

小説

機動戦士ガンダム

水星の魔女

高島雄哉 [原作] 矢立肇・富野由悠季

2

Mobile Suit Gundam
THE WITCH FROM MERCURY



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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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Novel Edition Original Episode **#2** Twin Lines of Langlands

Love takes the meaning in love's conference.

From William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

[MASS DRIVER] A mechanism used to accelerate and eject objects, often achieved through electromagnetic forces. In Ad Stella, it is utilized not only for ejecting cargo containers but also as an acceleration aid during shuttle launches.

1. TRI-CORPORATE CONFERENCE

"I'm going to win, and I'll stay at this school with Ms. Miorine!"

Suletta Mercury's words, cried out in the middle of the duel, suddenly came back to Miorine Rembrandt.

After completing the joint training session that left the taste of cold stew in her mouth, Suletta was troubled by her inability to communicate with Miorine. Miorine, unaware of Suletta's inner turmoil, had detached herself from the situation.

On her first day of transferring, Suletta had challenged Guel to a duel out of the blue and had won overwhelmingly, becoming Holder – in essence, her own groom. On the other hand, she had once burst into tears during a different training session, expressing her wish to return to Mercury.

In her private quarters – a room that used to belong to the former chairman – Miorine found herself smiling at the thought. The more she thought about it, the stranger their relationship seemed.

It had begun as a mere transaction that benefited both Suletta and Miorine. Suletta was new to the Asticassia School of Technology and was on the verge of being expelled, while Miorine was on the verge of being forced into an undesired marriage.

By winning the duel, Suletta had arguably gained Miorine and a place in the school.

Miorine, too, had faced the threat of losing her school life with Suletta several times. Even thinking about the recent incubation party makes her palms sweat – not that she'd ever admit that to Suletta!

There had been countless branching points on that day, during that presentation, in that moment. GUND-ARM, Inc. would not have been established if they had made a mistake at any of those points. Even now, voices saying it is certain to go under any moment now reach Miorine's ears directly and indirectly. Among them are people who claim to know that Miorine herself will soon grow tired of playing at being at a company.

But to Miorine, GUND-ARM, Inc. was like a crucial cradle meant to protect Suletta and Aerial. It was inconceivable to think she would tire of it or see it as just a game. Even today, she participated in a teleconference after finishing her training and having an iced tea.

Displayed on the monitor of her desk were Prospera, the CEO of Shin-Sei Development Corporation, and the four CEOs of Peil Technologies.

With her heart swelling with confidence, Miorine faced the camera. She didn't have half the experience, achievements, or age of the people in front of her, but she was a representative of the company too.

"Thank you all for gathering here. Today's topic is a joint development project with our three companies."

Prospera was the first to speak.

—*As the Shin-Sei Development Corporation, we are prepared to cooperate technologically.*

"Thank you very much," Miorine thanked her sincerely.

However, Prospera continued,

—*But before we delve further, can you first share the business direction of this project?*

She had expected this. She had discussed it with Suletta and the others in Earth House.

"We are thinking of developing GUND with a focus on medical applications. However, the field of medicine is diverse. I would like to discuss and decide on the project details with all of you."

Prospera responded with a warm smile.

—*Understood. If that's the case, our company will consider moving in that direction.*

"Thank you. What about Peil Technologies?"

When Miorine prompted, one of the Peil Technologies' CEOs, Kal, started talking in a grave yet verbose manner.

—*As Peil Technologies, we would like to request the provision of Aerial's confidential technological data for joint development.*

Miorine reacted to the word 'Aerial'.

"Please wait, Ms. Kal. As I've mentioned earlier, GUND is exclusively for medical use. Aerial has nothing to do with it."

Then another CEO, Nugen, interjected in the same severe tone.

—*It is clear that the core of the GUND that your company owns is based on Aerial. Therefore, sharing information about Aerial is a natural part of joint development.*

"But..."

As far as Miorine was concerned, Peil Technologies, using Elan and the Pharact, had been the one to corner Suletta, and it was unthinkable to hand over the secrets of the Aerial. However, she also knew that it was pointless to voice such emotional objections here and now.

Miorine searched for words to refute, but none came readily.

—*May I interject?*

At this point, Prospera calmly raised her hand.

Fighting the surge of unease, Miorine said,

"Ms. Prospera, please, go ahead."

—*Thank you. If we're willing to provide Aerial's secrets, it would be fair for Peil Technologies to share all data concerning the Pharact, wouldn't it? I'm very curious about how you managed to break the curse of Gundam.*

At Prospera's words, the four CEOs of Peil Technologies remained expressionless and silent for a moment.

Then one of the CEOs, Golneri, spoke up.

—*A great deal of our company's technology has been used in the Pharact beyond the GUND format. We cannot share those.*

Prospera shrugged her shoulders.

—*That's unfortunate. The same can be said for Aerial.*

Miorine understood what Prospera was trying to argue. By using Pharact as an example, she could also seal the request for information about Aerial. Miorine felt as if she was thrown a lifeline, but it was clear that Prospera herself did not want to disclose the secrets of Aerial either.

The four CEOs of Peil Technologies exchanged glances, and one of them, Nevola, grinned.

—*We withdraw our request to share information for now. However, might we suggest the use of our staff and facilities in the future maintenance of Aerial?*

Miorine glanced at Prospera for a moment, but she couldn't tell what her expression was under her mask.

The clock indicated the scheduled end time of the meeting.

"It seems we're out of time. Ms. Nevola, we'll take your proposition into consideration. We'll communicate the date for the next meeting in due course. By then, I'll prepare a draft for the joint development content. Thank you for your time today."

After ending the video call, Miorine took a deep breath.

Negotiating with these five was a relentless task; even a brief meeting was tiring. She couldn't let her guard down. But now, she had to act.

The most important thing for a newly born company is work.

Miorine immediately contacted Peil Technologies shipbuilding division. As Nevola had said, the call went through quickly, connecting her directly to the head of the department.

"To what do we owe the pleasure of a call from the CEO herself?"

"Hello, Director. It's been a while. Do you have a moment?"

"Of course. I've heard about the joint development proposal."

"Great! From our company's point of view, we're considering incorporating GUND technology into your medical ships——"

But her words were abruptly cut off.

——*We've been considering this internally, and taking into account the track record of GUND, we'd really like to apply it to the control system for simultaneous attacks by multiple cannons on military ships.*

"Ah, that's the direction you're considering... Let me bring this back to my team."

After hanging up the phone, Miorine let out a much deeper sigh than before.

Incorporating GUND into a fire control system!

Either the message hadn't been properly conveyed, or they simply had no intention of joint development at all. Either way, the situation was far from smooth sailing.

"Phew."

Miorine took a moment and started scrolling through the contacts in her student handbook.

Being the daughter of the president of the Benerit Group, Miorine had been exposed to various social occasions from a very young age. She had more connections than she could possibly need.

"Connections are a form of 'social capital!'"

She had learned this in her management strategy class. Social connections can be considered a form of capital in themselves.

As the daughter of the president, Miorine was born with pure capital that she could use freely. She was also given cultural capital in the form of education and academic background, and she naturally acquired social capital as well.

The connections she currently has were not something she acquired on her own. They were given to her. She would like to be confident that she acquired at least this on her own one day, but she had discarded such cheap pride, literally, at that party.

There's no room for pride now. Whether it was given to her by her parents or not, she had to use everything at her disposal to get GUND-ARM, Inc. on track.

"Alright!"

Miorine started calling her acquaintances in the medical group companies one after another. These were Miorine's personal connections. She had no choice but to do it herself.

2. JOINT DEVELOPMENT

GUND-ARM Inc. did not yet possess a product or service that could be sold. All it had was GUND technology, and without a manufacturing line—barring reliance on Shin Sei Development or Peil Technologies—there was little else.

Miorine wanted to find a company that would jointly research and develop GUND as medical technology.

Two hours later, the companies she contacted were polite on the phone, but their attitudes changed when she brought up joint development.

"It's a very attractive proposal, but..."

This was the 20th call.

Most adults working in the industry had a real-time understanding of the "Vanadis Incident" that occurred 21 years ago. At that time, Miorine's father, Delling, had explicitly declared the Gundam a curse.

Since then, GUND technology has been banned from research and development in Ad Stella. Even with Gundam Inc., which Delling invested in, it was inevitable that many companies were reluctant to jointly develop. From the investors expecting military usefulness, Miorine's policy of focusing on healthcare would certainly be hard to accept.

At that party, Delling said to Miorine in a voice she could only hear.

—*You can't run away.*

"This is the curse of Gundam..."

Gundam, the "GUND-ARM," takes people's lives. In that sense, it can certainly be called a curse.

But the GUND technology used in it, by precisely controlling the human body and medical equipment and connecting them, may save people's lives instead. When Miorine sees the Aerial operated by Suletta, she feels like she can see the future of GUND.

Miorine opened the address book on her student handbook. At the top, Suletta's account was displayed.

She slid down the addresses and stopped suddenly at the "M" section. Touching Mirzahani's name displays a picture with Yushura, but no contact information is available. Her life, it seemed, had been a

series of unexplained decisions foisted upon her by Delling—dictating her enrollment at Asticassia, forcing her to quit the piano, and even went as far as deciding who her friends should be. Interaction with Yushura had always been prohibited.

"Yushura..."

In a small voice, Miorine murmured as if calling out.

The Langlands Corporation, where Yushura currently served as the chief technical officer, used to be a company specializing in exterior paint for mobile suits and shuttles. But since Yushura's generation, they have been expanding their proprietary high-level "liquid control technology" in various fields, backed by abundant capital power. Recently, Miorine heard that they have also entered the food and medical sectors.

She had been playing with Yushura since the time she barely had a sense of self. Delling had separated them and prohibited any form of communication.

"Lousy father..."

While saying that, Miorine laughed at her own flash of inspiration.

Even if she can't call Yushura herself, as the CEO of Gundam Inc., she *can* contact the CTO of Langlands Corporation.

Besides, her father Delling invested 3%—a whopping 7.2 billion—in Gundam Inc. So, Miorine had to take the best possible action as CEO.

With excitement, Miorine pressed the number for the representative of Langlands Corporation.

—*Hello, Langlands Corporation, general reception.*

"This is Miorine Rembrandt, CEO of Gundam Inc. Could you please connect me with your CTO, Yushura Mirzahani?"

—*Yes, please hold one moment.*

They're probably consulting with upper management.

Miorine didn't expect to talk to Yushura today, either.

—*Sorry to keep you waiting, Ms. Rembrandt. Our CTO is currently out, but I can take a message if you'd like.*

"That's fine, thank you."

—*Then, if you could please...*

A beep sounded, and Miorine took a deep breath and started talking.

"Yushura? It's me, Miorine Rembrandt. I have something to talk to you about... call me!"

Just with this, Yushura should return the call.

Miorine hung up the phone.

Though nothing had been decided, the possibility of talking to Yushura filled Miorine with anticipation, allowing her to calm down slightly.

Miorine had been overwhelmed with company issues, but as soon as she had room to breathe, she thought of Suletta.

She was so preoccupied with the upcoming meeting with the five of them that she was spacing out when talking to Suletta. She's not even clear on what they said when they parted.

When Miorine opened the address book again, she tapped on Suletta's name a little harder.

The ringing sound of the call was frustrating.

—*T-thank you for your call! This is Suletta Mercury!*

"It's me!"

—*I can't answer the phone right now! Please leave a message!*

"Seriously?! Suletta? Why are *YOU* going to voicemail too? Where are you? It's me! Call me as soon as you hear this!"

Miorine got up as if to kick the chair away and quickly left the former board chairman's office.

3. YAYA GROENEVELD

As Miorine was dialing Yushura, Yushura herself stood facing Suletta in the zero-gravity dueling grounds of the Front Lapis Garden.

Hovering mid-air, both were perched atop their respective mobile suit containers, with only the tips of their toes tucked under footholds.

—*Ah, the thrill of a duel.*

Yushura's voice, amplified by the speaker built into the Haro of her cane, was clearly audible to Suletta. Her voice was also picked up by the Haro, facilitating their conversation.

"Are we really dueling in mobile suits?"

In response to Suletta's question, Yushura responded with a broad smile.

—*Yes!*

In the spectator lounge away from the dueling arena, Nika and Chuchu were watching the start of the duel.

"I hope neither of them gets hurt."

"Suletta, you got this!"

Yushura's bodyguard, Yaya Groeneveld, was operating a tablet in the spectator lounge, opening the massive mobile suit containers at the feet of both Suletta and Yushura.

Suletta gripped the edge of the container and peered down at her feet.

The steel locks were slowly being released.

"W-whoa..."

—*Helmets and pilot suits are in the cockpit. Use them.*

However, right after the front faces of the containers started opening, their surroundings were plunged into total darkness.

There was no hint of emergency lights coming on. The doors of the containers beneath their feet were frozen.

"M-Ms. Yushura?!"

Despite this, Suletta was accustomed to such scenarios. The power generation and transmission systems on Mercury often malfunctioned due to intense magnetic storms from the sun.

Suletta illuminated their surroundings by taking out her student handbook.

At almost the same time, the top of the container about fifty meters away lit up brightly. The Haro at the tip of Yushura's cane was glowing brightly. The Haro had a built-in battery.

—*Suletta! Can you hear me?*

"Ye-yes! Ms. Yushura."

—*I'm coming over there.*

"What? Whaaaaat?!"

Yushura, surrounded by the light of the Haro, leapt through the darkness.

"M'lady!"

Yaya, who was watching the situation in the lounge, cried out, but it bore no trace of panic.

Swiftly, Yaya started to assess the situation through the tablet, careful not to neglect duty to their guests.

"Ms. Nika, Ms. Chuchu, it seems we have an intruder!"

"What?"

"An intruder?"

"As the recovery program isn't functioning, we've likely been breached by hostile forces. I'll repel the intruders while meeting up with Suletta and the young lady! You both should get in your normal suits!"

Yaya said this, pulling out an emergency pack from the wall and tossing it towards them.

Chuchu caught both packs with ease and passed one to Nika. Seeing Nika flustered, she flashed a relaxed smile.

"Isn't this just part of the attraction?"

"Y-you think?" asked Nika.

"They're trying to scare us, but it won't work."

"No, this is not a game," Yaya said, her voice low and stern.

"Chuchu, just in case. Let's suit up."

While Nika and Chuchu were putting on the unfamiliar Benerit Group normal suits, Yaya quickly put on a helmet and called out to the two of them from outside the lounge.

"You can hear me through the helmet radio, right? Let's go!"

Nika and Chuchu exchanged glances.

Suletta caught Yushura, who was descending, enveloped in light.

"Thank you."

"N-no problem!"

Catching Yushura felt as light as catching a feather.

Under zero gravity, Yushura landed close to Suletta while holding onto the Haro on her cane. The moment she did, she closed her eyes in apparent pain and swayed slightly.

"M-Ms. Yushura?!"

"I'm okay... It's all right."

Then Yushura spoke to the Haro on her cane.

"Connect me to... Yaya."

—*Communication failure. Unable to establish a link.*

"That's strange. The communication function should have a backup power supply. We might have an intruder."

"What?"

"I have my suspicions."

"Wh-what?!"

"Well...there have been recent reports of Front robberies."

"I think I've heard of it... maybe?"

Even in space, crimes happen. The most common are illegal intrusions onto transport ships and Fronts with the intent of stealing data and materials.

"We need to think about escaping first."

It seemed Yushura was already considering they'd been infiltrated.

Suletta chimed in with an idea.

"Can't... can't we open the container?"

The containers were not wired and were floating in zero gravity, which meant they must have a battery installed and should operate independently of a power outage.

Yushura nodded.

"That's right. If we have the mobile suits, we can move around, and at worst, we'll be safe if we get into the cockpit. Haro, what about it?"

—*I'm sorry, but I cannot operate the container.*

"Why not? Battery run out?"

—*No, control has been taken away.*

Yushura took a breath.

"We have quite a hostile intruder, don't we?"

4. LAPIS GARDEN UNDERGROUND SECTION

In relentless pursuit of Yaya, who was fast enough to almost vanish from sight, Nika and Chuchu journeyed through the weightless sections of Lapis Garden.

"Aren't we headed for the dueling grounds?"

"From the lounge we were in, it would take far too long. We have a predetermined rallying point for emergencies, the miss and I. That's where we are heading!"

The emergency lights in the corridor were barely functioning. Yet, thanks to a guidance system projected onto their helmet visors, they could navigate without stumbling into the walls or floor, following the route Yaya had taken.

In about five minutes, the trio entered a room reminiscent of a compact control center.

Using her student handbook as a light source, Nika surveyed their surroundings.

"So, this is the meeting point?"

"Yes. This is the sub-control room for emergencies. It's directly beneath the amusement park. We can monitor the entire front from here... Though it would seem the young ladies are not here yet."

As Yaya touched a panel, a comprehensive map of Lapis Garden and surveillance camera footage appeared on the monitor.

Instantly, Yaya's expression clouded.

"I've located intruders. They seem to have breached the cargo hatch."

Light points appeared on the map.

Five or so points of light were on the move in a location distant from the amusement park section.

"Could they be the delivery people?" Nika suggested.

"No, there are none scheduled for today. Anyone besides the young lady, you all, and myself should be considered a foe."

Realizing that this was a crisis, even the usually brash Chuchu seemed to shudder.

"What can I, uh, do to help?"

Yaya didn't seem to have time to reassure Chuchu, who was trying to act tough, as she tried one program after another.

"It seems they couldn't hack the ones that just rewrote the protocol. Activating the capture security!"

Something began to seep from the corridor walls on one of the camera feeds. Within moments, the substance filled the passage.

"What is that? Water?" Chuchu asked.

"It's a magnetic fluid for security purposes—Ferroslime. It's our company's latest innovation!"

Having changed into their normal suits at the exit of the dueling arena, Suletta and Yushura had taken a different route to enter the underground sections of Lapis Garden. Before long, they stepped into an artificial gravity section, picking up their pace.

"The gravity is intense."

Yushura muttered under her breath.

Her Haro stick provided support for her movements, using posture control and thruster ejections, but it was no match for the freedom of motion in zero gravity.

"Are, are you okay?"

"No problem, no problem. Let's hurry."

While emergency lights were also sparse here, Yushura's Haro stick cast a bright glow around them.

In the center, a spherical object the size of a mobile suit was visible.

"Wh-what is this?"

"This is the magnetic suspension reactor. It can melt materials while keeping them suspended with magnetic force. It's no longer operational, though."

With a nostalgic look, she touched the now inactive reactor.

"This reactor was first introduced into the Langlands Corporation by my grandmother's grandfather. It's a very, very old thing. I was thinking of putting a company museum in the amusement park."

"It looks like it was very well cared for."

"Yes..."

Yushura gave a slight smile, then released her grip on the Haro stick and promptly collapsed backward.

"Yushura!"

Startled, Suletta rushed over, catching Yushura from behind.

Her mind was a whirlwind, but her body knew what to do in this crisis.

She checked the oxygen concentration in the helmet—there were no problems.

Then, the Haro embedded in the stick approached Yushura.

—*Q-value in blood has dropped. Please take your medicine.*

Immediately after, the Haro's mouth opened wide, revealing a single tablet.

"Um... Can she take it here?"

—*The air environment in this area is not an issue. It is safe to open your helmet visor.*

"Oh, oh, I see."

Suletta opened both her and Yushura's visors and then carefully reached for the Haro.

"So, I should, um, administer it, right?"

—*Thank you. As Suletta, you have been registered as a friend of Ms. Yushura.*

"A-a friend..."

Suletta felt a wave of happiness at this first acknowledgment of friendship outside school.

"Then, here goes!"

She delicately picked up the tablet and brought it towards Yushura's mouth.

"Yu-Yushura, could you open your mouth a bit?"

"Mm..."

"Do...do you need water?"

"It's okay..."

Having managed to swallow the tablet, Yushura slowly closed her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Suletta. I'll get up soon..."

"Yes, let's take a little break."

While Yushura slipped into sleep beside her, Suletta spoke to the Haro.

"Until Yushura wakes up, let's defend this place together, okay!"

—*Understood.*

The Haro responded, its eyes glowing red.

5. SULETTA VANISHED

Suletta was nowhere to be found, neither in the Earth House's living room nor where Tycho the goat or Brahe the yak resided. She hadn't called either.

Growing impatient, Miorine ventured towards the Dueling Committee's lounge, though the thought of it filled her with disbelief.

At the party, Suletta had run into Elan; despite being left alone, she didn't seem upset and had the momentum to perhaps even go on a date. Could it be that she went to see Elan?

Miorine stepped off the elevator and hurried into the lounge.

"Are you looking for your bride-to-be?" The ever-sofa-bound Secelia Dote wore a provocative grin as she baited Miorine.

Beside her, Rouji sat silently, stroking his Haro, engrossed in some research.

"Secelia, have you seen Suletta?"

"The job of looking after the groom is for the bride, right?"

Basically, Secelia had no idea, and her sass was infuriating, but Miorine had no time for quarrels.

"Lauda, how about you?" she asked, turning toward him.

Now that Lauda had become the head of the Jeturk House, he was also a member of the Dueling Committee.

Lauda glared at Miorine for a moment, then rose from the sofa.

"That Mercurian wench hasn't been here since the last duel."

"And Elan?"

"I wouldn't know." Lauda's right hand grazed his left bangs - a signature tic.

Miorine faced him, knowing full well he bore no love for her - being the bride of Suletta, the one who defeated Guel. But she was also certain he wouldn't waste time on petty lies.

Judging there was no further point in her stay, she asked "If Suletta comes, tell her I was looking for her."

With that, she tried to leave the lounge.

As she waited for the elevator, Lauda approached her.

"Seeing me off?"

"No. Do you know where my brother is?"

Lauda's expression turned grim.

Miorine, however, briskly retorted, "Why on earth would I know?"
Lauda looked down, lost in thought. He and his half-brother Guel were the same age. He must be worried.

The elevator arrived, and its doors slid open.

As Miorine moved to get in, Lauda held the door.

"Need something more?"

"I haven't accepted that transfer student. One day, my brother will reclaim everything."

"Do as you please. Are we done here?"

With that, Lauda released the door, and it closed.

It was indeed peculiar for the triumvirate - Guel, Shaddiq, and Elan - the three former leading branches- to be absent from the Dueling Committee.

Such massive changes were beyond Miorine's power. It could only be the doing of Suletta - *the* Suletta who commanded Aerial, *the* Suletta who was forcing changes at Asticassia.

And yet, the key issue was that there was still no response from Suletta. No sooner had she thought it, her student handbook beeped with an incoming call. Miorine answered without checking the caller ID.

"Suletta!? --Oh, it's you, Martin. What's the matter?"

—*S-s-something big has come up! Hurry back to Earth House!*

6. AN UNFORSEEN CALL

GUND-ARM Inc. didn't have a dedicated office building; they had simply aligned three desks in a corner of the Earth House living room and labeled it their workspace. Everyone busied themselves with work there.

But at that moment, they were all gathered, reading an email that had just arrived.

GUND-ARM Inc. CEO, Miorine Rembrandt,

Please accept my apologies for the sudden contact.

My name is Grace Chain, and I am from the Planning Department of the independent research institution Chain Optics Research Institute.

We would like to ask for your company's cooperation in a performance verification test of the space telescope that we are currently developing.

Please refer to the attached file for a comprehensive financial proposal.

The order content is an approximate calculation on our part, but we would like to finalize it after discussing it with you.

We hope to schedule a meeting to introduce ourselves and explain in detail.

We are available anytime during business hours, so please feel free to call us.

"Is this email real? It's not a prank, right?"

As soon as she came in, Miorine asked the Earth House residents, who were also employees. Her mind toyed with the possibility of this being a cruel jest by other students who don't think highly of GUND-ARM Inc.

She counted the faces - Martin, Till, and Aliya, all third-year students, Nuno and Ojelo from the second year, and Liliq, the youngest of the bunch, in her first year. She noticed Suletta's absence

and the lack of Nika and Chuchu, but the email required immediate attention.

"A prank?" Nuno echoed, an annoyed edge to his voice.

"Unlikely."

"This email must be genuine. There's nothing suspicious about the order," Lilique assured. Of all of Earth House, only she and Martin were in the management strategy department.

Despite being in the same department, Miorine wasn't openly thrilled about her first true order, something that didn't escape the group's attention. "Unusual? What about this ridiculously low order amount!" she exclaimed, pointing at the screen.

"I see your point," agreed Til, and Ojelo chimed in.

"This amount won't even cover the travel expenses of the CEO. They must think we're stupid because we're a student-run company," he said as if to seal the deal.

"That may be because our first order that looks like an order is not from a company but from a research institute,"

Miorine brought up the research institute's information on the monitor and quickly skimmed it.

It is an independent research institute, not a corporate one. They have a patent business based on the technologies they developed through research and development, and they also undertake performance testing of various companies' mobile suits and ships. They have a track record with the three branches.

"It seems like a legitimate research institute, but I wonder if there's a connection between the telescope and GUND?" Lilique muttered.

Martin was also beginning to feel apprehensive.

"I wonder if our vision isn't getting across?"

Nuno, who had been looking at the research institute's data behind Miorine, mused.

"So it's a telescope to find meteorites that collide with the front in advance. Is the idea to apply GUND technology in visual information processing?"

"And how does that relate to medical technology?" challenged Ojelo.

After finishing reading the attached file, Miorine continued.

"It appears they expect GUND to be a form of body-function augmentation technology in terms of vision enhancement. They say they'll introduce us to their cooperative medical research institute."

With that, she crossed her arms.

"Are you dissatisfied, ma'am?"

"No," Miorine shook her head, "On the contrary, it could serve as an easily marketable achievement. We should be able to deliver results quickly."

"Right. It's definitely faster than developing from scratch."

Nuno conceded, nodding in agreement.

"Okay!"

Miorine's voice cut through the air, silencing everyone.

All eyes turned towards her.

"First, I'm going to say hello to the people I'll be meeting. We'll start from there. Prepare for a video call in 5 minutes!"

Without missing a beat, Miorine took her place at the communication-ready seat, booting up the monitor to be ready to show visual material to the other party at a moment's notice.

While the rest of the team began to tidy up the area that would appear on screen, one person, Aliya, remained seated on the floor.

"Give us a hand, Aliya," Martin, who was hauling cardboard boxes, pleaded. However, Aliya quietly refused.

"Quiet. I'm concentrating."

Upon seeing what Aliya was doing, Martin accepted the situation and moved on. Meanwhile, Lilique straightened Miorine's hair as she sat on a chair, checking her appearance.

"Alright, you look cute."

"Good! Thanks. Everyone, we should be ready soon. I'm going to make the call, so please keep quiet."

Lilique and Martin moved to either side of Miorine. They were ready to quickly show any documents related to GUND-ARM Inc. in case anything came up.

"Hold on."

All eyes turned to the source of the voice – Aliya.

Before anyone knew it, Aliya had spread out a divination board and was tossing white bones and green stones onto it.

"Okay."

"Aliya?" asked Till.

Aliya solemnly began to interpret the divination board.

Miorine couldn't help but ask, "What's it say?"

Aliya smiled wryly and replied, "It's good. This project will go well."

Hearing the prediction, Lilique immediately burst into applause.

"Ms. Aliya, you're the best!"

Miorine shrugged, "Well, in that case, I'm going to make the call."

However, at that moment, Miorine's student handbook started to vibrate.

"Hm?"

An unfamiliar number was displayed on the student handbook's screen.

It might be related to GUND-ARM Inc.

"Just a moment, I have a call."

The team reluctantly returned to their seats.

Miorine cleared her throat softly before answering the call.

"Yes, this is Miorine Rembrandt."

The name that followed had her heart skipping a beat.

"This is Mirzahani with Langlands Corporation." The voice, however, was unfamiliar, too deep to be Yushura's.

"I, Umm..."

"Yushura mentioned that you called. Oh, perhaps you don't remember me?"

"You're the CEO, Yushetas?!"

"Yes, if it's alright with you, I'd like to discuss something."

Yushetas is Yushura's twin brother. Miorine vividly remembers spending time with the two in the past.

A young Miorine was almost always playing with a young Yushura, and back then, Yushetas was a quiet child who would read picture books by himself. However, when they needed an extra hand for games like house or tag, they would call Yushetas.

—*Yushetas, come here!*

—*Brother, come here!*

Each time, young Yushetas would inch closer, but he was a clumsy child, and often the journey ended with a tumble.

—*Ow.*

—*Always crying. Crybaby Yushetas.*

—*Brother, be careful.*

Now that Yushetas is the CEO of Langlands Corporation, he's quite well known within the Benerit Group. Yushura and Yushetas, the talented Mirzahani twins, have led their not only their rapid growth but their ranking within the group as well.

"Can I call you Miorine?"

"Huh? Yes, of course. It's been a while, Yushetas."

"So, your call to my sister was a proposal for a joint development?"

The question startled Miorine.

He might have heard about the joint development from another company, but if that's the case, given that it had only been a few days since Miorine began making contact, it would mean that Yushetas has an exceptionally efficient information network. Or it could just be

pure speculation. Either way, it seems the CEO of Langlands is far from incompetent.

The affairs of Langlands Corporation are widely known not only among mechanic students like Nika but also among management strategy students. In particular, the question of who, between older brother Yushetas or younger sister Yushura, has contributed to the rapid growth of the corporation often becomes a topic of conversation among management strategy students. Although Miorine has never participated in such casual chats—mainly because she doesn't have close friends in her faculty—were she asked, she would have confidently stated, based on her childhood image of the bold and cheerful Yushura, that the CTO's influence must be significant.

"By the way, I don't think I've said this because it's been so long. Congratulations on your appointment as CEO. You're doing great work."

"Haha. You're one to talk. Aren't you also a CEO? Your establishment of GUND-ARM Inc. was impressive."

We are leagues apart from Langlands Corporation. As you said, our company is considering proposing a joint development project with your company."

"Excellent. Marvelous. Since we're here, why don't we start the discussion right away?"

His eagerness to proceed sparked hope within Miorine.

If any kind of partnership with Langlands Corporation was decided, just that fact alone could be announced prominently as news about GUND-ARM Inc. If that happened, investments would likely increase, and more partnership offers would come in.

"I'd like to discuss this with the three of us, including Yushura. Can you get in touch with her?"

"I'll try calling her from here."

The line with Yushetas was put on hold, and music started playing. Miorine sighed.

The partnership with Langlands Corporation was due to her relationship with Yushura. But even if she could speak to Yushura later, if she could move the conversation forward with the CEO, that would be better. Right now, she was the CEO of GUND-ARM Inc., more than she was Yushura's childhood friend.

"Unfortunately, I can't reach her."

"I'll try getting in touch with her again later. Shall we discuss our potential partnership for now? Perhaps for five minutes?"

"Five or ten minutes, either would work."

"Great. So, what are the criteria for choosing a partner?"

"Nothing in particular. We're doing business even with a student-run venture, and I'm not referring to you."

"I understand. Anything else?"

"Recently, we've been in talks with Jeturk."

"Jeturk!? Is Langlands planning to get into the mobile suit business?"

"Is there a problem?"

All the top companies in the Benerit Group are related to the mobile suit business.

Langlands Corporation, which originally manufactured ship paint, experienced rapid growth due to the development of a magnetic fluid paint specialized for mobile suits, which mitigates beam attacks.

Despite GUND-ARM Inc.'s medical focus, she couldn't fault Yushetas for his choices.

"No... I was just a bit surprised."

"I know what your business is about. You're trying to use GUND-ARM, which is supposed to be a weapon, for medical purposes, right? Although our directions are polar opposites, but we're both intent on making significant changes. We are perfect as partnership candidates."

"That might be true."

GUND-ARM Inc. wants to commercialize GUND as medical technology. She must confirm Langlands Corporation's—and Yushetas's—intentions.

"Let me be clear, we are offering GUND technology for medical use, okay? Neither the GUND format nor GUND-ARM will be given to anyone."

In response to Miorine's statement, Yushetas remained silent.

After waiting a few seconds in silence, she could only hear a slight noise.

"I'm sorry, our conversation was interrupted."

"Is it okay? You're on the move, aren't you?"

"Yes, to the front where our lab is located."

"You must be busy."

"As busy as you are, I presume. However, in a bid to rekindle old friendships, how about we arrange a more formal meeting soon? We'll certainly involve Yushura."

"No problem. Let me know when you're available. I'll do my best to accommodate."

"Got it. Catch you later, Miorine."

"Thank you, Yushetas."

7. YUSHETAS MIRUZAHANI

Yushetas, Yushura's brother, ended the call with Miorine and opened a conference call with his subordinates.

"Where is my sister now?"

— *She's currently in the underground section of the Front with that student from the Asticassia School.*

"It's good we could isolate her from Yaya. That butler can be quite a handful. Guess it's not my turn yet."

— *About that... magnetic slime was just deployed, and most of the infiltration team has been apprehended. We're currently on standby at the duel arena.*

"What? Didn't I give you the deactivation code?"

— *It appears that Yaya or Miss Yushura rewrote the protocol entirely.*

"Can't be helped then. Let's break a bit of the 'Stone Garden!'"

— *It's regretful that you, the CEO, have to do this, especially since this place holds many memories for you. Our deepest apologies.*

"Don't worry about it. This place needs a major renovation anyway. Cleaning up after my sister is a brother's duty, after all."

Yushetas ended the call and gripped the control lever. He was sitting in the cockpit of a mobile suit.

The Jeturk Heavy Machinery-made mobile suit *Dilanza* began to boot up.

"Someday, I'll create a mobile suit that surpasses even the Aerial, all on my own at Langlands Corporation."

In the provisional control room, the Ferroslime was seen wrapping around the intruders' bodies. The liquid metal moved as if it had a will of its own, and with just a small amount of slime, all five of them were plastered against the floor and walls.

"That's awesome," Chuchu exclaimed in admiration while watching the monitor.

"No, not yet, it isn't."

"Not yet?"

Nika asked anxiously. Neither she nor Chuchu was used to these rough situations.

Meanwhile, Yaya was calmly operating the control panel, securing the overall functions of the Front.

"I'm detecting a mobile suit outside the Front."

"What?"

"No way."

If they could operate a mobile suit, it would mean a large-scale infiltration.

Nika and Chuchu inadvertently looked at each other and huddled together.

Only then did Yaya notice their anxious looks.

"I apologize for the inconvenience. We're going to transform the 'Stone Garden' and activate the mass driver. It'll cause some shaking, so please sit in the seats over there."

Yaya took a seat at the control panel, and Chuchu and Nika sat in the auxiliary seats behind her.

"Why the mass driver?"

Nika asked. Until a moment ago, she had been excited to see the mass driver.

Immediately after, vibrations spread throughout the mass driver section.

"We're going to intercept them with it!"

As the provisional control room shook, Chuchu shouted, looking at one of the monitors.

"It's Suletta!"

"And the Miss!"

Yaya also noticed and zoomed in the camera.

"The heck is she doing?"

Suletta was chasing after the Haro stick ahead of her, skillfully manipulating the thrusters equipped in the backpack of her normal suit, while carrying Yushura at her side.

Nika watched Suletta on the screen,

"Eh? Is this..."

"She's being pursued! If we can pinpoint her location, we should be able to get in contact somehow!!!"

"Suletta... I'm sorry."

"It's okay!"

Suletta moved with exceptional sharpness, excelling in zero-gravity movement.

Then, a voice echoed from the Haro.

— *Mistress Yushura! Ms. Suletta!*

Yushura replied in a weak voice.

"Yaya..."

— *My lady, are you feeling unwell?*

Yushura couldn't answer, she was feeling faint.

"Um, this is Suletta! Ms. Yushura, s-she, she collapsed!"

— *Did she take her medicine?*

"Yes, yes!"

— *Thank you. Then she should be fine for a while. I will guide the Haro from here, could you please move with M'lady Yushura?*

"I, I understand!"

Then, Nika and Chuchu interrupted.

"Suletta! Are you okay?"

"What's going on over there!?"

"Ms. Nika, Ms. Chuchu!"

And then, Yaya shouted.

— *Please, I beg of you, take care of the lady!*

8. TWINS

The vibrations in the provisional control room subsided as the mobile suit container was loaded onto the rail of the mass driver.

"Are you suggesting we strike with the mobile suit container?" Nika inquired.

Yaya, rather than answering, simply offered a curt nod.

"But wouldn't our own mobile suits be at risk if we launched the container?" Nika, undeterred, pushed further.

"The launch velocity of this mass driver does seem significantly high."

"We need not concern ourselves with that. The pilot in question will likely perceive this as nothing more than a bluff. Should they choose to fall back, all the better," Yaya reassured them.

"That pilot...?" Nika muttered, confusion coloring her features, even as the preparations for the mass driver continued unabated.

Without hesitation, Yaya thrust the control lever forward, swiveling the mass driver to aim it at the incoming mobile suit.

"Ms. Nika, Ms. Chuchu, brace for recoil!"

Gauging the distance between them and the mobile suit, Yaya adjusted the mass driver's output, calibrated the target—and pulled the trigger.

The transport container shot down the rail, gaining momentum before it was propelled into the void, a rectangle larger than the suit it aimed to disable. It hurtled through the empty abyss of space, unerring and deadly.

But just as it was about to strike, the opposing suit fired its thruster, deftly evading the oncoming projectile.

"Such agility... Indeed, Master Yushetas is in a league of his own..."

"Huh? Who's that?" Chuchu questioned, oblivious, but Nika reacted to the name.

"You don't mean... Yushetas Mirzahani, the CEO, is piloting that machine?"

Yaya turned to Nika for a brief moment, confirming, "Yes, that's right."

Chuchu directed her question to Nika, "Hey Nika, who is this Yushetas?"

"He's the CEO of Langlands Corporation, one of the renowned Mirzahani twins. They both made a name for themselves in the tech industry after their parents, former CEOs, tragically perished in an accident, leaving them as the new CTO and CEO."

"An accident, huh... So then she's had her share of hardships," Chuchu observed. Yaya shot her a stern glare.

"What, what now!?"

"Nevermind... Wait, what?!"

Yushetas, having evaded their onslaught, trained his beam rifle onto the front wall's exterior hatch, letting loose without a second thought.

The hatch was blown away, revealing the hangar within. It was ready for battle. The beam output, unrestricted, unlike in a traditional Asticassia duel, was at full power.

Langlands Corporation's proprietary magnetic paint formed an airtight seal on the hangar's interior walls, attempting to mitigate the rapid depressurization. As the air pressure plummeted, visors descended to shield Suletta and Yushura's faces.

Yushetas's suit breached the hangar before the magnetic barrier could fully form, standing ominously before the pair.

"W-w-what! A Dilanza?!"

Indeed, it was a Dilanza, identical to the one Guel had piloted. However, the suit—probably coated with Langlands Corporation's magnetic fluid paint—shone beautifully in striking gold and white.

Suletta, cradling Yushura, scrambled towards the exit.

However, Yushetas suit crouched on its right knee and swiftly moved its left forearm, blocking Suletta's path.

"D-dangerous!"

"Suletta..."

"Yushura! You're awake! Th-things are bad! A m-mobile suit!"

"No need to move..."

"Huh?"

"That... my brother's mobile suit..."

"Huh?"

The hatch of the Dilanza's cockpit opened, and the pilot revealed himself, lifting his visor.

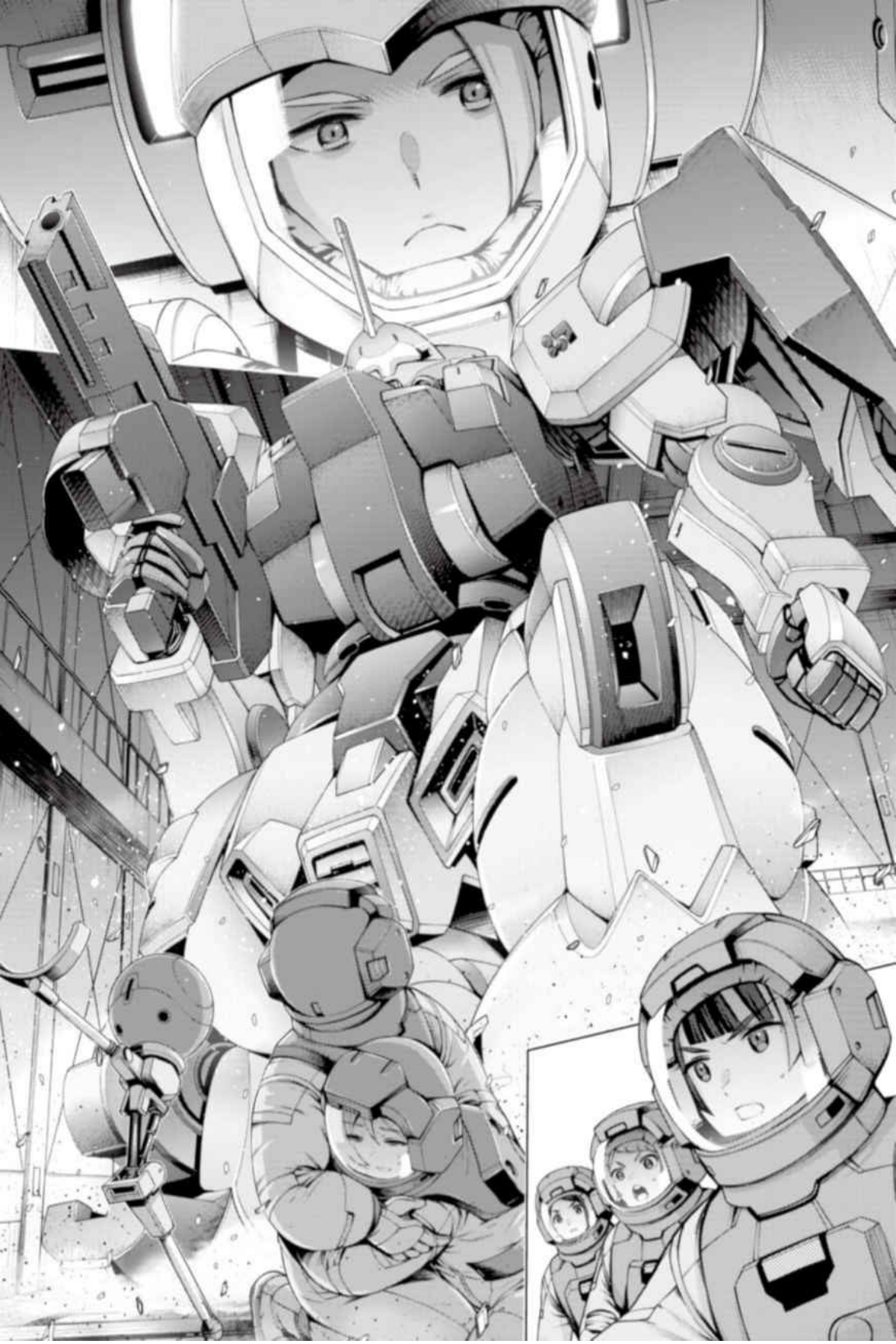
"So, that means that person is——"

At the sight of the pilot, Suletta gasped in genuine surprise.

But Yushura's face bore a bitter scowl.

"Yushura's... older brother!"

Their faces were mirror images, indistinguishable.



—*You're Suletta Mercury, aren't you?*

Suletta heard the voice through her helmet, the comms line overridden.

—*I'm Yushetas Mirzahani, Yushura's twin.*

"Twins..." Yushura whispered.

"Tw-Twins! I've never seen twins before!"

Suletta found herself studying their faces, comparing their similarities.

Yushetas broke into a grin, flashing a row of white teeth.

—*It seems my sister has been under your care.*

Retreating back into the Dilanza's cockpit, he maneuvered the mobile suit, its mechanical arm outstretched ominously towards them.

Suletta clutched Yushura close, shielding her as she took a step back.

"Why would you do this to your own sister?" She demanded.

—*Unfortunate circumstances, I agree. However, I insist my staff examines her. We wouldn't want her condition to worsen.*

"Ah, that... please do."

Yushetas nodded, his fingers dancing over the submonitor controls in the cockpit.

Moments later, the hangar door slid open, allowing entrance to two staff members clad in the signature suits of Langlands Corporation.

"We will now proceed with the examination," one of them announced.

"Can I... stay with Yushura?" Suletta asked tentatively.

"Of course, that's not a problem."

Suletta nodded and laid Yushura down where they were.

The staff members began their work, sensors probing through Yushura's helmet visor towards her eyes.

"Is Yushura going to be alright?" Suletta asked, her voice barely above a whisper off to the side.

One of the staff members reassured her. "She's stable. The drug concentration in her blood is under control. A little rest, and she should wake up."

Relief washed over Suletta, but she shot Yushetas an accusing look.

"Yushura is fragile. You can't just manhandle her like this!"

"My sister has eluded me for two days. I had no choice but to resort to such measures."

"Eluded you...?"

"Ah, it seems our visitor has arrived."

From the hangar entrance emerged another figure, clad in the same suit as the staff but moving with a swift, well-drilled precision. The staff members made way, deference in their actions. It seemed like this was someone important.

"Yushura!"

The figure landed near Yushura, approaching her with measured steps, careful not to startle her.

"Do you two know each other?" Suletta queried.

In response, the figure offered a gentle smile. "Yes, I'm a friend of both Yushetas and Yushura's—"

But before they could continue, Yushura coughed weakly, her eyes fluttering open.

Suletta rushed to her side. "Are, are you alright?"

"Yeah... I'm okay now. Thank you, Suletta, for being there."

But there was a hollowness in Yushura's eyes, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Um... are all these people... friends of yours, Yushura?"

Yushura propped herself up slightly, her gaze sweeping the room.

"Friends wouldn't break the front..."

She shot her brother a contemptuous glare.

Yushetas merely shrugged, seemingly unperturbed in the Dilanza's cockpit.

"Who's that?" Suletta's gaze fell on the figure who still hovered around Yushura, concern and a trace of sorrow etched on their face.

As they approached, they spoke softly to Yushura.

"Yushura... are you alright? I never imagined you'd flee..."

But Suletta was already in full protective mode.

"Hold on! Who, who are you!?"

The figure appeared genuinely distraught, teetering on the edge of tears.

Yushura, seeming more composed now, exhaled a sigh and offered a pained smile.

"Suletta, this is..."

"Yes, yes?" Suletta leaned in eagerly.

"...*My* fiancé."

"What?!"