

[PREVIOUSLY ON GUNDAM BUILD FIGHTERS: DESTINY](#)

Johann and his teammates, Joseph and Mia, and Leah, their mechanic have all arrived at the Gunpla Battle 18 and Under National Championships, held in Anaheim, California. There, they met Nergal Academy's Team Shadow Force, based out of Virginia. Though the team captain was family to Leah, the team's newest member was familiar for an entirely different reason...

EPISODE 5: THE ELIMINATION ROUND, Part 1

"So was that really her?" Joseph was lounging on a large queen-sized bed, his belongings still in his suitcase. Johann was unpacking his clothes, laying them into the drawers in his dresser. The hotel room was nice, with plenty of room, and a fairly large desk with a lamp. He was sure it'd be useful for repairing the EZ-X. The two girls on the team were in their own room together.

"I'm sure of it. How many Fira Elliases exist in the world?"

"Not many, probably."

"Then we either found another one who's good enough at Gunpla to be chosen for Nergal Academy's National Team, or she's come back."

"Well, at least we'll be fighting her again." Joseph turned to face Johann. "So why didn't you say anything?"

"Well, I wanted to confirm it in private. I didn't want to cause a scene in front of both teams."

"I would have just called her out."

"I know."

Joseph turned on his frown. "Why do you make it sound like you do the opposite of what you know I would do?"

Johann readjusted his glasses. "Because I'm not the one who's put his foot in his mouth so far it's coming out his ass."

"I ask a girl if she's pregnant once. Once!"

"Even you should be able to tell overweight from expecting."

"Whatever, it doesn't matter." Joseph waved his hand, as if swatting the topic out of the air.

Johann finished arranging his stuff, and rechecked the small case that contained his Gunpla. It was still in perfect condition. *That reminds me.* "Hey, Joseph, how's the Titan?"

"Oh, right." Joseph opened up his backpack and pulled out a cardboard box, and he pulled his own machine out. It was mostly gunmetal, but the torso, shoulders, and leg armor was red. It looked like a GM, but its armor was heavier, and instead of normal hands, it had a contraption that looked like a large pair of three-pronged mechanical claws. Two shields extended from pylons on its back, and had thrusters on the bottom. It looked like it could survive most anything short of a nuke.

"Still in top condition, of course," Joseph said, with not a small amount of pride.

"Cool. I'm sure Leah's doing rapid adjustments to Mia's suit. She's a good fighter, but Leah's the better builder by far."

"Remember the time she forgot ammunition for her rifle?"

"Oh, god, that was terrible. Good thing she had the pistols."

Joseph yawned. "I'm gonna go to bed, Johann. Turn the light out when you're done."

"Sure."

Leah was the first of the four to wake up. *What time is it?* She leaned forwards, still only partially awake, and turned to the alarm clock, its bright red numbers making a sort of improvised night light. *Six forty-four. Of course. I always wake up before the alarm goes off.* As if to prove her right, the final digit changed to a 5, and a loud beep echoed throughout the room. In the bed next to hers, a mop of brown hair leaned forwards, making tired grunts as she spat a strand of hair out of her mouth.

"Mornig', Leah."

"Hey. Sleep good?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, lets get you cleaned up."

"Thanks, mom."

The hotel provided breakfast, and when the two girls made their way down to the dining hall, it was already crowded. While some tables were still empty, the majority were filled with chatting teens, many of whom appeared not to have had enough sleep.

They found Johann sitting at a table eating bacon and eggs. There was another table setting next to him, and Leah could see Joseph at the buffet. The two sat down, and Johann stopped eating for a second. "Hey. Sleep well?"

Leah nodded. "Yeah. How bout you?"

Johann grimaced. "Joseph isn't a heavy sleeper, but I got enough."

Mia was still groggy, and yawned loudly. "How's the food?"

"It's pretty good for mass production stuff."

"Cool."

"Well, eat up. We've got a big day." He turned to Mia. "Is the Ranger ready?"

"Yeah, its fine."

Johann glanced over at Leah, who nodded subtly.

"Great. I'll go back and get changed after I finish."

Johann zipped up his jacket, the patch on the shoulder proudly displaying a GM head and the stylized letters OGM. The jacket had been stylized to look like a Federation Pilot's normal suit, but without the bulk. *Am I ready for this? Am I ready to battle the nation's best pilots?*

He shook his head clear of the negative thoughts. *I can't think like that. We made it here on our own; we've proven ourselves as much as they have. I just have to make sure to give the correct orders, and we'll be fine.*

With a final check to make sure he hadn't forgotten anything, Johann picked up his backpack and slipped it on. *It's showtime.*

"GOOD MORNING ANAHEIM!" The loud, booming voice echoed throughout the stadium, increasing the volume of the crowd to nearly deafening levels. Johann winced, as did several of his opponents. Fifty teams of four stood on the floor of the arena, around a massive hexagon made out of battle systems. Johann saw a hand waving from across the arena, and the trench coat and curls showed that it belonged to Team Shadow Force's Margaret. He waved halfheartedly back, then returned to checking his Gunpla's joints.

"I'M SURE YOU'RE ALL READY FOR SOME GUNPLA BATTLE!"

The crowd cheered again.

"WELL, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE DISAPPOINTED! FIFTY TEAMS, ONE BATTLEFIELD! ONLY THIRTY-TWO CAN COME OUT!" He took a breath. "I'M MAES WILSON, FOR ESPNe, THE E-SPORTS CHANNEL, AND LET'S GO OVER THE RULES OF THE ELIMINATION ROUND, FOR THOSE TUNING IN!" A diagram popped up on the screen, listing the names of all teams in the tournament in alphabetical order. "FIRST, THIS IS THE ONLY TOURNAMENT MATCH THAT WILL BE HELD AT MODEL DAMAGE LEVEL C! THIS IS DUE TO THE LARGE VOLUME OF GUNPLA INVOLVED, AND THE DIFFICULTY OF RETURNING A HUNDRED AND FIFTY GUNPLA TO THEIR OWNERS. THIS MEANS THAT DAMAGE WILL NOT BE REFLECTED ON THE GUNPLA THEMSELVES, AND WILL BE SIMULATED BY THE BATTLE SYSTEM. ALL FUTURE 3v3 MATCHES WILL BE HELD AT MODEL DAMAGE A, SO BE SURE TO HAVE SPARE PARTS HANDY!" He let the crowd die down for a second, then continued. "IN THIS ROUND, EACH TEAM WILL BE DROPPED FROM SPACE OVER A SMALL SCALE MAP

OF THE CONTINENTAL US. THOUGH THE MEMBERS OF EACH TEAM WILL BE DEPLOYED TOGETHER, EACH TEAM WILL BE DELIVERED TO A RANDOM LOCATION ON THE MAP. THEREFORE, EACH TEAM MUST CHOOSE WHETHER TO STAY IN ORBIT OR FIGHT ON THE SURFACE. BATTLE PROCEEDS ACCORDING TO STANDARD GUNPLA BATTLE RULES: A GUNPLA IS ELIMINATED WHEN ITS COCKPIT IS DESTROYED OR WHEN ITS PILOT SURRENDERS. A TEAM IS ELIMINATED WHEN ALL MEMBERS OF THAT TEAM ARE ELIMINATED. ONCE MEMBERS OF ONLY THIRTY TWO TEAMS REMAIN, THE ELIMINATION ROUND WILL BE OVER, AND EACH TEAM WILL BE SCORED BASED ON THEIR PERFORMANCE. JUDGEMENTS WILL BE BASED ON NUMBER OF ENEMY SUITS DEFEATED, AS WELL AS THE AMOUNT OF DAMAGE YOUR OWN TEAM TOOK. THESE SCORES WILL DETERMINE THE SURVIVORS' SEED NUMBER FOR THE FINAL BRACKET. IN OTHER WORDS, DEFEAT AS MANY OF YOUR OPPONENTS AS POSSIBLE AND TAKE AS LITTLE DAMAGE AS POSSIBLE IF YOU WANT A HIGH SEED NUMBER."

Johann narrowed his eyes. So it'd be possible to advance to the final round by simply hiding while your opponents attacked each other, but the judges would consider your performance lacking and rank you lower. And a low seed means you have to fight harder opponents. Therefore, a higher seed would be better if we want to get an easier first round match.

"WITH ALL THAT OUT OF THE WAY, LET'S GET THINGS STARTED! EVERYONE, SET YOUR GP BASES!"

A cacophony of clicks echoed throughout the stadium as 150 GP bases were snapped into the consoles on the edge of the arena.

"SPECIAL FIELD ACTIVATE: UNITED STATES!" He waved his arm dramatically as the field changed to a massive orbital view of the states, excluding Hawaii and Alaska for space reasons.

He twirled around, gripping his microphone and facing the audience. "YOU ALL KNOW WHAT COMES NEXT, SO SAY IT WITH ME!"

A thousand voices shouted in unison: "SET YOUR GUNPLA!"

Whipping his EZ-X out of his bag, Johann whirlwind slammed it onto the catapult, where its visor lit up as the suit activated in the presence of the particles. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Mia and Joseph doing the same thing. Suddenly, his vision was blocked by the opaque, blue holographic cockpit that formed around him. He grabbed onto the two control spheres as they appeared, and made sure that their play was within acceptable limits. Satisfied, he prepared himself for the coming impact. In the corner of the catapult, he saw three lights, like a stoplight with two red and a green. With a loud buzz, the first red light turned on. Johann tightened his grip and started to slow his breathing. *Concentrate. We need to get to the ground before we get picked off by the more space-capable suits.*

Over the team intercom, he heard Mia start talking. "What's the plan?"

"Enter 3-Clasp mode directly after initial launch. Joseph, we're counting on the Titan for most of the thrust and for preventing us from burning up in the atmosphere."

"Roger." Joseph's voice came over clear.

A second alarm, and the second red light.

"Sync laser communication after launch, but use contact comms until we hit the ground." He pushed his glasses up. "Team OGM! Mission objectives: Eliminate as many enemy forces as possible while keeping yourself alive. Is that clear!"

"Roger that, Tactical Officer Thierial!" Both voices spoke in unison, without a touch of sarcasm.

A third alarm, and the green light activated. His display showed that he now had catapult control. “Johann Thierial, EZ-X, commencing orbital insertment!”

“Mia Ainrich, GM Ranger, orders accepted!”

“Joseph Groden, GM Titan, carrying out the mission!”

One after the other, the catapults fired, launching the suits into space. A quick visual survey showed him the tiny dots of dozens of other suits falling out of the sky. A few stabilized and began flying around in the blackness, but many continued their descent. It was if the world was being pelted by a colored meteor shower.

The Titan and the Ranger moved near his suit, and Johann and Mia moved to the Titan. With delicacy unfitting for such a bulky suit, its claws grasped the two suits gently, one in each arm. Johann and Mia linked arms, and with their other arm grabbed onto the Titan’s shoulders. It looked remarkably like the three suits were having a group hug. However, the formation’s true purpose was revealed when each suit began to fire its thrusters, aimed directly at the ground below. With each suit contributing to the acceleration, they quickly caught up to and passed the other descending suits, some of whom were firing potshots at each other as they descended.

Suddenly, the display started to glow. “We’re entering the atmosphere. Burn retrograde!”

The formation flipped around, and within seconds, the thrust was slowing the suits down. The red glow lessened. Suddenly, Johann saw an explosion on the horizon. Then another. *They must not have been able to decelerate fast enough; they burned up in the atmosphere. Good thing we drilled for this.* His velocity meter clocked him at a speed of 324 meters per second. *Well within acceptable limits.* He turned on contact communications. “Everyone okay?”

“No damage.”

“None here either.”

“Good. We’ll split up when we get to a kilometer above ground. Make sure to keep within laser comm distance.”

“Got it.”

“Understood.”

The numbers on his altimeter ticked down. 5000...4000....3000...

“Separate on my mark!”

2000...1500...

“Mark!” The Titan let go, and the Ranger and EZ-X pushed away from each other, turning towards the surface of the planet. They were in a forested area, but there were several clearings. He didn’t see any enemies within visual range, but he kept checking his sensors. *The trees will fool visual, but not thermal or EM sensors. We’re still going to have to be careful.* As the ground sped towards him, he activated his thrusters, slowing himself to a mere 3 meters per second. Just before he hit the surface, he increased his thrust, causing him to hover for a second before he cut power and landed with a thud, crushing a small tree underneath his mobile suit’s foot. Immediately, he surveyed his surroundings, and compared his location with the crude aerial map his system had constructed on the way down from visual data.

“Johann, I’ve landed.” Mia’s voice came in loud and clear.

“Me too.”

“All right, our first objective is to find an enemy. Based on the data I have, there was another landing about three kilometers north of us. Joseph, you lead the vanguard. Mia, as usual, take up the rear and perform recon with your backpack flyer after there’s been time enough for the enemy suits to land. Keep it low so it’s not visible below the treeline.”

Joseph and Mia affirmed their comprehension of the orders, and Johann began moving in the direction of the aforementioned combat zone.

"Johann, the Nadesico Zwei is reporting electromagnetic fields at 3.3 kilometers north-northwest. The signature was large enough to be at least two suits, maybe three."

Johann considered this. *Likely a team moving together for safety. Typical newbie maneuver. Always split up and keep an ace in the hole, if for no other reason than to keep at least one team member out of danger in case of a trap. It seems that depending on power has made some of our enemies lax.*

“Mia, is the Nadesico tailing them?”

“Of course, outside of conventional sensor range, of course. They haven’t changed course since we detected them, and they appear to be heading in this direction.” A path overlaid itself on his map, heading southeast.

“Understood. Joseph, new orders. Move ahead and identify the target. Engage at your discretion, using all necessary force to defend yourself. Mia, take up a sniping position nearby. Use the Nadesico for recon, but weapons free once the enemy has encountered Joseph. I’ll ambush them once they’ve engaged the Titan.”

“Got it. Heading to specified coordinates.” Joseph’s location marker moved in a direction to intersect the projected path.

“Understood. I’ll be out of normal communications range soon, so I’ll use the Nadesico as a relay.”

“Good. Keep communications to a minimum; radio silence is only to be broken in cases of new combatants entering the zone or after engagement.” Johann then flipped off his comms system.

I wonder what kind of suits they have. Joseph was sitting in hiding, having pulled a few trees down to serve as cover. *I hope it’s a Hygogg. I’ve never destroyed one of those before.* He became alert when he saw the brush rustle on the other side of a nearby clearing. This was a seismic disturbance, though, not something pushing through it. A tree broke as something ran into it, and suddenly, a large metallic green shape appeared. It’s domed head glowed with a single red eye, and a commander horn emerged from the forehead. *A Zaku, too bad. Actually, judging by the lines, it’s a Z.A.K.U., probably the Slash Phantom.* This one seemed to only have light customization. The shields seemed to have a pair of rifles on them, and had been altered to swivel more easily. It wielded a massive hammer with a large curved pick instead of a second head. Nothing had been done to the large gatling guns on the shoulders, though. Suddenly, two more suits emerged into the clearing, a pure white Dom and a crimson Gouf. These also appeared to be the SEED variants of the suits. *Together, they’re Christmas. Looks like I’m gonna have to play the Grinch here, though.* He chuckled at his own joke. *Nothing seriously dangerous in sight. The Dom might be a problem, but I know exactly how those work.* He looked at his map. Mia had stopped moving, about a kilometer to the west. According to his map, there

was a forested hill there. *So she's ready.* Johann was approaching from the enemy's rear. It was a 3-way pincer attack.

Flexing his shields, he activated his thrusters, immediately bursting out of cover and dashing straight for the Dom. All three noticed him at roughly the same time, but the larger suit didn't have its hover mode activated in the dense forest. The Titan found its mark, grabbing the enemy suit's head with its massive claw. Squeezing down, he managed to crush it before either of the other suits could move more than a meter. Suddenly, both raised their weapons and opened fire.

Joseph grabbed the Dom's chest with his other arm and swiveled around, the bullets from the Zaku's gatling gun impacting his teammate, tearing new holes in the armor. Joseph let go and moved back as the suit exploded. The Gouf's arm cannon had apparently been turned into a four-barrel beam rifle, which lanced towards the GM's back, but with a simple twitch of the shield boosters, the beams were deflected to a nearby tree, blowing it to splinters. Within a second, Joseph had started moving again, seemingly retreating from the two suits. Both of them exchanged a look, then raised their guns.

But before they could fire, the Zaku's chest exploded, bits of charred metal littering the ground. Shards of a large caliber bullet could be seen among the shrapnel.

Realizing that there was a nearby sniper, the Gouf attempted to retreat back into the woods, but in the same instant, it hesitated, as if it had noticed something.

But it was an instant too late. A pair of pink beam saber blades arced through the air, creating an X out of molten metal on the suit's chest. Johann kicked the red suit in the back, causing the four parts to collapse into a pile on the ground.

“Well, that was easy.” Joseph moved back into the treeline. Johann did the same, and Mia’s location marker began to move closer to the group.

“They got careless. Great shooting as usual, Mia.”

“Oh, you say that to all the girls, commander,” Mia said in a teasing voice. Suddenly, her suit emerged from the brush into the clearing, a dark grey and navy blue GM Sniper II, with a couple of extra armor plates and no backpack. Suddenly, a large object flew into the clearing. It looked like a spaceship, with two large laser guns on either side of the main body, and a pair of thrusters. You could easily mistake its general shape for the White Base or the Battleship Nadesico, except for the color scheme: like the GM Ranger’s, but lighter. The ship folded up, the conning tower folding up and the two guns rotating behind the rear thrusters. It descended slowly, attaching itself to the Ranger’s back and forming a strange but functional backpack.

“Good work, everyone. We’ll lay low in this area for a while, so keep emissions to a minimum. Once the Nadesico is fully charged, we’ll move out again. I’ll keep watch.”

“Got it. I’ll tell you when we can move.” Mia’s voice came over the laser comm lines.

“Thanks. Until then, rest. We’ll need it.”

Where are they? A bright blue mobile suit wandered in the desert. It appeared to be based on the Gundam Dynames, but with the X1 Full Cloth’s armor. *I should never have come down to the ground; at least then I’d have my teammates.* Team Sapphire Light, from Colorado, had lost contact with each other as they entered the atmosphere. Fortunately, he had managed to survive the fall alone with the added thrust and protection of his mods to the suit, but he was

now alone. *Where are they? I can't use my comms with all the interference, so I might have to wing it.* He scanned the horizon again, but saw nothing. *Nothing on scanners, either. Maybe I should just wait; at least if I survive, we'll advance.*

Suddenly, a glowing green blade slashed through the air, cutting off the suit's legs at the knees. *What? I didn't see anything!* The green blade swooped back around, and embedded itself in the back of the suit, the tip sticking out of the cockpit door. The blue lights in the suit's eyes flickered and died. If he had been able to watch the Jumbotron, he could have seen large red text scrolling across the screen: *Team Sapphire Light / Colorado ELIMINATED.* The green blade flickered out, and three sets of blue flame erupted from thin air, rising away from the smoking wreck.