. "As if Grave would grin over girl talk. Besides, I'd rather not. I'm a family man, show some respect."

"Fine, whatever. The real problem is there aren't any nice girls around here anyway."

Among the women in the facility, only two interacted frequently with Hixar and Grave. One was agent Sumeragi Lee Noriega, a dark-spirited woman scarred by a major accident involving a Gundam, resulting in the loss of her comrades. The other was Gundam Meister 874, a child and an eccentric who only communicated through monitors, far from being a romantic interest.

"These two, huh... If only the new Gundam Meister scouts could bring in some beautiful and voluptuous women, the male Meisters' performance would surely improve. Maybe I'll suggest it to Veda."

Though the conversation seemed light-hearted, it was understood within the organization that this levity was a deliberate escape from the mounting tension of upcoming armed interventions.

Celestial Being, a private armed organization, was soon to declare war to the world.

File No.11

Grave Violento

In the shadowed confines of his quarters, Grave Violento, a Gundam Meister, found himself immersed in the details of his impending mission. The year was A.D. 2302, and Celestial Being had yet to unleash its military interventions upon the world. Yet Grave, a Meister and an agent in equal measure, was already deep in the throes of numerous missions.

His current preoccupation lay with a mission of utmost secrecy, safeguarding the organization's hidden truths. Even in the absence of open warfare, the tendrils of Celestial Being were inextricably linked to the world, and information, like water, found its way through the cracks.

Central to their cause was the Gundam, the mobile weapon around which their military might revolved, forged in the depths of their clandestine factories. Yet, their materials were an Achilles' heel, necessitating sourcing from across the globe.

Furthermore, the recruitment of new Gundam Meisters had begun. Veda, the guiding intelligence of their cause, meticulously screened the selected candidates, drawing them closer and inadvertently widening the chasm for potential leaks.

This mission was intrinsically linked to new Meisters and safeguarding against the intel leaks. The decision to compose the Meister ranks predominantly of humans was already set in stone.

The tragedy of Plutone had cost them dearly, losing exceptional Meisters and momentarily setting back their plans to incorporate human pilots. Grave had anticipated a shift towards Innovades for the Meister roles.

However, Veda, swayed by strong advocacy within the organization and its logical assessments, had opted for humans. "I wonder if it's because the previous human Meisters were so exceptional..." Grave mused, thinking of Ruido, Marlene, and Chall.

"If only they could have participated as Meisters," he couldn't help but think, despite how impossible that scenario was.

The third-generation Gundams, four in total, now lay masterless. The scouting for three Meisters was nearly complete, each candidate uniquely suited to the capabilities of their respective Gundams. The reserve Meister would likely be chosen from those not selected as main pilots.

Candidate 1: Lasse Aeon, 20, member of the mafia in the criminal underworld. No issues with consenting to the principles or piloting ability. A top candidate.

Candidate 2: Eco Calore, 25. Piloting skills are unstable; doesn't demonstrate consistent ability. Shows top-class skill at peak but unreliable.

Candidate 3: Amy Zimbalist, 18, Union Army pilot with exceptional yet unripe talent.

"Amy, huh? A teenager in our ranks would certainly add some flair," Hixar suddenly chimed in, peering over Grave's shoulder at the documents he was reviewing.

Grave chose to ignore him.

"What's the matter? Don't ignore me. That hurts, you know. What if, during combat, you need my support, and this emotional wound from today suddenly resurfaces, causing a momentary delay in pulling the trigger? You might die, Gravey. I'm sure you wouldn't want to die like that."

Grave reconsidered and decided to respond to Hixar's words, not because he didn't want to die, but because he understood that ignoring him would only make him more persistent.

"Currently, aside from Gundam Meister 874, there are no young female Meister candidates."

"But wasn't she removed from the list? Even her custom Gundam's construction was halted," Hixar interjected, shocked by the revelation.

"Another thing. The Amy Zimbalist listed here is a male."

"Wh-what? But Amy is a girl's name, isn't it?"

Hixar reacted dramatically as if the world had been turned upside down. However, if one looked closely at the documents, there was a clear ♂ symbol next to Amy's name.

"It's a fact. According to the documents, it seems his parents wanted a daughter. He seems to have been raised as a girl during his childhood."

"No way~ That's false advertising."

Turning his attention back to the dossier, Grave continued his preparations, undeterred by Hixar's astonishment and the complexities surrounding their potential new recruits.

Standing beside the towering Rasiel Gundam, Grave and Hixar appeared minuscule. At a commanding eighteen meters, the Gundam was a titan among men.

"Stealth," Grave whispered, and like a mirage, the behemoth blended into its backdrop, vanishing from sight. The GN Stealth, a feature equipped in the Gundam, rendered it invisible not only to the naked eye but to sensors and radars alike. However, its effectiveness waned with the Gundam's rapid movements or when GN particles, emitted upon activation, interacted with its stealth coating. Despite its limitations, the ability to conceal such a massive entity was invaluable.

"Now then, with the Rasiel hidden, shall we head into the city?" Hixar suggested, gesturing towards the distant urban sprawl, the site of their

current mission. They had discovered a special unit from the Human Reform League, shadowing a Meister candidate. This unit, cloaked in secrecy even from Veda's extensive intelligence network.

Officially, they were responsible for the development of the new units following the Tierens, but there was more to it than that.

"They're probably involved with the Super Soldiers..."

The Meister candidate involved was a "super soldier," someone who had undergone artificial enhancement. However, these super soldiers, developed by the Human Reform League, had yet to yield successful results, and research was on the verge of being scaled back. The candidate they were targeting had developed a split personality, which led to the classification as "disposable material."

Grave felt reservations about scouting this candidate, considering it too risky. Yet, the decision of Veda, their governing intelligence, was absolute. If he deemed the candidate unfit upon meeting, he would report it. His deep understanding of humanity, gained from living among them, granted him insights others lacked, something that Veda valued, which was why he was assigned to this mission.

"How are we getting to the city? It's not like we can hail a taxi, right?" Hixar asked, noting the distance. Grave's response was action, not words, as he began walking towards the city.

"Seriously, walking? It's kilometers away! Come on, Gravey-boy, have some mercy. We'll be exhausted and sweaty by the time we get there, and that won't sit well with the ladies, affecting our mission," Hixar complained.

Grave, maintaining his pace, chose to ignore him, though he recognized the truth in Hixar's words. This mission's success hinged partly on Hixar's interactions with women, a dynamic as intricate as the webs of war they navigated.

"All right, let's do this!" Hixar exclaimed, his spirits unusually high as they entered the city. His mission, to scout beautiful women for the organization, was a dream come true.

"I have another mission to attend to," Grave quietly mentioned and parted ways, leaving Hixar to his fanciful endeavor.

"Gravey-boy, you're an alright guy. You even went to Veda to suggest this mission for me," Hixar thought to himself.

Hixar first stopped at the city's most renowned florist, purchasing a large bouquet of roses. Despite the pain of paying out of his own pocket, as Celestial Being's covert operations didn't allow for receipts, he saw it as a necessary expense for the mission. He didn't want to miss out on a potential asset for the organization.

"No girl can resist roses," he thought, though he quickly added, "Any girl who doesn't like them isn't the type I want anyway."

As Hixar began scouting for girls, he remained blissfully unaware of how Grave was using him...

Grave, on the other hand, had ventured into a deserted alleyway, a sharp contrast to the bustling city. It was a narrow alleyway flanked by tall buildings on either side. He continued to wait, knowing well the commotion Hixar would cause on the main streets. Grave had planned for that, ensuring that people's attention would be diverted there. Soon, a man emerged from a back door facing the alley, the target.

Approaching from behind, Grave addressed him: "Shep Alwan of the Human Reform League's special forces, right?" The man's immediate flight was all the confirmation Grave needed. Scaling the walls with incredible agility, a feat impossible for an ordinary human, Grave swiftly leapt in front of the man.

To the man, it seemed as if the person who had been behind him had suddenly descended from the sky.

"H-How...?" The startled man began to speak but couldn't finish his sentence.

"Confirmed," Grave muttered, comparing the man's face with a photo. Suddenly, he brandished a knife and, with a swift motion, slit the man's throat as he passed.

"First phase of the mission, complete," he whispered as the man let out an inaudible scream and fell dead. The commotion on the main street had grown even louder. It would take a considerable amount of time before people would notice the fallen man in the alley.

Soaring above, Gundam Rasiel deactivated its GN Stealth, revealing three of the Human Reform League's main mobile suits, Tierens, below. Hidden in an old warehouse, these were the machines of the same special forces unit as the man Grave had just eliminated. Grave's strategy was simple: eliminate the target in the city and flush out the rest.

"Target acquired," he muttered in the cockpit, pulling the trigger. The GN beam rifle in Rasiel's hand discharged, its concentrated energy particles piercing through the leading Tieren's cockpit.

A direct hit.

Since he had accurately aimed for the cockpit, only a small hole appeared in the chest section, yet the pilot inside was now incapacitated, and the unit came to a halt.

"Enemy attack!"

"From above!"

"Check the radar!"

Came the cries from the remaining Tierens. These machines, sacrificing mobility for heavy armor, weren't easy to down in one strike unless they took catastrophic damage. But this time was different, their radar systems were jammed by the GN particles emitted by the Gundam. The rifle of the Rasiel glowed. Grave fired two more shots, then three more. The Tieren pilots were helpless and couldn't respond.

"Second phase complete." Grave maneuvered Rasiel away. The wreckage of the remaining Tierens would be discreetly disposed of by Chall Acustica, a former second-generation Gundam Meister, and a highly skilled agent. She would ensure that no beam traces indicating the presence of a Gundam would be left behind. Despite her physical and emotional scars from the Plutone tragedy that left her unable to pilot, she remained dedicated to the organization's cause. Despite being emotionally closed off and her own personal struggles, she continued to work diligently to fulfill Aeolia's vision.

She was a source of pride for Grave nonetheless.

Grave met with Hixar at the designated rendezvous point. Already there, looked dejected, obviously failing in his mission to scout women, an outcome Grave had anticipated.

"I'm sorry, Gravey-boy. You went to such lengths to create this opportunity for me."

"It's not a problem," Grave replied calmly.

"I got a little too excited chasing after the girls and caused a commotion... even the cops showed up. Bystanders joined in, fueled by a misplaced sense of justice; it was utter chaos. There were some promising prospects, too. If I could've recruited them, they would've been a big help to energizing the organization... but..." Hixar said sheepishly.

He seemed burdened by the "scouting failure," and that was a sight that stirred a pang of regret in Grave. The mission's primary objective was never Hixar's scouting. His chaos served as a distraction, allowing Grave to complete his task unnoticed. He'd done that perfectly, but Grave knew this would happen, and if he were to profusely apologize too much, the guilt would eat away at him.

"I'm really sorry, Gravey. I know you were looking forward to it, too, right? I'm really sorry!"

"Don't worry about it," Grave said with no choice but to reiterate the same thing.

"Feels better hearing that, makes me think, 'Alright, I'll do even better tomorrow!'"

"Is that so?"

"So, about tomorrow, where shall we scout next?"

"What do you mean?"

"Scouting girls. We struck out here, but if we try a different town tomorrow, I know we'll make it happen! No, I'll make it happen!"

Grave realized Hixar intended to continue this mission until he succeeded.

"Oh, and I need to buy flowers to give to the girls, but they're pretty expensive. Veda won't front the cash, so Grave, could you cover half?"

Though he wanted to refuse outright, Grave couldn't bring himself to deny the request after deceiving Hixar into cooperating. He even considered coming clean about the deception but didn't have the heart to tell him that his anticipated "scouting" wasn't real, seeing how excited he was.

"I'll cover the full amount," he found himself saying.

"Really? You must be looking forward to this as much as me, Gravey! Alright, I'll keep at it tomorrow, too!" Hixar was practically dancing with cheerful energy.

A week later, Grave finally revealed the truth to Hixar, whose attempts to woo women remained firmly at zero.

File No.12

Intelligence Agency

"Tch!"

Grave muttered under his breath, ensconced in the cockpit of his Gundam Rasiel. He and his beloved machine found themselves in dire straits. On a mission to the AEU, he had unexpectedly stumbled upon a large squadron of Hellions.

This encounter was not foreseen even by Veda's predictions. The Rasiel, dispersing GN particles in flight, was now unavoidably close to enemy engagement.

"If only I had noticed sooner..."

Had he gained more distance, he could have landed and hidden his machine using GN Stealth, but that required the machine to be stationary, which was now impossible given his current distance.

The enemy consisted of AEU-05/00 Hellion Mediums. Known as the Type '00 Hellion, they were upgraded versions of the mainstay AEU-05/92 Hellion Initium, with armaments upgraded from smoothbore guns to linear rifles. There were twelve of them, three squads by AEU standards. A considerable force for the era but not a significant threat to a Gundam.

The real challenge was engaging such a number without leaking information about the Gundam. Even with its superior combat capabilities, it couldn't instantly destroy all enemies. Any delay increased the chance of an enemy escape, risking exposure.

Worse yet, the enemy Hellions were in flight mode, undoubtedly faster in the air than the Gundam. Despite the GN particles enabling stable control in the air, in terms of flight speed, the Hellions, designed for this purpose, had the advantage.

"No escape, a swift and total takedown," was the only option left for Grave. He set himself a time limit: forty-seven seconds to end it all. The enemy was already under the influence of the scattered GN particles, rendering their radars and communications useless.

"I'll strike first!"

With a single shot from the Rasiel's rifle, a high-density particle beam tore through the air, ending in a massive fireball. Leaving the fiery chaos behind, enemy shadows approached, unaware and confused. Grave couldn't afford them to recognize the Gundam as an unbeatable foe and retreat.

As the Rasiel approached the enemy squadron, releasing a torrent of GN particles from its large shoulder thrusters, Grave continued firing on the move.

"Two, three, four!"

He reduced their number with each shot.

Twelve seconds into combat, one squad was annihilated. The enemy's confusion deepened, their formation broken, scattering in different directions. Diving into their midst, Rasiel, using its shoulder thrusters, sniped the enemies one after the other.

A warning beep sounded suddenly in the cockpit, a gauge indicating the rifle's power nearing its limit. Although Gundam was equipped with a solar furnace providing limitless power, the beam rifle, relying on stored GN particles, would be incapacitated once depleted until recharged.

The Rasiel, designed primarily for reconnaissance missions, wasn't focused on attack capabilities. Its rifle, suited for long-range shooting, was lighter and slimmer than others, easier to handle but with a smaller capacitor, leading to quicker power depletion.

"The attack isn't just about the rifle!" Grave thought as he kicked a nearby Hellion. Not designed for melee combat, the Hellion was unprepared for such an assault and plummeted down, losing control before crashing.

"All enemies down... mission complete," Grave exhaled, his breath slightly ragged.

The clock showed forty-six seconds since combat commenced.

"Hey there, Gravey, quite a scene you've made, huh?"

The emergency signal sent by Grave was promptly received by Celestial Being, who immediately dispatched a support team consisting of Hixar Fermi, Chall Acustica, Ian Vashti, and Joyce Moreno.

"You really went all out, didn't you?" they remarked, noting each downed machine covered with stealth sheets that mirrored the surrounding scenery, a mere stopgap measure, ineffective at close range.

"Let me update you with Veda's information," Chall approached Grave, holding a terminal, and began her report in a business-like tone. "The enemy was a unit that scrambled in response to information about a Human Reform League invasion. It was an unexpected launch, so even Veda couldn't predict it."

"Veda needs to step up its game," Hixar joked. "We're counting on it, right, Gravey?"

"It's unavoidable. Veda's predictions of the future are only probabilistic, not definite," Grave explained, to which Chall added, "If everything were known... there would be no accidents or misfortunes..."

Her reference to an accident in her past was understood by everyone present. It had occurred during a Veda-authenticated mission, making her frustration understandable.

A heavy silence fell among the three. Hixar, attempting to lighten the mood, thought better of it in the prevailing atmosphere.

"I'm sorry," Chall apologized, realizing she had dampened their spirits. She quickly refocused and continued her report to Grave.

"All the downed machines, except for one, bear beam marks. They need to be either destroyed outright or dismantled urgently, but handling this number will take considerable time."

"What about information control?"

"We've intervened with the meteorological information center through Veda and sent a fake communication to the AEU military headquarters. Here's the cover story: A large tornado occurred in this area, forcing the Hellion units to make an emergency landing. Currently, no damage is reported, but as a precaution, the suits are being checked for safety..."

It was crucial to report the Hellion units as only temporarily grounded. Any mention of damage could trigger a rescue mission. The story needed to imply, "The Hellion units are delayed but safe," to buy time.

"Understood."

"We'll only retrieve parts from the destroyed Hellions that could indicate the existence of a Gundam," Chall stated, ignoring Hixar's addition about armor tracks. "The rest will be disassembled and sold through black market routes to arms dealers. If four squads of mobile suits disappear without a trace, the military will search desperately, but once disassembled and distributed, it's impossible to track every missing part."

Grave looked again at the Hellion he had shot down. Ian had already begun the dismantling process while Moreno was examining the pilots' remains, though Grave had already confirmed there were no survivors.

If there were any, he'd have dealt with them himself before Moreno's team arrived, unwilling to leave the dirty work to others and determined to protect the organization's secrets. He couldn't afford to leave survivors, as unpleasant as that task might be.

"It's really a hassle. Now I have to play delivery driver, selling parts to junk dealers. I get we're short-handed, but remember, I'm still a proud pilot of a combat machine," Hixar lamented.

"I'm sorry," Grave apologized quietly. He understood Hixar's discomfort, even though the situation wasn't caused by his own mistake.

"It's fine, it's fine. We help each other out when things get tough. I'll lend you a hand, do my part for you anytime, Gravey," Hixar offered reassuringly.

"Right," Grave responded nonchalantly, unaware that he would deeply regret this casual reply later.

After parting ways with Chall and the others, Grave had another mission in this location: to investigate Neil Dylandy, a Gundam Meister candidate. According to the documents he had reviewed, Neil had encountered terrorism in his childhood, losing his family and leaving only his younger brother alive. His strong aversion to terrorism made him ideologically compatible with Celestial Being's goal of eradicating conflicts.

Neil had excelled in sports shooting and later applied his sharpshooting skills in his career. While his mobile suit piloting skills were unknown, he seemed a likely candidate for the GN-002 Dynames, a unit currently under

development and specialized in long-range shooting. Although the final assessment of his suitability would only be clear after years of training post-recruitment, on paper, he was an impeccable candidate.

"Still, these are just details on paper." Grave reminded himself.

His mission was to observe Neil in person and confirm the information. This was a preliminary investigation, and there were no plans to make direct contact with Neil; the sole purpose was to observe his actions. At that moment, Neil was walking a few meters ahead of Grave, who trailed him without being noticed.

After three hours of observation, it was clear that Neil was well-liked by people. He had good interpersonal skills and cared about others' feelings, evident even in casual conversations. This trait would likely boost camaraderie among Meisters, a detail not captured in documents. Grave made a mental note of this human aspect; it was an essential consideration since he was acting as a scout to evaluate aspects that Veda couldn't comprehend.

Suddenly, Grave stopped in his tracks. As a professional, he could tail someone without being noticed, and likewise, he could detect when he was being followed.

"Hey, Grave stopped," whispered voices from behind.

"Did he lose sight of the target?"

"By the way, who is the target? I have no clue."

Turning around, Grave saw Hixar, Ian, and Moreno poorly disguised in dark sunglasses and black coats.

"What is this about?" he asked, standing in front of the three, his voice calm but tinged with irritation.

"We... just wanted to see what kind of person the new Meister might be..." Hixar stammered.

"You know discussing Meister candidates is a breach of confidentiality, right?" Grave reminded them, indicating the seriousness of their misconduct. This breach would be even more severe for someone closely associated with an official Meister. If Veda had become aware of this infraction, the consequences for the trio could have been serious. Perhaps Veda already knew but didn't consider them a threat to the secrecy surrounding the Meister candidates.

"I just wanted to help out Gravey, purely out of kindness. By the way, that glamorous woman walking ahead of us, she's the target, right? Let's get back to tailing her!" The enthusiasm in Hixar's voice was evident, even as he made to move forward.

Grave's hand shot out, grabbing him. Hixar's face twisted as he winced in pain.

"Ow, ow!" he exclaimed.

"Really now..." Grave sighed, a note of exasperation in his tone. He suggested they change locations, knowing all too well that discussing mission-related matters in a crowded place was out of the question. They

moved to a back alley, where the air was thick with the weight of unspoken words.

"What are you thinking?" Grave's tone was as calm as ever, misleadingly so. To the uninitiated, it might seem he wasn't angry, but of course, he was. Their ruse hadn't caused a major uproar, but by the time they'd made contact with this suspicious trio, following Neil was already a lost cause.

"I wanted to help with your work, Gravey," came the reply.

"You're a combat machine pilot, aren't you? Intelligence missions aren't your thing, are they?" Grave's question was pointed.

"Yes, that's correct," Hixar responded, his voice carrying a tinge of dejection.

"We're from the AEU. We can be useful," Ian interjected, though he didn't seem convinced his words would sway Grave. As expected, Grave's icy gaze made Ian retract his statement immediately.

"Sorry, I just followed Hixar's lead."

"Ah, that's not fair, blaming me now!"

"But it's true, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"Stop it, both of you. No infighting," Moreno interjected, stopping the bickering between Ian and Hixar. "We're truly sorry. We're all curious about who the new Meister might be. Our apologies."

The three, realizing their mistake, apologized. Grave then asked, "Where's Chall Acustica?"

Even he couldn't fathom why he asked such a question. A serious person like her would never indulge in such antics. He knew that right from the start.

"Chall is..." Ian was the one who started to answer. "She doesn't want to meet the new Meister."

The reason was clear to Grave. Chall had lost comrades in the past, and hence, she feared forming new connections.

Grave wondered, "Could Neil heal Chall's heart if he became a Meister?"

He quickly dismissed the thought, reminding himself that Meisters work for perpetual peace, not to heal one individual's wounds.

"Still..."

He realized that deep down, he harbored the hope that Neil would become a Meister.

That day, upon returning to the base, Grave was busy organizing documents about the Meister candidates. In a matter of hours, he had compiled his findings into two reports. One of them concluded with his personal opinion: "I believe Neil Dylandy is a suitable candidate for a Gundam Meister."

After finishing, he transmitted the two reports to Veda through his dedicated terminal. Seconds later, a response came back from Veda after

scrutinizing the documents. "Neil Dylandy is to be considered the prime candidate for Gundam Meister."

Grave felt a sense of relief wash over him at the response.

There was also a reply regarding the second report. "Continue investigating Lyle Dylandy as a potential candidate."

Grave had indeed been conducting a parallel inquiry into Neil's brother, Lyle. However, he had advised against scouting both simultaneously, a suggestion that had already been accepted. There was a certain tension between the two brothers. Yet, having more candidates for Meister was always better, hence the ongoing investigation.

If Lyle were to be scouted, it could mean Neil's early retirement or a change in dynamics between the brothers, leading to both serving as Meisters. Imagining the Dylandy brothers operating Gundams side by side, Grave spent his time in quiet contemplation.

File No.13

Sefer Rasiel

Grave Violento, through his exclusive terminal, was perusing documents provided by Veda. These contained classified information, necessitating direct linkage to Veda for viewing to ensure they remained unseen by others. Granted elevated access solely for member candidate information of the organization, Grave's current focus was on prospects for Celestial Being's operational command structure.

"Leesa Kujo..." he murmured as he went through the data.

A woman. Former AEU army tactical forecaster. Qualified at the Union's International University. Young, yet remarkably skilled. Her ideal: resolving conflicts swiftly through strategy, minimizing damage, and saving lives. Her abilities and ideology were spotless. However, she had recently committed a grave error in an operation, resulting in her lover's death.

"This fault lies not with her but with the commanding officer," Grave whispered. Even the finest tactician is rendered ineffective under an incompetent commander, a classic example here. He delved deeper into the documents.

The mission was the retaking of an AEU military facility occupied by the Human Reform League. The commander pitted two tacticians against each other: Kujo and Kati Mannequin, a prodigious genius linked to numerous victories even during her university days.

Each was assigned a unit composed of AEU-05/92 Hellion Initium and tasked with devising unique mission plans. The target, an AEU facility flanked by a mountain on one side, was impenetrable from the air due to multiple anti-aircraft guns. Even mobile suits would find it impossible to cross this side unscathed. The opposite side was more open, but it would lead to a direct confrontation with the enemy forces, potentially resulting in a protracted battle. It was a challenging situation, no matter which approach was chosen.

Their solutions were polar opposites.

Kujo's unit attacked from the mountainside to avoid anti-air guns, her Hellions taking a route along a river beneath the cliffs, a path so narrow, even the AEU who built the facility hadn't considered it. Mannequin, however, deployed her unit openly but refrained from entering. Her first move was to cut the facility's power lines, depriving the enemy of fuel for their mobile suits. A surprising tactic for both the AEU's military high

command and foe, given the mission's objective, was 'facility recapture' not 'destruction.'

Next, Mannequin emphasized that there was no chance of winning against the enemy forces. As a result, some of the enemy soldiers surrendered. While it took time, this approach reduced the enemy's combat strength without direct confrontation, a practical tactic typical of Mannequin.

An hour later, with no further surrenders, her unit, alongside the surrendered soldiers, began advancing into the facility, still largely under enemy control. Mannequin was confident they could persuade more to surrender.

Simultaneously, Kujo's Hellions, employing her bold strategy, crossed the mountain and infiltrated the facility, surprising Mannequin's unit, who had no idea Kujo's team was inside, and vice versa.

Kujo's first encounter inside was with Mannequin's Hellion unit, escorted by the surrendered Human Reform League soldiers.

"Active Hellions spotted. Unclear if they are friendly or if the enemy has captured the facility's units. However, they are moving with Human Reform League soldiers!" reported one of the pilots from Kujo's team upon entering the facility.

Mannequin's unit faced the same dilemma, unable to determine if the Hellions belonged to the enemy or not. Both tacticians were instructed to confirm friend or foe first. However, due to the eagerness of some of the pilots to secure victories for their respective forecasters, attacks were initiated prematurely. The pilots were well aware that this mission had become a competition between the two tactical forecasters, and their eagerness led to hasty decisions.

"Enemy unit confirmed! Initiating attack," announced both teams independently, as they incorrectly identified each other as the enemy.

A few minutes later, after it became clear that they were allies, both teams had suffered significant losses. If it weren't for the presence of the two tactical forecasters, such extensive casualties would likely have been avoided in such a short time. However, their presence had also precipitated the unfortunate situation by inadvertently pitting their teams against each other.

Tragically, among Kujo's unit was her lover, a pilot.

"What impact will this event have on her? Will it intensify her desire to eradicate conflict?" pondered Grave.

"Those who've experienced the tragedy of war resonate with our organization's philosophy." That's undeniable. Yet, scouting grief-stricken individuals like hyenas, drawing them into the fold, was hardly pleasant.

Days later, Grave met Leesa Kujo in person. It was clear: she had completely withdrawn from the battlefield.

Psychologically scarred. The battlefield reminded her of her lover and her failures. She had almost entirely cut off contact with military associates and old friends.

Her life was in disarray. Heavy drinking, health concerns...

"For now, it can't be helped... But eventually," Grave thought, believing people could change.

He was reminded of another woman close to him, Chall Acustica. Like Leesa, she had lost someone dear in a mission of her choosing but had risen to continue the fight, staying with the organization. She was still actively working to prevent further tragedies.

Just as he had sensed upon reading the documents, Leesa, too, would likely return to the fight in time. But now was not that moment. He must wait for her wounds to naturally heal.

"If Hixar were here, he would say to recruit her immediately..." Grave mused.

Leesa was indeed the 'voluptuous' type Hixar always advocated for. He briefly wondered if a man like him by her side would aid her healing but quickly dismissed the thought.

For now, he chose to wait on Leesa's case.

Chall Acustica visited Joyce Moreno's medical office. Having been exposed to a massive amount of GN particles during the Plutone tragedy, Chall required regular treatment from Moreno.

"What do you think?" asked Moreno.

"No issues with my health," replied Chall, engaging in the routine exchange between doctor and patient. However, Moreno, with a smile, shifted the conversation.

"Not that. What about my sunglasses?" Moreno had grown fond of the sunglasses he wore for a disguise during an investigation with his colleagues and Meister candidates, and he continued to wear them daily.

Chall, slightly perplexed, responded, "They feel a bit odd. Sorry, but it's just that you don't often see a doctor in sunglasses..."

"I see. Ian and Hixar said they suited me," Moreno chuckled, not missing the change in Chall's tone. These light-hearted conversations were part of her therapy. Physically, Chall was almost fully healed, managing daily life without trouble. Her mental scars, however...

"I am powerless to truly save her," thought Moreno as Chall left the medical office.

Chall's cells had suffered severe damage from the GN particles, with significant harm to the telomeres involved in cell division, making regeneration treatments impossible. Without normal cell division and metabolism, survival would typically be unfeasible.

It wasn't Moreno's treatment but another second-generation Meister, 874, who had saved her. Meister 874 provided Chall with nanomachines through Moreno, capable of repairing cellular abnormalities.

"Nanomachines, when used in humans, will be expelled from the body over time. Please add them regularly."

"I understand. I'll make use of them," Moreno had agreed, undeterred by the unknown. Saving his patients was what mattered most to him.

This represented a breakthrough in technology. Telomere repair could lead to immortality, a quest as old as humanity itself. Why did Meister 874 possess such technology?

Moreno was aware that 'non-human' entities existed within the organization. Based on human genetics but surpassing human capabilities, these beings did not age. He suspected Meister 874 had acquired the nanomachines from such beings.

Moreno also pursued his research into these 'non-human' entities. His medical curiosity was one reason, but more importantly, if they were organization members, he might one day be responsible for their treatment. The thought of failing them due to ignorance was intolerable to him, human or not.

"I desire the knowledge for their treatment," Moreno thought, recalling when Meister 874 provided the nanomachines for Chall.

"If Veda doesn't object, it is permissible," Meister 874 had replied emotionlessly, seemingly indifferent.

As a doctor in the organization, Moreno continued Chall's treatment, his research into non-human entities, and studies on the toxicity of GN particles. He had identified that the particles only caused cellular abnormalities under specific high-energy conditions, hinting at the possibility of altering their state to produce beneficial effects on cells.

If they could find beneficial effects on the human body, it might bring redemption to people like Ruido and the others.

He had identified at least the harmful states of the particles. Sharing this with Ian, he hoped to adjust the Gundams to prevent future tragedies. Veda endorsed Moreno's research, granting him access to its extensive medical and biological data. Direct data on non-human entities remained inaccessible, but Moreno realized the immense volume of data accumulated by Veda.

"What is this amount of data..." It was beyond what a military organization would need. Such data accumulation could have led to the creation of beings similar to humans.

"And this too," Moreno mused, looking at the capsule of nanomachines prepared by Meister 874.

"Perhaps Veda... No, Aeolia dreamed not just of eradicating conflict, but of evolving humanity..." He voiced his realization.

These goals weren't mutually exclusive; a world without conflict was a prerequisite for humanity's evolution to the next step.

In front of Gundam Meister 874 lay a young girl. However, Meister 874 didn't possess eyes in the traditional sense; she existed only as a digital entity without a physical form. But now, she was about to be given a body for the upcoming armed interventions by the Gundams, where lacking a physical form would be a disadvantage.

Meister 874, a second-generation Meister, was transitioning to the third generation to participate in actual armed interventions. The body floating in

a solution inside a capsule bore the same face as the digital Meister 874. It was modeled after humans, composed of biopolymers rather than metal, not grown from a fertilized egg but constructed from over sixty trillion artificially manufactured cells, assembled block by block. Though only hours old, it appeared close to a ten-year-old human child. This body would neither grow nor age further, containing many nanomachines not found in humans.

"This body... it's alive," Meister 874 perceived this body as if it were a living human.

"If I use this body, does it mean I am taking a life?" She couldn't fully comprehend why she thought this way, but she knew the trigger.

"The tragedy of Plutone, losing Ruido and Marlene, changed my view on life..."

The respect for life was a shift that could certainly impede the organization's planned armed interventions. Yet, she welcomed this change, as it signified she was becoming more human-like. Part of her mission was to understand humans on behalf of Veda.

"In that case... I will follow my heart and not take this body, this life."

Meister 874 conveyed her resolution to Veda. Veda respected her decision. The newly created body was assigned a fresh personality data, number 887, and became an independent entity, an agent of the organization, given life in its own right.

Several years before Agent 887 came into existence, a major incident occurred at the Human Reform League's Übermensch Facility of Technological Research: a mass escape of test subjects. These subjects, treated as super soldiers, were all young at the time of their escape, and most were presumed dead during the breakout.

However, recent intelligence suggested some survivors and a subsequent event raised concerns: all members of a special agency conducting a follow-up investigation went missing. Whether this was an act of retribution by the surviving super soldiers or a mass defection by the agency members was unclear, but either scenario was undoubtedly a scandal.

The Institute, failing to produce combat-ready super soldiers, chose to cover up all facts related to this incident. Whether the super soldiers survived or the agency members defected, leaving things as they were seemed the safest course; no further reaction was expected from the other side.

Amidst this concealment, another group took an interest in the incident from a new perspective: the Next Generation Development Technology Institute, an organization tasked with developing a mobile suit to replace the Human Reform League's Tieren.

Two pilots from this institute had been cooperating with the special task force in pursuit of the super soldiers. They happened to witness an incredibly high-performance mobile suit that they had never seen before.

Armed with this information, the institute initiated a plan to capture this new machine.

"We've got a signal. Launch now!" shouted a red-haired female pilot.

In the Human Reform League's mobile suit hangar, beside her stood a Tieren with an unusual appearance: massive shoulders and a giant cannon on the right side. Its silhouette, within the dark hangar, appeared significantly deviated from the human form.

"Hurry up! We're launching!"

"Launching... right," responded a blond-haired boy, appearing too young to be a soldier yet clad in a pilot suit.

"That light-emitting unit has fallen into our trap."

"That sparkly thing is coming out? Del?"

"Lieutenant Bedelia," corrected the woman, addressing the boy, Leonard Fiennes, a special junior lieutenant. "I've told you to call me that. Even in the army, no one calls me Delfine, let alone Del... I'm not your friend. Understood?"

"Y-yes, sorry."

The female soldier and the boy vanished into the peculiar machine in the hangar.

File No.14

Sefer Rasiel [2]

"Stealth."

Grave Violento, seated in the cockpit of the Gundam Rasiel, issued his command in a calm, tranquil voice. The Gundam stood hidden in the shadows of crumbling buildings in a city turned to ruins. But at Grave's voice command, a GN Stealth film enveloped Rasiel's exterior, making the colossal machine vanish into the urban landscape as if it were a mirage.

This drastically reduced the chances of enemy detection. While the GN Stealth was active, the Rasiel couldn't move.

A high-pitched whine filled the air, as if on cue with the Rasiel's disappearance. A squadron of Union Army's VMS-15 Realdo units flew overhead. Sixteen machines, four squads in all. Their plasma jets echoed briefly against the walls of the buildings before silence returned.

"It was a trap after all..." Grave began analyzing the situation from inside Rasiel's cockpit.

His reason for coming here was to acquire new information on a third-generation Gundam Meister candidate, "Subject E-57", who was reportedly captured by the Union after escaping from the Human Reform League's special soldier program.

The information, intercepted by Veda from a dedicated network used in the underworld, suggested a Human Reform League-created special soldier had escaped and was later captured by the Union. Veda was always monitoring global information networks.

Grave was dispatched not to rescue but to verify the information's authenticity. Though Meister candidates were valuable, the organization wouldn't actively intervene in life-threatening situations prior to recruitment. In such cases, they would simply elevate another individual to Meister candidate status.

But now, Grave realized the information was false and drew several conclusions, more than expected.

"The enemy is the Human Reform League... and their target is the Gundam."

First, the deployment of the Realdo squadron. The presence of such a large number indicated preparation for high-level combat, either against a large force or a Gundam. The Union Army, possibly dancing to false information, might have anticipated a large force, but the instigators targeted a Gundam. The leak also included some truths about the existence of a super soldier, a fact known only to a few within the Human Reform League.

Therefore, it was safe to conclude that the enemy was indeed affiliated with the Human Reform League.

Grave had previously undertaken several operations regarding "Subject E-57", which the Human Reform League was also pursuing. He had destroyed their units following these missions. Apparently, this had alerted someone to the presence of Gundam.

It was unlikely that the Human Reform League and the Union Army were collaborating. If their target was the Gundam, they would prefer to keep it for themselves rather than share it with another country. The Human Reform League unit in play was probably small, acting independently and without reporting back to their home country. Capturing the Gundam would be immensely valuable. They could use it as leverage for asylum in another nation, or if their knowledge of technology was sufficient, they might even pose as the developers of the Gundam and earn recognition from their own country. Either way, they wouldn't risk reporting back and losing this opportunity.

"In that case..." Grave decided on his course of action: to wait patiently.

While the Rasiel could easily engage the surrounding Realdo units, it would leave the true enemy untouched. He needed to wait for the mastermind to make a move and ascertain how much they knew.

In time, Veda would likely issue a new mission plan.

"Then it will be your turn..."

A slight smile crept onto Grave's face.

"Ah-choo!"

A loud sneeze echoed through the Celestial Being's hangar.

"Is someone talking about me?" Hixar Fermi rubbed his nose, tickled by the sneeze.

"Got a cold? Veda has issued a sortie order. Are you okay? Maybe you should get some medicine from Moreno," Ian suggested, though his tone didn't convey much concern.

"No need for that. Probably one of the many girls I talked to recently is thinking about me. Even Moreno, as great a doctor as he is, doesn't have a cure for love," Hixar joked.

"Right, no need to visit Moreno. There's no cure for stupidity, after all."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It's a complicated matter, too difficult for a fool to understand."

"Ian, deep down, you know I'm quite the catch. That's why you won't let me meet your daughter, Mileina, isn't it?"

"That's because..." Ian started.

"I'm the one who stops it." a clear, youthful female voice took over.

"Mileina is still a child. We don't know yet if she will live as part of the organization. It's not wise for her to have too much contact with many members in such circumstances."

"Linda's right," Ian agreed, nodding emphatically.

The woman who appeared was Linda Vashti. Ian had met and married her within the organization, surprising everyone with their significant age difference.

"Linda, when did you get back to Earth?"

Hixar greeted her cheerfully. To him, a woman's marital status was irrelevant, and since Linda usually stayed in space at Lagrange 3's Factory Colony Krung Thep, their meetings were rare. A reunion with an acquaintance was always a delight.

"I came for you, Hixar. Brought lots of presents."

"Presents?"

"What you've been looking forward to."

"The GN Sefer!"

This was the support combat machine that Hixar was designated as the pilot for, seeing that he was designated as a pilot candidate. While resembling a fighter jet, it possessed special mechanisms to support Gundam missions. Hixar had already received one of the completed GN Sefer earlier, but its true capabilities would be realized only when multiple units were combined. Linda had brought additional GN Sefers produced at Krung Thep.

At that moment, Hixar's terminal beeped.

"Linda, Ian, looks like it's time for action. Are the preparations complete?"

"All three units are ready to go," Ian responded proudly.

"Typical Ian, quick with machines and ladies!" Linda blushed.

"You fool! Sometimes, you talk too much."

"All right, Hixar Fermi, GN Sefer Team, let's sortie in style!"

Hixar ran towards his machine, flashing a victory sign. Linda watched him go, unable to hide her anxiety. Ian, sensing his wife's feelings, drew her close.

"Don't worry. Even if the pilot has doubts, the GN Sefer, designed by me and built by you, is top-notch." He opened his terminal to check the updated mission plan. "Plus, it looks like Veda has everything under control. We need to hurry; it's our job."

"Hell yeah!"

As the Rasiel hid in the ruins, a single combat machine, Hixar's GN Sefer-soared overhead. It immediately shot down a Realdo unit with a spectacular acrobatic flip.

Following it, two more GN Sefers zoomed into the scene.

"Sorry for the wait! GN Sefer squad, led by Captain Hixar and his subordinates Haro, present and accounted for!"

"Boss, Boss!"

"Leader, Leader!"

Apart from Hixar's, the GN Sefers were piloted by the organization's autonomous terminals, Haro. Haro could execute basic maneuvers as per orders but lacked advanced combat judgment. The trio swiftly moved around, scattering GN particles to disrupt enemy communications.

"Follow the mission plan and combine," declared Grave, deactivating GN Stealth and propelling Rasiel into the air. The GN Sefers disassembled mid-air, with parts integrating into Rasiel.

"Sefer Rasiel... Third Form."

GN Proto Bits are attached to its back, front, and back, with two on each side and additional bits on the feet. Skipping the usual "Second Form" that involved one GN Sefer unit merging with Rasiel, Grave opted for the "Third Form" directly, a sign of heightened alert. This form allowed for omnidirectional high firepower using the GN Proto Bits as cannons and sustained beam usage by not releasing the bits.

"Cool, Sefer Rasiel made with my support!"

"Amazing, Boss. Amazing, Boss."

"Great, Leader. Great, Leader."

The separated GN Pods spread wide to continue disrupting enemy communications without drifting too far from the battlefield. Rasiel alone couldn't cover a large area, especially against aerial units like the Realdo. But with the GN Pods, a wider range was achievable. They couldn't let the enemy escape the jamming field and risk exposing Gundam's presence.

"Starting the attack."

Sefer Rasiel's bits fired beams in rapid succession. The Realdo units, unprepared for this unknown enemy, were swiftly downed.

While engaging in aerial combat, Grave remained vigilant of ground activities, the Human Reform League and the architect of this trap. As the Realdo units neared annihilation, a moment of distraction was all that was needed for a counterstrike.

Suddenly, a shockwave whizzed past the Sefer Rasiel, a solid projectile attack.

"Was that from... one of the buildings?"

A strange-looking Tieren emerged from a building. It had oversized shoulders and a large cannon, not a typical Tieren.

Immediately, Grave released the bits, sending them out. However, the enemy evaded every close-range bit attack, a feat unthinkable for a cumbersome Tieren. Simultaneously, the enemy fired another round of projectiles towards him.

"A next-generation unit, huh?"

Grave knew of the Human Reform League's development of a Tieren successor, capable in both space and ground, from Veda's reports. The enemy moved like gliding on land with high mobility, evading the bits while firing its mounted machine guns, downing them one by one.

"What are you doing, Gravey?" Hixar complained just as his GN Pod took a hit.

"No way!"

"Clumsy, Boss. Clumsy, Boss."

"Sloppy, Leader. Sloppy, Leader."

Though Hixar narrowly avoided fatal damage, his machine was incapacitated.

A few Realdo units remained. The widespread GN particle disruption had to continue.

"Haro, keep scattering. Increase altitude by 120, prioritize defense while circling the battle area," commanded Grave, taking over from the downed Hixar.

"Roger, New Boss."

"Roger, New Leader."

The disruption continued, but with only two machines, coverage was limited. They needed to end the fight before the enemy could escape. But by then, Rasiel had lost all its bits.

"If I were up and running, I'd have gone back for new bits!"

Hixar yelled from his crashed GN Sefer. Regret was pointless; Grave decided to engage the Tieren in close combat.

Then, new GN Sefers appeared, shooting down the remaining Realdo units.

"Five GN Sefers! Who's commanding them? Those are my machines!"

Hixar shouted in surprise.

"Grave, this is Gundam Meister 874. I'm sending you bits. Use the Fourth Form," she instructed, detaching bits from all units, which quickly integrated with Rasiel's core block, forming a book-like structure, the original form of Sefer Rasiel, "The Book of Angels."

"Attack!"

At Grave's command, four of the ten bits launched at the enemy. This formation allowed continuous assault; as bits depleted their particles, they'd return to Rasiel, replaced by others for uninterrupted attacks.

The enemy kept dodging the barrage. Despite its agility, the Tieren couldn't attack while evading this intense offensive.

"We're cornering them!" Hixar cheered naively.

But Grave and Meister 874 knew time was up. Grave ceased the bit attacks, and the strange Tieren retreated.

"Should we let it go?"

Hixar questioned. But the enemy already knew about the Gundam. Further engagement risked Union forces, alerted by the loss of contact with the Realdo units, investigating. They had to erase traces of Gundam combat quickly.

"They'll come back to us eventually. No problem," Grave was already focusing on the next mission.

Descending from the strange machine, the Tieren Kytwo, Leonard was trembling uncontrollably. Snowflakes fluttered around him in the cold air.

"It must be because it's cold," he tried to reassure himself. But deep down, he knew this was a lie. As a super soldier created for combat, Leonard had cleared numerous simulated battles with his superhuman reflexes, excelling in all of them. Yet, real combat was entirely different. The mobile suit emitting dazzling light was terrifyingly formidable.

Leonard, still a child, felt his own childishness, a powerless burden. Delphine, the female soldier who had accompanied him aboard the Kytwo, realized anew that Leonard was just a child.

"He's trembling... it's no wonder."

Even Delphine had felt a continuous dread during the battle. It was only natural for Leonard to tremble. Yet, he had performed remarkably well on the battlefield, far exceeding her expectations. Without him, she would have likely been defeated.

Gently, Delphine stroked Leonard's head, causing him to look up in surprise. Taken aback by his reaction, she reassured him.

"Don't worry... you fought well enough."

Leonard nodded, a hint of happiness on his face. Delphine resolved that next time, for Leonard's sake, they would secure a victory.

File No.15

Hixar Fermi

Just hours ago, the Gundam Rasiel and the support unit GN Sefer team had engaged in combat. It was the most extensive battle the Rasiel had faced to date. At this stage, the existence of Celestial Being was a closely guarded secret, and combat involving Gundams was generally to be avoided. Yet, unavoidably, certain battles had to be fought.

Chall Acustica, as an agent, had just returned to the base after erasing all evidence of this battle. In the hangar, maintenance was underway on the GN Sefer units, which had returned from combat. These newly developed support units were in the preliminary stages of demonstrating their utility in supporting Gundams.

"From what we've seen in this battle, its practicality seems promising... I wonder what it's like inside," Chall mused, her thoughts drifting to piloting. It was an instinctual reaction for her, a pilot at heart. Originally a test pilot for the second-generation Gundams, she had suffered severe injuries during the "Plutone Tragedy" and retired.

"Even if I can't pilot a Gundam, can I still enter the battlefield with a support unit?" The thought briefly crossed her mind, but she quickly dismissed it as unrealistic. A weapon is a weapon, after all, and the physical strain of combat would be no less.

"I can no longer fight for my comrades," she realized, feeling a dull pain in her heart. Yet she remained unbroken; there were still things she could do, even if she couldn't fight.

"Hey, Chall, what are you doing here?"

The sudden voice belonged to Hixar, leader of the GN Sefer Unit and a man too light-hearted for his own good. Chall had always found him difficult to deal with.

"Just looking at the GN Sefer," she replied, suppressing her emotions.

"Cool, huh? Wanna take a ride?" Hixar asked, hitting the nail on the head unexpectedly.

"Oh, whoops, did I hit a nerve there? But, it's too bad, the Sefer is a single-seater. No room for a sky date with you," Hixar joked, completely missing the point. He seemed to think Chall wanted to ride in the cool machine with him, not as a pilot herself.

"What an airhead," she thought, slightly surprised that Hixar saw her as a woman. She had prominent scars on her face and body, which she had assumed would be a negative factor when viewed as a "woman." She had already resigned herself to the fact that she wouldn't be seen as a romantic interest by men.

"Is he just a hopeless womanizer, or genuinely a good person?"

"What are you staring at?" Hixar asked with an easy smile, making Chall realize why she found him difficult: he reminded her of the bittersweet and painful reality of comradeship, something she had been avoiding to escape the pain of loss.

"Do you ever want to pilot a Gundam, Hixar? Are you satisfied with just a support unit?" Chall asked, knowing he had failed the test to become a Gundam Meister and was assigned to a support unit instead. She asked to push him away, a sad habit she had developed to avoid getting close to her comrades.

But Hixar's smile didn't fade.

"The GN Sefer is the best. I can support Grave with it and earn his gratitude. Of course, I'm satisfied."

"But even in a support role, using a Gundam would enable more advanced support. What do you think about that?"

Chall pressed further, but Hixar remained unfazed.

"If I can't do something, there's no point in wishing for it. We do our best with what we can. That's all there is to it."

Hixar added with a grin, "Besides, there's no such thing as a Gundam dedicated to support. Oh, unless you count the first and second generations. Man, there are quite a few Gundams around. Hahaha."

As he laughed, their mechanic Ian shouted, "Stop slacking off, Hixar! It's your machine, too, you know!"

"Right, right," Hixar called back as he left to help with the maintenance.

Chall stood there, pondering their conversation. Then it struck her: "Gundam supporting Gundam," "The organization possessing numerous Gundams," these thoughts coalesced in Chall's mind, sparking the idea of a Gundam-based support organization.

"This organization would be an entity independent of Celestial Being. A support group, always ready to be sacrificed in times of emergency... To lessen the emotional burden of such a decision, its existence should remain a secret even within Celestial Being..."

This marked the birth of what would later be known as Fereshte. Though not part of the original Aeolia Plan, Fereshte would significantly alter the destinies of those involved and eventually etch its existence into the pages of history.

A few days later.

"A reconnaissance mission? Sounds fun, I'm in," Hixar said, eagerly accepting Chall Acustica's offer before she could even detail the mission.

"It's a dangerous assignment," Chall warned, concerned by his casual attitude.

"There's a chance you might die."

"Hey, I've been bored with just training and maintenance. It's about time I got some fresh air outside," Hixar replied nonchalantly.

"You probably won't get a chance to enjoy the outdoors. The only time you might be outside is if the GN Sefer gets shot down and you have to escape on foot from enemy territory," Chall said bluntly, regretting her decision to approach Hixar for the mission and hoping he would decline.

"It's been less than ten minutes since I asked, and already I'm surprised by my own change of heart."

"You're trying to scare me, huh? No worries, that won't happen. I never turn down a request from a lady. Plus, with my luck, even if I crash and have to walk, I'm sure I'll find a beautiful girl along the way to recruit for the organization. I always make the best out of any situation," Hixar said, his sincerity unclear.

Chall wondered if he was serious. Everything he said seemed genuine, which was the scary part about Hixar.

"So, you're looking for someone... busty?" Chall asked sarcastically, her face clouded with displeasure.

"Yeah, that's nice, busty," Hixar replied, unfazed by her sarcasm.

"Ah, sorry, Chall. Women aren't just valuable for their bust size. Don't worry about it," he added, making Chall feel strangely self-conscious about her own chest size, though she had never considered herself lacking in that area.

"Forget it. Please just complete the mission. I'll report to Veda and send you the details once we have approval," Chall said, eager to leave Hixar's presence.

"Okay," Hixar replied, making a peace sign beside his head, a pose he seemed to be practicing lately. Chall had seen him do it several times before.

"Excuse me, then," she said, wanting nothing more than to get away from him as quickly as possible.

"Hey, Chall, wait!" Hixar called, oblivious to her discomfort. His ability to misread the mood was almost a strength like GN particles disrupting radio waves.

"What is it?" Chall asked, an expression clearly conveying her displeasure painting her face.

"I just wanted to say thanks. I'm glad you asked me instead of Meister 874," Hixar said, looking for a chance to redeem himself after Meister 874 had outshone him in a recent sortie. Chall knew this and had asked him in part as a thank you for the idea he had given her for the new support organization.

"It's nothing. This is just part of our work for the organization. I don't need thanks," Chall said, quickly leaving, her way of ensuring Hixar didn't have anything more to say.

Back in her room, she checked her face in the mirror, wondering if she was blushing. Hixar's smiling thank-you had affected her just a little.

Hixar was actually quite handsome if it weren't for his personality and behavior.

"Even so, to think I'd see Hixar in that way..."

Chall mused, feeling a bit like her younger self, slightly in love with love.

It wasn't a bad feeling.

The "reconnaissance mission" Chall had tasked Hixar with was swiftly approved by Veda and set into motion. The objective was straightforward: to scout a suspected military factory being constructed by the AEU in Africa, which had once been a fossil excavation site. This impoverished country had no exportable resources other than fossils, which seemed to have been exhausted, as Veda had noted no recent shipments.

Veda was aware that the fossil excavation rights had been acquired by a certain corporation, a front for the AEU military, and decided it was essential to investigate the base's interior. With the base being underground, satellite cameras and other surveillance methods had limitations, prompting the need for on-site reconnaissance.

The plan involved two prongs. One was an infiltration mission by agents, with Chall posing as a member of the UN's Historical Resources Preservation Committee, inspecting the site under the pretense of monitoring illegal fossil excavation and trade. Veda had already made the necessary arrangements.

Meanwhile, Hixar would fly the GN Sefer above the site, observing their response. Any aggressive action would confirm the site was no ordinary factory. In such a case, instead of retaliating, Hixar was to scatter GN particles to disrupt radar and retreat at top speed. This mission was not about destroying the facility but gaining insight into its activities so they wouldn't take unnecessary risks.

The reason for using the GN Sefer instead of a Gundam was to intentionally provoke a reaction from the enemy. They wanted to gauge how the enemy would respond when they were discovered. The Gundam was off-limits no matter the circumstances.

"What's with this mission? This is way too easy," Hixar complained, disappointed by the apparent simplicity of the task. "I was hoping for something more exciting, like deploying Bits and engaging in a flashy battle."

Yet, at that moment, Hixar seemed to forget Chall's repeated warnings about the mission's danger. The only time he would be outside was if he got shot down.

"Man, this is way harder than I thought!" Hixar exclaimed as he approached the target excavation site in his GN Sefer, only to be shot down almost immediately. It turned out there were a staggering number of anti-aircraft guns set up even far from the facility. The underground tunnels used for fossil excavation seemed to crisscross in all directions, with most of them hiding anti-air guns.

Caught off guard, Hixar had barely any time to react before the automatic ejection system kicked in, tossing him into the middle of the desert. Miraculously, he absorbed the impact of the landing without injury, a feat he couldn't quite believe himself. "I guess I'm pretty good in a pinch," he mused, recalling past moments of unexpected adeptness.

Suddenly, the GN Sefer exploded behind him, its self-destruct mechanism activated to prevent the leak of secret technology. The remaining GN particles scattered in a blinding burst of light.

"Too bright!" Hixar shielded his eyes just in time to avoid being blinded, though his vision was speckled for some time after.

When his sight finally cleared, the GN Sefer was completely obliterated.

"That's a lot of explosives. If it had malfunctioned while I was still onboard, I'd be nothing but dust. Dr. Moreno wouldn't have been able to fix me then," he muttered, though complaining did nothing to improve his situation.

It was only then that Hixar realized why he and the GN Sefer had been chosen for this mission. A Gundam would be too conspicuous, but the GN Sefer could pass as a new type of fighter jet and, if necessary, be destroyed without significant loss to the organization.

Grateful for being alive but at a loss for what to do next, he pondered his situation. "What now?" he wondered. The mission's goal was to gauge the enemy's response; being shot down was as informative as not. The result was clear: "Extremely suspicious."

"Mission complete, Hixar!" he shouted, trying to lift his spirits, but it felt empty. Hopefully, the agent infiltrating the excavation site would gather more useful information.

Resigned to his fate, Hixar started walking back. He half-hoped for rescue but knew it was more likely that the enemy would reach the crash site first.

"Might as well look for some 'busty' company on the way," he said, recalling his earlier jest, though the desolate desert seemed an unlikely place to find anyone.

"Busty, busty, buuuuuuusty busts." he sang to himself about his unlikely quest. He stumbled upon what appeared to be the entrance to a cave.

"Could this be part of the facility? Nah, that would be too much like a comic book," he thought, entering the cave nonetheless.

It was dark inside, but soon, he saw lights, and before him, factory machinery came into view.

"Bingo. What are they making here?" Hixar muttered, scrutinizing the parts moving along the conveyor belt. His eyes widened in shock. "GN Condensers?"

That's Celestial Being's exclusive tech.

"Troublesome, having you wander in here." a voice suddenly spoke from behind him, and Hixar tensed up. As a pilot, he hadn't been trained on what to do in such situations. He tried to recall scenes from spy movies but panicked and could only remember the romantic scenes. Resigned, he turned to face the speaker. The speaker was an androgynous figure, seemingly talking to someone not present.

"How did you get in? The sensors didn't detect you..."

"Uh, I just walked in. I'll leave if I'm causing trouble. Sorry for intruding," Hixar attempted to defuse the situation.

The stranger seemed uninterested in Hixar's explanations. "Ah, so you're one of us. The sensors don't react to allies."

Hixar couldn't comprehend what the person meant. As the stranger continued to speak, their eye color subtly shifted. "We can't let Veda know about this place yet. The quantum brainwaves are blocked inside, but I can't just let you leave now. What should I do with him?"

The person appeared to be consulting with someone invisible. "Oh, you know him? That's impressive. Alright, I'll leave it to you."

After finishing their one-sided conversation, the person turned back to Hixar. "Take care. Keep up the good work for our sake."

"Wait, what are you talking about? Who are you?" Hixar asked, confused.

"Beside Pain," the person replied. "Not that it matters. You'll forget soon enough. Lucky you, that means you get to live."

Before Hixar could respond, everything went black, and he lost consciousness.

Interval

In the vastness of space, a colossal spaceship hovered, an architectural marvel tethered to asteroids near the Martian orbit. Its surface, rugged with exposed rock, served as a shield against the pernicious cosmic rays and interstellar matter, hazards typically trivial to ordinary spacecraft. However, this vessel was designed for enduring lengthy voyages across immense distances.

Central to its design were five engines embedded within a towering structure at the ship's core. Yet, as of now, none were installed. The engines, powered by GN Drive, harnessed the boundless generation of GN particles, a type of photon. Propelled by these GN particles, this vessel was a colony ship destined to pioneer humanity's expansion into the outer cosmos.

Named the Celestial Being, this ship was the linchpin of the final phase of Aeolia's project.

The ship, largely complete, had been transported into Earth's orbit. Its interior was still under construction. In its final form, it would house a vast factory, making it a self-sustaining entity.

A rotating residential area lay within one of its segments, near the heart of the ship, maintaining a gravity akin to Earth's, albeit through centrifugal force. This area, stark and spartan, celebrated a single decorative theme: "rationality."

Here, a solitary youth stood. His skin, pallid to the point of seeming unwell, and his delicate appearance gave him an almost ethereal allure, radiant as a woman's. In the streets of a bustling city, he might be mistaken for a male escort.

"This is where Veda doesn't get it..." he muttered to himself, alone. No sentient being, human or otherwise, could bear such a prolonged stay in this austere space.

He knew this ship would eventually be his, necessitating a dramatic interior overhaul. His vision: opulent, Western-style rooms, preferably in understated elegance. He had grown weary of gold, especially since he was currently in the company of someone who favored it. A garden would be ideal but realistically challenging to maintain. At least the windows should display Earth-like vistas.

Redecorating was a delightful pastime, transforming something into a reflection of oneself. Even the idea of reshaping the entire world in his image brought the same thrill as altering a single room.

"Strange, isn't it? How the same joy I find in changing a world, I find in redecorating a room." Life was full of contradictions, reaffirming his own existence and allowing him to evolve beyond the limits of an Innovade towards being an Innovator.

Closing his eyes, he linked with Veda, instantly grasping every situation. Born to be a Gundam Meister for Celestial Being, he was an Innovade, a synthetic human crafted from human genes. Yet, he was dissatisfied with his role.

Aeolia's project was indeed magnificent. But his interactions with numerous humans left him disillusioned by their folly. "Must I fight and be destroyed for these beings?" It was intolerable.

He understood his purpose yet believed that errors must be corrected if better methods were proposed. To prove his point, he initiated actions meticulously planned over time. His ultimate goal was to seize control of Veda, take the world into his hands, and reshape Aeolia's project as his own. The location of Veda remained unknown, but the Celestial Being, with its Veda backup terminal, was now within his grasp. Once he commandeered Veda and transferred its functions to this terminal, nothing could thwart his plans.

That day wasn't far off. He needed only to proceed with cautious haste.

The human Gundam Meisters are destined to perish in place of their Innovade counterparts. The selection of these sacrificial pawns was well underway.

He had anticipated difficulties in convincing Veda to replace superior Innovades with humans, yet surprisingly, Veda acquiesced with ease. It seemed to respect the opinions of those deeply connected to the human candidates.

Indeed, he had been taken aback by the incident involving the thwarting of a terrorist attack using Plutone, bracing himself for significant delays in the plan. But everything was proceeding smoothly.

The development of the machines designed to annihilate the Gundams piloted by these human Meisters had already begun.

"Surely, it will continue to go well..." he thought, a smile breaking across his face as he felt the world already within his grasp.