

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM CHAR'S COUNTERATTACK

Beltorchika's Children



A NOVEL BY
YOSHIYUKI TOMINO

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM CHAR'S COUNTERATTACK

Beltonchika's Children

Universal Century 0093. Char Aznable, once lost to the world, has risen from the shadows to revive the Neo Zeon forces. Turning a blind eye to the pleas of the space colonists, the Earth Federation government wallows in its terrestrial indolence. Char, ever audacious, wages a war against them, hatching a plan to hurl an asteroid at Earth, altering its climate, and triggering an artificial Ice Age. The consequences would not only render Earth uninhabitable, but also subject countless innocent lives to brutal purging at Char's hand!

Amuro Ray, Char's age-old rival, dares to stand against this grand design. Behold the spectacle of unparalleled proportions in the history of animated storytelling: the original narrative of "Mobile Suit Gundam: Char's Counterattack" makes its triumphant debut!



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

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For nearly a century, the majority of mankind has called outer space home, bearing and raising their children there. However, the existence of the lush and verdant Earth adrift in space still allowed the existence of others to eat the bread of idleness.

Among them, two men, once fierce enemies and later uneasy allies, were enthralled by the same woman. As time passed, the two men made space their home, though each for their own intentions.

A third time was about to be, but that was not because fate ordained it for the two. Instead, it was their resolve that worked that way.

But that wasn't planned either.

The two had flexibility in their resolve, enabling them to adapt to each new phase in a changing situation. A fear of suffocating from being rutted to one point, bound to one will, must have made them develop such a habit.

But humans are beings having only one body. Memories accumulated deep within their bodies, mixed with their emotions, bind them from becoming what they should be.

For this reason, yearning for change, they desired to challenge one another. If they had encountered others who could truly test them, the two should not have come into conflict.

Yet unfortunately, they could not find any new Newtypes around them.

Yoshiyuki Tomino

PART 1 **AMURO & BELTORCHIKA**



Being able to wake up late in the morning is truly a blessing. Though just because it is, if it were always like that, it would probably be more of an affliction. If life were solely about enjoyment, we would have to invent things that would never cease to entertain us. If that were the case, then human sensibility would be focused solely on a singular point, harboring dark sides that could turn murder into pleasure.

However, living isn't about seeking out such violent phenomena.

Man is slow and stupid, and so long as we have comforts now, it is enough to enjoy the moments in life without wanting anything more than that. So much of our lives end with what we eat, what we wear, when we go to the bathroom, and when we should take a shower. And yet, we can't do that because we can't acquire food, water to wash, and a 'place' to do so every day without thinking about it.

To do all those things, we have to foster some sense of thriftiness and budget. To that end, we are forced to have the perseverance to work, whether robbing Peter to pay Paul or earning cash daily. It is a lot of work, but because of those troubles, a pint of beer at a pub at night and idle chit-chat is a sense of catharsis, and that fun, that pleasure becomes all the sweeter. What would a vacation be if everything we did in our daily lives were like a vacation?

"Bloodsports... I've heard the rumors about them."

"Mmm..." Beltorchika pouted her thick lips, murmuring and burying them into Amuro's chest.

"So, is it true what they say?"

"There seem to be games like that on Earth."

"So, you're saying that if your whole life had been easy, like a vacation, you wouldn't be able to survive?"

"That's exactly what man is like now. Do you think you could make good decisions about what brings pleasure if everything was always easy?"

"Heh heh heh."

Beltorchika made a rather salacious sound, her throat quivering, "When I'm with you, I always feel good. I don't care about any of that."

"Really now... Prove it to me without blushing. And get off me; your chin hurts. It's way too sharp."

Amuro grabbed a handful of her blonde hair and tried to pry her off of him.

"Ow, that hurts!" she protested.

Scrunching her nose in disgust, she sat up, pulled the terrycloth towel into place with both hands, and stood up from the bed.

"You can be so rough sometimes, you know that?!"

Her voice ebbed and flowed like a tidal wave as she flounced out of the room, her slender back and plump posterior hidden beneath the towel.

"She's right... even in times like this, I can be." Amuro's subconscious reminded him.

To whom, though? He didn't know, but he had a strange habit of always saying that. He reached out his right hand and opened the window blinds.

Closer to noon than early morning, the sun's rays were terribly bright and filled their bedroom. Amuro, half-naked, felt a mix of pride and embarrassment wash over him.

"Ah, the hell with it," he muttered to himself, another meaningless phrase.

He adjusted the blinds to block out some of the sun's glare and lay on his back, examining his chest.

"My chest is surprisingly built, even for me," he thought, amused by the fact that even the tiny, thick patch of chest hair he had matched the reddish tinge of the hair on his head.

"I don't know who I look like more," he continued to ponder, feeling like he didn't resemble either of his parents.

"Don't tell me I'm the child of a secret lover..." he mused, knowing that his mother, Kamaria Ray, wasn't that kind of woman in that sense. And, given the way that his father, Tem Ray, had raised him, there was no doubt in his mind that he was, in fact, her biological son.

"Dad sure died at a good time, huh?"

His change of thought was sudden.

He could hear the sound of Beltorchika's shower in the background, louder than usual, but he paid it no mind. He was relaxed, and the mundane sounds of daily life didn't bother him. Sometimes, he was on edge, but that was just part of his daily routine.

He finally got out of bed, the thought of facing reality reminding him that he had to leave their shared nest eventually, however obsessive that made him feel. Being with her allowed him to escape reality, and if they let anything come between them, their time together would be miserable. It wasn't just during sex – if they couldn't see eye to eye when they were alone together, then there was no point in having a nest.

So, it takes a tiny bit of courage to be able to leave that nest and face the world.

"They can't see any movement with the fleet at Sweetwater? That's a lie."

As the sound of the shower filled the room, Amuro felt bad for Beltorchika as he tapped a key on the computer terminal on his bedside table and called up the Londo Bell data. It was another terrible habit of his.

Amuro sat up in bed and looked at the display, momentarily forgetting that he was naked.

"Char's movements have changed?"

The display showed high-level data from the Ra Cailum, the ship that he was assigned to, and was a version that only Amuro had access to.

"That means he's close to departing, huh? This means we'll have to move out tonight."

Despite these revelations, there were no official orders for his unit because Amuro's work was mostly done. Yet, they were far from perfect, and there were further contingencies that had to be made. Even if the work to deal with Char's fleet were to continue day in and day out, there was a limit to what the Londo Bell unit, which wasn't very well prepared to begin with, could do. Moreover, the Earth Federation government and the Space Forces General Staff Headquarters had yet to issue orders to mobilize.

And yet, right before his very eyes, Char had moved his fleet from Sweetwater the previous night.

So, Amuro and Beltorchika were prepared for the fact that this might be their last vacation.

Before he went into the bathroom to shower, Amuro brought up the news fax index and a few articles to have them printed out. In the meantime, Beltorchika went into the kitchen to start making them something to eat.

This was a normal routine in Amuro's house, but it felt somewhat more relaxed due to the temporary break in their usual hectic schedule.

"All of last night's intel leaked. Char's left Sweetwater, and the Sweetwater government made a unilateral declaration that it recognizes Neo Zeon's administration." Amuro said in disgust as he flung the newspaper away from him and finally turned on the television. He had been trying to avoid any outside distractions while they spent time together.

"So, what's the word?" Beltorchika Irma asked after she started serving their meal.

"I'll be heading out. It looks like it'll be tonight," he replied with a sigh.

"Understood. I'm still heading for Anaheim Electronics as we planned, then?" Beltorchika asked, her professional demeanor returning even though she was still wearing her underwear.

"Yes, make sure the final adjustments to the Nu Gundam are completed as planned. It's the only reliable weapon Londo Bell has right now."

"I do a little shopping before I go. Speaking of which, has the Re-GZ been left with Astonaige?"

"Of course. He's more professional than you are, Bel."

"Oh, well, pardon me." She purred with a laugh, holding a glass of milk with both hands.

"Get me some of those frozen strawberries, would you? I always have a craving for something sweet when I come home." He said in response to her shopping comment.

"Sure thing."

As they prepared to leave, soldiers often thought about when they might return home and set their houses in order. Many soldiers would buy new model kits only to read the instructions, or they might purchase ingredients for pickling, spreading them out in the living room to dry before bottling them up. Amuro, however, had lost touch with the basic concept of what home meant, so he was prone to neglect these routine tasks.

As he got ready to leave for work, he kissed Beltorchika and left his condominium.

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The alleyways of the back streets of Kashi, a city in northern India, have remained unchanged for centuries. Since the dawning era of space colonies and the beginning of forced emigration into space, the population has dwindled, leaving the land to deteriorate. Despite this, Kashi remains a bustling hub of activity due to its designation as a "special ward."

Yet today, however, several black vehicles were screeching through the city, and quite a few policemen were also running about, donned in their protective attire they donned when "manhunting."

The Earth Federation government has designated certain areas across the planet as "special wards," similar to nature preserves. In India's case, the government has designated the land as a "sacred land" for religious purposes. As a result, many people continue to make pilgrimages from the space colonies across the Sides. Thanks to a religious fad, it has morphed into a tourist mecca for the younger generations.

However, residency is not allowed in these areas, so it's less crowded than it used to be in the past. The only reason there are as many people as there are is that they're allowed to do business with those who make pilgrimages. This situation may seem contradictory, but it is the current reality.

The Earth Federation government's police organization monitors these people's access, yet they are unwilling to manage the vast continent completely. Yet, not to arouse suspicion surrounding their slipshod ways, the government periodically conducts "manhunts" to round up any violators.

Today, however, the police presence feels different from the usual manhunts. "What do they want?"

"It seems like they're searching for someone?"

There were quizzical whisperings. But Hunters didn't look for people.

Instead, they preferred to use underhanded methods to abduct people from any location, cramming a predetermined amount of them into a convoy before disappearing as quickly as they came. It would be easier to deal with if this were all there was to it, but the Hunters seemed to take pleasure in the hunt, using their guns almost as if it was all just a game.

Unfortunately, this often resulted in numerous casualties.

Then there were the salacious rumors about them, the ones that said some people shelled out cash to Hunters to "hunt" for specific individuals, earning the slang term "hunting" for their activities in India.

"Are they looking for someone specific?"

The alleyways were barely three meters wide, sometimes doubling as the city's main thoroughfares. In the shadowy corners of dingy rooms hidden behind these streets, where Hindus used to reside, people huddled together and whispered nervously, waiting for the Hunters to pass by.

"Tch! I told you we never should've let Quess join us!"

The man at the back of the pack grumbled as he ran. A girl who looked to be in her early teens was running with a group of other men and women in front of him.

"Then don't follow us!" the woman leading the group snapped over her shoulder as she rounded another narrow bend.

"Whoa!" she cried out, vaulting over the skeleton of a cow. The young boy and girl following suit over the corpse.

"Oh shit!"

The man who had been complaining stumbled and fell face-first onto the cobblestone road, landing in a mess of sludge and dung as he tripped over the bones.

"There should be a boat at the ghat to get us out, right?!" asked another man with a scholarly appearance as he passed the woman at the front. The group was dressed in a way that might be expected of wanderers – their jeans were torn, and their leather vests were tattered.

"Christina!" the fallen man cried out.

"Don't look back!"

Now leading the group, the young man slid down a slope facing the Ganges river.

Bang!

As the sound of a gun echoed through the gaps between the houses, the woman known as Christina slid down the embankment, her long, tattered skirt billowing. The teenage girl in shorts followed suit, sliding down the muddy slope mixed with cow dung. Two more young men followed behind them.

The flow of the Ganges was less than half of what it had been a hundred years ago. The group ran along the flat riverbed for a dozen or so meters from where the ghats marked the old riverbed. The ghats were places for Hindus to bathe in the olden days. They saw a few Hunters running down the steps as they reached the lower end of the river. Just then, an old gas-powered patrol car started to drive down the embankment through the narrow alleyway where the group had fled.

There was a boat made of thick planks along the bank of the stream in the middle of the riverbed, but it sunk with a sploosh when the young man in front jumped into it.

"What the-?!"

The murky waters of the Ganges filled half the boat freely and easily.

"Swim for it!"

Christina, her long skirt still billowing, padded the back of the young girl following close behind her, her feet pounding the powdery dirt. The girl wearing a jean vest was startled and stepped out onto the slimy riverbed.

"Guwah!" The young man standing at the edge of the boat let out a cry before collapsing into the water.

"Wha?!"

"That's far enough, wouldn't you say?!"

A voice boomed out, echoing off the roof of a heavily armored wagon that had slid its way down the steps of the ghat toward the river and was speeding down the riverbed. Even the machine guns poised on top were aimed directly at the group.

The Hunters' patrol cars were closing in from downstream while the armored vehicles approached from upstream, encircling the group and kicking up a cloud of dust. The Hunters were clad in black masks and thick protective armor, both shielding their bodies from the heat and concealing their faces.

"You sure this is the one?"

"That runt there is Quess Paraya!"

The Hunter in command on the roof of the armored vehicle confirmed their target.

"Enough! You're all under arrest for kidnapping a minor and evading arrest!"

The girl the group was shielding didn't understand what he meant, only that she knew she was the youngest.

"What're you talking about?"

"You're Quess Paraya, aren't you? We're taking you into protective custody. Please, come with us."

His words suddenly became more polite.

"Screw these damn Hunters!"

A man beside Christina suddenly put his arm around Quess's neck and tried tightening it.

"Try me, and she's a goner! So unless you want that, we're not handing her over unless you guarantee our safety!"

"Milton!"

Christina had tried to pull off the man's arm, but Quess had already bitten it.

"Quess?!"

The man staggered, and before she knew it, his body went rigid, and he toppled over, kicking up a cloud of powdered dirt.

Quess spat, cursing them.

"These people are friendly!"

The Hunters slowly drew closer, ignoring what she was saying.

"What is it? What're we accused of anyway?!"

Christina snapped at them, her metal necklace clinking around her neck.

"That's something lowlifes fooling around here on Earth would ask!"

The Hunter stood in front of Christina, twisted slightly, and slammed his baton into her midsection.

"Uuungh!!"

Christina collapsed onto the dry riverbed, her body writhing in pain.

"You've gone too far!"

"Quess Paraya, come along, please."

The Hunter standing in front of the girl said politely, still not removing his black visor. They all exuded arrogance.

"I don't want to!"

"Your father is waiting for you."

Two Hunters approached and firmly took hold of Quess's arms, lifting her off the ground. Despite her wriggling and thrashing, she was unable to escape their grasp.

Bang! Bang!

A series of gunshots echoed from behind them.

"You guys!"

Quess let out a scream, her mouth wide open as the sunlight shone in.

This was the current situation in India.

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"So, where are we at?"

"Well, you're not gonna like this, but we're headed for Fifth Luna. Char is following through with his op, just like you predicted."

"He's not going to do something stupid like drop it on Earth, right?"

"It won't come to that. The Earth Federation government's General Staff finally gave us the go-ahead to mobilize. I swear they were only planning on making a move after the battle was over!"

Bright Noa, captain of the Ra Cailum, was relieved he was finally back with Amuro Ray.

It wasn't that they hated the idea of having to wait for orders from Lhasa to mobilize their fleet; they had the freedom to do so on their own. The downside, though, was that they'd end up serving life sentences in doing so. But more than that, they felt it was foolish to end up wounded in a war that the government wasn't even monitoring.

Despite that, the enemy they were about to face was Char Aznable. The fleet he commanded was the Neo Zeon. For the two men, he was someone special. Someone they couldn't ignore on a personal level.

"We'll be finished resupplying in about three hours, Captain. Everything is going smoothly down below."

Amuro checked the bridge's display for the loading operations of his mobile suit squadron, reporting like the Lieutenant he was.

"Understood, Lieutenant. We'll wring that little traitor's neck, won't we?!" Bright growled as if finally finding the words.

"Don't be so fired up, Captain."

It was classic Amuro, but he felt the same as Bright. Thinking back, as someone who had also been kept in limbo, controlled by the Federation Forces, this operation was their opportunity to vent their pent-up frustrations. Of course, they were fully aware they shouldn't think of war that way, but neither of them couldn't help it. Char was a man beyond reproach, a man who should not have returned to the Earth Sphere after all this time.

"Right, I'll dial it down. Beltorchika is still heading to the moon as planned, right?"

"Yeah. Work on the Nu Gundam is running a little behind schedule."

"Are we going to need it tomorrow? We do have a modified Re-GZ for you until then. What do you think? Will that suffice?"

"You want me to use that? You sure about that, Bright?"

"It's fine. With the annual pension given by the military, my wife and kids should be able to get by. That's the only good thing about the Federation government."

"Mirai is a strong woman. She'll survive, even in the colonies."

"Can you believe it? I haven't been out into space until today. Ever since the White Base, I've been captain of the Argama and the Nahal Argama, and even though you all thought of me like I was some Japanese father figure, for some reason, even that lot in Lhasa thought of me as a Newtype. So, you know, they shackled me to the Earth, keeping me under observation because they were so afraid that I'd cause a rebellion once I went out into space?"

Bright Noa had suddenly found himself transferred to Londo Bell a month prior, partly due to his extensive combat experience. If Char hadn't stationed himself on one of the colonies, namely Sweetwater, he probably would have spent the remainder of his life as a soldier on Earth.

"Prepare to launch! Start the countdown!"

"Aye, sir!"

As the call went out on the bridge and their executive officer Meran got to work checking their ship for departure, Amuro made his way down to the mobile suit deck.

"Lieutenant! Please, don't go out to the front with the Re-GZ! I don't want to see your wife saddened if something were to happen to you."

"Cut it out. I don't have a wife, remember?"

"Really? Well, who's that lady who also shares the name bell, like our forces?"

"She's just my partner."

"What do you mean? You don't share a last name?"

"Beltorchika didn't like the idea, so I didn't push it. If there's a need to someday, well, then we'll go through with it."

"Meaning?"

"Well, if a child comes along, then I guess I'd have to settle down somewhere nice and raise it with her, wouldn't I?"

"You sure you'd be okay with that?"

"It's not like I'd have a choice."

Been! Boon!

Throughout the ship, the siren went up, its tone signaling the vessel was fully vacuum-armored.

"Keira, what's the problem? With Re-GZ, I mean?"

"Well, the suit isn't very mobile equipped with the backpack."

"Gotcha. I won't overdo it."

"Whatever you say..."

The Re-GZ is based on the earlier Z Gundam-type frame and is just a modified version of that armor. As it could not achieve the outstanding performance initially sought after, a backpack sporting a mega particle cannon, typically used on cruisers, was added to have it serve as a support mobile suit.

It was a suit Amuro had strong-armed into being built, compensating for the ineffectiveness of the Jegan, the mainstay mobile suit of Londo Bell. But, his efforts were about to be half-wasted thanks to Bright's appointment.

The Earth Federation Forces had long had a new mobile suit under development by Anaheim Electronics near the city of Von Braun on Luna. Bright arranged for it to be sent over to Londo Bell as a token of his new posting.

So, Amuro tried having it equipped with a psycommu of his own design and then having it officially adopted by Londo Bell. This was the Nu Gundam.

With their already limited military strength, the Earth Federation Forces were averse to letting Newtype pilot Gundam-type mobile suits, so they treated these suits of yesteryear as if they were nuclear weapons, keeping them hidden away.

This narrow-minded approach affected many aspects of their affairs.

Three other Ra-type ships accompanied the Ra Cailum, setting a direct course to Fifth Luna.

En route, they had to get to the bottom of Char's motives for mobilizing his fleet toward Fifth Luna's airspace and be prepared to receive any orders from Lhasa. To do this, they constantly monitored the Tibetan region on Earth, particularly Lhasa, through celestial and optical observations.

It was downright primitive work.

The development of computers allowed fleets to navigate without radar, which was ineffective under the anti-electronic weapon known as the Minovsky particle. But the advent of this same particle killed radio, forcing them to resort to communication methods that captured laser oscillations directly. And yet even then, high-altitude pulse signals would be distorted by the Minovsky particles, so they relied on Morse code.

If the primary mission of the fleets had not been this nerve-wracking surveillance work, space wars would have ended in a flash through an exchange of missiles.

However, since this was impossible, close combat in space became a reality, and wars were fought using mobile suits, the humanoid machines that looked like something straight out of old comic books, wreaking havoc through the cosmos.

On the mobile suit deck where Amuro was now standing stood nine of these humanoid machines, Jegans.

It was difficult to say whether it was their height or length, but the suits of roughly eighteen meters were worthy of being called titanic robots nonetheless. A narrow hatch on the chest allowed access into a spherical cockpit. Inside was a seat surrounded by a spherical 360-degree display, with scenes projected on it the same as what a pilot would see. The footage from several cameras captured a full 360 degrees and was controlled by a computer, which was then relayed back into 360-degree video.

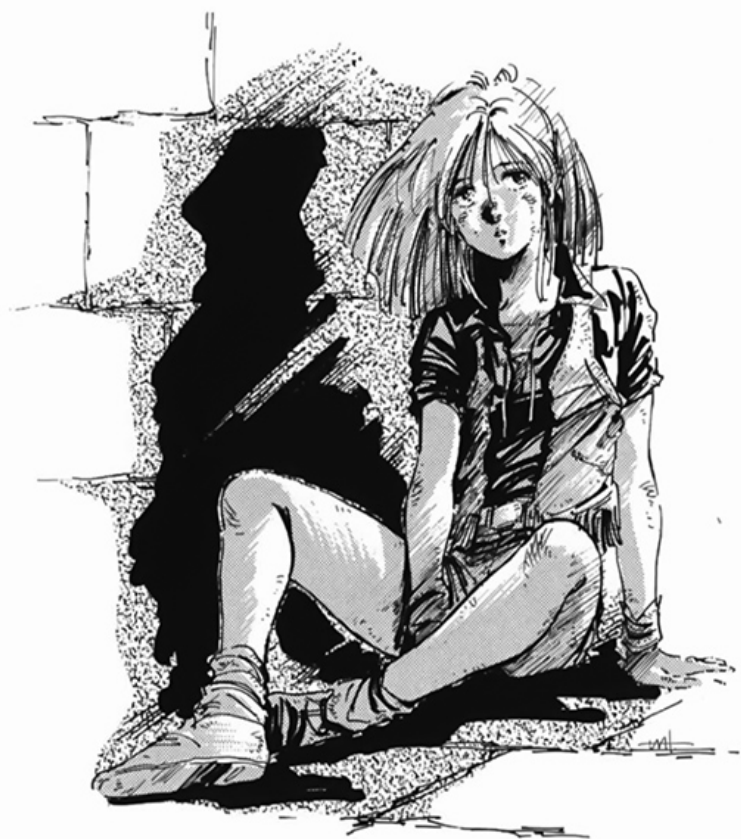
This footage was known as a "panoramic monitor," "all view," or "real display" on account of it reproducing the angle of view as actually seen.

The reproduced footage was arranged like a computer game. Although it was easy to convert the scenes to match what was seen, the full 360-degree display could sometimes cause anxiety for the pilot. To counteract this, the panoramic display had a toy-like appearance, like a computer game.

On the other hand, computer games tended to have more realistic scenery and were more in style, at least according to the public.

It was crucial to keep this in mind to prevent pilots from feeling excessively fearful when unexpectedly thrust into combat situations.

PART 2 **OVER QUESS' HEAD**



Quess Paraya was identified at the Kashi police station and handed over to her father, Adenauer. Together, they immediately made their way by jet to the Delhi Airport, where they entered the international flight's lobby.

She was reunited with her father, who had come via helicopter, only a few hours after being captured on the Ganges riverbed. It all happened in what felt like the blink of an eye.

All this was possible because her father, Adenauer Paraya, was a high-ranking official of the General Staff Headquarters of the Earth Federation Forces. Had he not been, there's no way he would have been able to mobilize the police to search for an errant child.

However, someone was waiting for them at the airport that Quess had not wanted to see. So, she positioned herself behind her father so as not to see her.

"Quess?" Adenauer said.

"Why do I have to get on the plane with THAT woman?" she fumed, turning away from her father and starting to walk outside.

"Just deal with it for now, Quess. Just until we make it out into space, and then you can do whatever you want."

He responded, trying to placate her. It wasn't bad for his image; it was just how he had to deal with his daughter.

"Into space?"

Quess paused at her father's words. Even though he was a staffer of the Space Forces, he never ventured out into space, so she thought there had to be something behind what he said.

"Yes. Earth has become too dangerous. Just deal with it for now and go along with your mother—"

"That woman is NOT my mother!" Quess retorted with disdain.

Adenauer sighed, "I know. That's why I said to deal with it. Once we're in space, you'll have more freedom. Trust me."

"Really? You really mean it?" Quess asked, still unsure.

"Yes," Adenauer confirmed, patting her on the shoulder.

Together with a porter, they walked towards the woman who was Adenauer's current wife, waiting by the departure counter with several men.

"Sorry we kept you waiting," Adenauer said, addressing her.

"What kept you?" the woman spoke softly to Adenauer but paid Quess no mind. Quess felt sullen, wondering if they would leave the lobby soon. The smell of rotting, dried flowers was overwhelming.

"We hope for the best then, Vice-Minister," one of the men said.

"Thanks. Come on, Quess."

Quess walked by the men without making a peep, staring at her father's arm wrapped around the woman's waist as they made their way down the stairs and out onto the airport apron where the sleek airframe of the Orient Express was waiting, baking in the Indian heat.

"It's a charter plane?" Quess asked, noticing that they were the only passengers on board. This would give her a temporary reprieve from having to see the woman she detested.

Adenauer escorted his wife to the front row of seats and then returned to check on Quess, who was sitting at the back of the plane.

"What do you think?" he asked her.

"About what?"

"I bought us a house on Side 1's Londenion. I think you'll really like it."

"Why didn't you come to your senses a lot sooner? As long as you're still an animal living on Earth, you're being tricked by women like HER!"

Quess exclaimed, her voice loud enough for the woman to hear.

"Quess!" Adenauer scolded her, glancing towards the front with a sad expression.

"Will you call mom over, then?"

"You know I can't do that. She hasn't sent a single letter since she left for space," Adenauer replied but abruptly paused as he noticed his wife rushing toward them from down the aisle.

"This isn't what we discussed! You said we'd escape to a safer part of the planet! You didn't say anything about going into space!"

"Kara! Char has already mobilized his forces. My mission is to negotiate with him to prevent the war from escalating further. Otherwise, even you all would be in danger from Char's meteorite attacks..."

"But the Federation Forces have the Space Forces and Londo Bell, right?!"

"Thanks to the complacency from those in Lhasa, the Space Forces have been poorly managed. Even if they were to act now, it would take far too long to prepare a counterattack. So I don't have much of a choice. I have to go and negotiate with Char."

"But isn't that Newtype Amuro Ray a part of Londo Bell?" asked Quess, interrupting the couple.

"Newtype? That's just a bunch of nonsense about human reformation. It's only something you'd find in comics!"

"You shouldn't talk. Looking at you, one would think the same!"

"What was that?!"

"Enough!" Adenauer said, silencing his wife.

"Vice-minister, we'll be departing now. So please take your seats," said one of the crewmen, poking out of the cockpit.

"Yes, yes, just go. But, please, sit down already," Adenauer urged as he nudged his wife back to her seat in the front of the plane.

"It feels strange being in a civilian plane like this! Why can't we travel on a military shuttle?"

"I told you, the military's been mobilized. It's safer for us to take a civilian shuttle from Hong Kong."

"Why couldn't you stop Char's plans of putting Earth in a deep freeze?" Quess asked her father, sarcasm lacing her words.

"The Earth Federation government didn't believe that Zeon's Char was still alive," he grumbled as he settled his wife into her seat.

"There are ten billion people living in outer space. You think you all really know them even though you're just looking up at them from Earth! Now that you'll be living in space and trying to figure it all out, it's too late to do anything!"

"Nevertheless, who would've thought he could assemble an army all on his own?"

Adenauer's head sank into the headrest as the Orient Express began its slow taxi. The craft would take them to Hong Kong in less than an hour. As they gained altitude, high above them, the Ra Cailum's fleet made inroads into the airspace near Fifth Luna and was starting to make contact with Char's fleet.

x x x

In a sector of space near Earth's geostationary satellite orbit, flashes erupted on the night side of the planet's plane. They all seemed to be centered around a meteorite. As they faded, the glow from the tail nozzles of mobile suits converging from sectors of space on either side could be seen as large, elongated tails. As they began arcing towards it, close combat among them broke out.

With their bulky forms, these mobile suits were called Geara Doga and were deployed from a five-ship fleet commanded by Char Aznable. They spread out with Fifth Luna to their rear. The mobile suits launched from the Ra Cailum, a squadron of Jegan, abandoned their Base Jabbers and attempted to draw closer to Fifth Luna, avoiding the Geara Doga's lines of fire.

"Our target is Fifth Luna only! Ignore everything else!"
That was what word was relayed to the Ra Cailum's pilots.

"But-!!" one of the Jegan pilots protested before being silenced by the sudden attack from a Geara Doga coming at him from behind. Its attack only proved just how well-trained they were as they appeared to block the relatively linear assault by the Earth Federation Forces pilots with ease.

"Lieutenant Amuro!"

As if in response to the cry, three Jegan moved forward, skirting the airspace of the now-destroyed Jegan.

"Fifth Luna, it's-!!"

The team leader of the three Jegans, Lieutenant Kayra Su, rocketed toward the meteorite that seemed to melt into the darkness of the Earth ahead.

But, as Fifth Luna drew closer, it suddenly started glowing: the four nuclear pulse engines had been activated.

"They lit it up!"

Keira shuddered at the horrific band of light. Fifth Luna had begun its descent towards Earth.

Now the Jegan forces had to put a stop to its descent, in addition to the Rewloola fleet. If they failed, the impact from the huge meteorite would cause a devastating deep freeze across the planet.

Complicating matters was the awareness that it would impact Lhasa, Tibet, where the seat of the Federation government was located. Char had declared such since he occupied Sweetwater.

But, the Earth Federation government dismissed the possibility and even delayed dispatching Londo Bell.

"The private army of one man can't possibly have enough power to destroy Lhasa."

They never envisioned a meteorite drop operation. The same could be said for Amuro and the rest of Londo Bell.

"Should the Earth Federation government fail to recognize the sovereignty of Sweetwater, we are prepared to launch a direct attack on Lhasa."

Some were confident that Char's declaration meant either a mobile suit battle or a nuclear strike. It wasn't until a third of Char's ships pressed into Fifth Luna's

airspace that Londo Bell finally learned of the operation, which had only been made possible with such a small combat force.

No troops were stationed at Fifth Luna because it was initially a meteorite brought in from the asteroid belt out between Mars and Jupiter to mine for additional resources for colony development. However, Char targeted it due to its ten-odd kilometer diameter and its being equipped with nuclear pulse engines to move the hulking rock.

A scorching hot line of fire shot out from one of the recesses of Fifth Luna's unique nuclear pulse engines, engulfing Kayra and other Jegan.

"Lieutenant Amuro, Fifth is falling toward Earth! We failed to stop it!" Kayra cried out, decisively evading the line of fire. The other two suits, however, were struck and heavily damaged.

Amid the enormous flashes from the nuclear pulse engines, the red triangular silhouette of a Rewloola-type space battleship looming in the distance could be seen.

"Entry angle of Fifth Luna, check! Speed, check!"

"Testing nuclear detonation for deceleration!"

"Check! Velocity minus 23, confirmed!"

The left side of the Rewloola's narrow combat bridge seemed to have turned into a makeshift Fifth Luna control center.

One would think dropping a meteorite onto Earth was easy, as evident by their callouts. Still, the opposite was true: it was more difficult to maintain speed, so it didn't get incinerated by frictional heat upon reentry. The difficulty in making it land at a targeted location was even more obvious. Despite that, the operation appeared to be going smoothly.

Mesta Mesua, seated to the captain's right, confirmed control of Fifth Luna as she tapped on the keyboard on the right armrest.

"Captain Char!" she called out. She was sitting in the seat of the tactical command officer. She was somewhat slender, but her thick lips and fullness around her cheekbones gave her a gentle air of femininity.

"What is it?"

On a small display to Mesta's right, the Rewloola's mobile suit deck popped up. She moved the cursor on the display, highlighting the red mobile suit and zooming in. Despite the suit having a somewhat bulky silhouette, it was quite formidable.

A yellow normal suit floated up toward the cockpit core in the head, and as it slid into the cockpit, Mesta's display showed the face of a Caucasian man in a yellow helmet.

"Glarv Guss' sector is in a deadlock. I think we need to offer support."

Mesta's gaze flicked to the holographic display of the entire airspace between the ship's captain and herself. On it, computer graphics indicated enemy and ally vessels as well as major movements of mobile suits, all centered around Fifth Luna.

"Is there a possibility of it being destroyed?" his voice tinged with concern.

"There appears to be a powerful mobile suit in the sector just ahead of Fifth Luna."

"I take it we've done what's required to send Fifth Luna to Earth? Signal all units to withdraw."

On her display, Char looked to have more pressing matters on his mind and didn't bother looking at Mesta.

"I have. But we're unable to disperse Minovsky particles to prevent them from detecting our mobile suits."

"I see. This will be the first time Nightingale participates in combat. I'm worried I may be unfamiliar with it."

"Understood, sir. We'll send the Carrabbas unit back around. They're returning to the ship with only twenty percent damage reported. We can use radio."

"No, I want to use this chance to familiarize myself with the Nightingale. I'll back up Glarv's Psycho Doga and bring him in! Nightingale, heading out!"

As the red mobile suit slid out onto the upper catapult deck of the Rewloola, the launch lights illuminated its path before turning green.

The single energy tube holding the Nightingale in place hummed and snapped free, allowing the suit's sleek frame to float above the catapult, its wide legs preventing it from using the catapult.

The six tail nozzles on its back belched out phosphorescent light, propelling the massive suit forward with a sudden jolt before it streaked off and over directly towards the flashes of Fifth Luna's nuclear nozzles in front of the Rewloola.

"Damn that Glarv. He should've been enhanced. What the hell is he doing?" she cursed as she watched the launch of the Nightingale from the combat bridge.

Glarv Guss is the only one among the pilots considered a Newtype, enhanced by Mesta.

He was far too ornery, and despite some issues adapting as a Cyber-Newtype, he was the only one who could use funnels through psycommu control.

Although he was a pilot who should have achieved the most in combat, he'd been stuck in the airspace surrounding Fifth Luna since his initial foray, unable to make significant progress. None of that was enough for Mesta, who cursed his ineptitude and devoted herself to helping Char.

Mesta raised the visor on her normal suit.

"Coordinate mobile suit team retreat and deploy mobile suit forces for direct fleet cover!"

"Launch escort forces!" signaled the Captain.

The final three Geara Doga suits aboard the Rewloola clear the ship. Following them were several others returning but were ordered to provide direct cover for the fleet.

"Londo Bell will likely pursue Fifth as it falls, but the problem lies with the laser attack from colonies on Side 2."

"Are we able to hold them off?" Captain Lyle asked, finally raising his visor and glancing at Mesta.

"That is the plan, but something strikes me as odd."

Mesta activated a display on the ceiling of the combat bridge and input several figures into a concept diagram showing each colony, Fifth Luna, and Earth, along with a rough estimate of lines from which beams from Side 2 would come.

"Side 2 could've attacked any time in the last thirty minutes..." she said, her face twisted in frustration.

"Our Neo Zeon spies have infiltrated Side 2's ranks. So they could've suppressed any of the beam attacks— ah, the heck?!"

Mesta shone her tactical laser at the officer who made the remark, silencing him.

"Lieutenant?!"

"Don't rely on what you can't see! Have our mobile suit forces put up a defense line!"

"Y-Yes, ma'am!" the officer stammered, quickly complying with her orders.

Meanwhile, Char's Nightingale drew closer to Fifth Luna to replace their retreating allied units.

"This way?"

The Nightingale picked up speed, maneuvering around Fifth Luna in one smooth motion and positioning itself directly in front of it.

"Is that it?" Char pondered as he noticed the ring of flashes on his display as he approached.

On the narrow, rocky terrain of Fifth Luna, the Re-GZ piloted by Amuro Ray was unable to gain ground as he was locked in a running battle with a single mobile suit. Moreover, part of its backpack had already been hit and partially sheered off, rendering his mega particle cannon, which was supposed to be its primary weapon, inoperable.

"I can't believe we couldn't stop Fifth Luna from falling to Earth, but I can't take out this one unit either!"

For the third time, Amuro's eyes met the familiar silhouette of his enemy. Its use of homing-like missiles set it apart from the other enemy suits, signaling to him that it was a psycho-type. Despite his pride in being a Newtype pilot, he couldn't shake off the frustration of his inability to outmaneuver this opponent, fully aware of the capabilities of his own mobile suit from the get-go.

With a fluid motion, Amuro detached his suit's backpack and descended towards the surface of Fifth Luna, his Re-GZ now unencumbered. But, in that moment of vulnerability, the enemy mobile suit unleashed a beam attack.

Evading the attack was something only Amuro could do, but the other pilot's expertise also played a role, toying with the Re-GZ to such an extent preventing Amuro from turning toward the rear of the hulking rock.

There was no need for Mesta to be cursing.

Amuro had successfully limited the enemy's ability to attack by depleting their supply of homing missiles and funnels. Although he could only fly in a straight line, he was still able to hold his own in battle, despite the Re-GZ already lacking the means to counterattack.

"Ngh!"

Amuro maintained his bounding suit along the surface of Fifth Luna as he tore after the enemy that was taking cover somewhere directly before him. Reflections from the light of Earth revealed the surface of the rock.

Amuro was determined to win the battle and thought, "If he's out of funnels, the outcome should be the same..."

He unsheathed a beam saber from the attachment pack at his waist with one fluid motion. He primed the energy pack of the beam rifle in his right hand, allowing it to unleash a burst of fire for nearly a second once the rifle left his hand. He released it.

Naturally, the beam rifle would recoil, using the beam fire as thrust. Amuro brought his suit down low and charged forward.

The enemy's Psycho Doga emerged from behind cover and was momentarily stunned by the rifle's attack. Taking advantage of this momentary disorientation, Amuro struck with his beam saber, the energy blade singing through the air.

Shung!

With a swift strike, he severed the mobile suit's left leg. Then, using the momentum from the attack, he brought the beam saber around to slash down on the tail nozzle on its back as well.

Gyang!

The strike wasn't fatal, but it significantly hindered the mobility of the enemy's suit. Either way, it was enough to halve the destructive power of the beam rifle clutched in the enemy's hands.

"What the?!" Glarv Guss, the pilot of the mobile suit, cried out in astonishment.

"You're mine!" Amuro shouted, reorienting the Re-GZ, intending to deliver a final blow with his beam saber. At the same time, pillar-like beams of light rained down in

a circular pattern around the mobile suits, the two briefly vanishing in the plume of smoke created by the explosion, but the Re-GZ had managed to evade the explosion and was slipping away.

"What now?!"

Amuro sensed tremendous power from the enemy reinforcements. He scanned his displays, locking onto a shadow.

"Hm?"

A streak of light arced outward against the Earth's light, the red mobile suit of Char's Nightingale discernible.

"Damn Glarv, Mesta should've been looking after him!" Char spat out a curse as he watched Glarv's Psycho Doga give one final struggle on the display's enlarged monitor.

"Huh? Could that be Char?!"

Amuro felt a familiar sense of psychological pressure emanating from the red mobile suit. It had to be Char. These were memories etched deep in his mind, ones he would never forget.

He continued his retreat, releasing a flurry of dummies in his wake.

"Of all time, you pick NOW to show yourself?!"

Char had taken to calling himself Supreme Commander since stationing himself at Sweetwater and was the last person Amuro expected to see in a mobile suit. If he did, that would be his downfall, Amuro decided.

However, in a way, he didn't necessarily dislike the fact that Char had shown up in one. Despite fighting alongside one another as allies, if Char had reclaimed his position as an enemy and radiated the same intimidating pressure as before, he wouldn't be someone that Amuro could defeat with the Re-GZ.

So, Amuro retreated.

But, Glarv's Psycho Doga dove out after the retreating Re-GZ, instead colliding with one of the dummies released by the suit. A detonator built into it exploded, hurling the suit away at the cost of the other leg and sending it reeling toward Fifth Luna.

"Shit!" Glarv cursed as he struggled to control the mobile suit after the direct hit to its knee.

It was a dummy, a balloon coated with paint that reflected radio waves, making it impossible to pick up on radar. It was also equipped with built-in apogee motors allowing it to zigzag back and forth, giving it the illusion of a mobile suit. One mobile suit is equipped with multiple of these dummies.

Glarv was relieved the front display wasn't dead as he checked the beam rifle's energy capacitor gauge, which indicated he'd still have to wait a few more seconds before he could fire again. But he gasped at the scenery before him: the enemy Federation mobile suit was confronting Char's Nightingale.

Behind them, the Earth was shifting so much that it was evident they were drawing closer to it.

"That Earth Federation government mobile suit bears a striking resemblance to a Gundam. So does that mean the pilot I was up against is a Newtype or Cyber-Newtype?"

Waves of anger washed over Glarv. He knew the enemy he was dealing with wasn't your typical pilot, but for someone who was supposed to have been enhanced by Mesta, he was forced to put up such a poor fight. He suspected that the level of enhancement he received at the Newtype Labs was inadequate.

"What good is it if I can sense the enemy but can't break through them?"

This kind of thinking was a reflection of the youthful arrogance and pride of Glarv.

"Hm? Minovsky particles are thinning out?"

Glarv turned up the volume on his normal suit's headphones.

"Why are you crashing this to Earth? Temperatures will drop, and it'll become uninhabitable!"

"That is my intention! It is to purge those safely living on Earth! I have already proclaimed it to be so!"

As if following his voice, the red form of the Nightingale charged the enemy mobile suit.

"?!"

In a split second, the two mobile suits had disappeared from Glarv's view as they moved behind the Fifth Luna. Glarv attempted to chase after them, but his Psycho Doga could only manage to barely hover above the surface of the rock with half power.

"I feel that mankind can correct itself accordingly!"

"It is my destiny to enforce discipline, Amuro!"

Glarv could tell that Captain Char's voice exuded confidence. But at the same time, he noticed that his commander wasn't using his funnels despite his conviction, which puzzled him.

When Glarv finally spotted the two mobile suits on his forward display, they were locked in a fierce battle with their beam sabers. The constant clashing of the sabers created interference waves that erupted and sparked in every direction, giving the illusion that the two suits were being vaporized.

"One man doesn't have the right to carry out a cleansing of mankind!"

"You're a foolish man! Humanity has no right to pollute and destroy the Earth! And that is why I must force a change!"

"You're full of yourself!"

"Obviously, you know that the Earth cannot last if this continues! So why do you say that? Humanity must pay the price for polluting the planet for so long!"

The enemy's mobile suit pulled back as the Nightingale swung its beam saber. Nevertheless, it continued to slash at it.

"Oh!"

Glarv gasped as the enemy mobile suit deftly continued to avoid the Nightingale's fearsome saber onslaught.

"Hmph! Your mobile suit is still no match for me. This is just the first battle for my Nightingale!"

Char's taunting sounded strange as it lingered in Glarv's ears.

"Even if you told those in the Federation Forces of your ideals, Captain, they wouldn't understand! The time to pull back has long passed!" Glarv shouted involuntarily, firing off his rifle as he catapulted out with his Psycho Doga. Little did he realize that his own screams were slowing the suit's movement.

Even with Char's Nightingale positioned in front of him, the Re-GZ still tried to counterattack with a beam attack on Glarv. It was a truly superhuman feat to him.

"Uwah!"

Glarv felt the flash from the beam that grazed him from the front and the faint impact of the beam's particles impacting him as it forced his suit to the surface of Fifth Luna, only this time unable to move.

"Glarv!"

By the time Char's cry registered in Glarv's mind, the Nightingale had already landed beside the Psycho Doga and was extending a hand toward it.

The enemy mobile suit seemed to have retreated.

"Captain, please go after the enemy! Don't worry about me!"

"Your Psycho Doga is unable to retreat. Leave it."

"Huh? B-but I'm fine, I can--"

"You can't. Not the way you look. Don't rely on the computer readouts so much!"

The Nightingale's manipulator wrapt on the Psycho Doga's cockpit, forcing Glarv to open the hatch and exposing his pilot suit to the harshness of space.

"Captain! I didn't rely on the computer!"

"Enough!" he said peremptorily, the Nightingale's hand clutching Glarv by his pilot suit as he lifted off from the rock. Glarv found it strange to see his suit missing both legs and lying on the surface of Fifth Luna. But as he looked up at the Nightingale, he saw that its mono-eye was already extinguished, the ferocity felt by it gone.

Amuro stared in shock at the sheer speed of the red mobile suit's retreat but knew that Char was acting according to plan. He emerged from the shadows with his heavily damaged Re-GZ, the bright light from Earth reflecting off its frame.

PART 3 **CONSEQUENCES OF THE
ASTEROID**



The rail for the space shuttle in Old Hong Kong city sat atop a massive bridge that ran from the island of Shek O, southwest of Hong Kong Island, to the east. Below the linear rail for the shuttle was a highway. At the head of that same rail was a passenger center where the shuttle Tian Lu was parked, waiting for takeoff.

A heated exchange could be heard at one corner of a departure counter in the shuttle passenger center next to the rail. Mirai Yashima, the wife of Bright Noa, was locked in an argument with an attendant. Her two children, Hathaway and Cheimin, watched on with intrigue.

"But this is a valid ticket! I even have a letter of recommendation."

Unyielding, the attendant replied, "Yes, and it's like I've explained already, circumstances have changed... Are you ready, sir?"

The Asian man at the counter called out loudly to Adenauer Paraya's family, who were embroiled in their own argument in the middle of the lobby behind Mirai and her children.

"Hold on!" Adenauer exclaimed, trying to intervene.

"Forget it! There's no way I'm going with her! I'd rather stay behind and die on Earth!"

Ignoring Adenauer, his wife shouted as though she were guiltless him.

"Good idea," Quess Paraya nonchalantly chimed in, sitting on one of the suitcases behind her father.

"Why you! The only reason anyone went looking for you is because I asked your father!"

"You have a lot of nerve, considering you were the one who drove mom away," Quess fired back, her anger rising.

Before Quess could say another word, the woman's hand shot out and slapped the girl hard across the cheek. But it was the woman who let out a cry of pain next.

"Oh, OH!!!"

With a roar that sounded like that of a beast, Mirai, her kids, and the man running the counter all stood dumbfounded, their mouths agape as they stared wide-eyed at the bizarre spectacle of the girl biting the back of the woman's hand.

"Big Brother..." Cheimin said softly as she put her arms around the elbows of her brother and gave his shoulders a shake.

"I know," Hathaway replied, even though he couldn't help but look away from the disturbing sight. Mirai, sensing his discomfort, reached out to guide him toward the counter.

"They're with the Federation government?"

"Indeed they are, Mrs. Mirai," the clerk affirmed, tapping his ballpoint pen on the counter with nothing else to say as he took another look at the ticket she had produced.

"Hathaway Noa and Cheimin Noa. Noa is your father's last name?"

"Yes. Our father is stationed on Londenion. He's a soldier."

"Well, at least it's clear where he's going to stay."

"So, there's nothing else you can do?"

"I'm afraid not."

As Mirai and the man at the counter glanced back at Adenauer and his daughter, they saw the wife attempting to pull away, her arm trying to shove the girl's head away from her.

"I've had enough! I can't stand that child!"

Furiously shaking her bitten hand, she grabbed the handle on her suitcase and stalked away from Adenauer.

"You--"

Adenauer's words were cut short as Quess pulled his fedora back as he attempted to call out to his wife.

"We don't have time, remember?!"

"Yeah, you're right."

As they turned toward the counter, Mirai and the clerk's eyes darted back down to the ticket.

"Well, that's a problem. Because I have a letter from the Federation government."

Mirai's theatrics were matched by the clerk.

"You have to understand, ma'am, my hands really are tied for this."

Adenauer stepped in and presented his own ticket, "All right. Make it two."

Mirai could hear Adenauer's breath coming in ragged, labored gasps.

As the clerk gave Mirai a look of "it's complicated," he tapped away on his computer terminal, tore off a boarding ticket, and handed it to Adenauer.

"Uh, Mister," Adenauer took the man by his elbow and led him away from Mirai as he whispered in his ear.

"Who is their letter of recommendation from?"

"Huh? Oh, from John Bauer of the Federation Government."

"Hm. Bauer, huh? Let one of them on board. The two can take the next flight out?"

"S-sir?"

"We jumped the line with my political privileges. Besides, I owe Bauer a favor," he said to the man away from the others before leaving the counter and briskly walking back towards his daughter.

"Politicians are all the same," said the clerk giving an exaggerated shrug of his shoulders before turning back to Mirai.

"We can take one of you. I'll put two on the next shuttle?"

"There might not be a next shuttle."

"True, according to the news, war has broken out."

"Then I'm going to send him."

Mirai produced a single flight ticket and showed it to the man.

"Hathaway, is it?"

"But mom!" Hathaway had heard the man's question and looked toward the counter, attempting to protest.

"You're a big boy now. Besides, it's time you experienced space," she responded, shutting him down.

"But what about you and Cheimin?"

"We'll be fine. This war won't last very long. This man says we'll catch up in no time."

The clerk gave Hathaway a broad, ingratiating smile as he presented the boarding ticket.

Hathaway navigated the cramped cabin of the shuttle, scanning the rows for his assigned seat. He finally spotted his aisle seat in the same row shared by Adenauer and his daughter.

The young girl who had bitten the man's wife was staring out the window at the evening sky as though she'd forgotten all the commotion from earlier. Her profile looked so unconcerned and innocent.

"Pardon me," Hathaway said to Adenauer Paraya, who was seated next to her, as he shoved his bag under the seat before taking his own. He felt cramped. Sitting elbow to elbow next to the same people who played out a family feud didn't sit well with him.

Plus, he was leaving behind his mother and sister. He wondered whether they'd have a place to shelter while they waited for the next shuttle out of Hong Kong.

"..."

The thought made his chest ache, so he tried to distract himself by flipping on the display in the seatback in front of him. The news anchor's voice droned on in the background as an image of Char Aznable filled the screen, the same image that had been broadcasted across countless networks since his fleet had appeared at Sweetwater.

He pulled his headphones from the armrest and slipped them over his ears.

"Char Aznable says that if Neo Zeon's independence is not acknowledged, he will see to it that it is. However, in subsequent negotiations, he seems to only speak of practical actions rather than direct negotiations. To gain a deeper understanding of Char's statement, let's go to political commentator Bill McKay--"

"Due to unforeseen circumstances, there will be a slight delay in our departure schedule," an announcement from the captain of the Tian Lu interrupted the news video.

Confused, Hathaway looked up and around at the cabin.

"Pardon me," Adenauer said from his left as he slipped in front of the boy and raced toward the cockpit.

As he thought about how irrational Adenauer seemed, he suddenly glanced over at the window. Looking back at him was that young girl, only now she put on a pleasant smile.

Caught off guard, he tried to think of something clever to say, but his mind went blank, so all he could do was screw up his face.

Feeling a bit lost, Hathaway scanned the aisle for Adenauer, but he was nowhere to be found.

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The Ra Cailum's mobile suit forces, the Jegan, were returning one after another. Yet, even as they retreated, they maintained their formation and continued pursuing the descending Fifth Luna.

The number of severely damaged mobile suits was higher than anticipated, so the ship's deck crews and mechanics worked frantically to accommodate them.

To their rear, artillery fire from missiles and beam cannons continued intermittently. Several fireballs blossomed in response, erupting in the defense net of particle bombs scattered from the Ra Cailum.

The current combat strength of the Ra Cailum and Rewloola was such that both sides were doing everything they could to keep Fifth Luna from consuming them.

Amuro pushed the half-destroyed Psycho Doga suit used by Glarv Guss, along with the backpack of his Re-GZ, down onto the catapult deck of the Ra Cailum before attaching his own suit to the ship's bridge.

"Amuro! Do you think we've got room for a captured enemy mobile suit?!"

"Things have changed. I'll explain later," he shot back and then entered the bridge.

"Side 2 hasn't started their laser attack yet?" raising the visor on his helmet, Amuro called out to Bright Noa as he ascended out of the combat bridge below.

"I know. It could be that they didn't hear our request," he replied, somewhat dismally.

"There's no way. They think we're the saviors of Earth."

As Char unleashed his meteorite, the Earth Federation Forces and the Space Forces' General Staff Headquarters were suddenly jolted into realizing the gravity of their situation. They had never truly comprehended the magnitude of their situation until that moment, and a sense of stunned realization swept over them. Their previously unvoiced complaints were now rendered irrelevant as the true gravity of their situation became clear.

"It's here! Incoming heat source!" called out Meunier Thuhigg, an operator who had scrambled up from the combat bridge as his hands flew over the console panel.

Amuro bent forward, his eyes scanning their upper left. He watched as a flurry of laser beams streaked across the void, hurtling towards Fifth Luna as it made its desperate bid for concealment, retreating into the shadows of Earth's edge.

But as the lasers struck, they transformed into radiant halos, illuminating the darkness from where they were positioned. However, from the other side of Fifth Luna, another flash of light shimmered, a reminder that even the vast expanse of space was not immune to pollution.

"The laser attack from Side 2 seems awfully light, don't you think?"

"Sir! They've started course correction with the thrusters on Fifth Luna! It's continuing its descent toward Earth!"

"Understood. Captain, have they issued a warning about Fifth Luna's descent?"

"To those in Lhasa, Tibet? Those on Earth are probably under the impression that we'll manage something out here. But the bigger question is, did the ones who had the intel run away first without telling anyone?"

"That's why Char has the upper hand. Still, he needed a lot of energy to propel Fifth Luna. So how'd he get all that nuclear power?"

"The Federation government?" Bright asked simply.

As if in response, there was a deafening BAGOOM followed by a blossom of light in front of them.

"Hard ascent, now! What's going on with the movement of Char's fleet?"

"It looks like he's planning to go around the Earth once, then break away back in the direction of Sweetwater."

"Is Char really that simple-minded? Their shots are thinning out..." as Amuro furrowed his brow, light from the laser beams had already ceased.

A laser cannon on the exterior of a Side 2 colony that had been firing off shots was engulfed in a fiery explosion of red light.

Inside, men clad in typical normal suits broke into the laser cannon block and engaged in a firefight.

"Who are you?!"

"Neo Zeon! Death from the heavens!"

Their voices crackled in and out in the defender's normal suit headphones as the sound of gunfire echoed throughout the narrow corridor.

"Hail Neo Zeon!" proclaimed the Neo Zeon soldier, lobbing a grenade into one of the gates.

BOOM!

Before the echoes of the explosion had even died down, the laser oscillator detonated with a deafening roar, engulfing the soldier who had thrown the grenade in a swirling vortex of exploding light, blasting a corner of the colony out into the vast expanse of space.

This same fate befell the other two turrets.

"So, rebels siding with Char have even infiltrated Side 2, huh?"

Bright's head hung low in defeat as he acknowledged the disappearance of Fifth Luna on the far side of the planet.

"Captain."

"Oh, much appreciated."

Claire Thrune went about serving coffee to the crew on the bridge. She wasn't all that pretty, but she was an attentive non-commissioned officer, despite her worrying about being too tall.

"Thanks."

Amuro smiled back at Claire, who was an entire head taller than he was and accepted a cup of coffee with a straw.

"For two years now, all the colonies have been inspected by Londo Bell. Yet there wasn't even a whisper about Char or the Neo Zeon. Not a damn thing. So why is it Char was able to put together his forces so quickly?"

"Most Spacenoids don't want to acknowledge that the Federation government rules outer space from the planet. So long as the citizens and the masses keep their mouths shut, then we as soldiers learn nothing," mumbled Bright, the straw from the coffee in his mouth.

"One of the enemy ships is breaking off from the rest of the fleet! We might have a second wave incoming!"

"Amuro!"

"I know. The question becomes when he'll attack."

"A course for Sweetwater should set out from Earth's shadow in about twenty minutes, I'd say."

Amuro nodded as he left the bridge and went down to the mobile suit deck.

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"We're clear for takeoff from the control tower, Vice-Minister."

"Excellent," came Adenauer's nonchalant reply as he tried to leave the cockpit of the Tian Lu shuttle.

"But Vice-Minister, our course will bring us close to an asteroid. Be prepared."

"Just so long as we get to Londenion on time," he replied haughtily as he returned to the cabin.

"He's got some nerve! We'll wear our normal suits," the captain scoffed as he looked at his copilot before opening the door to their normal suit compartment.

A short time later, the shuttle Tian Lu, with a massive booster on its back, started making its takeoff run.

Mirai and Cheimin saw it off, watching in silence from the windows of the passenger center as the shuttle soared off into the evening sky, the last light of the

day glistening and gleaming off its airframe until the tail of its plume began to bend in the wind.

The Tian Lu's booster had two stages, a manned first stage followed by an unmanned, disposable second stage. The shuttle itself also had two stages of boosters, which could propel them into lunar orbit. The ascending shuttle shed its main booster and geared up to enter into final acceleration that would break them free from the gravitational sphere. During this twenty-odd-minute accelerated burn, passengers were subjected to mild G-forces.

Despite that, very few passengers were inclined to read during the unpleasant interlude, so the cabin was silent and still.

"Ah, look at that!"

The exclamation was abrupt.

Quess Paraya's sudden exclamation jolted Hathaway out of his thoughts. He turned to look at her, but because she was behind Adenauer, he didn't know what or why she was shouting.

"What's wrong?" Adenauer's voice, tight with confusion, reached Hathaway's ears.

"A fireball! Don't you get it?"

As Quess shrieked, leaning forward, affording Hathaway a glimpse of the deep worry etched on her face.

"Huh?"

Adenauer turned to look out the window.

"Captain! Steer us to the right!" Quess cried out again, only this time pressing Adenauer into Hathaway, the thirty or so passengers in the cabin now murmuring, grumbling, and criticizing over the girls unpleasant shrieks.

But, blame from the passengers was entirely unfounded.

The two crew members in the cockpit stared in shock at the fiery red object looming in front of them.

"It's further north than expected!"

"That intel was bogus!"

The crew had been aware of a battle happening near Earth, but they had felt confident in the safety of their current airspace, which was located on the opposite side of the combat zone. They had not bothered to conduct adequate radar surveillance. While one might blame the crew for this, it was worth noting that the shuttle's launch procedures had been left to the computer, so this was the time when the crew was naturally inattentive.

A bright red inferno loomed ahead, punctuated by the blinding flashes of nuclear explosions used for deceleration as Fifth Luna continued its descent. Smaller chunks of rock broke off from the space rock and shot past on either side of the Tian Lu like shooting stars.

"Take evasive action!"

The crew had the Tian Lu's left apogee motors at full-throttle, trying to make their course correction as far south as they could. Despite their efforts, they still couldn't break away from the sector where Fifth Luna's fragments pelted the craft like shooting stars.

"Oh god!" the two men in the cockpit exclaimed.

As the tiny meteors came into view through the windows, the passengers erupted into a frenzy of screams and panic, all of it filling the cabin as a supersonic shock sent the shuttle into a wild and violent ride.

"You've got to go further right! It's coming!"

"Stay seated! There are meteorites!" Hathaway shouted to Quess. Strangely enough, this time, Adenauer's body wasn't blocking them. Just then, a red light was spat out from the window across from Quess, moving from right to left.

The main body of Fifth Luna had passed by them.

"Aaaah?!"

A violent shutter assaulted the cabin, Quess' body flailed and hit the ceiling. Hathaway stretched out his arms, catching her and pulling her back down.

In the seat next to him, Adenauer buried his upper body between the seats in front of him, clutching his head with both hands.

"Please, dear God!"

Now on Hathaway's lap, Quess could hear her father's panicked prayers clearly over the screams of the other passengers in the cabin.

"Ptooeey!" She spat on her father's back.

That entire ordeal went unseen by Hathaway as he struggled to support her body amidst the violent shaking.

It didn't take long for the main body of Fifth Luna, which had only just grazed the shuttle, to appear in the skies over Tibet. The fiery space rock blazed a trail of red as it hurtled towards Lhasa, leaving a trail of meteors in its wake to crash into the highland lakes. Throngs of cars crowded the streets to the east, marveling at the spectacle above.

"Look, Mama! A huge shooting star!"

The excited exclamation from the boy caused the mother behind the wheel of their land cruiser to glance up at the massive, fiery red orb of Fifth Luna sinking into the edge of the mountains to their rear.

"Rumors in Lhasa say it's a meteoroid!"

"Now we know why the government building was so quiet! The bigwigs ran off a while ago!"

Their words were replaced with abject joy in having escaped, and there was a collective sigh of relief. But, only one mountain separated them from Lhasa. They were not safe.

Fifth Luna broke through the clouds and struck Lhasa with several strikes.

First, a falling supersonic wave threatened those still fleeing Lhasa, a meteoric rain falling upon the surrounding area, sheering off the sandstone and stucco walls of Lhasa's iconic Potala Museum. Then, the compressed force between the ground and the meteor erupted in a fiery explosion. The city was gutted and vanished in an instant.

Those still in the line of cars who had just witnessed the space rock crash into the mountain across from them now saw the edge of the mountain crumble away with a blinding flash across the sky. The ensuing violent tremor caused the mountain itself to collapse in a storm of earth and sand.

"Ah!"

"Get down!"

Their cries were lost in the deafening roar of a landslide.

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Far from geostationary orbit, in an airspace where it was unclear whether it would head for the Moon or Side 2, a Musaka from the Neo Zeon fleet pivoted, its bow aimed toward the pursuing Ra Cailum fleet. Yet, there was no sense of urgency in their movements.

Several Geara Doga units transferring to the Musaka floated into it, receiving supplies from Petit mobile suits. As this went on, a three-dimensional video of Char floated in space beside the ship.

The video of Char Aznable depicted him wearing a sharp, high-collared uniform with a cape, that of the Supreme Commander of Neo Zeon, not the business attire he was often seen in on the news.

"The operation to drop Fifth Luna marks the first major battle of the Neo Zeon fleet. It has given me the opportunity to observe you in action. I'm very impressed."

The three-dimensional video was projected from the flagship Rewloola, behind the Musaka, creating the illusion that Char was looking contemptuously at the Earth.

"However, the dropping of Fifth onto Earth alone was not nearly enough to purify it. That, you are all well aware of."

As Char's video played on the mobile suit deck of the Rewloola, the Nightingale and other mobile suits stood below it in what seemed like silent attention.

The mechanics listened to the speech without tearing their hands away from the resupply and repair of the mobile suits. That freedom is likely what makes Neo Zeon so evocative.

But one pilot was not so enraptured by Char's words amongst the sea of focused individuals. Glarv Guss. He paid the speech no mind as he drifted above the mobile suit deck.

As he turned around at the catwalk's top ledge, he grabbed onto the lift grip along the walkway leading to the bridge, drifting away.

"We'll conclude our mission today with a wrap-up. While it is a simple diversion, it is nonetheless a crucial operation that will determine the future fate of Neo Zeon."

On the bridge of the Rewloola, Char stood in the glare of the projection camera, flanked by two men who, unlike Mesta Mesua, did not have the look of soldiers. These were his political advisors, Kaisas M. Buyer, and Horst Harness.

"This will serve as a check on the fleet of the pursuing Ra Cailum. It is my hope that you will complete this operation safely and return to Sweetwater. That is all."

Char gave a crisp salute, and the camera light went out.

"That was first-rate."

Though shorter in stature, Kaisas Buyer applauded the man, yet his eyes shone with a vigilant gleam.

"I feel like a total clown."

Char removed his cape, disapproval marring his face as he tossed it in Mesta's direction. It floated in zero gravity, spreading out as though it were a magic trick.

"Yes, but as Neo Zeon's leader, you must maintain your public image. Otherwise, a leader quickly becomes just a Captain who becomes just a pilot," said the other man in plainclothes, Horst Harness.

"So I should quickly become a politician then?"

Char winked in Mesta's direction, but she merely smiled back at the man as she gathered up his cape. She despised opening her mouth in front of these men.

Leaving the bridge, Char noticed Glarv drifting toward them.

"Captain!"

"What is it?"

"Sir! Are you aware of the nasty rumors going around among the mechanics about you?"

The young Glarv was being somewhat unreserved, but for Kaisas and Horst, who had followed him down the passageway, they paid him no mind. Char positioned himself to hear what he had to say.

"I wouldn't know. What I do know, though, is that I loathe soldiers who snitch."

"I'm very sorry. I do have a question, sir."

"What is it?"

"Please tell me, why did you abandon my Psycho Doga on Fifth Luna?"

Mesta couldn't stand the sight of Char's men, let alone the enhanced Glarv, talking to him about such things.

"Watch your tongue, Glarv," Mesta interjected sharply, "You have another mission to attend to, so get your head in the game and get down to the lower launch deck!"

"So, what, it was a *faute de mieux* to let the enemy capture my Psycho Doga?"

"Don't act like you're the only one who can make the tough calls."

"Londo Bell doesn't even have any decent mobile suits! We should have repaired the suit and let me use it!" he retorted.

"The Psycho Doga is beyond repair. There's no way for them to make use of it!"

Char stepped forward, cutting off the argument, "You've undergone extensive enhancement at the Newtype Labs, which doesn't come cheap. We can't afford to lose you. We can copy the data from the psycommu installed on your Psycho Doga, so it won't affect future operations. That's why I made the call for you to abandon your suit."

With that said, Char turned away from Glarv and drifted toward the waiting elevator with Horst and Kaisers in it.

"Londo Bell hasn't been able to produce a successor to the Gundam, you know! But you've created the Psycho Doga, the Nightingale, and are even trying to finish the Alpha Azieru, Captain! So then why—Ow!"

Glarv's words were cut short as Mesta's hand struck him across the cheek.

"The Captain made the right call. You need to understand that your life and abilities are far more valuable than any mobile suit," she said firmly, her glare intimidating.

Glarv took a deep breath, feeling the weight of her words sink in before offering a crisp salute. With a wave of her hand, Mesta motioned for him to leave, gripping the lift grip to the elevator.

Despite it all, she knew how he felt.

Abandoning a Gears Doga would be one thing, but it was a risky play for Char to leave behind one of his main forces mobile suits, namely the Psycho Doga, on Fifth Luna.

"If what Glarv says about Londo Bell is true," she thought, "then I can only assume why the Captain made that call."

Yet she knew exactly why.

"You're trying to make sure everything is perfect..." she whispered.

Even as the elevator doors opened, she hesitated to step into the empty space.

"Ordering a Psycho Doga from Anaheim Electronics on Luna proved to be a fiasco, didn't it? Their factory used to be under the direct control of the Federation government. So it's no surprise that the mechanics are upset about what happened, am I right?"

Kaisers said from the living room of their leader's office, taking over what Glarv was letting on about.

"True, but had we not, we might not have been able to pull off this operation in time, now would we?" Char countered, entering the room with a smile. "Besides, there's no indication that Anaheim leaked any intel on the Psycho Doga's construction to the Federation government."

"Well, I certainly wasn't aware of the Psycho Doga's construction period, now was I?"

Kaises inquired, leaning towards Horst.

"Yes, well, I was preoccupied at the time..." replied the man over his shoulder, rifling through papers in his briefcase.

The living room door opened.

"Pardon me, gentlemen."

It was Mesta.

"Is Glarv fit to go with us?"

"He might be more than a little nervous, but he'll make for dependable security. The colony scenery will also serve as a tranquilizer of sorts, so please, take him with you."

"As you say," Horst said, nodding.

"He considers himself an indestructible machine. But, unfortunately, that kind of confidence leads him to make impulsive decisions."

"Do you think he's been enhanced too much?"

"My primary focus was on psychological imprinting. Drug-induced neuroreflex enhancement was secondary. Biotech enhancements were—"

"He's just young. Let's go, shall we?" Char interrupted, emerging from another room dressed in civilian attire.

"Captain, you have to understand you are the supreme commander of Neo Zeon. This kind of work is your responsibility."

"Yes, I'm aware. That's why I'm getting ready to act like a politician," he assured the man before turning to Mesta. "Mesta. Can I count on you to orchestrate a diversion against the Londo Bell fleet?" he asked, pulling her close to him by the waist.

PART 4 **TOGETHER IN SPACE**



The diversionary operation was intended to distract the Ra Cailum and prevent detection of the launch carrying Char from the Rewloola. The attack on the fleet was carried out solely by the Geara Doga forces of the Musaka.

The Geara Doga units, launching from either of the two catapult decks on the Musaka, veered off along the port side and made contact with the Shackles standing by in the airspace ahead of them before jettisoning off one after another towards the Earth.

Shackles were platforms that served as a faster means for mobile suits during long-distance incursions.

Two or three Geara Doga clung to them as they rocketed along. Despite that, for some time now, mobile suit pilots have referred to these types of vehicles as "sleds." Few people know its origin, though.

"Don't they realize mobile suits aren't meant to run decoy operations?!" Rezun Schneider, one of the pilots, swore. She was a woman who seemed born to pilot, with a fiery temper that would've earned her the reputation of a gangster if it weren't for the military.

The launching of the mobile suit teams from the Musaka was at a distance that couldn't be seen by the Rewloola's bridge, but command of the op came from the same ship situated to their rear.

"Once our mobile suits are engaged in combat, send out the launch."

"Yes, ma'am!"

Kaises sat in his seat behind Mesta, contently.

He watched the Fifth Luna drop operation play out, eager to witness the efforts of a man who had put whatever was left of his life on the line.

The outcome was beyond gratifying. In a world where it seemed like a far-fetched dream to make a name for yourself for anyone not born near the Earth Federation government, Char's youthful exuberance was an eye-opening experience for Kaises.

A small civilian launch was anchored on the lower hatch of the Rewloola. Horst, Char, and Glarv had all just boarded it. The rear container of that launch was a sort of cargo ship with enough space to house a single mobile suit.

"Enemy mobile suits sighted! All mobile suit forces, prepare to engage!"

It was less than fifteen minutes later when the bridge crew of the Ra Cailum made a dash for the combat bridge.

Pilots on standby in the briefing room streamed onto the mobile suit deck, Amuro in tow.

"The Re-GZ still grounded?"

"Lieutenant Amuro, you can head over to the sixth Jegan! We're short a pilot!"

Amuro's question had been followed up with an order from the deck chief.

"On it, chief!"

Amuro used a wire lift from in front of the damaged Re-GZ to drift up to the opposite side of the mobile suit deck.

The pilots of the Geara Doga squadrons drawing closer to the Ra Cailum's combat zone were thinking to themselves, "You're a total dumbass if you get damaged in an op like this. Just do what needs doing and get back to the ship!"

But,

"Get it together! Now's our chance to squash a few!"

Even in this one-sided, risk-taking battle, Rezun was brave.

The three Geara Doga under her command detached themselves from their Shackles and, when its afterburners were fully opened, fell into its shadow and rushed forward. Using sleds in this fashion couldn't be found in any Neo Zeon combat doctrine.

The moment the enemy Jegan forces were within sight, the dummies equipped on their sleds were unleashed, overwhelming the enemy and allowing the three Geara Dogas to launch a synchronized attack.

With blazing speed, they plunged straight into the heart of the warzone, shredding through the opposing mobile suits.

However, Amuro's Jegan was not caught off guard.

Cool and collected, he flew along the edges of the battle, zeroing in on the most critical areas with precision. This methodology was something only he was allowed to do.

Amuro possessed a heightened sense, able to perceive the "chi" or energy of his surroundings, even in mobile suits not equipped with a psycommu system. Although not as clear as it could be, it was simply a matter of sharp reflexes.

This small edge was the dividing line between success and failure, mastery and mediocrity.

Amuro drifted in front of Rezun's team. Making a counterattack from one flank, he found that he had wrecked one Geara Doga. But Rezun and another were hot on his trail, launching their decoys to both sides of him.

"Ugh! Damn them!"

Amuro pulled the trigger on his Jegan's beam rifle but was hit by a direct shot from Rezun's. The beam particles slammed into his suit, jolting the cockpit with a violent shake.

"Tch! What's wrong? Has Char sucked the life out of me?"

Amuro cursed to himself as he tried to evade and fight back.

Meanwhile, in the vicinity of the same battlefield, the Tian Lu shuttle drifted aimlessly with the Earth as its backdrop. Two figures, clad in normal suits, were frantically working to repair the battered hull. After drifting too close to Fifth Luna, the shuttle sustained massive damage and was in dire straits.

"What're those lights over there? You don't think it's a battle, do you?"

The officer was the first to spot the lights of battle and rushed to drift toward the cockpit. Meanwhile, the captain and co-pilot were crouched on the cockpit floor, pouring over the wiring beneath the deck plating. They were completely unaware of the conflict that lay ahead.

"Change course! Change course! There's a battle over there!"

The two men bolted upright, panic in their eyes.

"The damn apogee motor won't listen to me. That's why I said to fix it quickly! Look at this mess!"

"What do you think we're doing?! We're trying!" the officer replied, darting back to the stern.

The captain was fed up with the entire debacle. All he could think about was the fact that a certain individual from Lhasa had brought this misfortune upon them.

"Oh no, don't come this way!"

The mechanics sudden outburst horrified the officer, who looked away from the hull he was trying to repair. An unfamiliar mobile suit flew past them, its mono-eye gleaming.

"There's no God in outer space, is there?!"

Amuro was the first to spot the shuttle in their combat zone, though he didn't hear the officer's exclamation. He was quick to pick up on it since he had just retreated from Rezun's suit, which was demonstrating remarkably well-trained and coordinated attacks.

"Huh? What's that? A civilian craft has drifted into the battle zone?!"

Amuro brought his Jegan in close to the Tian Lu, which was flashing a civilian aircraft signal, before laying down a barrage of fire against the enemy mobile suits that mistakenly tried to approach.

In the shuttle's cabin, passengers weren't allowed to don normal suits, so they were cowering on the floor and between the seats. Quess was stretched across two seats, using Hathaway as a makeshift pillow, as she watched Adenauer's frenzied pounding on the cockpit door.

"He looks so hopeless," she muttered. "Trapped, with no escape."

Hathaway could feel the soft touch of Quess' body on his back and her breath on the back of his neck.

"Captain, send out the civilian craft signal! You can do that much, can't you?!" Adenauer implored, desperation in his voice.

In the cockpit, realization dawned on the Captain at what he could do on account of Adenauer's protests, so he pulled the signal flare lever.

"It's your fault this is happening!"

The flare skyrocketed away, not as a stray bullet but as a brilliant beam that grazed the shuttle's wing. It exploded into a magnificent display of seven colors, painting space like a beautiful fireworks show, a stark contrast to the violence and destruction of war.

"So it's a civilian craft?! Tch! We'll pull back five seconds earlier than planned!"

It was a principle of the space colony era that even in the heat of battle, all hostilities would cease if a civilian craft wandered into the crossfire. Even Rezun abided by this. Three signal rounds were fired from her Geara Doga to signal the order to retreat, and the Rewloola's squadron swiftly pulled back.

Staring out at the tail nozzles as they spread and converged from all directions like fireworks, Amuro was perplexed.

"They sure know when to quit... but how?"

At the same time, the launch carrying Char, which launched from the Rewloola, was on course for Londenion.

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"Seems we now have a troublesome passenger aboard," Bright grumbled, tossing the passenger list of the Tian Lu onto the console where it stuck with a magnetic attachment.

"Who could that be?"

"The Vice-Minister of the Earth Federation Forces Space Forces."

"Wowza! What was he doing on a civilian shuttle?"

"Probably running away."

Bright's joke sparked a burst of raucous laughter on the bridge, breaking the tension and bringing a sense of relief. Unfortunately, in the midst of the merriment, Bright overlooked Hathaway's name on the passenger list.

Directing the shuttle passengers to the officers' mess hall was a test of patience, as most were unaccustomed to zero gravity. Most of them had finally made up their minds to go into space following Char's occupation of Sweetwater.

"As long as you keep your feet flat on the floor, you'll be fine!"

The Ra Cailum crew did their best to instruct the passengers but ended up having to physically guide them into the mess hall.

As Bright descended the lift grip, the frustration from the earlier commotion still lingered, and he mentally berated himself for the impending encounter with Adenauer.

"Hathaway?!" Bright called out, spotting his son behind the ship's crew and wondering why he hadn't seen his name on the passenger list.

Hearing his father's voice, Hathaway turned towards Bright, slipping back by Quess since he was almost in the mess hall.

"Dad?!"

Clearly unaccustomed to space, Hathaway flailed awkwardly, hit the ceiling, and drifted away. Bright stepped forward and grabbed onto him."

"C'mere you!"

"Dad!!"

"Why were you on the shuttle?"

"I didn't know you were the captain of this ship..."

"Hathaway, where's your mom and Cheimin?"

"Huh? Oh, it's just me. They only let one of us on the shuttle."

"Just you?"

Their face-to-face meeting didn't last long.

"Captain, I'm sorry to break up your family reunion and all, but..."

Adenauer balanced himself on Quess' shoulders, making it evident he, too, was unaccustomed to zero gravity.

"This man is the one who got me on the shuttle."

"Oh really? You must be the Vice-Minister."

"That I am. You'll need to redirect this ship to Londenion."

"Londenion? That's already our ship's intended destination."

"That's good to hear. When do you think we'll arrive?"

"Well, we'll be in contact with a military unit, so I'm afraid I can't discuss that with you."

"I'm on special assignment. Here's the paperwork," he said in a somewhat low profile as he produced a document from his pocket and handed it to Bright. This is what happens when it comes to those who protect themselves.

"Hathaway, go straight to the mess hall. We'll discuss why you've come later," Bright said to his son as he took the paperwork.

"S-sure!" Hathaway said, eagerly agreeing.

As he floated away, Bright shot a sideways glance at the girl who was supporting the Vice-Minister, feeling a twinge of annoyance that he hadn't even bothered to introduce her.

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Amuro's figure was writhing in the cascade of shimmering light. He was transfixed, his eyes fixed on a single source of light.

He gasped in wonder as a single swan emerged from the light, transforming into the shape of a young woman. Her features seemed to be of a mixed race, and she was clad in pale yellow-like garb.

"Lalah Sune!" he shouted her name in the light before his voice turned into a furious scream.

"If you think you can treat me like Char, you're sorely mistaken!"

Hearing Amuro's cries, Lalah's outline swiftly turned away.

"It's torture, you know. Having one's consciousness live on for eternity. All I wanted was to see you both. To provide me with some respite from that pain... That's all I wanted!"

"You can't hold him one moment and me the next!"

"For as long as I was alive, I was torn between the two of you! Do you have any idea how painful that was?!"

"As if! Let Char go!"

"But... Char is pure."

"Pure?!"

Amuro's upper body jolted. He had been talking in his sleep. His body moved with such force inside the zero gravity sleeping bag as he sat up that he struck its seal, and his body rebounded, hitting the cushioned wall. Finally, he blinked.

"This is what happens when you let your mind get slow..." he muttered, chiding himself for being shaken by a dream.

Shaking off the remnants of his dream, he opened the seal on the sleeping bag, allowing the dim light of the quarters to illuminate his nearly naked form.

The Ra Cailum drifted silently through space, its engines now silent.

"It's not like there's a manual for captured mobile suits!" Amuro grumbled, running his hands through his fiery red hair before making his way to the shower room.

"Is the psycommu on this mobile suit similar to the one used in the Gundam?"

As he opened the door to the shower room, the sudden brightness from the automatic lights caused him to squint.

"Did Beltorchika know about Char's hidden agenda? He had the Psycho Doga built at Anaheim, after all. He had the audacity to do that!" Amuro spat out as the shower sprayed over him. The vacuum in the floor roared to life, sucking the water down. Just then, a call chirped from the bridge.

"What is it?!"

"It's the Nu Gundam, sir! It's making its approach to the ship."

Claire Thrune, the non-commissioned officer from the bridge, seemed to bound up and down in elation on the three-inch display she popped up on.

"Quit clowning around," Amuro shot back, launching himself out of the shower room and dabbing his wet hair.

"Who is it?"

"Who is what?"

"The pilot of the Nu Gundam!"

"Beltorchika Irma!" operator Messis Brown yelled from the display on the wall facing the living room, their expression clearly indicating that it was obvious.

Once in the normal suit room, Amuro changed into his pilot suit.

As reports of the Nu Gundam's approach course filtered in, the crew was buzzing with excitement. They were expecting reinforcements, but the arrival was quicker than they had anticipated.

The rear mobile suit deck was open and facing Earth, indicating that it wasn't returning from the moon. Amuro was so relieved that he had momentarily forgotten about his dream.

A familiar mobile suit silhouette gradually drifted in. It was the Nu Gundam.

A Base Jabber, which had been following the Nu Gundam, started its approach, making a three-point landing on the rear of the mobile suit deck, followed by the Nu Gundam as it, too, made a soft vertical touchdown.

It was a sight to behold.

Amuro was taken back to the first time Beltorchika made contact with him and the others. During the Titans rebellion, they were aboard the carrier Audumla orbiting the planet when she descended in a small vintage plane, a replica of a classic.

Amuro couldn't help but chuckle at the sight of her Beechcraft Comet, even though he didn't see the landing. They later had a conversation about the Helen-Helen brand of soap that Amuro used.

Three people in normal suits emerged from the Base Jabber. They looked up at the cockpit in the Nu Gundam's chest and saw Beltorchika's suit floating down.

"Why didn't you come up to welcome me?"

"You were expecting me to?"

"You couldn't even be bothered to come up to the Gundam's cockpit!" she huffed like a petulant child as she pressed her normal suit's visor against Amuro's. This skin-to-skin conversation relied on the vibrations between each of the visors to transmit voices.

"Lieutenant Amuro!" A voice called out from the Base Jabber. It was October Saran, a technician from Anaheim Electronics.

"You brought the funnels too?" Amuro asked, surveying the pile of parts stacked on the platform of the Base Jabber as he acknowledged the favor that October had done for him.

"They haven't been tested yet, but we brought them along. At Beltorchika's insistence..."

"He's right. I forced him to. But, thanks to you, you were able to run a familiarization test on the Nu Gundam, though, right?"

"This is it. I'm totally going to keel over. I haven't gotten a lick of sleep. You know that?"

"Gotcha. I'll finish up the checks on my end until we get back to Londo Bell. Get some rest."

Amuro also gave a few words of encouragement to the mechanics that October had brought along with him and also introduced them to their chief mechanic, Astonage.

"Astonage, except for the psycommu, there are no exceptions. Secure the Nu Gundam here and start the final checks," Amuro instructed.

"I guess we'll have to. The forward deck air is fouled up from the repairs to the Re-GZ and going over the Psycho Doga."

Astonage's casual mention of the Psycho Doga caught October off-guard.

"A Psycho Doga is here?"

"Yup, but it's missing its arms and legs, so what?"

Astonage's tone was slightly irritable, with a hint of disdain.

"Please. Show it to me."

"You guys built it, though, didn't you?"

"I wasn't involved. The Granada factory and our Von Braun factory are two completely separate companies on opposite sides of the moon."

"What do you want to see on it?"

"It's the Psycho Doga, isn't it? It's equipped with a psycommu. If we don't compare the two, there could be some weird interference that could affect the pilot, right?"

Amuro was relieved by October's response, as he saw him as a strong ally.

The performance of a mobile suit isn't entirely dependent on the performance of its psycommu, but having superior abilities to detect the enemy's presence is always an advantage. Furthermore, if you can assess the performance of an enemy psycommu, you can find ways to avoid it.

The psycommu for the Nu Gundam was designed by Amuro himself, though it is solely intended for the control of the brainwave-controlled missiles and funnels.

However, the Psycho Doga's psycommu is considered a psycho-frame which was embedded into the frame around the cockpit. A psycho-frame has a tendency to constrain the pilot's intentions even more than that of the Nu Gundam. One could say that it has a coercive force that keeps a pilot's consciousness moving forward.

"He said Psycho Doga. Is that the psycho-type mobile suit made by Char?"

"Yeah. Wanna see it?"

"Duh."

Beltorchika, seeming to forget just how tired she was as well, caught up to October and the others, drifting along toward the forward mobile suit deck.

The main mobile suit deck and the rear mobile suit deck were in separate compartments, connected by three lift grip ways.

"This is great! They've already come up with a simulation using data from the last battle!"

The voice came from a young girl which seemed terribly out of place on the mobile suit deck.

"Remember, that's classified information. Keep it under wraps."

Beltorchika looked overhead. Disbelief was painted on her face.

Adenauer Paraya, Bright Noa, and Quess were on a crane platform that extended upward in front of the cockpit to one of the Jegans.

"Crap, dang, this guy! You're goin' down!"

Hathaway's voice came from inside the Jegan's cockpit.

"Huh? Who's that?"

"The Vice Minister of the Earth Federation Forces. He was on the shuttle."

"What're they doing?"

"Bright's entertaining them. He's letting Hathaway and Quess play a game with the Jegan's computer graphic simulation."

"So why's the Vice Minister here?"

"Rumor has it he fled from Lhasa."

"So Fifth Luna fell?!"

"That's the state of the Earth Federation government for you."

"What fools!" spat Beltorchika as she drifted towards the section where the Psycho Doga was kept.

"I think she's got good instincts."

"I had no idea she was interested in stuff like this."

Adenauer seemed to scoff at Bright's comment, neither flattering nor serious. Just then, Quess' body drifted away from the platform and toward the same direction as Amuro and the others.

"...?"

Amuro couldn't miss the look of discontent on Quess' face. It was evident she did not want to be around her father.

"Quess, you'll get all greasy that way. They're repairing mobile suits," Amuro said, a smile on his face as he drifted upward in front of the girl.

"Huh?"

"Plus, this is a military vessel. There are some things we don't want civilians to see. Not to mention some pretty strong language from adults and soldiers, too," he added, catching Quess by the elbow and pointing towards the tarp-covered area with a nod of his head.

"Oh, the other side of that tarped wall?"

"Yup. That's a military suit."

"Ah, gotcha! Mind giving me a push?"

Quess noticed they were drifting in the center of the mobile suit deck.

"Sure."

With a shove to her shoulder and hip, she drifted up toward the cat deck, which could be seen between the Jegan. Despite the recoil sending Amuro drifting toward the other side, he still had his wire lift.

"Are you Amuro Ray?"

Quess asked as she drifted.

"That's right, I am."

Amuro fired the wire of the lift toward where Beltorchika was floating.

"I see! He's so kind, isn't he?" Quess mused, grabbing onto the railing of the catwalk.

"...?"

Looking back, Quess could see Amuro floating along by the wire lift, drawing closer to Beltorchika in her normal suit, who was between the legs of a Jegan.

The confident and poised demeanor of the woman in the normal suit caught Quess' attention, but she was also touched by the warmth in Amuro's response. She felt it was best not to say anything for now and instead savored the feeling.

"They say Amuro is no ordinary person. Could he be the one?" Quess thought, feeling content.

"Quess, you'll get in the way. Come back!"

She could see Adenauer and Bright floating toward the cat deck on the other side, but she was still upset with her father for ruining the good mood she was in.

"Go ahead without me!" she called out with a scowl.

Adenauer was about to say something to address Quess' hostile demeanor, but Bright pulled him away and concealed him behind the catwalk.

"I shot down three enemies!" Hathaway boasted as he drifted over from the Jegan, blissfully ignorant of Quess' sour mood.

"That's how many I got."

"Really?"

"He's pretty chill," she thought, given Hathaway's carefree attitude.

x x x

The Side 1 colony of Londenion is a standard open type. A tranquil view of Earth, seemingly unmarred by the deep freeze operation, spreads out before it.

Just prior to the Ra Cailum's acquisition of the Nu Gundam, Char and his crew were aboard a launch navigating their way towards Londenion's port, following the glowing guide lights of the dock.

"We're on target, thanks to the code the Federation provided."

"They're pretty casual with their information, aren't they?"

"You've got that wrong, Captain. It's all thanks to us laying the groundwork behind the scenes," said Horst, peeking over Char's back, pouting in a way that was completely uncharacteristic of him.

"Ah, I must commend your and Kaises' expertise. I presume you've also booked a luxurious hotel?"

"I see. I should have had Mesta go along as well, then."

Horst wasn't joking around; he was being deadly serious. This was one of the many instances where Char and his team found themselves clashing with Horst's approach.

"Is that what we appear to be?" Char quipped with a sarcastic edge, but Horst only gave him a bewildered expression. Those who view secretaries as merely hired arm candy would not appreciate Char's reaction, as it was too sober and honest.

Char's launch was subjected to customary checkpoints and immigration inspections, but with their VIP passports issued by the Federation, they glided through the beltway alongside Londonion's Londo Bell unit's wharf without raising any red flags.

"Too bad the fleet isn't here, eh?" said Horst with a wry smile.

"I've seen enough in actual combat. We can take the launch into an industrial block, right?"

"Yes. The permission to use the Notomi Mining Company's hatch is a genuine one issued by the Earth Federation government. No one will suspect anything."

Horst stroked his prized goatee and looked at Glarv, who was sulking behind him.

"Heh!"

Glarv snorted as he looked up at the mobile suits flying in the skies- albeit at the height of only a dozen or so meters above the harbor.

"Does the Earth Federation government think it can wipe out the remaining forces of the Zabi Family, Haman, or the like, with this kind of force?"

"Don't be so dismissive. They have a fleet stationed on every colony and every rock in lunar orbit. That's the Earth Federation government for you. You're making a huge mistake if you continue to think the same way as when you were in outer space."

The captain of the launch admonished Glarv.

"The same sort of unit?"

"They're no joke. Londo Bell may be a special forces unit, but they're the smallest among the Earth Federation forces. The others may have larger forces, but they're lying untapped."

Said the pilot, following Horst's question.

"The Captain plans to attack the head of the Earth Federation before they wake up. That's why we're going to all this trouble."

"Please don't take this the wrong way, but I come from an Island 1 colony with a population of 15,000. I lost my parents in the colony destruction during the One Year War, and I've lived out of orbit ever since."

"I know. That's why I'm asking you to be humble and face reality. You won't be able to bring down the Earth Federation government with just a few enhancements," said Char just before he drifted into one of the elevators ahead.

"You are aware that the Federation government may be using these negotiations as a pretext to arrest the Captain, aren't you?"

"Ah! Is that why we entered the port covertly?"

Upon hearing Horst's words, Glarv realized, finally comprehending the true purpose of their mission.

"When that time comes, Glarv, I'm counting on you. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in this colony."

"Yes, sir!"

In the elevator window, several floors sped past upwards until finally, the sight of construction within the cylinder came into view from under the clouds.

"So much greenery," Glarv marveled, feeling a hint of the meaning behind Char's and the others' warnings against the backdrop of the picturesque surroundings.

PART 5 **YOUNG BOY & GIRL**



The Ra Cailum fleet was making its way to Londenion as if it were in pursuit of Char.

Hathaway was situated just outside the airlock to the officer's mess, peering through a telescope and taking in the sights of Side 1's airspace and the location of Londenion. This region, set in a unique position as if in pursuit of the Moon, was home to the first space colonies ever built, housing over a hundred colonies and nearly two billion people.

"That's a space colony?! If we can build something like this, then it makes me think people really can evolve!"

Quess peered through the telescope, her eyes wide as she gazed upon the space colonies, each with three long mirrors attached to slender cylindrical structures.

"Yeah! It makes sense why the Zabi family from the Principality of Zeon in the Side 3 colonies on the Moon's far side would seek independence from Earth."

"Oh, I get where you're going! The One Year War. The one where the Zeon made war or something."

"Yeah. And don't forget, Char, the legendary Red Comet, was part of the Zeon forces during that war. Do you think he's the one leading the Neo Zeon now?"

"Didn't he also serve the Federation Forces at some point?" Quess asked, still fixated on the view through the telescope.

"During the Titans rebellion, I believe. After the Principality of Zeon lost the One Year War, Char fled to the asteroid belt. No one knows exactly what he was up to, but he came back from his mysterious stint and aligned himself with Amuro and my dad to take on a sinister Zeon woman as part of some anti-Earth Federation Forces."

Hathaway explained though he wasn't entirely sure of all the details.

"You're talking about the Gryps War, right? And now they say he's trying to freeze the Earth?" Quess asked, turning to Hathaway.

"That's the rumor. But why would he do that? I can't wrap my head around it."

The young Hathaway struggled to comprehend Char's twisted motives.

"Really? Well, I get why he's doing it. Char is carrying out his beliefs. His father, Zeon Deikun, was the one who advocated for independence for Spacenoids, right? He was assassinated by the Zabi family, and they co-opted his name. That's why Char joined the Zeon forces to seek revenge against them. He's always stood behind Deikun's declaration, and even I can tell that he will do something about people whose souls are being weighed down by the Earth. So that's why there's an operation to freeze the Earth! If you just took a step back, you'd see that too!"

"..."

Hathaway was left speechless, simply staring at Quess.

"What's wrong?"

"How do you know all of this?"

"What? I saw it all on TV and in newspapers."

"It's impressive how you've pieced everything together, but I'm not sure. Do you think that gives him the right to plunge Earth into a freeze?"

"Uh, well... I don't know if it's right or wrong to do that."

Hathaway was taken aback by Quess's straightforwardness, but he couldn't help but be impressed by her quick thinking.

"I thought that Char was a Newtype. But then why would someone like him even consider wiping out Earth?"

As if laughing at Hathaway, she grabbed the railing and flung herself down the corridor. Hathaway thought it was beautiful seeing her body floating through the air.

"I also met Amuro, who they say is a Newtype too. But I got the sense that there's more to him than just being a kind person," she said, her body contorted towards the ceiling.

"Everyone says he actually knew how to pilot the first Gundam the moment he sat in the cockpit and even wiped out a Zeon Zaku!"

"You think that's true?"

"Apparently, he just took one look at the console panels and understood the mobile suit's circuits and movements."

The story was most likely exaggerated, as rumors often are the more they're repeated. But it still caught Quess by surprise.

"Huuuuuh?"

"What?" Now it was Hathaway's turn to be surprised.

"Bahahaha!" Quess suddenly erupted into laughter. "Sure! I suppose."

She approached the window once more.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing, really. And that makes him a Newtype?"

"In a way, yes. As humans adapted to life in space, they developed new abilities due to their exposure to zero gravity and altered sense of up and down. And the more they exhibited these abilities, the more they evolved into beings like espers."

"That's different from what Christina told me. She grew up with me in India, and she says that a Newtype is able to comprehend people and things without misunderstanding. No matter how far away they may be."

"Yeah, that makes sense! Back when humans only lived on Earth, they were only able to use half their cerebral cortex, right? But when they went into space, people started using the other half. That's why they improved their telepathy and precognition abilities. Otherwise, families living apart in colonies and on Earth would lose their connection to each other."

Quess shifted, looking somewhat lonely, "Is your family like that?"

"Somewhat. But is your dad always strict?" Hathaway asked.

"Our family has always lived on Earth. It's terrible," Quess said, her face pressed against the window staring out it.

To Hathaway, Quess's silhouette was shrouded by a bleak shadow.

x x x

A gnawing fear plagued Quess that she might never lay eyes on Amuro Ray again. But, on the other hand, it was only natural, given that the ship was about to dock in less than half an hour. With that in mind, she steeled herself and made up her mind to return to the mobile suit deck without a moment's hesitation.

Surprisingly, no guards were stationed at the hatch leading to the deck. Instead, the crew seemed at ease; the atmosphere relaxed as they approached the port. Quess cautiously opened the hatch and peeked down the catwalk deck that hugged the wall, making sure it was empty before slipping inside.

The mobile suit deck was eerily quiet, a stark contrast to the hustle and bustle she had heard from beyond the tarped-off area earlier. The towering Jegans, illuminated by dim lights, looked like ancient Buddha statues she had seen on her travels to India.

"...?"

"Hey, you there!"

A voice from below interrupted Quess' thoughts. Peering over the railing in confusion, she looked down to see Beltorchika Irma floating by the Jegan's legs, dressed in civilian attire.

"This area is off-limits to civilians," snapped Beltorchika, throwing Quess off-guard. But as she watched the woman ascend towards the catwalk deck, she had a hunch as to why.

"She's got quite the temper...but there must be a reason for it," Quess pondered.

"You wouldn't be Vice Minister Adenauer Praya's daughter by chance, would you?" asked Beltorchika, causing Quess to meet her gaze and smile in response.

"You're..."

Beltorchika's eyebrow arched as she looked at Quess quizzically before letting out a forced laugh.

"What's the matter?"

"You're... pregnant, aren't you?" Quess said softly.

"What? You're kidding. In the middle of a war?" Beltorchika scoffed.

"Hahaha!"

Quess couldn't help but find the woman's irrational reaction amusing.

"A tad bit impolite, would you say?? Are you really his daughter?"

Beltorchika chuckled as she realized the peculiar nature of her own inquiry but still felt the need to defend herself.

"You grown-ups always miss the point."

"Adults? Adults..."

Beltorchika pushed off the Jegan's manipulator she was holding onto and drifted up to the catwalk's deck railing.

"Sorry. It's just that your entire demeanor emanates a different kind of strength if that makes any sense?"

"Then I'm relieved."

"Mm, is it Amuro's child?" Quess asked hesitantly, but it was something she needed to know.

"You're sure? But how?"

"No, no... it's fine."

Quess replied, trying to put some distance between herself and Beltorchika as she felt her shoulders relax.

"Ms. Paraya?"

"It's Quess. Just Quess is fine."

Quess was left feeling powerless, a sense of betrayal coursing through her as her interest in Amuro waned.

"Quess!"

"Forget it! Later!" Quess replied, drifting through the hatch of the catwalk deck without even looking at Beltorchika.

x x x

From the front window of Ra Cailum's bridge, the third hatch of Londonion's port opening could be seen as they approached.

"Do you think Char will go through with his plan to freeze the Earth?"

Bright asked Amuro as he came onto the bridge.

"What's making you doubt it?"

"In order to send Earth into a total Ice Age, he has to crash another asteroid into the planet. But think about it. The Federation Forces control everything within the Moon's orbit. Char succeeded in threatening the Federation government by dropping Fifth Luna. He's pushing to get Sweetwater recognized as Neo Zeon territory. You think he plans to end the war?"

"Do you think Adenauer Paraya came to outer space to negotiate?"

"Most likely. If the high and mighty of the Federation government are going to live on Earth themselves, they'll have to acquiesce to Char's demands. They don't give any consideration to Spacenoids."

"So then, why did Char build those ships in outer orbit? Why else would he need all that firepower?"

"Maybe people with kids are way too optimistic?"

"You think so?" Amuro asked as he flashed a grin and tilted his chin towards Bright. Meanwhile, the guide beacons started to illuminate from the entrance of Londenion's port.

Below their vessel, the damaged shuttle Tian Lu was detached and towed toward a harbor just below theirs.

The airspace referred to as "outer orbit" here is beyond the orbit of the Moon, where several small Island 1-type colonies that served as the base for the space colony construction era remained.

Some were abandoned and sold to the private sector, while others were used as Federation government-controlled astronomical observatories or bases for meteorite collection. However, the true nature of all the small colonies is not entirely clear. It wasn't until Char led his five warships to occupy the space colony of Sweetwater on the outer edge of Side 5 that their forgotten existence came to light once more.

Established several years prior, Londo Bell is an independent, functional unit designed to stem the rise of anti-Earth Federation movements epitomized by the Zabi family, remnants from Haman, or the Titans, all within an army that had essentially become a glorified unemployment reliefs project. However, Londo Bell was under-equipped, a precaution taken by the Earth Federation government to prevent it from becoming a breeding ground for rebellion.

At such a time, Char suddenly returned to the Earth Sphere and made a forced occupation of Sweetwater.

The Ra Cailum was now docked at Londo Bell's pier, and the crew, led by Captain Bright, lined up on the upper deck to bid Adenauer Paraya and Quess farewell. Hathaway stood among the crew, trying to conceal himself.

"I'm relieved you got us here in time, Captain. Thanks to that, Earth can be saved."

"I have some concerns about Char. The attack on the shuttle was also a signal to intimidate you and to show that he means business in your negotiations. If not for the fact that we didn't have the Nu Gundam yet, we would have been destroyed right then and there."

Bright's somewhat disparaging comments fell on deaf ears with Adenauer.

"Negotiations? With whom? Where?" Adenauer asked, coughing.

"You give orders to the Space Forces from Lhasa. I can't imagine you came out here for sightseeing."

"No one must know I'm here. Until the Federation government makes an official announcement."

"Sir!"

Bright saluted as Adenauer nodded slightly and then nudged Quess on the shoulder, guiding her towards the lift grip on the ramp that led to the luxury limousine waiting on the pier.

"Welcome, sir. I'm Cameron Bloom from Londenion's Audit Bureau."

The administration official waiting and holding the door introduced himself, and as Adenauer and his daughter got into the limousine, he closed the door. As Bright and the others observed from afar, he turned towards Ra Cailum.

"Captain Bright Noa, huh? Seems like Miss Mirai made a wise choice in her partner," Cameron mused as he turned toward the passenger seat of the limousine.

"He has the Londo Bell unit to search out the remnants of Zeon, yet before we even know it, he conveniently opens up a direct channel with Char."

"But that's what politicians do."

Beltorchika smiled and nudged Amuro in the elbow while she watched the girl who had made the strange prediction earlier sway across the rear window of the limousine.

"That girl seems troubled..." Beltorchika thought for no reason at all.

"I can imagine how the Titans who rebelled must have felt after witnessing something like that," a voice was heard among the crew. As the limousine disappeared in the direction of the elevator along the guide rails on the pier, everyone dispersed after seeing it off.

Beltorchika glanced at Hathaway, sulking behind the crew, and gave a wry smile, then took Amuro's elbow and headed for the mobile suit deck.

"Hathaway looks pretty down. You think he's okay?"

"He'll be fine. He's just at that age."

x x x

Beltorchika caught Amuro murmuring to himself inside the zero-gravity sleeping bag, but she was still feeling drowsy and knew it wasn't time to get up just yet.

The mobile suit maintenance section was located by the side of the pier where the Ra Cailum was docked.

Amuro had discovered that the performance of the Psycho Doga's psycho-frame didn't interfere with his own psycommu, which led him to suggest attaching a part of the frame to the Nu Gundam. Fortunately, the cockpit of the Nu was in the center of the frame, so there was space around it, and the Psycho Doga's frame could be cut and added as reinforced plating.

It all seemed like a pointless endeavor for someone like Amuro, who was said to have innate Newtype abilities. However, he had his doubts about his own abilities, and so he had taken it upon himself to undertake this task.

"I just want to ensure that the control of the funnels is precise. If it helps reinforce the Nu, I'll do whatever is necessary," was his justification.

Desperately longing for the Psycho Doga's unique psycommu, October Saran was sacrificing the time they could have spent returning to their quarters together.

The psycommu, which could be considered a brainwave amplification device, was primarily in a single device, as evident with the one designed by Amuro and equipped on the Nu Gundam. The Psycho Doga, however, had psycommu chips infused into the frame around the cockpit.

"I heard rumors that our materials development lab was working on it, but..." October tried to defend himself.

"So, the Neo Zeon... Did Char provide it to you?"

This was one of the issues that cropped up between Amuro and October.

"..."

Despite there only being two people in their shared quarters, the air was stuffy and muggy. In an effort to get some fresh air, Beltorchika tore open the tape that held her sleeping bag together, but the air remained stagnant, leaving her with the feeling that she needed to wash her hair.

"How could you say that?! Lalah!"

Amuro's voice startled her as she caught a glimpse of him in the dim light filtering in from the mobile suit deck. He was thrashing around in his sleeping bag, the belt holding him down creaking as he moved.

"Amuro?" Beltorchika spoke softly, realizing that talking in his sleep was not unusual for him, but this level of intensity was new to her.

Slipping out of her own sleeping bag, she drifted over to him. Amuro's breathing was ragged and unsteady, and she could barely make out the contours of his face as they came into focus.

"That he's pure?!" she heard him say before his words trailed off. The faint grinding of his teeth was audible, sending shivers down her spine.

"..."

Perhaps it was the sound of her heavy breathing that caused him to wince, but suddenly his eyes flew open.

"Oh, sorry. Did I wake you?"

"Yeah."

Realizing it was her, he relaxed, and she placed her hand on his forehead, feeling the clammy sweat. Grabbing a towel from the basket, she wiped his face and chest.

"Thanks. Did I say anything?"

"No, not really."

"I was pitiful when I used a Jegan. I even managed to put the Re-GZ out of action..."

"That's not true at all. You've gotten stronger, Amuro. And, in fact, you weren't talking in your sleep. You just seemed to be having a nightmare. Something from long ago, something about Lalah and 'seeing time.' Mumbo jumbo like that."

Amuro undid the tape on his sleeping bag and rose to his feet, rotating his head to ease the stiffness.

"I feel like my body is becoming weaker..."

"Because you're with me, I wonder?"

"It could be. I feel like I've become complacent and lost my edge."

"So, are you saying that all married men lose their edge?"

"Well, part of me leans towards that notion. I mean, I am a man who triumphed over Char as the Gundam pilot, a groundbreaking mobile suit in its time. And yet I'm just kept on the payroll of the Federation Forces. Char can construct a sleek new red mobile suit, and only now have we caught up. Not to mention the concept of the psycho-frame... I'm falling behind."

"You think so?"

"I do," he responded, twirling her hair around his fingers - a habit that she found irritating but chose not to mention.

"I mean, we're talking about Char here. The Psycho Doga? That's the name of the mobile suit in the manual. He allowed me to capture it simply to flaunt it in front of me. Otherwise, I wouldn't have gotten away as easily as I did."

"You think there's some meaning behind all that?"

"There is. He took pity on me because I could only use a mobile suit like the Re-GZ, plus he gave me research materials..."

Amuro stared intently at Beltorchika, and she could see the moment when everything fell into place for him.

"Char had Anaheim's Granada factory build the Psycho Doga, but he must have known that the Nu Gundam was constructed at the Von Braun factory, right? That has to be it. He was aware of the Nu Gundam's capabilities and was shocked by it, which is why he offered me the Psycho Doga."

"No way! There can't be any merit for Char doing something like that!"

"No, for him, there is. An operation to freeze the Earth gave him a chance."

"?!"

"No, that's it. I finally understand what Lalah meant when she said that Char was pure. That's who he truly is. He has been preparing to defeat me since our battles against the Titans. And now, with no obstacles in his path, he has returned to the Earth Sphere. He wants to defeat me by fighting with mobile suits on an even playing field."

"That sounds like a childish fantasy to me!"

"Char put his life on the line for that. And to carry out the purge of mankind."

Beltorchika couldn't fathom, let alone agree with, Amuro's perspective.

"That's absurd!"

She thought about adding "*especially for a man who is about to become a father*," but she wasn't certain herself yet. So instead, she simply gazed up at Amuro, who was standing there with excitement and let out a sigh.

PART 6 **ADULTS**



Cameron Bloom trailed behind Adenauer Paraya and a group of Earth Federation officials as they entered the exclusive Canberra Hotel, nestled in an upscale residential area of Londenion.

Undercover police heavily guarded the small hotel, and there wasn't a single guest in sight. Nevertheless, despite being left in the dark about the purpose of their visit since he had welcomed Adenauer at Londo Bell's pier, Cameron followed the group as they split into three and rode the elevator to the top floor. Cameron could hear the light-hearted chatter of the officials already filling the corridor. Upon reaching the top floor, Cameron was directed toward a room.

"This way."

"Thank you."

Despite thanking the doorman, as soon as he stepped inside, he had a gut feeling that he was in the wrong place. Adenauer and other high-ranking officials from the Earth Federation government and ministers from Londenion's government were engaged in lively conversations with men clad in Neo Zeon uniforms.

"...!"

Taking the chair on the far left as directed by the waiter, he kept his head down, hoping to conceal his astonishment. A lengthy, narrow table was adorned with intricate plastic models of Sweetwater, Axis, and Luna II.

The Neo Zeon's representative was Horst Harness, and Glarv Guss sat at the opposite end of the table like Cameron.

"It is my pleasure to introduce to the representatives of the Earth Federation Government, under Adenauer Paraya, our Supreme Commander of Neo Zeon, Char Aznable."

"The Supreme Commander?!"

The high-ranking Earth Federation officials, who were just about to sit down, gasped and immediately rose to their feet at Horst's words. From Cameron's vantage point, Neo Zeon soldiers in formal attire opened the door to the right.

Char himself strode in confidently, his blond hair contrasting against the scarlet Neo Zeon uniform and cape he wore, moving at a deliberate pace. The Federation officials gaped in disbelief until he finally sat in a chair before the fireplace.

"His Excellency Char is here?!"

Adenauer's muttered utterance broke the silence.

"Of course. We have posed a threat to the Earth Federation government. However, we approach today's negotiations with the utmost respect for the Earth Federation government..."

Horst's amicable tone reassured Adenauer, and he took his seat with a wide grin.

"Your presence indeed puts our mind at ease, Your Excellency."

"I trust the treaty document you've prepared is genuine?"

Horst, who sat diagonally across from Char, suppressed a smile and got straight to the point.

"Of course, it is, Your Excellency. Our government moved its headquarters before Fifth Luna hit Lhasa and put together what we consider an official document."

"So, you were able to see that we were serious about this?"

"We didn't think for a moment that your previous broadcast was mere posturing, Your Excellency. As such, our terms and conditions are outlined in the treaty. Should you accept them, we will transfer Axis to you."

Cameron was appalled and cast a glance at the high-ranking Earth Federation officials beside him, but they remained composed and unfazed. His head snapped at the sound of snapping fingers, and several soldiers entered through the same door Char had emerged from, pushing carts loaded with briefcases.

In the meantime, Horst and several high-ranking Neo Zeon officials were discussing something around Adenauer's signed documents. At times they seemed to be trying to get Char's agreement.

"Following the surrender of the Neo Zeon fleet to Luna II, we can then move Axis to Sweetwater, correct?"

Horst read aloud, revealing a particular article that seemed problematic for them.

The soldiers carrying the briefcases placed them in front of the Federation officials one by one before leaving one in front of Cameron. A key dangled from the grip, prompting him to inspect the contents. Gently opening the lid, he was taken aback to find it tightly packed with gold bars.

"...?!"

Cameron immediately understood what was going on.

"Should you choose not to accept the conditions, the Federation government will have no choice but to engage in all-out war."

This was no laughing matter. Even if he wanted to put on a show of integrity at this point, each high-ranking official has already received bribes. However, as a government official, Kamuran couldn't simply ignore his superiors and turn down the gold bars.

"I see. Well, in that case, we will have to concede defeat."

"Precisely," Adenauer spoke haughtily as if he didn't know his own position, like a peacock flaunting its feathers.

"Very well. We only ask you recognize the Neo Zeon government at Sweetwater and permit us to obtain mineral resources from Axis for colony development. However, there are additional terms and conditions."

Before Horst could say anything else, the Neo Zeon officials were having another cart brought in.

"This is our payment for Axis. Do you wish to confirm it?"

"That man there is from the Audit Bureau."

Cameron hastily stood up at the voice of the Londonion Government Audit Bureau Director in the back right.

"S-sir!"

A container several times the size of the briefcase was brought to his side. He was dumbfounded by the mountain of them on the cart and waited for the two soldiers to open their lids one by one. All of this was torture for him.

"What are the collateral conditions?"

Guided by Adenauer, Horst finally spoke up.

"We'd like to ask that our fleet remain in order to transport Axis to Sweetwater."

"If that's what you're worried about, there's no need. Nuclear weapons from the previous century are in storage on Axis, so you can move it easily with the engines that utilize those nukes. So, your fleet should still head for Luna II for disarmament."

"What a relief! So those old nuclear pulse engines are still operable?"

The Federation officials laughed at Horst's impressed voice.

"Heavens! With a fleet such as your own, Your Excellency, we were led to believe you had received at least that much intel!"

"Not at all. We're just a private army, after all. This is the best we could do to round up the number of ships..."

One of the Neo Zeon soldiers interjected. Although everyone seemed relieved that the main topic had ended, their positions were immediately apparent.

"All the better then. We'll withdraw the collateral conditions then. Once Axis makes contact with Sweetwater, colony development projects will be underway, and our unemployment issues will be settled quite rapidly. So with that, we would be most pleased if you would allow members of our fleet to find work within the Federation Forces."

"Find them work within the Federation Forces?"

Adenauer leaned toward Horst with his hands clasped together.

"The men have voiced concern about low wages, so..."

"I wasn't made aware of that, Horst."

Char muttered from behind, showing a displeased expression.

"I'm certain that should have been reported."

"This is the first I've heard of it."

"Hahaha"

"Well, well, now!"

Once again, laughter spread through the Earth Federation government's seats like ripples.

"I completely understand, Your Excellency. We need to consider that upon our return to Earth, but we promise to discuss it further."

After both deputy ministers confirmed the two letters of agreement, Adenauer and Horst signed the documents with their gold fountain pens.

"Very well then, we understand that today we will sign the basic treaty and will have further discussions on an administrative level thereafter."

"Then it is settled."

After saying this briefly, Char stood up and left the room. The high-ranking officials of the Federal Government, including Adenauer, applauded Char as he departed. Cameron counted the gold bars in despair.

x x x

"I've been looking for you, Hathaway! They wouldn't let me call the ship directly. Sorry, I had to bug the Captain!"

Quess was on the phone in her bed, dressed only in her underwear. Her hotel wasn't far from the hotel where the signing had taken place.

"Let's get together! I'm so bored here by myself! Whattaya say, Hathaway?"

"I feel you there. It doesn't seem like they'll let me become a crew member anytime soon..."

Hathaway had received the call in the lounge of his accommodation with the Londo Bell forces. Behind him, Bright looks quite displeased as he met with his crew.

"You're at the Dorak Hotel? Where's that?"

While he was being told where the hotel was located, Beltorchika, who was coming down from the pier, noticed him.

"Amuro might be able to show you around."

"Does he have time?"

"Yup. He said he needed to take some time off, so he took a break."

"Sounds great, Quess. What time?"

"When you see her, tell her not to call your dear old dad to ask you about going out on a date," Bright said to Hathaway as he handed the receiver back to the female soldier at the information desk in the lobby.

"Sure thing! Mr. Amuro, you sure you're okay with this?" Hathaway asked, rushing over toward Amuro, who was standing and talking with Beltorchika.

"It's fine. I was on my way home anyway."

"Will you be joining us, Miss Beltorchika?"

"I have somewhere else to be."

"Where are you off to?"

"The doctor's office to pick up some meds."

"Your usual nutritional supplements?"

"That's the plan!" she said as she turned to leave.

"Sure she'll be okay?"

"Yeah, she'll be fine. They contain a lot of vitamins and minerals, and they always nag about that. Besides, women have more complex bodies than men."

"Wha? Oh..."

Amuro handed over a roughly thirty centimeters in diameter yellow-green sphere to Hathaway with a look of understanding on his face.

"Ah! What's this? Wait, a Haro?!"

"Yup. A memento for your reunion with your dad. Just make sure you register your voice print; otherwise, it won't respond to your commands."

"Mom used to tell me about that! That much I know."

"Good. Take good care of it. It took me six months to make it. We'd better go. She's waiting for you, isn't she?"

x x x

From his private room at the Hotel Canberra, Char looked down at the procession of Adenauer Paraya and the other limousines leaving. Then, adjusting his tie, he glanced at Horst, who stood by the entrance.

"If the Londo Bell found out we were here, do you think they'd attack?"

"Well, any rational person would understand the foolishness of what the Earth Federation government did today. We might get ambushed."

"It's ridiculous... Why are those who are in charge of politics like that?"

"If all they do is shuffle paperwork, they won't see how the real world works. Businessmen have been one or two steps ahead of politicians for over a hundred years, but politicians still haven't realized that."

As Char looked out at the ranch on the right side of the room, he picked up his sunglasses from the tea table.

"Amuro. I'm doing something extremely wicked. If you're nearby, feel my presence."

Suddenly mentioning the name of an old acquaintance, Char headed toward the adjacent room. Horst took the briefcase and opened the door. Several high-ranking Neo Zeon officers who had been waiting in the next room stood up and saluted Char in unison.

"Sieg Zeon!"

Char returned the salute and reciprocated their greeting as he walked through their midst.

"Sieg Zeon!"

x x x

In the end, Amuro found himself outside the Dorak Hotel, picking up Quess Paraya for a sightseeing jaunt around Londonion.

"Sound good to take one lap around the lake?" he asked.

"They have something like that in the colonies?"

"It may not be as breathtaking as the scenery on Earth, but it's still a nice distraction."

Quess was straightforward, which made Amuro think it was okay to go along with her. They could stop by her house later.

Amuro steered their elec-car towards the mountains. The cityscape on either side mimicked England's Georgian and Victorian eras yet exuded a sense of the times. It was no coincidence that the trio came across a lake where swans were flying. As they watched the swans and their young, Amuro recalled his dream with Lahah. Suddenly, more than a hundred birds took flight from beneath their elec-car, prompting Hathaway and Quess to cheer.

"Yeaaaaah!"

Quess stood in the backseat, bracing herself against the bar and reveling in the car's intense vibrations.

"Let's go over there! Even further!"

"I didn't imagine the colonies would look like this. My perspective has shifted."

Amuro steered the vehicle up the mountain slope towards the sound of cowbells, carried on by the children's joyful cries.

"Kyaaaah!"

Vroooomph!

The elec-car skidded across the grass, causing Quess to grab onto the bar while Hathaway held onto her waist. On the umpteenth bounce, Quess shouted,

"Chaaaaa!"

Amuro felt a sensation akin to cold water being poured over his head at Quess's cry. His intuition proved correct.

As the elec-car careened towards some bushes, a horse neighing emerged from the shadows, followed by a mounted figure who reared up on their steed.

"What the?!"

"Whoa!"

Sitting atop the horse was none other than Char.

Amuro recognized him instantly. He released the brake and attempted to make their elec-car speed forward, but Char had already calmed his horse and turned its head.

"You bastard!"

Frustrated by the elec-car's sluggish response, Amuro reached for his pistol, only to have Quess hold his hand from behind.

"Quess?!"

In the instant that Amuro turned to look at Quess, Char's horse had already leapt over a brook and was galloping across a meadow.

Amuro slammed on the brakes, narrowly avoiding plunging into the stream. He spotted a wooden bridge a short distance away and headed in that direction.

"Sir, what's going on?" Horst asked.

Amuro watched as Horst's horse leapt over the brook in pursuit of Char.

"Why is he here?!"

He had met Adenauer Paraya but couldn't fathom why he was right here. The fact that Char was in this colony, where he had lived with Beltorchika, was intolerable to him on a visceral level.

The two riders raced side by side, but soon Horst's horse veered off to the right, and Char urged his horse towards the woods ahead.

"What's your plan? What are you doing here?!" Amuro shouted.

He drove the elec-car at full speed through the rolling grassy fields, but the dense young woods that Char had entered were impenetrable, and they had to go around.

"I'm more than just a pilot, unlike you!" Char's voice reverberated through the trees.

"That's Char? Zeon's Char?"

Quess crouched low in the rear seat, mesmerized by the young man's appearance, which looked much younger and more vibrant than the images she had seen on television. Seeing him on horseback made him even more attractive to her.

"You called yourself Quattro Bajeeena and fought with us against the Earth's enemies! So why are you trying to destroy the Earth?"

"Back then, I learned the true nature of those who remained on Earth! The ones who pushed for migration into space are monopolizing the Earth all for themselves!"

Char deftly maneuvered his horse through the trees, changing course left and right, while the elec-car could only detour around the forest.

"You say all that, but it's just your own self-righteousness!"

Quess looked at Amuro's shoulders and sensed the difference in social status between the two men.

"Char! That's Char?"

Hathaway muttered and followed Char's movements with a groan. Quess could tell from his contorted face that he was in pain.

"That's what created discrimination between people on Earth and in space! It's what causes wars and pollutes the Earth! Their souls are weighed down by gravity!"

"Ahh, that's why even couples can quarrel in the small confines of Earth!"

Char's words gave Quess the answer she had been looking for since India, and her heart was filled with emotion.

Suddenly, the trees broke, and Char's horse charged into a herd of moving cows. The horse neighed, and the loud mooing of the cows spread before their elec-car. Char's horse collided with a cow and staggered wildly.

"So that man is Char?!"

Quess stood up, watching him intently. Amuro honked the horn and drove the elec-car into the herd of cows. The cows parted left and right, and the stench of livestock filled Quess's nostrils. It smelled like India.

"Char!!"

Amuro yelled as he leaped from the elec-car toward Char on horseback.

"Nngh! Ooof!"

Hathaway panicked, trying to grab the empty handle, while Quess was entranced by the sight of the two men wrestling on the grass. The herd of cows stampeded past them, their thundering hooves shaking the ground.

"The Earth isn't big enough to swallow all of humanity's ego!"

"The wisdom of mankind can overcome even that!"

"Then impart your so-called wisdom to those ignorant people!"

Quess sympathized with Char's words as she watched the two men grappling on the ground.

"He's right. It's true! Because that can't be done!"

"I'll do what you say after I get rid of you!"

Amuro managed to throw Char off and drew his gun from his waist, but Quess saw it coming and jumped in.

"Hey, that's not fair!" Quess exclaimed as she pushed Amuro down and swatted his gun away.

"What the...?! Ugh!"

Char stood up and kicked Amuro's gun away while Quess quickly picked it up. The speed with which Quess acted surprised both men.

"Ah!"

Char ran straight towards Quess while Amuro backed away.

"Will you come with me, young lady?"

"Huh?" Quess responded, her breath catching in her throat. Char's soft hand grabbed her wrist and pulled her towards him. Quess ran alongside him, and she was so caught up in the moment that she forgot about Amuro and Hathaway.

"Char!" Amuro shouted from behind.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of a mobile suit approaching.

"Quess! Where are you going?" Hathaway's voice was drowned out by the sound of the mobile suit descending between Char and Amuro. It was a Hi-Zack with a gaudy paint job for hobbyists. Looking out of the cockpit was Glarv Guss, wearing a leather flying cap and glass goggles to disguise himself as a hobbyist.

"Captain!"

The Hi-Zack's manipulators scooped up Char and Quess and then blasted its tail nozzle, propelling Amuro and Hathaway backward with the force of the exhaust.

"Ah!"

"A true victory for me is to fight on equal terms and win!"

As Char's voice reached Amuro's ears, he was struck with disbelief that his earlier speculation shared with Beltorchika had been right all along.

"Damn Char!"

"Quess! Where are you going?" Hathaway's anguished voice reminded Amuro of the relationship between Lalah and Char.

"To seduce a young girl... that's what he thinks is a fair fight!" Amuro groaned.

x x x

Bright recognized Cameron Bloom as soon as he opened the door and shook his hand with a firm grip.

"It's been a while."

"I hate to bother you like this, Captain. I'm currently working at the Audit Bureau for Londo Bell's government."

"I see nothing's changed..."

"H-how is Mirai?"

"I haven't seen her for two months. She's been living on Earth this entire time."

"So she's well, I take it? That's good. I find it hard to believe, but... something has happened."

Cameron seemed to be struggling to find the right words.

"What has?"

"I wasn't sure who I could talk to, but then I thought of you, Captain. And, well... Char is here on this colony."

Now it was Bright's turn to gasp.

"What?!"

"Char Aznable met with high-ranking officials from the Federation government about half an hour ago."

"With Adenauer Paraya?"

"He wasn't the only one, though. There were several others. Those on Earth think they've signed a peace treaty with Char."

Bright couldn't believe what he was hearing. "A what?!"

"I wouldn't have believed it myself if I hadn't been there for the signing," Cameron said. He pulled a copy of the paper from his bag and explained the details to Bright.

Cameron had been engaged to Mirai before she married Bright, and they had even been caught arguing by Bright himself.

Around the same time, the Hi-Zack entered the airlock of an industrial block.

"Thanks," said Glarv as he greeted the airlock monitors with an amiable grin.

"You've got good taste! Those colors of Haman's forces Hizack? How much would you sell it for?" the watchman asked, serious.

"It's still not combat-ready, so it won't sell for much yet!"

From atop the manipulator, Quess watched as Glarv Guss boasted about his hobby and then whispered to Char.

"I thought he was dressed like a fool, but it's all for show, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. I didn't expect Glarv to be able to pull off tricks like that." Char, now down to his white shirt, also waved to the monitors and returned their smiles.

Once they passed through the airlock, they entered a 500-meter diameter industrial area. Factories lined the four walls of the small space, and manufacturing factories that utilized zero gravity and mineral sorting factories were scattered around. It was an entirely artificial environment with no greenery.

As the Hi-Zack approached the Notomi Mining building, the factory ceiling opened as if it was waiting for them.

Waiting for them as they descended into the building was the same launch they came in on.

"We're heading into space. What do you wish to do?"

"Mm, you're Char, right? I'll go with you."

"Please hurry, Captain!"

Glarv stepped forward with his Hi-Zack and bent his upper body. Char kicked off the manipulator and floated into the launch, followed by Quess.

"Well done."

Holst, who was waiting with the hatch open, greeted them with a visible sense of relief.

"We're taking her with us."

"Really?"

"Sorry. It's nice to meet you?"

Holst watched Quess's hair fluttering as she entered the launch with a slightly unpleasant feeling.

Meanwhile, Glarv brought the Hi-Zack into contact with the top of the container at the back of the launch and connected the cockpit and container hatch with a tube. When the mineral transport hatch's airlock opened, the launch carrying the Hi-Zack slipped into space. Then, with the tail nozzles of the two vessels jetting simultaneously, they quickly left the colony of Londenion behind.

x x x

Bright and his Operations Officer Tooth were hot on the Adenauer Paraya heels as they walked along the pier.

"None of you have any idea what Char is up to!"

"With the money used to buy Axis, we can fulfill our colonial welfare policies!" Adenauer retorted.

"You're only making Neo Zeon stronger!"

Adenauer ignored Bright's protests and grabbed the lift grip of the gangway that led to the Clop cruiser, climbing up with determination. Using a wire lift, Bright attached the tip of the wire to the side of the ship and climbed onto the deck before Adenauer.

"Oh, get off it! We can avoid all-out war with just Axis! Besides, Char said he'd wipe out some colonies!"

Adenauer shouted, pointing a finger at Bright.

"Char would never harm the colonies. He only wants to wipe out all those who remain on Earth," Bright countered.

Adenauer was a man who believed that sitting in the Staff Headquarters seat was his job. This was his first negotiation in quite a while, so it was natural for him to have confidence in his occasional work. Nevertheless, he wasn't about to let someone like Bright, a mere captain, get in his way.

"I'm headed to Luna II to have them get ready for their disarmament." He couldn't help but become arrogant. Adenauer kicked the deck and floated toward the Clop's bridge. It was a bold move for the man, who was not accustomed to zero gravity.

Bright followed right after him, persistent.

"Then why not engage Londo Bell to oversee their fleet disarmament?!"

"We can't invite Char's fleet near the colonies! Wah!"

Finally, Adenauer realized that his body had risen quite a distance from the bridge of the Clop.

Bright clung to the hatch of the Clop's bridge and ordered one of his officers to rescue Adenauer.

"Watch yourself there, Pops."

"That's the Vice Minister!"

"Oh, right, right."

The junior officer rescued Adenauer with a smirk and returned to the bridge.

"Oh, could I borrow a phone?"

Even though he had been saved, Adenauer found the intercom on the wall and asked without thanking the junior officer.

"Huh? Sure thing. Here you go."

Taking the intercom from the officer's hand, Adenauer jabbed at the keys in front of Bright.

"Then you'd permit us to act independently, Vice Minister?" Bright asked as Adenauer held up the receiver to his ear.

"Yes, of course. You may act any time you judge the Earth to be in danger."

Adenauer muttered something in disgust as he put the receiver back on the wall.

"Why isn't Quess in her room at the hotel? Ah, well, Captain, pass on a message to Quess for me. Tell her I'll be back in a few days so just sit tight at Dorak Hotel and wait for me. Sound good?"

"Yes, sir."

Bright, along with Tooth, left the hatch of the bridge and descended to the pier.

"You get all that recorded, Tooth?"

"Yes, sir. Especially that part about leaving things up to Londo Bell?" replied Tooth, grinning as he took a recording device from his pocket and registered the date and time.

As they approached the pier, Executive Officer Meran pulled up in an elec-car and called out to them.

"Captain! I have Lieutenant Amuro on the line!"

Meran handed Bright the receiver as he slipped into the backseat of the elec-car.

"He says he made contact with Char..."

"What?! For me? Where are you?"

"Down at a lower gate. Char took that girl named Quess."

Amuro was at the gate of the Londo Bell inside the colony. Hathaway sat in the passenger seat of the elec-car outside, trembling as he held his Haro. Inside the gate, a few MPs began arranging a search for Char over the phone.

"Adenauer's daughter? What the hell is going on? Hm. I'm on my way!"

Bright watched the Clop begin to launch and decided there was no need to inform Adenauer now.

"Why did Quess go with Char?!"

Hathaway pounded the table repeatedly, his hands surely hurting by now. Nevertheless, he probably wouldn't stop banging the table for a while.

Beltorchika didn't know what to say to console him, so she just watched him in silence. Although she had received a doctor's confirmation of her pregnancy, the joy of that news was overshadowed by the recent events.

"Char's been this close to us all this time..."

Beltorchika felt a heavy weight in her chest, like a burden was pressing down on her.

"Dammit!" Hathaway slammed the table again, causing the Haro at his feet to roll around.

"Char... he has this ability to win anyone over... That's why."

Beltorchika's comment sounded contemptuous to Hathaway's ears. He glared at her and shouted, "How the hell can you say it like that without a shred of concern? Like it's someone else's problem?!"

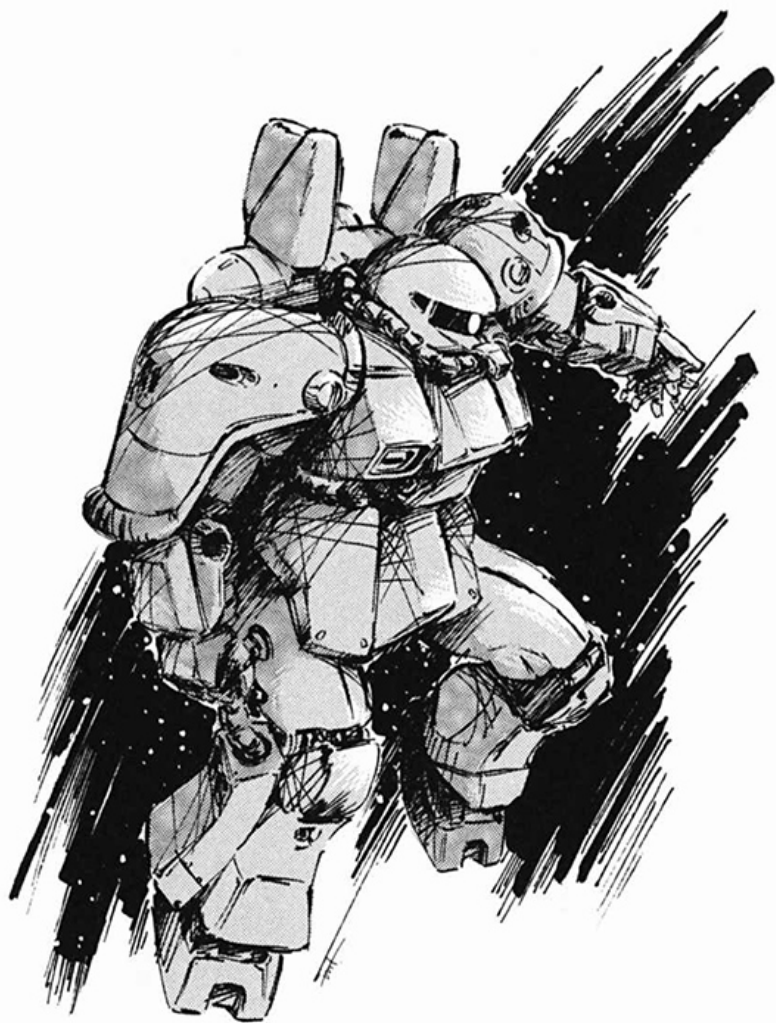
Hathaway stormed out of the officer's lounge, shaking the table and causing the door to close halfway. The Haro chased after him but only bounced off the door.

"Hathaway..." Beltorchika got up, intending to return to work.

"What that girl told me was true, and now she's been taken away by Char..."

Even though Beltorchika denied the need to read too much into the situation, she couldn't help but feel something unsettling deep in her heart.

PART 7 **OUT OF CURIOSITY**



The area known as the shoal zone, with the moon as its backdrop, was once the airspace where Side 4 used to be located but was now filled with remnants of destroyed colonies and debris from space battles. As they navigated through this area, the monoeye of the Hi-Zack on top of the container of Char's launch lit up. Quess, still in civilian clothing, floated into the cockpit of the Hi-Zack through the tube that connected the launch and the mobile suit.

"There's only one seat, though."

Glarv, who was sitting in the Hi-Zack's cockpit, continued to protest.

"You can sit on my lap."

Looking up at Char from the hollow space of the container, he said, "Would that be okay?"

Quess slipped in front of Glarv and sat on his lap. Char looked at them and closed the hatch of the container.

"Once we're away from the launch, I'll let you take over."

Reluctantly, he closed the hatch in front of the cockpit and detached the Hi-Zack from the launch, and a bird's-eye receding view appeared on the front display.

"Whoa! We're floating!"

Quess said contentedly, reaching out for the levers in Glarv's hands. Watching Quess's hand movements, Glarv withdrew his hands and fidgeted with his knees, feeling uneasy.

"Can you not move? It makes me feel weird."

"The feeling's mutual. Anyway, these levers--"

"I know. It's different from the Jegan, but I get it."

"Really?"

Quess's delicate hand grabbed the levers on the left and right, and she moved her fingers up and down on top of the levers.

"Like this, right?"

Suddenly, she pulled the lever. The G-forces pulled the mobile suit down. The scenery on the surrounding display flowed quickly.

"Keep it like that and raise it even higher!"

"Alright!"

Following Glarv's instructions, the display's scenery changed rapidly, all under Quess's control.

"Bring the launch in front of us!"

"Okay!"

Without hesitation, the launch slid in front of them.

"Is this really your first time piloting a mobile suit?" Glarv asked, unable to contain his surprise.

"It's strange. When I'm sitting like this, I can feel the connection between my actions and the mobile suit's movements. Now watch, a backflip!"

The Hi-Zack executed a backflip, appearing in front of the launch's cockpit.

"Whoa!?"

"Is that Quess?"

"Yes. Looks like she's a natural."

Char explained to Horst, peering over his shoulder.

"Captain, the Muska's ready to pick us up."

"Huh...?"

Upon hearing the co-pilot's announcement, everyone turned to see a Neo Zeon vessel flashing its lights in the shadows of the rocks where the Hi-Zack was playfully maneuvering.

The Hi-Zack appeared to notice the Musaka too. Its tail nozzle's light intensified as it approached the ship.

"Watch out!"

Glarv panicked in the cockpit, but Quess made a swooshing sound and propelled the Hi-Zack towards the Musaka, narrowly missing the bridge.

"Don't provoke them!"

"It's not my fault."

"Please stop, at least for my sake. It's bad enough they don't trust me already."

"Really now?"

"Being at the Newtype Labs makes you elite, but it also draws envy."

"What's wrong with that?"

Quess made a rapid turn with the Hi-Zack and skimmed past the Musaka's bridge once again.

"Quess!"

No longer able to stand it, Glarv grabbed Quess's arms from both sides and yanked her away from the controls. However, he alone received a reprimand from the Musaka's captain, deck officers, and mobile suit unit commander.

"Like a kid can just operate a mobile suit on their own! Huh! A Newtype should come up with a more clever excuse!"

While being berated, Glarv couldn't help but think the captain's words were justifiable.

"I promise to be more cautious!"

Glarv apologized loudly and was finally let go.

"Seriously, what a thankless role..."

Even though Glemmy thought this, he couldn't help but smile bitterly when he recalled how he had obediently listened to his superior's orders today.

"I'm at my wit's end..."

Perhaps it was because the bittersweetness of inhaling Quess' scent still lingered in his thoughts.

As Glarv headed to the pilots' lounge, he halted the lift grip upon spotting Char and Quess ascending a different passage.

"Up here...?"

The passageway was dim. Glarv scanned the area, ensuring no one was around, then climbed to the level where Quess had disappeared and cautiously peeked out.

A young soldier entered carrying a tray.

"Oh! You're letting such a young soldier attend to you?"

Quess's voice emanated from within the room, and soon after, the soldier emerged.

"What are you doing?"

Glarv, having forgotten to conceal himself, was chastised by the young soldier.

"Ah, my apologies. I took a wrong turn... it's my first time on this ship."

"Isn't the pilot core the same on any ship?"

The young soldier scoffed.

The Commander's room that Quess was led to featured genuine velvet walls and was lavishly adorned with authentic wooden columns and wainscoting.

"Wow! Are rooms like this set up on every ship? You certainly have refined taste, don't you?"

"It's not like I asked for it."

"Why don't you drop the modesty? After all, you're important."

Quess sipped milk through a straw brought by the soldier and sprawled onto the incredibly plush leather sofa as Char stepped into the adjoining room.

Char came out wearing a dinner jacket over his dress shirt.

"You must have some terrible memories for you to hate Earth, Quess Air?"

Char called her by the false surname she had introduced herself with, knowing it was a lie. Quess's body was floating horizontally in the middle of the room.

"..."

Char took his own cup of unsweetened tea and gazed at Quess's still childlike body while sipping from the straw.

"So why did you take an interest in me?"

"You said that people are weighed down by gravity, didn't you?"

Quess gently floated towards the ceiling.

"Your words resonated with me. But I believe those who genuinely understand that notion are somewhat tragic. That's why you appear so cool on the surface."

With his back to Quess, Char gazed out the porthole, thinking, "well, well." They appeared to have navigated through the shoal zone, leaving only stars in view.

"I've always tried to pursue my passions, you know?"

"Really?"

"When I saw the swan take flight, Amuro yelled, and then I did too. That's when you appeared..."

"Did you betray Amuro and the others because of that?"

"They just happened to save me. I wouldn't call them friends."

"Is that so...?"

As Char peered through the porthole glass, Quess, who clung to the ceiling, was reflected in it.

x x x

Lieutenant Kayra Su peered out of the window of the Londo Bell's mobile suit maintenance factory and was greeted by the imposing sight of the Ra Cailum docked at the pier, filling the entire view. Her attention shifted to the Re-GZ as she asked, "Great work. Did you manage to add even a single extra round?"

"Of course!"

The one with a cheerful demeanor was Atonaige Medoz.

Behind them, the final inspection of the v Gundam's cockpit area was underway, and the mood was quite tense. However, with the formerly unpainted sections now painted, the v Gundam finally resembled a standard Earth Federation Forces mobile suit.

"Wow! The Londo Bell colors really complement it, don't they?"

"Well, it is originally a Gundam, and Amuro contributed to its design, so it's only fitting."

Kayra laughed heartily at Beltorchika's comment, but her expression soon turned serious.

"What about the Psycho Doga? There weren't any hidden transmitters or self-destruct devices, were there?"

"We didn't miss anything, not even bombs disguised as grease."

"That's a relief."

Kayra nodded confidently but leaning in, Beltorchika couldn't help but ask, "Do you think all this work will be worth it?"

"Are you talking about the peace agreement? No, I don't think so. Char is bent on crushing the Earth in one fell swoop."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Yes..."

Beltorchika looked unconvinced, and Kayra appeared to have lost her feminine touch.

"How can we get Amuro out of the mobile suit?" Beltorchika asked.

"End the war, of course," Kayra answered.

"Kayra!"

"Sorry, Beltorchika..."

Feeling regret for her callous words, Kera apologized to Beltorchika.

Hathaway was as busy as the mobile suit deck. He was secretly making a large purchase without his father Bright's knowledge.

Within the courtyard of a salvage yard near the Londo Bell barracks, Hathaway straddled a machine called "Medd," appearing to be a hybrid between a Petite Mobile and a mobile suit. He had just managed to stand it up.

"Incredible! It feels so genuine!"

Hathaway leaned out from the boxy frame to inspect the leg length, then attempted to make it walk. Despite the numerous creaking sounds it produced, the Medd moved.

"Are you sure this is okay?"

"It's fine. Look, it's moving. The real challenge, though, is obtaining a space-use license even if you practice with this."

The junk shop owner, sporting a shiny red nose, casually spoke in front of the warehouse.

"If you work for the Colony Public Corporation and perform colony repairs, you'll never go hungry."

"What a dreary prospect. Are you one of those young people who plan their entire life so early on?"

The old man raised his weary voice when a loud clattering echoed, and the Medd toppled into a heap of debris.

The Medd failed to stick the landing after a jump, and the Haro ejected from its cockpit and hid in the pile of junk.

"Ouch! You little...!"

As Hathaway cursed, the old man approached the Medd and asked,

"Is the canopy intact? This thing is built tough."

"If it's leaking air, replace it."

"No can do. That's extra. You can spread the loan over 50 months, alright?"

"Okay, I'll go with that."

After hoisting the Medd back up, Hathaway crawled under the heap of debris in pursuit of Haro.

"Haro! Harooo!"

Hathaway was resolved to master mobile suit operation, even if it meant taking out a loan to acquire this miniature version.

"To win Quess back, I need the skills to venture into space. Otherwise, I won't get close to Char."

Hathaway was convinced that he needed to become proficient in operating a mobile suit to achieve this.

However, around the time Hathaway began his efforts, Quess was already piloting a mobile suit at a level far beyond what he could imagine.

Located a considerable distance from Side 5's airspace, there was a distinctive space colony with a massive cylinder rotating on its own.

About one-third of the sun-facing side was a closed-type colony used in places like Side 3, and about two-thirds of the rear side was a cylinder colony with three mirrors, commonly called an open-type. Steps created a sloping connection surface due to the different diameters.

This was now, in fact, the colony established by the Neo Zeon regime, Sweetwater.

The benign name was assigned to dispel the dark image of a hastily built colony created by connecting destroyed colonies to accommodate refugees. But, unfortunately, bureaucratic sensibility has always manifested in such ways.

A rough-looking object was flying at a considerable speed in the airspace just ahead, followed by Glarv's second Psycho Doga.

"Commander Char, you're engaging in something risky..."

Glarv couldn't help but think this.

However, Glarv was piloting a Psycho-type. Although his thoughts were not explicitly read by the monitors, unnecessary thought waves would still be recorded, so he quickly tried to concentrate on his task. This was the downside of the psycommu, a brainwave amplification device. Glarv was willing to expose everything about himself to others until he obtained true strength, but having to block even this level of thought occasionally caused physiological discomfort.

Pash! Pash! Pash!

The apogee motors of each joint of the rough-looking craft seen in the upper right flashed, and the machine executed a swift turn.

"All right! Let's proceed to the target."

Glarv called out and flew off in the opposite direction of Sweetwater.

Near the port of the colony, the Rewloola was patrolling.

However, the scene did not seem to be preparing for the handover to the Earth Federation government. Instead, several Geara Dogas were lined up on the upper catapult deck, and an atmosphere of tension dominated as if it were always like this.

In the right corner of the spacious bridge of the Rewloola, the staff of the Newtype Labs occupied the area, with Mesta Mesua sitting in the center seat with a slightly tense expression.

Behind her, observing the situation, Char also shared a similar tension.

"Joint-Movable Balancer, they call it Jomb, right? Amazing..."

The voice came from a small display on the console panel in front of Mesta. Quess, wearing a T-shirt, was seen operating the rough-looking machine.

"You don't have to think about the movement of the apogee motors in the Alpha's joints!" Mesta said sharply.

"Yes!"

Quess's lively voice echoed clearly in the crowded bridge of adults.

"Okay! We're going to start testing the funnels!"

"Are you sure you want to do that?"

A somewhat apprehensive voice came from Quess.

"Is that something a strong-willed girl like you would say?"

Mesta intended it as a joke, but that was the best she could do.

Char, who had been silently observing, felt a sense of accomplishment, believing his judgment was correct. However, he was still preoccupied with something.

"Am I making this one the same as her?"

That was his obsession.

Nevertheless, when confronting the overwhelmingly powerful Earth Federation Forces, Char wanted to utilize every possible advantage, even when devising a small operation.

He was convinced that they needed to deploy a mobile suit at a level beyond a mere prototype, even if it meant using a prototype of a prototype. That was why the Alpha Azieru, which Quess was piloting at that moment, was so crucial - and why Quess herself was regarded as a formidable asset to their forces.

It wouldn't be accurate to call the Alpha Azieru a mobile suit.

This was because it did not have a completely humanoid form.

The section extending out like a deck on its shoulders was non-functional. Equipped with mega particle guns running along the rails below it, it extended and retracted through wires controlled by psycommu control. It had no legs. Below the waist, a giant skirt protected the tail nozzle, and there was an attachment for mounting two boosters for long-range attacks.

Although it was only a prototype, encountering Quess prompted Char to contemplate deploying the Alpha Azieru. However, he realized that the circumstances were not the same as when he met Lalah Sune during the Principality of Zeon era.

Naturally, Quess differed from Lalah in terms of personality and character. Nonetheless, Char sensed a similar kind of power in Quess as he had in Lalah.

As expected, the outcomes aligned with his vision. Although there had only been four test flights so far, Quess had already reached the level of regular pilots.

After witnessing those results, they were finally prepared to test the funnel controls through the psycommu.

The Neo Zeon fleet was scheduled to surrender to the Earth Federation government the following day. Time was of the essence. The test needed to be completed before then.

"Sync Quess's brainwaves with the psycommu control!"

"Confirmed."

"Enhancement levels are calibrated to version RJ32 and deemed functional."

"Try it out. Quess, any discomfort or headaches?"

"No, nothing!"

"Mesta, did you enhance her that much?"

As expected, Char whispered to Mesta.

"No... it's just a psychological adjustment. We didn't use any drugs, but that's all we needed to do."

"I see..."

Char's gaze shifted to the Alpha Azieru outside the window, bearing a resemblance to the ancient mobile armors, its silhouette framed by the sun.

"Quess, can you pinpoint the target's position?"

"Yes, it's imprinted in my mind clearly," Quess answered, her brainwaves synchronized with the powerful Psycommu system.

In this scenario, Glarv was acting as the target.

"If you can visualize the target, the funnel will penetrate the enemy's territory autonomously."

"Yes..."

"Release the funnels!"

"Yes!"

As Quess responded, several flashes of light raced across the skirt of Alpha Azieru. However, they seemed to hover unsteadily in the air in front of it. It was discernible even on the monitoring display that those few funnels floated in all directions, showing erratic movements.

"Can I really control them with my thoughts?" Quess asked, a hint of doubt in her voice.

"Visualize the target! Doubting thoughts will confuse the funnels!"

"Got it!"

"Encourage the funnels!"

"Go, funnels, go!"

Her thoughts connected with the funnels, and they began to move with purpose.

There was no doubt that Quess wasn't operating mechanically, as seen on the surveillance display. Quess' hands remained crossed over her chest.

"Now, sense what the funnels see and give the command to attack!"

"Funnels! Hit!"

Quess, with her eyes tightly shut and shouting commands, filled the small monitor screen.

"Here they come!"

Glarv's voice rang out, as he sequentially identified the approaching figures. He skillfully intercepted the dummy funnels with decoys deployed around him.

"That makes eight!"

At Glarv's call, Char and the other staff members were impressed.

"Wow..."

"We can confidently say that Quess is a Newtype," Mesta reported.

"If we need to expedite our plans, deploying her in actual combat might be our best option,"

"Deploy her to crush Luna Two?"

"As the head of the Newtype Labs, that's my assessment."

Char couldn't help but make a grim face.

"Captain..."

"It's not my job to make a judgment about Quess. I'll leave it to you."

"Are you sure?"

Mesta asked Char, who had turned his back, as if to confirm.

A pair of Geara Dogas stationed at the Rewloola's catapult deck hatch emerged before the Alpha Azieru, gliding past Glarv's Psycho Doga.

They connected a conduit from the Rewloola to the Alpha's head, establishing a passage for Quess.

The Alpha's colossal size precluded it from fitting in the mobile suit deck. Quess reached the upper booth of the mobile suit deck by traversing the conduit.

"Amazing! Newtypes are incredible!"

The crew members who greeted her found it hard to fathom that a girl clad in a t-shirt and shorts had piloted such a massive machine, and they showered Quess with compliments.

"Thank you."

Quess bowed her head and said, "I can do this because everyone is here to support me."

Her words weren't flattery. Quess had learned the value of collaboration during her training in India, so she spoke from the heart.

"Quess! You really are a Newtype! I know how scary it is because I was the target!"

Glarv ascended from the mobile suit deck, grasped Quess's hand, and cheered exuberantly.

"Hahaha... It's because your thoughts are sharp. It hit the target so well!"

"I've never seen anyone like you before!"

"I'm thrilled too! It feels like my emotions and spirit are being unleashed into the cosmos, you know?!"

Moved by the moment, Quess embraced Glarv without hesitation.

PART 8 **THAT WHICH IS HARBORED**



Inside the Sweetwater colony, everything was a reproduction of the past or hastily constructed. In terms of 20th-century sensibilities, the term "prefabricated" might be the closest expression. Even so, there was a sense of naturalness from the harbor to the mountainous part of the cylinder's inner wall.

A linear car of seven vehicles descended the mountain slope, gliding into the suburban area filled with plastic sheets partitioning the town. There, a modest river had been created, and greenery was present. From above a café terrace with a cheap bonsai-like garden, the car passed through a district of buildings with exposed steel framework.

The cars were quite crowded.

"The Supreme Commander is on board?"

"Up front. Over there!"

Whispers of excitement spread among the passengers, and with each station, more people boarded, creating a ripple of emotion.

"For the Supreme Commander!"

"Right."

A small bouquet of flowers changed hands among the passengers in the vehicle.

"For the Supreme Commander, right?"

The bouquet arrived at its destination, where Char, accompanied by Quess and Glarv, stood. Still, no one offered their seat, as it was Char's custom not to accept one.

"Flowers?"

"For the Supreme Commander."

The elderly man who offered the bouquet in front of Glarv shyly reached out his hand towards Char, urging him for a handshake.

"For me? Thanks?"

"It's an honor, Supreme Commander! This bouquet is from over that way."

After shaking Char's hand, the old man stated the obvious and turned to face the passengers behind him. The passengers opened up the middle of the car to allow Char to see the middle-aged woman who had sent the bouquet to him.

"Sieg Zeon!"

The woman raised her right hand and sent a resolute call. Then, in harmony with her, the passengers all shouted "Sieg Zeon" in unison.

Char had made a habit of riding the linear car as soon as he was stationed in Sweetwater. This seemingly vain act of attention-seeking was overwhelmingly supported by the refugees of Sweetwater. Char's consideration had indeed laid the groundwork for accepting the Neo Zeon fleet in a short time. However, the passengers did not know that the Neo Zeon fleet would surrender to the Federation government the following day.

As the linear car entered the central station of the entertainment district, Wischingen, news of Char's presence spread by word of mouth. Even a young man with an accordion had heard it.

From the linear car running between the towering high rises, a song bubbled up, accompanied by the accordion as the passengers sang together.

"In the light of the stars, our thoughts intertwine / Flowing like a river / It is the dream of blood, an eternal dream / Char, praying, become our light"

This simple, almost unpoetic song had rapidly gained popularity over the past month, and it now threatened to occupy the national anthem's position in the Neo Zeon government.

The linear car approached the hilly area of Sweetwater's only upscale residential district. It was a section built using the slope of the connection point between the closed and open-type colonies.

The linear car stopped at Beverly Hills Station, surrounded by trees.

The elevated station was desolate, with only a few silent soldiers standing guard. As Glarv, Quess, and Char disembarked one after another, the soldiers darted their vigilant gazes around the station, giving the impression they were working hard at that moment.

None of the other passengers got off.

"Commander! We're counting on you!"

"Down with the Earth Federation government!"

"Glory to the Spacenoids!"

Char acknowledged the passengers with a smile and saluted before watching the linear car depart.

It was a quiet residential station. From the platform to the waiting limousine, a long staircase had tents set up, with the shadows of security soldiers scattered about.

"Hehehe..."

Quess chuckled softly, looking at the sporadically lit houses from the running limousine's window.

"What's so funny?" asked Char, seated next to her.

"It's not just for show, is it? You're really trying hard?"

"Yes, we're trying hard. You have to do something, or nothing will happen."

"Does that mean you're going to destroy the Earth?"

"No, that's a little different. We just want the Earth to take a little rest."

"I see..."

Quess found Char's words to be very gentle.

"Do you have a headache? Alpha's psycommu should be forcing you, right?"

"No! I'm fine. My head's just dull, isn't it?"

The limousine stopped in front of a house with a round glass lamp at the entrance. The driveway was long, and darkness veiled the depths.

"Glarv, I'm counting on you to look after Quess in tomorrow's operation, okay?"

"Yes, sir!"

Glarv only answered Char with a glance in the rearview mirror and showed no signs of getting out of the car. Char disliked getting out of the car and being seen off at this location.

"Are you okay with that, Quess?"

Char got out of the car alone and looked into Quess's face. She pressed herself against the door, looking up at him.

"Of course! The Alpha Azieru's psycommu system amplifies my brainwaves. Just by commanding, the funnels launch laser attacks... You have no idea how good that feels, do you, Captain?"

"Is that so?"

Quess didn't know why she was so excited, but she was happy because she could now clearly understand the presence of people who acknowledged her existence.

"Yes! I can feel the freedom, not affected by Minovsky particle interference. Everything I've been vaguely thinking about, I can now do... It's wonderful... Huh?" Char kissed the back of Quess's hand, which was sticking out of the window.

"Captain!?"

Quess held her breath, sensing not only the softness of Char's lips but also the firm resolve behind them, and gazed intently into his eyes.

In return, Char's eyes smiled back, and he spoke to her like a father would.

"Get a good night's sleep tonight."

"Yes, sir!"

Char saw off the limousine and then walked through the small side door next to the gate light, casting a red glow onto the dark pebble road.

Mesta could keep a dog, Char thought to himself, savoring the few minutes of solitude during his walk.

He had returned to the Earth Sphere and had been able to meet Amuro, who had been his primary concern. All that was left was to gamble on the outcome of the battles starting tomorrow. There should have been nothing left to think about.

Perhaps that was why he was feeling somewhat weary.

The entrance light came on, casting a single shadow, but there was no one to greet him or unlock the door.

Of course, Char could also unlock the door, but the owner of this elegant house understood the peace of mind that comes with being able to enter a home without a locked door.

Glancing at the darkness where the gate light had disappeared, Char opened the door. A chime sounded in a distant room, but there was no sign of movement.

Everything was as it always was.

The air was neither too cold nor too hot, and a faint fragrance wafted through it. Char, slightly dissatisfied with the orderly welcoming method of this disciplined house, headed to the living room as he took off his jacket.

"Would you like to have dinner? Or..."

Mesta Mesua's voice came from the kitchen in the back right corner of the living room.

"Um... I'll take a shower..."

Char said that, hung his jacket on the usual hanger, and headed for the bathroom.

He allowed the use of several items procured for the quarters for personal use to avoid the danger of specifying only the things Char himself used. By preparing several similar buildings, Char tried to secure his private space.

However, letting Mesta Mesua use a single house is an abuse of Char's authority. The reason no one protests is that they also desire to have a mistress's house someday, and Char does not think of it as a sad human trait.

Mesta prepared a drink at the bar in the living room, but she spoke a lot.

"Ramming Axis into Earth will leave the planet in a state similar to that of a nuclear winter. Plus, if we were to utilize the nuclear weapons permanently stored on Luna II and drop them on Earth, it would be perfect, but..."

Char, wearing a bathrobe, sank deep into the sofa facing the window, and after signing the documents he had been reading, he placed them in a red trunk on the side table to his right. It was a trunk specifically for transporting administrative documents.

Mesta placed a glass on the side table to Char's left, "An atrocity never committed by any dictator before," she concluded.

Char, seemingly ignoring Mesta, picked up his glass and gazed at the forest spreading beyond the window. Unusually, lights from the city on the opposite side lined the skies on both sides, creating a column of brilliance.

Judging by the amount of light alone, Sweetwater appeared to be prospering. However, recalling the housing supply plan he had recently reviewed, Char was filled with a somber feeling, unable to shake off the harsh reality.

Mesta grabbed her own glass and perched herself on the armrest of her sofa.

"Why is it that humanity, even after venturing into space, still continues to fight for supremacy?" Char, sipping the amber liquid in his glass, asked.

"It's because we allowed exceptions, leaving people to reside on Earth."

"There's another reason. As social animals, humans have a natural tendency to fight over territory. I want to believe in the innovation of humanity in space, but someone has to shoulder all the evils of humanity."

"I don't understand your determination... or why you let Amuro capture the Psycho Doga."

"...?"

It was only natural for Mesta to be fixated on that issue. She fervently desired Char to remain at the forefront and serve as their leader.

This was because Mesta, as her career woman talents were revealed, began to crave a peaceful life.

She met Char when he began organizing his fleet, and she did not overlook the shadow of domesticity within him. Char, too, took interest in Mesta, who was intrigued by this side of him.

However, as Char's need for personnel became apparent, Mesta discovered her own surprising aptitude for practical work, and she started assisting him in building his military organization.

Starting with personal secretarial tasks, she was entrusted with discretionary power over personnel matters in small organizations and, eventually, managing finances. It was only natural for someone living on the frontier to become interested in striking back against the Earth Federation government.

Mesta's parents were suspected of supporting the Zabi faction, and they were assigned to asteroid mining and collection duties. They were exiled to an outdated, small Island One-type colony. Mesta, who lost her father to a workplace accident there, spent her days weeping with her mother while looking at the Earth, smaller than a coin.

That's why Mesta was also fascinated by Char's plan for Cyber-Newtype, as she was captivated by the dream that someday humans could survive even in a vacuum.

This feeling was not unrelated to her father's death.

"Glarv mentioned that it should have been possible to retrieve it... Is it the enemy, Amuro Ray? His mobile suit was weak and no match for the Nightingale... I don't understand. You say Amuro is your sworn enemy, but he doesn't attack when he could... So, does that mean you are giving up on tomorrow's operation? No, that's not it... In other words, the asteroid drop operation that began with Fifth Luna will be carried out."

"Isn't that bad...?"

"Why do you see Amuro Ray as such an enemy? Amuro Ray is a man who mistakenly thinks compassion is a weapon... But women, perhaps because they can feel it in their wombs, can swallow any kind of man's kindness. But you cannot forgive that about Amuro. Why?" {A woman may forgive his delusions}

Char stared into the amber liquid in his glass, not listening to Mesta's words. Mesta was unusually talkative, likely due to the anxiety of having to act separately the next day. That's why Char was indulging her.

Perhaps this tolerant aspect of Char felt like a domestic side to Mesta.

Char was watching the scene where the early prototype of the First Gundam and the pale green mobile armor, Elmeth, made contact.

"During the last battle of the Zeon War of Independence, the pilot I was looking after, Lalah Sune... She found compassion in Amuro, even though he was the enemy... I don't want to think that was Newtype empathy..."

At that time, Char saw a sudden image of people appearing between the clashing Gundam and Elmeth. It was the entwined forms of young Lalah and Amuro.

It might have been Char's illusion or hallucination. But Char also heard the two voices.

"Lalah!"

"Amuro!?"

At that moment, he was enraged. At that time, he drove the red mobile suit he was using, the Gelgoog, between the two machines.

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

Char had the conviction that Amuro and Lalah, each in their separate mobile suits, heard his cry.

The Gundam, with Elmeth at its back, tried to confront Char, but

"Stop!"

Elmeth's Lalah's scream struck Char's ears. In Char's eyes, he saw the image of Lalah shielding Amuro.

"Damn it!"

Char charged the Gelgoog, and Elmeth came between the Gundam and Gelgoog. Because of that, the beam saber of the Gundam, trying to attack the Gelgoog, pierced through Elmeth's cockpit instead.

"Ah! Ugh!"

Amuro and Lalah's screams intertwined in Char's ears, and a flash of light erased everything, scattering them into space.

"Merely because one could sense another's intentions..." Char thought.

"What troubles you?"

Char showed a slight hint of unease. Mesta's décolletage filled his view, the soft, pale skin stretching from her neck to her chest appearing like an expansive sea, perhaps due to Char's incomplete awakening.

"Ah? I was just thinking... Amuro and I... we're too similar."

"As Newtypes, you mean?"

"... If we were both true Newtypes, then yes. But I am not a Newtype. I am a living, breathing human with emotions. Newtypes are far purer."

Char had grown tired of Mesta's company. He stood up.

"I'm counting on you tomorrow. I will go ahead to Axis..."

Char let the glass he held touch Mesta's chest. The cold sensation made her shudder slightly before she took the glass.

She felt a slight urge to grind her teeth.

If only she could ask Char whether he intended to wage war against Amuro because of Lalah Sune. It would save her from this tiresome conversation.

Mesta cursed her personality for being unable to ask. She had heard Lalah Sune's name in Char's sleep talk numerous times. She had researched the name and understood the relationship between Amuro, Lalah, and Char.

During their mobile suit battle, Lalah and Amuro, who had barely met, intuitively recognized each other as necessary partners, exchanging words and thoughts. Char, sensing this, tried to separate the two. This fact was not detailed in war history.

But Mesta could deduce it from Char's sleep talk.

Because of his fixation on this one event, Char had infiltrated the Earth Federation Forces under the alias Quattro Bajeeena, becoming close to Amuro for a time and waiting for this day.

Mesta understood that this was Char's nature.

However, Mesta had resolved, as a woman, never to mention Lalah's name in front of Char. It was her preparedness, her nobility.

"What about Quess? Is she fine?"

She asked Char, who had his hand on the door knob.

"...? Just don't meddle too much."

With that, Char left, closing the door behind him.

Mesta Mesua stared at the glass Char had left in her hand.

"There have been signs that he's been trying to run away with a girl like Quess ever since he was ready to take on the name of Deikun. Quess is close to Lalah's age... Acknowledging that makes me sick..."

Having voiced her deepest concern, Mesta felt disgusted with herself and threw the glass she held onto the bar counter.

The glass, with its remaining ice and water, scattered about, making hardly any noise as it rolled onto the thick carpet.

Not far from Mesta's residence, there was lodging for the mobile suit pilots. The building was designed to resemble a medieval chateau and had originally been a privately owned hotel.

Although it was late, an early victory party was held in preparation for tomorrow's sortie, and the festivities lasted late into the night. For the pilots who had recently been stationed there, they had no homes to return to.

In the central lobby surrounded by corridors, pilots filled the space with their last dance. Rezin Schneider, who had been laughing at the bar just moments ago, was now drunkenly watching the young people dancing cheek to cheek while urging the burly pilot next to her, "You better join me tonight, alright?"

Under a corner stand light, Quess and Glarv, who still looked like a boy and a girl, were sitting up and facing each other.

"Dangerous? The Captain?"

Quess pursed her lips as she stirred milk with a spoon.

"That's right... He's just channeling his frustrations into war."

"Is that bad?"

"Tch! You don't understand war at all, do you?"

"I know it's scary! We were the only passengers on our space shuttle that barely missed Fifth Luna you guys brought down!"

"That's what I mean. People like the Captain, when they make a mistake, they don't hesitate to destroy colonies like Gihren Zabi of the old Zabi family. I want to stop the Captain when that happens. That's why I had my Newtype abilities enhanced. My parents died when the Side 4 colonies were destroyed..."

"Hmm. So you want to become a psychic?"

"Yeah, I'd love to. But I realized that I can't become like you just through enhancement at the Newtype Labs. That's why I want to study you more."

"What do you mean?"

By the time she asked, Quess was already standing.
"You know, like, hanging out more and stuff..."
"You're just badmouthing the Captain because you're jealous!"
With that, Quess slipped through the dancing pilots and left.
"It's not like that!"
As Glarv tried to chase after her, he tripped over Rezin's outstretched leg and fell.
"What the-!"
"Don't talk nonsense! Go pee and go to bed! Having kids in the military is a bad sign for the future!"
Rezin swayed to her feet and propped up the muscular pilot beside him.
"What did you say?!"
"Don't talk back, you Cyber-Newtype!"
"I'm not a Cyber-Newtype! I'm a Newtype!"
Glarv clenched his fists and stood up, but he was shoved from behind and stumbled.
"Ah...!"
As Glarv's upper body staggered towards the muscular pilot, the pilot's knee caught him in the chin.
"Ugh...!?"
Glarv stiffened, and amid the jeers of the other pilots, he fell backward.

x x x

Halfway up a run-down high-rise apartment building in a slum in Hong Kong, Mirai climbed the stairs with a package in her hands, catching her breath. The elevator in the building didn't seem to work.

Just before Mirai's eyes, beyond the railing, a pile of discarded garbage tumbled down.

"Always like this...!"

Catching her breath as she walked down the hallway, Mirai glanced up at the laundry hung like festive decorations on a rope stretched from the neighboring building. This was not a sight she enjoyed either.

Down below, she could hear the voices of children fighting.

As Mirai pressed the chime on the iron door, a cautious girl's voice inquired from within, "Who's there?"

"It's me."

"Okay, just a sec."

The sound of a chain being removed was heard, and Cheimin's face greeted Mirai.

"With that face, I guess you couldn't get a shuttle ticket?"

"It's not just that. The shuttle company is fleeing Hong Kong."

"Is the news about peace being possible a lie?"

"There are rumors that Hong Kong is being targeted in this meteorite drop."

As Mirai organized the contents of the package she had brought, she told Cheimin, "We're leaving here tomorrow." Beyond the window of the room, the sea could be seen far away between the buildings.

"Is it true...?"

"If it's Char, he would do it. I know because I fought him in the past. The people of Earth just make things worse. Char is just too much of a perfectionist."

Half of the rumors Mirai had heard were false, but the other half were true.

Char was delivering his final instructions to all the vessels and soldiers of Neo Zeon, preparing for yet another sortie.

Nearly a dozen vessels were anchored in the port of Sweetwater, their catapult decks lined with fully armed mobile suits, all listening to Char's speech.

"This colony, Sweetwater, was hastily built to accommodate refugees who had been victims of past space wars..."

On each vessel's mobile suit deck, a holographic image of Char was projected, surrounded by pilots and mechanics standing at attention.

"However, the Earth Federation government's efforts for the refugees stopped here. They concluded that this would suffice. They remained on Earth and refused to share the planet. My father, Zeon Zum Deikun..."

From the port to the colony's inner pier, three vessels, including Rewloola, were moored, and countless soldiers on their decks looked up at the holographic image.

On the colossal platform at the back, Char passionately argued his case.

"...When my father had made a request for autonomy for all space emigrants, known as Spacenoids. But he was assassinated by the Zabi family! Then, the Zabi family deceived the Zeon army and waged a war of independence against Earth. You know how it ended, with the Zabis losing the war..."

Behind the podium, high-ranking officials occupied rows of seats, with Mesta, Glarv, and Quess at the rear.

"I knew all that."

Quess was deeply moved.

"However, as a result, the Earth Federation government had grown arrogant, and corruption spread within the Federation Forces. This gave rise to anti-federation government movements like the Titans and the rebellion of Haman, who claimed to be remnants of the Zabi family. This is the history that made us refugees! Now, in order not to repeat the history of war, I will purge those who continue to live on Earth – the source of all problems in the Earth Sphere! This is the true purpose behind our operation to drop Axis onto Earth!"

A tumultuous roar of applause and cheers erupted from the soldiers, and Quess looked down at the source of the noise, the pier.

"Ants are screaming....!" That was Quess's true feeling.

However, the government officials in front of Quess also stood up, clapping and cheering.

"Supreme Commander Char!"

"The savior of Sweetwater!"

"The eternal shining star of hope for the refugees!"

Finally, Quess realized that Char's speech and the soldiers' cheers were indeed a bizarre spectacle.

"...? There was talk of disarming at Luna Two, I wonder if that was a lie?"

"Everyone! So that we may forge our own path, I ask you to lend me your great strength for just a little longer!"

At Char's final words, applause and cheers rose again. He raised both his hands in response, and with his Neo Zeon commander's cape fluttering, he descended from the podium.

High-ranking officials, including Horst Harness and Kaisers M. Buyer, greeted him with applause and sought to shake his hand.

"Kaisers, what do you think?"

"Quite good. You have the aura of a commander. After this operation, I'd like you to step away from mobile suits, don't you think? That's my request as someone involved in politics."

"I'll step away from mobile suits after this operation."

"Can you promise me you'll step down now?"

"I still consider myself young. I don't want to lose to those girls."

Char glanced at Quess, who was sitting behind the adults. Suddenly noticed by them, she stood up, flustered, and nodded to no one in particular.

"A Newtype, you say?"

Kaises asked quietly in Char's ear.

"Her performance is quite good. I'll have those girls purge the politicians of the Federation government who fled to the colony."

"Yes, indeed! Those seeds of theirs are harmful substances to humanity."

"Seeds? Yes, that's right."

Char approached Quess with a smile, took her hand, and spoke to Mesta next to her.

"Mesta, let's see the results of the Newtype Labs, shall we?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Glarv!"

"Sir!"

Receiving salutes from the two, Quess gazed up at Char as if looking at something dazzling.

"Captain, you're amazing, aren't you?"

"Hm...? Thank you. It's not the era to continue small wars anymore. With this, we'll put an end to everything."

"I understand, Commander!"

Quess saluted as well, and then followed Mesta and the others, her body flowing gracefully.

"Is this really enough to deceive them?"

High-ranking government officials, including Char, stood in a lounge overlooking the harbor. They watched as what appeared to be rocks outside the window began to inflate with a bubbling sound. With a hint of concern, Kaises spoke.

The inflating decoys took on the silhouette of warships, some even resembling Char's flagship, the Rewloola.

"Navy officers are easily reassured by the correct number of ships," Char stated.

"So the plan is to assemble a decoy Neo Zeon fleet to surrender to the Earth Federation using the Rewloola and preserved harbor ships, while the real Rewloola-led vessels invade Axis?" Kaises asked.

"Did you get all that?" Char inquired, peering into Horst's face with a wry smile.

"I must admit, I don't quite understand military strategy. Will the timeline work out? And then you intend to use the surrendered fleet to transport Luna Two's nuclear weapons to Axis, Supreme Commander?"

"Yes. Luna Two's nuclear weapons can be used to accelerate Axis and contaminate Earth. Mesta can handle it."

"I don't doubt her or the Musaka's captain's capabilities. But aren't there cunning strategists within the Earth Federation as well?"

"Well, in that sense, the Londo Bell unit might be, but the Federation Forces won't try to mobilize them."

Before their eyes, the decoy fleet began to move, towed by the real ships. Leading the procession was the Musaka, towing the massive Alpa Aziru.

"I must share tragic news with the people of Sweetwater. I can't find the words to express my feelings..."

The Neo Zeon fleet's departure was suddenly broadcast live on Sweetwater's government-run television station.

The news came as a shock to the people of Neo Zeon, but However, for the crew of the Clop, which had entered Luna Two's harbor with Adenauer Paraya aboard, the news was expected.

"How many nuclear weapons from past centuries are stored at Luna II?"

"Ha! There's enough payload to annihilate the Neo Zeon fleet a hundred times over," the captain of the Clop replied curtly, clearly not fond of Adenauer.

"Char is aware of that fact. He's a very clever man."

"Are you implying that our Londo Bell is itching for a war?"

"It does look that way from Earth."

This was how things stood.

"Vice-Minister. There's a broadcast from Sweetwater!"

"Good... This one?"

The Clop's captain opened a ceiling display for Adenauer.

"How's the signal?"

"The fleet that offered great hope to the refugees of Sweetwater has now set sail to establish eternal peace with the Federation. This is the final, glorious departure of the fleet that brought independence and courage to our Sweetwater."

Listening to the overly emotional announcement, Adenauer was satisfied.

"Their flagship Rewloola is at the rear?"

"The count is correct, right? There's one extra cruiser, more than our intel suggested."

"Shows you how honest Char is."

Adenauer, seemingly proud of his own achievement, replied as he gazed intently at the television screen.

"Bon voyage! Although our time was brief, the Neo Zeon fleet has brought pride to the refugees! Yet, from now on, the name of Neo Zeon will live on in Sweetwater!"

"The only thing left to worry about are space aliens. The military will be disbanded, right?"

"I wonder if any jobs will be left when this is over."

"On Earth, they're always looking for people to clean the beaches."

At that moment, the captain of the Clop thought about striking Adenauer's head with a fist but only raised it halfway.

Not long after the broadcast from Sweetwater ended, in the command center near the pier of the Londonion's Londo Bell, Bright was dumbfounded as he read the files received from Cameron.

"There were fifteen nuclear warheads in addition to the ones on Luna II?"

"But considering they're under the Audit Bureau's jurisdiction, I'd say they're virtual antiques. Thus, they're destined for the museum. If used, please exercise caution."

"Aren't your actions considered a crime?"

"If the Federation government survives, I'll get life imprisonment."

"You're fine with that?"

"I'm betting on the success of Londo Bell's operation."

"Thank you, Cameron."

"No need for thanks... I've done this because I want to see Mirai alive."

"You were once her fiance. I understand."

"This Neo Zeon broadcast. Is their claim that the entire fleet has left for disarmament a sham?"

"Probably. It's all a big show."

Bright immediately dismissed Cameron's optimistic observation.

PART 9 **SURPRISE ATTACK**



Luna II, a celestial body with the peculiar appearance of a misshapen lemon, could no longer be justly deemed a planet. Instead, having taken up residence within Earth's orbit, it earned the rather dismissive moniker of "a mere pebble."

A flotilla of Salamis and Ra-type vessels encircled it, their bows poised toward the direction from which the Neo Zeon fleet was anticipated to emerge.

"Where pray tell, is the Neo Zeon fleet?" inquired Adenauer Paraya, ensconced on the bridge of the Clop, basking in the most glorious moment of his life. His negotiations with Char had played out precisely as he had envisioned.

Absent this crowning accomplishment, his life would have been a drab affair, bereft of any semblance of grandeur. The sting of his heartrending parting from his woman had all but dissipated.

He was now consumed by an ardent longing to forge a new path alongside Char.

"Sir! The radar indicates the same number of ships as when they launched from Sweetwater!"

"Three vessels, including the Rewloola, have removed their gun barrels. The rest appear to be signaling their surrender," reported another operator, scrutinizing the enlarged reconnaissance images on the display. This intelligence only served to heighten Adenauer's euphoria.

"Captain, ought we not position the Clop at the forefront? Remaining at the rear could be perceived as disrespectful to Char, no?"

"As a junior officer, it is my obligation to safeguard the esteemed members of Lhasa who stand beneath you, sir," replied the captain.

Adenauer could not contest this, yet a lingering dissatisfaction remained.

"Hmm... Is it just me, or is the Neo Zeon fleet approaching faster than expected?"

He feigned the composure of a commanding officer, but his observation was accurate.

"They must be eager to join our ranks and get their hands on a high salary, eh?"

"Right..."

The Clop captain's sardonic comment slipped past Adenauer, who remained ensnared in the web of his own jubilation.

Yet, upon the bridge of Neo Zeon's flagship, the Musaka, the captain had already established attack vectors targeting Luna II's ports and vessels.

"Owing to the sparse Minovsky particles, we can direct missiles towards Luna II's ports," he declared.

"And our mobile suit units will follow suit, shall they not?"

In response to Mesta Mesua's inquiry, the Musaka's captain nodded, his eyes narrowing at the peculiar silhouette of Luna II, now discernible to the unaided eye.

"It seems the Neo Zeon fleet is spreading out laterally."

For the first time, the Clop's captain displayed genuine concern toward Adenauer.

"They're supposed to approach single file."

Despite his merriment, Adenauer was no fool. He sensed the fracture in Char's commitment and began to entertain doubts.

"Spread out our mobile suit forces! Send out scouts as well!"

As the Clop's captain issued orders, Adenauer leaned towards the forward window, observing three Jegans advancing in the direction of the Neo Zeon vessels.

Neo Zeon's fleet had assembled around the Musaka, scattering left, right, upward, and downward. The three Jegans navigated the spaces between, looping around to the rear.

In that position, the silhouettes of the decoy Rewloola and three additional vessels emerged.

"We'll commence our attack."

Witnessing the enemy mobile suits' movements, the Musaka's captain confirmed with the bridge crew.

"Yes, sir!"

The central operator activated the ship's horn, and a sharp whistle sounded throughout the ship.

Each vessel's cannons, initially poised at maximum elevation, leveled horizontally. The Jegans launched from Luna II appeared to falter upon discovering the Rewloola was a ruse.

"Ready the mobile suit units for deployment! The Alpha as well!"

As one, the blinding flash of the ship's cannons flooded the Musaka's bridge, and the missiles and mega particle beams of Neo Zeon's fleet hurtled towards Luna II.

The reconnaissance Jegans, caught in that searing radiance, were pitiable. They vanished swiftly after sustaining direct hits from the focused assault. However, the explosion of these mobile suits was like a sparkler compared to the swirling light that erupted on Luna II moments later.

"Numerous heat sources!" An operator aboard the Clop's bridge shrieked.

"Evade!"

"But the treaty! This is madness!"

As streaks of light flashed across the bridge and explosions erupted before them, Adenauer could not bring himself to admit that what he believed in had been mistaken.

Homing missiles poured into numerous ports on Luna II, engulfing the base in crimson flames. While the Clop and other vessels attempted to retreat, most suffered direct hits and exploded.

The Clop, however, situated at the rear, had been spared the first wave's direct impact.

As the second wave of missile and mega particle beam attacks began, mobile suits were launched from each vessel, with Glarv's Psycho Doga and Quess's Alpha Azieru being the last to take off from the Musaka.

As the Psycho Doga catapulted from the deck, the Alpha Azieru, anchored beneath the Musaka, ignited the pair of booster nozzles concealed beneath its skirt – a feature absent during training.

Glarv's Psycho Doga flew diagonally ahead of Quess.

"Quess, today you just need to get a feel for real combat, understand?"

"Roger! Fuel tank burn test complete! Detaching now!"

As Quess detached the two tanks from beneath the Alpha's skirt, she guided its ungainly form southward along the fleet's attack path toward Luna II. The rotund Psycho Doga trailed, appearing simultaneously childlike and akin to a watchful guardian deity.

As Luna II loomed closer, Quess's cheeks tensed from her position in the cockpit in the Alpha's head.

Though the missile onslaught had subsided, Luna II remained engulfed in vermillion, punctured by mega particle beams, and distended from internal detonations.

To Quess, the scene evoked a nightmarish hellscape.

"Incredible..."

She held her breath, compelled to stay close behind Glarv.

The airspace seemed a realm that repelled women – a domain where manifold forms of insanity converged, driving individuals to madness.

Quess entertained the notion that a woman's voice might offer solace, but the thought dissipated rapidly.

Her irritation intensified. Through the psycommu, she detected a vast surge of thoughts incensed by their own vexation, and within that turbulence, she discerned an unusually vivid thought.

The striking thought emanating from Luna II's northern airspace captivated Quess more than any disordered notion.

"There's still a vessel attempting escape!"

The colorful thoughts in that direction grated on Quess's mind, infuriating her.

She sharply steered the Alpha towards the source of her agitation.

Glarv's Psycho Doga wavered for an instant before attempting to pursue but was soon compelled to engage several Jegans that had emerged in defense of Luna II, diverting his attention.

"Damn it!"

Glarv released his funnels, concentrating his will on controlling them for a moment.

The ship Quess approached was the Clop, carrying her father, Adenauer Paraya.

Of course, the Clop responded to the appearance of the Alpha, which looked like a small battleship, with a barrage of frantic anti-aircraft fire.

Quess's vision became saturated with the swirling lights of combat for the first time, her emotions overwhelmed.

"There!"

The eight funnels mounted on the Alpha's skirt fired in unison, hurtling towards the Clop like a cascading torrent.

"Ugh... It's a mobile suit!"

Upon witnessing the bizarre appearance of Alpha from Clop's bridge, Adenauer perceived the machine as the "Grim Reaper."

The fact that his daughter piloted it was a notion beyond Adenauer's imagination, a mercy in its own right.

However, Quess's experience differed significantly.

"Uwah! Ahh!"

The funnels launched from the Alpha charged toward the Clop, discharging lasers and ultimately colliding with the ship before self-destructing. One of them scored a direct hit on the Clop's bridge, obliterating it.

The instant Adenauer's body vanished, Quess emitted a scream, feeling the direct impact of her father's vivid thoughts.

"Aaaaahh...!"

Nevertheless, she failed to fully comprehend that the pressure and flow of thoughts she experienced originated from her father. Her vision momentarily faded to white, and she sensed a peculiar sensation as if her spinal cord was being forcibly compressed from her neck. She held her breath. She held her breath.

"Buhah!"

Quess gasped for air as if attempting to expel her stomach's contents. However, she could barely produce any saliva; her mouth was parched.

Her entire body, beneath her pilot suit, quivered with fury. Shaking her head seemed to alleviate the stimulus coursing through her brain only slightly. Quess retrieved a wet carton from the basket on the armrest and drained its water in one go.

"Quess!"

Glarv's Psycho Doga neared Quess's motionless Alpha.

"Don't stop! You're my rear guard!" he ordered.

"Ah!? ...Y-yes, I understand! I'll do that... Glarv..."

Quess pressed the wet carton to her forehead and took a breath, but the sensation of revulsion persisted.

The battle situation on Luna II could be discerned through the observation of the celestial telescope aboard the Rewloola, which had ceased all propulsion systems. The ship then reactivated its main engine and proceeded towards Axis, accompanied by three escort vessels.

"The operation appears to be successful," Captain Lyle informed Char.

"Hmm... By the time we reach Axis, the Axis fleet will have mobilized to reinforce Luna II, leaving it defenseless, correct?"

"That should be the case, indeed."

Events were unfolding in accordance with Char's designs, not Adenauer's anticipations.

x x x

As Cameron Bloom disembarked from the elec-car and joined Bright and Hathaway, he found Bright reprimanding a teary-eyed Hathaway for his unbecoming conduct as the son of a soldier. In the background, the Ra Cailum was beginning to detach from the dock, towed by tugboats.

"Is it true? Has Luna Two been completely destroyed?"

"The details are unclear--Stop crying! It's disgraceful!"

As Bright scolded him again, Hathaway's shoulders trembled as he walked away, heading towards the Med.

"Please look after the boy."

"His naivety comes from his mother, Mirai. Good luck out there!"

Cameron saluted Bright as he made his way to the Ra Cailum's bridge.

Cameron didn't worry about Hathaway; after all, arrangements had been made for him to visit his home once he had calmed down.

However, contrary to the adults' expectations, Hathaway closed the Med's canopy and crossed the opening third bulkhead, moving closer to the harbor entrance.

"My big sob act sure got me out of there."

As Hathaway wiped away his tears with his arm, he jumped the Med onto the underside of the departing Ra Cailum.

After adjusting the Med's balance with several bursts from its apogee motor, Hathaway made contact with a hatch near the center of the ship and opened the Ra Cailum's hatch.

"Good thing I studied the ship's layout."

Being the captain's son had its advantages. And so, Hathaway slipped the Med into the ship's underbelly. Naturally, the opening and closing of the hatch was detected on the bridge.

"Hey! We have a problem with hatch 48!"

"What's that?"

By the time Executive Officer Meran peeked at operator Meunier Thuhigg's console panel, the anomaly light had disappeared.

"Huh... Problem corrected! Armor maintenance team, check out hatch 48!"

As the final harbor bulkhead rose, the vast expanse of space became visible through the front window.

Hidden in the corner of the Ra Cailum's storage compartment, Hathaway left the Med tucked away and crawled out.

"Mom said it's about time I get space experience. I have to hold out a bit longer..."

In a panic, Hathaway returned to the Med, retreating into the darkness of its cockpit. Two deck officers had come down to patrol.

Hathaway realized that although he hadn't been discovered, he couldn't leave the Med either.

The Ra Cailum was accompanied by three Ra-type space cruisers, and surrounding them, mobile suit forces conducted their final formation flight training. Thus, the Londo Bell was a makeshift military force.

Meanwhile, the Ra Cailum attempted to make contact with the various colony fleets, but the situation was far from promising.

"It's no use! We're not getting any response from the fleets!"

"Are they all so afraid they won't fight against Char!?"

As Bright cursed, Amuro, who had been checking the displays of Axis, Luna Two, and the fleets on the bridge's panoramic display, called out to him.

"Captain, doesn't this seem odd?"

"What do you mean? If we consider Char's fleet at Luna II capturing the base's nuclear arsenal and heading towards Axis, we should reach Axis first. With the nuclear warheads provided by Cameron, we can obliterate Axis, leaving Char without any rocks to drop on Earth and rendering him powerless. Dropping Luna II on Earth would require time-consuming preparations to use the nuclear bombs as propulsion, which is not a viable strategy."

"But is Char really that foolish?"

"Lieutenant, here's the mobile suit unit formation chart and equipment placement. Please review them one more time before the operation."

"Understood..."

Amuro received the file from Beltorchika.

"What's so strange about it?"

"Char is smarter than that. Even if fleets were dispatched simultaneously from Luna II and Londenion, we would still reach Axis first. Would Char really allow that?"

"But there were more vessels in the Neo Zeon fleet that surrendered than we expected."

"That's the thing... Can we really trust the camera footage from the Sweetwater broadcasting station?"

After saying that, Amuro played the news video on the ceiling display, finally realizing something unbelievable.

"The barrel of the Rewloola is missing, isn't it?"

It was Bright who noticed.

"Right!"

Amuro stopped the display and zoomed in on the footage.

"It's a well-crafted decoy. The news camera didn't capture a close-up of the fleet. I believed it was meant to show the Earth Federation government that there were fourteen ships, but I was wrong. It was to conceal the decoy."

"So that means...?"

The entire bridge crew held their breath at Amuro's revelation.

"Does that mean Char's fleet might have already arrived at Axis?"

"No, they're already under attack."

Amuro's conclusion was correct.

Axis, with its triangular mountains above and below the flat rock surface.

In front of it, a harbor area had been constructed. Concentrated gunfire poured into that area like an avalanche as four ships under Char's command sunk the two Federation ships stationed there for defense.

Char, not even wearing a normal suit, watched the scene unfold from the bridge of the Rewloola.

He then sent mobile suit forces ahead, dispatching a team of engineers to prepare the nuclear pulse engines, and descended to Axis for reconnaissance in his own Nightingale.

The central part of Axis, which was composed of seemingly smooth iron-like rock, had a mountain-like mass of magma protruding above and below its center. It appeared to be a meteorite formed as a result of several different meteorites colliding with each other.

Furthermore, traces of structures were left here and there, as if they had merged with the rocks after being bombed.

"Axis, huh..."

There were four massive tail nozzles for the nuclear pulse engines at its rear, which the Rewloola fleet did not attack. The Nightingale circled around from above them and emerged on the harbor side facing Earth.

Axis was a space fortress built by Char when it was in the asteroid belt.

However, after Char left Axis and the Zabi family's heir, Mineva, in the care of Haman Karn and returned to the Earth Sphere, Haman Karn took over Axis and used it as a base for Earth invasion.

Haman was defeated when she attempted to bring Axis down into the Earth Sphere.

Even a layman could speculate that if a meteorite of this size collided with Earth, the planet would experience a devastatingly cold climate similar to the one that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs.

"I'll drop this on Earth... Amuro! There's no way you'll just stand by and watch, right?"

Char cast his eyes toward the Earth behind him.

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From the airspace of Luna II, the Musaka and the fourth ship, trailing long tail nozzles, launched towards Axis. The Alpha was being towed by the Musaka, while the remaining ships provided cover against sporadic resistance from Luna II.

Mesta Mesua had managed to load as many nuclear weapons as possible onto the fourth ship from a corner of Luna II, and now, the Musaka carried the maximum number of mobile suit troops on board, heading to support Axis.

"Are we certain that the Captain's fleet has occupied Axis?"

"There's no mistake. Minovsky particles are beginning to thicken, so the information is somewhat unclear, but..."

"There's no doubt."

Quess's voice rang through the bridge, sweeping away the operator's hesitation.

"Quess?"

Both the Musaka's captain and Mesta raised their eyebrows at the voice and her appearance.

Quess, who had brazenly climbed onto the bridge, had changed into civilian clothes and was curiously looking around the bridge. It was as if she were on a school trip.

"Is this the combat bridge below? Ugh, it's as cramped as a mobile suit cockpit!"

"This is problematic. We're on secondary combat alert. Everyone's on edge."

The captain of Musaka spoke openly to Mesta, but had no intention of yelling at her himself. All the Newtypes and Cyber-Newtype were under Mesta's jurisdiction.

"I understand, Captain."

Mesta grabbed Quess by the neck, who was peering into the combat bridge, and tried to lead her out.

"This isn't a playground!"

"Let me go!" Quess retorted, swatting Mesta's hand away, her rebellious nature on full display.

"You! In that outfit!"

Mesta's hand flew to Quess's cheek, but Quess's hand also flew to Mesta's cheek in retaliation.

"You hit me! I don't see the problem! I just wanted to refresh myself because it felt disgusting! What's wrong with that?!"

"This is the military! We can't have the discipline of our officers and soldiers disrupted for your sake! We're in a war!"

"I'm not fighting any war! I'm just helping the Captain!"

Mesta delivered several more slaps to Quess's cheek, each one igniting Quess's anger further.

"I don't care anymore! I don't care about you!"

Quess flailed both of her hands, storming out of the bridge in a huff. In that moment, she tore off her jacket and hurled it at Mesta, as if to strike her.

x x x

The Re-GZ's backpack glided across the mobile suit deck of the Ra Cailum, docking around the main body of the Re-GZ as if enveloping it.

"Great! Now, I can take down the enemy fleet all by myself, right?"

"Please stop talking that way! I'm worried about you getting hurt, Lieutenant..."

Astonaige's lighthearted concern made Kayra burst into laughter.

"Astonaige... You, silly man!"

She playfully poked Astonaige's chest with her finger.

The surrounding crew couldn't fathom how the flamboyant and spirited Kayra Su and the unassuming Astonaige got along so well, but that's just how things were between them. The relationship between a man and a woman is something others can't quite grasp. The two of them teased each other, even with the crew around them.

The atmosphere on the deck was shattered by the bridge's urgent call.

"Fleet identified! Prepare for contact! They're Federation vessels!"

"No doubt! It's Luna II's fleet! Is the Clop among them!?"

Urged by the bridge's voices, the crew rushed to the outer deck. Four heavily damaged ships approached the Ra Cailum, their survival a marvel in itself.

From one ship, a mobile suit drifted toward Ra Cailum. Amuro and the others on the upper deck saw two people in normal suits riding on the suit's manipulator.

"I apologize... A sudden, fierce simultaneous attack left all key personnel, including Vice Minister Adenauer Paraya, were killed instantly. The Clop was destroyed in an instant..."

"What about Char's fleet?"

"Intercepted radio communications revealed they broke into Luna II's nuclear weapons cache... Luna II's space forces are... Ungh..."

The Ra Cailum's crew could only watch as the Clop's officer sobbed.

"The colony fleets won't help us. They're afraid of riots breaking out."

"It's as if the colonies and Earth were helping Char!"

Meran shouted as if Bright was responsible for this.

"Not all of Neo Zeon's vessels are gathered at Axis! Our forces are the same! If we strike now, we can win!"

Bright retorted, not backing down.

x x x

"Out with that woman! Drive her away! That... that wench!"

Glarv heard or rather sensed, the near-madness in Quess's voice when he was waiting in the briefing room.

"Quess...?"

Thinking it might be a trick of his ears, Glarv stepped out into the corridor connecting the briefing room and the mobile suit deck and was stunned.

"What are you wearing?!"

Glarv saw Quess ripping off her bra as she floated by.

Glarv ignited the verniers on his pilot suit, ascended, and grabbed Quess's arm.

This was far from normal. But Glarv sensed that Quess's intentions were clearly directed towards Char and that her mind was not clouded, which brought him relief.

"I'm going to the Captain!"

"Why?!"

Glarv tried to calm Quess down by grabbing her shoulders, but her body continued to drift toward the center of the mobile suit deck.

"Who cares about the reason! I hate it here! I hate it!"

"Quess! We're on a battleship! We're at war! This is for the Captain's sake, too!"

"If I stay here, I can't do anything here, so I'm going to the Captain!"

The mechanics glanced at Glarv, holding the naked girl but did not intervene. Even Mesta on the bridge witnessed the scene.

"What do you think, Director of the Newtype Labs?"

The captain of the Musaka asked Mesta mockingly.

"The Captain intends to use her effectively as a military asset. If that girl says so, shall we release her?"

"That's true. With the Alpha Azieru's auxiliary fuel tank, she can reach Axis's airspace. Even the Musaka would be faster to enter Axis's combat zone if we released the Alpha. But how do we put the naked Quess in the Alpha's cockpit?"

"Glarv! Allow Quess to launch! Put her in the Alpha and launch it!"

Ignoring the captain's sarcasm, Mesta ordered Glarv.

Glarv held Quess and floated over to his Psycho Dog.

"We have permission. Ready to head to Axis?"

"Did that woman say that?"

"Yes!"

Quess sighed in relief and sat on Glarv's lap, just as she had in the Hi-Zack.

"Open the mobile suit deck! Psycho Doga, heading out!"

After that call, Glarv launched the Psycho Doga from the catapult deck, maneuvering it toward the Alpha, which was being towed behind the Musaka.

"You know, Quess, Mesta's that kind of woman who slept her way to the top, becoming the head of the Newtype Labs and a tactical officer," said Glarv. "You don't need to bother with someone like her."

"I'll get rid of her and claim the Captain for myself!" Quess declared.

"That's not the point."

Glarv disconnected the radio from the bridge and the mobile suit control center, but a call came in on a separate line saying, "Release the radio block!"

However, Quess bit Glarv, disregarding the call.

"I don't want to hear about your jealousy!"

"I'm not jealous!" Glarv protested. He brought the Psycho Doga close to the Alpha's head and ordered the mechanics to connect a tube. For now, it was best to let Quess do as she pleased and calm her emotions.

Glarv sensed the growing turmoil in her thoughts.

As he lowered the cockpit console panel, Quess's nearly nude figure flowed through the narrow space of the tube toward the Alpha's cockpit. While he didn't understand her feelings behind stripping, if it helped her calm down even a little, he thought it was for the best.

"Still..."

It was a fact that her exposed form stirred the desires of men. Quess was no longer a little girl.

Quess tore the cables towing the Alpha from the Musaka and set her course toward Axis.

Glarv followed closely behind in the Psycho Doga, leaving the Musaka. He was well aware that he hadn't received Mesta's permission.

x x x

"All hands, prepare for level two combat alert! Ready the mobile suits for the first wave!"

The call from the Ra Cailum echoed through the block where Hathaway sought refuge. Wrapped in a stolen jumpsuit to fend off the cold, Hathaway crawled out of his hiding place and decided to head for the upper section.

"I-I need a normal suit..."

Hathaway fastened a string to Haro's ear and set off towards the illuminated area.

The speed of the lift grips used by the mechanics ahead in the light was faster than usual.

The Ra Cailum's fleet began deploying Base Jabbers and started preparing to send mobile suit squads into Axis's combat zone.

"Entering missile range! Fire the decoy missiles, now!"

"Disperse the anti-electromagnetic particles! Spread the Minovsky particles!"

The Minovsky particle dispersion apparatus on the side of the Ra Cailum engaged, silently initiating the spread of particles.

"Prepare for visual combat! Activate monitoring systems!"

"First wave of missiles, launch!"

Numerous missiles burst forth from the Ra Cailum's side, some being nuclear missiles. Three accompanying vessels followed in kind, launching their missiles as a feint.

As the flashes from the missiles vanished into the void, Earth came into view, while Axis's silhouette remained barely discernible, like a faint haze.

Hathaway rode the lift grip that connected the cat deck vertically and caught a glimpse of the mobile suit deck when a sharp female voice said, "Mobile suits, everyone in your team here?"

Startled by the red-suited pilot's exactitude, Hathaway arrived at the end of the lift grip. He struck his head on the cat deck's underside, and his body floated towards the mobile suit deck, where Kayra noticed him.

"Ugh!"

Kayra used the vernier of her pilot suit to intercept Hathaway's drifting form and chastised him, "In civilian attire?! Do you want to die?!"

While berating him, she realized he was Bright's son, and she exclaimed, "Hathaway...?!"

Amuro spotted the pair.

"Kayra. I'll take care of this. You're leading the first wave. Scout the enemy's movements. You know the bearing for when you rendezvous with me in the second wave, right?"

"Leave it to me! What were you planning to do if this ship was hit?!"

"I knew where the normal suit room was. I planned to sneak in there."

"If it were me, I'd throw you out into space right away!"

Kayra tapped Hathaway's forehead and drifted towards her Re-GZ.

"Open the airlock! All hands, prepare for space combat!"

A sign reading "Air Pressure Lost" started flashing on the open deck, and the blaring buzzer that had pervaded the deck was swiftly silenced as the air hatch opened.

It happened right after Amuro tossed Hathaway into the ship's internal airlock.

"Opening the air hatch with only five minutes' notice, while still in civilian clothes, will result in two weeks of confinement or a one-month suspension of pay."

"Does that apply to civilians too?"

Ignoring Hathaway's objection, Amuro ushered him towards the officer's mess hall.

PART 10 **FIRE FROM THE HEAVENS**



"Enemy heat signatures approaching! Intercept with missiles! Disperse particle rounds!"

The alert resonated through Axis's core pulse nozzle and engine control chamber. Around the nozzle, mobile suits busied themselves with maintenance tasks.

"Enemy vessels detected at bearing code 4!"

"A.E.M.! Scatter!"

"Transfer control to combat bridge! Contact the Captain at Axis!"

Crew members of the Rewloola scrambled into the combat bridge, and the three vessels, led by the Rewloola, dispersed laterally against the Ra Cailum fleet.

"So... they've finally come?"

Char set down the intercom and addressed the individual in a normal suit beside him, "Initiate ignition once adjustments are complete. We'll have ample time to correct our course. Londo Bell shall not breach this place."

"We're counting on you, Supreme Commander!"

"Please, dispense with formalities. I prefer being called a pilot."

Char smiled at the technician before heading towards the Nightingale.

"They were quicker than anticipated..."

Char's sentiment was stirred by the exceptionalism he sensed in the Londo Bell unit.

He doubted Mesta could grasp such a perception.

"Is that it?!"

From the Nightingale, Char launched a barrage of funnels toward the rapidly encroaching trail of missile light.

Yet, he couldn't dispel the notion that the missile swarm concealed more than mere inanimate "objects."

"...!?"

Char, slightly unnerved, tried to concentrate on the few "heated" presences nestled among them.

An explosion detonated within the missile cluster. A brilliant band of light unfurled. Within it, one particularly immense fireball sent a chill down Char's spine.

"Tch! They hid a nuclear warhead inside those missiles?"

The revelation stirred a maelstrom of emotions in Char—betrayal by the Earth Federation government and astonishment that Amuro and Bright dared employ a nuclear weapon against him.

Retreating from the swelling fireball, Char wrestled with a foreboding sense of an arduous battle looming on the horizon.

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Crack!

The force behind Bright's slap across Hathaway's cheek was anything but gentle. In the zero gravity, Hathaway's body drifted away, and Beltorchika caught him.

"Your mother and sister would be worried sick if they knew you were on the battlefield!"

"Leave him be. Boys should be like this."

"This is no laughing matter!"

Ignoring Amuro's interjection, Bright tried to dismiss Hathaway as Amuro pushed a normal suit towards him and inquired,

"You want to see Quess, don't you?"

"I'm going to get her back from Char!"

Hathaway's fervent words left Amuro and the others at a loss for words.

As Bright prepared to lash out again, Amuro restrained him and said, "Hathaway, Char is taking advantage of Quess' very sensitive nature. Right now, she's become a mere tool for Char. It's a lost cause."

He attempted to persuade him with the utmost composure.

"A tool for Char?"

"Yes... Char is a man who dares to change the world by destroying lives. If she's going to follow a man like that, she's merely courting the Grim Reaper..."

"Courting the Grim Reaper?!"

"The battlefield has that kind of influence. Get into a normal suit! That's an order!"

".....!?"

Without a word, Hathaway began to don the lower half of the normal suit.

"Beltorchika! Lock Hathaway in the study. We don't know what he'll do if he's wandering around like this."

"I-I'm on it!"

Beltorchika hesitated.

"What's wrong?"

"No... I got tired all of a sudden, but I'll be fine. I'll take some medicine."

"Do that. We're leaving soon."

Amuro longed to berate Hathaway, who was slowly putting on the normal suit, but he restrained himself and exited the mess hall.

Beltorchika's reluctance to inform Amuro of her pregnancy wasn't solely due to the mission's chaos.

She worried that if Amuro discovered the truth, he might either strive harder for the child's sake or become excessively cautious.

Either way, it would alter the man Amuro had been until now.

She couldn't discern whether such a change would yield positive or negative outcomes. Although she had considered consulting Dr. Chan Swahn, the frenetic nature of their deployment prevented her from doing so.

"Ahh!"

As Bright entered the bridge, cries of alarm erupted from the operators.

"Have they come?"

"Axis has fired up its engines! It's heading for Earth!"

The brilliance of Axis's nozzle was visible on the enlarged display. Even from a considerable distance, the image unmistakably showcased the might of Axis's nuclear pulse engine.

"Enter the mobile suit combat zone! Launch our mobile suits! Fire the third wave of missiles!"

"Hold the fourth wave for a moment!"

As Bright issued the orders, he directed them to switch control to the combat bridge.

From the catapult decks of the Ra Cailum and accompanying vessels, mobile suits like the Re-GZ were launched. Jegans attached themselves to the Base Jabbers hovering before the ships, pursuing the leading Re-GZ.

"Deploy the decoys!"

"At the same time, prepare for evasive maneuvers!"

The decoys, released from the flanks of the Ra Cailum, inflated into forms resembling rocks and ships. They remained stationary at strategic positions, connected by wires.

"In case of danger, we'll come to get you right away... If something abnormal happens, plug this into the intercom line and let us know, okay?"

"Yes."

Hathaway took the interphone from Beltorchika and entered the study room. Watching him, Beltorchika mused that raising a child must indeed be a formidable challenge.

"A third wave, huh?!"

Char entrusted the second wave of missiles to the minefield and the mobile suits and defended against the third wave by unleashing the full firepower of the Nightingale.

Amid the tumult of missile explosions, there was a single, particularly large flash of light.

"I suspected this would be the primary assault, but there's only one nuke among them. Well played, Bright..."

Char maneuvered the Nightingale and retreated along the line of fire from the cannon barrage originating from Axis.

"Mesta! Hurry and join me!"

Char's voice sounded like a desperate plea.

"They've caught up to Axis. Londo Bell was faster than we anticipated."

On the combat bridge display of the Musaka, a CG representation showed the positions of ally and enemy ships. The graphics were an integration of data obtained from radar and laser measurements, as well as human optical observations. Without such a system, it would be impossible to analyze information under the influence of Minovsky particles. Still, this was less accurate than the radar systems of the old century.

Rezin Schnyder launched from the Musaka's catapult deck. She was delighted that the Cyber-Newtype and Quess, whom she detested, were gone.

"I don't understand what Char is thinking, letting them handle the job!"

"Once the second wave of mobile suits is finished launching, continue cover fire for another thirty seconds. Then, we'll engage the enemy mobile suit forces! I wish you all the best."

At Mesta's decisive command, Rezin smirked and replied, "Alright! Mesta babes, Rezin is heading out!"

Rezin, along with her squad of three Geara Doga units, latched onto a Shackles and charged into Axis airspace.

Subsequently, the Musaka and the fourth ship's missile and mega particle cannon barrage commenced in the area where the Ra Cailum fleet was presumed to be. The assault was strikingly accurate.

The decoy units deployed by the Ra Cailum vanished one by one under the attack from the flank.

In this dire situation, Amuro initiated the launch sequence for the Nu Gundam.

"Reinforcements are en route, but is it safe to launch!?"

"Second wave of mobile suit forces, move out! The fleet will endure with close support!"

"Please! Kayra and the others are already engaged. Halting Axis's advance is our top priority!"

Amuro, in the Nu Gundam, tilted forward and equipped with fin funnels resembling heat dissipation plates on its backpack, rode the catapult's acceleration and departed the Ra Cailum.

"We're losing..."

That was the sentiment Amuro harbored as he sat in the cockpit of the Nu Gundam.

With Axis at its rear, the Rewloola executed evasive maneuvers while repeatedly firing its ship cannons. The other four ships followed suit, but their intensity had diminished. This was because mobile suit combat had erupted on the frontlines.

The mobile suit skirmish unfolded in the airspace below where the mega particle beams from the fleets intersected. However, the area teemed with floating rocks. Both enemy and ally mobile suits had to navigate around the rocks while exchanging gunfire, occasionally using the rocks as shields. Amid the pandemonium, some mobile suits collided with the rocks and detonated upon impact.

Kayra Su's Re-GZ, flanked by several Jegans, had slipped into an airspace where Axis was visible to the naked eye by circling near the North Star.

"Should we target the enemy fleet's core to establish a foothold to halt Axis, or should we bypass the fleet and obliterate Axis's core nozzle itself?"

She wavered momentarily, but within seconds, she would have no choice but to charge in one direction or the other.

"Huh...!?"

Although the main forces should have started engaging one another, Kayra spotted the glint of another Geara Doga squad directly ahead of her Re-GZ.

The supporting Jegan units discarded their Base Jabbers and unleashed a surprise assault, plunging into the heart of the enemy's fragmented resistance line.

"Nice cover!"

Kayra barreled through the airspace where beams crisscrossed. The enemy would evade, rendering her advance more dependable.

"Uh!? Another mobile suit squad!?"

She saw multiple tail nozzles extending to the lower right. Realizing that the defense of the Rewloola's mobile suit units was remarkably robust, Kayra hastily aimed at the flash of Axis's core nozzle with the mega particle cannon on her backpack.

"Even if this doesn't take it down in one shot!"

She discharged the first round. However, the misfortune of the mega particle cannon lay in its sluggish beam speed and the conspicuous trail of light it left in its wake. Once detected and confronted with a defensive beam barrage, the beams would easily be deflected and dispersed.

Rezun Schneider's Geara Doga forces, which had launched from the Musaka, were watching the glow of the mobile suit battle.

"We're on a winning streak with these consecutive battles! Hahaha...! Londo Bell, huh? They should've stuck to ringing bells!"

As Rezin destroyed a Jegan, she gazed at the unscathed Axis and marveled at Char's prowess.

"If only he didn't have a penchant for young girls!"

That was the general consensus among the pilots when it came to Char.

At the same time, Quess's Alpha Azieru, which had penetrated deep into Axis's combat airspace, searched for Char's Nightingale.

"Captain! Where are you, Captain?! I can't stand Mesta!"

Quess, who was scanning left and right on her display, didn't notice the flashes of light from the battle.

"Captain!"

"You're being careless, Quess! Be more aware of what's around you!"

Glarv suppressed the urge to leap into the cockpit of the Alpha Azieru as he heard Quess's mournful cry. It was all he could manage.

"He's over there?"

Quess zoomed in on her multi-display, focusing on the airspace above Axis.

"Captain! You're hiding over there?!"

Quess detached the Alpha Azieru's external fuel tank and accelerated rapidly. The abrupt acceleration shook off Glarv's Psycho Doga.

"Quess!"

Glarv attempted to chase the Alpha Azieru but felt an odd pressure on one side. It was the same "heat sensation" Char had experienced. He zoomed in on the display.

"Is this the pressure of the Nu Gundam...?"

Glarv directed the Psycho Doga towards the flash of light. He quickly realized that it was a group of missiles and doubted his own sensing ability. But...

"...!? A nuclear warhead?"

Rationale dawned on Glarv.

With Axis at his back, he positioned the Psycho Doga so that Earth shone brightly behind him and focused his mind on the "heat."

"Damn... these guys!"

Glarv released all the Psycho Doga's funnels at once.

"Hit them! Funnels!"

Glarv's powerful will was transmitted to the funnels through the Psycho Doga's psycommu system.

The fourth wave of missiles from the Ra Cailum contained five nuclear warheads, but Glarv's funnels scored direct hits on all of them, creating an enormous, dazzling light that engulfed dozens of regular missiles flying alongside.

"I did it!"

Glarv shouted in triumph.

"The nukes have been intercepted?"

Amuro angled the Nu Gundam's body towards the swirling vortex of the nuclear explosion, instantly realizing that the primary menace had been neutralized.

"Could Char truly possess such power?! No, that can't be it!"

Amuro's thoughts raced as he deduced that there must be a number of individuals with immense abilities scattered across Axis's combat airspace. A shudder coursed through him at the idea.

"It seems we face a multitude of formidable adversaries..."

The nuclear flash starkly illuminated Char's Nightingale and the approaching Alpha Azieru in the void of space.

"Incredible!"

Quess was captivated by the ferocious spectacle of light.

"Quess!"

Char's voice pierced through the cacophony of noise.

"Captain! Captain! What is it?"

She strained her eyes, and the Nightingale emerged on the main display of the Alpha Azieru.

"Glarv intercepted the enemy's nukes."

Quess quickly brought the Alpha Azieru in contact with the Nightingale.

"Captain! Mesta slapped me real hard!"

"Oh? I'll talk to her about it."

As Char replied, he flinched when the Alpha's head, dominating the display, shifted. He opened the hatch of the Nightingale's cockpit.

As Char leaned out, the Alpha's cockpit opened beneath the armor of its head, and Quess was propelled towards him by the air pressure within. The vacuum, the absolute zero, direct light created a skin-burning environment...

"She's naked...!?"

As Char caught Quess's approaching body with his own, he embraced her naked body and retreated into the cockpit, closing the hatch.

"You're not wearing a pilot suit?!"

Quess shook her head, gasping for breath.

"C-cold..."

Coughing and shivering, Quess was alive... Char, with his pilot suit's visor open, couldn't help but scold her.

"What were you thinking?!"

"Will you really... make sure she's punished?!"

"Yes... Don't worry."

Char, finally catching his breath, marveled at Quess's purple skin and her incredible vitality.

"Well, Captain, I'll do my job!"

Quess seemed satisfied. She quickly pulled up her slightly lowered panties and tried to open the hatch.

"Stop! You don't know the dangers of the vacuum. Don't get carried away!"

Char held her still-youthful chest to restrain her.

"But...!"

"Real combat is a terrifying thing. Beyond what you can imagine."

"Terrifying? Yes, it's frightening! Even though I endured that fear and fought, Mesta didn't praise me! She just got really mad!"

"I see... so that's what it's about?"

"That's right. Captain, don't waste your time on someone like Mesta. She lacks empathy. It diminishes you."

Quess, now calmer, spoke earnestly, completely naked on Char's lap as he wore his pilot suit.

"You're right... Mesta is practical, but she does have the shortcomings you mention... I have an idea. Quess... we'll continue your training here. If you can experience more of the battlefield's horrors without entering it, you'll truly become a

Newtype. Then, you can unleash the power to turn all of humanity into Newtypes and save humanity..."

"Isn't that your job, Captain?"

"I'm just paving the way. It's up to your generation to achieve it."

"Captain, you're amazing."

Quess murmured as she tried to stroke Char's cheeks with both hands from underneath his helmet.

"Isn't Kayra being too reckless?"

Amuro's anxiety mounted as he neared the rendezvous point, finding no sign of mobile suits in the vicinity.

His concern was warranted, for Glarv detected the Re-GZ's presence within the airspace close to Axis.

"What's that!? I feel a sharp sensation from the upper left!?"

The Psycho Doga, poised to return to Axis, swiveled and climbed. The lack of funnels made Glarv increasingly uneasy, yet he persisted.

"Is it the pressure of the Gundam!? The suit I encountered on Fifth Luna!"

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"If I can't control it remotely, I'll just shoot them directly!"

"But still!"

Hathaway pressed his ear against the door, straining to catch Beltorchika's voice as she paced the hallway outside the study room.

"I'll just man the machine gun seat and fire directly!"

"Beltorchika's really giving it her all...ugh!"

The ship's hull shuddered, sending Haro floating upward. Hathaway grimaced and clutched the Haro.

Having slipped into the rear gun seat, Beltorchika operated the machine gun as if expelling pent-up frustration.

Before her, a lone Geara Doga approached, decimating the dummies deployed by Ra Cailum. It was Rezin Schnyder.

"Really! Cyber-Newtype or Newtypes, if they can't stop the fleet, they're nothing but useless nitwits!"

Rezin, dodging the Ra Cailum's machine gun fire, unleashed a volley of missiles from her shield.

"...!"

Simultaneously, Beltorchika countered with her machine gun, thwarting Rezin's missiles from reaching their mark.

But...

"Not bad!"

Within the exploding missiles' glare, Rezin's Geara Doga retreated and spun, exploiting the blinding light. Beltorchika struggled to track Rezin, firing the machine gun wildly.

"Ah...!?"

"Mama!"

Hearing the voice, Beltorchika swiftly swung her machine gun right, channeling all her strength into her two thumbs. Tracer rounds homed in on Rezin's Geara Doga as if the suit were sucking them in.

"Wha?! The light... it's...!?"

Rezin's scream was cut short as a concussive explosion blossomed, her suit vanishing in the flash of light.

"I-I did it...!"

Beltorchika wondered if the voice she heard was "Mommy," "Mama," or something similar to the Chinese word for "Mother."

"What was that...?"

Still, she believed that the sound had informed her of the enemy mobile suit's direction of invasion.

"Is it because of the baby?"

Beltorchika's hand groped her abdomen through her normal suit, but all she could feel was an unpleasant sensation as if heartburn and nausea had melded together as one.

"Aah!?"

Quess, sitting on Char's lap, shuddered with a sudden tremor. It was a convulsion.

"What's wrong?"

"It feels like... a lot of people are entering me..."

Quess murmured her words as if grounding them to the earth. It was not an unfamiliar sensation to Char.

"...Captain... I-I'm scared..."

Quess's hands quivered in terror, gripping Char's elbow. He tenderly embraced her exposed back, soothingly caressing it...

"...!?"

Hathaway, cradling Haro, felt as if Quess's scent lingered nearby and scanned the dimly lit self-study room.

"Dad?... Quess!?"

Hathaway struggled to grasp the situation beyond the escalating battle, but that alone was sufficient. He pondered what he could do amidst the chaos.

The Re-GZ deftly evaded the enemy warship's mega particle cannon assault with a sweeping maneuver, closing in on Axis's rear.

"There it is! Go!"

As the Re-GZ unleashed beams and missiles simultaneously, several Geara Doga units distorted the beams emanating from Axis.

"Not yet!"

The Re-GZ swerved amidst the flash, but a separate formation of Geara Dogas ambushed from the fleet's vicinity as though anticipating the wide turn.

"Hmm!?"

Simultaneously, Kayra detected a distinct presence and glanced up to see Glarv's Psycho Doga bearing down from behind.

"With this one machine, I'll obliterate the entire fleet!"

Glarv's exasperated emotion exerted a unique pressure on Kayra, distinct from the other mobile suits. The Psycho Doga's psycommu transmitted Glarv's thoughts.

"There you are!"

Glarv fired his beam rifle at the Re-GZ, heedless of friendly Geara Dogas in his path. Naturally, some allies were hit, but the heavily armored Re-GZ, with its backpack, remained functional.

"With one more shot, I can stop Axis from falling to Earth..."

Kayra fired the mega particle cannon while dodging Glarv's onslaught, but in the next instant, half of the backpack was obliterated.

"Agh!"

"Like hell you will! You're full of yourself!"

Glarv referred to the pressure emanating from the Re-GZ's main body, reminiscent of a Gundam. The Psycho Doga's missiles annihilated the Re-GZ's tail nozzle, causing the mobile suit to whirl uncontrollably.

"Just because you think you're some successor to the Gundam!"

The Geara Doga squad encircled the Re-GZ and launched their assault. Armor from the Re-GZ's back was shredded and cast aside.

"Grr! Don't finish it off just yet! Incapacitate it and capture it!"

Glarv's realization was that the pilot must be Amuro. That's why he called out to the mobile suits on both sides.

A beam struck the Re-GZ's leg directly, but only the armor's tip was sheared off.

"Nngh!"

In Kayra's view, the display showed damage points blinking incessantly, menacing her.

"Leave only the cockpit! The pilot of the Gundam is supposed to be Amuro! Some Newtype!"

Glarv continued giving orders.

"What the hell is with them? They're toying with me!"

Kayra was filled with despair.

Once more, the manipulator gripping the Re-GZ's beam rifle was blasted away. Prior to that, the beam rifle's primary energy tube had been severed, rendering it inoperable.

"Kayra!?"

Perceiving the despair that engulfed Kayra's thoughts, Amuro guided the Nu Gundam with unyielding resolve into that airspace. The psycommu, attuned to that steely resolve, served to stimulate Glarv.

"...!?"

Though the sensation was still vague, Glarv realized that the order he had just given was a mistake.

"Tch...!?"

Aware that the Geara Doga squad was restraining the movements of the Re-GZ, Glarv tried to pinpoint the direction from which the "stimulation" was coming.

And there it was – a distinctive tail nozzle light, unmistakably unlike any other mobile suit.

"Stop!"

Amuro sensed, or rather perceived, the stagnant air within the intense, lightless abyss. Through the video game-like cockpit display, he addressed the external "presence."

"Incoming! I don't know who you are, but if you come any closer, this Gundam-wannabe's pilot will--"

In that instant, Glarv magnified the oncoming mobile suit and observed that it, too, bore a striking resemblance to a Gundam. He cast a glance at the immobilized Re-GZ.

"A Gundam? Two Gundam wannabes?"

A slight unease crept over Glarv as the pieces of the puzzle started coming together.

He remembered the Re-GZ's vulnerability compared to their previous encounter at Fifth Luna. The implication was unmistakable. Judging from the intensity of thoughts radiating from it, the pilot of the approaching mobile suit, the new model, must be Amuro Ray.

If that's the case, the "presence" advancing head-on...

"Amuro! If you come any closer, this mobile suit's pilot will lose their life!"

Glarv maneuvered the Psycho Doga nearer to the Re-GZ and struck its frame. Inside the swaying Re-GZ cockpit, Kayra Su struggled to engage the emergency escape lever on her seat.

"Dammit! It won't work!"

The flickering, half-knocked-out display was filled with the visage of the Psycho Gears Doga.

"You, the Gundam wannabe! I'll kill this mobile suit's pilot!"

"Ugh!"

Kayra manually opened the cockpit hatch and ignited the verniers of her pilot suit.

With a swift swoosh, Kayra's pilot suit soared into the void.

"You won't escape!"

Glarv sent the Psycho Doga's manipulator chasing after Kayra and caught her.

"Ah!?"

"Damn him!"

As Amuro scrutinized Kayra's pilot suit on the enlarged display, her fragile form was held tightly by the enemy mobile suit's manipulator.

Several of the surrounding Gears Dogas began to close in on the Nu Gundam.

"Lieutenant! The enemy has stopped! Please, take the shot!"

"Surrender that Gundam wannabe and your life shall be spared, pilot - and you as well, Amuro!"

Amuro received Glarv's message via an optical signal. However, through the psycommu and psycho-frame, he detected even more ominous, shadowy thoughts from Glarv.

"...!?"

If he didn't show a total willingness to surrender, Kayra would be crushed by the manipulator.

It appeared as though the manipulator proffered Kayra towards the Nu Gundam.

"Lieutenant, don't worry about me. Just shoot! These people are insane! It's all because of Char, who's misleading them as if he's watching this battle from the heavens!"

"...!?"

"It's all because of Char, who's misleading them as if he's watching this battle from the heavens!"

Amuro did not hear this through radio transmission but sensed Kayra's intentions directly. Although her suit had a radio, the din in the high-density Minovsky particle environment rendered it inaudible.

For a moment, Amuro faltered, and his emotions manifested in the Gundam's movements.

Seizing the opportunity, several Gears Doga units launched wires from their shields, ensnaring the Gundam with the intent to tow it.

"Wait! I surrender! I'll release my funnels and beam rifle!"

Amuro cried out. If the enemy mobile suit was a psycho-type, it ought to have received his intentions.

"Alright!"

Amuro sequentially released the fin funnels attached to the Nu Gundam's backpack and let the beam rifle he held in his right manipulator drift forward.

Nonetheless, the Gundam's actions infuriated Glarv.

"Releasing the heat sinks, what sort of funnel is that!?"

Force was applied to the Psycho Doga's manipulator gripping Kayra's torso.

"Ugh!"

Kayra's ribs were likely shattered...

"What!?"

Neo Zeon's funnels were cylindrical, unlike these flat fin funnels. To the inexperienced observer, the Gundam's funnels appeared as heat sinks.

"Terminate the Gundam's pilot!"

At Glarv's behest, high-voltage electricity surged from the wires entangling the Gundam. Four Gears initiated the assault.

"Ugh!?"

For an instant, it seemed as if the direct hit had reached Amuro's seat. However, the detached fin funnels instantly folded their wings and discharged mega particles from the gaps, severing the wires.

Amuro escaped a lethal blow, but the fin funnels' movements were not entirely his own doing.

Kayra's body met its demise within the relentless grip of the Psycho Doga's manipulator.

"Ugh!"

"You'd dare resist, Amuro?! It wouldn't have come to this if you just followed orders!"

Infuriated, Glarv bellowed as he hurled Kayra's lifeless pilot suit and charged toward the Gundam.

"You're nothing more than Char's lackey!"

Amuro, too, charged, directing the Gundam's right manipulator to grasp the rifle.

"I am Glarv Guss--What!?"

Glarv sensed the Gundam's movements and the funnels whirling about it, suddenly converging on him. He retreated with the Psycho Doga at full force.

This was where Glarv diverged from ordinary pilots. Without a doubt, there was a part of him that had been enhanced as a warrior.

"Nnnngh!"

"What's the matter, Quess?"

Char felt as though he had heard Amuro's voice, but at that moment, Quess's back was convulsing more intensely than before, causing him to forget about Amuro's presence.

"Captain, Captain... If I don't kill all my enemies, I... I'll be undone..."

Quess whimpered, her teeth chattering.

Had Amuro pursued the Psycho Doga at that time, he might have managed to destroy Glarv. However, as he evaded the onslaught from the Geara Doga squad on either side, he discovered the crushed pilot suit of Kayra Suu, preventing him from acting.

Amuro seized the opportunity to recover Kayra's body, but in doing so, exposed himself to the relentless assault of the Geara Doga and Rewloola, compelling him to fall back.

Upon seeing Kayra's pilot suit hidden in the shadow of the left manipulator's shield, Amuro swiftly retreated from the airspace.

Immediately after, the Nightingale descended upon the point where the Gundam had been, unleashing a torrent of beam attacks. Char realized Amuro's retreat.

"He's not here? He knows when to quit. So, Amuro, you're using a new Gundam?"

"Go after him, Captain!"

"No, it's too late..."

Char gently patted Quess's back as he spoke.

"Glarv suffered too, you know."

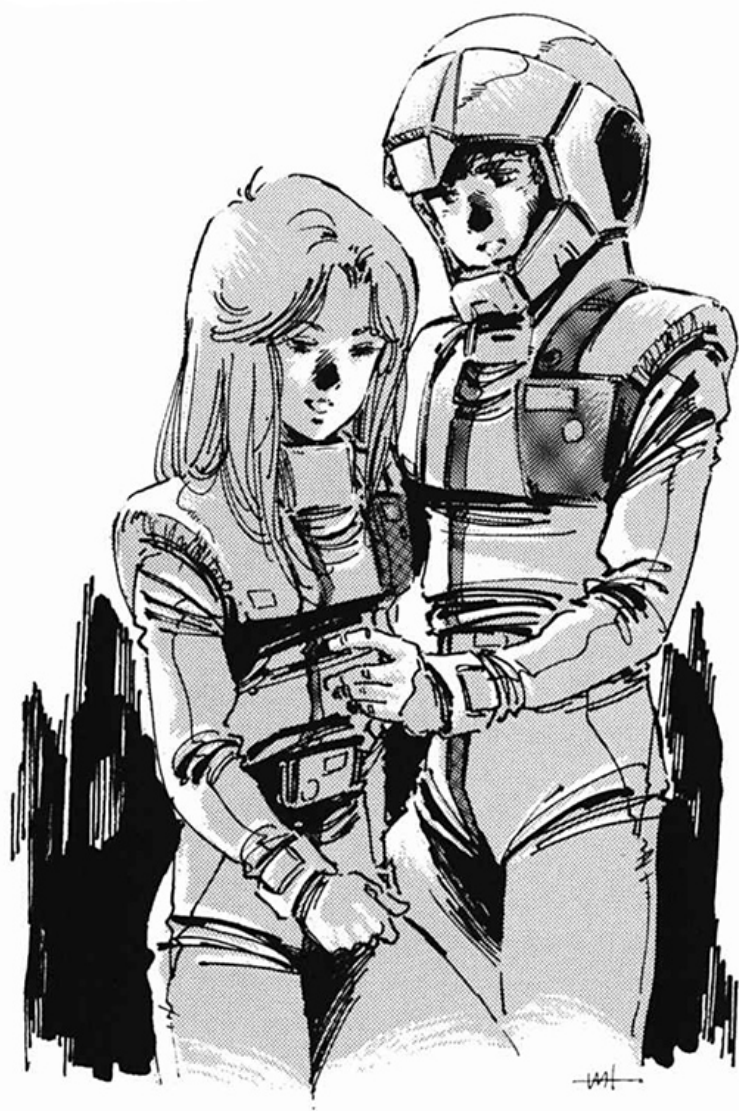
"I could tell. But fighting to conceal our fear will only hasten ones death."

Removing his helmet, Char tenderly counseled Quess.

"Ah...!"

Quess pressed her cheek against Char's, embracing his neck with all her might.

PART 11 **A TIME TO LOOK UP**



The fleet of Ra Cailum evaded the sporadic missile attacks from the Rewloola fleet, putting up a barrage of anti-missile and particle fire to maintain distance.

The flash of Axis's nuclear nozzle was still observed piercing through the Earth's night side.

"Conserve the anti-missile particle rounds!"

"Roger! Observation team, any enemy mobile suits?"

"Retreat of enemy mobile suits confirmed! Allied mobile suits, recover in sequence!"

Control had switched from the combat bridge to the regular bridge. Helmets could now be removed, but there wasn't time to take off their normal suits.

Each ship's catapult decks and landing decks were chaotic with the returning Base Jabbers and mobile suits.

"Don't think you can use the fixed attachments! Use wires!"

Astonaige and his mechanics crew and deck personnel frantically worked to recover the Jegans.

Several crew members fired cables at the approaching Jegans, securing them in place.

The damaged Jegans, regardless of the extent of damage to its own body, desperately wants to return to its mothership. If not careful, a Jegan on the verge of explosion might even manage to reach the deck.

Chief Hanna, overseeing mobile suit recovery on the upper deck, approached Astonaige and whispered something to him—an intimate touch conversation.

"Kayra?!"

"By the rear hatch."

Leaving the deck command to Hanna, Astonaige headed toward the rear of the Ra Cailum.

The Gundam had returned. Further in, on the deck in front of the Gundam's outstretched manipulator, Astonaige saw several normal suits crouched down.

"..."

Astonaige couldn't believe it, but his body instinctively moved in that direction. He lost the courage to counterthrust, letting inertia carry him to the scene.

The closest pilot suit turned around and shouted, "Astonaige! Don't come any closer!"

"No way..."

Astonaige landed on the deck in one swift motion, looking down at Kayra's pilot suit, which had become mysteriously crumpled and torn.

"What is this? It's not in its original shape, not the same volume as Kayra's body... It can't be Kayra..."

That's what Astonaige thought.

"Astonaige."

Beltorchika's muffled voice was heard near Astonaige's headphones.

Only then did Astonaige notice the crumpled Kayra's pilot suit helmet visor. Beneath it, Kayra's colorless eyes stared at him. Her cheeks appeared swollen, and her short bangs clung to her forehead.

"What?!"

Astonaige's knees buckled, and he bent down to check if Kayra was alive.

"Kayra!?"

"Get her out of here! Hold Astonaige back! Don't let him see!"

Amuro's sharp reprimand echoed through Astonaige's headphones, but there was no way he could hear it.

"Kayra?! Kayra!"

As Astonaige's scream began, the mechanics lifted up the crushed pilot suit of Kayra Suu. Men grabbed Astonaige from both sides, holding him back.

Watching this unfold, Beltorchika's normal-suited upper body swayed back and forth—a painful sight for Amuro.

"Beltorchika..."

Amuro's pilot suit embraced Beltorchika.

"How was she killed?"

"Kayra... She suffered..."

"I can imagine... Oh, God!"

Beltorchika's sob was heard through her visor while Astonaige's crazed voice echoed in their headphones.

"I can't die until I've taken down Char, who made this happen..."

"...!? Stop it! Don't say that! It's cruel to the baby!"

Beltorchika spat out the words, clinging to Amuro's pilot suit.

"Without that, there's no meaning in fighting! There's no meaning!"

Amuro had no words to respond.

Determination was, after all, just an abstract concept.

Now, Beltorchika, a woman with a physical presence, is attempting to embrace the reality she has just mentioned, even if it means holding back her once assertive personality. When a man comes to terms with this reality, abstract concepts like determination and self-righteous thoughts like male pride are quickly discarded, leaving the man with no option but to kneel before the woman.

"A baby...?"

Amuro finally asked, moving his parched lips.

"It seems I'm pregnant. It's not even three months yet, but I'm sure. So please, don't say things like that now."

"I see... Our child...?"

As Amuro watched the mechanics carrying Kayra, he said it once more.

"I see!"

The confined briefing room aboard the Ra Cailum buzzed with tension as main staff members, ship captains, and pilots from each squadron filled every available space, akin to ants in a colony.

"The crux of the matter is that the Neo Zeon fleet at Luna II has nuclear weapons at their disposal, intending to detonate them here at Axis, thereby accelerating its trajectory."

As the operations officer, Tooth, elucidated the movements on the monitor above the Axis model, some of the captains and pilots quickly consumed combat rations. At the very least, steaming cups of tea were in everyone's grasp.

"Even if we manage to thwart Axis's descent, a single detonation of the nuclear weapons from Luna II in low orbit would still spell success for Char's strategy."

"To counter this, we must either destroy Axis's tail nozzle to alter its course or detonate the remaining five nuclear missiles near Axis, effectively splitting it apart."

Amuro, his impatience palpable, rose to his feet.

Bright, who had been observing from the right corner, held up four fingers inquisitively. "Are we aiming to split Axis apart?"

"Yes... Only four nuclear missiles left?... This section is its Achilles' heel."

Amuro gestured toward a spot just behind the center of Axis on the display, then toggled the screen to reveal a cross-sectional view of Axis's intricate tunnel system.

"I see, the most convoluted part of the tunnels. So, we're left with no alternative but to mount an all-out fleet assault, correct?"

"While executing the kamikaze attack, we'll also employ the tube. The v Gundam's Hyper Mega Bazooka Launcher, powered directly by the Ra Cailum's main engine, will target Axis's nozzle. Concurrently, we'll assault with nuclear missiles. If that fails, we'll infiltrate Axis and obliterate this block from within."

"Splitting Axis will drastically alter its mass, and if we don't adjust its entry direction, Axis's orbit will shift, ejecting it from Earth's sphere. Even if it plummets to Earth, destroying the deceleration nozzle beforehand ensures it disintegrates in the atmosphere."

The crew members paused their meal, riveted by Shin and Tooth's detailed plan.

"Rather than deeming it a possibility, I'd say we stand a fighting chance."

"It's a brute force tactic. I initially believed the Neo Zeon, with potential reinforcements from Luna II, held the upper hand. But with this plan, we can emerge victorious!"

Murmurs of agreement rippled through the cramped briefing room.

"Alright, it's a three-stage plan. We must execute it before the enemy reinforcements arrive from Luna II."

Bright stepped in front of the display, prompting the assembled staff to stand at attention.

"Synchronize our time!"

"Zero synchronization. Ten, nine... two, one, go!"

In the hushed aftermath, Bright saluted and solemnly implored, "I apologize, everyone. Would you give up your lives?"

The assembled team members returned the salute with determination etched on their faces.

Axis had already reached the perilous point where Earth's gravity threatened to consume it.

Despite this, frantic activity persisted in the control booth of the nuclear nozzle, which continued to propel Axis. Efforts were being made to ensure the designated crash site would be Mexico City. To accomplish this, a nuclear explosion for speed control had to be placed at the front of Axis, programmed to react to any interference.

This was a challenging task, as it could not be completed until the nuclear nozzle was activated and its effective output confirmed.

It was fortunate that the Ra Cailum fleet had temporarily withdrawn. The Musaka and Rewloola-class ships concealed themselves beneath Axis's shadow,

awaiting task completion while hastening the maintenance and resupply of mobile suits.

"Cruiser 4 will enter Axis's port in ten minutes."

Mesta Mesua glanced at Char's face, noting his evident fatigue.

At Luna II, Char had been tense and solitary, and Mesta felt as if she hadn't seen him for over a week.

The two stood atop the armor above the Nightingale's head, which flowed beneath Axis.

"Once the fourth ship docks at the port, secure it and evacuate the crew. When Axis dives into the lowest layer of the Van Allen belt, detonate the nuclear weapon aboard the fourth ship."

"Yes... So it's a race between the Londo Bell ships and the fourth ship?"

Mesta pressed her visor against Char's, inquiring, "Can we talk through the vibration of the visor?" Char had been so engrossed in monitoring the ships and Axis's defenses that Mesta had inadvertently closed the gap between them. She yearned to touch Char's body.

"Glarv's overprotectiveness of Quess might cause him to overreact and confront the Londo Bell fleet."

Char's irritation was palpable, but he refrained from responding. Mesta, sensing his annoyance, hastily tried to justify her statement.

"Isn't it better that way? It allows Glarv to fully demonstrate his abilities..."

She emphasized, though her true intention remained unspoken.

"The judgment of the Newtype Labs' director would be more accurate than mine, right?"

As always, Char replied with these words and pulled away his visor.

"Yes..."

Within her normal suit, Mesta clenched her teeth in frustration.

Had they been in an atmosphere, Mesta lamented that the situation might have unfolded differently – a realization that seemed to come too late.

At Axis's port-side facility, several mobile suit repair beds lined the area, and the mechanic crew bustled about, equipping funnels to the Psycho Doga and resupplying the Geara Doga.

"I left the Musaka on my own and performed well in combat earlier... But now, with both the Captain and Mesta gone... They're ignoring me..."

While ensuring the smooth resupply of the Psycho Doga, Glarv felt uncertain about his next move.

"Glarv!"

Quess, clad in her pilot suit, floated over. Her demeanor seemed to have entirely erased any memory of her previous naked distress, leaving Glarv bewildered.

Quess's expression and bearing radiated an innocent charm. At that moment, it was unbearable for Glarv Guss.

Glarv knew that his actions could result in his expulsion from the military, shattering the dreams he held dear. He wasn't entirely arrogant, and he recognized that without Neo Zeon, he would be lost. All of this was because of Quess, who was now drawing nearer.

As Quess approached, blissfully unaware of Glarv's turmoil, he felt the urge to slap her.

"Quess? Weren't you with the Captain?"

"Mesta took him away."

Giggling, Quess brought her face close to Glarv's. Her exquisitely shaped lips lingered just before him.

"You think they're just talking business?"

Glarv attempted to dismiss the thought.

"But, Glarv, even if you intervene, the Captain will still be mine, alright?"

Quess offered a knowing smile, her expression more mature.

"Don't think like that!"

Glarv encircled Quess's waist, and with his pilot suit's verniers ignited, they soared away from the mobile suit maintenance area and delved deep into Axis's structure.

"What are you doing?!"

"You know, I wiped out all of the enemy nukes at once! I even fought to capture the v Gundam!"

Glarv's impassioned declaration resembled that of a fervent youth, which wasn't entirely unappealing to a girl like Quess. However, this time, it felt somewhat abrasive.

Glarv led Quess to a mine deep within Axis, where a miniature, mid-20th-century mining town from the previous century was recreated, built for resource extraction.

Short streets of the mining town were flanked by red streetlights casting long shadows on the duo as they descended. The fact that the lights were on testified to the precision of the nuclear pulse engine's operation.

"I can achieve more than the Captain himself. Don't waste your time on that middle-aged man!"

"It doesn't matter!"

Quess retorted, squirming in midair.

"It does matter! Everyone at the Newtype Labs knows it! They know why the Captain tries to approach you even while maintaining a relationship with Mesta!"

"Who cares! I like the Captain!"

"Listen! The Captain is obsessed with a young girl he met during the One Year War. He's sick. You don't know that!"

"What...?!"

Quess clung to a streetlight pole to steady herself and gazed at Glarv with a puzzled expression.

"People think he has a thing for young girls!"

Quess couldn't comprehend what he meant.

"What?"

"Char has a lolita complex, nympholepsy, call it whatever you want!"

"If that's an illness, it's different! Char is an adult! He's with Mesta, isn't he?"

Quess believed a more dignified description of Char was appropriate. Unfamiliar with the term Glarv used, she felt compelled to resist his desperate attempt to slander Char.

"It's just a facade. He flaunts his relationship with Mesta to maintain the image of a dignified leader! Many girls have heard the Captain muttering Lalah's name in his sleep."

"You...!"

Quess pushed off the ground and slapped Glarv's cheek with all her might.

Then, she activated her pilot suit's verniers and quickly ascended back the way she had come.

"Quess! The Captain started this war because he lost Lalah to Amuro. That's not the mark of an adult! He's not reliable!"

"Go to hell! That's why I can't stand young men!"

The three ships, spearheaded by the Ra Cailum, surged through the decoy asteroids at full speed. Meanwhile, the Jegans' unit stood at the ready atop the Base Jabber, and Amuro prepared to launch the Gundam, fitted with the tube-connected system, from the catapult deck.

"Amuro...!"

Beltorchika, who had come from the catwalk, floated before the Gundam's cockpit, clutching a small basket.

"A lunchbox...!"

"Huh? Oh...! Do you have something to drink?"

Amuro peered into the basket.

"The white pack is water, blue is pure tea, and pink is coffee, right?"

Beltorchika entered the cockpit and explained the contents, which included several drinkable packs.

"Thank you. This is truly helpful."

Amuro closed the hatch, lifted his visor, and kissed Beltorchika.

"Thank you..."

"...Why?"

"I never imagined that I, abandoned by my parents, could become a parent myself... I'm a fortunate man. Thank you for giving me a wonderful child. That's why I won't push you too hard. I asked Bright to have you brought up to the bridge."

"No, that's not necessary..."

As Amuro caressed Beltorchika's belly over her normal suit, he said,

"I can't wait to meet our child..."

"...Soon. After this battle is over..."

"Yeah..."

Amuro kissed Beltorchika once more.

"Don't be reckless, alright?... This battlefield feels haunted by Char's bitterness. Do your best, okay?"

"Char knew about the construction of this Gundam. And he even afforded me the opportunity to utilize the psycho-frame. I think I understand Char's feelings well... I can't turn down his challenge. Otherwise, I'll never be able to become a father, nor will I be able to surpass Char."

"...Are you confident?"

"I've made thorough preparations, and for our baby's sake, I will win... No, that's not it. Char never had the chance to meet a woman like you, Beltorchika, or have a child. But I have you and the baby inside you. This difference is an absolute power."

"Oh... Amuro!"

After receiving Amuro's kiss, Beltorchika finally retreated from the Gundam.

The Gundam's manipulator grasped the hyper mega beam launcher fastened to the Ra Cailum's wall.

"I'll be waiting, Amuro!"

With a whoosh, the vGundam's exhaust gas billowed, and Beltorchika's voice grew distant through Amuro's headphones.

From the command deck, Bright intently observed the Gundam's departure, his anxiety manifesting in the unzipping of his normal suit and the absent scratching beneath his undergarments.

"Captain, should we have Hathaway join us on the bridge?"

"Hmm... We might all meet our end in this battle. Would you really want to do that?"

"We've prepared a capsule for recording last words, if necessary..."

"Sorry."

With urgency in his voice, Meran opened the console panel's display and called out, "Bring Hathaway to the bridge!"

"Prepare the tube for release! 3, 2, 1!"

From a makeshift cable box affixed to the Ra Cailum's rear engine, two energy cables were launched. They connected to the Gundam, which was waiting fifty kilometers ahead. Of course, this was done while both were moving at high speed.

".....!"

With precision, Amuro navigated the approaching tube, aligning the Gundam parallel to one cable while expertly evading the other undulating one. The makeshift apogee motor offered little in the way of accurate cable control.

Undeterred, Amuro maneuvered the Gundam to grasp one cable, connecting it to the waist engine while skillfully avoiding the second cable.

"Excellent..."

Activating the Hyper Mega Beam Launcher, the barrel emitted a brief glow, coinciding with a momentary dimming of the lights on the Ra Cailum's command deck before they returned to normal.

"Connection successful! The tubes' flight angles are limited! Adjust the apogee as quickly as possible, if feasible!"

"Understood! Retracting the tubes! Mobile Suit units, exercise caution!"

Bright was acutely aware that adjusting the apogee was out of the question as they needed to maintain a direct course for Axis, but the relief he felt upon the test's successful completion was palpable.

"Ah, Hathaway...!"

Upon hearing Meran's voice, Bright turned toward the rear-left hatch, where Hathaway was being led by a guard.

"The combat bridge is restricted. However, if you can remain quiet, you may observe. Consider it a learning opportunity. Also, have you prepared your final words? Place them in a capsule, and we'll release it."

"Y-Yes, sir!"

Bright breathed a sigh of relief as he observed Hathaway, resolute while listening to Meran's instructions.

"Captain, what are your thoughts on this?"

"Huh?"

Bright examined the display that Claire Thrune presented to him.

"Federation fleets mobilizing? These must be from Luna II, and these here from Side 2 and 5, correct?"

"Could it be? Are they really our fleet?"

"Based on their movements and trajectory, there's no doubt..."

"Are they coming to support us?"

"Or perhaps they simply wish to bear witness?"

Though not beautiful, Claire's expressive features were endearing. Her lips formed a pout, accentuating her well-shaped mouth.

"Periodically update them on our position."

"But Axis will target us."

"We're launching a suicide attack regardless. There's no reason to hold back."

"Should we cease dispersing Minovsky particles?"

"Fool!"

As Bright chastised her, Hathaway observed from behind, penning his final words on a sheet of paper atop Haro's head.

"Axis in range! Heat signature intensifying! Axis has accelerated!"

"Should we deploy our mobile suit forces?"

Meunier Thuhigg inquired of Bright.

"Stick to the plan! Fleet kamikaze! Tubes! Mobile suit combat! Nuclear missiles! Proceed as planned!"

"Switch control to the combat bridge!"

"Transfer to the combat bridge!"

As the bridge crew relocated, Meran glanced at Hathaway, diligently composing his will. He swiftly skimmed the document.

"Very well-written, isn't it? You even wrote something up for your father."

"Then....!"

"Indeed..."

Meran collected the will, folding it as he floated toward the combat bridge. Bright, the last one remaining on the regular bridge, addressed Hathaway, seated in the auxiliary chair.

"Put on your helmet. The visor will close automatically if it becomes a vacuum."

"Yes..."

"If you get scared, head to the study room. It's the deepest part of the Ra Cailum."

"Sure, Dad."

Bright descended to the combat bridge, leaving Hathaway alone with Haro in the dimness of the regular bridge.

In the southern reaches of Guangxi, China, roughly a dozen kilometers from Hepu, an aged land cruiser navigated an asphalt road marred with cracks as if a violent earthquake had struck.

Mirai Yashima was at the wheel, with Cheimin clutching a small teddy bear in the passenger seat. The rear seat held a meager collection of luggage, too sparse for those leaving their home behind.

As they climbed a gentle slope, a queue of vehicles carrying refugees like Mirai and Cheimin came into view. Drawing to a halt at the end of the line, Mirai instructed, "Wait here. I'll see what's happening," before sprinting toward the gathered crowd ahead.

"Ugh...!"

A chilling wind blew. Clouds had hung heavy in the sky since the meteorite struck Lhasa, plunging the world back into winter's embrace.

Although the cloud cover was temporary, it heralded the approach of a long-term cooling trend. Sitting in the driver's seat, Cheimin nervously fingered the small handgun concealed beneath her sweater, doubting her ability to wield it effectively.

The crowd was curiously composed mainly of Caucasians, local faces few and far between. This stemmed from the forced migration to space and the privilege afforded to those remaining on Earth. More crucially, the ethnic distribution of the planet had been thoroughly disrupted in this era.

Elbowing her way through the throng, Mirai gasped at the sight of the valley where the asphalt road had been torn asunder. The road had been gouged out for several meters, brown water snaking below it amidst overturned cars. Observing

people sliding down the slope, she realized the ground was carpeted in a thick, viscous mud.

It would be quite some time before passage was possible. To either side, a barren wasteland stretched out, the once fertile fields now surrendered to the ravages of nature.

"Even though they say we have to go south via the mainland... if we waste time here, we'll be caught in the catastrophe when the meteorite strikes Hong Kong..."

"Is it true that another meteorite is going to fall?"

"The rumor is that it'll fall in North America."

"If it turns into a nuclear winter, nobody will survive more than twenty years, no matter where they are. The ozone layer will be in shambles too..."

Overhearing the murmurs around her, Mirai shivered and ran back to the car.

"...Let's abandon the car. If this weather persists, solar batteries won't help, and I doubt any gas stations will sell us gasoline."

"Are we going to walk south?"

"Yes, being closer to the sun increases our chances of survival, right? One piece of luggage each?"

Mirai retrieved a suitcase from the rear seat and began packing their belongings.

"But... I'm definitely taking Mimasa with me."

"I won't carry it for you, you know?"

"!"

Cheimin showed off the small teddy bear she was holding. Suddenly, they were bathed in warm light, and Cheimin widened her eyes. The sun had peeked through a break in the clouds.

"Yay! It's the sun!"

"Hey! It's the sun!"

Cheering erupted among those who had parked their cars. Both Mirai and Cheimin squinted, astonished by the sun's ability to kindle hope in their hearts.

"Huh...?"

"What's that...?"

In the sun's brief appearance, they glimpsed a solid shadow—distinctly not a cloud—slowly traversing the solar disc.

The silhouette resembled a vertically elongated rectangle.

"Is that... Char's meteorite...?"

For the first time, Mirai saw the physical entity that the man she once knew, Char, was connected to, and her entire body trembled.

However, that shadow was soon obscured once more by the roiling clouds.

PART 12 **RHYTHM**



At Axis's pier, the Rewloola lay moored. Glarv Guss snapped to attention before Mesta Mesua.

"As you were! Despite leading Neo Zeon, the Captain has chosen to face Amuro personally. We must protect him at all costs!"

Mesta spoke with formality before attempting to board the Rewloola. Glarv muttered disdainfully as she turned away.

"Really, that's why you called me here before heading out?"

Mesta spun around, severing the wireless connection, and descended using her normal suit's vernier. She pressed their visors together and spoke.

"An all too human remark, wouldn't you say? A Cyber-Newtype in their right mind would simply die, wouldn't they?"

"In combat, I am a machine. I am a Newtype."

"Hmph, of course. Look after Quess. If you do, ultimately, you'll safeguard the Captain, Neo Zeon's forces, and we can live in peace."

As Mesta attempted to leave, Glarv's hand grasped her arm.

"One more stipulation..."

"What is it!?"

"You must keep the Captain in check with those 'abilities' of yours."

"You little shit!"

Mesta shook off Glarv's hand with force, then kicked the pier and drifted away.

"Hahaha... is that even harder than defeating the Gundam with the Psycho-Doga?"

"Glarv!"

Mesta's anger flared, but she couldn't deny the truth in his words. Unable to retort, she remained silent.

"Enemy vessels detected! All hands, level one battle stations!"

The Rewloola's announcement echoed through every soldier's headphones. On the Rewloola, Captain Lyle still had issues that needed confirmation.

"Are you certain? Cruiser 4 from Luna II is on approach?"

"It's the fourth ship. And there's clearly another distinct light."

"Is this an image captured before the Minovsky particle dispersal?"

Lyle scrutinized the photograph handed to him by the operator.

"Yes, these lights on the radar screen are Federation Forces vessels."

"So, enemy reinforcements are on the move?"

"They appear to be ships from Side 2 and Side 5. Fleets from Earth's orbit are also closing in... some have even escaped Luna II."

"Where's the Captain?"

"He's directing the launch of our mobile suit forces at a harbor on Axis."

"Align the Rewloola and Musaka side by side to engage the enemy."

From the port at the front of Axis, the mobile suit teams of Geara Dogas were already launching one after another.

"Captain!"

Unrestrained, Quess opened the hatch behind Char's seat and launched herself in.

"What's the matter?! You're late for your sortie!"

Char challenged, eyeing the Alpha Azieru, but Quess disregarded it, moved in front of Char, and clung to his chest.

"...?!"

"Am I a substitute for Lalah?"

For a moment, Char thought this girl had finally realized something. However, there were lower-ranking officers lined up in front of him. He wanted to silence her.

"Who said that? I mean, why would that bother you?"

"I love you, Captain! I hate the idea of being a substitute!"

"That's a problem."

Noticing the deck conductors' gazes turning their way, Char scooped up Quess and stepped outside. He hoped their curiosity wouldn't affect their command and closed the hatch behind them as they entered the airtight corridor.

"What makes you think you have the right to make such a demand of me, Quess?"

Char held Quess's slender waist in her pilot suit.

"It's not about rights or obligation! Thanks to meeting you, I can destroy the Earth that bore the woman who took my father from my mother. If I do that, maybe my father will return to my mother, and ultimately, it'll serve your plan, right?... That's right! Forget about my father and mother! I am who I am. I want to be useful to you, Captain!"

"I suppose you're right."

Char acknowledged the shimmer in Quess's eyes, which seemed to form a world of their own.

"I'll put Lalah out of my mind."

Char softly proclaimed.

It was a lie. And yet, it wasn't. Perhaps Char could already anticipate the outcome of the battle.

"...?!"

Quess's eyes widened.

"If you doubt me, leave one funnel from the Alpha. If I betray you, use it to kill me."

"Captain...?!"

"That's why, just for now, fight alongside Glarv. You won't survive without him as your protector."

"Captain!"

Quess sunk her teeth into Char's neck and fervently kissed him, whether it was his cheek or his lips.

"So you won't die because there's someone to fulfill your promise?"

"Thank you, Captain!"

"I'll go out in the Nightingale as well. I don't mind Mesta's reprimand. I'm more concerned about you, Quess."

Quess knew those words were a lie, but she cherished the sentiment behind them from Char.

To board the Alpha Azieru, Quess lowered her helmet's visor and pushed off the ground toward the pier. Char supported her from below by lifting her rear.

Quess's pilot suit fluttered up, and the suit's vernier gas hissed out. While watching the two, Glarv stepped in front of Char.

"What's up?"

"I had a meeting with the operations officer!"

Glarv's eyes were on the rising Quess. He wasn't looking at Char. Char touched his visor to Glarv's visor and asked,

"Why do you think I have an interest in Quess?"

"I don't understand, Captain."

"She's still a child, isn't she? Get along with her. If you protect Quess, she'll be drawn to you."

"Captain...?"

"I have no interest in anything other than the revival of Neo Zeon. Whether you're a Newtype or not, there are unimaginable things between Mesta and me."

"Huh...?"

Indeed, even Glarv couldn't imagine what Char would say next.

"You see, Mesta is kind to me in bed, despite her appearance."

"Wha...?!"

It was Char's intimidation. But the young Glarv was overwhelmed. Char slapped Glarv's buttocks and lifted him up just like he did with Quess.

With his vernier firing, Glarv saluted Char and headed for the Psycho Doga.

"That's right, Captain! Until I grow up, I'll have to put up with Mesta. I'll allow that."

In the cockpit of the Alpha Azieru, with Axis behind her, Quess was feeling very grown-up and cheered.

"Quess! Aren't you cold?!"

Glarv's voice, heard through the static-filled radio, was gentle.

"Oh!? I'm fine! Glarv! Hang in there!"

If Quess allows Char to be with Mesta, Glarv's role for Quess might be the same as well.

"Christina also said that love requires discipline..."

This understanding brought Quess a sense of comfort.

"Ah!?"

Below the Alpha's field of vision, she spotted trails of fire extending from behind. It was the light from the missiles launched by the Ra Cailum.

The battle had begun.

The fleet, with Axis in their rear, opened fire on the incoming missiles in unison. Behind the missile group, the Ra Cailum and other ships, while having their surrounding decoys destroyed one after another, advanced.

"I'll handle them!"

"No, don't!"

Ignoring Glarv's warning, Quess's Alpha surged forward, and the Alpha's diffusion mega particle cannon unleashed a volley at the visually detected missiles.

About five fireballs expanded in quick succession, turning the airspace into a warzone.

"Quess! You're incredible! You really are!"

Glarv marveled at the agility of the Alpha, which belied its appearance.

"Our missiles were taken out? Who did it?!"

Gazing in awe at the numerous fireballs expanding before him, Amuro, piloting the v Gundam, continued his direct approach towards Axis. The movement speed of Axis had visibly increased.

"!? No, this is something different!"

Amuro sensed several sharp "presences" within the wall of mobile suits deployed before him. In other words, it was a wall constructed from the pilots' intentions.

"Is it Quess...!?"

The nature of the thoughts was distinct, and there was no other way to describe it.

Facing this formidable barrier, Amuro charged forward, feeling as if he were exposing his entire being.

"It's a mobile suit! Quess, fall back. I'll protect you when you need it most!"

"Don't worry! I can do it!"

"Listen to an experienced person for once!"

"Hehehe..."

Quess, at this moment, had the tolerance to accept Glarv's kindness. That's why she felt happy. However, she sensed the pressure of a sudden approach within the fluctuations of her emotions, and her heart trembled.

"Amuro is coming?!"

"It's a powerful enemy! Fall back, Quess!"

"Eh? Oh...!"

Glarv's Psycho Doga moved forward with a loud boom, covering the Alpha from behind.

"Glarv....!?"

When Char entered the regular bridge of the Rewloola, Mesta was the only one present.

"Cruiser 4 has moved in front of Axis."

"Good. Once it's moored at Axis, immediately have the crew--"

"On it. We are directing a Musaka to recover them."

Char stood in front of the combat bridge, seemingly counting the number of fireballs spreading in front of him.

"You managed to trick Glarv, huh?"

"He's not someone you can trick easily. I just told him the truth."

"And after the battle concludes? Will the truth remain?"

Char did not engage with Mesta's barbed sarcasm.

"I'm prepared to bear the stigma of polluting the Earth. Besides, I let Amuro have the Psycho Doga's psycommu abilities."

"...?"

Mesta's astonishment was tinged with the realization that her suspicions about Char's mindset were correct.

"I've done what I had to do. Now, I leave it to fate."

Char turned from Mesta, peering into the combat bridge.

"I'm going down to the mobile suit deck! If needed, I'll go out immediately."

"Understood!"

Lyle responded, looking up.

"Captain! What did you just say?"

Mesta's voice, laden with emotion, reached Char as he entered the corridor.

"Captain! Captain!"

Her voice quavered with unshed tears.

"...!? I just stated the facts."

"Did you give the psycommu to Amuro with the intention of dying?"

Mesta, her usual composure shattered, grasped Char's shoulders, desperate to impede his progress.

"Don't be ridiculous. There's no merit in defeating an inferior opponent like Amuro in a lesser mobile suit."

"No, what happened at Fifth Luna wasn't just a matter of a man's pride. Captain, you intend to be defeated by Amuro as atonement for polluting Earth, don't you?"

"My atonement is to realize my father's ideals and transform all of humanity into one as Newtypes."

"That's right. That's right!"

Mesta nodded vigorously.

"However, men possess their petty pride. When facing a weaker adversary, an equal playing field is necessary, lest it haunt us indefinitely. That is all, Mesta. Today, I bid farewell to the foolish man within. So, observe in silence."

"..."

Mesta's sorrowful gaze returned, her hands sliding from Char's shoulders to his elbows.

The very embodiment of tender affection.

"A man who genuinely aspires to rule the world must possess such ambition, don't you agree?"

"Yes! Without doubt. Otherwise, you wouldn't be the man for me."

"After all, if I were to be defeated by the Gundam, the dropping Axis would not succeed, right?"

"No, kindness and gentleness alone do not make a man..."

Mesta reiterated.

"Hmm...!"

Char pressed a kiss to Mesta's tear-brimming eyes, absorbing her tears before descending to the mobile suit deck.

At the Axis spaceport, the fourth vessel approached at high velocity, the Earth as its backdrop. On its deck, dozens of crew members bustled about, making ready for docking procedures. Awaiting their arrival was the Musaka.

Strobe signals from both ships marked the nearing of Cruiser 4 to Axis.

"Don't rush to your deaths! This battle has nothing to do with you!" Amuro screamed, annihilating several Gears Dogas and surging forward.

"It's pointless!"

The Gundam evaded while still possessed by a bizarre force, destroying an approaching Geara Doga. At the same time, a strobe flash emerged from behind the Gundam.

"Signal from the Gundam! Extend the tube!"

Bright issued the order, recalling Hathaway left on the bridge above.

"Disperse additional Minovsky particles!"

"Launch the second wave of mobile suit forces!"

"Uh...!?"

The ship tremored. The approaching Geara Dogas' numbers, combined with friendly Jegans, were no trifling matter. Anti-air fire from the Ra Cailum cascaded around like a torrential downpour. As the tube's tip reached for the Gundam, Amuro located its glowing end while nimbly dodging the Geara Doga's assaults.

However, overhead, a lone flashing tail nozzle of a unique hue extended. It was Glarv Gas.

"This is it!"

Glarv launched a volley from the Psycho Doga's rifle, but the Gundam cleverly used a decoy as a shield, advancing towards the tube.

"Funnels!"

Glarv focused four funnels on the Gundam, which countered by deploying two Fin Funnels to intercept. These contraptions danced through the void as if possessing minds of their own, weaving a tapestry of scattered beams and laser light, all blossoming with the radiance of interference waves.

"Funnels...!?"

Glarv's agitation grew upon seeing the Gundam's Fin Funnels – initially misidentified as heat sinks – adeptly counter the nimble Psycho Doga funnels despite their size. As the Fin Funnels' mega particle beams collided, interference waves billowed like a curtain, obliterating the smaller Psycho Doga funnels.

In the meantime, the Gundam's manipulator connected the tube from the Ra Cailum to the Hyper Mega Bazooka Launcher's mechanism.

The Ra Cailum's combat bridge was momentarily plunged into darkness.

"Connection complete! Hyper Launcher powering up!"

Bright's voice echoed throughout the vessel.

"Intending to snipe Axis, are you?!"

Realizing the purpose of the connected tube, Glarv unleashed the remaining funnels while simultaneously firing the Psycho Doga's rifle.

"Tch!"

The Gundam extended the beam of its left-hand-held beam saber, slashing it towards the Psycho Doga. The swift movement inadvertently forged a barrier, deflecting the beams fired by the Psycho Doga.

"Glarv! If this continues, the Captain is done for!"

Nearing the battlefield, Quess cried out.

Her tender feelings for Glarv during deployment had evaporated. Quess launched the Alpha Azieru's funnels.

"What is this malicious presence?"

Amuro questioned, although deep down, he already knew.

Behind the funnels emitting lasers, there was a strangely shaped machine. Capturing the will of that girl, Quess Paraya, within the heavily guarded machine was easy.

"It can't be!"

Quess witnessed that exact instant. No, she experienced it. As the funnels were obliterated, a sudden jolt coursed through her skull. The shock forged a visual image that projected onto her retinas from within, as if conjuring a vision from the depths of her mind, akin to dreaming.

With her visor raised, Quess shoved a hand inside her helmet, wiping sweat from her brow. The sensation of "saturation" loomed, threatening to engulf her once more.

"That's Amuro!? He's angry...!"

Yet, Quess likely found herself in an airspace near Amuro, spared from the onslaught of saturation. It was probably because Amuro held no malice capable of twisting others. If he had been consumed by hatred, the airspace permeated by his thoughts would have become a whirlwind of sheer insanity.

That being said, Quess wasn't naïve enough to comprehend the situation she found herself in, where she didn't instantly succumb to saturation. She was too young, one might say.

Instead, she concentrated on directing the remaining undestroyed funnels towards the tube connecting the Gundam and the Ra Cailum. The tube was severed in an instant.

"Hmph!"

Quess's arrogance, Amuro's irritation.

"I don't have time to play with children!"

Amuro, yet to aim his Hyper Launcher at Axis, seethed as the tube was severed.

"Quess, retreat!"

Glarv fired his beam rifle, but several Jegans supporting the Gundam approached, forcing him to engage.

"Damn! Just a bit more!"

In the meantime, Amuro searched for another tube. Glarv's Psycho Doga destroyed three Jegans.

"The Gundam is in danger because of the tube!"

Meunier exclaimed, and Bright rebuked.

"Supporting mobile suits! What the hell are you doing?!"

"We're trying our best, but we're outnumbered!"

The combat bridge shook. In a corner of the regular bridge above it, Hathaway clutched his Haro, trembling.

"Mama, Chey, Quess..."

Murmuring their names like an incantation, Hathaway abruptly looked up.

"Quess...? Is she close by?"

Haro floated from Hathaway's grasp.

"Huh...? It's no good...! They're all shouting at one another..."

Hathaway rose to his feet and opened the hatch to the bridge corridor, leaving Haro adrift. Flapping its ears provided no propulsion.

"Beltorchika! What are you doing?!"

Astonaige spotted Beltorchika, clad in her normal suit, leaping into the cockpit of the Re-GZ, tethered to the starboard catapult deck by a wire.

"The bridge says we're short on mobile suits!"

"That may be, but this is a terrible idea!"

"It's fine as long as it moves!"

Astonaige approached, intending to stop Beltorchika as she fumbled within the cockpit, but the Re-GZ's hatch slammed shut.

"Beltorchika! Stop it!"

"Amuro's struggling, Astonaige!"

The remaining right manipulator of the Re-GZ jerked into motion, severing the wire.

"Beltorchika! That's reckless! What can you do?!"

"The baby in my womb says go!"

"That's preposterous! It's nonsensical!"

The exchange between the two streamed unapologetically into Hathaway's headphones, who had drifted into the mobile suit deck facing the catapult deck.

"Beltorchika... A baby...?"

Within Hathaway's sight, multiple fireballs swelled before the Re-GZ and flashes from the mobile suit's tail nozzles intersected.

"Beltorchika!"

It appeared Astonage was pounding on the Re-GZ's cockpit hatch, but the Re-GZ's body shifted abruptly. The sole surviving tail nozzle activated.

With a thunderous roar, the Re-GZ left the Ra Cailum, and Astonage's body sprawled onto the catapult deck.

The exhaust blast hurled Hathaway back into the mobile suit deck, smashing into a wall and collapsing between maintenance panels. In that instant, a direct hit from a beam struck the catapult deck. The flash engulfed the deck with a resounding boom. If Hathaway hadn't slipped into the shadow of the maintenance console panel, he would have shared Astonage's fate.

"Ah...?"

Astonage's normal suit vanished in the explosion, and Hathaway cowered within the blinding light.

"Mr. Astonage?!"

As the remnants of the explosion dissipated, Hathaway gazed towards the catapult deck and saw the Re-GZ disappear into the flashes surrounding Axis.

Hathaway instinctively ignited his normal suit's vernier, drifting across the ravaged deck and out into the open.

"The Jegans...?"

Hathaway caught sight of several damaged Jegans tethered to the upper-right deck of the catapult. Beyond them, he saw the approaching Ra Zyme. The emitted beams fanned out like needles in every direction.

Hathaway drifted towards the Jegans and slid into the cockpit of one, finding that the cockpit was still operational. He grew frantic.

"Quess is coming, Quess is coming...!"

He had no way of knowing why the engine was still warmed up.

"...?!"

He saw a Geara Doga being destroyed in the defensive fire from the Ra Zyme, which was shielding the Ra Cailum. Hathaway tore a beam rifle from the neighboring Jegan.

"Uwah!"

He fired it suddenly in one direction. With a resounding blast, it scored a direct hit on the invading Geara Doga. It was destroyed!

"...A-alright!"

Hathaway snapped the wires restraining the Jegan's legs and raced towards Axis. Unknowingly, Hathaway didn't notice that the seat he occupied was drenched in blood.

"What's going on?! Some dumbass just flew into the middle of our anti-aircraft fire!"

Bright, watching the Jegan's trajectory from the combat bridge, failed to issue an order to confirm the pilot's identity due to Claire's furious shout. If the culprit survived, there would be a report from the responsible officer later, and they would soon find out who the fool was.

The Gundam connected another tube to the engine block.

"Damn it!"

Quess followed with her funnels. The Gundam's beam saber was no longer able to evade her relentless attacks. She was faster than before.

It could be attributed to youthful arrogance, but her agility, born from her youth, allowed her to fire lasers from all directions as if cutting into Amuro's flesh.

"Quess, stop it!"

"Don't bother the Captain! Not like this!"

Amuro sensed Quess's intentions and restrained the movements of his Fin Funnels, consolidating them.

Then, the five Fin Funnels gathered around the Gundam, spreading their beams and interfering with each other. The interference waves of the beams enveloped the Gundam's body.

"Ugh!"

Seeing that her Fin Funnels seemed to have forgotten their attack, Quess felt as if she was being mocked by adults.

She fired Alpha's diffuse mega-particle cannon from its head. The cascade of beams that flowed like a waterfall swept through space.

"Has she gone mad?!"

Amuro positioned the Gundam between the Fin Funnels, taking the attack overhead.

Zan! Gyuyan!

The light turned violent, engulfing the Gundam, but...

Shululul

The particles scattered like breath from Alpha's diffuse beam cannon, and the onslaught subsided.

"...?! No!"

Quess saw the Gundam within the pyramid-shaped curtain of light, spreading particles in all directions.

She couldn't understand why the Gundam was unharmed. She was saturated.

"My funnels!"

Quess focused her funnels on the dissipating curtain of light.

However, when the funnels' lasers struck the space adjacent to the Gundam, the interference wave created by the beam appeared to form a pyramid-shaped barrier. And the funnels that leapt into that barrier self-destructed.

Even while moving at high speed, the interference waves of the Fin Funnels' beams constructed a pyramid-shaped barrier.

"Ah... Ugh!?"

Quess simply accepted the multiple sparks that exploded inside her head with a blank expression. Within her now-whitened mind,

"Found it! There...!"

It echoed as if an entirely different, utterly alien, white consciousness had uttered those words.

"Eh?!"

Quess was startled and retreated the Alpha. She remembered the impression of that voice as innocent words...

"What? Whose voice was that just now?!"

In that instant, the Gundam aimed its Hyper Mega Bazooka Launcher with the extended tube and unleashed a barrage. Quess had overlooked that the Fin Funnel barrier was not expanded at the bottom of the pyramid shape.

"Aah!?"

Quess saw the torrent of the Gundam's Hyper beam's flash heading towards Axis in her receding view. However, the massive beam that seemed to strike Axis's core nozzle directly hit the Neo Zeon vessel positioned in front of it.

In that explosion, the shadow of Rewloola emerged.

"Did they get us?!"

Groans arose in Rewloola's combat bridge.

"No, the Moussac shielded us! Axis's tail nozzle is intact! Mobile suit squads, the enemy fleet has scattered!"

It was a reasonable judgment by the crew. They couldn't believe a mobile suit could unleash such a potent beam attack, so they assumed the Ra Cailum unit, which appeared to be invading recklessly head-on, had divided into two forces.

"...?!"

Mesta activated the display before her and contacted Char.

"Nightingale. The Moussac has been sunk."

"Sunk?"

"The enemy deployed a powerful beam cannon."

"Hmm... well played. Has the Musaka retrieved the crew from Cruiser 4?"

"Yes! They're withdrawing from the frontlines."

"Good! Then I'll head out there!"

Mesta exhaled a sigh of relief.

"I've sent the Captain out again..."

Closing her eyes, Mesta surrendered to the swaying of the ship, feeling a profound sense of sorrow.

PART 13 **MOTHER & CHILD**



"Stop it, Amuro! Stop tormenting me!"

Quess focused her will on the last remaining funnel, attacking the overstretched tube that connected the Gundam to the Ra Cailum again and again.

"Enough, Quess!"

But her stubborn determination won out over Amuro's reprimand. The tube melted away.

"The tube to the Ra Cailum has been severed?!"

The Gundam discarded its Hyper Launcher and raced towards Axis. Then, bereft of fin funnels, it took the beam rifle from its waist and clenched it in its right hand.

"Huh? He's heading for where the Captain is?"

Quess's anger swelled, but her funnels were spent, leaving only the diffused mega particle cannons on either side of her Alpha Azieru. Still, they packed enough power to obliterate Ra Cailum's fleet in an instant.

The Ra Zyme, shielding Ra Cailum, emitted a dying flash of light. Escaping the explosion, the Ra Cailum surged ahead, leaving only two ships to follow.

"Close the distance!"

As a wave of mobile suits bore down from the front, the Ra Elm positioned itself in front of the Ra Cailum, creating a barrage of cannon fire in all directions. Yet, through the chaos and the falling wreckage of their own, the Geara Doga pressed on.

"Launching the last nuclear missile!"

"Not yet! We'll hold onto the treasure for now!"

Bright held them back with cool resolve. He believed they could endure a little longer.

Against the backdrop of the immense Earth, the Neo Zeon fleet watched the light of the Ra Cailum fleet's charge toward Axis on the ridge. The Musaka, the fourth ship with one last launch in reserve, aimed all its gun ports at the enemy fleet.

"Londo Bell is putting up quite the fight. Target their flank. Fire at will!"

At the Musaka captain's command, beams and mega particle cannons were unleashed. The Ra Elm erupted in a fiery blaze just ahead of the Ra Cailum, and the intensity of the explosion shielded the Ra Cailum.

"Don't falter! Let's do this! Prepare our treasured missile! Ready, fire!"

"Bright! A nuclear missile!"

Amuro's senses within the Gundam sharpened as the attack commenced. A dozen missiles hurtled toward the nearing Axis. However, Char had noticed them too.

In fact, it was possible that Amuro had unwittingly alerted Char.

"There it is!"

Char unleashed all but one of the Nightingale's funnels. The five funnels zeroed in on the incoming missile cluster.

"Only two ships left in the Ra Cailum fleet!?"

Four brilliant flashes of light illuminated the entire battlefield.

"No, no...!"

In the midst of the hellish inferno, another Neo Zeon vessel vanished.

Evacuating vessels also had their sides melted by the searing heat of the nuclear blast. The Rewloola slipped into the shadows.

"That's it for the nukes, right? Even if two ships collide with Axis, the course won't change!"

Char boldly charged the Nightingale towards the Ra Cailum's fleet.

"T-the nukes have been stopped!"

"I can see that! Land the Ra Cailum on Axis! Get inside and detonate it! Three hundred degrees, barrage!"

"All hands, prepare for ground combat!"

"Can we even make it to Axis?"

As he spoke, Bright opened the hatch to the combat bridge and raised the Captain's seat, but Hathaway, who should have been on the regular bridge, was nowhere to be found. Only Haro remained, shining like the moon in the dimly lit bridge.

"...?"

"Where is Quess?!"

When Glarv, who had decimated a corner of the Jegan unit, turned his attention to Axis, he suddenly glanced back.

He sensed an unusually heavy presence approaching.

"What is it?"

The heavy sensation was fleeting; a more fitting description would be a vivid, repulsive feeling. More accurately, it felt like the essence of life itself.

Glarv's focus landed on the Re-GZ piloted by Beltorchika.

"The enemy is here?!"

Despite being unnerved by the Psycho Doga's unique silhouette, Beltorchika's Re-GZ knew she had ventured toward Axis past the point of no return.

"Nngh...!? It's that Gundam wannabe! You so brazenly show yourself?!"

Glarv caught sight of it and felt a deep sense of ridicule.

The damaged mobile suit from the previous battle still clung to life, and, moreover, it appeared unarmed before the Psycho Doga, a machine known as a psycho-machine. He had one funnel left, but the enemy hardly seemed worth using it.

Glarv had the Psycho Doga's right manipulator clutch the beam saber hilt and charged.

"Ah!? A psycho-machine!?"

There were two bazooka launchers on Re-GZ's waist. That was the only weapon Beltorchika had. She fired one of them.

"Hmph...!"

Glarv's Psycho Doga dodged the incoming shot and,

"Are you serious?!" he roared, firing his rifle.

The beam struck the Re-GZ directly, engulfing it. The beam seemed to burst and scatter. But something strange happened.

"No, you mustn't!"

The same innocent voice Quess heard pierced Glarv's mind like a dagger.

"What the...?"

In Glarv's vision, an image of a fetus materialized, seemingly enveloping the Re-GZ and diffusing the beam in all directions. Then, the fetal image interwove with the beam of light and dissipated into the light.

Time seemed to stop...

In the cockpit of the Nightingale, Char caught sight of the Gundam.

"Ugh?!"

Char's hand on the control stick, the arm raker, tightened for a moment.

On the bridge of Rewloola,

"Ugh?!"

Mesta covered her mouth.

"!?"

Captain Lyle felt dizzy, holding his head as if to restrain it.

"Captain!?"

"I'm fine. Keep moving forward!"

A severely damaged Clop at Luna II made contact with a vessel that departed Side 5. The soldiers on the deck also showed a similar reaction to the crew of Rewloola's combat bridge.

"Did you see that light racing towards Axis?"

"Are they calling for reinforcements?"

"We have to go! We can't just sit here!"

A pilot called out from the deck to the bridge.

In another airspace.

"Hey, can we use the Getas to deploy mobile suits to Axis?"

"It'll be tight, but we can do it. Should we go?"

Pilots were in discussion with the tactical officers.

Mirai Yashima stumbled over a stone hidden in the powdery dirt and fell.

"Mama!"

"I'm fine..."

Mirai, with a suitcase strapped to her back, stood up with a wry smile. She felt like she was causing more trouble for Cheimin.

"If only we could go into outer space, right?"

"If we could put up a barrier on Earth, there would be no need for that..."

Cheimin muttered, gazing at the low clouds in the east.

"If only we could, huh?"

Mirai took a sip of water from the cold water bottle, swished it in her mouth, and spat it out.

The heat formed a wall or lid, enveloping the plain. That was the Indian subcontinent.

The group with Christina, who had been with Quess, suddenly looked up at space.

"That's right. Religion wasn't meant to teach survival know-how. Each school of thought used it as a tool to loudly promote their own positions."

"I understand that in theory, but the founders or prophets were different. They were undoubtedly enlightened."

"They had to think so. Religious theory is nihilistic... However, they could never convey their extremely personal experiences to others. Be it Buddha, Muhammad, or Christ..."

"And Allah, right?"

"Talk like that will get you killed."

"Is that the reality of religion?"

"For existing religions, yeah."

They seemed unable to escape the shock of their friends being killed, and their wandering life would likely continue.

Children gathered in the shadow of a slum-like inn in Karsee looked up at the sky.

"Hey!"

"Yeah...?"

"Did you see the light running through the clouds?"

"You think it's Shiva?"

"Hahaha...!"

The children simultaneously bared their yellow teeth and laughed together.

Pilots from the Earth Federation government, emerging from the ruins of Luna II, caught sight of the Neo Zeon fleet's tail nozzles illuminating as they moved towards Axis.

"We might not make it in time, but we should head towards Axis."

"Look for any usable ships!"

With urgency in their voices, the soldiers dispersed across Luna II's surface.

Meanwhile, a fleet on a geostationary satellite orbit with Side 4 behind them seemed more likely to engage in the battle at Axis.

"In terms of course, can we intercept Axis just before it falls?"

"We can approach from below. Shall I have our mobile suit teams on standby?"

The officers, cheeks flushed with anticipation, reported to the commander.

"If we can break up Axis even a little, it just might ease the damage. Launch them!"

In another fleet with a similar orbit toward Earth.

"Our fleet can reach the front of Axis. Go as far as you can! Those who can't make it, we'll pick them up!"

At the Captain's order, the mobile suit squad launched.

"If the cruising range is insufficient, even if two units have to push, make one unit contact Axis!"

The Ra Cailum, now close to Axis's surface, applied reverse thrust to decelerate. The surviving Jegan units descended one after another, bolstering their defenses.

In Glarv's vision, the image of a fetus contracted as the final shot from Re-GZ's bazooka launcher approached. The projectile rotated languidly, filling Glarv's view.

"What kind of power is that?"

Glarv thought, but neither Quess nor Char were in his thoughts anymore. Only he remained, strangely moved by the force pushing something into the fetus.

As it expanded and collapsed, the vortex of light assaulted him. He felt a surprising warmth in his final moments of consciousness before his existence vanished.

"What was that?!"

Hathaway witnessed the flash of light from the rapidly moving Jegan.

As Quess sensed Glarv's demise and was finally freed from the curse of the fetus, she cried out, "Oh no, Glarv?!"

The massive gap created by Jegan's attack forced Quess to evade with all her might in the Alpha Azieru. She caught sight of the left-side diffusion mega particle cannon being blown away.

"Ah... Ugh... Uhh...! Is everyone gone!?"

While evading with the Alpha, Quess screamed.

"Captain! Captain!"

Desperately, Quess tried to turn the Alpha toward Axis and make contact.

"That's Quess, isn't it!?"

Hathaway's faint voice reached her.

"Stop getting in the way!"

"Quess!" Hathaway's Jegan charged, a sight eerily reminiscent of Glarv's vision of the fetus.

"That mobile suit! It's Quess, right!?"

"Ah... Captain! Save me!"

Char sensed Quess's thoughts, and as he shook the body of the Nightingale, which moved like a flash, he muttered, "Quess!?"

Amuro wouldn't miss the opening by the Nightingale. The Gundam's beam rifle fired simultaneously. The Nightingale evaded.

"So you've made it, Amuro! But you're far too late!"

The Nightingale soared above the Gundam. Its mobility seemed overwhelmingly superior.

"I'll be able to stop Axis once I take you down!"

The Nightingale unleashed its last funnel, attacking the Gundam. Zap! A direct laser hit damaged the Gundam's left shoulder. The machine shook violently.

"Gah!?"

Amuro sharply pivoted the Gundam. Even a weak-output laser could end everything if it hit the engine directly. He aimed his beam rifle.

In that instant, beams from both the funnel and the Nightingale converged upon him.

"No good!"

Flash!

A burst of light filled the cockpit's panoramic display, which enveloped Amuro.
"Father!"

He thought he heard such a voice.

"Ridiculous! There's energy that can emit a barrier like that?!"

"A barrier!?"

Amuro heard Char's thoughts and marveled at the aurora-like light enveloping the Gundam. A barrier akin to an aurora had formed around the Gundam, repelling every funnel beam.

The funnel's laser reached its limits. Devoid of thrust, it plummeted to the surface of Axis.

"Father!"

"A voice!?"

The Gundam descended just above the surface of Axis, evading the Nightingale's rifle fire from both sides. However, debris from the exploding surface of Axis collided with the Gundam, destabilizing Amuro's balance.

"Tch! A cruiser? Why's it here?"

The sight of the fourth vessel, armed with nuclear weapons and anchored at Axis' port, was unmistakable.

"It's unmanned?"

Amuro understood. He slipped past the fourth vessel.

"He would. Damn Char!!"

Amuro swiveled the Gundam around and fired its beam rifle at the fourth vessel.

"Do you really think I'll let you?! I can't let it explode yet! The fully loaded nuclear weapons have to detonate at a lower altitude, or I can't contaminate Earth!"

The Nightingale charged, but just then, Cruiser 4 began to explode. Engulfed in the nuclear blast, the Nightingale was forced back.

"Ugh!"

"Will this explosion be the brake for Axis?"

As Amuro watched the roaring explosions in front of Axis, he rotated the Gundam, targeted the base of Axis's nuclear pulse nozzle, and fired the beam rifle.

He halted one nuclear nozzle and continued his assault on the second.

"Out of energy!?"

Amuro sensed that the inevitable had arrived.

Discarding the rifle, he leaped forward with the Gundam, clinging to the base of the violently shaking nozzle, and destroyed the mechanism with the manipulator. A damaged Gears Doga spotted the Gundam and launched an attack.

"So close!"

Amuro had the Gundam grasp the handle of the saber and lowered the mobile suit.

"Ugh..."

Beltorchika clutched her stomach and thrust her chin forward, staring intently at the display.

"Is Papa... Is Amuro in danger!?"

She guided the Re-GZ toward Axis's nuclear nozzle.

"What!?"

The Re-GZ approached the brilliance below the nuclear nozzle.

"Amuro!"

The Re-GZ attacked the Gears Doga assaulting the Gundam from behind, sending it spiraling into the shadows. The Re-GZ followed, descending in pursuit.

Realizing that the Gears Doga was already heavily damaged, Beltorchika grew more confident. Charging forward,

"Kuh...!"

She aimed the Re-GZ's shoulder at the enemy cockpit hatch and struck it.

Thump!

The Geara Doga's hatch was blown off. However, the Re-GZ also lost its footing and floated under the nuclear nozzle. There seemed to be no choice but to let the current take her.

"Aah...!"

Beltorchika had fainted.

"The Re-GZ!? Who's that!?"

But Amuro had no time to be entangled with a single mobile suit. He directed the Gundam toward the Ra Cailum, visible on the horizon.

"Bright, you've infiltrated Axis?"

Amuro sent the Gundam soaring toward the Ra Cailum, but just before reaching it, a bazooka shell landed nearby, causing the Gundam to tumble.

"...!?"

The Nightingale appeared unsteadily on another ridge amidst the violent shaking and hurled the bazooka.

"Axis is already falling, drawn in by Earth's gravity!"

Char's voice, transmitted through the radio, struck Amuro's ears.

"Tch!"

The Nightingale descended upon the lowered Gundam.

Byaan!

Both beam sabers extended, emitting interference waves. In the fierce exchange of beam sabers, both front armors were damaged.

The shaking of Axis seemed to subside slightly. However, Earth already loomed large in their field of vision.

PART 14 **COSMIC RAINBOW**



Darkness lay heavy on the block, illuminated faintly by fluorescent panels. Some areas were brighter than daylight when fully powered. This was the Axis tunnel.

The entire structure shook from the nuclear explosion's seismic activity. Bared rock and mineral veins twisted around the tunnel, pieces of dislodged stone bouncing off the walls in a chaotic dance.

Despite the danger, a few Petit mobile suits darted through, undeterred.

Leading the suits was Bright in a Med. As dispatched from the Ra Cailum after making contact with Axis, their mission was to infiltrate the Axis tunnel and either plant timed explosives or attach timers to the stored explosives.

The fact that Bright himself was undertaking such a mission could only mean he'd lost his mind.

Yet, driven by the compulsion to stop Char's operation with his own hands, he had no choice. After all, Bright was never an exceptional captain to begin with.

"Is a nuclear explosion of this scale happening in front of Axis?" Bright thought, watching rocks collide with the walls around his mobile suit. He braced himself for the canopy's imminent breach.

"The valve to the nuclear engine is over here. If we blow this up, it'll be a fatal blow!" Tooth called out to Bright.

"Alright! Set a timer here!"

One of the mobile suits remained behind.

They continued forward to a point where about five tunnels converged. But it was almost dark there, rocks still bounding around.

"Plant explosives here!"

Another suit stayed behind. Three of the remaining mobile suits plunged into the dimness beyond, seeming to have found an ammunition depot. They stopped to set the timers.

Another mobile suit, springing up to a higher tunnel, spotted the cable connecting the nuclear nozzle and the control booth.

"We'll connect this here!"

"No, it's over here!"

The cacophony of technicians arguing over the correct connection echoed in Bright's helmet. Then, glancing over, he saw a technician clambering out of a mobile suit, attempting to join a cable held by another suit's manipulator to a condenser on a circuit board.

The grim reality of their situation struck Bright as a large rock plowed into the technician, sending him spiraling into the abyss.

"Nh... Ah!"

The technician's visor seemed to have shattered.

"Continue the operation!" Bright commanded, his voice a steel-edged blade cutting through the tragedy of the moment.

The tip of the Nightingale's beam saber made sharp contact with the Gundam's right elbow. With a sudden burst, oil droplets scattered, disappearing into the void of space.

"Damn it! My beam saber?!"

The Gundam's beam saber fizzled out, leaving it defenseless against the Nightingale's onslaught.

"Is that the best you can muster!?"

Char, ensconced within the Nightingale, twisted his suit's torso, the tail nozzle flaring with raw power as he launched a devastating slash.

Its edge pulsating with lethal energy, the beam saber bore down upon the Gundam's shoulder. Reacting with desperate swiftness, the Gundam fired every apogee motor in its limbs, the unconventional maneuver giving it the bizarre, puppet-like pose, its entire body seeming pliant and soft.

"Good save!"

Not to be deterred, the Nightingale extended its beam saber, relentlessly hunting the Gundam. Skimming its back nozzle against the pockmarked surface of Axis, the Gundam propelled itself off the ground, jouncing the colossal machine body.

"Whoa!"

In a move as surprising as it was daring, the Gundam swung high above the Nightingale. The misalignment of the tail nozzle had sent the elongated beam saber searing into the surface of Axis.

"Ugh!?"

Char watched, bewildered, as the Gundam skidded uncontrollably left and right, descending toward the Ra Cailum without even attempting to strike the Nightingale.

"Amuro!?"

He couldn't comprehend the Gundam's maneuvers. Unfazed, the Nightingale pursued. Then, to his surprise, the Gundam halted. It appeared to be a show of intimidation, but it wasn't.

From the cockpit of the Gundam, Char saw Amuro emerge.

"What the hell!?"

Amuro's pilot suit had slipped into one of the openings leading to the Axis tunnels in the blink of an eye.

"Is he trying to split Axis from the inside!?"

Char finally realized the implications of the Ra Cailum's contact with Axis.

In turn, he began to scour for another entrance to Axis. Unfortunately, the battle-ravaged surface, scarred from incessant bombardment, made it a daunting task to find a suitable tunnel entrance for the Nightingale. The precious moments spent could have been used to obliterate the Gundam, but Char was single-minded in his pursuit of Amuro.

Perhaps this was the tragic flaw of beings born of flesh and blood.

Eventually, he spotted a tunnel entrance amidst a heap of twisted, melted metal, grotesque as molten candy. Char maneuvered the Nightingale into the opening, disembarking from the cockpit.

He was certain his knowledge of the Axis tunnels would be enough to corner Amuro.

Elsewhere on the scarred surface of Axis, Hathaway's Jegan was locked in a deadly dance with Quess's Alpha Azieru. Then, in an unexpected turn of events, Hathaway had exited his cockpit.

"Quess! Show yourself! Quess!"

Hathaway pounded on the armor of the Alpha's head.

"Oh, Captain! Where are you!?"

Quess's display screen was filled with the intimidating image of Hathaway's shouting face.

As Char navigated the labyrinthine Axis tunnels, he found a locker in a recess and peered inside.

There was a portable launcher inside. It was designed to spring-load projectiles, primarily used as a transport case for ammunition. Even though it was no weapon, Char decided it was more valuable than a single handgun.

Char pressed further into the block where he believed Amuro had passed through.

"...!?"

He could sense something. It felt right.

"Whoa!"

A bullet ricocheted off the rock wall, grazing Char.

"You... don't understand the concept of reform, do you!?"

Char pivoted, looking in the direction the bullet had come from. Yet, the voice seemed to come from below, not an illusion created by the stereo perception of his headphones. Instead, it felt tangible, closer. It was coming from the lower tunnel.

Gun in hand and the launcher case at his hip, Char moved in the direction of the voice with a chilling calm.

"...?"

A transceiver with an extended antenna was placed on a block of fluorescent panels.

He didn't believe that alone was the source of Amuro's voice. But...

"Revolutions always start with intellectuals, right? But these intellectuals, armed with idealistic theories, always resort to radical actions in practice. It's a bad habit."

Char moved silently.

The voice seemed to emit from all directions, and the "presence" of Amuro himself felt remarkably close.

"Once a revolution is victorious and the organization is established, the ideals of the revolution get swallowed up by the bureaucracy and the masses. That's the process. Then the intellectuals, disgusted by this, withdraw from society, right? Char, do you realize that's you?"

"Amuro!"

With a low growl, Char rapidly moved in one direction and launched a projectile from the launcher into one of the tunnels.

BOOM! The explosion sent shockwaves rippling through several tunnels, causing chaos.

In the midst of the blast, Amuro emerged from a recess in the wall, bazooka in hand, and charged toward Char, weaving through the falling debris.

"There you are!"

Char rose to meet Amuro's headlong charge.

Char's launcher fired, and Amuro's bazooka echoed the gesture.

BOOM! A flash of light. Bright light!

However, within the blast, Amuro was still alive.

"Daddy?!"

The surface of Axis convulsed in a massive explosion. Amuro's body was flung into the void, spinning helplessly.

"Damn! Who saved me!?"

Amuro ignited his verniers, attempting to return to the surface of Axis.

"We need to move!"

Tooth's call rang in Bright's ears, and he issued a retreat order to the Petite Mobile unit.

"If the Ra Cailum is gone, it's game over."

"If that happens, let's ride Axis back to Earth, yeah?"

"I'm game! Were you from Earth?"

Bright and his team exchanged bravado, bolstering their courage, and sprinted the Petite Mobile at full speed, taking off.

As the Ra Cailum and Rewloola were exchanging artillery fire, the Musaka let out its final burst of light.

Amuro drifted past it, descending towards the Gundam. Streaks of light from the fleet battle pierced through the void, causing chunks of Axis to explode violently. Utilizing these erupting rocks as a makeshift springboard, Amuro propelled himself toward the Gundam. Unfortunately, he couldn't comprehend his instinctual skill.

Amuro clung to the head of the Gundam, rolling his body against the armor to slide into the cockpit.

"Where's the Nightingale?"

The words were barely a murmur, a silent summoning of the Nightingale.

Char's Nightingale responded, its mono-eye glowing like a predator's gaze amidst the wreckage. It reminded Amuro of a human's breath, a chilling thought.

"Char, you!?"

The Nightingale jumped and kicked the side of the Gundam.

"Wha-!"

Amuro clung to the edge of the cockpit hatch, refusing to be dislodged. The plummeting Nightingale crushed one of the fallen Gundam's arms.

"Damn...!"

As Amuro tumbled into the cockpit, the Gundam's engine revved to life with a piercing whine.

In the meantime, the Nightingale jumped again and descended. The remaining manipulator of the Gundam swept the leg of the Nightingale while it was still in motion from the twisted tail nozzle and rammed into the Nightingale.

The impact was explosive, reminiscent of a wrestling match. The two machines entwined, sliding down the surface of Axis.

"What the--?!"

Amuro, taking advantage of the Nightingale's twisted tail nozzle, spun the Gundam into a series of swift kicks against the Nightingale's side and back.

Several of the Nightingale's tail nozzles fell silent with each impact, its backpack contorting under the assault. The longer-armed Gundam seemed to have the upper hand. Yet, in a swift counter, the Nightingale's manipulator aimed to grapple the Gundam's waist mid-kick.

"Oh!"

Moving the Gundam's upper body slightly forward, Amuro executed a swift karate chop.

"Kuh!"

The two machines momentarily separated. But the Nightingale, sliding on Axis's surface, lunged back into the Gundam's personal space. The manipulators of the two

machines are locked in a struggle. The Gundam, now one-armed, struggled to fend off the Nightingale's attacks.

With a sickening crunch, the frame of the Nightingale's elbow shattered.

Oil spurted out like blood, coating both machines. This was the first protracted hand-to-hand combat in mobile suit history.

A punch from the Nightingale was met by a counterpunch from the Gundam.

"Ah, ugh!"

That punch struck the head of the Nightingale, where Char's cockpit was located. Regardless of the perfection of the shock absorber protecting the seat, it was bound to shudder violently under the impact.

"Captain!?"

The Alpha Azieru shook off Hathaway's Jegan and flew low toward the melee. The force of its departure sent Hathaway's body spiraling into the void.

"Ugh!"

The Alpha's protruding shoulder armor swatted Hathaway aside as if he were nothing more than a pesky insect.

"Uwaah!"

Bouncing off the surface, Hathaway collided with the Jegan and clung to it. It was a near miracle his visor hadn't shattered on impact.

"End of the line, Char!"

The Gundam had turned the tide.

"What?!"

Thump! The Gundam's right finger latched onto the armor of the Nightingale's head, peeling it off.

"Char!"

"No!"

Just as the Gundam was preparing to leap, the massive body of the Alpha Azieru collided with it, preventing the jump. As a result, the Nightingale seemed to escape from Amuro's grasp, slipping out of sight.

"Whoa!"

"Stay away from the Captain!"

"Get out of the way!"

Quess, rebounding off the Alpha, attempted to crush the Gundam once more.

"The Captain... The Captain is mine!"

"Quess? You!"

Amuro felt as if he had been stabbed in the chest. But then, Boom! A direct beam hit the cockpit of Quess's Alpha Azieru.

"Kyaaa!"

Quess's beast-like scream rapidly faded away.

"What?"

Turning his head, Amuro spotted Hathaway's Jegan, its beam rifle still aimed at Quess.

"Oh, I-I hit it..."

"Ugh!"

As the Gundam slipped under the sparking Alpha and began to ascend, it closed in on the Nightingale.

"You can't get away with that suit!"

"Are you sure?"

The Nightingale's head flow system activated, and the cockpit capsule detached. It was now a free-floating capsule.

"I told you not to underestimate me!"

Amuro had the Gundam's right manipulator throw a piece of tube stored in the waist unit. The tube tangled around the Nightingale's cockpit capsule.

"Uwah?!"

"There's no way I'll let you go alone!"

The capsule and the Gundam, now linked, skidded along the surface of Axis. Bright and the others jumped out onto the surface.

"Huh?"

"The Gundam?"

"Ignore it! It's time!"

As if signaling the Petit Mobile Suits jumping onto the Ra Cailum one after another, flashes of light streaked across the surface of Axis between the engine section and the residential area, followed by a belt-like explosion.

"Ugh...! So they've done it?! Amuro!"

Thud! The Gundam, feeling as if it were tumbling into the smoke of Axis's explosion, started to ascend, clutching the cockpit capsule of the Nightingale in one hand.

"So Axis didn't crumble! At this altitude, it'll fall to Earth! Looks like I win, Amuro!"

"I told you I won't let that happen!"

Still holding the capsule, Amuro maneuvered the Gundam to the front of Axis.

The Ra Cailum, in a desperate ballet of survival, was in retreat, dodging the rock-strewn remnants of Axis's catastrophic explosion. All the while, hundreds of stone projectiles pelted her hull.

Axis, once a monolithic presence, is now fragmented into a cosmic jigsaw, its pieces cleaving apart in the foreground.

Yet, behind this destructive spectacle, Earth hung like a half-lit jewel, a poignant reminder of what was at stake.

The larger shard of Axis bore the scars of the nuclear blast, its once bustling port now a hollowed cavity. The Gundam circled around it.

"Either slow it down or change its direction. You help too!"

Amuro's tone was instructional, his desperation masked by his commander's demeanor. He maneuvered the Gundam to attach itself to Axis, the suit's thrusters fighting to maintain control. The tail nozzle shook erratically, the task proving Herculean.

"No, that's not it! The back half will fall to Earth!"

Amuro directed the Gundam to the rear part of Axis. Then, the Gundam's manipulator slammed Char's capsule onto Axis's surface with a jarring crash.

"Whoa...!"

Char clung onto his seat, the emergency hatch unresponsive, his survival now in the hands of his foe.

"Amuro! What are you doing?!"

His voice was swallowed by the expanding roar of the Gundam's tail nozzle, which flared open like a sun in birth. Posture control was forsaken for raw power. Its manipulators dug into Axis, a stubborn parasite unwilling to let go.

"I will stop at nothing until I can be sure! That is our responsibility as those who have stained the universe with warfare!" Amuro's battle cry resonated through the void, the Gundam itself responding, its body radiating with an almost sentient fervor.

The Ra Cailum nestled into the shadow of a fragment of Axis, seeking refuge from the relentless barrage of debris.

The two large fragments of Axis in front seemed to be falling faster.

"The fragments in front are deviating from their trajectory to Earth due to the propulsion of the explosion!"

"Are you sure?!"

To Bright's confirmation, Meunier answered, "Absolutely."

"What about the one the Gundam is attached to?"

"If the entry angle was a little further out, it might be doable, but as it is, it's impossible!"

"Bring the Ra Cailum forward! Use the ship to change the entry angle of Axis!"

"That's insanity! Our armor is barely holding together!" Melan, the executive officer, retorted.

The Gundam, now a radiant beacon in the cosmos, threatened to outshine even the approaching Earth's light. From whence such energy sprang was a mystery, yet, the Gundam's tail nozzle manifested a tangible proof of this power, emitting a brilliant trail of light.

"What the!? Whose mobile suit forces are those?!"

Meunier's exclamation rang out in the Ra Cailum, cutting through the argument between Bright and Melan. Drawn to the spectacle outside, they observed a surprising display.

"...?"

Flashes of thruster lights began to streak across their view. Among them, several Jegans cast aside their Base Jabbers, embarking on a course that seemed to loop around to Axis's rear.

A squadron of antiquated mobile suits swooped in, converging on Axis's fragments, seemingly anchoring themselves to the side facing Earth.

"The 88th Fleet's mobile suit forces!"

The reinforcements, with the Jegan at their helm, descended upon the Gundam grappling with Axis. They latched on, one after the other, their combined strength geared towards altering the asteroid's deadly course.

"What!? What unit is this!? Stand down! I can handle this alone!"

"That's not an option! We're here to adjust the entry angle, even if it's just by a smidge!"

These were pilots who had traversed the expanse of space to lend their support. Their suits clung to Axis, thruster nozzles blazing as they strained against the celestial mass.

"We can't let the Lieutenant have all the glory, now can we!"

Another mobile suit joined the effort, its thruster nozzle a bright beacon in the darkness.

From Earth's direction too, mobile suit units, riding Geta, disengaged and slipped between Axis and Earth, joining the effort to redirect the asteroid's trajectory.

"Reinforcements... the reinforcements have arrived...!"

Claire's voice was a mix of relief and elation as she turned to Bright.

Their numbers swelled: thirty... fifty... more. They swarmed around Axis's fragments, latching on and firing their engines to the maximum.

Among them, some mobile suits were already straining under the pressure, their engines glowing ominously red.

Beneath them, the daylight side of Earth continued to grow, a silent witness to their struggle.

The front of Axis's rear fragment began to glow ominously, the atmospheric friction creating a fiery halo around the mass.

Despite this, the mobile suits endured. From their vantage point, over a hundred beams of light from the mobile suits' thruster nozzles stretched out, creating a surreal spectacle.

"Don't do it! Don't get any closer! I'll handle this with the Gundam!"

But even as Amuro yelled, his cockpit was already beginning to heat up.

"Yeah, but!"

"You'll melt from the overload! Pull back!"

"Not yet!"

"But some of you are exploding! You can't! Fall back!"

BOOM! A mobile suit, glowing dangerously, exploded in a brilliant flash.

The pilot's intention, an ethereal 'ting,' echoed through the void.

Hathaway, frozen in shock inside his Jegan, noticed the ripple of the pilot's intention, his eyes wide with surprise.

"Huh...? That's... Axis...?"

The Jegan was adrift with the rubble from Axis. Beyond the flow of the rubble, two enormous rocks moved slowly against the backdrop of Earth.

"It's no good! Get away!"

"Just a bit more! If we do this... Axis will be completely... Ahhh!"

BOOM! Another mobile suit exploded, bathed in an intense glow; the pilot's intention, an ethereal 'ting,' echoed through the void.

In a hospital somewhere on Earth.

"Wahh! Wahh!"

A newborn baby was crying. The doctor, cradling the baby, had a twinkle in his eyes as he presented the tiny life to its weary mother.

"Char! I'll halt Axis even if I have to drain your very essence!"

"Go ahead and try, then!"

Both were inside violently shaking cockpits. Once again, the fragments of the exploding mobile suits flowed north along Axis.

"Stay away! Everyone! Char! Your power will--!"

"Daddy!"

"Uh...?!"

Outside the glowing red-hot cockpit, the Gundam's frame became a beacon of white-hot energy. Waves of light emitted from the overtaxed suit seemed to glide amidst the rising heat, clashing with the Mobile Suits converging from all directions.

In the clash, mobile suits were flung from Axis with explosive force, cascading away like fireworks.

"Ah?!"

The pilot, grappling with the unruly controls, could only watch helplessly as Axis drifted further away.

On the plains of Africa.

A group of children in worn-out jeans sprinted faster than gazelles, their joyful laughter echoing the warrior cries of their ancestors.

"Hah! Kyahohohoho!"

Their laughter was a beacon of joy amidst the dire circumstances.

The overloaded waves from the Gundam were repelling the surrounding mobile suits one after another.

"Lieutenant!"

"I don't need extra lives! Mine and Char's are all I need!"

The expanding white-hot wave from the Gundam repelled more mobile suits, emitting them in all directions around Axis.

"Ah! Lieutenant Amuro!"

The glowing red rear of Axis was gradually widening its distance from the front, making it feel as if it was approaching Earth.

Now, the only ones attached to the debris of Axis were Amuro and Char.

"Has Amuro gotten rid of the other mobile suits?"

Char, cocooned in a light that resembled an aurora, questioned his understanding of the chaotic scene unfolding outside.

"But still, Axis's course hasn't changed!"

Desperation and fury laced Amuro's words.

Back on the Ra Cailum's combat bridge, the crew could only watch the gleaming specter of Axis advance, their faces a mask of helpless dread.

In a forgotten house somewhere on Earth.

A child jolted awake, eyes wide and hopeful, "Is that a shooting star?"

Then, swoosh! A white light flooded from around the child, streaking toward the heavens. It was an ethereal glow unseen to the naked eye.

In a cabin in some forest.

A mother who just gave birth while squatting took the legs of her newborn lying on a fur-covered sheet. She gently patted the wet back of the infant, still connected to her by the pulsating umbilical cord.

"Wahh!"

The baby's first cry pierced the silence, strong and defiant. A soft light radiated from the pair, embracing them before shooting skyward. The mother, oblivious to the light, waited for the afterbirth pains; she tied the umbilical cord with two strings and cut it with scissors.

A man, obscured by steam, unknowingly stepped into the light, drawn by the primal bond between mother and child.

In another corner of the world, a different family.

Twin brothers, their sleep disturbed, kicked off their blankets with youthful energy. A burst of light sprang from their small forms, racing toward the cosmic expanse.

In a space colony.

A child, their back to the spinning cosmos, put down their book, their gaze drawn to the Earth coming into view.

"Huh...?"

Streaks of light crisscrossed the Earth, countless beams converging towards the looming presence of Axis. The earthly glow magnified the planet, making it appear several times larger than usual.

"What could it be?"

The light, a beacon from Earth, was being drawn into the radiant heart of the Gundam.

The number was unknown, but the streams of light emanating from various corners of the Earth became lines, then ribbons, then curtains of shimmering energy. They arced low, then high, encircling the Earth and converging on the vGundam.

Perhaps the psycho-frames near Char and Amuro resonated. Maybe it was the call of Beltorchika's unborn baby.

Or perhaps it was the collective will of the men and women gathered in this space around Axis, summoning these lights, absorbing them.

Regardless, the concentration of light amplified the radiance from the Gundam, manifesting an awe-inspiring wall of white light between Axis and Earth, stretching out into infinity.

It seemed to guide the gargantuan rock of Axis, showing it a path forward.

"Ah... Wh-what is this!? Am I seeing the world...!?"

Amuro, violently shaken in the scorching cockpit, sobbed and groaned, tears tracing hot lines down his face.

Char, increasingly visible within the aurora-like light permeating the capsule walls, spoke with a bitter edge to his voice.

"Was I too caught up in myself? That can't be it... That can't be...!"

Char unzipped his pilot suit, revealing a silver locket hidden within. Despite the violent shaking of his seat, he managed to open it.

"The rear of Axis also seems to be changing its course!"

"Tell the Gundam, tell Amuro! Order him to pull back now!"

"It's impossible. Comms are blacked out due to the overload wave! He can't hear us!"

From the Ra Cailum, the crew observed a slight deviation in Axis's trajectory, no longer tracing the Earth's rear.

"Where is Amuro?"

Beltorchika, now awake, breathed a sigh of relief at the coincidence of Ra Cailum's hull being right in front of her. Yet, her relief was short-lived as she noticed the countless rocks flowing between her and the ship.

However, when she saw the shape of the object flowing in front of the Earth beyond the flowing rocks, her heart sank as she realized that Amuro was not by her side.

"Amuro?!"

Her eyes widened upon seeing the massive fragments of Axis slowly gliding along the white band of light stretching between Earth and Axis. From the vGundam's position at the tip of the rocks, a diffused light spread outwards, creating a spectacular dance of sparks in the void of space. Beltorchika thought that each spark might represent a life.

"Because there is life, light shines..."

This realization became like a divine revelation for Beltorchika and ingrained itself into her consciousness.

Char tried to look at the photo inside the locket, but the violent shaking made it impossible. The photo showed a blonde girl, Char's only living blood relative, smiling back at him.

"Still, Artesia, I suppose this result was better for you since you're living on Earth after all..."

Char was unaware of his sister's whereabouts. Known also as Sayla Mass, they had been separated since the establishment of the Principality of Zeon, growing apart as siblings.

Char absently licked his lips.

"Beltorchika!"

Amuro's scream seemed to burn amidst the aurora filling the cockpit.

However, Amuro felt anything but fortunate.

As the Ra Cailum and the supporting mobile suits watched, the bands of light emanating from the Earth showed the way to the sun for Axis, gently undulating like waves.

The two massive rocks of Axis, seemingly riding those waves, scattered countless fragments as they tried to leave Earth behind.

And when that belt of light disappeared, the two massive chunks of Axis sped through space, seemingly falling towards the sun.

Yet, Earth remained massive and blue, unaware of the events that transpired so close to it, leisurely revolving only for the sake of the next day and night.

"Captain... the Captain is..."

Mesta was in the combat bridge dominated by silence, her face smeared with tears.

"Your motives were absolutely not wrong... absolutely... If they were, then what were... we..."

Even as she groaned, Mesta lowered her visor and attached a dark filter. She hated being seen in such a state, and looking at the band of light was painful.

"Ugh...!"

Beltorchika hunched over as nausea washed over her. Amidst her uncontrollable tears, she prayed to God for the safety of her unborn child.

The Nightingale's sweet song could no longer be heard.

Afterword

If the movie is considered the main story, this book might be positioned as a motif novel – something not inherently destined for publication. Additionally, I am offering a novelization of Char's Counterattack under another publisher during this period, one that is directly based on the movie's story.

Therefore, I felt a certain obligation to address why I undertook such a task.

The other publisher's "Char's Counterattack" attempts a method of introducing characters who expand the story before and after while advancing the main plot. It is an approach I have taken out of fear of being surpassed by the younger generation.

As for this book, I decided to release it in this form for two reasons. One is that expression differs between film and text, and I wanted to provide a sample of that. The other reason is that even though it's a motif of "Char's Counterattack," I wished to convey my personal feelings.

However, the first reason was an issue where only the regret remained acutely, as I was unable to fully grasp it during the planning stage. This issue is very challenging, as it needs to be judged case by case, depending on the situation. For instance, based solely on my judgment, I believe that Japanese films until today have reached this point without accurately understanding this mistake during their planning stages.

Naturally, I wrote the script for the movie version of "Char's Counterattack." When the first draft of this script was submitted for review by the investors, who could be called the "Gundam Filmization Committee," various opinions and criticisms were made about this script.

Among them, the most crucial opinion was that the theme of this novel was denying mobile suits. Of course, that was my intention.

However, Gundam is supported by the sales of mobile suit toys, forming a robust market and providing funds to produce films. If the work itself denies this realistic basis, it's only natural for investors to refuse to finance the film production. This isn't just a matter of differing perspectives. I must admit that I pursued my dreams too fervently.

Further, another opinion that dealt a severe blow to me was, "we don't want to see Amuro getting married in the movie." Of course, some may consider this opinion trivial or mundane. Still, to me, it seemed like the most critical opinion in planning the movie production, and I adopted it as a critical point.

The reason I could intuit this is because I had similar thoughts about the nature of the medium of film. However, despite having these thoughts, I was unable to act on them.

Movies should be open entertainment, something a large group of people can watch and enjoy together. There was a time when Japan accepted what is called literary films, but as times change, the concept of planning has to fundamentally change as well.

Two decades ago, the cinematic projects of yesteryears are now commonplace, unfolding daily on our television screens, in video format, in mini-theatres, and in cable software. Their expressive quality continues to rise. Yet, movie companies, once a pillar of the industry, only allowed top students into their ranks, and thus

these high achievers continued to produce films in the artistic spirit of a bygone golden age.

Of course, the film industry's tendencies towards repeating successful formulae remain unchanged. The crux of the matter is that those lacking stamina can hardly emulate the likes of Spielberg. This stamina, in essence, is the spirit required to create open entertainment. Of course, "Gundam" is not yet at a level to speak of such a standard, but it aspires to it in its dreams.

Film heroes, from Tange Sazen to the era of Rambo, have remained bachelors, retaining their identities as James Bond or Sherlock Holmes regardless of changes in actors. Age and appearance are irrelevant; they must fall in love and embark on grand adventures.

Why? Because cinema serves as a respite for those wearied by the real world. Propaganda films are dangerous territory.

Moreover, Gundam is a mecha genre. If the protagonist becomes someone's possession within the story and leads a "normal life," there is no need to watch. Furthermore, it must have battle scenes, even if it earns frowns from the Parent-Teacher Association.

I believe I have not forgotten this principle regarding combat. As for the characters, the world of Gundam is a story of evolving humans, which inevitably leads to the "denial of things" and "denial of machines = denial of mobile suits." This is what is meant by the "denial of Amuro's marriage." There is even a risk that the film could be condemned by investors.

So, what will happen? Nothing will change. The next Gundam will cease to exist, and even my small success in creating Gundam will be denied.

Furthermore, the existence of Gundam fans taught me an important lesson: there are things in reality that can evoke a Newtype-like response. I fear that even this might be negated.

In other words, I realized the danger of making a film based solely on personal thoughts from this point. I am convinced that this understanding will undoubtedly become the next step for me and for everyone.

For this reason, I willingly revised the movie version and wanted to further expand the success of Gundam. A film is not a personal property. It must not be produced solely by the will of one director or one original author. This is what I mean by "stamina" mentioned earlier.

The market created by Gundam is not just about the box office. If we truly understand the "field" that keeps Gundam alive, there could be a resurgence of new films. I'm humbly exploring this.

And even at the lower end of this, I hope to discover it and seize the next opportunity. Therefore, I would be delighted if you could discern from this work the differences between writing novels and films and the different ways of working between individuals and groups.

Therefore, what is included here is a method that can only be permitted in the form of novels and by no means in the field of films, and I would like young readers to understand this.

However, the greed of the animal, the individual, is profound. I am deeply grateful to all those who have given me the opportunity to publish the Gundam I originally wanted to depict in this form, and I truly thank you for reading this passage.

November 5, 1987
Yoshiyuki Tomino