

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER 3 CHAR

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機動戦士ガンダム
ハイ・ストリーマー 3 シャア篇



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Dual

機動戦士ガンダム ハイ・ストリーマー

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機動戦士ガンダム
MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 3

SECRET MEETING

CHAPTER-Q

1

Londenion, a name derived from ancient London's Roman-era appellation, stands as one of Side 1's oldest space colonies. Its cityscape, backed by rolling hills and sprawling pastures, centers around the Hotel Canberra in the bustling business district—a structure deliberately mimicking architecture from centuries past.

At this moment, Cameron Bloom from Londenion's Audit Bureau found himself trailing behind Adenauer Paraya and a coterie of Earth Federation bigwigs. They were about to enter the hotel's grand entrance, its old-world charm a stark contrast to the covert security detail poorly disguised as regular guests. Their conspicuous presence, coupled with the absence of typical patrons, only heightened the air of intrigue.

Cameron had accompanied Adenauer and the Federation officials to this hotel for reasons unknown to him. This peculiarity had nagged at him since greeting Adenauer at the Londo Bell dock.

As they exited the elevator on the top floor, Cameron immediately recognized that the men standing guard were neither plainclothes police nor hotel staff.

"What in the world...?" he muttered under his breath, suspicion coiling in his gut.

Following the procession down a plush corridor, Cameron's ears pricked at Adenauer's booming welcome: "Welcome, gentlemen. We're glad you could join us."

"What the—?"

Bringing up the rear, he nearly dropped his glasses in shock. The opulent conference room was teeming with men clad in the unmistakable uniforms of Neo Zeon. His mind reeled.

"Zeon? Here?" The thought screamed through his mind, his composure threatening to crumble.

Desperate to conceal his alarm, he kept his gaze fixed on the ornate carpet as an attendant guided him to his seat.

"The pleasure is ours," came a cultured voice from the Zeon contingent. "We appreciate you making the journey from Earth."

"Well then," a man identified as Horst began, his tone deceptively casual, "shall I introduce our esteemed representative?"

Adenauer's brow furrowed. "I was under the impression you were the representative, Mr. Horst."

"Oh no, I'm but a humble administrator. A meeting of this magnitude requires... shall we say, a more authoritative presence," Horst replied amiably from his position by the fireplace, signaling to one of the soldiers in the corner.

The man promptly opened a door to an adjoining room.

"What now...?" Cameron wondered, his anxiety mounting.

From beyond the threshold emerged a golden-haired man resplendent in the full regalia of the Neo Zeon Supreme Commander - none other than Char Aznable himself.

"Supreme Commander Char... in person?" Adenauer's voice wavered, a mix of awe and trepidation.

"But of course," Char's rich baritone filled the room. "While it's true we've been at odds with the Earth Federation, today's summit demands the utmost respect."

"Indeed... this certainly puts our minds at ease," Adenauer replied, visibly relaxing as Char took a seat by the fireplace.

"Thank you. This allows me to gauge the Earth Federation's sincerity as well," Char's resonant voice hit Cameron like a physical force.

"What's about to go down here?" Cameron wondered, desperately hoping this was a peace negotiation.

"Now then, I trust the treaty is genuine?" Horst interjected, positioned beside Char.

"Naturally. The Earth Federation government, having relocated just before Fifth Luna's impact, has prepared a document with full legal effect," Adenauer produced a treaty bound in black leather.

"I hope you understand the gravity of our intentions?"

"We never doubted it for a moment. That's why we've outlined our basic conditions here. If you'll agree to these terms, we'll cede the asteroid Axis to Neo Zeon."

Cameron, dumbfounded, glanced at the Federation officials on either side. To his amazement, they seemed entirely unfazed, as if they were fully aware of these developments.

As Horst perused the document, he mused aloud, "I see... after the Neo Zeon fleet surrenders at Luna II, Axis will be moved to Sweetwater..."

While reading, Horst snapped his fingers, issuing new orders to his men. The door Char had entered through reopened, and two soldiers wheeled in a cart stacked with attaché cases. Horst showed the document to Char, exchanging a few hushed words.

Meanwhile, the Neo Zeon soldiers began distributing the attaché cases to the Earth Federation officials. One was placed before Cameron. With trembling hands, he cracked it open and gasped. The case was filled to the brim with gold ingots.

"What is this?" he whispered.

"If you can't accept these terms, the Federation will have no choice but to declare all-out war..." Adenauer's voice snapped Cameron back to attention. He hurriedly shut the case, his gaze darting between Horst and Char.

"Oh my... in that case, we would surely face defeat," Horst replied smoothly.

"Exactly!" Adenauer's response was almost gleeful, no doubt buoyed by the promise of gold.

"Very well. All we ask is that you recognize the Neo Zeon government at Sweetwater and allow us to utilize Axis for its mineral resources to develop our colonies. We accept your basic terms... Any additional clauses can be ironed out later. For now, let's sign this transfer agreement," Char concluded.

At these words, another cart was wheeled in from the adjoining room, this time accompanied by a civilian rather than a soldier.

"This is the payment for Axis. Would you care to verify it?"

"He's from the Audit Bureau," Adenauer indicated, gesturing towards Cameron.

Before he could gather his wits, Cameron found himself on his feet.

"Ah... yes?"

A container several times larger than the attaché cases was brought to his side.

"This contains the full amount in gold ingots. Please confirm."

Cameron accepted a slip of paper from the Neo Zeon official.

"R-right! I'll verify it immediately!"

However, the string of numbers held no meaning for Cameron in his befuddled state. He mechanically began counting the ingots, his mind reeling.

"Mr. Adenauer, regarding the additional conditions..." Horst continued, "We'd like our fleet to remain operational until Axis is transported to Sweetwater."

"Hmm? That won't be necessary. As you know, Axis is equipped with nuclear engines. This will allow for easy relocation."

"I see! How impressive! As expected of the Earth Federation government!"

"Come now, surely you've done that much research?" one of the Federation officials quipped, eliciting ripples of laughter.

"With our manpower and ship shortages, we couldn't possibly..."

The Neo Zeon side's agreement was all too apparent.

Horst, sensing the need to further reassure the Federation representatives, delivered his coup de grâce:

"If we could perhaps... find positions for our fleet personnel within the Federation Forces, that would be most appreciated."

"Positions in the Earth Federation Forces?"

"Yes, you see, our personnel have been complaining about low wages."

"Horst, I haven't heard anything about this," Char interjected from behind, his tone serious.

"Oh, I'm quite certain I've reported it, sir."

"I don't recall that at all."

"Hahaha..."

This exchange between Horst and Char was masterfully executed. The Federation officials, lulled into a false sense of security by the apparent conclusion of the main agenda, seemed to enter a state of complacency. Following Adenauer's lead, they too burst into laughter.

"Understood. Supreme Commander, we'll need to discuss this back on Earth, but consider it a promise," Adenauer said, his tone jovial.

Cameron, from his objective standpoint, saw through Char and Horst's performance. But he no longer had the will to alert Adenauer to their machinations. All that remained for him was despair... and the glittering gold before his eyes.

2

A short distance from Hotel Canberra, in a room at the Drake Hotel, Quess was bouncing on the bed.

"Ahahaha... Found you, found you! Hathaway! Apparently, you can't call warships directly! Sorry for making them page the captain! Let's meet up! I'm so bored all alone!"

"Same here. Doesn't look like they'll make me a crew member anytime soon..."

Hathaway had picked up the phone in Londo Bell's lounge, a call that had initially come for Bright.

"Hotel Drake? Where's that?"

"Need a guide?" Amuro's voice drifted from behind the lounge information desk, startling Hathaway as he clung to the receiver.

"You can go? What time?"

Amuro slid a pale green spherical object towards Hathaway. About 40 centimeters in diameter, it unfurled two wing-like appendages, fluttering as it glided towards the boy.

"Uh... I can be there in 30 minutes?"

"We can make it."

"Alright, Quess! See you soon!"

Hathaway caught the sphere as he returned the receiver to the information desk.

"This is Haro, right?"

The object Amuro had sent was a round robot.

"It's a gift to commemorate your family reunion. But remember, it won't follow orders until you register your voice pattern."

"I know. Mom told me about this."

"Take good care of it. It took me half a year to build..."

"I will!"

As Hathaway and Amuro headed for the elevator, Chan came rushing in.

"Got a hot date planned?"

"No way! You're on duty, pilots are on leave!"

"How strict!"

"Well, Londo Bell is technically military."

As they bantered, the elevator descended from the colony's central zero-gravity zone to the outer wall's artificial gravity area.

"Wow! It's just like a city on Earth!"

Hathaway exclaimed, marveling at the vast cityscape built into the colony's inner wall as it emerged from the clouds.

"Of course. It's designed to mimic the ground, after all."

As Amuro explained, Chan leaned her head on his shoulder.

"...?"

Amuro turned, feeling Chan's hair brush against him.

"Amuro, you can be scary sometimes, you know?"

"Huh...?"

"The other day, on the Ra Cailum..."

"Ah, really? ...Was I?"

Amuro feigned forgetfulness.

Meanwhile, from the window of Char's private room in Hotel Canberra, the limousines carrying Adenauer Paraya and his entourage could be seen departing. As he watched the convoy disappear into the hotel's lush front gardens, Char donned his jacket and glanced at Horst.

"If the Londo Bell crew discovers we're here, we'll be under attack, won't we?"

"Undoubtedly... I've arranged for a launch to wait in the industrial block. We should hurry."

As Char retrieved his sunglasses from a small table in the adjacent room, his gaze drifted to the pastures visible through the window. Rolling hills stretched all the way to the mountains.

"Amuro... I'm about to do something extremely wicked. No, I'm already doing it... If you're nearby, feel my presence."

Char put on his sunglasses and headed for the door Horst had opened. The waiting Neo Zeon military officials rose en masse.

They offered small salutes, then spoke in unison:

"Sieg Zeon!"

As their low, powerful voices enveloped him, Char responded in kind:

"Sieg Zeon..."

3

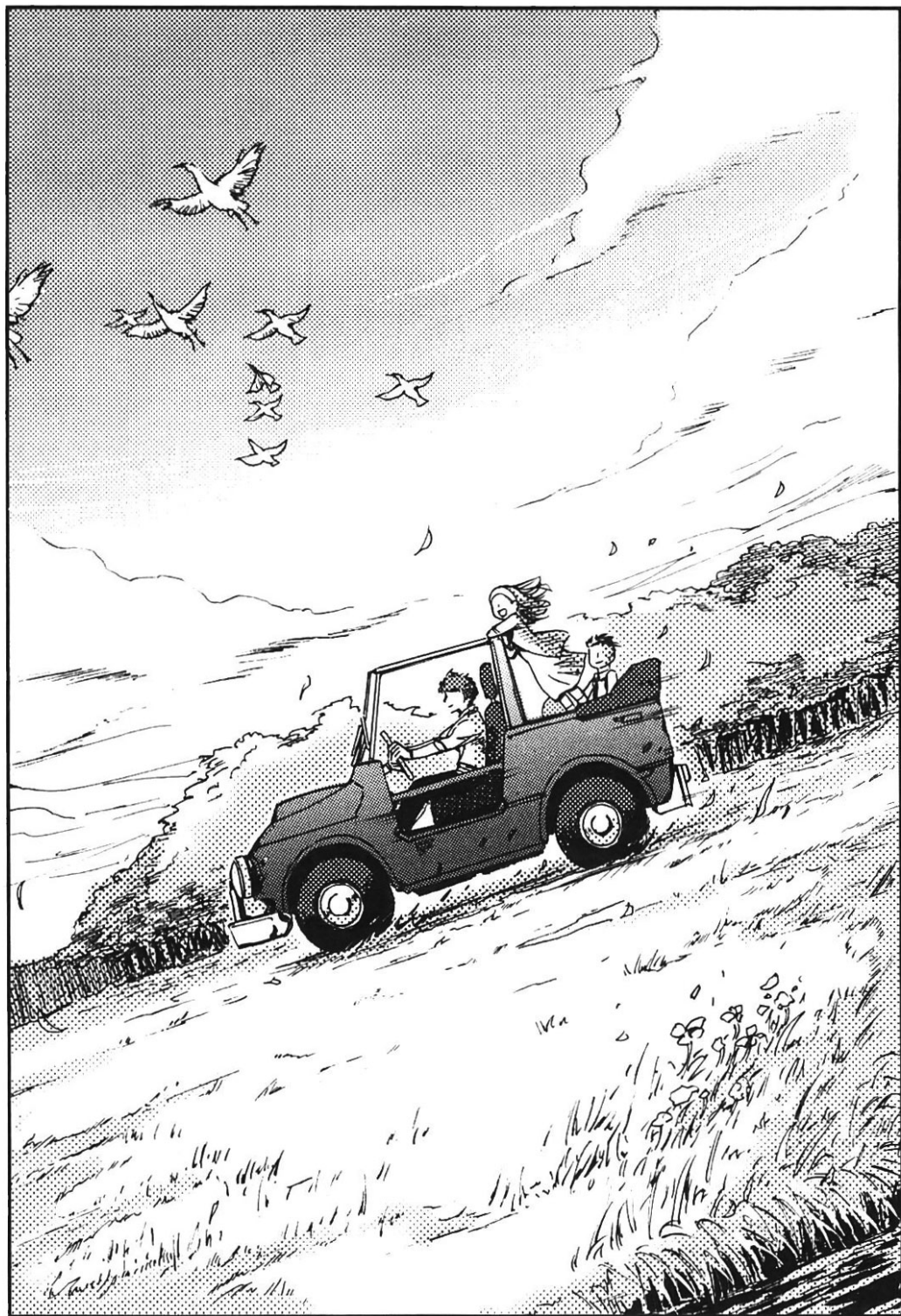
Amuro's elec-car purred to life in front of Hotel Drake. Hathaway and Quess occupied the back seat, while Haro nestled in the front passenger seat.

"Where are you taking us?" Quess inquired eagerly.

"How about the lake or the mountains?" Amuro's eyes twinkled with mischief.

"It's different from Earth, but it'll be a nice change of scenery," he added.

"Both! I want to see both!" Quess exclaimed. "Are there really such places in a colony?"



Amuro glanced back, flashing a smile that sent an unexpected flutter through Quess's chest.

"Wait... Don't you have plans, Lieutenant?" she asked, suddenly uncertain.

"Me? No..."

"Oh..."

Hathaway, ever the jester, chimed in, "He cancelled a date with Chan for us!"

"That's not true!" Amuro protested.

"Why would you do that?!" Quess blurted out, her reaction was sharper than she intended.

Taken aback, Amuro found himself asking, "What do you mean?"

"No reason. You just seemed down. It's not because I dislike Chan or anything," Quess replied, realizing she might have said too much.

"I appreciate your concern, but I do live here. Life can be a bit heavy sometimes," Amuro explained gently.

"Is that what adults call 'circumstances'?" Quess probed.

Amuro chuckled. "Adult circumstances? Haha... I suppose so."

As he answered, Amuro realized Quess had sensed his desire to see Alyona. He'd tried calling her apartment before meeting Hathaway, but there was no answer. He'd left a message, but with the Ra Cailum blocking all outside calls, Alyona couldn't reach him unless he called. He'd resigned himself to visiting her apartment after Hathaway and Quess's date.

"Amuro... Londenion means 'barren land' in some old language, right?" Quess asked suddenly.

"Ah, yes. A fitting name for the colony's pioneering days," Amuro nodded, impressed.

"Wow, Quess, you know a lot!" Hathaway exclaimed.

"Well, I was raised on Earth, you know?"

Quess was delighted to be with Amuro like this, even more than meeting Hathaway.

"He really does understand me... But adults might betray you, so I need to be careful," she thought to herself, her newfound wisdom apparent.

"There's Lake Hamilton," Amuro announced.

"Wow! Just like the one on Earth!" Hathaway and Quess exclaimed in unison, pressing against the windshield for a better view.

The elec-car cruised along the unpaved road circling the lake. Suddenly, a flock of waterfowl, startled by their approach, took flight from the nearby shore.

"Whoa!"

"Eek!"

Hathaway and Quess's excited cries were drowned out by the birds as they swooped over the elec-car.

Amuro's keen eyes caught sight of a family of swans gliding across the water, pushed dangerously low by the pursuing waterfowl. The sight stirred a memory of Lah in his dreams.

"Tch!" he clicked his tongue, a faint "Why now?" flitting through his thoughts.

"Let's go over there!" Quess pointed. "There might be more swans!"

"I never realized colonies could be like this. It's amazing!" Hathaway marveled.

"Alright, alright," Amuro forced a smile, trying to shake off the unsettling dream.

As they drove along, they spotted a herd of cattle moving along the mountainside, their cowbells creating a symphony of gentle clangs. Amuro pressed the accelerator, guiding the elec-car up onto the verdant pasture, navigating the undulating terrain.

"Kyaaaah!" Quess squealed as the elec-car bounced and jumped over the uneven terrain. Even as the vehicle slid upon landing, Quess stood up in the back seat, exhilarated.

"Char!" The name escaped Quess's lips, somewhere between a gasp and a cry, striking Amuro's ears.

"Char?!" The unspoken sentiment raced through Amuro as he swerved to avoid a thicket ahead, nearly colliding with a horse that suddenly emerged from behind it.

The horse reared up, whinnying loudly.

"Whoa!" The rider's sharp voice cut through the air.

There, astride the horse, was a blonde man wearing sunglasses—Char Aznable himself.

Char calmed his mount while eyeing the elec-car as it screeched to a halt. Haro tumbled out from under the seatbelt, rolling to a stop near the horse's front hooves.

Amuro and Char's gazes locked, while Quess and Hathaway stared at the unexpected appearance of the infamous pilot.

"You bastard!" Amuro snarled, his hand instinctively moving towards his waist.

"Stop it!" Quess cried out, her body lurching forward to grab Amuro's arm, sensing he was reaching for a weapon.

Seeing Char turn his horse away, Amuro shook off Quess's hand and gunned the elec-car's engine.

Char's horse leapt over a small stream. Amuro slammed on the brakes just short of the water, then sharply reversed the towards a nearby bridge.

"What's the matter, sir?!" A voice called out - it was Horst, who had been riding with Char.

"It's Amuro," Char replied, his voice taut with tension. "Get Gyunei for me!"

"Yes, sir!" Horst responded, hunching low on his horse as he disappeared down the hill.

"What are you planning? Why are you here?!" Amuro shouted, frustration building as the elec-car struggled with the terrain.

"Unlike you, I'm more than just a pilot!" Char retorted as he urged his horse into a dense young forest, too thick for the elec-car to follow.

"Is that really Neo Zeon's Char?" Quess asked, peering over Hathaway's shoulder at Char's retreating figure.

"Char... it can't be..." Hathaway muttered tensely, puzzling Quess.

"Why not? Isn't it natural for them to meet?" she thought to herself.

"If you're so important, why don't you use your political power to take down the Federation instead of trying to destroy the Earth?!" Amuro shouted, his frustration at being unable to pursue through the forest evident in his voice.

"How dare you!" Char shouted back, skillfully maneuvering his horse through the trees. "You, who can't step away from the military, lecture me? Is creating new mobile suits all Newtypes are good for?"

The elec-car approached the forest's edge, trying to cut Char off.

"The man who called himself Quattro Bajeeena and fought alongside us against Earth's enemies..." Amuro's voice trailed off, heavy with disappointment.

"Back then, I realized that those who promoted space migration were monopolizing Earth!" Char's voice rang out, filled with righteous anger. "I can't forgive those who pushed the masses off the planet!"

Char had focused too much on Amuro, and his horse emerged from the forest, only to be confronted by a new obstacle - a herd of dairy cows. The cows, startled by the sudden appearance of the horse, bellowed in discontent at the sudden equine intrusion. Char's mount found itself surrounded on all sides by the lowing cattle.

"Damn it!" Char cursed. "That's what created the discrimination between Earth and space dwellers! That's the root of war and Earth's pollution! Their souls are weighed down by gravity!"

"Yes!" Quess exclaimed, sudden understanding dawning on her. "That's why even married couples can be at each other's throats..." Char's impassioned words crystallizing her understanding of her own family's dysfunction.

Amuro's elec-car was forced to make a wide detour around the herd. Char's horse stumbled through the bovine crowd, finally finding an escape route behind the herd.

"That's why I'm dropping the asteroids!" Char shouted. "If you don't like it, try to stop me with your Gundam! I won't go easy on you just because you're in an inferior mobile suit!"

"What?!" Amuro's voice rose in indignation. "Are you saying you spared me out of pity during Fifth Luna?!"

Amuro blared the elec-car's horn, parting the cows and closing in on Char's horse as it emerged from the herd.

"Char?!" Quess's heart raced as Char's back, astride the horse, came into clear view.

"Char!" Amuro's body suddenly vanished from the elec-car, launching itself at the man on horseback. The two tumbled onto the pasture, a tangle of limbs.

"Ugh!" Hathaway lurched forward, grabbing the elec-car's controls and sliding into the driver's seat to slow the vehicle.

"The Earth isn't vast enough to swallow all of humanity's ego," Char grunted as they grappled.

"Human wisdom can overcome such limitations!" Amuro shot back, throwing a punch.

"Then bestow that enlightenment upon all the ignorant masses right now!" Char challenged.

The two men hurled insults as they grappled and rolled on the ground.

"Those men..." Quess watched, feeling a mix of empathy and strange irritation at the sight.

"Ah?!"

As Amuro threw Char from a low position, Quess instinctively leapt from the elec-car.

"I'll deal with you first!" Amuro snarled, rising to one knee and reaching for his gun again. Quess pushed him from behind, causing him to stumble.

"Oof!" Amuro grunted as he fell forward, and Char's leg kicked the gun from his hand. Quess, with surprising agility, snatched the weapon from the air. Both men looked at her in shock.

"Amuro! You're not fighting fair!" Quess admonished, surprised by the cold, heavy weight of the gun in her hands. She hesitated, knowing she shouldn't lower the weapon pointed at Amuro. In that brief moment, Char slid in and deftly disarmed her.

"Ah?!" Quess exclaimed as Char's body moved behind her. She found herself turning, almost magnetically drawn to follow his movement.

"Quess!" Amuro and Hathaway called out in unison, giving chase.

"Quess! Where are you going?!" Hathaway's desperate cry was drowned out by the sudden, oppressive sound of an approaching mobile suit.

"A Hi-Zack?!" Amuro looked up in disbelief, seeing a mobile suit with eccentric civilian paintwork descending towards them.

The Hi-Zack's cockpit revealed a man wearing a leather flight cap.

Amuro was dumbfounded, unable to comprehend the connection between Char and this mobile suit enthusiast.

"Captain!" The pilot, Gyunei Guss, called out. He maneuvered the Hi-Zack's legs to touch down, positioning himself between Char, who was running with the girl, and their pursuers.

"Impeccable timing!" Char called back, turning to wait for the Hi-Zack's manipulator to lower, its massive metal fingers extending towards them.

Amuro, hindered by the mobile suit's exhaust, could only watch as Char lifted Quess onto the manipulator, her small form dwarfed by the massive machine.

"Quess! Don't!" Hathaway sprinted, dodging the exhaust, but the Hi-Zack's manipulator was already rising, its legs straightening as the tail nozzles ignited.

"Aah!" Hathaway shouted as the blast from the mobile suit's thrusters lifted him several meters into the air before slamming him back onto the pasture. Amuro, too, was forced back by the intense exhaust.

"Damn you, Char..." Amuro muttered through gritted teeth.

The eccentrically camouflaged Hi-Zack ascended towards the industrial block, disappearing into the clouds.

"Quess!" Hathaway's voice, on the verge of tears, rang out pitifully.

"Is this your idea of a fair fight, Char? Seducing young girls?" Amuro growled, memories of Lalah Sune and Char's relationship flashing through his mind.

"Is it always the same? Always!" Amuro's fists clenched in frustration.

With this unexpected turn of events, Amuro had lost his chance to visit Alyona's apartment, leaving him with a bitter taste of regret and anger.

4

The door slid open, revealing Cameron Bloom's frail yet familiar face. His presence stirred a mix of emotions in Bright's chest.

"Mr. Cameron! What brings you here?" Bright's voice was a blend of surprise and concern.

"I apologize for disturbing you... Do you still remember me?" Cameron's words were tinged with uncertainty.

"Of course. How could I ever forget?" Bright's response was immediate, his tone warm with recognition.

"You're too kind. Please, let's put the past behind us." Cameron's voice carried a hint of embarrassment. The air between them was thick with unspoken history - Cameron had once engaged in a lovers' quarrel with Mirai, Bright's partner, right in front of him. Ironically, that incident had brought Bright and Mirai closer together.

"How is Mirai faring?" Cameron asked, his voice softening at the thought of her name.

"We haven't seen each other in two years. She's been on Earth all this time, raising our two children." Bright's voice held a mixture of pride and longing.

"That's... that's wonderful..." Cameron's words trailed off, his tone bittersweet.

"What brings you here at such a time?" Bright pressed, sensing the urgency in Cameron's demeanor.

Kamran hesitated, his internal struggle visible on his face before he finally spoke.

"It's almost unbelievable... At first, I wasn't sure who I should inform about this. Char is here, in this colony, right now."

"What? What do you mean?" Bright's brow furrowed, struggling to process this unexpected information.

"Char Aznable met with high-ranking Federation officials right here in this colony," Cameron elaborated, his voice barely above a whisper.

"With Adenauer Paraya?" Bright's mind raced, connecting the dots.

"Not just him. There were several others, including some from the Londenion government and even from Lhasa. They believe they've reached a binding peace agreement with Char."

Cameron's words hung heavy in the air.

"This can't be happening!" Bright's voice rose, disbelief and anger mixing in his tone.

"Yes, that's exactly it!" Cameron nodded vigorously, relieved that Bright understood the gravity of the situation.

Meanwhile, Gyunei's Hi-Zack was entering an airlock in the industrial block on the colony's sun-facing side. Surveillance cores flanked the entrance, scrutinizing all traffic. However, the Hi-Zack's eccentric camouflage pattern, far from raising suspicion, only piqued the interest of the monitoring staff.

Gyunei, donning a leather flight cap and knickerbockers, confidently greeted the staff. Their response? Eager inquiries about the mobile suit's price tag. Char, perched atop the manipulator, playfully waved to the onlookers, with Quess following suit. To any observer, they appeared to be nothing more than enthusiasts out for a joyride.

"Wow! Is this mobile suit disguised as a hobby model?" Quess's eyes sparkled with curiosity.

"Indeed. I'm impressed Gyunei could pull off such a convincing act," Char remarked, a hint of pride in his voice.

Quess flashed a smile at Gyunei, her childlike enthusiasm infectious. Gyunei found himself thinking that this mission might not be so bad after all.

As the Hi-Zack approached a mineral processing plant in the zero-gravity factory sector, a section of the ceiling slid open. The mobile suit descended into the dark, square opening.

Minutes later, a launch vessel emerged from the mineral loading hatch of the industrial block, the Hi-Zack perched atop its container. As the thrusters of both the launch and the Hi-Zack ignited simultaneously, they rapidly accelerated away from the Londenion colony, leaving only a trail of exhaust in their wake.

MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 3

TRAINING

CHAPTER-R

1

Bright Noa's fingers slipped from the pier's central rail lift, his body drifting towards Adenauer's entourage. Lieutenant Tooth, ever the vigilant tactical officer, darted after him. Ahead, Adenauer Paraya stood poised to board a Londo Bell cruiser, a Clop, his face a mask of grim determination.

"Vice Minister!" Bright's voice cut through the air. "You're blind to Char's true nature!"

Adenauer, a man whose mind couldn't fathom the notion of Char's escape, barely spared him a glance.

"Captain," he retorted, his voice dripping with condescension, "Char's purchase of Axis is a boon for Federation welfare policies. Sweetwater was originally a refugee colony. We can never have too much funding to push forward with strong welfare measures."

Brushing off Bright's protests like bothersome flies, Adenauer activated the lift grip to board the Clop. Undaunted, Bright deployed his waist wire lift, gliding onto the ship's middle deck with the grace of a seasoned spaceman, intercepting Adenauer mid-stride.

"That kind of thinking is what's empowering Neo Zeon!"

Adenauer's patience wore thin.

"Your persistence grates, Captain! With Axis alone, we can avert this war. Need I remind you of Char's threat to obliterate the colonies if we refused?"

His belief in his negotiation's success made him as immovable as a mountain.

"Vice Minister, open your eyes. Char won't touch the colonies. His crosshairs are fixed on you earthbound holdouts. How can you not see this?"

At last, Adenauer's composure cracked.

"Oh, please! I need to go to Luna II to prepare for the disarmament of the Neo Zeon fleet!"

He shouldered past Bright, his patience clearly at its limit.

"Why not engage Londo Bell handle Neo Zeon's disarmament?"

"Inviting Char's fleet near the colonies? Madness!" Adenauer's eyes darted to a wall-mounted phone. "You there! That phone - lend it to me!"

"Huh? Oh, yes sir!"

A deck officer, startled by the sudden address, fumbled with the intercom before passing it to Adenauer.

"Then we will act independently to monitor the situation. Is that alright?"

"Yes, of course. If you officers determine a threat to Earth, then make a move."

Adenauer punched in a number and held the receiver to his ear, waving Bright away like a bothersome dog.

"So be it!"

Bright and Tooth snapped crisp salutes before retreating to the gangway's lift grip.

"Captain, if the Federation brass had half your insight, Char would be ancient history," a Londenion government employee whispered, grabbing Bright's elbow with a wink.

"Huh? Oh, right."

"Just play along. No need to seriously humor those Lhasa folks."

Even government workers, if they were Spacenoids, felt closer to Bright and his crew than to the people from Lhasa.

"Why the hell isn't Quess in her hotel room!"

As Adenauer returned the receiver to the deck officer, Bright descended to the pier, shaking his head in disbelief at the politician's lack of discretion.

"Captain!" Adenauer bellowed. "Tell Quess I'll be back in a few days. Until then, she's to stay put in that hotel room, understood?"

Bright returned his perfunctory salute from the pier, marveling at how easily Adenauer could shout such private matters for all to hear.

"Tooth, you recorded that, right?"

"Yes, sir. The part about leaving it to Londo Bell?"

Tooth pulled a recorder from his breast pocket, putting an earphone in to check the recording.

"All grown up on the outside, all child within," Bright mused. "How such a man climbed the ranks..."

Bright realized his own simmering frustration was equally childish.

"Captain!" A voice called. In the passenger seat of an approaching military elec-car sat Meran, the executive officer, his thin mustache twitching with urgency.

"Lieutenant Amuro on the line..." Meran began.

"What?" Bright's attention snapped into focus.

"Says he's made contact with Char..."

Bright snatched the car's receiver, his knuckles white.

"It's me. Where are you?"

"Down below."

Amuro was calling from inside the gate in front of Londo Bell's quarters within the colony. Through the gate, Bright could make out Hathaway in an elec-car, clutching Haro, his shoulders visibly trembling.

"That girl Quess... Char took her..."

"Adenauer's daughter?" Bright's mind raced. "What in the world... Get up here immediately!"

Behind Bright, the Clop was just leaving the pier, towed by a tugboat.

2

"Why did Quess go with Char?!" Hathaway slammed the table, causing Haro to roll beneath it with a whir.

"There are rumors Char has a mysterious power... So..." Chan Agi spoke carelessly. She couldn't understand why Hathaway was so taken with a girl like that, and more importantly, she thought this might be a good opportunity for him to break things off with Quess.

Hathaway's eyes flashed with barely contained fury.

"You're talking like it doesn't even matter! How can you say such things?" The table groaned under another assault from his palm as he bolted from the room.

"Hathaway?" Chan's voice trailed off, the weight of her tactlessness finally sinking in. She remained rooted, knowing her fumbling attempts at comfort would only exacerbate the situation.

"Char, huh..." For Chan, the weight of the enemy leader Char's presence in Londonion was far more pressing.

"War," she mused, her voice barely above a whisper, "it's not just about machines colliding in the void, is it?"

Meanwhile, against the inky canvas of space, Char's launch cut through the treacherous shoal zone of Side 4, the moon a silent sentinel in the background. They were evading the Earth Federation's pursuit to rendezvous with allied ships.

The Hi-Zack clung to the launch's container like a misshapen parasite, its hatch an ungainly appendage connected to the container's own portal. Through this umbilical passage floated Quess, her civilian attire a stark reminder of her recent defection.

Gyunei Guss, ensconced in the Hi-Zack's cramped cockpit, eyed the approaching girl with thinly veiled annoyance. "There's only one seat," he grumbled, the words heavy with implication.

"Just put her on your lap," Char called up from the container with a wry smile.

"That'll do!"

Quess, unencumbered by social niceties, took the suggestion as an invitation. She nestled herself onto Gyunei's lap, fastening the seatbelt with a triumphant grin.

"Hehehe..." Her hands darted toward the controls, but Gyunei intercepted them with the reflexes of a seasoned pilot.

"I'll let you try once we're clear of the launch," he said, closing the hatch and detaching the tube. The Hi-Zack separated from the launch.

"Yes!" Quess could see the launch retreating on the display in front of her.

Gyunei shifted uncomfortably, acutely aware of their intimate proximity. Quess, oblivious to his discomfort, surveyed the cockpit with keen interest.

"I know this," she declared. "It's different from a Jegan, but I can figure it out."

Her confident assertion sent a shiver down Gyunei's spine.

"You... you really understand all this?"

"Like this, right?" Quess manipulated the Hi-Zack's four levers deftly, slightly accelerating the mobile suit forward.

"Try going up."

"Mmkay!" Before he could finish speaking, the view on the front display changed rapidly.

"Get the launch in front of us!"

With uncanny precision, Quess maneuvered the mobile suit, centering the launch in their sights. Suddenly, she clicked her tongue and jerked the controls. Gyunei's protest died on his lips as a stray asteroid hurtled past, missing them by mere meters.

"Did you... did you see that coming?" he asked, unable to mask his astonishment.

It was a rock Gyunei hadn't even noticed.

"Of course?"

"Is this really your first time piloting a mobile suit?"

"Is it strange? When I sit here, I can see the relationship between what I touch and the mobile suit's body. Watch this, backflip!"

The universe spun around them as the Hi-Zack executed a perfect rotation, eliciting a startled yelp from the launch's captain.

Back on the launch, Horst Harnell peered at the spectacle with a mixture of awe and exasperation.

"Is that really Quess piloting?"

Char's lips curled into a knowing smile.

"It seems our young friend's boasts weren't unfounded." Yet, beneath his calm exterior, a seed of unease took root. "A sensitive soul, drawn to power... Is that why she followed me?" The thought left a bitter aftertaste.

Their contemplation was cut short by the co-pilots urgent report.

"The Musaka's ready to pick us up!"

They looked to the upper right and saw blinking lights behind the rocks, in the Hi-Zack's rear.

"That was quicker than expected," the captain said with satisfaction, beginning to change the launch's direction. Suddenly, Gyunei's Hi-Zack turned and rushed towards the Musaka.

"Looks like Gyunei spotted it too," Char said. He knew the co-pilots report was incorrect, but he said nothing.

"Are you insane?!" Gyunei protested.

"Zoomie!"

Gyunei's protests fell on deaf ears as Quess guided their mobile suit in a hair-raising dance around the Musaka's bridge.

"We're going to catch hell for this!" Gyunei groaned.

Quess's laughter filled the cockpit.

"Then it's on you, isn't it? I'm just the innocent passenger."

"Great," Gyunei muttered. "As if I needed more reasons to be disliked."

"Oh?" Quess's curiosity piqued. "And why's that?"

"Once you're out of the Newtype Labs, and suddenly you're too 'elite' for comfort," he explained, a hint of bitterness in his voice.

Quess's eyes glittered with mischief. "Well then, why not give them something to really talk about?"

Before Gyunei could protest, she sent the Hi-Zack into another death-defying maneuver, skimming the Musaka's hull with reckless abandon.

3

After transferring to the Musaka, Gyunei endured a thorough dressing-down from the captain and deck officer before being granted permission to rest in the pilot's quarters.

"All because of that girl!" he grumbled.

As Gyunei descended from the bridge to the pilot's section, he spotted Char and Quess ascending the opposite gangway lift grip.

Curiosity overrode caution, and Gyunei found himself drifting towards the section they had entered. The air grew thick with anticipation as he approached Char's private quarters, the dimly lit block a stark contrast to the utilitarian brightness of the rest of the ship.

His clandestine pursuit was cut short by a boyish orderly closing the door to Char's room. Their eyes met, a moment of mutual surprise frozen in the recycled air of the ship.

"What the hell are you doing here?" the orderly demanded, his youthful face contorted with suspicion.

Though thinking the orderly looked like a brat, Gyunei's mind raced, fumbling for an excuse.

"I... I got lost. First time on this ship, you know?"

"The pilot area is always below on every ship!"

Gyunei reluctantly drifted down to the lower level, his eyes lingering on the presidential suite door behind the orderly.

The room was lavishly appointed, unbefitting a warship, with velvet-covered walls and genuine oak paneling.

Wow! Do they roll out the red carpet for you on every ship?"

Char, seemingly embarrassed by the display, busied himself with a teapot. "I didn't ask for this," he muttered, his back to the young girl.

Quess giggled, bouncing slightly on the ornate bed.

"You're blushing! But it's fitting for someone of your importance, isn't it?"

Char turned, his eyes searching Quess's face. "You claim to hate Earth. You must have had some terrible memories for you to hate it, Quess Air?" He used the false surname she had given, knowing full well it was a lie.

"There's an annoying woman on the Ra Cailum..."

"I see. But tell me, why are you really interested in me?"

Quess floated lazily, a milk straw between her lips.

"You talked about souls being weighed down by Earth's gravity. I feel that, viscerally. But you know... I think that people who really understand that are kind of tragic."

Char nodded, finding her explanation both naive and perceptive.

"I'm just walking the path that I truly believe in," he replied, his voice tinged with a conviction that belied inner turmoil.

"I saw a swan fly, and Amuro shouted, so I shouted too. Then you appeared right after that."

Char's lips curved in a small smile, charmed by her girlish logic.

"And so you betrayed Amuro and the others?"

Quess's response was chillingly detached. "I only met them by coincidence. I mean, I wasn't really even friends with them or anything."

In that moment, Char realized the depths of Quess's intelligence – and perhaps, her potential for ruthlessness.

Londo Bell's maintenance facility was in the zero-gravity zone at the colony's center. The Ra Cailum's hull filled the window view.

Kayra Su's voice cut through the buzz of activity, sharp and expectant.

"Well? Did you miracle workers manage to cram in even one more round?"

"You bet your ass we did!"

As Kayra's gaze swept upward, drinking in the sight of the Re-GZ, Astonaige descended from the mobile suit. His usually stern features had softened, touched by a rare smile.

"Minimal armor is fine."

"We can't do that. Your safety comes first."

"Won't that kill the mobility?!"

"That depends on your skills."

"Heh..."

As Kayra wondered why she was so at ease with this homely man, she completed her circuit of the Re-GZ, her attention was caught by a solitary figure hunched in a nearby booth. Chan sat alone, surrounded by a fortress of data readouts and component samples.

Kayra's curiosity piqued.

"What's got you holed up in here?"

She leaned against the booth's doorframe, peering in.

Chan was examining samples of the T-shaped frame.

"Frame giving you trouble?"

"It's not the problems I'm seeing... it's the ones I'm not. It's too perfect." Chan's voice was tight with worry.

"You're a worrier, aren't you?"

"It's my principle..."

Kayra knew Chan's thoroughness wasn't merely professional pride. Yet, the intensity of her focus these past few days bordered on obsession. As Kayra turned to leave, sensing her words would fall on deaf ears, Chan's voice stopped her.

"Lieutenant..."

"Huh?"

"Do you ever wonder if all this is for nothing?"

The raw vulnerability in Chan's tone made Kayra pause.



"Why would you think that?"

"There's talk of a peace treaty, right?"

"Yeah. Amuro says it's a crock."

Chan's shoulders seemed to tremble slightly.

"How can we get the Lieutenant away from mobile suits?"

"After this war ends, I suppose."

"Kayra!" Chan stood abruptly, her chair skidding back. The sudden outburst startled them both.

"Whoa, easy there," Kayra said, taken aback by Chan's intensity.

Seeing the earnestness in Chan's eyes, Kayra softened her tone. "Look, you're overthinking this. Amuro's not going to die."

"That's just empty comfort," Chan retorted, her voice tight. "This is war, Kayra. Real war."

Kayra sighed, conceding the point. "True... But remember, Amuro's outlasted all of us here. Hell, we all feel a bit invincible with him around, you know?"

"You're right... That's true..."

Chan sank back into her chair, the fight leaving her. "You're right... That's true..."

"Hey," Kayra ventured, "maybe you should ask Amuro to take a breather, hang out for a bit?"

But Chan had already retreated into her world of data and diagnostics, Kayra's words falling on deaf ears.

With a resigned sigh, Kayra glanced up at the factory floor. The massive crane was maneuvering the Fin Funnels into place on the Nu Gundam. Atop those sleek, wing-like structures stood Amuro, his voice carrying across the hangar in a torrent of agitated instructions.

"Guess R&R isn't in his vocabulary," Kayra muttered. She cast one last look at Chan, hunched over her display, before closing the booth door.

As she drifted away, a final thought struck her.

"I swear... He's dead set on fighting this war against Char single-handedly."

Amuro's tirade continued unabated, his frustration palpable.

These Fin Funnels were the Nu Gundam's ultimate weapon, but Londo Bell hadn't had time to test the missiles – a fact that gnawed at Amuro's already frayed nerves.

4

"So, like this?" Hathaway asked, manipulating the five levers controlling the MED, an outdated machine that was somewhere between a Petite mobile suit and a full-sized mobile suit. With the hemispherical canopy open, he made it lumber across the yard in front of the warehouse with heavy, clanking steps.

The junkyard owner, a mountain of a man whose posterior threatened to devour his folding chair, nodded approvingly. His nose, as crimson and polished as the knees and seat of his denim overalls, twitched with interest.

"Not bad, kid. Not bad at all."

Hathaway's heart soared.

"This is great... feels like the real deal!"

"But listen, boy," the owner's gravel-voice rumbled, "getting a space license through self-study ain't gonna be a cakewalk."

"Yeah, but if I'm gonna work for the Colony Public Corporation doing repairs, I need to get good at the practical stuff. Watch this!" With a surge of bravado, he commanded the MED to jump. The machine leaped, a graceless bound of a few meters, but the landing impact was barely absorbed. Haro nearly flew out of the control core.

"You want it on a fifty-month loan, right?"

"Yeah, that's ri-- Whoa!"

Hathaway's second jump ended less gracefully, the MED crashing into a pile of junk with a cacophony of scraping metal.

"Ack!"

Hathaway had decided to learn how to pilot something close to a mobile suit, thinking it might come in handy. He hoped it would give him a chance to sneak aboard the Ra Cailum and get close to Quess.

While Hathaway grappled with antiquated machinery, Quess Paraya had already ascended to realms beyond his wildest imagination. Under the supervision of the Newtype Labs, she had entered the pilot training process.

"Her performance is... extraordinary. Gyunei Guss's data pales in comparison, doesn't it?" Nanai asked.

"Shall we push forward with the test?" The staff's response was a chorus of eager anticipation.

"Her biosignals show no signs of distress. Let's proceed." Nanai's decision was swift, her eyes never leaving the readings before her. She dismissed Char's looming presence behind her, his silence a palpable weight in the room.

"Yes, ma'am."

They stood in the heart of the Rewloola's monitoring core, the vast expanse of space punctuated by the nearby Sweetwater colony. Through the reinforced windows, the Jagd Doga's apogee motors flashed like newborn stars, each pulse a testament to the machine's raw power.

In the cockpit, Quess sat clad in a simple T-shirt, her hands dancing over the controls with an intuition that bordered on the supernatural. Her connection to the mobile suit was so profound that it seemed an extension of her very being.

"The attitude control balancers are lighter than the Geara Doga's!?"

Nanai's face flickered to life on Quess's console, her features ghostly amidst the static.

"Yes. Quess, you needn't concern yourself with the apogee joint movements. Your instincts are guiding you perfectly. Let's move to the fixed point and initiate the funnel launch test," Nanai instructed.

Quess's voice wavered, a mixture of anticipation and uncertainty.

"Already? Can I... can I really do this?"

"If anyone can, it's you, Quess Air." Nanai's encouragement was gentle, almost maternal. "Alright, Quess, imagine the target's position... You understand?"

Quess closed her eyes and pressed the headphones that half-covered her head with both hands.

"Target... where's the dummy shaped like a ship..."

The psycho-phone, a marvel of Neo Zeon engineering, synchronized with the Jagd Doga's psycommu system. It was the same technology equipped in the formidable Nu Gundam, a testament to Neo Zeon's mastery of Newtype augmentation. As Quess's heightened senses probed the surrounding space, the very concept of "target" transformed from an abstract notion to a visceral reality.

"I... I think I see it," Quess breathed. "Bearing... front and center, about twenty degrees wide."

"Excellent. Now, command the funnels to launch."

"The funnels are..."

Quess's concentrated consciousness ignited the funnels' sensors.

"If you can imagine the target, the funnels will automatically infiltrate the enemy airspace."

"Yes..."

"Deploy the funnels."

"Sure!"

In that moment, Quess's consciousness exploded outward, drawing an invisible line between herself and the target. She had been taught that the more concentrated her will, the more direct the funnels' path would be.

Six funnels detached from the Jagd Doga's shoulder shield, floating outward in a display of potential energy. But then, they wavered, their movements erratic and uncertain.

Quess's brow furrowed. The funnels were an extension of her will, and their instability mirrored the conflict within her. Her consciousness, projected into these remote weapons, left her own sense of self blurred and indistinct.

"Can I really control them with just my thoughts?" she wondered aloud, a hint of doubt creeping into her voice.

Through the static, Nanai's command rang out: "Visualize the target!"

"I... Yes!"

"That's it! Pour your fighting spirit into the funnels!"

Quess clasped her hands to her chest, her entire being focused on melding with the brain-guided missiles, the funnels. In her mind's eye, she saw them not as mere weapons, but as extensions of herself.

"My other selves! Go!"

It was as if a switch had been flipped. The once-erratic funnels suddenly blazed with purpose, streaking towards their target with lethal precision.

"Now, the thread!" Nanai's voice cut through Quess's concentration. It was the imaginary line Quess had first envisioned, the link between her will and the target's destruction.

"Y-yes! Funnels, hit your mark!"

With eyes still closed, Quess felt rather than saw the impact. Six laser beams converged on the dummy cruiser, their combined fury turning the target into a brilliant supernova.

The resulting explosion bathed the Rewloola's observation windows in harsh light, eliciting cheers from the monitoring station. Nanai allowed herself a relieved sigh before turning to face Char.

"To acclimate her further, it would be faster to deploy her in actual combat. We don't have much time..."

"Are you going to send her to crush Luna II?"

Char frowned slightly.

"It's a calculated risk," Nanai explained, her tone professional. "As head of the Newtype Labs, I believe she'll complement Gyunei's abilities. His rigid personality needs her adaptability."

"Oh?" Char's interest was piqued.

"If Gyunei develops a protective instinct towards Quess, it will expand his own capabilities. His attention to her safety will broaden his awareness in combat."

Char agreed with this. The battlefield, a special space, concentrates people's consciousness and easily obtains the brainwave average necessary to operate the psycommu, but it also has the downside of narrowing the range of defense with linear emotions.

It was a fact that the "attentive consciousness" Nanai spoke of would expand the defensive range.

"Do you object?"

"Decisions regarding Quess are not my purview. I leave it in your capable hands." Char's words were carefully chosen, his tone maddeningly ambiguous as he turned away.

Nanai's eyes narrowed, a frown creasing her brow.

"Again, you fixate on a girl like her... Have you learned nothing from the past?"

Her unspoken thoughts drifted to Lalah Sune, a ghost that seemed to haunt them both.

As the Jagd Doga docked on the Rewloola's mobile suit deck, Quess emerged to find Gyunei waiting expectantly. Their reunion was a whirlwind of excitement and shared triumph.

"Did you see, Gyunei? It was incredible! So amazing!"

"Quess! You're a true Newtype! I've never seen anyone like you before!"

"I understand now, what it means to be free in space! The sensation is indescribable, Gyunei!"

Quess practically flew into Gyunei's arms, their laughter echoing through the hangar.

"Quess..."

"Hahaha!"

But their joy was not universally shared. Other pilots watched the display with barely concealed disdain.

"Sending a brat like that to the battlefield, the commander must be out of his mind."

Rezin Schnyder's laughter cut through the muttering like a knife.

"Why so glum? If she's as good as they say, she'll make a fine shield for the rest of us."

"But, Lieutenant," another pilot protested, "she'll be more hindrance than help!"

"Is that so? Well, if she becomes a problem... there's always a solution for that. One well-placed shot from behind, and problem solved."

"You can't be serious..." The other pilots exchanged uneasy glances, their faces a mixture of disbelief and barely concealed resentment as they watched Gyunei and Quess's continued celebration.

5

Char Aznable made it a habit to ride the public linear train from the port entrance. It was a calculated decision, born in the early days of his residency, a masterful stroke of public relations disguised as civic duty. In mere weeks, this simple act had transformed him from a distant figure of authority into a beloved leader, his crimson uniform a beacon of hope amidst the colony's manufactured landscape.

Sweetwater itself was a study in contradictions. Plastic-molded floors gave way to token patches of greenery, while artificial streams babbled beneath the harsh glare of industrial lighting. The train glided above cafe terraces where cheap bonsai struggled for dignity, sliced through the rarified air of upper-class enclaves, and wove between the exposed steel skeletons of buildings reaching for a simulated sky.

Even in the lull after rush hour, the car buzzed with the energy of a hive. Whispers, electric with excitement, rippled through the crowd.

"The Commander... here? With us?"

"Up front! Over there!"

Like a game of pass-the-parcel infused with reverence, a small bouquet made its way through eager hands. "For the Commander!" The words were hushed, almost prayer-like.

"Right..."

At the epicenter of this quiet commotion stood Char, flanked by Quess and Gyunei. The unspoken rule held firm - no one offered the masked leader a seat. It was part of the mythos now, the commander who stood with his people.

"For you, Commander..."

"For me? I'm grateful."

"It's an honor, sir! The bouquet is from over there..."

As the elderly man pointed bashfully to one side. The car parted like a red sea, revealing a middle-aged woman at the far end. Her smile, visible between the forest of arms and elbows, was radiant as she raised her hand in salute.

"Sieg Zeon!"

The cry was both benediction and battle cry.

As the train slid into the elevated station at the heart of the entertainment district, a curious alchemy took place. Departing passengers' cries of "Sieg Zeon!" merged with the excited chatter of new arrivals, creating a swirling vortex of sound and emotion.

"Is the Commander really on board?"

"What? The Captain?!"

A man clutching an accordion, his crew-neck sweater a splash of civilian normality, let out a whoop of delight.

His fingers found the keys, and as the train plunged into the canyon of skyscrapers, a new sound rose above the din. It was a song, rough-edged but heartfelt, accompanied by the wheeze and sigh of the accordion.

"High hopes and noble endeavors will shine with all the twinkling stars.

We hold you next to us the galaxy, so glorious.

We'll build with our dreams a new world that bravely shines.

Char is fighting for our prayers."

It was more than just a paean to their leader; it was the birth cry of a new identity, a hymn aspiring to become the very heartbeat of Sweetwater itself.

The linear train entered Sweetwater's hilly area with its dramatic elevation changes, stopping at Beverly Hills station nestled among dense woods in a special district. A few guards stood on the platform, and only Gyunei, Quess, and Char were permitted to disembark here.

The farewell cries of the passengers swelled into a crescendo of hope and determination.

"We're counting on you, Commander!"

"Down with the Earth Federation government!"

"Glory to the Spacenoids!"

Char returned their salute and held it until the linear train disappeared into the shelter of the trees.

"Hehehe... So you're not just putting on airs, you're really giving it your all, aren't you?"

"Does that amuse you?"

"No."

The limousine drove down a dark road, flanked by an upscale residential area where only occasional lights peeked out from between shadowy houses nestled in the trees.

"Are you going to crush Earth for those people?"

"No, we're just going to let Earth rest for a bit. Not crush it... Such a thing is beyond human capability."

The gentleness in his tone stirred something in Quess, her eyes widening with a mixture of understanding and adoration.

"Oh. That's what you want."

"No headaches from piloting the Jagd Doga?"

"No! I'm fine!"

"Very good."

After a few minutes of driving, the limousine stopped in front of a mansion with gate pillars adorned with reddish light bulbs in round glass fixtures.

Beyond the iron gate, two Great Danes came bounding up, tails wagging.

"Gyunei, I'm counting on you to look after Quess in tomorrow's operation."

"Yes, sir!"

Gyunei responded from the passenger seat window. Even here, he wasn't permitted to exit the car to see Char off.

"You understand your role, Quess?"

"Of course! The Jagd Doga's psycommu system... it's like an extension of my very thoughts. The funnels respond to my will, launching beam attacks at my slightest command. And the Minovsky particle interference? It's like it doesn't even exist for me. I have complete control!"

Quess, unfamiliar with actual combat, was simply excited. Her words tumbled out, each syllable vibrating with the intoxicating rush of newfound power. She was desperate to convey to Char the sheer exhilaration coursing through her veins, the absolute certainty of her capabilities as a pilot.

"This feeling..." she continued, her eyes shining with an almost feverish light, "it's as if everything that was once just a hazy concept has suddenly snapped into crystal-clear focus. I don't think you can truly understand, Captain, how it feels to--Oh!"

Char took Quess's hand and kissed it on the back.

"Captain?"

"Rest well tonight."

"Y-Yes..."

Quess managed, her senses reeling, caught between the dizzying heights of her newfound power and the bewildering depths of emotions she was only beginning to understand.

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 3

NANAI'S ROOM

CHAPTER-S

1

The mansion that welcomed Char, heralded by two imposing Great Danes, was nominally one of Neo Zeon's military lodgings, but Nanai Miguel had commandeered it for his personal use.

"The observational data from Fifth Luna has proven quite promising, according to reports," Char remarked.

Nanai, relaxed in a lounging robe, shifted her shoulder. The clink of crystal glass shimmered through the room's atmosphere.

"Should Axis collide with Earth, we'll witness a cataclysm rivaling the nuclear winter of lore. Couple that with Luna II's dormant arsenal, and the transformation becomes absolute."

Nanai placed a drink on a wheeled cart beside Char's sofa chair.

"We're treading where even history's most notorious tyrants dared not venture."

She took her own glass and turned her back to the window. Behind her, in a rare display, the colony's city lights sparkled like a tapestry of pearls against the void of space.

"Your propensity for moral discourse - a familial trait, perhaps?" Char asked, taking a sip of his drink.

"If you emerge victorious, Captain, you'll bear the entire weight of humanity's resentment."

"As I've said, I'm prepared for that burden," Char retorted, a hint of irritation coloring his tone. "I yearn to believe in humanity's potential beyond Earth's cradle. But the harsh reality is that to elevate our entire race to Newtype status, someone must bear the weight of our collective sins."

Char felt a twinge in his neck as he leaned back on the sofa, his mind momentarily distracted by the physical reminder of his mortality. These weighty matters made him acutely aware of the passage of time.

"And you're content with that?"

"What would you have me do? Nothing? Then why did I return to Earth's sphere?"

"I guess it's a woman's weakness to wish for your happiness," Nanai said with a self-deprecating smile.

"I guess so," Char replied simply.

His tone, though expected, stung Nanai.

"Captain, You've been fighting Amuro Ray from Londo Bell since you were both young..."

"Ah..." Char glanced at Nanai, who had suddenly changed the subject.

"Call it women's intuition, but isn't this whole plan just to get back at Amuro?"

"Do you take me for such a petty man?"

Char's eyes fixed on the amber liquid swirling in his glass.

"Amuro Ray is a man deluded by the notion that kindness is a Newtype's greatest weapon. A woman might forgive such naivety, but you... you can't forgive Amuro. Is it because you're a man, Captain?"

Nanai's words hung in the air, a challenge and a plea for understanding.

But Char had already drifted beyond Nanai's words, lost in the tempest of his own thoughts. His mind wandered to an old, yet vivid memory - Lalah Sune, a girl of phenomenal piloting ability.

Psychic research had advanced to the point of developing devices that enhanced human perception, but it was mainly focused on strengthening so-called extrasensory abilities. That device, the psycommu, certainly expanded human perception, but it wasn't something anyone could use. There was a risk that those without strong abilities would have their capabilities destroyed by the psycommu instead.

When Char met Lalah Sune, he recognized her potential and entrusted her to the Flanagan Agency for psychic research. She lived up to Char's expectations well and came out to the battlefield. But in her first battle, her mobile armor, the Elmeth, encountered Amuro in the Gundam prototype.

And when Lalah screamed, it propagated to Char through the psycommu. It was a mistake, but it became reality. Char heard words from the depths of a person's soul that he shouldn't have heard.

"Lalah!"

"Amuro Ray! Why did you come? You came too late, so I fell in love with Char!"

When he heard that voice, Char was devastated by the fact that these were the words of someone he was meeting for the first time. And he realized that this way of empathizing was what it meant to be a Newtype.

"Did Lalah... sense in Amuro, her enemy, the kindness she had been seeking? Is that the empathy between Newtypes..."

Char's understanding made him doubt whether he wasn't just becoming obsolete after all. He felt as if he had seen an illusion of Lalah's naked body embracing a young man.

"Lalah! Don't play with the enemy!"

Char screamed, trying to insert his mobile suit between the Elmeth and Gundam. The physical movement of objects forced people into an impossible situation.

The Gundam tried to confront Char with the Elmeth behind it, but-
"Stop!"

With Lalah's scream, the Elmeth moved in front of Char's mobile suit. To Char's eyes, Lalah's image seemed to be shielding Amuro.

"Aaargh!"

The sequence of events - Char's charge, the Gundam's defense, and how Gundam's beam saber ended up piercing the Elmeth's cockpit - is now unclear. When Lalah's scream burst, a flash from the Elmeth had already scattered her consciousness across space.

2

After that fateful moment, Char found himself unable to stem the tide of his tears. Perhaps this is the cruel irony of life - we only truly grasp the significance of something once it's been torn from our grasp.

"Lalah... My Lalah!" he cried out in anguish.

It was only when Char witnessed Lalah's connection to his nemesis that he fully comprehended the true extent of her abilities. Yet this revelation came hand-in-hand with another startling truth: Amuro, the Earth Federation pilot who had reached Lalah's consciousness, wasn't even piloting a mobile suit equipped with a psycommu system.

While it was conceivable that Amuro, being a pilot of Char's caliber, could receive Lalah's psycommu-amplified thoughts, the real shock came when Char himself found he could perceive Amuro's thoughts. The inescapable conclusion hit him:

"That man... he must be a Newtype."

This realization ignited a spark of curiosity within Char.

"He managed to draw Lalah to his side in an instant. Was that the power of their resonance?"

Yet, as Char was beginning to learn, omniscience isn't always a blessing. The weight of such knowledge can be a crushing burden. There's a limit to how much truth a person should bear, proportional to their capacity to handle it.

Perhaps it was this sobering realization that drove Char to retreat to the vast emptiness of the asteroid belt with Mineva, the last legitimate Zabi heir. There, overseeing the monumental construction of Axis, he sought the space and time to contemplate his worthiness to bear the weight of ultimate knowledge. However, when the political machinations surrounding Mineva's protection began to wear on his patience, he made the decision to return to Earth. Under the alias Quattro Bajeena, he infiltrated the ranks of the Earth Federation Forces.

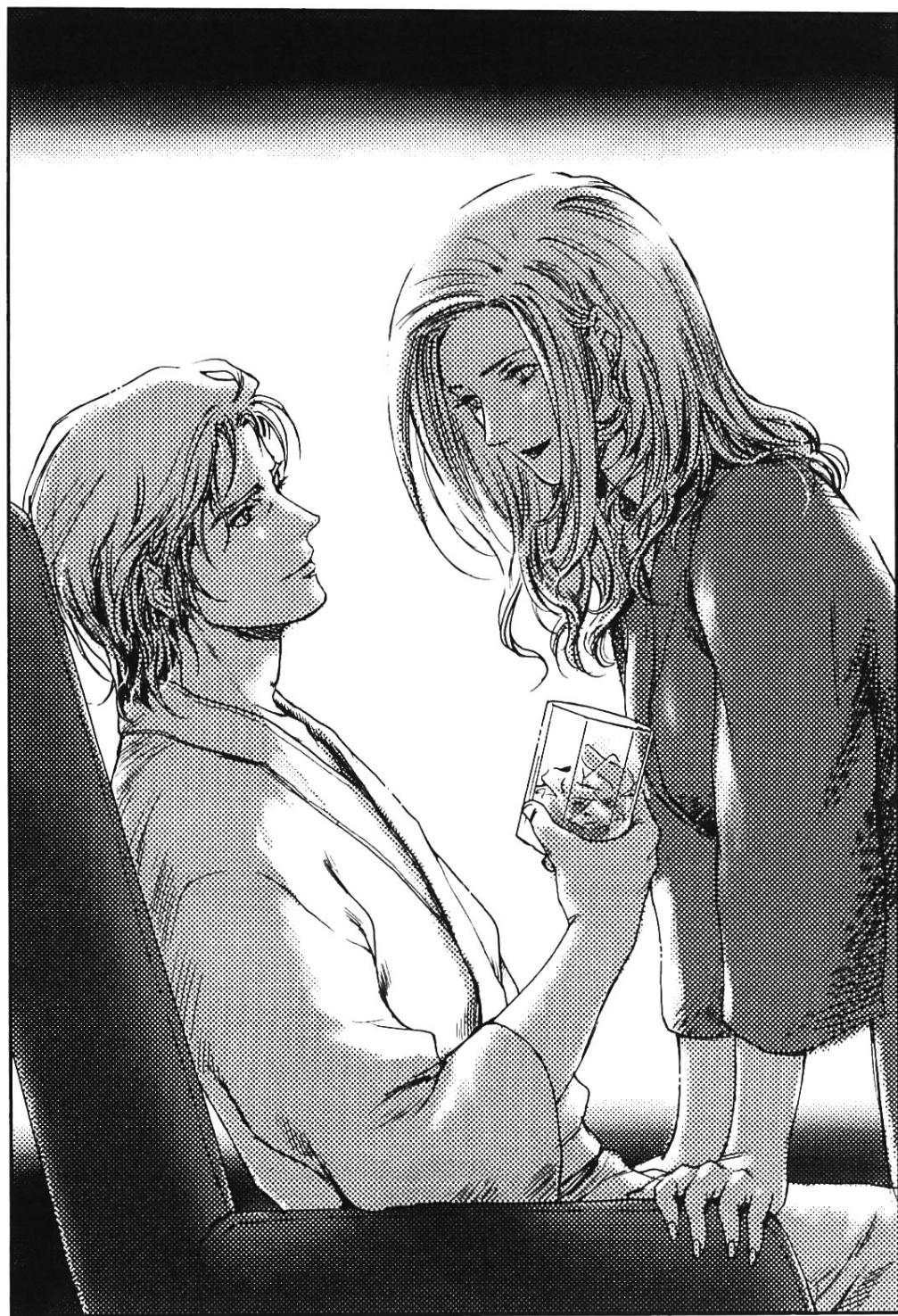
His motives were twofold: to make contact with Amuro Ray and to unify the scattered remnants of the Zabi faction for another attempt to overthrow the Earth Federation government.

When Char, cloaked in his Quattro persona, finally crossed paths with Amuro again, he found the man surprisingly, almost maddeningly unremarkable despite his apparent supernatural luck. It was in this moment of anticlimax that Char began to grasp the profound, almost terrifying meaning and weight of "ordinary."

"I put Lalah on a pedestal, but he didn't see her that way. Their bond, even with its extraordinary empathic abilities, was rooted in a shared sense of normalcy." This understanding pained Char deeply.

"Is something troubling you?" Nanai's voice cut through his reverie, her bare neck and collarbone filling his field of vision.

"Mm..." Char murmured noncommittally.



Nanai was no stranger to the name Lalah Sune. It appeared in the war records available to those who knew where to look, and she had heard Char whisper it in the throes of his nightmares. But Nanai was perceptive enough, wise enough, not to pry into this particular wound, even if she suspected there was a novel's worth of tragedy in the story of Lalah, Amuro, and Char.

"I strive to be extraordinary, but Amuro doesn't. When two souls cut from the same cloth realize they've chosen diverging paths, that's when the seeds of hatred take root," Char mused.

"Your relationship with Amuro... it's a fine line between love and hate, isn't it? A tempest of convenient emotions to mask the truth," Nanai observed.

"Isn't that human nature? You could call it pride, or folly, or both. I'm only a man, after all, despite my aspirations. I'm as much a slave to such feelings as anyone."

As if to punctuate his words, Char brushed his glass against Nanai's chest, causing her to shiver at the cold touch and the electricity of the moment.

"I'm entrusting you with tomorrow's operation," Char said abruptly, standing up as if Nanai's proximity had suddenly become too much to bear. "I'll be making my way to Axis ahead of the main force."

"What about Quess?" Nanai called out to his retreating form, concern evident in her voice. "Are you certain about her role in all this?"

Char paused at the door, his hand resting on the knob as if it were an anchor to reality.

"Yes..." he said after a moment of contemplation. "I don't believe she requires any further enhancement."

"I agree. That girl might be a true Newtype, even if only temporarily."

"Mm..." Char nodded, a ghost of a smile touching his lips as he savored Nanai's astute assessment. As he was about to step through the doorway, he hesitated, turning back with an uncharacteristic vulnerability in his eyes.

"Nanai, I... I owe you an apology. When this war is over, would you consider spending some time with me? I fear I've been cold to you..."

"Captain?"

"Is that a no?"

"It's fine."

Nanai couldn't help but smile despite herself, noticing how Char's eyes suddenly resembled those of a lost child seeking approval and comfort from his mother.

"I'm sorry..." Char's downcast eyes as he finally turned to leave spoke volumes, telling Nanai that his apologies were but the tip of a glacier of regret.

"Really..."

As Nanai stared at Char's empty glass in her hand, she regretted accepting his offer.

"It's not just the crushing burden of Deikun's legacy that's grinding you down," she murmured to the empty room. "You're in love with Quess, aren't you? You and your predilection for young girls..."

With a sudden burst of frustration, Nanai hurled the glass across the room. It rolled across the thick carpet before coming to rest against the wall.

3

In the heart of Londo Bell's mobile suit maintenance block, Astonaiage and his team of mechanics clustered around Amuro and Chan Agi. Amuro sat with a headset on, while Chan faced a computer display. Dozens of wires snaked from Amuro's headphones to Chan's computer.

"Seems like there's a remarkably strong resonance between the psycommu and psycho-frame."

"What does that mean for us?"

"Nothing bad, I hope. You're not getting a headache, are you?"

"No, not at all."

"That's good. Can you sense it? Everyone's thoughts?"

"Yes... I can sense everyone's restless mood. The hunger pangs are creating quite the mental waves.""

"Really? That's an excellent response."

"You think? Are you all hungry?"

The mechanics chimed in, suddenly aware of their empty stomachs.

"We're starving. Absolutely famished."

"Alright Amuro, I'll adjust the vector from here. We'll have to test the rest in actual combat."

"Right..."

Sensing the end of the session, the circle of mechanics began to disperse.

"Let's grab some grub," one called out.

"I'm in!" another responded enthusiastically.

Astonaige, ever perceptive, ushered the team away, leaving Amuro and Chan alone.

Amuro removed his headset, handing it to Chan.

His eyes searched her face.

"What's wrong, Chan? You look tired."

Chan blinked, surprised by his observation.

"Do I?"

"You've seemed down lately."

Chan hesitated, then spoke softly, her words carefully chosen.

"Since you asked... I hope you don't mind, but there's something I'd like to ask you."

"What is it?"

Chan's voice wavered slightly.

"In your memories... there's a woman. Who is she?"

Amuro's expression turned guarded.

"...?"

"I'm sorry," Chan backpedaled. "I can understand the place of a mother in memory from a psychological standpoint. But there seems to be someone else, someone vibrant and real..."

Chan, able to analyze the amplified psycommu data, could perceive such things.

Amuro sighed.

"Do I have to answer?"

"No, of course not!" Chan backpedaled again, her cheeks flushing. "I'm overstepping. As a psycommu technician, I shouldn't ask such personal questions. We already glimpse too much of people's inner lives... Please, forget I said anything."

Amuro's lips quirked into a small smile, recognizing Chan's jealousy.

"You must be picking up on Alyona Page? I haven't been able to contact her for a few days. She was one of our informants in the EGUM..."

Chan's face fell.

"I'm sorry... Oh, god, now you're going to hate me."

"Not at all," Amuro assured her, his voice warm. "My relationship with her is strictly professional."

"No, I'm just happy to be working with you on this mission, Captain. I'm sorry."

Amuro's voice softened.

"How about we grab something to eat?"

"Amuro?"

"...?"

"Then... kiss me."

She reached behind to turn off the lights and leaned against Amuro's chest.

Meanwhile, in the lounge of Sweetwater's pilot quarters, the last dance of the evening was in full swing. At the counter, Rezin slumped over her drink with a hulking man beside her.

"Kuh! Hahaha!"

Their raucous laughter cut through the mellow mood music.

In a secluded corner under a stand, Quess stirred her umpteenth glass of milk while eyeing Gyunei warily.

"That's why the Captain is just channeling his sexual frustration into the war," Gyunei said.

"What are you on about?"

"It's a personality thing. When men like the Captain get riled up, they lash out - in his case, by destroying colonies. That's why I pushed to become a Newtype, to be a check on his impulses when he goes off the deep end. My parents... they died when a colony was destroyed."

"Hmm. So you want to be an esper?"

"Sort of. But I realized the Newtype Labs enhancements won't make me like you, Quess. That's why I want to know more about you."

"You mean you want to date?"

Quess took a measured sip of her milk.

"I'm curious about how your talent manifests... I want to dissect you mentally, in various ways."

"...?! That's... that's a bit presumptuous. Poor expression is also a reflection of personality, you know!"

"Quess?"

"If that's the best you can come up with, you're more despicable than I thought!"

Quess stood abruptly, weaving through the dancing couples with barely contained anger.

Gyunei made to follow her, his disgust at the surrounding adults warring with his desire to explain himself. However, Rezin's booming voice stopped him in his tracks.

"Hey! Isn't it past the kid's bedtime?"

"What did you say?!" Gyunei whirled, his fist already in motion towards Rezin's face. But the older woman, belying her drunken state, dodged with startling agility and drove her knee into Gyunei's solar plexus.

"Oof!" Gyunei crumpled to his knees, the wind knocked clean out of him.

"Some Cyber-Newtype you turned out to be!"

Rezin's fist connected with Gyunei's temple, sending him sprawling.

"Hahahahaha!"

Rezin's triumphant laughter echoed through the lounge, egged on by the surrounding pilots.

4

"Just three more floors..." Mirai muttered, her breath coming in short gasps. The climb to the eighth floor was taking its toll, more than she cared to admit.

"Am I getting old?" The unwelcome thought flitted through her mind as she paused to catch her breath.

Mirai's gaze wandered to the scene below. Through the forest of laundry strung between apartments, she could see children squabbling in the streets. Pushing aside her fatigue, she pressed the buzzer of her destination, the sound sharp in the corridor's stillness.

"Who is it?" Cheimin's cautious voice crackled through the intercom.

"It's me," Mirai replied simply.

"Oh! One moment!"

The staccato of unlocking chains preceded the groan of the iron door as Cheimin swung it open.

"From the look on your face, I'm guessing the shuttles won't be running anytime soon."

"That's the least of our worries. The shuttle company is pulling out of Hong Kong entirely."

As Mirai unpacked groceries from a paper bag onto the table, her voice was heavy with concern. Through the window, slivers of sea glimmered between the towering buildings.

"So the peace talks were just a sham?"

"Rumor has it that Hong Kong is the next target," Mirai replied grimly.

"Another asteroid drop?" Cheimin's voice quavered.

"If it's Char, he'll do it," Mirai said, her eyes distant with memories. "I fought him once, long ago. I understand how he thinks. The people of Earth will only grow more restless. Char... he's too pure in his convictions."

Mirai's assessment, born of bitter experience, hit uncomfortably close to the mark. At that very moment, Char Aznable's voice rang out, electric with purpose, as he rallied his forces.

"Our colony, Sweetwater, is a hastily constructed hybrid of closed and open-type designs. It was built to house refugees from past space wars. Yet its very existence is a symbol of our ongoing tragedy!"

Char's impassioned speech reverberated through the comms of over a dozen warships docked at Sweetwater's port. On each vessel's mobile suit deck, rows of newly serviced Gears Dogas stood at attention. Above and below, soldiers lined the catapult decks, their eyes fixed on the holographic image of Char floating at the center.

"The Earth Federation government, oblivious to the plight of war refugees, believed that simply providing us with a place to live would absolve them of all sins. They retreated to Earth, forgetting our existence, blind to the dire conditions within the colonies, refusing to relinquish their grip on our home planet. I petitioned the Earth Federation to allow us to use Axis for the reconstruction of Sweetwater. Their response, as you all know, was exorbitant. They demand we pay for Axis over the next fifty years!"

This claim about the repayment terms was a fabrication, but its veracity was irrelevant in the moment. Char stood on a 50-meter square platform at the center of the port's main dock, surrounded by high-ranking Neo Zeon officials. Above, below, and to either side, three warships including the Rewloola were moored, their decks a living carpet of soldiers standing rigidly at attention.

"When my father, Zeon Zum Deikun, dared to dream of autonomy for us Spacenoids, he was assassinated by the Zabi family. They twisted his legacy, wrapping themselves in Zeon's mantle to wage their war of 'independence.' We all know how that blood-soaked chapter ended..."

In the back row of the officials' gallery, Quess Paraya and Gyunei Guss sat, Nanai a silent guardian beside them.

"I... I knew all this," Quess murmured, surprise coloring her voice. The familiarity of Char's words puzzled her – how could she know this history so intimately? Then Hathaway's advice surfaced in her mind: piece together the fragments, news clippings and broadcasts, and the larger picture emerges.

Char's voice swelled, a tide of righteous fury. "In victory's wake, the Federation grew fat and complacent, rot spreading through its ranks like a cancer. This spawned abominations like the Titans, and let Haman skulk

about in Zabi's rotting skin. This, my friends, is the poisoned well from which refugees spring! To break this cycle, to cauterize this festering wound, we must excise those who cling to Earth like parasites! No – we will excise them! This is the true face of our operation to drop Axis!"

A roar erupted from the assembled masses, a primal sound of approval and bloodlust. Quess flinched, the sheer wall of noise a physical force as she looked up at the gangway. All around her, even the staid officials leapt to their feet, their applause a thunderous counterpoint to the cheers.

"Captain!"

"The savior of Sweetwater!"

"Hope for all refugees!"

Even hardened officers joined the frenzy, but to Quess's sharp eyes, their enthusiasm rang hollow, a veneer over deeper, murkier motivations.

"Was it all lies?" she wondered, her voice lost in the din. "The disarmament talks at Luna II – just another mask?"

"My comrades!" Char's voice cut through the din. "I ask for your strength one last time, to forge our own path forward!"

Another wave of adulation crashed over the dock, the very air seeming to vibrate with fervor. Char descended from his pulpit, his Neo Zeon cape billowing behind him like the wings of an avenging angel.

Government officials swarmed him, Kaiser M. Bayer and Horst Harnell at the forefront, hands outstretched in supplication and congratulation.

"Masterfully done, Captain," Kaiser simpered, his diminutive frame quivering with barely contained excitement. "Surely now you'll consider hanging up your pilot's suit? The political arena awaits your talents."

"I'll retire after this operation," Char replied smoothly.

"Why not make that promise now?" Horst pressed.

Char's lips curled into a smile. "I'm not ready to be put out to pasture just yet. I still have a few tricks up my sleeve." His gaze swept past the sycophants, landing on Quess. The girl started, feeling the weight of his attention like a physical touch.

Kaiser leaned in, conspiratorial. "A Newtype, you say?" he whispered, eyes gleaming with avarice.

"And a remarkably gifted one at that," Char nodded. "In the near future, she and others like her will be instrumental in purging the Federation politicians who seek refuge in the colonies."

"Exactly!" Kaiser's voice dripped with venom. "They're a cancer on humanity's future!"

"A cancer?" Char mused. "An apt metaphor." He strode to Quess, taking her hand with surprising gentleness. Turning to Nanai, he spoke with quiet authority. "Show me what miracles your Newtype Labs has wrought."

"With pleasure, sir!" Nanai's reply was crisp, professional.

"You too, Gyunei," Char added.

"Sir!" Gyunei snapped to attention, his face a mask of devotion that buried any trace of his clumsy overtures to Quess the previous night.

"You're incredible, Captain," Quess breathed, awe evident in her voice.

"Hmm? Thank you," Char replied, a hint of warmth in his tone. "The era of petty wars is over. This will be the final act."

"Can you really do it?" Quess asked, her eyes wide with hope and admiration.

"Without a doubt," Char assured her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "The coming age must be one of peaceful evolution for all of humanity."

"I understand, Supreme Commander!" Quess exclaimed. "That's the essence of true peace, isn't it?"

Char and the Neo Zeon officials moved to a floor overlooking Sweetwater's port, preparing to see off the departing fleet.

"Will this ruse be enough?" Kaiser whispered to Char, worry etching lines on his face.

"Hm. People tend to feel reassured when the numbers add up," Char replied cryptically.

Beyond the reinforced glass, a surreal transformation unfolded. What seemed at first glance to be misshapen asteroids began to swell and shift, metamorphosing into the silhouettes of warships – elaborate decoys, crafted to deceive.

"So we're padding out our actual fleet with these dummies?" Horst muttered, as if trying to convince himself. It seemed even government officials needed such reassurances.

"This will fool Luna II's surveillance, allowing us to approach and strike their fleet..." Horst continued, thinking aloud.

"Horst? Have you grasped the operation's key points?" Char's voice carried a hint of sarcasm.

"Y-Yes, of course!" Horst stammered. "While this fleet diverts attention, you'll lead the Rewloola and the dock's fleet to capture Axis. If all goes well, the fleet engaging Luna II might even secure their rumored nuclear cache for use on Axis."

"Well reasoned," Char nodded approvingly. "Those warheads could accelerate Axis or be used to contaminate Earth."

"Indeed, indeed!" Kaiser and Horst nodded in unison, flanking Char like eager acolytes.

As the dummy ships began to move, towed by the real fleet, the grand departure of the Neo Zeon armada commenced. The air thrummed with the promise of impending change, for better or worse.

5

Luna II, once a mere asteroid plucked from the asteroid belt, now stood as the beating heart of the Earth Federation's Space Forces. Its transformation from lifeless rock to bustling military nerve center was a testament to human ingenuity – and perhaps, folly.

Cunningham Shaw's voice dripped with cynicism as she shared the latest scuttlebutt.

"Get this – they say the Vice Minister himself is coming to oversee the Neo Zeon fleet's surrender. Since when does a pencil-pusher from Earth stick his nose in space affairs?"

Unbeknownst to Cunningham, this twist of fate would prove fortuitous. The Ra Zaim, nestled deep within Luna II's most secure dock for a refit, would escape the impending tragedy – as would Cunningham and her fellow pilots.

A peculiar malaise had settled over the Earth Federation Forces. The prospect of Neo Zeon's surrender cast a long shadow over their future. What use were soldiers in a world without war? Yet, duty compelled them to maintain their mobile suits, polishing war machines that might never again taste the thrill of battle.

"Staying sharp for the day we meet real aliens," some joked, their gallows humor a flimsy shield against an uncertain future. It was as if true, lasting peace was a concept too foreign to fully grasp, a language they'd never learned to speak.

Through this sea of dormant warships, a Clop cruiser glided with stately grace, bearing the architect of this new era – Adenauer Paraya. A formation of mobile suits swooped past in a display of ceremonial respect, their thrusters painting ephemeral patterns against the star-studded void.

"Morale seems high," Adenauer observed, a hint of smugness coloring his tone. He basked in the illusion of control, like a child mistaking a toy steering wheel for the real thing.

The Clop's captain, ever the sycophant, was quick to stoke the embers of Adenauer's ego.

"Indeed, sir. And this impressive display is but a fraction of our might. Every colony houses a fleet, all under your supreme command."

Adenauer preened, thoughts of earthbound mistresses evaporating like dew under the harsh light of his imagined importance.

"What of Luna Two's nuclear cache?" he inquired, affecting a casual air. "How much of the old world's fire do we still hoard?"

The captain's response was immediate, rehearsed.

"Enough to annihilate the Neo Zeon fleet a hundred times over, sir."

A self-satisfied smile played on Adenauer's lips. "Char knows this. His choice to surrender... it's the wisdom of a cornered rat."

The captain bristled, a flash of defiance in his eyes.

"Are you suggesting Londo Bell thirsts for war, sir?"

Adenauer waved a dismissive hand. "From Earth's vantage point, one might draw such conclusions."

The captain's thoughts turned to darker possibilities, fantasies of ridding the world of such pompous fools dancing at the edges of his mind.

"Vice Minister, we're receiving a broadcast from Sweetwater," an operator's crisp voice cut through the tension.

Adenauer's gaze lifted to the bridge's ceiling display, where images of the departing Neo Zeon fleet flickered to life. An announcer's voice, thick with emotion, provided narration to this historic exodus.

"...And so, the fleet that brought hope to Sweetwater's refugees now embarks on its final, glorious journey – to forge an eternal peace with the Federation. This armada, which gifted us independence and courage, makes its last sortie not in war, but in pursuit of harmony."

The captain's brow furrowed as he ordered a closer inspection. "Confirm the Rewloola's position. Is it bringing up the rear?"

After a moment of scrutiny, an operator replied, "Sir, the numbers match our intelligence. Wait... there's an extra cruiser. It seems Char had an ace up his sleeve we didn't account for."

Adenauer's chest swelled with misplaced pride. "You see? Char is a man of integrity. He comes to us with open hands, hiding nothing."

The Vice Minister's eagerness to validate his own judgment was palpable, each perceived success a brick in the monument to his ego.

The announcer's voice cracked with emotion as he continued, "Bon voyage, brave souls of Neo Zeon! Though your time with us was brief, you instilled pride in the hearts of refugees. While your ships may depart, the name 'Neo Zeon' will forever grace the annals of Sweetwater's history!"

Adenauer's voice took on a theatrical quality. "And so, Earth's only enemies become the phantoms of deep space. The military, as we know it, is obsolete."

The captain, unable to contain his bitterness, snapped, "And what becomes of us, sir? What brave new world awaits career soldiers?"

Adenauer's reply came with breezy indifference, as if discussing the weather. "Oh, there's work aplenty. Earth's beaches won't clean themselves, you know."

In the vacuum of space, no one could hear the captain's teeth grinding in barely suppressed rage.

機動戦士ガンダム

MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER:3

FOUL OPERATION

CHAPTER-T

1

The vast emptiness of space shimmered with distant stars as four sleek cruisers, led by the imposing Rewloola flagship sliced through the void. They had launched from Sweetwater, purposefully lagging behind the main fleet that was putting on an elaborate show of surrender at Luna II. This fleet was to make a direct assault on Axis.

Kaises M. Buyer and Horst Harnell exchanged solemn glances as they watched the departure, their faces etched with the gravity of the situation.

"The real battle begins after we claim victory. Taming the colonies – that's where the true war lies."

"Indeed. We're pushing hard for an early audience with Anaheim Electronics' chairman."

"And what of Melanie Hue Carbine? His work on the Sazabi was nothing short of revolutionary."

"He's a difficult person to pin down," Horst replied, his words careful. "Our latest intelligence suggests he's on the moon. We have operatives working to establish contact as we speak."

"Hmm... Make it quick."

"Right..."

As this exchange unfolded, Londo Bell was still docked at Londenion, and a very different scene was playing out. Bright Noa's laughter echoed as he pored over the file Cameron Bloom had just handed him.

"You find humor in this, Captain?" Cameron inquired, his own expression a mask of calm.

Bright's eyes danced with mirth. "Well, isn't it? Fifteen 'non-existent' nuclear warheads under the jurisdiction of the Audit Bureau, of all places. It's absurd enough to be comical. Were these really stored somewhere other than Luna II?"

Cameron's cheeks flushed, a hint of embarrassment coloring his features.

"Officially, they were cataloged as assets under the Bureau's management. Museum pieces, really. Exercise caution if you intend to use them."

Bright's gaze drifted to the bustling dock visible through the viewport. "That inconspicuous container, I presume?"

"The very same," Cameron confirmed, leaning closer to the glass.

"I'm surprised I was able to get them out," he added, his voice tinged with disbelief.

Bright turned to him, his expression serious.

"Aren't your actions considered a crime?"

"If those stuffed shirts in their ivory towers survive this mess, I'm looking at a one-way ticket to a very small cell," he replied, his tone surprisingly nonchalant.

"You're fine with that?"

Cameron's eyes softened.

"I'm doing this because I want Mirai to live."

"As her former fiancé, I suppose you've earned that right," Bright acknowledged, clapping him on the shoulder before barking into the intercom. "Secure the container by the second hatch immediately. Contents: missile warheads. Top priority!"

Cameron's voice was hesitant.

"So, that flowery broadcast about Neo Zeon's entire fleet launching for disarmament... it was a lie?"

"Most likely. It's all a big show," Bright replied decisively.

"Then please, be careful. This war isn't worth dying for."

Bright nodded solemnly.

"Your concern is appreciated, and shared. But with this arsenal, we hold the power to destroy Axis or, at the very least, alter its course at Luna II. Whether Char aims to rain destruction upon Earth or obliterate a colony, the failure of this operation will force his retreat. He never possessed the strength for a prolonged, open conflict."

"But as long as Char lives, the seeds of war will remain," Cameron cautioned.

"No," Bright interjected firmly, "Char is but a symptom. The true disease is the current Earth Federation government. Its continued existence is the real threat."

"I... I see," Cameron stammered, taken aback by Bright's candor. "What's your next move, then?"

"A coup aboard the Londo Bell would be foolhardy at best."

"Perhaps," Cameron mused, his voice growing stronger, "you captain, the crew—you all could become the political leaders we so desperately need. When that day comes, I'll support that effort."

The vast expanse of space stretched before them, Luna II's domain drawing ever closer. Though still beyond the reach of unaided sight, Neo Zeon's fleet moved with calculated precision, a ballet of deception. Amidst the backdrop of distant starlight, fleeting sparks of brilliance danced—a pair of Jagd Dogas locked in an intricate aerial tango.

"Quess, you're relentless! Incredible!" Gyunei's exhilarated cry echoed through the cockpit of the lead mobile suit.

Behind him, Quess's Jagd Doga mirrored his every move with uncanny precision. No matter how wildly Gyunei veered or pivoted, she remained in perfect sync, as if their minds were one.

"She's reading my intentions before I even act..." Even factoring in the Jagd Doga's advanced psycommu system, Quess's raw talent left Gyunei in awe. Unbeknownst to him, this sentiment was mirrored aboard the Musaka's bridge, where Nanai's eyes tracked the duo's aerial acrobatics with a mixture of admiration and unease.

"Quess and the Captain..." she murmured, her tongue itching to click in frustration.

The young pilot's abilities were undeniable, yet Nanai found herself grappling with a reluctance to fully acknowledge them. Quess's youthful visage seemed at odds with her extraordinary gifts, and a niggling doubt wormed its way into her thoughts. If Char's affections were swaying, even slightly, towards the girl, could it be that some fraction of Quess's power stemmed not just from Newtype potential but from a more primal, feminine allure?

The captain's commanding voice cut through Nanai's musings.

"Navigation axle targeting Luna II, locked in. All right! All gun turrets, maximum elevation!"

As one, the Musaka's impressive array of weaponry tilted skyward, their barrels stretching towards the infinite black—a universal gesture of capitulation.

On cue, the two Jagd Dogas swooped towards the Musaka, each gliding into its respective catapult deck with balletic grace. From her perch, Rezin Schnyder's sardonic voice carried to Gyunei below.

"Enjoy playing nursemaid, hotshot?"

Gyunei's response was instantaneous and heated.

"Care to repeat that?"

Rezin's smirk was audible in her words.

"I said, did chasing after your little green playmate get your blood pumping?"

In a flash, Gyunei's hand lift cable shot out, its suction cup finding purchase on the catwalk's wall. He launched himself upward, rage propelling him as surely as the mechanism.

"You ass! As if I'd stoop so low! Unlike some, I've got standards—and I don't pick fights with sober cyborgs!"

Rezin retreated, her fellow pilots in tow, but Gyunei's indignation echoed after them.

"Get it straight! I'm no cyborg or Cyber-Newtype. I'm a Newtype, through and through!"

Before he could pursue further, Quess materialized beside him, her own wire lift retracting.

"Gyunei, forget it!" she admonished, her voice a cool balm to his heated temper. "Just ignore those 'normal people.'"

2

"Captain, this doesn't sit right with me. Why aren't we leading the charge against Neo Zeon's fleet?" Adenauer Paraya's voice cut through the bridge's tense atmosphere, his eyes fixed on the looming presence of Luna II directly below the Clap cruiser.

The captain's response was measured, almost rehearsed.

"Vice Minister, my primary directive is to ensure your safety. Our position at the rear is strategic, not cowardly."

Though the logic was sound, it did little to quell Adenauer's unease. In his mind, propriety demanded he face Char's forces head-on, a gesture of respect between adversaries.

"Surely we have a clear view of Neo Zeon's approach?" Adenauer pressed, his body now acclimated to the ship's artificial gravity as he leaned over an operator's console, hungry for information.

The response came swiftly, tinged with a hint of surprise.

"Confirmed, sir! Radar shows identical numbers to their Sweetwater departure."

A nearby observer chimed in, his voice carrying an undercurrent of skepticism.

"The Rewloola and her escort have visibly disarmed. The remainder are displaying clear surrender protocols."

Adenauer's brow furrowed.

"And yet... their velocity seems... excessive for a surrendering force, doesn't it?"

The captain's retort dripped with sarcasm: "Perhaps they're simply eager to sample our superior pay scales?"

"I see..." Adenauer bit back his irritation. Despite the crew's thinly veiled hostility, he remained buoyant. Everything was unfolding according to plan – or so he believed.

Meanwhile, aboard the Musaka, Neo Zeon's flagship, a very different scene played out. The combat display blazed with potential firing solutions, a deadly web connecting their fleet to Luna II's vulnerable docking bays.

"The Minovsky particle density works in our favor," the Musaka's captain observed, a predatory gleam in his eye. "We'll have a clean shot at Luna II's port."

Nanai's response was crisp and professional.

"Affirmative. Mobile suit squadrons stand ready for immediate deployment post-strike."

A wolfish grin spread across the captain's face as he alternated between the telescopic feed and the lemon-like silhouette of Luna II framed by the bridge's panoramic windows.

Back on the Clop, a note of uncertainty crept into the captain's voice. "This is... irregular. The fleet's spreading out laterally."

Adenauer's confident facade cracked.

"But... the agreement was for a single-file approach. Surely..."

"Spread out our mobile suit forces! Now!" The captain's order brooked no argument.

Adenauer fell silent, his world tilting on its axis. For the first time, the possibility that Char might renege on their carefully crafted deal became terrifyingly real.

"Is this... truly necessary?" he ventured, his earlier bravado evaporating.

The captain's reply was terse.

"In matters of survival, caution is our ally. Welcoming team, take point!"

As if unleashed, a swarm of Jegans surged forward, a thin line of defense against the approaching storm.

"Let's not act in haste..." Adenauer's words trailed off as he noticed the captain's left hand, a trembling betrayal of the fear that now gripped them all.

The Neo Zeon fleet unfurled like a deadly fan, the Musaka at its center. The formation, already imposing, took on an eerie asymmetry due to the four ghostly dummy ships trailing behind. Through the vast emptiness of space, the keen eyes aboard the Musaka picked out the approaching forms of Earth Federation mobile suits.

"Jegans on intercept course!"

"Signal the fleet! All ships, prepare to unleash hell!"

The Musaka's bridge flashed Morse code signals on both sides, relaying attack readiness. As one, the massive gun barrels visible through the bridge's panoramic windows swung into position.

"Sir, shall we commence the attack?"

The question hung in the air, pregnant with possibility.

"Affirmative. Let it begin."

With a simple flip of a switch, the shrieking call for battle echoed through the ship. The Musaka surged forward as if eager to meet its destiny.

Nanai's voice crackled over the intercom, steel and determination in every syllable.

"Mobile suit squadrons, prepare for immediate deployment!"

The bridge came alive with a chorus of confirmations.

"Targeting systems locked and loaded!"

"Missiles armed for homing assault!"

"All systems green!"

The captain, without ordering a move to the combat bridge, gave the command for missile and artillery fire.

In that instant, the void erupted. A writhing mass of missiles burst forth from the Musaka's bow, their formation loose yet purposeful as they hurtled toward Luna II's unsuspecting defenses. In their wake, over a dozen Neo Zeon warships unleashed ribbons of searing energy, a deadly light show illuminating the darkness of space.

The Earth Federation's welcoming force, caught off-guard by this sudden onslaught, found themselves in a deadly dance. Missiles screamed past, missing by mere meters. In that moment of confusion, the true hammer fell. Mega particle beams lanced out, finding their marks with brutal efficiency. Two Jegans, caught in the crossfire, bloomed into short-lived suns.

"So it begins," Nanai murmured, her eyes reflecting the carnage unfolding before them. Despite the tactical success, a shadow crossed her features. In the glare of the mega particle cannons, she tasted the bitterness of their underhanded methods.

"Multiple heat sources detected!"

A panicked cry from an operator echoed through the bridge of Adenauer's Clop.

"Evasive action, now!" The captain's command cut through the chaos.

Adenauer, his face a mask of disbelief, could barely comprehend the streaks of light that heralded their doom.

"What's happening?!" he bellowed, his mind refusing to accept Char's betrayal even as the evidence blazed before his eyes.

"We're under attack, sir!" came the frantic reply.

"Preposterous! The treaty—" Adenauer's protests were swallowed by an inferno as countless fireballs blossomed above Luna II, transforming space into a hellish tableau. The bridge's reinforced windows struggled to contain the fury, the world beyond bleaching to a searing white.

"Close the shutters!"

Adenauer's world spun, nausea clawing at his throat.

"What's going on? What happened?!" he wailed.

The bridge erupted into a cacophony of desperation.

"Intercept those missiles! Every ship for itself!"

"Fall back! Use Luna II as cover!"

"Minovsky particle density to maximum! We need that interference!"

Adenauer bit into his seat's headrest, feeling the operator's head repeatedly bump his arm as the ship rocked. Fireballs blossomed across Luna II's airspace, with missiles exploding at multiple port entrances.

Deep within Luna II's bowels, alarms shrieked to life as the station shuddered. Around the Ra Zaim, confusion reigned supreme, the true nature of their peril yet unknown.

"This is not a drill! Level one battle stations!"

Cunningham Shaw and her fellow pilots sprinted for the mobile suit deck, realization dawning.

"The Neo Zeon fleet—they're here!"

"This is no welcome party—it's an all-out assault!"

"Shit!"

Bulkheads slammed shut, sealing off corridors as the station's defenses engaged.

"Normal suits, now!" Cunningham barked, the gravity of their situation hitting home as they scrambled for protection from the nearest room.

"Is it the Neo Zeon?"

Outside, the dance of death continued. The Clop and its consort ships sought shelter behind Luna II's bulk, while their less fortunate comrades erupted into short-lived suns.

Aboard the Musaka, Nanai's voice rang with cold authority.

"All mobile suits, launch! Encircle Luna II—no quarter given, no mercy shown!"

Rezin Schnyder and her compatriots itched for battle, bloodlust barely contained.

"Time to earn our keep, boys! This is our chance for a pay raise!"

Geara Dogas streamed from the catapult deck, a deadly swarm thirsting for combat. As the last prepared to launch, Gyunei's voice crackled over the comm to Quess.

"Quess, just get a feel for real combat. Understand?"

His practiced eye noted her Jagd Doga's smooth positioning as it lowered into a horizontal stance.

"Perfect form! Now, let's dance!"

Gyunei's machine shot into the void, Quess hot on his heels.

"Right behind you!" she called, exhilaration and terror mingling in her voice as they pursued the vanguard mobile suit units.

As they soared above the devastating barrage of mega particle fire, Quess beheld war in all its terrible glory. Though the missile barrage had ceased, Luna II, once a bastion of strength, now glowed an angry red, pummeled relentlessly by energy beams.

"It's... it's incredible," Quess breathed, awe and horror warring within her. Yet even as the spectacle unfolded, she maintained her perfect formation with Gyunei.

3

As the Geara Doga squadron plunged into a frenzied dance of death with the enemy Jegans, Gyunei charted a different course. With practiced precision, he skirted the edges of the inferno, drawing ever closer to Luna II's scarred surface. Quess, his dutiful shadow, followed in perfect formation.

"What?"

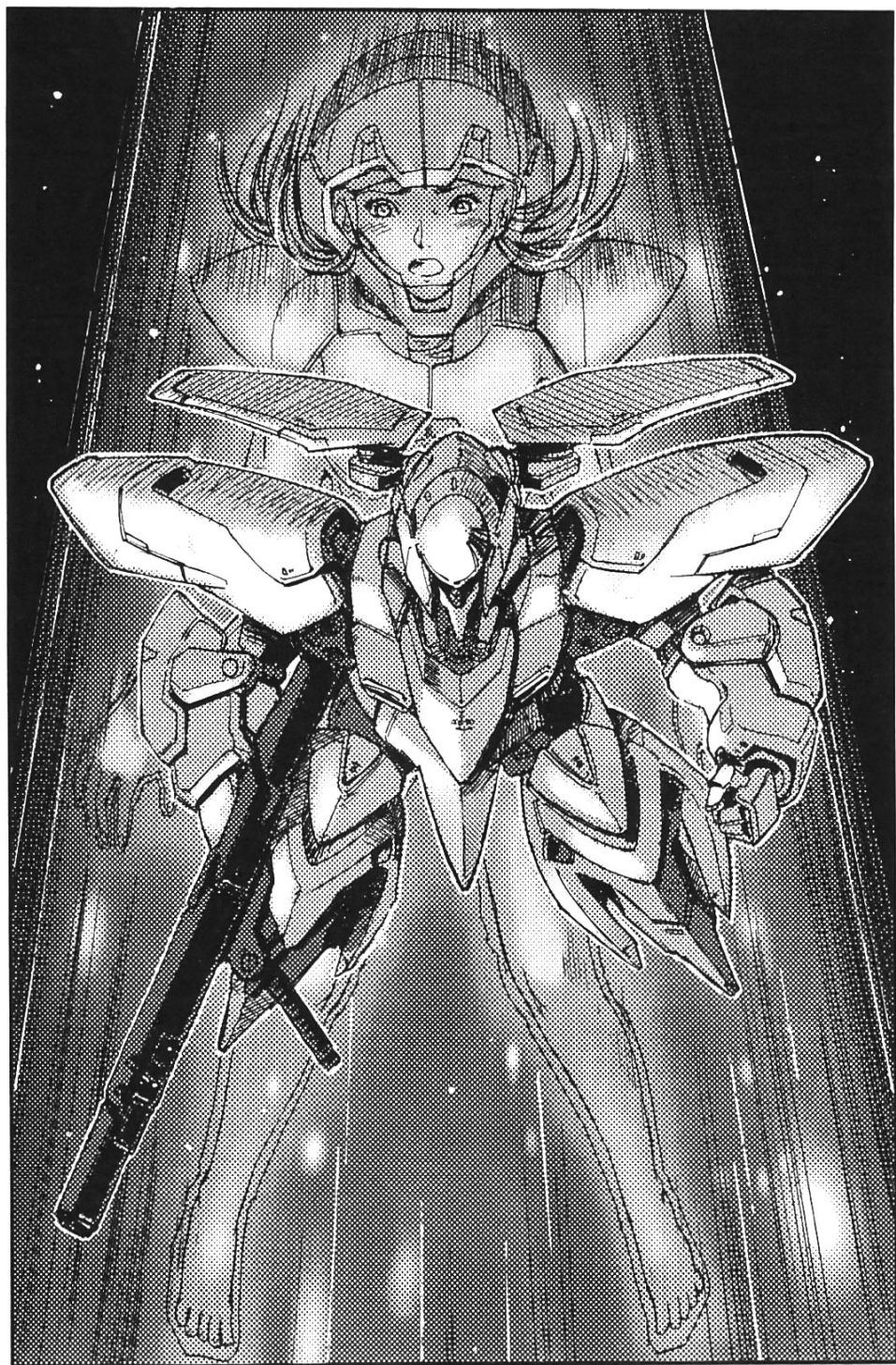
Quess breathed, her eyes widening at the hellish tableau before her. The void erupted in a cacophony of light and fury – fireballs blooming like deadly flowers, beam weapons painting deadly arcs across the void. A wounded ship, more wreckage than vessel, drifted into view. In its death throes, it spat defiance, unleashing a final barrage.

"Gah!"

Quess gasped as energy beams lanced past her Jagd Doga, close enough to leave ghostly afterimages on her retinas. Instinct took over, her machine pirouetting through the deadly lattice. Ahead, Gyunei's shield flared, a retaliatory beam swallowed by the dying ship's expanding inferno.

"I... I did it," Quess whispered, adrenaline surging as she tucked in behind Gyunei's reassuring bulk. Her breath came in ragged gasps, the enormity of the moment crashing over her.

"This... this is war."



The panoramic displays surrounding her lacked the detached unreality of a simulation. This was visceral, primal. Something electric crackled in the cockpit's recycled air – an energy that defied explanation, yet pierced through her normal suit as if it were gossamer. It prickled her skin, setting every nerve alight.

A sharp, alien sensation bloomed in her mind – disgust, fear, and exhilaration warring for dominance. Her body trembled, caught in the throes of sensory overload.

Gyunei's beam rifle sang out, carving a path through the chaos. Luna II's pockmarked surface loomed beneath them, a grim reminder of the stakes at play.

Suddenly, Quess's heightened senses screamed a warning. Something lurked in the inky void ahead – a presence that radiated pure, unadulterated rejection. It was as if the very fabric of space recoiled from this entity.

"What... what is that?" Quess murmured, an irresistible compulsion driving her to investigate. She climbed, breaking formation for the first time.

Gyunei's voice crackled over the comm, tinged with concern.

"Quess! What are you—" His words were cut short as he engaged targets below.

Quess's eyes narrowed, focusing on a flicker of movement.

"A ship? Still trying to escape?"

Without hesitation, she twisted her Jagd Doga into a steep dive. Gyunei's warning came too late.

"It's not safe! Pull back!"

But Quess was beyond caution now, drawn inexorably towards the source of that nauseating presence. Unbeknownst to her, she bore down on Adenauer's last refuge – the Clop.

The ship's defenses came alive, spitting streams of energy skyward. Yet Quess, riding a wave of heightened awareness, danced through the barrage as if it were child's play.

On the Clop's bridge, panic reigned supreme.

"Mobile suit incoming!"

"God help us!"

Adenauer, his grand plans reduced to ashes, cowered in the captain's chair.

"Do something!" he wailed.

"Return fire! All weapons!"

But their efforts were futile. Quess's Jagd Doga filled the forward viewport, a harbinger of their doom.

"Found you," Quess whispered, her finger tightening on the trigger.

The beam rifle roared to life, lances of destructive energy punching through the bridge's armored hull as if it were paper. Quess's machine skimmed over the dying vessel, the explosion chasing her like the grasping fingers of the damned.

"I... I actually did it!"

Quess gasped, a mix of exhilaration and disbelief coloring her voice as she wheeled her Jagd Doga around.

"Damn it!"

Her jubilation was short-lived as her heightened senses screamed a warning. With reflexes honed by adrenaline and her Newtype abilities, she wrenched her mobile suit into a twisting dive, narrowly avoiding a barrage of missiles launched from the Clop's dying form.

In that moment of peril, something within Quess crystallized. Her thoughts sharpened to a laser focus, and she felt a surge of power coursing through her very being.

With a thought more than a command, three funnels erupted from her Jagd Doga's shield. They danced through space, a deadly ballet guided by her will.

The pursuing missiles vanished in a series of silent explosions. The funnels then turned their fury on the Clop itself, tearing into its already battered hull. While the ship wasn't completely destroyed, it was left a floating wreck, limping away from the battlefield.

As the immediate danger passed, the adrenaline ebbed from Quess's system. A violent shudder wracked her body, and she shook her head as if trying to dislodge something unpleasant.

"Ugh!" she cried out, the sound a mix of disgust and confusion.

With trembling hands, she raised her visor, desperately patting at her face as if trying to wake from a nightmare.

"Quess!" Gyunei's voice crackled over the comm, a mix of concern and urgency. "What's wrong with you? Don't lose focus now! I need you watching my back!"

His Jagd Doga swooped in front of her, unleashing a barrage of beam fire at a fresh wave of mobile suits pouring out of Luna II's battered ports.

"I can't... I feel so sick," Quess moaned, her hands clawing ineffectually at her chest, the rigid pilot suit denying her the comfort she sought.

"Quess! Pull yourself together!"

In desperation, she spat inside her helmet as if trying to expel the nauseating feeling consuming her.

"Ptuh! Ptuh!"

"Captain!" she cried out, her voice cracking. "Something's wrong... I feel awful!"

Quess raised her head, still shaking it violently from side to side, trying to clear the fog of revulsion clouding her mind.

Unbeknownst to her conscious mind, Quess had just become a patricide.

While her rational thoughts remained blissfully unaware, her Newtype senses – amplified and sharpened by the psycommu system – had picked up on this horrific truth.

4

The bustling dock of the Londo Bell's Ra Cailum was a stark contrast to the intimate scene unfolding beside the Med. Hathaway, his young face streaked with tears, clasped his father's hand in a farewell that felt far too final.

"Don't cry!" Bright's voice was gruff, but his eyes betrayed a hint of softness. "You're a soldier's son. Show some backbone!"

"But Dad..." Hathaway's voice cracked.

Their moment was interrupted by Cameron's urgent approach.

"Is it true?" he asked, his face etched with worry. "Luna II... completely annihilated?"

Bright's jaw tightened.

"Details are sketchy, but... Watch over him, will you?"

"That sensitive heart – comes from Mirai. Good luck to you."

Bright turned and strode towards the Ra Cailum. Hathaway, still sniffing, leaped onto the Med with surprising agility. As the docking bay faded behind him, Hathaway's demeanor shifted. Wiping away the last of his tears, a look of determination settled on his young face.

"Had to sell those waterworks," he muttered, deftly maneuvering the Med through a series of airlock bulkheads.

"...timing had to be perfect."

With the precision of a well-rehearsed plan, Hathaway maneuvered the Med beneath the departing Ra Cailum. His fingers flew across the controls, guiding the Med's manipulators in a desperate race to breach the ship's underside hatch.

He needed to sneak in before they exited or risk being spotted by patrol ships.

"Thank God for those blueprints," he breathed, relief flooding through him as the Med finally slipped inside just as the Ra Cailum breached the threshold of space.

On the bridge, a momentary blip on a console sent ripples of confusion.

"Hatch 48... is malfunctioning?"

Meran's brow furrowed as he peered at Meunier's station.

"What was that?"

When Meran checked Meunier Thuhigg's console panel on the Ra Cailum's bridge, the hatch anomaly signal had disappeared.

"Never mind, sir. Anomaly's cleared. Maintenance team, give 48 a once-over, just in case."

"...?"

Before Bright, standing at the bridge center, could ponder this oddity, three consort ships drew close. They were launching in fleet formation.

Just as the Ra Cailum breached the final airlock, Hathaway and his spherical companion, Haro, tumbled from the Med into the ship's dimly lit lower hold.

"Mom said it's about time I get space experience," he whispered, a mix of excitement and trepidation coloring his voice.

Seeing a mechanic in a normal suit approaching from another corner, Hathaway hurriedly retreated into the Med, catching his breath.

"Looks like I'm in for the long haul," Hathaway sighed.

As the Ra Cailum's fleet departed Londenion, they continued checking on other Federation space forces, but the results were dismal.

"It's no use, Captain! No response from any fleet," operator Methis cried out in despair.

Bright's fist slammed against his chair.

"Have they all lost their spines? Cowering while Char runs amok?!"

Amuro, ever-observant, studied the tactical displays with a furrowed brow. The positions of Axis, Luna II, and the fleets were on the panoramic display.

"Something's not adding up."

"What do you mean? If we reach Axis before Char's fleet assembles, we could destroy it with our nuclear weapons."

As Bright frowned, Chan burst onto the bridge, datapad in hand.

"Sir! The mobile suit armament manifest needs your approval."

"Right."

Chan passed the documents to Amuro.

"What's strange is that if fleets launched simultaneously from Luna II and Londenion, we'd reach Axis first," Amuro pointed out the course on the monitor.

"The red line is us, right?"

"Hmm... Would Char do something so foolish?"

"But Neo Zeon's fleet had one extra ship, didn't it?"

"That's the thing... Can we trust the Sweetwater broadcast station's camera?"

Amuro replayed the news footage on another display.

"This footage shows the Rewloola without gun barrels. Oh, I see, they removed them for surrender?"

Amuro paused the display and zoomed in on the image.

"A dummy. An incredibly convincing one."

The implications hit Bright like a physical blow.

"You're saying..."

"Does this mean Char's fleet might have already reached Axis?"

Chan looked up at Amuro.

"It's not just possible. Char *is* likely at Axis right now."

5

Axis loomed before them, a celestial sculpture of stark contrasts. Its flat expanse, reminiscent of a colossal stone slab, was punctuated by triangular mountains jutting defiantly from its poles. The asteroid's silhouette, delicate yet imposing, evoked the artistry of a cosmic bonsai master.

The serenity of this celestial garden was shattered as Char's quartet of warships unleashed hell upon Axis's port. Just as Amuro had foreseen, their concentrated barrage cascaded down like a molten avalanche. The two Federation vessels, caught woefully unprepared, were engulfed in a maelstrom of destructive light. Their fate was sealed in heartbeats, their demise hastened by the absence of half the Earth Federation's fleet – diverted by Luna II's fall.

Against Char's doubled might, they stood no chance.

As the assault played out, Char cut an imposing figure on the Rewloola's bridge. He stood tall, disdaining even the basic protection of a normal suit, as if daring the void to challenge him.

"Mobile suits, fan out and scout Axis," he commanded. "Capture any stragglers, but remember – this isn't a slaughter."

His tactical officer, a specter at his side, echoed the orders across the fleet. Already, the pyrotechnics of battle were fading, leaving Axis scarred but intact.

"Captain, I'm taking to the field," Char announced, his tone brooking no argument.

Captain Lyle's protest was immediate, tinged with concern.

"Captain, surely the young bloods can handle this?"

Char's response was measured.

"Our numbers are thin until the main forces arrive. Besides," he added, a hint of nostalgia creeping into his voice, "Axis and I have history. Let me pay my respects."

"Very well... but don't linger out there."

"Very well."

With a nod that spoke volumes, Char propelled himself towards the mobile suit deck. There, the Sazabi waited – a crimson titan, his newest instrument of war. At its feet, mechanics bustled about, preparing for their own foray into the void.

"Cather," Char called out, catching the chief engineer at the airlock. "Axis's original nuclear engines – can we reignite them?"

"Absolutely, sir! However, considering potential enemy fleet attacks, Axis should move as fast as possible until we clear the Van Allen belt. Luna II's nuclear stockpile would be a godsend right about now."

As the engineers departed, Char settled into Sazabi's cockpit, feeling the machine come alive around him.

"Fortune favors us," he mused. "Now, let's wake this sleeping giant."

"Yes, sir!"

The Sazabi erupted from Rewloola's launch bay, streaking past the engineers' more modest craft.

"Axis..."

As Axis filled his viewscreen, Char felt a complex surge of emotions.

The asteroid's surface was a study in contrasts. Vast plains smooth as polished steel gave way to volcanic upthrusts. Here and there, the remnants

of modifications poked through – half-melted pillars fused into abstract sculptures after having once supported structures.

Char's initial wave of nostalgia quickly soured. This place, once a haven, now bore the taint of Haman Karn's ambitions. He circled Axis once, drinking in the sight of Earth – a precious blue crescent on the horizon. With an iron will, he forced himself to feel nothing at the planet's ethereal beauty.

Banking the Sazabi around, he surveyed the expanded port facilities. Though the specifics were unfamiliar, having seen expansion after the Federation's seizure, the overall impression still transported him back years – to that first glimpse of artificial warmth in the perpetual twilight of the asteroid belt that sunlight barely reached.

"Soon, you'll fall to Earth. Amuro... can your shiny new Gundam reach us in time?"

The streets of Hong Kong had become a labyrinth of metal and exhaust, an endless sea of vehicles stretching to the horizon. This automotive purgatory had begun the moment whispers of Neo Zeon's space-side assault reached fevered pitch – rumors of an asteroid aimed at the heart of the city.

Official channels scrambled to quell the panic. News anchors, their smiles brittle and unconvincing, parroted the Federation line: "Neo Zeon was disarming, peace was at hand." But the destruction of Lhasa lingered in the collective consciousness, an open wound that refused to heal.

In this vacuum of truth, wilder theories took root. Some claimed Char Aznable was nothing more than a bogeyman conjured by Federation puppeteers, a phantom threat to drive humanity skyward. Tales of subsidized space migration tickets spread like wildfire, each retelling more elaborate than the last.

Reality and fiction blurred. The notion that the Federation had fabricated the entire Neo Zeon threat as a psychological weapon gained traction.

In the wake of Fifth Luna's catastrophic impact on Lhasa, Hong Kong's skies had become a perpetual shroud of gray, temperatures plummeting in an eerie echo of nuclear winter scenarios.

Faced with this bleak portent, a great southward migration had begun. Among the sea of vehicles inching towards salvation was a battered Land Cruiser pulled into a roadside gas station. The woman who stepped out was Mirai Yashima.

"Excuse me, could I buy some solar panels?" Mirai called out, seeing a silhouette through the glass, and reached for the door handle.

The moment her fingers brushed the door handle, electricity arced through her body. Mirai recoiled with a pained gasp, her nerves singing with residual current.

"Mom!" Cheimin's worried face appeared in the passenger window.

Mirai shook her tingling hand, peering inside to see a man gesturing meekly for them to leave.

"They've electrified the entrance," she muttered, a mix of understanding and frustration in her voice. "We need to get out of the city. I thought we could stock up before everything's gone..."

Reluctantly, Mirai eased the Land Cruiser back into the glacial flow of traffic. However, after several minutes, they'd barely moved fifty meters.

"No word from Hathaway?"

"All communications are locked down for emergencies. Civilians are cut off."

As if to punctuate this isolation, a staccato of gunfire erupted behind them. Mirai's eyes widened as she saw two men unleashing a barrage at the very gas station they'd just left.

"What the--?"

Before she could process this new threat, a thunderous explosion rocked the world. The station ballooned into a fireball, glass and debris raining down on the trapped vehicles.

"Get down!"

A chorus of car horns rose in futile protest, but the line of vehicles remained frustratingly static. Several unfortunate souls found themselves engulfed by the expanding inferno.

"We need to get out!" Cheimin exclaimed, face pale.

Mirai's hand shot out, restraining her daughter as a sliver of hope appeared – movement ahead. Seizing the opportunity, she guided their vehicle forward through a hail of concrete shrapnel, gaining precious distance from the chaos behind.

As they inched forward, Mirai's eyes darted to the rearview mirror, checking for any flaming pursuers. "We're okay," she assured Cheimin, her voice steadier than she felt. "We'll make it out of this."

Mirai felt an old, familiar focus settle over her. It was the same clarity she'd known years ago as a spaceship helmsman.

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER:3

AXIS FIELD

CHAPTER-U

1

Luna II smoldered in the distance, its scarred surface still pulsing with pockets of angry crimson heat. Against this backdrop of destruction, the Musaka and its sister cruiser, the fourth ship of the fleet, accelerated away from the battle zone, their engines leaving shimmering trails in the void. The grim task of neutralizing Luna II's remaining forces hung heavy in the air, far from complete.

Deep within the bowels of the asteroid, crews like Cunningham Shaw's on the Ra Zaim found themselves in a nightmarish predicament. Sealed off from escape, they faced a stark choice: fight to the last breath or embrace the finality of self-destruction.

On the station's battered exterior, pockets of resistance flickered like dying embers.

Nanai Miguel, her face a mask of determination, had orchestrated a hasty departure. The fourth ship's hold now bristled with a deadly cargo – as many of Luna II's nuclear warheads as they could secure in their frantic retreat.

"Can we be absolutely certain the Captain has seized Axis?"

"Sir! The Minovsky particle density is spiking. Intel isn't exactly clear, but..."

"It's done," Nanai cut in, her tone brooking no argument. The die was cast; doubt was a luxury they could ill afford until the dust settled.

"This is insane!" A shrill voice, jarringly out of place on the tense bridge, sent a ripple of irritation through Nanai's composure.

Quess Paraya erupted from the combat bridge hatch like a comet, her civilian attire a stark contrast to the uniformed crew around her.

"Was that combat bridge always such a claustrophobic nightmare?! I felt like I was being buried alive!"

"Quess?"

"Get out of here!" The combat bridge crew's collective frustration echoed from below.

"Gladly! This bridge is a ballroom compared to that sardine can!"

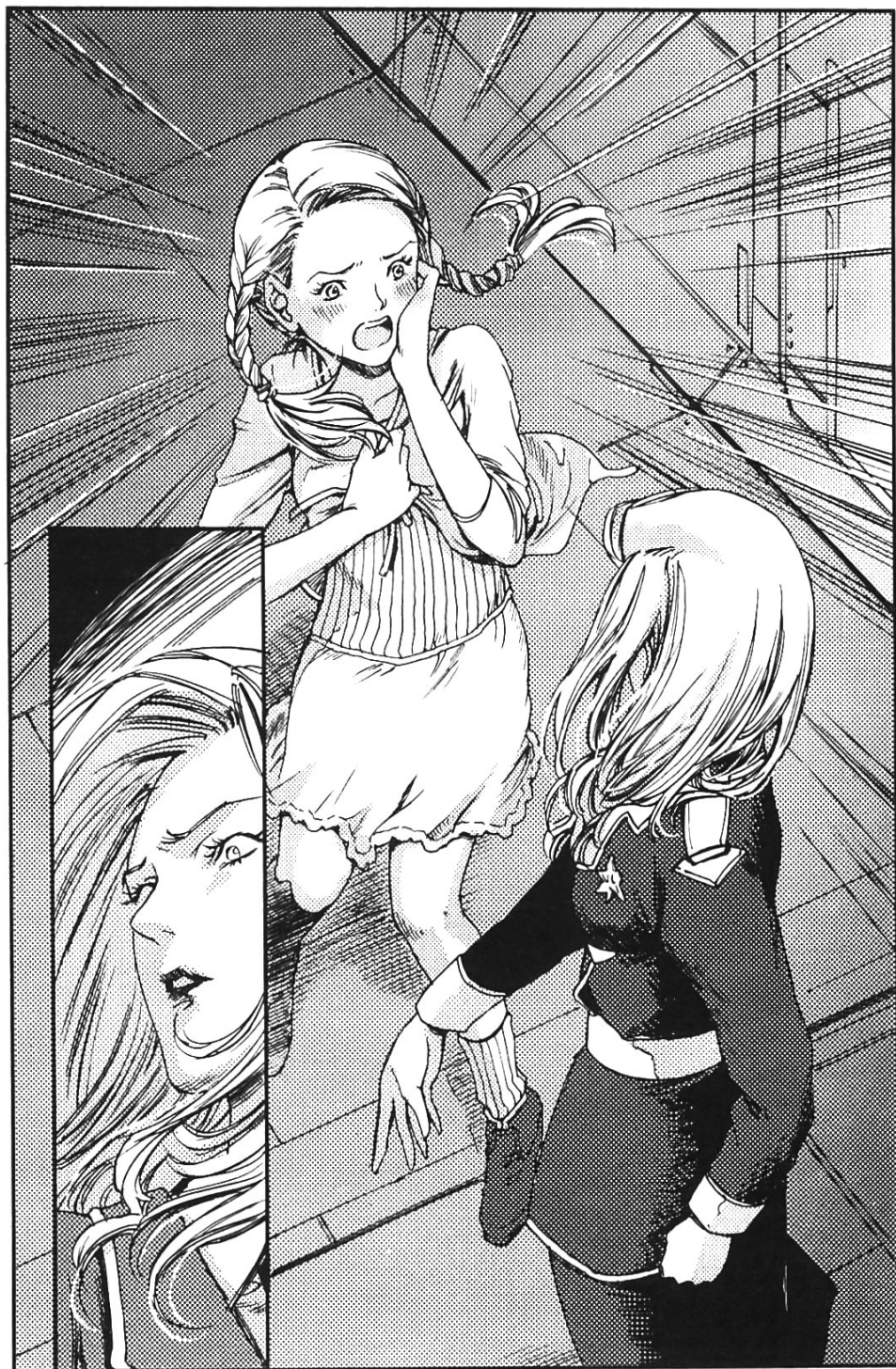
Quess pirouetted off the hatch, her graceful zero-gravity maneuver at odds with the gravity of the situation as she drifted to the center of the main bridge. The crew's expressions hardened, clearly unamused by this unwelcome intrusion.

"We're at second combat readiness. The crew is wound tighter than a spring!"

The captain's words to Nanai carried a clear subtext – deal with your subordinate.

"Understood, Captain." Nanai's voice was steel.

In a flash, Nanai closed the distance to Quess, her hand clamping down on the girl's slender neck.



"This isn't some amusement park joyride, Quess. You have a duty – at your post, on standby!"

"How rude!"

"Who in their right mind gave you permission for a wardrobe change in the middle of a combat situation? Right now--!"

Quess's hand lashed out, breaking Nanai's grip. Without thinking, Nanai's palm connected with Quess's cheek, the sharp crack echoing in the bridge's tense atmosphere.

"How dare you!" Quess's eyes welled with angry tears. "I thought a change might clear my head, help me focus. Is that such a crime?"

"Save your fashion shows and excuses for when we're on solid ground and out of this mess!"

Quess glared at Nanai, seeing through the commander's carefully constructed facade to the hypocrisy beneath.

"You're supposed to be a woman too! How can you claim to lead Newtypes when you can't even empathize with how I'm feeling? It's easy for you to spout military doctrine when you're sealed away in this sterile box, playing at war!"

"Quess!" Nanai's composure cracked, Quess's words cutting deeper than any physical blow.

Nanai reached out, whether to comfort or restrain, even she wasn't sure.

"Just leave me alone!" Quess's lithe form twisted away, propelling herself towards the bridge exit with the grace of a dancer and the speed of a hunted animal.

The captain's voice cut through the aftermath.

"Newtype or not, isn't it the height of cruelty to thrust children into the maw of war?" His words, though born of genuine concern, overstepped the bounds of military protocol, yet Nanai remained silent.

2

Against the vast, star-studded expanse of space, Londo Bell's quartet of warships hung like silent sentinels.

Deep within the twilight recesses of the Ra Cailum's lower deck, Hathaway cradled Haro, his body quivering. The scavenged jumpsuit, pilfered from some forgotten storage locker, was all that stood between him and utter surrender to despair.

"Just a little longer," he murmured, his voice a ragged whisper. "Show yourself now, and it's a one-way ticket to some colony..."

Time had become a fickle mistress for Hathaway, warping his perception until even the steady tick of his wristwatch seemed an unreliable narrator.

The mobile suit deck thrummed with activity as technicians swarmed around the Re-GZ, its imposing backpack descending like a mechanical carapace onto the main body.

"Perfect!" Kayra's voice rang out, brimming with misplaced confidence. "Double the armor means I could take on an entire enemy armada solo!"

Astonaige's face creased with worry.

"Lieutenant, please! Such reckless talk... I couldn't bear the thought of you getting hurt."

"Oh, Astonaige... you silly man! Just how much couldn't you bear it?" Her finger danced playfully across his chest.

The moment shattered as a bone-chilling announcement reverberated through the ship's corridors.

"Fleet detected on approach! Confirmed Federation signatures! Brace for contact!"

A tide of humanity surged towards the airlocks, faces etched with a mixture of dread and determination.

"Luna II's fleet?"

As the deck crew's eyes adjusted to the void, a collective gasp rippled through their ranks. The approaching silhouettes were nightmarish abstractions of warships, battered beyond recognition.

"Dear God... Was it a surprise attack?"

The lead vessel, presumably the Clop, drifted closer, its bridge a gaping wound against the backdrop of space. In its wake, a pitiful procession of broken shadows limped along.

From the seemingly lifeless husk of the Clop, a lone mobile suit emerged, gliding past Amuro's position to latch onto a hatch near the Ra Cailum's bridge. Two figures, clad in normal suits, clambered from the suit's manipulator into the ship's bridge.

Amuro ignited his suit's verniers, ascending to join the unfolding drama on the bridge. Inside, he found two Clop officers, their composure shattered, sobbing in the heart of the command center.

"Forgive us," they choked out between ragged breaths. "The attack... it came from nowhere..."

Bright's voice cut through the air, taut with barely contained frustration.

"What of Char's fleet?"

"They... they breached Luna II's nuclear weapons cache, sir! We intercepted transmissions during our retreat, but... God help us... the Federation Forces Space Fleet..."

"The Ra Zaim!" Amuro's shout silenced the blubbing officer. "What became of them?!"

"We don't know, sir! They should have survived, but... likely in Neo Zeon hands now..."

Meunier's patience snapped, berating the pathetic officers.

"You know nothing of Luna II's internal situation! Useless!"

Bright's fingers raked through his hair, a physical manifestation of his mental turmoil.

"This... this is the sorry state of our Federation Forces. Spineless leadership breeds incompetent soldiers."

Amuro's voice was a hollow echo of its usual self.

"The fleets stationed at the colonies are too afraid of internal rebellions to come out..."

Meran, the executive officer, erupted in frustration.

"At this rate, the colonies and Earth might as well hoist Char's banner themselves!"

"Not all of Char's forces have converged on Axis!" Amuro's rebuke was sharp, born of understanding Meran's honest concern but desperate to stem the tide of negativity.

Bright's decision cut through the miasma of doubt.

"We've wasted enough time. Set course straight for Axis! Our only option is to locate and obliterate Char's main force. We'll reach Axis before Luna II's fleet can regroup!"

Though tactically sound for Londo Bell, Amuro couldn't shake a creeping sense of futility. This fleet moved of its own volition, unburdened – or perhaps unaided – by the weight of Earth Federation mandate.

In his heart, Amuro knew that Londo Bell had yet to truly embody the collective ideals of all Spacenoids.

"What kind of woman is Nanai?!"

The question exploded from Quess's lips as she burst into the briefing room, her eyes wild with a storm of emotions.

The space, with its panoramic view of Musaka's bustling mobile suit deck, suddenly felt claustrophobic. Gyunei, alone in this sanctum of isolation, turned to face the whirlwind that was Quess.

"What's gotten into you?"

"I'm the one asking questions here!" Quess snarled, her fingers already clawing at her jacket as she whirled away from Gyunei's gaze.

With a sigh tinged with frustration, Gyunei repeated what he'd told her before.

"I told you before, didn't I? She's a woman who curried favor with the Captain to secure her position as head of the Newtype Labs, and tactical officer. She's a woman of petty ambitions and limited vision."

"I'll drive her out!" Quess's declaration was accompanied by the tightening of her shoulders.

In that instant, Gyunei's senses flared. A miasma, dark and roiling like a thundercloud, seemed to rise from Quess's very being.

"Quess, wait!"

"Don't you dare try to stop me!"

With a fluid, almost balletic motion, Quess's arms shot out horizontally. In a frenzy of movement, she tore off her shirt.

"Have you lost your mind?!"

"I'll ask the Captain directly. And if that fails, I'll take matters into my own hands!"

"I warned you to keep your distance from him!"

"I don't want to hear about your jealousy!"

Her discarded shirt became a projectile, sailing through the air towards Gyunei.

"I'm not jealous!"

His protest fell on deaf ears.

"Keep your hands off me!" Quess snapped, now clad only in her undergarments, darted out of the briefing room.

Before Gyunei could react, she was gone. He had assumed she'd make for the pilot suits, but to his horror, she grabbed a lift grip heading in the opposite direction of the normal suit room.

"What insanity are you planning now?!"

"I can't bear anything constricting me! It's suffocating, can't you see that?!"

With the grace of a zero-gravity gymnast, Quess kicked off the wall at a junction, her form disappearing around the bend.

"This isn't some Earth playground, Quess!"

"Level two combat stations! All hands to level two combat stations!"

The ship-wide announcement sent a chill down Gyunei's spine as he gave chase.

"Quess, we're near Axis. If we engage in combat, you'll die like that!"

But his words fell on empty space. Quess's lithe form executed a perfect somersault as she propelled herself upward. Her trajectory was clear – she was making a beeline for the mobile suit deck.

The Ra Cailum fleet pulsed with frenetic energy. Bridge-to-bridge signal lights danced in a complex percussion of communication as Base Jabbers streamed from catapult decks like metallic hornets from a hive. Axis, had finally entered their firing solution.

"All hands, level two alert status!"

The command crackled through every corridor and compartment.

Even in his makeshift sanctuary deep within the ship's bowels, Hathaway felt the electric shift to combat readiness. His heart raced as realization dawned.

"Damn it all... I need a normal suit, and fast."

Summoning his courage, Hathaway began a cautious trek towards the brightly lit sections of the ship. Haro, his silent conspirator, bobbed along in his wake like a mechanical remora.

"Missiles within optimal firing range!"

The combat bridge's announcement sent a ripple of tension through the crew.

On the main bridge, Bright maintained his command, a picture of stoic resolve. He'd weathered enough battles to know the initial assault rarely required abandoning this command post.

"Excellent! Ready dummy missiles. Follow up with standard payloads—and remember, slide those nukes into the mix after a 30-second delay. We need to catch them off guard!"

"Aye, sir!" Meran's fingers danced across the combat bridge's control panels.

"First wave primed! Second wave locked and loaded!"

"Good! Deploy anti-radar countermeasures! Flood the area with Minovsky particles!"

"All personnel, switch to visual combat protocols! Activate monitoring systems!"

The Ra Cailum's escort ships responded in kind, their signal lamps blinking a synchronized ballet of tactical information.

For a heartbeat, an eerie quiet descended on Bright's bridge. Yet through his suit's comm system, a cacophony of voices from gun crews and mobile suit teams painted a picture of controlled chaos.

"First wave... FIRE!"

A storm of missiles erupted from the Ra Cailum fleet, screaming towards Axis's unseen bulk. After a carefully timed pause, the second volley—its nuclear payload concealed among conventional warheads—followed suit. As one, the ships began their intricate dance of evasive maneuvers.

In this high-stakes game of hide-and-seek, tracking enemy missile launches by their brief, telltale flashes was the only reliable targeting method through the Minovsky particle interference.

Amidst this carefully orchestrated charade of destruction, mobile suit teams prepared to launch. Their trajectories would thread the needle between subsequent waves of missiles and mega particle cannon fire. As the hangar deck erupted into organized chaos, Hathaway drifted by on a lift grip, wide-eyed and out of place.

"All mobile suit teams, sound off!"

That crisp, authoritative female voice cut through the din, catching Hathaway's attention. His eyes locked onto Lieutenant Kayra Su, her lithe form in a pilot suit ascending gracefully on a wire beyond a hulking Jegan.

"Ugh!"

The moment's distraction proved costly. Hathaway slammed into a catwalk's underside—his lift grip's unexpected terminus. The impact sent him tumbling, Haro slipping from his grasp as they both pinwheeled towards the bustling deck below.

"What in the?"

Kayra's lightning reflexes saved Hathaway from an undignified crash landing, but her surprise quickly morphed to anger.

"Civilian clothes? Are you actively trying to get yourself killed?"

With a strength that belied her frame, Kayra launched Hathaway towards a nearby airlock. The push sent her drifting back towards a Jegan.

"Hathaway?" Amuro's voice held a mix of concern and exasperation as he snagged the errant Haro and moved to intercept the young stowaway.

"Why is the captain's son even on board?"

"Kayra, I'll deal with this. You're spearheading our first wave. Get moving."

"Sir, yes sir." Kayra's compliance was immediate, but her glare at never wavered from Hathaway as he curled up on the catwalk.

"What was your brilliant plan if we took a hit, kid? Pray?"

"I... I knew where the normal suit storage was. I figured I could sneak in..."

"/caught you. If it were up to me, you'd be taking a short trip out the nearest airlock!"

With a final withering look, she gracefully propelled herself towards her waiting Re-GZ.

"In. Now." Amuro's grip on Hathaway's sleeve was insistent as he maneuvered the boy into the airlock's relative safety.

The deck conductor's voice boomed over the comms.

"Depressurizing! All hands, final checks for space combat!"

Red emergency lighting bathed the deck in an otherworldly glow as the massive bay doors began to iris open. In a heartbeat, the cacophony of alarms faded to an eerie, absolute silence—the void of space hungrily swallowing all sound.

3

In the shadow of Axis's colossal bulk, mobile suits swarmed like industrious insects around the massive nuclear nozzles. Their pilots and crews worked with frantic precision, racing against time to bring the apocalyptic engines online. Suddenly, a cascade of warning signals from the Rewloola shattered their focus.

"Multiple heat signatures incoming! Profile matches enemy vessels! Launching interceptor screen!"

"Confirmed visual on hostile fleet, bearing code 4!"

The Rewloola's urgent transmissions cut through the chatter of work teams. Almost instantly, orders came for work teams to withdraw.

"Work complete! Initiate ignition sequence! Abort all non-critical systems checks!"

In the recesses of Axis, technicians stood ready with failsafe explosives. These were their insurance policy, a means to correct trajectory should the nuclear pulse engines misfire. Their calculations showed that even if only half of Axis struck Earth, it would be enough to plunge the planet into a devastating nuclear winter.

"Deploy AEM!"

Aboard the Rewloola, crew members scrambled for their combat stations.

"Transfer all systems to combat bridge! Get me a direct line to the Captain on Axis!"

"Aye, sir!"

The Rewloola and its escort ships pivoted as one, their bows swinging to face the approaching threat. Weapon systems hummed to life, ready to unleash hell.

Deep within Axis's heart, in the nerve center of the nuclear pulse engine control, Char absorbed the flood of incoming data. His lips curled into a small, knowing smile.

"So, they've decided to come after all..."

With calm precision, he issued his command.

"Initiate Version LR2 ignition sequence for the nuclear pulse. We have more than enough time to fine-tune our trajectory."

"Understood, sir!"

"We won't let Londo Bell lay a finger on this place!"

"We're counting on you, Supreme Commander!"

"Please, spare me the grand titles. I'm a pilot at heart, nothing more."

With a companionable pat on the engineer Cather's shoulder, Char pushed off from the console. He glided with practiced ease towards the waiting Sazabi, its crimson form hovering like an avenging angel above the control center.

As Char's Sazabi burst from Axis, the void before him erupted into a dazzling lightshow. A curtain of fireballs blossomed against the star-studded backdrop.

For a split second, confusion flickered across Char's features. "What in the...?"

Realization dawned quickly. Axis's formidable anti-missile defenses were already engaging Ra Cailum's initial salvo. With fluid grace, Char piloted the Sazabi along Axis's underbelly, positioning himself at the vanguard of his fleet.

"They've pushed harder than I anticipated... Wait, could it be?!"

Through gaps in the fiery barrier, Char spotted a new wave of missiles closing fast. Without hesitation, he unleashed the Sazabi's funnels, the remote weapons streaking away from the mobile suit's back in a deadly fan.

"Find your targets!" Char's mental command to the funnels was as sharp as a blade.

A series of exhaust trails wove intricate patterns across the inky void of space.

Seconds stretched into eternity. Then, chaos erupted. The incoming missile swarm detonated in a cascade of explosions. But one detonation dwarfed all others – a blinding flash that seemed to swallow the very stars themselves.

Char's eyes narrowed behind his visor.

That was no conventional warhead.

A low chuckle escaped his lips, equal parts admiration and challenge.

"Sneaking nukes into the mix, are we? Heh... I expected nothing less from you, Bright. And you, Amuro. Now this... this is an enemy worthy of Char Aznable!"

Alone in Sazabi's cockpit, surrounded by the unforgiving void of space, Char's declaration rang with arrogant pride.

"Your mother and Cheimin would be worried sick if they knew you were on the battlefield!" Bright's voice cracked with a mixture of fury and desperation. Before the echoes of his words faded, Bright's palm connected

with Hathaway's face – once, twice, three times in rapid succession. The force of the blows sent the boy stumbling backward, only to be caught by Chan's steady hands.

"Easy now. A little tough love can be good for a young man."

"This isn't a joke! Hathaway did you risk everything just to chase after that Quess girl?!"

Hathaway wrenched free from Chan's supportive grip, defiance written across his features.

"You've got it all wrong! I'm here to save Quess from Char's clutches!"

"Have you lost your mind?!" Bright's voice rose to a roar. "What makes you think you're capable of something like that?!"

The tense exchange was broken as the officers' mess door hissed open. Claire Thruene stepped in, Hathaway's normal suit draped over her arm. With a meaningful glance at the assembled men, she handed the suit to Chan.

"Is this about that girl?"

"Yes..."

Claire's eyes narrowed as she observed Bright's, flushed crimson with a rage she rarely witnessed.

Amuro's hand came to rest on Hathaway's shoulder, his voice taking on a somber tone.

"Quess's hypersensitive abilities are being manipulated by Char. It's a lost cause, Hathaway."

"Manipulated by Char?"

"That girl has already been reduced to nothing more than Char's instrument."

"A tool...?"

Bright's anger seemed to deflate slightly at his friend's words. He clasped Amuro's shoulder briefly before leaving with Claire.

"You need to understand this, Hathaway. Char is a man who can only reshape the world by climbing a mountain of corpses. If you allow yourself to be used by someone like that, you'll be drawn into the power of the dead. It can only end in tragedy."

Hathaway's face contorted, rejecting Amuro's grim philosophy.

"Drawn to the dead? That's nothing but abstract nonsense!"

"The battlefield has a power all its own!" Amuro's voice rose, tinged with frustration and a desperate need to make the boy understand. "You'll see it for yourself out there!"

"No, I won't!"

"Here," Chan interjected, thrusting the normal suit into Hathaway's arms. "Put this on. Now."

Amuro's eyes bored into Hathaway's.

"Listen to me. You don't have to understand everything right now, but don't you dare forget what I've told you!"

With those parting words, Amuro turned on his heel and strode out.

4

The bridge of the Rewloola thrummed with tension as strobe signals pulsed beneath Axis's colossal nozzles.

"...8, 7, 6..."

To Captain Lyle's right, the engineer continued his countdown. On either side, observers leaned forward, their eyes locked on instrument panels as if willing them to obey.

"...2, 1... Ignition!"

Cather's final word hung in the air for an eternity compressed into seconds.

FWOOOM!

They say in space, no one can hear you scream. But as Axis roared to life, light itself seemed to howl. The bridge erupted in a supernova of brilliance, overwhelming even the strongest filters.

"Gah!"

Captain Lyle and his crew recoiled, their visors' dark shields proving futile against the onslaught. As vision slowly returned, they witnessed Axis's trio of nuclear pulse nozzles ignite in sequence, a daisy chain of pulsing rings stretching far into the inky depths.

Aboard the Ra Cailum, an operator's cry of dismay pierced the air. Bright burst onto the bridge, his face a mask of grim determination yet again.

"So it begins," he muttered.

The operator's voice trembled. "Axis has ignited, sir! It's commencing its descent to Earth!"

Meran's commands rang out, crisp and urgent.

"We've breached Axis's combat zone! Launch all mobile suits! Fire the third missile wave!"

Bright's addendum was swift.

"Hold the fourth wave's primary force... for now."

On cue, the sleek form of the Re-GZ emerged onto the catapult deck.

"Re-GZ, Kayra Su, launching!"

The mobile suit's tail nozzles erupted in azure flame as it catapulted into the fray. A swarm of Jegans followed, their booster units leaving trails of light in their wake. From sister ships, more mobile suits joined the deadly dance, while dummy balloons inflated around the fleet, masquerading as false rocks and phantom vessels.

In the relative calm of Ra Cailum's core, Hathaway found himself being escorted to a study room. Chan and a guard flanked him, their postures a mixture of protectiveness and wariness.

"Remember," Chan's voice was gruff but not unkind, "we'll extract you at the first sign of danger. Use the intercom if anything feels off, understood?"

"Yes..." Hathaway's reply was subdued.

"Right then," Chan turned, reaching for the lift grip across the corridor.

As the older woman's back came into view, something caught Hathaway's eye. A curious T-shaped metal fixture adorned the waist of her normal suit.

"The third wave!"

The Sazabi's arsenal roared to life, its beams lancing out to intercept the incoming missile swarm. The void erupted into a picture of explosions, with a larger flash at its core.

"A lone nuclear warhead?" Char's lips curled into a smirk. "Come now, Bright... when will you unleash your true nuclear arsenal?"

With a grace belying its size, Char pirouetted the Sazabi away from Axis, dancing through the lethal light show of ship cannon fire.

"Nanai! Hurry up and get here!"

As if summoned by his urgency, Nanai Miguel's Musaka surged forward, outpacing the fourth ship. They pushed closer to Axis, close enough for the nuclear pulse's hellish glow.

"Visual confirmation on Axis. Londo Bell's response time is... impressively quick."

The Musaka's captain hunched over his display, eyes straining.

"Damned dummies everywhere. It's impossible to get an accurate count of their forces."

"Deploying our mobile suit teams."

"Mmm...!"

The Musaka and its two escorts opened fire, their salvos streaking towards the Londo Bell fleet.

"New heat signatures detected starboard! Incoming reinforcements!"

Ra Cailum's combat bridge detected missiles from Musaka's direction.

"Reinforcements from Luna II?!"

Even as he gave the order to intensify their dummy screen to starboard, the balloon ships began winking out of existence, shredded by incoming fire. The Ra Cailum's fleet responded in kind, launching a devastating spread of missiles that blossomed into a fiery barrier.

"Amuro, send out the second wave! The fleet will hold with direct cover units! Stop Axis's descent!"

"Understood! Gundam, launching!"

As the Nu Gundam launched, several Jegans followed in its wake.

5

In a surreal blur of pale skin and determination, Quess, clad only in her underwear, propelled herself through Musaka's mobile suit deck towards the Jagd Doga's waiting hatch. The deck crew, poised to initiate the open deck sequence, froze in shock at the unexpected spectacle.

"Abort hatch opening!" a crewman bellowed, his voice cracking. "We've got a half-naked lunatic on deck!"

"Come again?!" The deck conductor's disbelief crackled through the comm system.

Abandoning his post, the conductor launched himself towards the control core, his eyes widening in disbelief as he took in the small display screen. There, in all her scantily-clad glory, was Quess, sliding into the Jagd Doga's cockpit with reckless abandon.

"Patch me through to that cockpit, now!" he barked.

"Aye, sir!"

An assistant's fingers danced across the console, bringing the bizarre scene to life on the combat bridge's main display.

"Quess! You can't pilot like that!"

"Watch me! We're all racing to meet the Captain, aren't we?"

The absurd exchange echoed through the bridge, leaving hardened soldiers slack-jawed. Nanai and Musaka's captain exchanged looks of utter exasperation. This was decidedly not in any combat manual they'd ever studied.

"Open this hatch!" Quess's threat rang out. "Or I'll blast my own exit with the beam rifle!"

"Captain, I suggest we let her go," Nanai added, apologizing to the man.

"Agreed. Let the Captain deal with this... spectacle. It's wreaking havoc on morale as is."

His command rippled through the deck, and the hatch began to iris open. Seizing control of the situation, Nanai's voice cut through the chaos.

"Gyunei! Your mission: Protect Quess and secure Axis's airspace. Move out!"

"Y-yes, Commander!" Gyunei's reply came swiftly, but he couldn't resist adding, "Please, handle Quess with care. She's... sensitive."

"Gyunei, listen carefully. If you value Quess's life – and your own – do not leave her side until you rendezvous with the Captain. Is that clear?"

"You didn't need to tell me twice!"

With a roar of thrusters, Gyunei's Jagd Doga launched into the void.

The Re-GZ, flanked by two Jegans, surged into the space where Axis loomed large enough to discern its menacing details with the naked eye. With practiced precision, they shed their booster units.

"There!" Kayra's voice was taut with determination. "That nozzle is our target!"

Her world narrowed to a singular focus: Axis's pulsing, hellish maw. At this range, the Re-GZ's formidable long-range mega particle cannon could silence that infernal nozzle with one well-placed shot.

As Kayra aligned her crosshairs, a storm of fire erupted from the ships clinging to Axis. The barrage zeroed in on the Re-GZ with unerring accuracy. A flicker of doubt crossed Kayra's mind.

"Maybe striking at the fleet's heart would stop Axis faster?"

That split-second of hesitation proved costly. A volley of energy beams sliced through space, missing the Re-GZ by margins so thin they defied belief.

A faint shudder rippled through the mobile suit as particle beams grazed its armor.

Kayra's teeth clenched.

"Damn it!"

To her relief, the trailing Jegans surged forward, their weapons blazing in a protective screen. But the reprieve was short-lived. Ahead, a cloud of thruster lights scattered like startled fireflies, revealing the ominous silhouette of a Geara Doga.

"They've broken through!" Kayra's shock was palpable. The enemy had penetrated their defensive line far too quickly.

"Cover fire!" The Jegan pilots' response was immediate, their beams lancing out to create a corridor of relative safety.

Seizing the moment, Kayra drove the Re-GZ forward, threading the needle between friendly and hostile fire. With Axis dominating her rear viewscreen, she locked on and fired without a moment's hesitation.

THWOOM!

In its wake, enemy beams converged like angry hornets. The collision of opposing energies birthed a miniature sun.

"Can I maintain this trajectory?" She muttered, more to herself than anyone else. To her right, more enemy thruster trails bloomed like deadly flowers.

Meanwhile, aboard the Musaka, order had been restored to the mobile suit deck following the Quess and Gyunei fiasco. The launch sequence proceeded with military precision.

Nanai's voice crackled over the comm, crisp and authoritative.

"Maintain ship cannon fire for 30 seconds post-mobile suit launch. Brace for enemy mobile suit engagement immediately after. Fight well, all of you."

"How thoughtful," Rezin Schnyder's sarcasm dripped from every syllable as she prepared her Geara Doga for launch.

The Musaka had reached the precipice of Axis's combat zone. Their approach vector was a tactician's dream, allowing sustained cannon fire against the Londo Bell fleet from an oblique angle between the Ra Cailum and Rewloola.

Rezin's laughter echoed through the comm channels, a sound more chilling than merry.

"We're operating at peak performance after our recent skirmishes! Londo Bell? They might as well be ringing dinner bells!"

As she guided her Geara Doga into the fray, Rezin's excitement was palpable. The side approach afforded her the luxury of target selection, a predator choosing its prey.

"Twice in one day, I get to cosmic whack-a-mole with these fools?" Rezin's grin was audible in her voice. "It's like all my pilot Christmases have come at once!"

"Captain! Captain, where are you?!"

Having launched recklessly on her own, Quess's Jagd Doga streaked towards the combat zone, cutting a direct path from Axis's trajectory.

"That Nanai... I can't stand her!" Quess spat the words, her disdain for the older woman fueling her reckless advance.

With feverish intensity, she cranked the multi-display to its maximum magnification, her eyes darting across the screen in search of Char's distinctive mobile suit. She punched in the Sazabi's identification code, but Axis's looming presence caused such interference that the image remained a frustrating blur of motion and light.

"That's dangerously careless, Quess." The calm, slightly admonishing voice crackled through the console panel's receiver.

"Mind your own business!" Quess snapped, her hand lashing out to silence the unwelcome intrusion.

But even as she cut off the audio, her peripheral vision caught movement. To the left of her panoramic display, Gyunei's Jagd Doga was closing in, on the verge of physical contact with her suit.

"Get away!" Her curse was more frustration than real anger, her attention immediately snapping back to the main display, desperate to catch a glimpse of Char.

"Wait... there?!"

Quess's breath caught in her throat as she noticed the targeting cursor flicker ever so slightly. But it wasn't just the visual cue that alerted her. The Jagd Doga, with its advanced psycommu system, seemed to resonate with Char's presence, allowing Quess to sense him.

What made this even more remarkable was that Quess wasn't wearing the specialized pilot suit designed to interface with the Jagd Doga's systems. The fact that she could perceive Char's presence so acutely hinted at an expansion of her own Newtype abilities, her senses reaching beyond normal human limitations.

"It has to be..." Quess murmured, her fingers dancing across the controls to enlarge the multi-monitor. She focused intently on a patch of space above Axis, where her instincts screamed that Char must be.

Suddenly, it was as if electricity danced across her skin. The psycommu's emissions seemed to bypass the suit entirely, connecting directly with her heightened senses.

"Captain!" Quess's face split into a radiant smile, her earlier frustrations forgotten in an instant. "I found you! You can't hide from me!"

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER:3

NUCLEUS LIGHT

CHAPTER-V

1

Quess's Jagd Doga shrugged off Gyunei's grasp and surged forward. His instincts screamed at him to pursue, but a premonition froze him in place, his eyes drawn to a distant sector of the battlefield.

"Londo Bell's assault?!"

A sinister force hammered against Gyunei's psyche, an alien presence that sent shivers down his spine.

"This power... it's not born of human will. What could it be?"

Guided by an unseen hand, he pivoted his Jagd Doga towards the source of the otherworldly "presence." There, stretching across the void, he beheld a lance of searing light.

"Missiles?"

The concept of lifeless objects projecting a "presence" defied logic. Gyunei grasped at straws, hoping against hope that this emanation originated from Char, Quess, or even a Federation Newtype. But the truth was far more terrifying—this presence was unyielding, compressed, and tainted with an almost palpable corruption.

"Nukes? Damn it all! What else could harbor such devastation?"

Driven by a primal urge to banish this looming specter, Gyunei unleashed his Jagd Doga's funnels. The swarm of remote weapons rocketed towards the encroaching curtain of doom.

"Hit them!" he roared, even as a chilling realization dawned—this oppressive aura mirrored the tension he often sensed between Char and Nanai, but magnified a thousandfold.

A staccato of detonations ripped through space. But these were no ordinary explosions.

Nuclear hellfire bloomed in rapid succession, their unholy light throwing every mobile suit into stark silhouette and carving Axis's triangular peaks against the backdrop of infinity.

In that moment of terrible beauty, Gyunei realized he had intercepted the Ra Cailum's fourth wave of atomic fury.

"Our primary target has been neutralized!" Methis's cry of despair cut through the tense atmosphere of the Ra Cailum's combat bridge.

Bright's face contorted with a mixture of anger and frustration.

"Press on with the mobile suit offensive!" he commanded, his voice strained. The nuclear maelstrom before them acted as an impenetrable veil,

concealing Axis and leaving the crew of the Ra Cailum to fight an enemy they could no longer see.

"Were all of our nukes completely taken out?" Meran's voice wavered as he frantically scanned his displays, refusing to believe the devastating setback.

"This bears the mark of Char..." Bright murmured, his eyes closing as the weight of their situation bore down upon him. Their last hope now rested on Kayra or Amuro's ability to strike directly at Axis's vulnerable propulsion systems.

"Are we doomed to relive the tragedy of Fifth Luna?" The thought slithered unbidden into Bright's mind, filling him with a sense of foreboding. He found himself grappling with an unsettling question.

"Is this truly the inexorable path fate has laid before us?"

The nuclear flash nearby seared Quess's vision, igniting a primal fear that threatened to consume her.

"W-what was that light?! What's happening...?"

Her skin crawled, every nerve ending alive with terror. It wasn't just her muscles quaking, but her very epidermis rebelling against the horror she'd witnessed.

"Quess, is that you?"

The familiar voice cut through her panic. Her eyes snapped to the main display, where a lone figure stood against the fading atomic glow—the Sazabi, majestic and expectant, like a knight awaiting his lady.

"Captain! Oh, Captain!"

"What troubles you, child? Why are you alone?"

"What happened?! What was that light?"

Quess guided her Jagd Doga closer, her movements as unsteady as her nerves.

"Gyunei shielded us from the enemy's nuclear wrath," Char explained as their mobile suits made contact, metal fingers intertwining in an almost human gesture.

"Nuclear? That was... a nuclear explosion?"

Quess's gaze remained fixed on the dissipating hellscape, her flesh still quivering in its wake. Slowly, she raised her eyes to meet the Sazabi's mono-eye, its crimson glow a mirror to Char's own piercing gaze.

"Captain! Nanai slapped me really hard!" Quess blurted, suddenly remembering her initial quest.

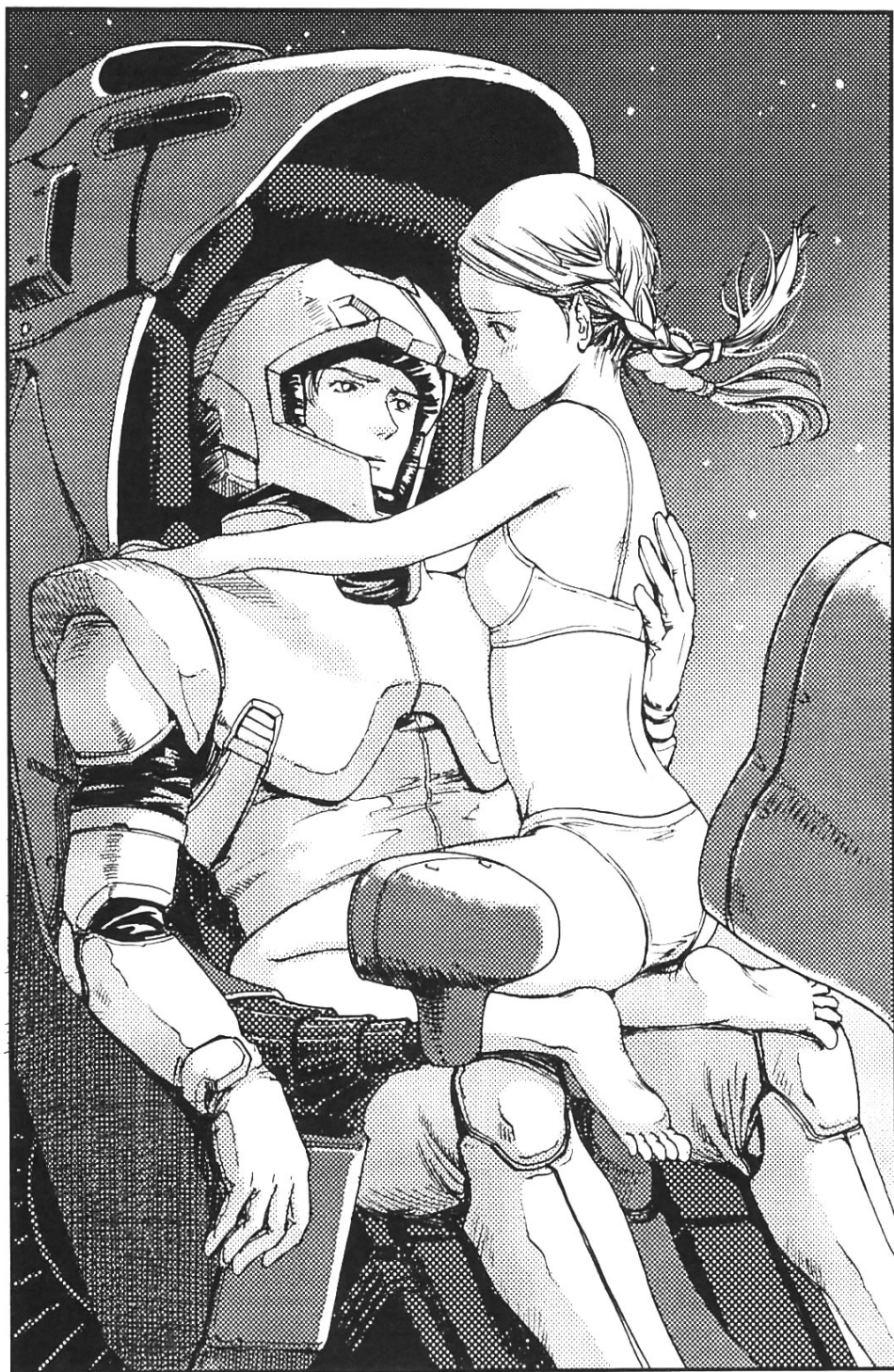
"Did she now? I shall have a word with her."

The Jagd Doga's cockpit front touched the Sazabi's head—an unnatural position for mobile suits.

"Quess? What are you—"

Sensing her intent, Char's hatch hissed open.

"Quess!"



In a heartbeat, Quess's own hatch erupted open, a plume of life-giving atmosphere propelling her near-naked form across the void.

"Quess!"

Char's arms enveloped her and the hatch sealed shut.

"Dressed like this?!"

Though mere seconds had passed, Quess had tasted the bitter kiss of space. Yet her body radiated warmth, her spirit unbroken. She shook her head, unfazed.

"Quess! Are you—"

"Hah! Will you really? Make sure she's punished."

"I... Yes, we'll address this matter."

"Excellent! Now, let me return to the fray!"

Quess grasped at the console, ready to plunge back into battle clad in just but her undergarments.

"Calm down! You don't understand the dangers of space!"

"But I must—"

Char pulled her close, his arms a protective cage around her slender form as he turned her to meet his gaze.

"You haven't felt the terror of real-life combat."

A sad smile graced his features.

"Terror? But I've seen—"

"Yes. The battlefield is a crucible of terror."

"I... I think I understand now. It felt... wrong. So terribly, indescribably wrong."

"Is that so? If what you've experienced aligns with my suspicions, then you are indeed a Newtype of rare caliber. More than that, if you can grasp this fear without stepping onto the killing fields... you might hold the key to awakening the Newtype potential in all of humanity."

"But isn't that your burden to bear, Captain?"

"I'm merely paving the way."

Char's embrace tightened, both a shield against the horrors of war and a silent acknowledgment of the weight now resting on Quess's young shoulders.

2

Hathaway Noa huddled in the shadowy confines of the study room, Haro clutched to his chest like a talisman. His body was a coiled spring of frustration and nameless dread, every nerve attuned to the unseen dangers lurking beyond the walls.

A whisper of sound reached his ears. Through the helmet's audio pickups, Chan's voice outside pierced the silence. Hathaway's head snapped towards the door, straining to decipher the commotion.

"To hell with the remote! If it won't work, we'll have to go and shoot!"

A man's voice responded, pleading, "But surely we can salvage it! Just a little more time..."

"This isn't a repair shop, it's a warzone! Fix it later or not at all!"

The woman's voice faded into static.

Hathaway pressed his helmet to the cold metal of the door, desperate to glean any scrap of information from the chaos outside.

"Stand aside! I'll handle the shooting!" The words barely penetrated the barrier between them.

"Chan's a mechanic, right? She sure can tough it out... Gah!"

The ship bucked violently. Haro, torn from Hathaway's grasp, pinballed off the ceiling in a graceless arc.

Chan clambered into the rear gun turret, finding another soldier already wrestling with the unresponsive controls. The targeting system, normally a marvel of technology, now sat useless as scrap. With practiced care, Chan slid into the right-hand gunner's seat, hyper-aware of the T-shaped tool dangling precariously from her belt.

The viewscreen before her erupted in a tapestry of destruction—plumes of fire blossoming against the void, punctuated by the azure flare of mobile suit thrusters. One suit bore down upon them with terrifying speed.

"What in the...?"

Chan's fingers danced across the controls, but the massive gun remained stubbornly inert. Her mind raced, grasping for half-remembered training protocols.

Another explosion rocked the ship, nearly throwing her from her seat.

"Come on, you beast... work!"

With a prayer on her lips, Chan yanked the manual override and disengaged the safety. She looked up, and in that instant—

"Now or never!"

Her finger had already squeezed the trigger. The gun roared to life, its recoil threatening to tear her arms from their sockets. A lance of crimson and white fury erupted from the barrel, cleaving through the darkness of space like an extension of her very will.

The Geara Doga squadron bearing down on Ra Cailum was spearheaded by Rezin, though four of her comrades had already been reduced to space debris. Rezin never took point in combat, preferring to hang back as second in command.

This deception required a masterful performance. The initially overeager Rezin would suddenly fall back upon entering the fray, and none dared question her methods. She used her own allies as living shields.

This strategy proved particularly vital when assaulting capital ships. The Ra Cailum-class vessels were known to deploy impenetrable "powder" barriers, necessitating the grimmest of meat shields.

"Useless!" Rezin snarled. "Cyber-Newtype, Newtypes—what good are your parlor tricks if you can't hobble a damned fleet?"

Rezin's blood sang as Ra Cailum's rear guns found their rhythm. She danced through the fireballs, using them as cover for a second, lethal approach.

"What the—?"

Chan, driven by instinct, swung the gun hard right and opened fire. The tool at her waist pulsed with an otherworldly light, unnoticed in the heat of battle.

"Not today, you Federation dogs!"

Rezin spotted the beam of light screaming towards her, but arrogance whispered that she could evade. She unleashed a swarm of missiles from her shield, a steel curtain between her and oblivion.

But Chan's barrage shredded through the missiles like tissue paper, striking Rezin's Geara Doga with devastating precision.

"Impossible—!"

Rezin's existence winked out in less time than it takes to draw a breath. Her mobile suit, caught in the crossfire of her own missiles and Chan's relentless assault, never stood a chance.

"Did I... Was that me?"

Chan felt as if time had slowed, allowing her to witness the Geara Doga's destruction in excruciating detail through her gun sights.

"I hit it? I actually hit it?!"

Chan's eyes darted across the battlefield, searching for new targets even as her mind reeled from her unexpected triumph. In that moment of exhilaration, the grim reality—that a human life had just been snuffed out within that metal coffin—never crossed her thoughts.

3

"Ah?!"

A violent tremor wracked Quess's body as she sat in Char's lap, the confines of the Sazabi's cockpit suddenly feeling claustrophobic.

"Quess? What's happening?"

"It's overwhelming... like a tide of souls flooding into me..."

"...?"

"Captain, I... I'm scared..." Her voice was barely above a whisper.

Quess's hands shook uncontrollably, a mix of exhilaration and primal fear. Even through the layers of his pilot suit, Char could feel the intensity of her trembling.

"This child... she's tapping into the very essence of the battlefield..."

For Char, this ability was the Holy Grail of Newtype potential. He had long been haunted by the possibility that Lalah Sune and Amuro possessed this profound level of perception. Now, to witness it manifesting in Quess...

Meanwhile, Hathaway's arm, still cradling Haro, shot up as if pulled by invisible strings.

"Quess?!"

The name escaped his lips unbidden.

Why now? Why this sudden, overwhelming thought of her? True, his initial motivation for this reckless infiltration of the Ra Cailum had been to reunite with Quess. But this... this felt different. More urgent. More vital.

Hathaway's eyes probed the murky shadows of the study room, as if expecting to find answers written in the darkness itself.

Kayra's Re-GZ sliced through the void, skirting Axis's flank with predatory grace. She closed the gap, unleashing a symphony of destruction—beams and missiles intertwining in deadly harmony. But the Rewloola's fleet stood ready, their diffusion beam cannons weaving a tendrils of light that barely held the onslaught at bay.

"Not yet!" Kayra's cry echoed through her cockpit as she executed a sweeping arc with the Re-GZ. As if summoned by her defiance, a formation of Geara Dogas materialized from the fleet's shadow. The Re-GZ's linear trajectory had painted a target on its back.

"Tch!" Frustration dripped from Kayra's lips as she shook off their assault, the Re-GZ's superior power allowing her to dance through the storm of fire.

A prickle at the edge of her consciousness made Kayra's gaze snap upward. There, silhouetted against the stars, loomed Gyunei's Jagd Doga. It was on approach to the Rewloola's fleet for resupply.

"A lone wolf dares to challenge the pack?" Gyunei's voice dripped with disdain as he easily identified the Re-GZ by its unique combat signature. Recognition dawned—this was the same unit he'd crossed paths with at Fifth Luna. His blood sang with the thrill of the hunt.

"Amuro!"

Gyunei's attack came swift and merciless, disregarding his Geara Doga allies.

Kayra, however, remained laser-focused on her objective. The Jagd Doga might as well have been a gnat for all the attention she spared it. Her mind's eye was fixed on Axis's vulnerable flank.

"One more strike," she whispered, a prayer and a promise. "One more, and I can halt Axis's death march to Earth..."

Gyunei, misreading the Re-GZ's deliberate movements as weakness, sneered.

"Your arrogance ends here!"

His Jagd Doga surged forward, its shield-mounted diffusion beam cannon painting the void with deadly light.

"Gah!" Kayra's world erupted in fire as the Re-GZ's backpack thrusters took a direct hit.

"This is the price of your Gundam legacy!" Gyunei's hatred for the Re-GZ's Zeta-like visage fueled his assault. His aggressive maneuver signaled the

Geara Doga squad, and they tightened their noose around the wounded Re-GZ with mechanical precision.

"Capture, don't kill!" Gyunei's command crackled through the comms, a spark of inspiration igniting in his mind. "The pilot is our prize!"

The Re-GZ shuddered as multiple beam impacts tore away its backpack and leg, leaving it a crippled beast.

"No..." Kayra's desperate attempt to flee the maelstrom of fire died as her main engine output sputtered and failed. The joint apogee motors, valiant in their efforts, simply couldn't provide the thrust needed for escape.

A sickening crunch heralded the destruction of the Re-GZ's beam rifle arm, its wrist a molten stump.

Gyunei's excitement mounted as he closed in on his prey.

"Preserve the cockpit at all costs! Amuro as our captive—imagine the possibilities!"

Horror dawned on Kayra as the bizarre nature of the enemy's tactics became clear.

"What kind of enemy is this?! Are they toying with me instead of finishing me off?!"

The encircling mobile suits, now numbering over ten, tightened their formation with surgical precision, deliberately avoiding her powerplant and cockpit—a strategy that defied conventional mobile suit combat doctrine.

"What...?" Kayra's breath caught as she noticed the mobile suit before her bore a more sinister silhouette than its brethren. Its face, a mask of mechanical malice, dominated what remained of her cracked display.

"A psycho type?"

The realization sent a chill down Kayra's spine.

"Amuro! Answer me!" The young voice that crackled through the comm system betrayed its owner's eagerness. Kayra's mind pieced together the enemy's true objective.

"So they wanted to capture Amuro?"

"You don't need to respond! We're capturing you! You can't do anything now!" The threat in the young pilot's voice was palpable, transmitted through the eerie "skin talk" system that allowed mobile suits to communicate in the vacuum of space.

"Surrender, and perhaps you'll live to see another day!"

"There!" A ghostly whisper, barely perceptible, overlapped the young pilot's bravado.

Kayra recognized it as Amuro's, but pinpointing its direction was impossible in the Minovsky particle-saturated space.

The enemy pilot's sudden unease was a tangible thing, radiating through space. Kayra's trained eye caught a flicker of movement—the telltale glow of approaching thrusters high to her right.

In a heartbeat, the mobile suit before her pivoted, the violence of its motion sending shockwaves through the Re-GZ's battered frame.

"Lieutenant..." Kayra groaned.

"What?! Amuro isn't piloting this mobile suit?!" The enemy pilot's shock manifested in the erratic dance of his mobile suit's mono-eye.

"It's all the same now! We've captured one mobile suit! And there's another approaching! Could it be... the Gundam?!"

The voice carried a note of awe, recognizing the newcomer as the Nu Gundam in all its glory.

Kayra's fingers flew over her controls, desperation mounting.

"Damn it all! Even the escape pod refuses to cooperate!" The brutal realization set in—manual egress was her only option. With grim determination, she abandoned her pilot's seat.

"Kayra! Come in!" Amuro's voice cut through the chaos with crystal clarity.

The enemy pilot's ultimatum rang out.

"Amuro! Hear me well—abandon your mobile suit and surrender, or this pilot's life is forfeit!"

Summoning her last reserves of strength, Kayra heaved the manual release lever and stepped into the abyss of space.

"Amuro! The enemy has stopped moving! Please, take the shot!"

Kayra leaned out, teetering on the precipice of her ruined cockpit. In that instant, the Jagd Doga's violent motion sent her tumbling into the star-studded blackness.

"No!" Terror clawed at her as the Jagd Doga's manipulator shot out, snatching her from the embrace of space.

A scream of pain tore from Kayra's throat as the metal fingers crushed her, leaving only her head free from their vise-like grip.

The enemy pilot's voice dripped with malice.

"Amuro! Your next move determines this pilot's fate!"

Kayra found herself thrust forward, a human shield against the void. In the distance, perhaps three kilometers ahead, the majestic form of the Gundam hung motionless, a silent sentinel.

"Amuro! Don't listen to these people!" Kayra's desperate cry went unheard, but the Gundam's advanced optics clearly identified her pilot suit.

"It can't be..."

"You're Amuro, right? The famous pilot of that Gundam wannabe!"

"Optical voice transmission?" His eyes locked onto a strobing light near the Jagd Doga's optical sensors, which the computer translated into audio.

"Abandon your mobile suit, and I'll release this pilot to you!"

"...?"

The Jagd Doga inched forward with predatory intent as its Geara Doga escorts smoothly transitioned to encircle the Gundam.

Kayra's voice, impossibly clear despite the limitations of her suit's comm system, cut through Amuro's indecision.

"Lieutenant, I am expendable! Take the shot! These madmen must be stopped! It's all Char's doing—his presence, watching from on high, has cast a spell of confusion over this battlefield!"

Amuro's breath caught, the crystal clarity of Kayra's transmission a testament to the awesome potential of the psycommu and psycho-frame technologies. Her thought struck his consciousness like a thunderbolt.

"Char, the puppet master, pulls strings from above, sowing chaos in his wake!"

His eyes darted across the visual display, tracking the crisscrossing lines of thruster fire that painted a deadly geometric pattern across the void.

With practiced precision, the Geara Dogas launched their grappling wires. The metallic tendrils snaked out, seeking to ensnare the Nu Gundam in their embrace. They planned to tow it.

A flicker of uncertainty passed through Gyunei as he observed his allies' tactics. A new strategy crystallized in his mind—the Geara Doga wires could channel lethal voltage.

His lips curled into a cruel smile.

"Why settle for a hostage when we can have a clean slate?"

"New orders!" Gyunei's command crackled through the comm. "Kill the pilot!"

In that moment, he tasted victory, believing he had outmaneuvered even the legendary Char Aznable.

A web of crackling energy erupted from the three Geara Dogas tethered to the Gundam, sending arcs of murderous current coursing through its frame.

"Argh!" Amuro's cry of pain was lost in the maelstrom of energy. In that fraction of a second, it was impossible to discern if his flesh had felt the kiss of electricity before his reflexes kicked in. The fin funnels on the Gundam's back exploded into action. Beams of concentrated destruction lashed out, severing the sparking wires with surgical precision.

Their movement provoked him.

"So you resist, Amuro!" Gyunei snarled. In a moment of blind fury, he wrenched the Jagd Doga's manipulator, the one still clutching Kayra's fragile form.

The sickening crunch of bone giving way to mechanized might was lost to the vacuum of space. In an instant, Kayra's body was reduced to a broken husk.

"No!" Amuro's anguished cry tore through the ether as he felt Kayra's consciousness flicker and fade, like a candle snuffed out the wind.

Gyunei's voice, a mixture of righteous anger and creeping horror at his own actions, lashed out.

"Your defiance brought this to pass! Her blood stains your hands, Amuro!"

Even Gyunei, hardened as he was, found he couldn't bear to look upon the pilot suit that now served as a macabre shroud. With a violent motion, he flung Kayra's remains away, as if to cast off the weight of his actions.

"Monster!" Amuro's psyche erupted in a tsunami of grief and rage, crashing against the shores of Gyunei's consciousness.

The Nu Gundam's beam rifle flared to life, shots streaking across the void. Gyunei's Jagd Doga became a blur of motion, disgorging a cloud of dummies

that danced and weaved, confounding the Gundam's funnels as they sought their mark.

As if awakening from a shared trance, the encircling Geara Dogas unleashed hell upon the Gundam. Their concentrated assault transformed space itself into a canvas of destruction, massive fireballs blossoming like deadly flowers. Yet the Gundam demonstrated a maneuverability that couldn't be destroyed by such attacks.

"Ah!"

Quess's body convulsed with increasing violence, her skin taking on an unsettling purple hue. "C-Captain... if we don't annihilate every last enemy, I... I..."

Her teeth chattered, a staccato rhythm of fear and rage.

"Hm!"

Char, too, sensed the maelstrom of hatred and revulsion emanating from a particular sector of the battlefield. His fingers, precise as a surgeon's, manipulated the arm rakers. The Sazabi responded, descending with predatory grace.

"Kayra! Kayra!"

Amuro's voice rang out as he obliterated Geara Dogas left and right, desperately maneuvering towards the Jagd Doga's last known position.

Yet something stayed his hand—Kayra's pilot suit, drifting into view like a grim reminder of war's cost.

"Kayra's...?"

Amuro latched onto this bizarre coincidence. In that instant, a torrent of beam fire cascaded through the space he'd just vacated.

"How?"

The assault had come from the Rewloola fleet, positioned with Axis as its backdrop.

Amuro's gaze darted to Kayra's suit, now cradled in his Gundam's metallic grasp.

"I see... You're still watching out for me, aren't you, Kayra?"

The Gundam executed a razor-sharp pivot. Once more, a cataract of deadly light flooded the space it had occupied mere moments ago. Char's Sazabi plummeted like a blood-red meteor. Twice, Amuro had waltzed with death and emerged unscathed.

"Was it you guiding me, Kayra...?"

As the Nu Gundam melted into the cosmic tapestry, the Sazabi glided in from the direction of Polaris, its sensors probing the inky void like spectral tendrils.

"He's gone? A masterful withdrawal..."

"Finish them, Captain!" Quess's voice quavered, a dissonant chord of terror and bloodlust.

"No, the moment has passed..."

"Gyunei suffered! He must be avenged!"

"I understand. But to fight as a mask for fear is to court death."

Char raised his visor.

"That's not...!"

Quess continued to writh on Char's lap, her half-naked form a stark contrast to the clinical environment of the cockpit.

4

"Conserve the anti-missile particle rounds! They're precious few!"

"Affirmative! Observation team, status on hostile units?"

"Enemy mobile suits in full retreat! Our forces returning for emergency recovery!"

The Ra Cailum's defensive screen blazed ceaselessly, a lethal lattice of anti-missile fire as it began the perilous dance of mobile suit retrieval. Jegans, more wreckage than war machine, careened towards the catapult deck. Their battle scars put even the Fifth Luna operation to shame.

"Conventional docking's suicide! Deploy the wires!"

The outer deck erupted into controlled chaos. Astonage and his crack team of mechanics, shoulder-to-shoulder with the deck crew, fought a desperate battle to snare the crippled Jegans with a web of high-tensile wires before the void could claim them.

"Incoming! Brace for impact!"

A mobile suit wreathed in angry sparks careened towards them, bouncing off the catapult deck like a pinball, only to be snagged mid-bounce by a volley of precision-fired wires.

At the lower hatch, the Nu Gundam's battle-scarred manipulator aligned with trembling precision to the deck. Chan and her team of mechanics rushed to meet it.

"Dear God... Kayra Su...?!"

Reverent hands lifted Kayra's crumpled suit, faces masks of disbelief and sorrow. Behind them, Chan's form wavered, as if the tragedy had rendered her incorporeal in her normal suit.

"Chan..."

Amuro, emerging from his cockpit, enveloped the shaken mechanic in an embrace that spoke volumes.

"Tell me... how did she meet her end?"

"She... she knew pain at the last..."

"I feared as much... Oh, God!"

Her sob, a discordant note of anguish, pierced Amuro's audio feed.

"I swear, I'll not rest until Char answers for this atrocity..."

"Amuro, no! Don't talk like that!"

"Now you know how I feel."

"But speaking such ominous words can make them come true. Please don't!"

"I see... You're right..."

Amuro's gaze followed Kayra's final journey, then hardened with determination.

"We'll win, no matter what!"

"Make it so, Lieutenant. For all our sakes."

Chan sought solace against Amuro's shoulder, her tears a silent requiem. Above, on the upper deck, Astonaige worked on, mercifully ignorant of the tragedy that had unfolded below.

"The clock is ticking on Axis's final two nozzles becoming operational," Tooth declared, his fingers dancing across the holographic display. The room hummed with tension as captains and high-ranking officers leaned in, their faces bathed in the eerie glow of the projected images. "And if Neo Zeon's fleet from Luna II arrives with their nuclear arsenal and detonates it here, they could accelerate Axis even further"

The captain of Ra Chutter let out a weary sigh.

"Even if they merely enter low orbit and unleash those infernal weapons, Char's mad gambit would be complete."

Amuro strode purposefully to the front.

"That's precisely why we must destroy Axis's tail nozzles before that nightmare unfolds," he proclaimed, his voice steel and fire. "We'll either alter Axis's trajectory or detonate the remaining five nuclear missiles in close proximity to split it apart."

From the front row, Bright's four raised fingers cut through the air like a grim countdown.

Amuro's eyes narrowed, comprehension dawning.

"Only four left? Then this..." he said, his finger hovering over Axis's core on the display, "...is where we strike our killing blow."

"So it's come to this," a voice from the back murmured, "A fleet-wide sacrifice is our last hope?"

"Indeed," Amuro confirmed, his resolve unwavering. "We'll throw everything we have at it – a suicide charge, ship cannons blazing, nuclear missiles screaming towards their target. And if that proves insufficient, we'll tear Axis apart from within."

Tooth seamlessly continued, "Between the nuclear engine and the living quarters lies a labyrinth of tunnels, a structural weakness we can exploit. A well-placed internal detonation could split Axis like an overripe fruit. Its trajectory will shift, sending it careening away from Earth. Even if it does fall towards Earth, destroying the deceleration nozzles would ensure it disintegrates in the atmosphere."

"Very well," Bright declared, rising to address the assemblage, his voice carrying the weight of command. "Our strategy is three-fold, and time is our enemy. We end this before Luna II's reinforcements tip the scales."

At Bright's words, a wave of determination swept through the room as every soul present rose to their feet.

"I ask the impossible," Bright continued, his voice thick with emotion, "but I need you to offer up your lives for this cause!"

His arm snapped up in a crisp salute.

As one, the room mirrored his action, a forest of arms raised in grim solidarity. The time for academic debates and hesitation had long since passed. This was the cruel calculus of war, where ideals collided with the unforgiving face of reality.

機動戦士ガンダム

MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER:3

SOME TIME

CHAPTER-W

1

Axis loomed ever closer to Earth, its massive form casting a shadow across the stars. At its rear, nuclear pulse nozzles continued their relentless push, while nearby, work still bustled around an adjacent thruster. The crimson Sazabi mobile suit drifted lazily past as if overseeing the operation. But the two figures in normal suits floating before its cockpit - Char and Nanai - exuded an air of tension that belied the mobile suit's casual approach.

"The fourth ship, loaded with nuclear warheads, will make contact with Axis in thirty minutes," Nanai reported.

Char's response was coolly methodical, "Once contact is made, secure the fourth ship to Axis and evacuate the crew. We'll detonate its nuclear payload the moment Axis dips below the Van Allen belt."

"Understood. It's a race against Londo Bell's fleet and our fourth ship, isn't it?"

Their exchange felt oddly detached as if they were discussing something far less consequential than the fate of humanity. Perhaps sensing the weight of the moment, Nanai pressed her visor against Char's helmet. To an outside observer, they might have appeared as lovers sharing an intimate moment. In reality, it was a common gesture between normal suit wearers, allowing for clearer communication.

"We can speak via the contact line now, can't we?" Nanai's voice came through with crystal clarity.

"Ah... yes," Char replied, his face barely moving within the confines of his helmet. Through the visor, Nanai's eyes held a hint of reproach.

"Gyunei..." she began, catching Char off guard with the change of subject. "He's overreacting, afraid you'll take Quess from him. He won't be able to perform at his best like this. I'll pair him with Quess and position them ahead of the Londo Bell fleet. That's where Gyunei's abilities will truly shine."

"They're your pilots to command," Char said dismissively as he pulled away, gliding towards the Sazabi's cockpit. Nanai bit her lip at his curt response.

Char slowly accelerated the Sazabi towards Axis' docking bay. Near the pier, mechanics swarmed over mobile suits, frantically conducting emergency repairs and outfitting the Jagd Doga with funnels.

Gyunei, satisfied that his own unit's preparations were on track, entered the airlock. He called up a display, checking the fleet positions. The Rewloola and Musaka were docked side-by-side at Axis' port - to him, it looked as though Nanai and Char were shoulder-to-shoulder.

"Not a word about our recent victories," he muttered. "The Captain and Nanai just vanish... If they want to ignore me, fine..."

He was determined to settle things with Char when this battle was over.

"Gyunei! I thought I'd find you here."

"Quess?"

The young pilot, clad in her flight suit, poked her head through the airlock hatch.

"Weren't you with the Captain?" Gyunei asked, brow furrowing.

"He left with Nanai!" Quess replied with a mischievous grin. Her expression betrayed no trace of her earlier terror.

"Just the two of them...?"

"Grown-ups have their own business, right?" Quess said playfully, patting down her suit as if checking its fit. Her carefree demeanor reminded Gyunei of how she'd been when they'd left the Musaka.

"What's gotten into you? Are you really okay with Nanai?"

"It's fine..." Quess sidled closer, mindful of the shouting mechanics nearby. "I understand now, how kind the Captain truly is to me. That's all that matters."

Her sweet, breathy tone was more than enough to inflame Gyunei's jealousy.

"What happened with the Captain?"

"Hehe... He held me... oh-so-gently."

"What?!"

His composure cracked. In one fluid motion, he wrapped an arm around Quess's waist and guided her out of the airlock.

"Hey!"

Ignoring her protest, he bundled her onto a small scooter used for intra-base transport and took off.

"You know, I shot down an enemy nuke," he boasted as they zipped through the corridors.

"Of course I know that!" Quess clung to the handlebars, bewildered by Gyunei's incomprehensible thought patterns.

"It means I'm just as capable as the Captain - maybe more so," Gyunei insisted. "You don't need to settle for a man like him. I can satisfy you in ways he never could."

The scooter burst into Axis' cavernous mining area at breakneck speed.

"Are you insane?!" Quess exclaimed. She let go, allowing herself to drift towards the rows of streetlights illuminating the quaint, old-fashioned mining town.

Gyunei abandoned the scooter to give chase.

"You don't know Char like I do! You might see him as some father figure, but he's not what you think!"

"That has nothing to do with anything!"

"It has everything to do with it! Everyone at the Newtype labs knows why he's cozying up to Nanai while still trying to get his hands on you."

"I love the Captain! I respect him!"

Quess touched down by a streetlight, planting her feet on the road.

"He's obsessed with a woman he used during the One Year War!"

"What?!"

It was utter nonsense to Quess. Gyunei landed in the middle of the street.

"Crazy, right? An adult chained to his memories, playing at being Supreme Commander and Prime Minister... It's not how the real world works. He hides behind that facade, pretending to be a proper leader, even hooking up with Nanai for show. It's disgusting."

"It is not!"

"Oh yeah? Plenty of people have heard him muttering 'Lalah Sune' in his sleep."

In a burst of motion, Quess launched herself at Gyunei. Her palm connected with his cheek in a resounding slap that echoed through the empty street.

"Quess..." Gyunei murmured, shock evident in his voice.

"It's fine! I'll drive away Nanai and this Lalah person too!"

She launched herself upward with another powerful kick.

"Quess! There's more! The Captain started this war because that Amuro guy stole his girl!"

To Quess, it sounded like nothing more than Gyunei's desperate parting shot.

"That's why he hates young men!"

From high above the desolate street, Quess hurled back her response with all the venom she could muster.

2

"All hands, battle stations! Look alive!" The sing-song command echoed through the combat bridge, its cheerful tone at odds with the gravity of the situation.

In the adjacent instrument room off the mobile suit deck, Chan Agi sighed heavily. She was alone, surrounded by blinking consoles and readouts.

"I still can't make sense of it..." she murmured, her eyes falling once more on the letter that had been occupying her thoughts for days.

"While we can't say for certain, it appears the psycho-frame casting technology was provided by Neo Zeon," she read aloud, the words of Anaheim Electronics' October Saran now etched into her memory. "What's more, our development team was apparently advised to use this technology in the Nu Gundam by a specific individual within Neo Zeon. However, this doesn't necessarily mean the Re-GZ's performance has been compromised..."

Chan's brow furrowed as she contemplated the implications.

"But the psycho-frame seems perfect. It doesn't make sense... Why would an enemy who wants to defeat Amuro leak flawless psycho-frame technology to him? It has to be a lie."

Her concern had driven her to continuously check for any potential negative effects the psycho-frame might have on its pilot. But long-term results were impossible to predict, and another worry nagged at her: What if Char's mobile suit was also equipped with a psycho-frame? What would happen if the two machines resonated with each other? Surely it wouldn't solely benefit Char.

"In that case, it would come down to the performance of the funnels," Chan mused. "Our funnels may be heavier, but I can't imagine they're inferior in terms of maneuverability..."

The thought of the Neo Zeon leader personally entering the battlefield was almost too much to bear. And yet, Amuro had reported encountering Char at Fifth Luna.

Chan carefully tucked the letter into a pocket at her normal suit's ankle, her mind still racing.

"Chan!"

She startled at the sudden call.

"Y-yes!"

Amuro's face appeared, peering into the room with a warm smile that belied the tension in the air.

"Is everything alright?"

Chan hesitated, her earlier melancholy threatening to surface.

"It's just... something the captain said earlier got me down..."

"Ah, I'm sorry about that," Amuro's expression softened. "How are the funnels looking? All set?"

"Of course," Chan nodded, forcing a smile. "Come back safe!"

"Don't worry," Amuro reassured her, his confidence infectious. "The psycommu seems to be energizing me too. We'll be fine." His eyes fell on the T-shaped sample still attached to Chan's waist. "Still running tests?"

As he reached out to touch the sample, his face drew close to Chan's. The proximity made her heart race.

"Amuro..." she whispered, impulsively planting a kiss on his cheek. "Do you remember what October from Anaheim said? About how the frame and your psycommu might resonate, unlocking unknown potential... Do you believe that's possible?"

Amuro shook his head gently.

"It's unlikely. I was involved in the basic design of the psycommu. I don't think it has any hidden capabilities beyond what we know."

"But what about the potential resonance with the psycho-frame?" Chan pressed.

"Listen," Amuro's voice took on a serious tone. "Searching for unknown factors is a luxury of peacetime. In war, machines perform according to their specifications. Only specialists can draw out a machine's full potential."

"But you can, can't you? You're a Newtype, after all."

Amuro's eyes widened slightly, understanding dawning on his face.

"You're right... Thank you, Chan."

He leaned in, returning her earlier kiss with a tender one on her lips.

"Amuro?" Chan breathed, surprised by the sudden display of affection.

"When this war is over," Amuro whispered in her ear, "I'd like to rest my head in your lap."

Before Chan could respond, Amuro had pushed off, gliding gracefully into the Nu Gundam's cockpit. Chan watched as the mighty mobile suit came to life. Its backpack bristled with the mega bazooka launcher, a beam rifle clutched in its left hand, missiles concealed behind its shield, and most impressively, the wall of fin funnels arrayed on its back.

The Gundam stood as a testament to humanity's indomitable spirit, a machine that seemed incapable of defeat. Chan could only place her trust in its overwhelming power and in the meticulous maintenance she had performed.

"I'll be waiting..." she whispered, unsure if her words reached Amuro as the Gundam's thrusters flared to life, bathing the mobile suit deck in a soft glow.

"Nu Gundam has launched!"

The report echoed through the bridge, prompting Meran, the executive officer, to turn to Captain Bright.

"Captain, should we bring Hathaway up here?"

Bright's expression was grim as he considered the suggestion.

"We might not make it out of this alive. At the very least, we should let him write a will..."

"Understood, sir. I'll see to it."

As the bridge crew watched the mobile suit teams deploy, a guard escorted Hathaway onto the bridge.

"Ah, Hathaway," Meran addressed the young man, speaking on Bright's behalf. "We can't let you into the combat bridge, but if you think you can handle it, you're welcome to observe from here. Also, please write your will. We'll place it in a capsule for ejection if necessary."

"Oh... alright," Hathaway replied, somewhat dazed by the sudden gravity of the situation. He accepted writing materials from Meran and settled into an auxiliary seat at the far corner of the bridge, placing Haro on his lap.

"Is that the fleet moving from Luna II?" Bright's voice carried from the center of the bridge.

Hathaway stared at the blank paper resting on Haro, struggling to find the right words. The concept of a will seemed so abstract, so final.

"Fleets are moving from Sides 2 and 5 as well, but they're too far to provide effective cover."

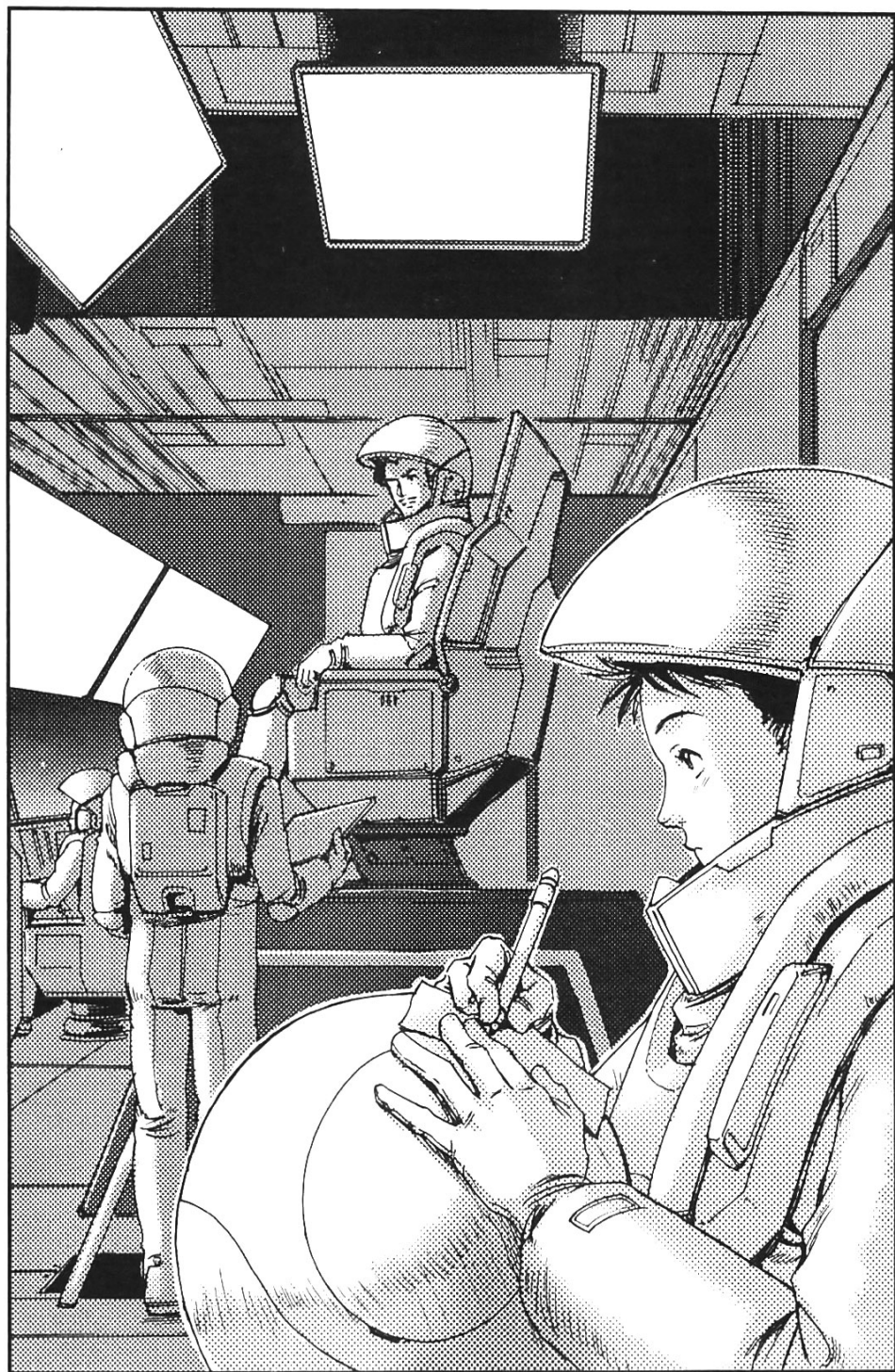
"Keep broadcasting our position regularly," Bright ordered. "We can't afford to be overly cautious now."

"But sir, that'll make us a target for Axis too!"

"We're on a suicide mission either way. Don't hold back."

Hathaway listened to the exchange, his pen hovering uncertainly over the paper. Finally, he began to write.

"Axis heat signature increasing! It's accelerating!"



The urgent cry snapped Hathaway's attention to the main display, where computer graphics illustrated the activation of Axis's nuclear thrusters.

"Fleet, commence final acceleration! Prepare for mobile suit combat and nuclear missile launch! Proceed as planned!" Bright's commands rang out as crew members began transferring to the combat bridge.

"Have you finished?" Meran asked, approaching Hathaway.

"I... I'm not sure how to write this properly..." Hathaway admitted, handing over the unfolded paper.

Meran's eyes scanned the page, a hint of surprise in his voice.

"None of us really know how to write these things... But you've done well. You even included something for your father."

Hathaway's gaze drifted to his father, now seated in the captain's chair behind Meran.

"If you get scared, go back down," Bright called out. "The study room will be safer."

"Sure thing, dad!" Hathaway replied, watching as Bright's seat descended into the combat bridge.

And just like that, Hathaway found himself alone on the main bridge.

3

The Land Cruiser carrying Mirai and Cheimin had barely penetrated the Chinese mainland before coming to a halt. Mirai eased the vehicle to a stop behind a long line of cars stretching out before them, their progress abruptly terminated by some unseen obstacle.

"Wait here," Mirai instructed, her voice taut with tension. "I'm going to check things out."

"A-alright!" Cheimin replied, anxiety evident in her trembling voice. She watched as Mirai engaged the door locks and vanished into the shadow of the vehicle ahead, her hand instinctively moving to the concealed pistol at her waist.

The wind bit with a preternatural chill. Since the asteroid's impact on Lhasa, the sun had remained obstinately hidden behind a veil of ash and debris. Mirai pulled her scarf tighter over her jacket, bracing against the gritty wind as she made her way towards the crowd gathering ahead.

Snippets of hushed conversation drifted to her ears as she wove through the throng.

"There must be a detour, right?"

"Who knows... word is every road's a dead end now..."

Mirai pressed on, squeezing through the mass of bodies until she emerged into a clearing. The sight before her crushed any lingering hope she'd harbored.

The road had simply ceased to exist, giving way to a treacherous slope stretching nearly twenty meters down. She watched in mute horror as people attempted to navigate the unstable incline, their bodies sliding and

tumbling in the loose earth. At the bottom, a viscous stream of muddy water snaked its way past the carcasses of overturned vehicles.

More fragments of conversation reached her:

"I heard the coastal routes are cut off too."

"Between the quakes and the rain, it's no wonder..."

"If we stay put and another rock hits Hong Kong, we're done for."

"Is it true? Another asteroid's really coming?"

"They're saying North America's the target this time..."

"Nuclear winter... we won't last twenty years no matter where we are. The ozone layer's shot to hell..."

Mirai recoiled from the oppressive weight of their grim speculations, retreating hastily to the relative safety of the Land Cruiser.

"We'll have to abandon the car," she announced, her tone brooking no argument. "We'll head south on foot as long as there's solid ground. One bag each."

Cheimin clutched a small stuffed doll to her chest.

"I'm taking Mimasa with me."

"I won't carry it for you," Mirai warned.

"Duh!"

Cheimin slung a daypack over her shoulders, the doll still pressed tightly against her.

Suddenly, the world around them brightened. A gust of wind had momentarily parted the ash-laden clouds, allowing a shaft of sunlight to pierce through.

"The sun!"

"It's beautiful!"

Cries of joy erupted from the crowd, the warmth of the long-absent sun stirring something primal within them.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Mirai breathed, a ghost of a smile playing at her lips.

"Yeah!" Cheimin agreed, her eyes wide with wonder.

They took one last look inside the vehicle, steeling themselves against the pain of abandoning their two large suitcases. The slam of the car door felt like a period at the end of a chapter in their lives.

"There's water ahead, but they've laid down planks to make a bridge. We should be able to cross," Mirai observed.

"Okay..."

As quickly as it had appeared, the sun retreated behind the oppressive blanket of clouds.

"With clouds this thick, I wonder if this is what Earth will be like from now on..." Mirai's voice trailed off, her eyes widening in alarm.

"What's wrong?"

Following Mirai's gaze, Cheimin looked towards where the sun had been. A strange, triangular shadow was slowly traversing the sky.

"That's... not a cloud, is it?"

"No... no, it's not."

The object crossing the sun's path could only be one thing – the rumored asteroid.

"That's... that's Char's asteroid," Mirai whispered, the reality of Char's intentions finally sinking in. "He really means to plunge the Earth into winter..."

The ominous shape vanished behind the clouds once more, but its image remained seared into their minds. The possibility that humanity might share the fate of the dinosaurs seemed too direct, too brutal to contemplate. Yet the harsh truth remained – only a fraction of the population could hope to survive through the power of science and technology.

4

On the bridge of the Rewloola, docked at Axis's port, Captain Lyle had just received a photograph from one of his operators.

"The fourth ship from Luna II is approaching," he announced, studying the image intently.

The operator leaned in, pointing to the photo in Lyle's hands.

"Yes, sir. But what do you make of these other lights?"

Lyle's brow furrowed.

"Are you suggesting Federation vessels are on the move?"

"It appears to be ships from Side 2 and Side 5, sir. They're closing in rapidly. Some seem to have escaped from Luna II as well."

"Where's the Captain?"

"He's overseeing the mobile suit launch at Axis's port entrance, sir."

Lyle's voice carried a newfound urgency.

"Prepare the main guns! Ready the Rewloola for immediate departure!"

At the dock's edge, Char stood in the conductor's booth, orchestrating the mobile suit launches. His eyes narrowed as he spotted Quess approaching.

"What are you doing? You're falling behind schedule!"

As Char opened the hatch behind the booth, Quess flung herself into his arms.

"Captain! Am I just a replacement for Lalah?" Her voice quavered with emotion.

Char's expression flickered with surprise.

"Who told you that? More importantly, why does it matter to you?"

"I love you, Captain! I won't accept being someone's stand-in!"

Char sighed, a hint of exasperation in his voice.

"This is troublesome... Quess, do you really have the right to make such demands?"

"This isn't about rights or obligations!" Quess's eyes blazed with intensity. "Because of you, I can destroy the Earth that gave birth to the woman who drove my mother away. Maybe then Papa will come back. And in the end, wouldn't that serve your plans too?"

Char's voice softened.

"You're right. I understand. I'll... forget about Lalah."

Quess's eyes widened in disbelief.

"Keep one of the Jagd Doga's funnels in reserve," Char continued. "If I betray you, use it to kill me."

Though the totality of his words might have been a lie, in that moment, Char meant every syllable.

"For now, fight alongside Gyunei. Without him, you won't survive."

"Captain!" Quess threw her arms around Char's neck, kissing him fiercely. Perhaps she understood that even if Char's words were false, the fact that he'd say them at all held its own significance.

"Quess..." Char's voice was gentle. "I'll sortie in the Sazabi. I don't care if Nanai scolds me. I'm more worried about you, understand?"

Quess responded with another passionate kiss.

Meanwhile, on the dock where the Rewloola was moored, Gyunei Guss stood at attention before Nanai Miguel.

"Do you need me for something?"

"The Captain intends to confront Amuro personally, despite his position as leader of Neo Zeon. Protect him completely."

"You called me here before launch just to say that?"

"As director of the Newtype Labs, it's my duty to confirm. Your overly human response is dangerous for a Cyber-Newtype like yourself."

"When it comes to combat, I'm as much a machine as any mobile suit."

"Understood. Take care of Quess. Ultimately, that will protect the Captain and lead to Neo Zeon's victory."

"There's one more condition," Gyunei's voice dropped to a dangerous whisper. "You need to keep the Captain... occupied."

"You son of a bitch!!"

Gyunei was already drifting towards the launch platform for his Geara Doga by the time Nanai retorted.

His mocking laughter crackled through Nanai's helmet speakers.

"Ha! Is that more difficult than defeating the Gundam with a Jagd Doga?"

As Gyunei's laughter faded, Nanai felt a pang of regret.

"We've nurtured something dangerous," she thought, making her way back to the Rewloola. "We need to cultivate a Newtype to counter Gyunei."

The thought felt as much about self-preservation as strategy.

"Gyunei, reporting!"

"Where were you?"

"Conversing with the strategy officer, sir!"

Char pressed his helmet against Gyunei's visor, the younger man instinctively recoiling from the casual intimacy.

"Why do you think I'd make a move on Quess?" Char's voice was low, meant for Gyunei's ears alone.

"S-sir?"

"Get along with her. If you protect her, she'll be drawn to you."

"Are you serious, sir?"

"Of course. Her talents are valuable on this battlefield. But I don't want her dead either. You're the only one who can keep her safe."

"That's..."

Gyunei felt Char's cold resolve piercing his mind like an icicle. This, he realized, was the difference between a seasoned veteran and a young upstart.

"You're too young to understand," Char continued, his voice devoid of emotion. "Adults carry complicated grudges. As for me, I'm only interested in rebuilding Neo Zeon."

"Yes... I'm aware of that, sir."

"There's one more thing. Something else your young mind – Newtype or not – can't fathom."

"Sir?"

"Nanai... she's kind to me. Do you understand?"

"I... I see..."

"Good. Now go."

A ghost of a smile played across Char's lips as he helped Gyunei propel upward.

"That should take care of everything..." Char murmured to himself, drifting towards the Rewloola as it began its launch sequence.

5

"That's right, Captain. Until I'm grown up, you'll have to make do with Nanai. I'll allow it." Quess's Jagd Doga led the charge towards Axis's air defense line, with Gyunei's machine following close behind. Gyunei's mobile suit circled Quess's once before settling into position on her left flank.

"Quess! Are you cold?" Gyunei's voice carried an uncharacteristic gentleness.

"Huh? I'm fine, Gyunei!" At that moment, Quess couldn't be bothered by Gyunei's sudden change in demeanor.

As Quess's gaze swept across the space before them, she witnessed the Ra Cailum fleet's first wave of missiles being intercepted, blooming into a string of fireballs.

"Ah...!"

Below, streaks of light stretched from behind them as the Rewloola fleet unleashed a barrage of cannon fire.

"I can do this too!" Quess exclaimed, her enthusiasm getting the better of her.

"No, don't!" Gyunei's warning came too late.

Quess's enhanced senses locked onto the tail nozzles of the incoming missiles. Her Jagd Doga's mega particle cannon sprang to life, picking off targets with uncanny precision. One by one, five fireballs expanded in rapid succession.

"Quess! You're amazing!" Gyunei's praise was tinged with awe.

Meanwhile, aboard the Ra Cailum, Amuro's eyes widened in surprise.

"The missiles were shot down? Who did that?"

As realization dawned on him, Amuro's voice dropped to a whisper. "No, wait... This presence, it's so exuberant, almost playful. Could it be... Quess?"

"Mobile suits incoming! Quess, fall back! Be ready to cover me if things get dicey!"

"Don't worry! I can handle this!" Quess's confidence was palpable.

"For once, listen to someone with experience!" Gyunei's youthful arrogance elicited a laugh from Quess. It was a refreshing change from Char's more mature demeanor.

Suddenly, Quess's laughter died in her throat. "Ah...!"

She sensed a powerful presence approaching, filling her with dread.

"What's coming...?!"

"A formidable enemy! Retreat, Quess!"

"Huh? Oh..." Before Quess could react, Gyunei's Jagd Doga surged forward, filling her viewscreen.

"The fourth ship is entering Axis's port."

"Good," came the reply. "Once it's docked, immediately evacuate the crew..."

"Yes, ma'am. The Musaka is moving to receive them."

Nanai stood on the Rewloola's main bridge, waiting for Char. As he entered, she couldn't help but comment, "It seems you managed to deceive Gyunei."

Char's response was coolly measured.

"He's not so easily fooled. I simply told him the truth."

"The truth, for now..." Nanai's voice held a hint of uncertainty. "But what about after the battle? When I see you getting close to Quess..."

Char cut her off sharply.

"I devised this strategy prepared to bear the stigma of polluting the Earth."

With that, he peered into the combat bridge below. "I'm heading down to the mobile suit deck."

"Sir!" Captain Lyle acknowledged, looking up at Char.

As Char drifted towards the hatch, Nanai pursued him, troubled by his words. "Captain! What did you just say?"

"I merely stated the facts."

"You spoke of bearing the stigma. Do you intend to die?"

Nanai maneuvered in front of Char in the corridor, her eyes searching his face.

"My atonement means realizing my father's ideal – elevating all of humanity to Newtypes in one fell swoop."

"I know that! But the way you just spoke was different."

"How so?"

"It was as if... whether you live or die, you're going to settle things with Amuro."

"I had Anaheim build the Sazabi to surpass the Gundam, didn't I?"

"But you also said you insisted on making the Sazabi to fight Amuro on equal terms."

"Did I say that?"

"Why, Captain? Why are you acting this way?"

Char's voice took on a contemplative tone.

"A man who aims for the top must be prepared for such resolve. Well, never mind. Today is the day I part ways with the foolish man inside me. Just watch silently. After that, I'll do as you say, Nanai."

"..."

"I believe it's a man's job to desire mastery over the world."

Nanai's voice softened.

"That's right. Gentleness alone doesn't make a man!"

"..."

Char placed a light kiss on Nanai's lips before turning away.

"I will be the Supreme Commander."

Those words hung in the air, and though Nanai wanted to believe they were meant as comfort, she couldn't shake the feeling that there was something more behind Char's declaration – something she couldn't quite grasp.

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MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER:3

INFLUENTIAL WAVE

CHAPTER-X1

1

"That's it! Funnels!"

A barrage of energy erupted as Gyunei's funnels converged on the Nu Gundam, their deadly beams slicing through the void of space.

"..."

In that instant, the Nu Gundam unleashed its own funnels. The resulting clash of lasers and beams created a dazzling interference pattern, painting the battlefield with a kaleidoscope of destructive light.

"Trying to snipe Axis? How impudent!" Gyunei snarled, his voice dripping with contempt.

The knowledge that Quess was nearby fueled Gyunei's aggressive assault. The fundamental difference in performance between the lightweight Jagd Doga's funnels and the fin funnels became apparent as the Gundam found itself in a perilous situation.

Char's prediction had been overly optimistic.

"Tch!" Amuro's frustration was palpable as he deftly maneuvered to compensate for this oversight. He extended the beam of his Gundam's beam saber to an unprecedented length, using it to deflect the incoming funnel attacks with graceful, yet deadly precision.

"Ugh!"

To Gyunei, the sight of the Gundam attempting to swat away funnels with what appeared to be an oversized laser sword seemed almost comical.

"Gyunei! At this rate, the Captain is going to get taken out!" Quess cried out, her voice tinged with alarm as she sensed the threat posed by the Gundam's movements. She deployed her own funnels in response, but they too fell victim to the Gundam's impossibly long beam saber.

"Impossible! Is that really Amuro?!" Quess exclaimed, her disbelief evident in her voice.

The battle intensified as Quess launched more funnels, joined by Gyunei's renewed assault. The space around them erupted into a chaotic storm of beams and lasers, a deadly light show that illuminated the darkness of space.

"I don't have time to deal with the likes of you!" Amuro roared, his patience wearing thin. Their relentless attacks felt like children's pranks, but with deadly consequences. They didn't understand – they were fighting on a whim, oblivious to the true stakes of this battle.

Amuro's anger resonated with the fin funnels, and suddenly, a path to break through this stalemate materialized in his mind.

Five fin funnels encircled the Gundam's frame, each projecting a beam that intersected with the others. The result was a dazzling pyramid of light that enveloped the mobile suit.

"What...?"

"Take this!"

As Quess and Gyunei's funnel lasers struck this luminous construct, they were warped and shattered by the interference patterns. The beams clashed, creating a barrier of pure energy.

"What the hell is this?!" Gyunei shouted, bewildered by this unprecedented development.

Refusing to back down, he extended his Jagd Doga's beam saber and charged at the Gundam from the side, attempting to break through its defenses.

"Stop it! Don't make things worse for the Captain!" Quess cried out, her voice trembling with a mix of fear and frustration as she watched Gyunei's reckless charge.

"Ah?!"

Gyunei's Jagd Doga managed to penetrate the fin funnel barrier due to its greater mass, but the cost was severe. In that split second, its armor began to disintegrate under the onslaught of energy. Amidst the blinding flash, the Gundam's beam rifle found its mark, piercing the Jagd Doga's shoulder.

"Damn you!"

Even with his mobile suit falling apart around him, Gyunei refused to yield. He swung his beam saber with all his might.

With a resounding clash, the Gundam parried the blow with its own beam saber from within the barrier. The collision of energy weapons within the barrier caused a violent reaction, expanding and distorting the protective field. For Gyunei's suit, it was like being hit by a second, more powerful wave of destruction.

"UWAAAAAH!"

Gyunei's scream echoed through the comm channel as his mobile suit's armor began to melt away from the front. As the fin funnels dispersed to follow the Nu Gundam's movements, Gyunei's main engine erupted in a spectacular explosion.

"KYAAAAHN!"

Quess let out an anguished cry, more befitting a wounded animal than a human. Through the fading brilliance of Gyunei's demise, she caught a glimpse of the retreating silhouette of the Nu Gundam.

"The Gundam is breaking through on its own!"

Bright's frustration mounted at Methis' report.

"What about our escort mobile suits?!"

"They're doing their best, but--!"

On the bridge above, Hathaway stood transfixed, his eyes wide as he took in the terrifying maelstrom of light visible through every window. Clutching Haro was all he could do to maintain his composure.

"Mom... Chei... Quess... Quess...?"

Amidst the cacophony of battle and the tempest of conflicting wills, Hathaway heard a woman's piercing scream cut through it all.

"Quess! What's wrong?! Quess!"

Without thinking, Hathaway leapt to his feet and bolted through the bridge hatch. Haro remained behind, a silent witness to the young man's departure.

Hathaway tore blindly through the ship's corridors, his heart pounding in his ears. After changing lifts several times, he found himself gasping for breath on the mobile suit deck.

"Chan, what are you doing?!"

Astonaige's voice rang out, startlingly close. Of course, it was coming through the headphones, Hathaway realized, looking around in confusion.

"They're saying we don't have enough mobile suits out there!"

"That doesn't mean you should go out there, Chan!"

Hathaway's gaze was drawn to an open deck to his left. Two normal suits were entangled, one drifting out into space. The T-shaped sample case on its hip glinted in the harsh light.

Chan was making her way towards the Re-GZ, which was secured to the side of the catapult deck with cables.

"This psycho-frame might give Amuro an advantage! I'm going to deliver it to him!" Chan's voice was filled with determination.

"Get a hold of yourself, Chan!"

"The Re-GZ's functional! I'm going!"

At the Re-GZ's cockpit, Chan pushed away Astonaige's grasping hands and sealed the hatch.

"Chan!"

At that moment, a beam struck the catapult deck. A pillar of light erupted, obscuring Astonaige from view. The Re-GZ's frame shuddered violently from the impact.

The force of the explosion slammed Hathaway against the wall, but his normal suit protected him from harm.

"Ugh..."

Fragments of Astonaige's normal suit mingled with debris from the catapult deck's armor, drifting into the ship.

"A-Astonaige?!"

Despite the shock, Hathaway struggled to his feet and made his way towards the catapult deck.

He caught a glimpse of the Re-GZ, its single functioning tail nozzle flaring to life as it launched towards the blinding light of Axis.

Hathaway couldn't remember why he had come outside. Perhaps it was an overwhelming sense that he had to do something, anything, that drove him onto the outer hull of the Ra Cailum in the midst of battle.

"Jegans?"

He spotted several damaged Jegans tethered to the deck and began crawling towards them.

"Quess is out there!"

Beyond Hathaway, one of the Ra Cailum's consort ships took a direct hit, erupting into multiple explosions.

Hathaway reached the cockpit of one of the Jegans and climbed inside.

"A-alright! The engine's still warmed up."

He retrieved a rifle from a nearby disabled Jegan and steeled his resolve.

"I can do this!"

With a burst of determination, his Jegan took flight, hurtling straight toward Axis and the heart of the battle.

2

"Alright... 3, 2, 1, go!"

Amuro unleashed his Fin Funnels towards Axis, but as they neared the asteroid's tail nozzles, they encountered a blistering barrage of fire from the Rewloola fleet.

With grim determination, Amuro forced the funnels forward, managing to critically damage one of the ships. But that was as far as he could push.

"Did they hit Axis' nozzles?!" Lyle's anguished cry echoed through the Rewloola's combat bridge.

"No, the Musaka shielded us! Axis is unharmed. Mobile suit squadrons, engage the enemy fleet!"

"Sazabi. The Musaka has been sunk," Nanai reported to Char, her voice tight with tension.

"A powerful beam weapon has infiltrated Axis' perimeter. No... it might be funnels."

"Strange. No enemy ships should have penetrated this far." Char mused, his tone calculating.

"That's true, but..."

"Very well, shall I take a look?"

"Please," Nanai's response carried the weight of her fears and hopes.

"I've sent the Captain out again," she thought, the realization twisting like a knife in her gut. Was this playing right into Char's hands?

Meanwhile, on the Ra Cailum's combat bridge, the atmosphere was thick with the tension of a final stand.

"Close the distance!" Bright barked.

As a wave of enemy mobile suits approached, the Ra Chutter moved to the vanguard, its guns blazing in all directions, forming a protective wall.

"I'm sorry, Ra Chutter! Be our shield!" Bright's voice cracked with the weight of his command.

"Prepare to launch nuclear missiles!"

"Not yet!" Bright countermanded, determined to hold out a little longer.

The Musaka in front of Axis, having taken on the last launch from the fourth ship, extended its tail nozzle.

"The Ra Cailum is giving it their all! Covering fire!"

The Musaka unleashed a salvo of missiles and mega particle cannon fire, skimming Axis' ridgeline in an attempt to obliterate the Ra Cailum's kamikaze run. But the Ra Chutter absorbed the brunt of the assault.

Bright, while acutely aware of the situation, refused to be distracted. "Eyes front! This is it... Prepare to fire our treasured missiles! ... Fire!"

A cluster of over a dozen missiles erupted from the Ra Cailum's bow, hurtling towards the looming mass of Axis.

Beside them, the Ra Chutter began to sink into the void.

"There they are!"

Unfortunately for the Earth Federation Forces, it was Char's Sazabi that detected the Ra Cailum's missile salvo.

The Sazabi deployed its funnels as Char confirmed the situation.

"The Ra Cailum fleet is down to just two ships!"

Four massive explosions erupted along Axis' flank. In their wake, two Neo Zeon vessels vanished into oblivion.

The Musaka attempted to retreat, but the nuclear heat melted half its hull before it could escape. However, the Rewloola, sheltered beneath Axis' protective bulk, sustained only minor damage.

Char's lips curled into a triumphant smirk.

"Is that all your nukes can do, Bright? Even if two ships crash into Axis, it won't alter its course!"

The Sazabi charged towards the remnants of the Ra Cailum fleet.

"The nuclear missiles have been intercepted!" Methis' voice was thick with despair.

Bright's response was a roar of defiance.

"If we can just get the Ra Cailum to Axis, we'll detonate it from the inside! 360-degree barrage!"

"All hands, prepare for ground assault!"

"Can we make it to Axis?!"

As he spoke, Bright opened the combat bridge hatch and raised his seat.

"Hathaway...?!"

The seat where Hathaway had been sitting in the dim corner of the bridge was empty. This wasn't a simple case of retreating to the study room. Haro floated silently, a mute witness to the young man's absence.

Several Jegans rushed to intercept Char's charge, determined to halt his advance.

"Tch!"

The Sazabi's precise fire dispatched them with ruthless efficiency, but the nuclear explosions had ignited a fierce determination in every pilot. They threw themselves at the crimson mobile suit again and again, pushing Char back.

"Not bad at all!"

Even Char couldn't help but feel the weight of "the power of ordinary people" in the face of such relentless opposition.

"Quess, where's Quess?!"

Hathaway's piloting skills had improved dramatically. His natural aptitude, combined with his training in simulators like the Med, was paying off.

"...?"

He zigzagged across the battlefield, searching for the source of Quess' earlier cry. Unknowingly, he was steadily closing in on her Jagd Doga.

"Ah... ugh, uh...! Is everyone going to disappear?!"

Oblivious to Hathaway's approach, Quess groaned as if coughing up blood.

With Gyunei gone, she felt the crushing weight of those who truly cared for her. But this realization came far too late.

"It's because of Amuro... because of the Gundam causing trouble for the Captain and Gyunei was killed..."

Quess' mobile suit was aimed towards Axis, but it was clear she no longer had the strength to reach it.

"...?"

The sensation was similar to the "presence" she had felt during Gyunei and Amuro's battle.

Quess instinctively scanned her surroundings.

The immediate area had thinned out as a combat zone.

"A Gundam?"

It wasn't the Nu Gundam, but the silhouette that appeared in Quess' vision strongly evoked the image of a Gundam – it was the Re-GZ.

"If only that thing wasn't here!"

The sight of the damaged Gundam-like mobile suit, still operational, struck Quess as profoundly unjust. She gripped her beam saber hilt and raised her beam rifle, turning to face the Re-GZ with murderous intent.

"It's a psycho-machine!"

Chan, seated in the Re-GZ's cockpit, identified the Jagd Doga approaching recklessly. In her current state, it was a terrifying enemy.

"What can I use?!" Chan frantically searched for a weapon, realizing she had neither functioning manipulators nor a beam rifle.

"The launcher...?"

Remembering the Re-GZ's waist-mounted launcher, Chan hastily fired a single shot.

"Are you serious?!"

Quess' rage boiled over at the sight of the damaged Gundam-like mobile suit still able to attack. She raised her Jagd Doga's beam rifle and unleashed a barrage at the Re-GZ.

The beams seemed to strike Chan directly, but at that moment, a human-shaped aura enveloped the Re-GZ, distorting the beams' paths.

"What...?"

Quess felt a chill run down her spine.

Chan, too, was stunned by the same light engulfing her. The T-shaped sample case at her waist had begun to glow, filling the cockpit with its radiance.

"W-what is this?!"

As Chan recoiled from the light, Hathaway finally spotted it.

"Quess!"

He directed his Jegan towards the source.

"No way!"

Quess understood the Nu Gundam's barrier, but this light defied explanation. Chan's amplified thoughts, propagated through Quess' psycommu, forced Quess to witness the image herself – a cruel twist of the machine designed to amplify and disperse human will.

"Quess! It's you, isn't it?!"

The visceral voice that assaulted Quess' ears shattered her ability to discern reality. It wasn't an image, Hathaway's Jegan had latched onto her Jagd Doga, calling out to her directly.

Quess couldn't comprehend why she'd allowed this. She could no longer distinguish between reality, imagination, and machine-generated images. Overwhelmed, she screamed into the chaos of sensations.

"What is this?!"

"It's me, Hathaway! I know you're in there, Quess! I'm coming to you!"

Hathaway opened his Jegan's hatch, attempting to enter the Jagd Doga's cockpit, but all he could see was its armored exterior.

"Quess! Where are you?!"

"What is it?! What's happening?!"

Quess' vision was half-filled with the enemy mobile suit on her panoramic display, her mind reeling at the familiar, gentle voice emanating from it.

Chan was astonished by the Jegan that had suddenly latched onto the psycommu-equipped mobile suit she'd been prepared to engage.

"Hathaway?"

The close proximity allowed Chan to hear Hathaway's childlike cries.

"Hathaway! Get out of the way! What are you doing?!"

Chan's hatred might have dispelled the protective light around her. The Jagd Doga's manipulator swatted away the Jegan.

"...?"

But this cemented Chan's resolve to attack.

With a thunderous boom, the Re-GZ's last waist launcher fired at point-blank range, scoring a direct hit on Quess' Jagd Doga.

"Ahhh!"

Hathaway's scream and Quess' existence were extinguished in an instant.

"Quess! Who was it?! Who did this?!"

Before the light from the Jagd Doga's explosion had faded, Hathaway turned towards the Re-GZ.

The Re-GZ drifted – just an object in Hathaway's eyes now. And so, he unleashed his emotions upon it. His Jegan's beam rifle fired wildly at the Re-GZ.



"Hathaway! It's me! Stop it!"

Chan's desperate cries had no hope of reaching Hathaway in his current state.

"Why you!"

Hathaway poured his life into that scream.

Chan, forgetting to operate the arm-raker, raised her hands in front of her face as if to ward off the beams.

With a muted crack, the panoramic display suddenly went black. Dozens of beams struck the Re-GZ, penetrating the cockpit.

This time, the sample didn't activate to protect Chan.

The Re-GZ exploded.

Yet Hathaway continued firing his beam rifle.

"Ah!"

Just as the explosion bloomed outward, a completely different, piercing light scattered in all directions.

Only then did Hathaway realize he had destroyed the Re-GZ.

"What...?!"

Hathaway held his breath as needle-like rays of light pierced his heart.

"No! Chan?"

By the time he understood, the Re-GZ's brilliance had expanded, and the needle-like light had taken flight across the cosmos.

That light raced through the Earth Sphere like a wave of consciousness.

"Chan?!"

In the Nu Gundam's cockpit as it charged through Axis' airspace, Amuro thought he heard Chan's voice in his headphones and turned.

But by then, Chan's physical form had surely ceased to exist.

Seeing a Gears Doga suddenly rise from below, Amuro used his backpack-mounted bazooka to snipe it.

Had he not turned, the Nu Gundam would have been destroyed by the point-blank attack.

In the Sazabi's cockpit, Char felt a strange force shake his body.

"Ugh?!"

It allowed him to evade the Ra Cailum fleet's line of fire.

On the Rewloola's bridge, Nanai felt a similar pressure and covered her mouth.

"...?!"

Captain Lyle clutched his head, staggering forward as dizziness overtook him.

"Captain Lyle?!"

"I'm fine... Nanai, are you okay?"

"Look ahead! The enemy is coming!"

A Clop that had been heavily damaged at Luna II had made contact with the Londo Bell Fleet and was now just making contact with a ship that had launched from Side 5.

On the Clop's deck, crew members preparing for towing suddenly stood up and looked towards Earth. On the ship alongside them, pilots did the same.

Though they couldn't see the battle with the naked eye, the soldiers began to murmur among themselves:

"Axis?"

"Could they be calling for reinforcements?"

"Shouldn't we... go out there?"

Such words spread through the ships, spoken by no one in particular yet echoed by all.

Deep within the bowels of Luna II, the prisoner holding block was a claustrophobic nightmare. Its low ceiling and cramped space, barely thirty square meters, held forty souls in suffocating proximity. The absence of normal suits forced them to endure each other's pungent body odors, a constant assault on their senses.

The oppressive darkness, broken only by the dim glow of emergency lights, added to their misery.

"What was that?" Cunningham Shaw's eyes darted around the confined space, searching for the source of the peculiar phenomenon.

"Dunno... but something flashed. You think there might be a crack somewhere?"

"Can't be an air leak, can it?"

The captured soldiers, driven by a mix of curiosity and concern, began meticulously examining every surface within reach – walls, ceiling, and floor.

"Looked like an aurora, didn't it? Like a band of light zipped by," someone mused, a hint of wonder in their voice.

Unease rippled through the group as they exchanged glances, each seeking reassurance in the other's eyes.

From near the corridor, a voice piped up, "Word is the Neo Zeon bunch are getting restless 'cause they can't make it to Axis..."

A resourceful soldier had fashioned a makeshift listening device from a tube and plastic container, eavesdropping on the vibrations from beyond their confinement.

"A light like an aurora?" Cunningham murmured, her fingers absent-mindedly running through her cropped hair. Her mind drifted to a rain-soaked day at Sweetwater, standing shoulder to shoulder with Amuro.

"It felt just like Amuro's presence..."

In the vast expanse of space where the moon loomed impossibly large, ships patrolled with their crews fixated on the battle raging around Axis. On one such vessel, an officer peering through a telescope suddenly turned to address the bridge, his voice tinged with uncertainty.

"Those light flashes from Axis... does anyone else feel like they're calling to us? Or am I imagining things?"

"What, like Morse code?" another crew member questioned, skepticism evident.

"No, it's... different. Not that kind of light," the first officer insisted, struggling to articulate the strange phenomenon.

"Let me see..." A second officer took his turn at the telescope, his brow furrowing in concentration.

"With all that shaking, how could you make anything out?"

The captain's voice cut through the murmurs, "If we use Getass, could we deploy mobile suits to Axis?"

"Impossible as-is, sir," came the reply, "But if we daisy-chain two or three Geta, we might make it. I'd estimate about a 30% success rate."

The captain's eyes narrowed, determination etched on his face.

"Our fellow Earth Federation Forces are struggling out there. Those who can't make it, we'll recover. Make it happen."

Meanwhile, on Earth, Mirai stumbled on a hidden rock, the powdery soil betraying her footing.

"Mom!" Cheimin cried out, concern evident in her young voice.

"I'm alright, I'm alright," Mirai reassured her, brushing off the incident with a forced smile.

Cheimin shook her backpack wistfully, "If only we could fly through space..."

"Gravity can be such a nuisance at times like these," Mirai chuckled, brushing dirt from her knees. Her eyes then lit up with an idea, "Hey, imagine if we could put a barrier around Earth. We could deflect even meteors!"

"That's true..."

Mirai's expression suddenly turned serious, the weight of such a dream settling on her shoulders.

In a grimy back alley of Hong Kong, a group of children at play suddenly looked skyward, their games forgotten.

"Hey!" one called out.

"Huh?" another responded, confused.

"Didn't you see a light just now?"

"A UFO?" a third suggested, half-joking.

Laughter erupted, but quickly died down as they continued to stare at the thick, stagnant clouds overhead.

"It definitely flashed..." one child insisted, his voice barely above a whisper.

At the police station in Varanasi, the officer on duty was jolted awake by the chief's phone call.

"It's me," the chief's voice crackled through the receiver. "Stop dozing off and bring something to my house."

"Yes, sir..." the officer replied, stifling a yawn.

"Remember that Buddhist book that girl Quess Paraya had? It should still be in evidence at the station."

"P-Probably..." the officer stammered, internally cursing. Why would a Hindu be interested in some outdated Buddhist text?

As he hung up, the officer muttered under his breath, "Has the chief gone hippie on us?" He stretched, yawned widely, then kicked the legs of his sleeping colleague on the nearby sofa.

"Hey, wake up! We've got patrol!"

Elsewhere, the group of hippies who had once accompanied Quess gazed up at the cosmos, their minds grappling with existential questions.

"The Kali Yuga..." one began, his voice taking on a scholarly tone. "The end times of the world. It's spoken of in the epic Markandeya Purana. In it, Buddhism is criticized as merely worshipping stupas filled with the bones of the dead. It speaks of the Kali Yuga's depravity, decay, and the brevity of human life..."

Toffler's explanation carried a weight of conviction that silenced the group momentarily.

"So, isn't it nonsense to pursue enlightenment from just one perspective?" Marian interjected, her voice challenging.

"No, that's not it!" came the passionate reply. "It doesn't matter where you start. Once you reach the heights, you can understand and accept other viewpoints. There's only one truth, after all."

"Sounds like sophistry to me..." Marian muttered, unconvinced.

"You think so? If you feel that way, it's because you're too mired in worldly concerns."

"What?! I'm here with everyone, aren't I? How am I being worldly?" Marian stood up, glaring down at her companions.

"Don't make light of this, Marian!" Christina snapped, her patience wearing thin.

On the bridge of a fleet in geosynchronous orbit, backing Side 4's airspace, a similar tension was building.

"Based on its trajectory, we should be able to intercept Axis just before impact, right?"

"Yes, sir! It'll pass right below us. I'll have the mobile suit squadrons ready!"

"If we can break up Axis even a little, it should alter its course!"

"Excellent! Our fleet will confront Axis head-on. Go as far as you can! We'll pick up anyone who falls short!"

The captain's orders seemed to ignite a fire in the mobile suit pilots. The hatch leading to the catapult deck burst open, and mobile suits launched one after another, streaking towards Axis.

"If you're running short on fuel, have two units push a third to make contact with Axis if necessary!"

On Londonion, Alyona's room was shrouded in darkness, the electricity cut off.

"Hic... hic..."

Soft sobs rose from the depths of the cold room, barely disturbing the still air. Alyona lay face-down on her bed, her back heaving with each anguished breath.

"Amuro..." she whimpered.

She remembered how depressed she'd felt coming home to her cold room after her part-time job. That memory rekindled her sorrow, drawing forth fresh tears. Once she started crying, she felt compelled to continue.

As she wept, she recalled Amuro's coldness – how he'd left her with promises of love, yet never returned. Even understanding there must be reasons didn't quell the surge of emotions.

"Lieutenant!" she cried out, her voice raw with desperation. "Where did you go? I can't stand being alone!"

Her sorrow ran deeper than mere fatigue-induced melancholy, making it all the more painful.

Meanwhile, the Ra Cailum, still firing its main guns while engaging reverse thrusters, made contact with Axis' surface, its hull scraping against the asteroid's rugged terrain.

機動戦士ガンダム

MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM

HIGH-STREAMER: 3

COLOR OF THE COSMOS

CHAPTER-X2

1

The Sazabi, skimming Axis' surface, deftly evaded a barrage of beam rifle fire. Char swung the mobile suit's head around, searching for the Nu Gundam's telltale flash.

"There you are!"

The space surrounding Axis was a chaotic ballet of destruction. Over a dozen mobile suits tangled in deadly combat, streams of fire crisscrossing the void as beams detonated in brilliant explosions.

Amidst this mayhem, Char's keen eye caught the distinctive gleam of the Gundam.

"But it's too late now, Amuro!"

In a heartbeat, the Sazabi maneuvered above the Gundam.

"If I can defeat you, Axis can be stopped!"

Amuro, too, had sensed Char's presence. Both machines, their funnels long since expended, were now armed only with conventional beam rifles and sabers.

BWOOOM!

Twin beams lanced out, each pilot skillfully evading the other's attack.

"Not bad, Amuro! That's why you're my rival!"

"You're holding up well yourself, Char!"

The Gundam hugged Axis' surface, desperately trying to circle around to the nuclear nozzles. It darted into a cavernous port opening.

"What's this?"

Amuro's eyes widened as he spotted a lone ship nestled within the artificial structure. It was Char's fourth vessel, loaded with nuclear warheads.

"Unmanned?"

In a split second, as the Gundam passed the ship, Amuro grasped its significance.

"I see!"

The Gundam pirouetted, its beam rifle unleashing a torrent of energy at the fourth ship.

"I won't let you! Those nukes can't detonate yet!" Char's voice crackled with urgency. "They must explode at a lower altitude to avoid contaminating Earth!"

The Sazabi's beam rifle answered with its own salvo, but it was too late. Dozens of beams had already pierced the fourth ship's hull.

Explosions blossomed across the vessel. Amuro, keeping the Sazabi at bay, initiated evasive maneuvers towards the nozzles.

BAGOOM!

The ship's nuclear payload detonated.

"Ugh...?!"

The Sazabi, in hot pursuit of the Gundam, was caught in the blast. The shockwave hurled Char's crimson mobile suit northward.

Amuro's panoramic display lit up with the massive explosion behind him.

"Will this explosion act as a brake on Axis?"

For Char, this nuclear detonation in Axis' path was meant for both deceleration and Earth contamination. Its effectiveness couldn't be dismissed.

The nuclear fireball erupted into a swirling vortex of light, violently shaking Axis to its core.

"But... it's not enough!"

Amuro remained laser-focused on his ultimate goal: destroying the nuclear nozzles.

Deep within Axis' quaking tunnels, Bright and his demolition team piloted their clumsy Meds and Petite mobile suits, bouncing off the walls.

"Next right turn!"

A Med's ungainly manipulator gestured to the trailing Petite Mobiles. The small convoy bounded off in the indicated direction.

"A nuclear-scale explosion at Axis' fore?"

Bright, observing the direction of the tremors rocking Axis, finally understood. He recalled one Neo Zeon ship that had mysteriously vanished from view.

The tunnels were a maelstrom of debris. Rocks ricocheted off the walls and canopies, a nerve-wracking experience even in normal suits.

In the pitch darkness, only the Petite Mobiles' headlights illuminated their path, revealing rough stone surfaces, metal support beams, and the constant hail of rebounding rocks.

The tunnels' dimensions were inconsistent. They had to navigate using only Earth Federation maps, pushing towards their designated target.

"This is it!"

Amuro maneuvered the Gundam beneath Axis' nuclear nozzles, its main propulsion. The beam rifle roared to life once more.

Looking skyward, he saw explosions erupt from the damaged nozzle base, but the adjacent nozzles remained intact.

Discarding the depleted beam rifle, Amuro launched the Gundam upward, latching onto an operational nozzle's base.

A T-shaped image flashed across his mind.

"..."

Noting its back-to-front trajectory, Amuro twisted the Gundam's frame. DOBABABA!

Beam rifle shots meant for the Gundam exploded nearby. Amuro evaded.

A Geara Doga descended upon him.

Grateful for the psychic warning, Amuro instinctively rolled the Gundam behind cover.

"Still not finished!"

As Amuro turned the Gundam, he spotted the Ra Cailum's bridge silhouetted against Axis' ridgeline.

"Bright...?! You've infiltrated Axis?"

The Gundam, now stripped of its shield, had no sure way to neutralize the Geara Doga's assault. As the enemy mobile suit closed in along the nozzle's underside, Amuro pressed the Gundam against the rocky surface, readying its beam saber.

A shower of stone fragments erupted. The Geara Doga plunged into the debris cloud, momentarily disoriented.

"Now!"

Amuro sprang the Gundam upward, delivering a powerful kick aimed at the Geara Doga's cockpit.

THUD!

The impact likely stunned the pilot, but Amuro couldn't be certain of unconsciousness.

The Gundam curled its upper body, swinging down its beam saber to sever the enemy's manipulators and snatch away its rifle.

"Can I use this?"

With a functioning energy pack, he might manage one or two shots. Normally, these weapons drew power directly from the mobile suit's main reactor.

"Tch!"

As Amuro attempted to return the Gundam to the nozzle's base, a bazooka round detonated nearby, sending the mobile suit tumbling.

"...?"

Atop another ridgeline stood the Sazabi, having just discarded its bazooka.

"Axis has already entered Earth's gravity well! It's falling!"

Char's laughter rang out as he rediscovered the Gundam. Amuro hunched the Gundam's upper body, attempting to fire the Geara Doga's beam rifle. It failed to respond.

"Damn...!"

The Sazabi pounced. Two beam sabers clashed in a furious impact.

VWOOM!

As the energy blades collided, their destabilized edges wavered and distorted.

"Persistent, aren't you?!"

"That's my creed!"

GYAAN! A spray of oil droplets glittered in the void of space. Both mobile suits sustained damage in the fierce exchange.

2

"This is it!"

At Bright's command, each Petite Mobile began setting explosives in the quaking, darkened tunnels. In some cases, it was as simple as planting timers in the explosive storage rooms. The Petite Mobiles' manipulators, tipped with fiber-optic-like tubes, moved with uncanny dexterity. All around them, loose stones continued to ricochet off the tunnel walls.

"The nuclear engine valves are this way!"

Tooth directed the mechanics. Another Petite Mobile advanced to manipulate the valves.

"Is this it?" Bright queried.

"Connect it here," Tooth responded.

"No, sir! Over here!"

A technician, having emerged from a Petite Mobile, grabbed a cable from the Med's control panel. As he connected it to another panel, a flying stone shattered his normal suit's visor.

"Ngh...! Aagh!"

Gyururu...

The Sazabi's beam saber flickered and contracted.

"Damn! The beam saber, it's...?!"

"I'm afraid that's as far as you go, Char!"

Amuro, poised to charge with the Gundam, watched as his own beam saber sputtered and faded away.

"Tch!" He clicked his tongue in frustration.

"Ugh...?"

Char observed the Gundam suddenly darting towards the Ra Cailum.

"Amuro?!"

The Sazabi gave chase, but the Gundam inexplicably halted.

"What's this?"

The Gundam had stopped at a corner of a partially melted structure, near what appeared to be an entrance to Axis' tunnels.

"Amuro?"

On his magnified display, Char saw Amuro exiting the Gundam's cockpit. In that instant, he grasped Amuro's intentions.

"Bright's inside Axis too?!"

The idea was admirable coming from a former comrade, but Char knew he had to stop it.

"They're trying to split Axis from the inside?!"

Char landed the Sazabi at another entry point and entered the tunnels himself. Despite the external damage, he was confident in his knowledge of Axis' internal layout.

Using his pilot suit's verniers, Char slipped into the passageway.

"..."

After two turns, Char extinguished his headlamp. The glow from fluorescent panels on the walls and ceiling provided enough illumination to discern shapes.

"Bright!"

Amuro traced the infiltration route, following wall sector codes.

"...!"

A bazooka floated by. Amuro grabbed it, confirming its functionality as he drifted along.

"The Federation knows Axis' weaknesses... if it's split, the chance of it falling to Earth becomes zero..."

Char, growing anxious, opened a locker at a tunnel junction and retrieved several grenades.

"Hmph..."

Even in such dire circumstances, both men sought every advantage.

"...?!"

Char heard Amuro's voice through the static in his headphones. It wasn't a conversation, but a one-sided persuasion.

"You don't understand what it takes to change the world!"

The headphones picked up nearby radio waves.

"He's found me first..."

Char felt a wave of despair. In this situation, Amuro would likely shoot on sight... but from where was he aiming?

Char kept his helmet still, moving only his eyes to scan his surroundings.

"...?"

"Revolutions have always been led by intellectuals. But those who tried to revolutionize based on ideals alone always resorted to extremism."

A forgotten transceiver hung on the wall.

"So that's it..."

If there were transceivers throughout the tunnels, Amuro could be broadcasting from anywhere.

"He hasn't spotted me yet..."

Char concluded, resuming his movement.

"As a revolution progresses and tries to maintain its initial objectives, it creates organizations and propagates its message. But those original goals and ideals get swallowed up by bureaucrats and the masses. Then, it's the intellectuals who flee from society in disgust. Char, do you realize that describes you perfectly?"

"Amuro—"

Char growled softly, then suddenly darted sideways, hurling a grenade.

Amuro emerged from a wall recess, countering the blast, and charged towards Char with the bazooka raised.

"There you are!"

Char threw another grenade as Amuro fired the bazooka.

A blinding flash! An explosion!

The shockwave sent Amuro hurtling upwards through the tunnel. The rock face cracked, and through the fissure, Amuro was flung into the void of space. An unbelievable stroke of luck. Ejected into emptiness, Amuro spun wildly.

"Ugh...?! Damn...!"

Activating his verniers to stop his rotation, Amuro struggled to return to Axis' surface.

The nuclear engine control room shuddered violently, the very air seeming to vibrate with each tremor. Headlights danced frantically in the darkness, illuminating the chaos.

"We've got it!"

"Excellent!"

At Bright's acknowledgment, Tooth's Petite Mobile issued the retreat order. Ominous timer displays began their eerie countdown at multiple points.

"If the Ra Cailum's gone when we get out, this is it for us."

"Then we'll hitch a ride on Axis back to Earth, eh?"

"No thanks!"

They exchanged forced bravado, struggling to mask their fear.

The Petite Mobiles ascended through the tunnels, following guide wires and fluorescent markers towards the surface.

Emerging from Axis, Bright saw the Ra Cailum's last sister ship positioned off its port side, continuing to bombard and impede Rewloola's advance.

"The Ra Cailum's still kicking! Return to the ship!"

At Bright's command, the Petite Mobiles bounded onto the Ra Cailum's deck. Above them, the drifting Amuro spotted the battered Rewloola rising near the ridgeline. Neither side now engaged in potentially fatal mega particle cannon exchanges.

Amidst the storm of beam-blasted rock fragments, Amuro kicked off a larger chunk, propelling himself towards the Gundam.

"The Sazabi...?"

He glimpsed the Sazabi emerging from behind a mass of melted metal on Axis.

"Char, you...?!"

"Amuro?!"

Char's keen eyes didn't miss Amuro slipping into the Gundam.

"Take this!"

The Sazabi's leap to kick the Gundam coincided perfectly with Amuro tumbling into the cockpit. The impact reverberated through both machines with a bone-jarring crunch.

A high-pitched whine filled the air as the Gundam's engine roared to life. The Sazabi, straddling the forward-tilted Gundam, brought its full weight down on one of the Gundam's arms. Metal screamed and buckled under the pressure.

"Ugh...?!"

As the Sazabi jumped for another body slam, the Gundam twisted away with a screech of protesting metal.

"What?!"

"Hah!"

The two titans clashed again, their manipulators interlocking with a teeth-rattling clang. Joints cracked and groaned under the strain, hydraulic fluid spraying out like arterial blood.

The two machines, pushing back and forth, remained anchored to Axis' surface as if gravity still held sway. Neither used their tail nozzles, locked in a pure test of mechanical might.

"Ch-Char...!"

"Amuroooo...!"

For a moment, the Gundam's manipulators forced the Sazabi back, but Char's machine redirected the momentum, sliding along the surface to slip beneath the Gundam.

Once more, the two locked in combat.

As if in response, both cockpits' panoramic displays began to glow, emitting a strange, pulsating hum.

"What?"

"Ugh?! What's this vibration?"

The stream of light seemed to cascade from the rear to the front of both cockpits. Char shuddered at the ribbon-like illumination.

In that split second of distraction, the Gundam's punch connected with devastating force.

"Ugh! This sound... Is it the psycommu resonating...?!"

Perceiving the mysterious light's nature, Char immediately ascended in the Sazabi.

Amuro, seeing the Sazabi through the light waves, gave chase.

"You won't escape!"

"Oh, really?"

Char, judging it time to rendezvous with Rewloola, jettisoned the Sazabi's head armor and detached the cockpit capsule from the main body.

"What?! A survival system?"

Amuro fired the Gundam's manipulator-mounted birdlime. It latched onto the glowing cockpit capsule, altering its trajectory.

"Ah...?!"

"You're not going anywhere alone!"

Char's capsule, its course bent by the trap, drifted towards Axis' surface. The Gundam pursued.

A chain of explosions raced between Axis' engine section and residential area, each detonation building upon the last in a cacophony of destruction. Fire and debris erupted across the surface in a terrifying display of raw power.

As Char's capsule tumbled towards the inferno, the Gundam's manipulator seized it with a metallic screech.

"Ugh! Amuro!"

Some of Char's capsule displays still functioned, allowing him to partially observe the Gundam's actions.

"Hmph! At this altitude, half of Axis will still fall to Earth."

"What?!"



Amuro attempted to halt the Gundam's descent and ascend, but inertia dragged them towards Axis' surface. Below, the explosions within Axis expanded.

"I won't let that happen!"

Amuro maneuvered the Gundam, still clutching the capsule, to circle around to Axis' front.

3

"Axis is breaking apart!"

Nanai heard the panicked cry with a sinking heart.

"Fall back!"

Lyle's order came too late for her to countermand. She could only think, "The Captain's efforts... all for nothing."

It was pure despair.

"Captain... Please concentrate our mobile suit squadrons to bolster the ship's defenses!"

That was all Nanai could manage to tell the captain.

The Ra Cailum ascended past Hathaway's drifting Jegan.

"What... what's happening?"

Hathaway stared blankly at the terrifying flashes of light engulfing Axis on his magnified display, unable to comprehend their meaning.

The sight was awe-inspiring and terrible. With Earth as a massive backdrop, Axis split in two, then fragmented into countless pieces, each separation marked by brilliant explosions.

Hathaway didn't even notice the saliva floating around his mouth in the zero-gravity.

The forward section of Axis, including the dock block, formed the largest fragment. The Gundam maneuvered around to its front, already heavily scarred by nuclear blasts.

But...

"No... not this part! The front section's been accelerated by the explosion that split Axis. It's the rear that's falling!"

"Amuro... you no longer have the power to stop Axis. Give it up!"

"Shut up!"

Amuro brought the Gundam closer to Axis' rear fragment.

"We'll slow it down or change its course! You help too!"

The Gundam's manipulator slammed Char's capsule against Axis' surface.

"Gah!"

Char's emergency hatch no longer functioned.

"Amuro!"

The Gundam's tail nozzles flared to maximum output, Earth looming large behind it.

"Until I'm certain, I'll try anything! That's our job – we who polluted space!" Amuro's scream was raw with determination.

The Gundam's nozzles overloaded, turning white-hot. The heat began to make the Gundam itself glow incandescent.

The Ra Cailum continued its retreat through the debris field left by Axis' fragmentation.

"The front section is definitely moving away from Earth!"

"Where's the Gundam? Why hasn't it returned?"

"It seems to have latched onto the rear fragment. It might be engaged with enemy mobile suits!"

"At this rate, the rear section will be pulled in by Earth's gravity and fall."

"Is there no chance it'll burn up in the atmosphere?"

"If we could just alter its trajectory a little more...!" Meunier Thuhigg cried out.

"Move the Ra Cailum forward! We'll use it to change Axis' course!"

"That's insane! Our armor is already in tatters!" Meran protested.

The Gundam, clinging to Axis' descending rear section, glowed ever brighter. It was like an ant trying to push back an advancing elephant.

"Damn it!"

"Amuro – you seem to be doing something incredibly stupid! Hah!"

Though Char cursed, a flicker of doubt crept into his mind. The ribbon of light in his cockpit still hadn't faded.

"What is this light?"

"Huh?"

"Mobile suit squadrons approaching the rear section!"

"Identify them!"

"Enemy? No, they're friendly!"

Bright opened the rear observation display to see dozens of tail nozzle lights.

"Reinforcements?"

"Well, well..."

Meran ordered the observation crew to quickly identify the lights.

"...?"

On the Ra Cailum's displays, more and more nozzle flares appeared, all heading towards Axis.

"Don't they realize we're here?"

A few Jegans seemed to circle to Axis' front.

"Which unit are they?!"

Several older model mobile suits formed up and slid towards Axis.

"It's the 88th Fleet's mobile suit squadron!"

Methis reported to Bright, his voice trembling.

With a thunderous impact, an Earth Federation mobile suit latched onto Axis next to the Gundam, mimicking its actions.

"What the...?!"

Amuro was stunned. These weren't from the Londo Bell fleet.

Another Jegan, from yet another fleet, attached itself to the Gundam's side.

"Fall back! I can handle this alone!"

"We can't do that!"

It wasn't the voice of a Londo Bell pilot.

"We can't let you have all the glory, Lieutenant!"

Another pilot altogether.

More and more mobile suits joined, their tail nozzles at full blast, all pushing against Axis.

"Reinforcements... They've come to help us...?"

They weren't approaching from just one direction. They came from the far side of Earth too, latching onto Axis.

Dozens of them...

But Axis was far too massive to be pushed back or diverted by the thrust of these insignificant mobile suits.

It continued its inexorable descent, approaching Earth's dayside.

"Stay back! Don't come any closer! The Gundam will handle this!"

Amuro's cockpit was already glowing red-hot.

"But...!"

"You'll melt from the overload! Retreat!"

"Not yet!"

The mobile suits clinging to Axis began to overheat from the strain. Their fate could only be self-destruction...

"It's no use! Get away!"

The point where the Gundam and Char's capsule touched began to glow, the light expanding.

"Just a little more! Then Axis will completely... Uwah!"

An overheated mobile suit finally exploded.

Simultaneously, the light expanding from the Gundam and capsule dispersed the explosion's debris.

"Char! I'll halt Axis even if I have to drain your very essence!"

"Does the psycommu equipped in the frames of the Sazabi and Gundam produce a different power when they resonate...?"

Char tried to operate his console panel, but the violent shaking made it impossible.

"What did you say?! Char!"

"The psycommu... it's channeling our wills...!"

"Everyone, get away!"

The resonance between the Gundam and capsule intensified, the light growing blinding. Below them, Earth's surface transitioned from day to night.

The white waves of overloaded mobile suits collided with the psycommu's light, ricocheting off the machines clinging to Axis from all sides. The spectacle resembled a vivid aurora.

"Gah?! Did the Gundam just push me away?!"

The aurora-like light deflected another mobile suit.

"Ah?! We can't push like this!"

The Gundam's aurora seemed to envelop all of Axis, repelling the mobile suits that had gathered to help.

Moreover, the light transformed into ribbon-like bands, expanding and stretching, reflecting images of Axis as they flowed to encircle Earth.

In a city on Earth's night side, people observed a shimmering mirage of Axis reflected in the light bands, visible through the cloudy sky above a skyscraper.

"What's that? A meteor?"

"No... it's not like an aurora either. The light's not flickering..."

A man peering from a room with a radio commented.

"That might be Axis. There's a war going on up there, you know."

"Why can we see it? Is it right above us?"

"It seems a bit different..."

"Lieutenant Amuro! We'll help stop Axis too! Whoa!"

Such voices, thick with static, emanated from the room's radio. The men gazing skyward strained their eyes, fixated on the bands of light.

On an African plain at dusk, black children in jeans ran desperately towards the mirage of Axis backdropped by the aurora.

"Hooo! Yoyoyo!"

Their war cries, learned from who knows where, echoed like those of ancient warriors.

Alyona switched on the TV, her face still puffy from crying.

"According to reports from Londo Bell's observation team, Axis has split apart, with some portions moving away from Earth... However, there are no details about the battle..."

The screen showed only the usual view of Earth.

"Oh... Amuro...!"

Fresh tears overwhelmed Alyona before the old ones could dry.

The waves emanating from the overloaded Gundam continued to repel other mobile suits.

"Lieutenant! What's the point of us coming if you're just going to push us away?!"

"No need for extra lives! Char and I are enough! Thanks for the cover!"

More mobile suits were flung back by the Gundam's expanding, white-hot waves.

"Lieutenant Amuro!"

Axis thundered forward, while the reinforcement mobile suits, thrown back, could only watch helplessly.

"What is this power? This force...? Char! I've definitely taken your power, but why is this happening?!"

"What's going on?!"

Both cockpits were scorching hot. Char, who had long since removed his helmet, wiped away sweat.

"The only explanation is that the psycho-frames are resonating..."

"We're certain that the Gundam is repelling other mobile suits."

Claire Thrune reported to Bright, based on reports from various mobile suits.

"What are you doing, Gundam?"

"I-I don't know... but the Gundam is trying its best..."

Claire's refined face was close to Bright's as she spoke.

"Keep gathering intel!"

"Yes, sir..."

"But Axis' course isn't changing..."

Bright felt he might have made a grave error in wasting the nuclear bombs.

A boy, suddenly awake, was struck by an odd sensation and approached the window.

"Are the stars... moving?"

The light he saw wasn't stars. Aurora-like bands of light hung in the cloudy sky, faintly reflecting the mirage of Axis.

"What is that...?"

The treetops surrounding the house rustled softly.

"Waaah!"

A newborn's cry pierced a young father's ears. He had been boiling water in the garden hearth and hurriedly checked its temperature after glancing up at the sky.

The same mirage floated in the cloudy heavens above.

"That's not a meteor..."

Even to this naturalist, the phenomenon was inexplicable.

A child turned away from their book, looking out a colony window at the rotating space beyond.

Earth came into view.

"Huh?"

Behind Earth, a sharp light distinct from the sun's rays could be seen dispersing, as if encircling the planet.

"What could that be...?"

"Whoa...!"

Cameron Bloom fingers froze mid-keystroke as jubilant cries erupted from the corner of the office. Overtime workers, their faces alight with excitement, shared the news.

"The Ra Cailum stands alone! Has Neo Zeon fallen at last?"

"It's over! Victory is ours, no question!"

As the celebratory voices washed over him, Cameron felt the weight of his future crumbling. Londo Bell's triumph heralded the current government's entrenchment. Even if his contributions were acknowledged, the specter of his transgressions loomed large. With a heavy heart, he decided to call it a night.

The white light centered on the Gundam formed a luminous wall, stretching across Axis and Earth's front. Though the light moved with an almost serene grace, the Gundam and capsule shuddered violently within its embrace.

"I sought only to face you as an equal," Char's voice crackled through the comm. "That's why I gifted you the psycho-frame technology. Can you hear me, Amuro?"

"You?! How dare you trivialize this!" Amuro snarled, his words barely audible over the thunderous vibrations of his cockpit, now a cauldron of searing heat.

"Yes, that was my intent. But there was more. I yearned to atone for the fear of polluting Earth. I bet on your power, Amuro... But what's happening now, I never planned for..."

"The psycommu calling to each other?! Then what purpose does this light serve?"

The incandescent aura enveloping both machines stretched its tendrils around Axis before unfurling into a luminous band encircling Earth. It was as if the cosmos itself was guiding Axis onto a new path.

Trembling violently, Axis began to shift its trajectory, riding the crest of the ethereal light wall. Within his blistering cockpit, Amuro's tears flowed freely, evaporating in the intense heat.

"This machine! This machine seems to have become the center of the world..."

The displaced mobile suits could only bear witness to the unfolding miracle.

On the Ra Cailum's bridge, a cry of astonishment pierced the tense atmosphere.

"A-Axis is definitely changing course!"

"Tell the Gundam, tell Amuro! Order him to pull back now!"

"Impossible! The overload wave has blacked out all communications!"

"Amuro!"

In his sweltering capsule, Char retrieved a locket from his normal suit, gazing at the solitary photo within.

"Artesia... Perhaps I acted merely to escape your scorn, to prove I wasn't the failure of a brother you believed me to be. Entrusting fate to Amuro like this... But to think it would come to this..."

He moistened his parched lips, attempting a wry smile. Artesia, his sister Sayla Mass, lost somewhere on the blue planet below.

"But perhaps now, at last, you might look upon me with pride?"

In that instant, the Gundam erupted in a blinding flash, engulfing Char's capsule in its radiance.

The Ra Cailum and the reinforcement mobile suits floated amidst the scattered debris of Axis. Earth loomed large and blue.

Rewloola, now alone, turned towards Sweetwater.

In his Jegan, Hathaway clung to the open hatch, adrift in the vastness of space, awaiting a rescue that seemed an eternity away.

"Quess... Quess..." he whimpered, curled into himself, quiet sobs wracking his frame.

The aurora-like phenomenon that had encircled Earth dissipated, leaving no trace of its ephemeral beauty.

Space reclaimed its quiet dominion.

Afterword

As ***Hi-Streamer*** was serialized in ***Animage*** magazine and later presented as ***Char's Counterattack***, I understand some readers may feel confused. I, too, found myself in a predicament, unable to make the final decision on this matter. I'd like you to understand that this situation arose from a misalignment of good intentions among all parties involved.

Initially, I had a personal desire to craft ***Hi-Streamer*** as a long-running story, separate from the business constraints of television. The Animage editorial team graciously agreed to this vision. We had envisioned a narrative that would incorporate elements of the ***Char's Counterattack*** movie while continuing as ***Hi-Streamer***, extending beyond the film's scope.

However, when this work was interpreted solely as material for the film, the possibility of a continuing story vanished, leaving my original intentions hanging in the air. To address this, we reintroduced the ***Hi-Streamer*** title alongside ***Char's Counterattack*** from the second volume. Yet, unless there's an outpouring of support from readers, I fear ***Hi-Streamer*** may not see a true revival.

As an author, it's painful to imagine this theme eternally continuing under the Gundam banner. But this very experience forces me to acknowledge the overwhelming reality of what Gundam has become.

Reflecting on Gundam's beginnings, I never imagined fiction could so deeply intertwine with real life. It's truly a blessing. My earlier thoughts were merely the calculated musings of an adult individual.

I must admit, my desire to break away from Gundam stemmed from a wish to establish myself as an independent man, not forever known as Tomino of Gundam. Despite our work existing thanks to supportive readers and viewers, we adults often selfishly believe we can do anything we want.

This is the unsavory side of adulthood and the reality of human nature. It's time to internalize our predecessors' wisdom about the importance of gratitude towards others.

The rest is up to your critique.

With that in mind, if I'm allowed to write the next story, I spend my days brooding, feeling as if I'm sitting in the defendant's seat.

I'm truly grateful for your continued support.

Thank you so very much.

Yoshiyuki Tomino

Yoshiyuki Tomino Interview

—Your recently completed work was previously known as the "Tokuma Version/Char's Counterattack" (Animage Bunko). This was to distinguish it from the Kadokawa Version (Sneaker Bunko) of the same title. It originally began serialization in Animage a year before the release of the movie Char's Counterattack (May 1987 issue) under the subtitle Hi-Streamer, which might cause some confusion. Now, after fourteen years, it's been republished under its official title. First, I'd like to ask you, Director, why was it serialized in Animage under the title Hi-Streamer? And how far along was the movie project at that time?

Tomino: I don't really remember that. However, at the time, the important issue was how to distance myself from Gundam. I wanted a new title, so I came up with Hi-Streamer. I'm not particularly versatile, so I couldn't completely reinvent Gundam, but the prevailing sentiment was about constant forward motion, facing challenges head-on. That's what it signified to me.

—In the afterword of the previous edition, you wrote that you wanted to continue writing this work under the title Hi-Streamer. Considering the timeline of the story, does Hathaway's Flash fit into that concept?

Tomino: Yes, that's right. While there's no direct narrative connection, that was the intention. For me, the theme of Hi-Streamer was whether I could effectively write a tragedy, and Hathaway is an extension of that. I hoped it could stand as an original work, not just a Gundam spin-off. But looking at where we are nearly twenty years later, it's evident that it didn't quite succeed in that regard.

—It didn't work out?

Tomino: Are you kidding me? Look at the title: "Mobile Suit Gundam" is still there, isn't it? (laughs) If it had been successful, you'd be saying, "Let's go with the title Hi-Streamer. We don't need 'Gundam,' right?" (laughs) I was trying to outdo the main series with an offshoot. I wanted to create something substantial, even if it was just a side branch. It wasn't a creative impulse, it was a business strategy. That's why it failed. Step back and look at it, and you'll see it's just been absorbed back into the main Gundam series.

To digress a bit, but you know how people talk about being possessed or cursed? Like, "Our family is bound by this fate"? For me, Gundam was like a vengeful spirit for a while. I thought I'd established Hi-Streamer as a separate entity, but before I knew it, I was just puttering around in the

confines of the main franchise. People were saying, "Hey, you're not really supporting the main series, are you?" It stings, but I have to admit I didn't have the strength to stand on my own. Even now, 20 years later, the Gundam ghost still haunts me through editors and various people. But recently, I've learned to shrug it off. It's all in your head, you know? I've gotten used to it.

—When did that happen?

Tomino: After finishing Turn A Gundam, everything became clear. Until I started working on Brain Powerd, I really thought I was cursed by Gundam, including this structure. But as I began to understand my own mental framework, I realized it was just my own perception. Back then, though, it was truly awful.

—So you weren't fully "exorcised" during Brain Powerd?

Tomino: Brain Powerd was just rehab for creating Turn A. The whole concept of Brain Powerd started with the premise of making another Gundam afterward. But I can tell you this – if I hadn't done Turn A Gundam, I might still be cursing people with this re-release, thinking, "They still won't let me drop the Gundam name. Damn it all!" *(laughs)* But cursing others is exhausting. You can feel yourself becoming twisted.

—It seems that Turn A not only lifted the curse from you, but from the entire Gundam franchise as well.

Tomino: That would be nice, but... Sunrise is currently making Gundam SEED, and I hope the staff involved are doing it with the intention of ending Gundam. I told them to do as they like without worrying about various things. As creators, it must be frustrating to have to work on someone else's title, so I want them to channel that frustration into something incredible. The curse is real and it's bigger than any individual, so it's tough, you know?

—The movie Char's Counterattack is highly regarded by fans, but what was your mentality like during its production?

Tomino: You might not believe it, but I was at my wit's end. I recently saw it again - or rather, was made to see it - at an event in New York. Sure, I tried to approach it positively since I had the chance to make a movie, but I was so focused on just wrapping things up that it's not a visually appealing work. It doesn't feel good to watch.

—I thought it was a very passionate film.

Tomino: Of course it was. I was a professional, even back then. A professional's skill is to hide the creator's emotional state. That's a given. These days, you see a lot of films lacking that skill. I'm not just talking about anime – even when I watch Hollywood blockbusters, I can see the apathy, like they're just going through the motions. It's frustrating when those still outsell my movies or win awards. I should be happy about the New York screening on 35mm film in a big theater on Broadway, but it's not like it was a road show release, so I can't really celebrate. In my case, unless I reach my goal, I feel like a failure. Given the fan following, maybe "failure" is too strong a word, but I feel pathetic about my directorial shortcomings when I can't compete with Harry Potter or Spirited Away.

—It's amazing how you never give up on things that many people would ignore or abandon for self-protection. "Newtypes" are a crucial concept in the Gundam world, and looking at characters like Amuro and Char, it seems their ability is "a strong sensitivity to misfortune, but an absolute refusal to give up." In other words, it's you, Director Tomino (laughs).

Tomino: Maybe so (laughs). These days, there are more people who can't endure things, but being unable to endure and refusing to give up are superficially similar words with completely different meanings.

—If we strip away the "mecha" filter from the Gundam narrative, what remains is the story of "Newtypes" – people who can't give up. How much sympathy do you think young fans and creators feel for this core concept?

Tomino: There might not be much, to be honest. On the creators' side, many have joined since anime became a socially recognized medium, treating it as just another profession. They might love drawing or the Gundam-esque world and characters, but few have that "something extra." I can't say for certain without talking to individual staff members, but it's natural that people joining a socially accepted profession would have a fundamentally different mentality and approach compared to those who had no choice but to work in an unrecognized field. It was my refusal to give up and my constant search for new forms of expression that allowed me to create the early Gundam series.

So, if there's anyone in the next generation who wants to create something new, something like the Gundam of that era, I want them to see me as their enemy. They should be extremely wary of feeling sympathy towards me. Why? It might sound arrogant, but when I was briefly at Mushi Pro, I saw Osamu Tezuka as my fundamental enemy. Of course, I respected him and looked up to him as a senior, but in terms of creating stories professionally, I always saw him as an adversary. I had this compulsion that I had to see him that way to stay relevant. That's why I fought to deviate from Tezuka's

original framework in Triton. It was only later that I could finally have good conversations with Mr. Tezuka.

—*In the afterword of Triton of the Sea in Kodansha's Tezuka Complete Works, there was a sense of reluctant admiration for the anime version from Tezuka.*

Tomino: I only vaguely remember, but was there?

—*There was. It's a good master-disciple relationship. By the way, Char's Counterattack concludes the Gundam story that began with Amuro and Char, but how important are these two to you?*

Tomino: Not important at all (laughs). Creating popular fiction is like this, if you worry about such things, you can't surpass Chikamatsu, can you? Chikamatsu didn't intend to create classics, he wrote popular fiction. You've got to aim to beat that. I don't have the skills to aim for the Akutagawa or Naoki Prize, so I want to beat Chikamatsu. Is that so wrong? (laughs)

—*Mentioning Chikamatsu explains why your novels have such a high romance quotient. In Hi-Streamer, Amuro's always chasing after one girl after another. It's like The Life of an Amorous Man (laughs). By the way, I heard that Amuro was created as an antithesis to the anime fans of that time.*

Tomino: Amuro and Kamille were both clearly positioned as antitheses. As a creator of popular fiction, I naturally created them intentionally based on the social climate of the time, but I never expected fans to accept them.

—*What about Lalah's character?*

Tomino: She's another entirely intentional character. When I consider whether I have any talent as a popular fiction writer, Lalah makes me think I might not have any at all. Because she's a character that doesn't exist within me, I'm just moving her based on pure logic. In other words, I'm too conscious of the peripheral elements and can't create the broader, more expansive aspects that popular fiction should have. That's why I'm utterly hopeless when it comes to moving characters like Lalah or Quess.

—*What power do you think popular fiction holds? Which characters do you feel embody this power?*

Tomino: Among the Gundam characters, the ones created without any business-oriented intentions, purely from my subconscious, are Ramba Ral and his wife. I still love them very much. Those two came into being so naturally, and even at my age now, I think, "Man, this couple is great." That's

why I remember Hamon's last lines so well. I didn't remember anything from Char's Counterattack until I watched it recently. It's that kind of subconscious awareness, that feeling of "this is the only way it could be," that I want to capture. Even when working on anime, I want to do work that people will recognize as coming from a true creator of popular fiction. That's why I'm now deliberately constraining myself with works like King Gainer in an attempt to be a true popular fiction creator. This makes me incredibly happy. The thought that I might be able to reclaim something I once discarded fills me with joy. The sense of living in the moment – right now, I am truly Hi-Streamer.