

GUNDAM BUILD FIGHTERS: DESTINY

EPISODE 1: Everything Starts with a Blue Gunpla

“Hey, get out of the way!” Johann opened his eyes, looking up at the sun and then over at the girl standing over him. She looked about nine years old, the same age as the young boy lying in the slide, with raven hair and green eyes, though her olive complexion was marred by the intense frown on her face. Johann scrambled to his feet, but in his haste lost his balance on the smooth metal of the slide. He slipped backwards, and was about to fall off the piece of play equipment when he felt a small hand grasp him, stopping his descent. He regained his balance as the girl pulled him back onto the platform.

“What are you doing, you idiot? You almost fell off!”

Though internally grateful to the girl, Johann was needled by the insult. “Are you calling me an idiot?”

“What’s wrong with that? You almost fell off because you were lying in the way! That makes you an idiot!”

“Only an idiot calls someone an idiot!”

“What? Say that again!”

The two children began to growl at each other, but they were interrupted by a bell chiming. Both kids started, dashing off the playground as she grabbed her backpack. Johann walked over and picked his own backpack up, though it seemed heavier than he remembered.

Somehow, he made it. The late bell rang just as he made it to an open seat and sat down. He reached into his backpack, pulled out his pink notebook—

Pink? Why was it pink? His notebook was blue! He looked into the bag, and noticed nothing of his own. In a flash, he realized—this was the other girl's backpack. They must have had the same model, and switched at the playground. This was bad: he couldn't be seen with a pink notebook; he'd get teased into oblivion. He quickly tore out a few sheets and put them on his desk, digging to find a pencil. Fortunately, the girl, whoever she was, had more conventional tastes in writing utensils, and he found a yellow #2.

After class, he wandered the halls, looking around. He saw a flash of black hair, and pushed through the sea of third-graders until he reached his target, but in dismay he realized that it wasn't her. Not only was this girl not wearing the backpack, but she was black. He apologized and looked around, trying to find the person who had his school

supplies. He ran around, as far as he could, glancing into classrooms now being emptied, checking each one, but the girl wasn't to be found.

Suddenly, he realized that he had wandered into the hall normally populated by the fourth graders. This is bad. They don't like having little kids wander in here. He turned around to move away from the area, but bumped into a group of taller kids.

Fourth-graders?

"What are you doing here?" said the tallest one, in a contemptuous voice.

"I'm looking for a girl." Johann managed to stammer out.

"Aww, he lost his girlfriend!"

"I am not and will never be that idiot's girlfriend."

Johann whipped around to see the girl from earlier march up to him and grab the backpack he had been holding. She dropped the one she had been carrying like a pile of bricks, then searched through her own bag, making sure that nothing was missing. She reached into a compartment that Johann hadn't looked through, then pulled out a small humanoid figure.

"Is that a Gunpla?" asked Johann.

The girl looked over and rolled her eyes as she put it away. "No, I like keeping small robots in my backpack. Of course it's a Gunpla."

The older students looked like they were getting annoyed at being ignored. “Hey, aren’t you going to apologize?”

Johann started to stammer that he was sorry, but the girl interrupted. “What are you apologizing for? You didn’t hurt them.”

“You’re really starting to get on my nerves, kid. Now beat it before I beat you.”

“You’re going to beat up two kids smaller than you? Are you going to brag to your friends about it? Ooh, I beat up a third grader! Then I went and punched a grandma!”

The girl mimed the voice of the tallest boy.

His face growing red, the boy pulled back his fist. “It might not be impressive, but it’ll be satisfying.”

Suddenly, the girl held up her Gunpla. Johann got a better look at it, and recognized the small figure as a small blue GM. It was holding a machine gun, and had a shield on its left arm like a hammer claw. The larger boy looked startled, as if this were the last thing he had expected. “Battle us.”

“What?”

“If you’re really that much better than us, beating us in a Gunpla Battle should be easy, right?”

“Or, I could just beat you up.”

“How about this. We win, you let it go. You win, both of us apologize and I give you my Gunpla.”

The boy smiled, and pulled out his own model, what appeared to be a yellow Dom, but it had two large cannons on the right shoulder. The armor also seemed to be extended, creating a much heavier set machine than normal. “You just lost yourself a gunpla.”

The nearest Hobbytown USA was only two blocks away from the school, but it was a very tense experience for the young boy. The older students walked while keeping the two smaller children contained to prevent their escape. Though Johann was nervous, the girl seemed to be confident, as if the boys were her escorts, not her captors.

They finally reached the store, and walked past the rows of shelves. The teenaged cashier looked up disinterestedly, saw the gunpla they were carrying, then went back to his computer.

The store, which previously had primarily sold planes, tanks, and trains, now was stocked heavily with Gunpla. In the back, one of the workrooms had been converted into a battle room, complete with the PPSE logo on the machine. The older boy typed something onto the keypad, then pulled a GP Base out of his backpack.

"GUNPLA BATTLE, COMBAT MODE, START UP. MODEL DAMAGE LEVEL, SET TO C"

The girl with him pulled out one of her own.

"PLEASE SET YOUR GP BASE"

Both children put their bases on the appropriate side of the machine. Johann got a look at the small machine as its display lit up. GP bases weren't terribly expensive, only being glorified data storage devices, but one would still take a significant amount for a third-grader to accumulate. Either her parents were extremely cool, or she was very into this. As it activated, Johann saw two things: First, the name of the machine seemed to be the "Blue Destiny Alpha", and the girl's name seemed to be "Fira Ellias".

"BEGINNING PLAVSKY PARTICLE DISPERSAL"

Suddenly, a sea of azure stars appeared above the hexagonal machine.

"FIELD 2: DESERT"

With a flash, terrain began to form. A massive, arid area formed inside the machine, and sand began flowing through the air, from one side of the boundary to the other. Various cliffs and rocky outcroppings rose from the sands, like sinking ships. Johann could see the other fighter start to grin.

At the same time, a holographic control console formed around Fira, keeping her separate from Johann, though he could still see the sudden shift in her face. She went from confident to determined in a second, moving the Destiny toward the mounting station.

"PLEASE SET YOUR GUNPLA"

Both the Dom and the Destiny were now standing on the catapult. As the particles began to permeate the small figurines, they straightened up, the Dom's monoeye and the Blue Destiny's visor flashing pink and green, respectively.

"BATTLE START"

The two machines began to be flung forwards, flying off the catapult and into the air. The Destiny adjusted its trajectory slightly with its thrusters, then raised its machine gun, searching the area for the enemy target.

The Dom made its presence known with a massive blast from its shoulder cannons. The shot went wide as the Destiny dropped in altitude quickly, but Fira was easily able to see the dust cloud of the approaching suit as it hovered over the dunes, moving much more quickly than a suit of its bulk should have allowed.

Fira fell behind a rock, then reached to her feet. She grabbed a rock, then threw it up. At the same time, only a millisecond later, she boosted out from cover, flying over the sand while firing her machine gun. The bullets found their mark, the other boy having been temporarily distracted by the rock, but they seemed to do only minimal damage, mostly leaving dents in the armor.

The Dom quickly responded, pulling out a shotgun and beginning to empty it in her direction. The metal balls seemed to spray just too high or low, missing the blue suit by a millimeter.

Johann looked away from the action to observe the two combatants. Both were looking at their displays, but Fira seemed to be much more calm. She was moving as if it were boring, as if the battle was simply something on her list of things to do, and she wanted it over as quickly as possible.

What the hell? She doesn't even care?

In the arena, the Destiny and Dom were still trying to deal lasting damage to the other. The Dom seemed to be out of ammunition for its shotgun, so it was taking potshots with the cannons on its shoulder. Suddenly Fira fired all her thrusters, stopping short of a beam blast and moving straight towards the heavier mech. It reached behind its back and pulled out a long rod, which began to glow with heat.

The Destiny dropped its machine gun and ejected its shield. Suddenly, the outside of its calves popped open, and two beam sabers shot out. They hummed to life as the machine gripped them and lifted them to meet the incoming heat saber. The weapons clashed, then hit again as the machines began to duel, Fira with two swords and the Dom with a two handed blade.

Johann looked at Fira, who was now looking slightly interested. She twisted her left control orb and moved the cursor to "Special Weapon".

Joseph was having fun. Though the battle had started from a confrontation, the battle had caused him to forget all that, in favor of the challenge right in front of him. He was

used to beating everyone without trying, so finding someone on his level was a feat.

Unfortunately, I have to get going. Sorry, kid. His Dom twisted around, using centrifugal force to accelerate the saber to ridiculous speeds. This was his finishing move, the Tornado Blade, which always won.

Except it didn't. The blade flew past the location where the blue suit had been, except it didn't collide with anything. Instead, it whistled through the air harmlessly. *What?*

The Dom tilted its head up, and through the desert sun, it saw a descending blue streak. It impacted the Dom faster than it could react, the twin beam sabers plunging into the machine's head, straight down into the cockpit. The last thing Joseph saw before his controls shut down was the visor of the suit burning red.

The Destiny jumped off, flipping off the sabers and dropping them back into the slots on the legs. Behind her, the Dom slumped and fell over, then exploded.

"BATTLE ENDED"

Fira reached over the table and grabbed her Gunpla, standing in an odd pose next to the collapsed body of her enemy. She removed her GP base from the slot and put it into her backpack, along with the blue suit.

Johann started to move again. "How did you do that? They're fourth graders!"

Fira sighed. "You really need to work on that self-esteem. So what? They're a year older than us. Doesn't mean anything."

Johann considered this silently.

"Look...you."

"Johann."

"Whatever. You know how they say 'Gunpla is Freedom'?"

"No."

"It's supposed to mean that you can build Gunpla however you want, but I think it also means that everyone is equal with Gunpla. If you're good, nobody cares about your age. You're free to fight anyone if you want. Just be yourself."

Joseph regained his senses, and walked over to Fira. "What was that move at the end?"

"You don't remember the Blue Destiny?"

"What? I thought it was a GM! That's the Blue Destiny Unit 1?"

"The Blue Destiny Alpha, yes."

"Then I lost fair and square. We'll let it go."

"Hey, Joe! Are you gonna let them off the hook because of something like that?" chimed in one of the boys with the fighter.

"Shut up. You don't know anything about Gunpla Battle. A win is a win, and you can't cheat. I lost, and we had a deal."

Joseph led his friends out of the store, though the other two continued to shoot Fira dirty looks. After they left, Johann spoke up.

"Do you think, maybe, I could learn? You know, to battle?"

Fira looked at him. "Maybe. You look pretty wussy, though."

"I am not!"

"Well, then, build a good gunpla, and I'll consider it."

"Fine!"

However, that seemed to be harder than expected. Many of the kits were very expensive, and Johann only had around \$10 on him at the time. He looked for a box with a price he could afford, but everything in his price range didn't look very cool.

However, he finally settled on an EZ-8, from 08th MS Team. He had watched the short series before and liked the look of it. "Fira! I found one!"

"Let me see." She took the box from him, looked it over, then handed it back. "Looks good. Simple enough for someone like you to build."

If she wasn't teaching me, I'd reconsider my policy on hitting girls.

However, he bought the box, then left the store. He checked his watch, and it was nearly two hours after school. His heart leapt in his chest. *I'd better hurry. Mom'll be worried.*

"Hey!" Fira's voice echoed across the parking lot, and Johann swiveled around. "Wait for me after school tomorrow! I'll help you put it together!"

"Okay!" He turned back around and started to run, the shrink-wrapped box rattling.

EPISODE 2: Promise

“So what series have you watched?” Johann looked up from his sanding at the girl sitting across his kitchen table.

“You mean Gundam series?”

Fira rolled her eyes and spoke in a sarcastic voice unbecoming of the young girl it was coming from. “No. I obviously mean Getter Robo. That’s clearly the type of model I’m trying to keep you from messing up.”

“You don’t have to be mean about it.”

“Whatever. Anyway, answer the question.”

Johann was unable to entirely conceal his annoyance at being bossed around by this girl not a year older than him, but he bit his tongue. “Well, I’ve seen the first one, 08th team, and SEED.

“Well, you don’t have much background. I guess you haven’t read many of the manga series yet.”

“There’s Gundam manga?”

“Really? You don’t even know that much? There’s Crossbone, Blue Destiny, and a lot of spinoffs.”

“Well, I don’t have much money to buy books.”

“You had enough to buy that gunpla.”

“Hey, that was almost all I had.”

“Whatever. Get back to sanding.”

Johann looked down at the small piece of plastic in his hand. It was apparently some kind of connector piece, since it was gray.

“If this is going on the inside, does it need to be sanded?”

“Yeah. If it was just for display, you could cut corners and only sand the visible pieces, but this is for battle, so it’s actually the opposite. Sanding the outside parts isn’t as important as sanding the joints. But since this is your first model, you need to get practice sanding. So keep at it.”

Johann blinked. Whenever she talked about gunpla, she seemed calmer. She cut back on a lot of the sarcasm, and became a lot more...educational. He looked back down, picked up a piece of finer-grit sandpaper from the toolbox Fira had brought over and started to buff out the remaining bump.

About two hours later, the model was starting to come together. The head and upper torso was done, and Johann was working on the legs, doing both at once. Fira had

recommended this, so that you could skip the step where the model had a leg but couldn't stand up.

Suddenly, Johann heard the door opening. He looked out and saw a slightly overweight brown-haired woman with a ponytail coming through the door. He dropped the sandpaper and the piece, which rolled onto the floor. Fira dove and grabbed it before it rolled under the refrigerator. "Idiot.", she muttered.

"Mom!" Johann ran to the woman, who reached down to hug the small boy. The two embraced for a bit, then separated. Only then did she look up and notice Fira, now washing the dirt off the piece Johann had dropped. Her face shifted to surprise, then back to a smile.

"Is this one of your friends, Johann?" Fira looked back from drying the piece, then put it down and looked up at the taller woman. She reached out her hand.

"I'm Fira Ellias. Nice to meet you."

"Oh, my. What good manners you have! I'm Elisabeth Thierial, but everyone calls me Elise."

"Then I'll do that."

Fira put the small piece into the open gunpla box. It bounced like a pinball through the half-empty runners before coming to a rest on the bottom.

“Oh, is this a gunpla?” Elise looked at the partially complete model on the table. “Oh, this is the one on that show you watched with your dad!”

“Yeah, the EZ-8. Fira’s showing me how to build it.”

“Well, that’s nice of her. Have you thanked her?”

“Yes.” Fira rolled her eyes and gave a confirming nod.

“Do you need me to take you home later, Fira?”

“No, thank you. I like a few blocks away, and I walk home from school all the time.”

“Well, aren’t you grown up? I’m sure Johann could pick up a thing or two from you.”

“Mom!”

Mrs. Thierial giggled, then walked out of the room. “Your father called me and told me that he’s not going to be home before you go to bed, so we’re probably not going to have a family dinner. Just eat when you’re hungry. We have hot pockets in the freezer, if you want them. Have fun!” She walked into the master bedroom and shut the door.

“Your mom seems nice. What does she do?”

“Oh, she works for the State Records office. She helps keep track of everything that the government wants to remember. My dad works for the hospital; he’s a doctor. He has to stay late all the time.”

“Huh. I guess you have a lot of free time, then.”

“Yeah, I read a lot.”

“I thought you didn’t have money for books.”

“They’re my dad’s. He likes reading manga, and he lets me read them as long as I don’t take them outside the room, eat or drink while I’m reading, or leave them out.”

Fira looked at the clock, which read slightly after five PM. Johann followed her gaze.

“Do you have to go home?”

“Not really. My dad is pretty cool with me being home whenever.”

“All right. Want a hot pocket?”

Johann munched on the hot pocket as he sanded. He could do that one handed, so it wasn’t a problem. Fira pulled out her GP base and started to play with it.

“Where’d you get that?”

“My dad bought it for me. When I told him I wanted to battle, he got me the latest model.”

“Sounds like your dad’s pretty okay with you battling.”

“I guess. I think it’s more that it was something he could do that didn’t require a lot of time. He’s pretty busy, so he doesn’t do much with me. But at least he’s not mean or anything.”

“Can I see it?”

“I guess, but be careful. A GP base is a Build Fighter’s soul. If they lose that, they might as well give up on gunpla.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. The GP base records your gunpla’s information, so first time you fight with a gunpla, it’s recorded into your GP base. The stats and weapons are recorded there too, so it’s really important to keep it safe. It also records everything about the detailing, so nobody can use your gunpla without your permission.”

“That sounds complicated.”

“Don’t worry about it. You don’t need to understand everything about something for it to be fun.”

After that, Fira stopped talking to him, so he kept building for about another forty-five minutes, finishing the legs. At the end of that, she said goodbye and left, leaving Johann by himself.

I don’t get her. She’s sometimes mean, but whenever she gets to gunpla, she’s a lot nicer and more patient. And she was perfectly polite to Mom. He looked at the closed

box, the action shot on the lid teasing him to complete the model. However, he didn't have his own tools yet, and Fira made it clear that he'd mess it up if he did it by himself. He took off the lid and looked at the parts still on the runners: the arms, the weapons, and the shields. *Nothing I can do yet.* He replaced the lid and carried the box upstairs, sliding it under his bed.

The next day, Johann arrived at school early, not stopping by the playground. As he entered the grounds, he noticed the three older students standing around under a tree, chatting. The one who had battled Fira had his Dom out, and appeared to be pointing out something about it. They noticed him as he got close to the door, but went back to their discussion after a few unintelligible words from the older boy.

"Well, you're enthusiastic today." Johann whipped around to see Fira, who had snuck up behind him.

"When did you get here?"

"About five minutes ago."

"Do you always get here this early?"

"Pretty much. The time we met on the playground was an exception."

"What were you doing there?"

"It's a playground. You tell me." Johann decided to let it go.

“Well, I was wondering if you could tell me where you buy your tools, because Mom said that she’d help pay for them if this was something I’d be serious about.”

“She sounds pretty cool.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I find some of them at Walmart, but you have to get the sandpaper at a tool store, like Lowes. The really specific stuff you have to buy online.”

“I’d have to ask Mom to help me with that. I don’t have my own computer.”

“Well, let’s worry about seeing how badly you crash and burn before you buy a bunch of stuff. Doing models is one thing, but battle is something else.”

“Well, can you come over and help me finish today? It won’t take very long.”

“I’ll see, but I might not be able to. Wait for me here after school, and if I can’t come with you, I’ll at least let you borrow my tools. If you finish, bring it with you tomorrow and I’ll teach you how to battle.”

“Thanks. I’ll wait.”

“Cool. Make sure you don’t forget.”

Johann spent the rest of the day hardly thinking about anything except how cool his gunpla was going to look when it was finished. He answered the questions the teacher

asked him, but he wasn't 100% sure what the class had been about at the end. As the bell rang, and everyone grabbed their bags, he left the building and went to the spot where Fira had asked him to wait.

"Hey." Johann turned to see the Dom kid approaching. "You there. Where's that girl?"

"Fira?"

"The one with the Blue Destiny."

"I'm waiting for her. Why do you want to know?"

"I want a rematch. She beat me last time, and I can't accept leaving that alone."

"Well, unfortunately, I'll have to postpone that." Fira flipped a small pink cell phone shut and slipped it into her bag as she approached the two boys.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have to do something later, and I have to go home now. Anyway, Johann, here's my tools. If I find something missing when you give them back, I'll make you wish you'd never heard of gunpla." Somehow, he was sure that she wasn't bluffing.

"What about my rematch?"

"Well," Fira seemed to be thinking something over. "How about this. You help this kid finish his gunpla, and I'll fight you the next time I have some spare time."

"Why would I help this kid?"

“Consider it the price for the battle. I don’t have that much spare time, so fighting someone like you is a hassle.”

“What? Say that again!”

“If you want me to take that back, you’d better make sure that his gunpla is complete tomorrow.”

“Fine. I’ll do it. Don’t even think of trying to wiggle out of this one, though.”

“Well, good luck, Johann!” Fira walked towards the school gates, where she was met by a red sports car. The door swiveled up, not out, and through the open door, he saw a blonde woman wearing a black pinstripe suit in the driver’s seat. She couldn’t be more than thirty or so.

“That’s a nice car.”

“It’s a Porsche 911. The GT1 model.”

“How do you know?”

“Not everyone who builds gunpla only builds gunpla. I have a model of that one. I want to get one when I get enough money, but I only have about a hundred dollars.”

“How’d you get that kind of money?”

“My grandma’s loaded. She sends me a check for Christmas. Anyway, I just have to watch you build your gunpla, right?”

“Oh, right. I guess that’s what she said.”

“Well, come on then. I don’t have all day.”

Johann built in relative silence, a bored looking upperclassman sitting around watching him.

“Can’t you build any faster? I could have done an entire Zaku by now.”

“I’m sorry. This is my first gunpla.”

“And you hang around with that ridiculously strong girl? Fira, was it?”

“She’s just helping me to start battling.”

“Huh. So she’s really not your girlfriend?”

“No! I told you that before!”

“Eh, whatever. She’s not my type anyway. She’s way too bossy.”

Johann felt torn between his desire to stick up for his “friend”, and agreeing with that statement, so he kept quiet. “Can you please hand me that file?”

“Which one?”

“I think the one with the round side and the flat side.”

“Which part of the box is it in?” Joseph searched through the small plastic tool chest, and found a small leather parcel. He opened it up, and pulled out the bastard file. “Huh. I feel like I’ve seen this logo before.”

“Where?”

“I don’t remember. Here’s the file.”

“Thanks.” Johann took the small tool and slipped it into a small crevice, too small for him to use sandpaper. He was almost done; all he had to do now was finish the backpack and the machine gun. He snipped the pieces off the runner, then used the file to remove some of the nubs. Fira had said that a hobby knife worked well, too, but his mom would have a cow if she found him with a sharp knife. He sanded to remove all sign of the sprue, then snapped the parts together. Though the instructions were in Japanese, the pictures were detailed and easy to understand.

“Looks good.” Joseph broke about five minutes of silence, gazing at the mostly finished form of the strange mix of GM and Gundam. “With some panel lining and a topcoat, it’ll be almost perfect.”

“Panel lining?”

“Yeah, that’s when you take a marker or some thin paint and color in the lines on the model. It makes it look a lot more detailed with not that much extra work.”

“Can you show me?”

“Finish the guy first. I’ll look through this and see if there’s a set of markers. I think there is, though. It’s small, but there’s a lot of tools in here.”

The two boys were set on their specific tasks for a while, Johann fitting the last of the backpack together and Joseph searching the box for markers. “Here we go.” He pulled out a set of what looked like pens, but what Johann knew must be the things he was looking for.

“Is that it?”

“Yeah, but finish up.”

“Ah, sorry.” About five minutes later, he snapped the last thruster into place, and the EZ-8 stood tall. It held a beam rifle in its left hand, and a machine gun in its right. On its back was a large pack with thrusters, but Johann knew it was actually a parachute.

“You know, if you get the Gundam Ground Type, you can use its weapons on this guy. That one comes with the backpack that has the artillery cannon, too. But don’t worry about that now. Here, watch this.” Joseph uncapped the .2 mm marker and began to draw it down one of the lines on the leg. It left a small black marking in the middle, which seemed to divide the piece into sections. As the older boy proceeded, Johann realized how much better the model looked.

“Can I try?”

“Here.”

Johann took the marker and tried to draw lines along the indents in the plastic. He slipped out of bounds occasionally, but he was shown that a small dab of rubbing alcohol removed the problem with no negative effects. Afterwards, he took the decal sheet he had ignored for now and put them on as per the instructions. Finally, he put the small model on the table, and took a step back. "It's done."

"That looks pretty good." Joseph picked up the model and inspected it.

"Ah, thank you! I couldn't have done it without you."

Joseph snorted. "Whatever. I just did it so that I could fight that Fira girl. Well, I'm out of here."

"Bye!" The door opened and shut, leaving Johann with a small pile of plastic nubs the same color as the humanoid machine standing tall next to it. *This is...my Gunpla.* He had taken a couple of sprues with shapes on them and transformed them into a fighting machine. It was one of the most beautiful things he had ever seen. *Wait for me, Fira. I'm going to become a build fighter.*

Johann slipped a small wooden box into his backpack, said goodbye to his mom, and began to walk to school. The playground stood empty, the fall leaves drifting across the bright metal of the slide.

The school gates stood open as usual. He wasn't sure what time they actually opened, since he'd never been there early enough for that. He passed through them, and

reached the front door. Joseph and his friends were standing around as usual, but this time, the group wandered over to him. “You bring it?”

Johann reached into his bag and brought out the wooden box. He opened it up, and pulled out a swaddled figure. He unwrapped it, revealing the EZ-8 in all its snapfit glory.

“Good. At least she can’t complain. It really does look pretty good, at least for an unpainted straight build.”

“Straight build?”

“It looks exactly like the box. No custom paint or parts.”

Johann had a thought. “Are all gunpla put together in the same way?”

“What do you mean?”

“Like, do they all have those gray rubber things?”

“Oh, you mean polycaps. Yeah, but they’re not all put together the same way. Stuff from the same series is usually similar, though.”

“So could the EZ-8 and the Gouf go together?”

“Try putting that Feddie trash with a suit of Glorious Zeon and see what happens.”

Johann shrank back.

“I’m kidding. It might work, but it wouldn’t work. Like it wouldn’t look good. Gunpla is freedom, but you still want to do something that doesn’t look stupid. Anyway, where is that girl?”

“I don’t know. She’s usually here by now.” Johann gazed around the schoolyard. Suddenly, he spotted a flash of red--the sports car from the previous day had returned.

“Oh, that must be her.”

The car door swiveled open, and the pinstriped woman got out. However, Fira was nowhere to be seen. She walked towards the door, but stopped in front of Johann. “Are you Johann Thierial?”

“Um, yes?” The woman reached into her purse, clearly made of some kind of high-cost leather, and pulled out a smallish parcel. “Lady Fira asked me to give this to you.”

“Is she coming to school today?”

The woman’s face flickered to an expression of realization. “I see. So that’s why.”

“That’s why what?” The woman started to walk back to the car. “Hey, wait! What’s wrong with Fira?” She turned around.

“Fira Ellias will no longer be attending this school. I presume that anything she wanted to say to you is in that box.”

Johann’s heart sank. *Fira’s not coming to school anymore?* “Why? Is she moving?”

“I’ve delivered the package. That’s all she told me to do.” With a few quick steps, she made it back to the car and drove off.

“Did she just say that Fira’s not coming back?” Joseph stepped forwards. “She makes me go through all that, and then she just *LEAVES*? Come on, what’s in the box?”

Johann looked down and tore the lid open. Sitting on top of another box was a small envelope. It had no address, only labeled as “To Johann”. He opened it up and started reading the fine, careful print on the sheet of light pink stationery inside.

Johann, by the time you read this, I’ll already be on my way to my new school. Turns out one of daddy’s friends owns a school, and they want me to go there. I’m not sure what’s going to happen, but I just wanted you to know, and that I’m not running away because I’m afraid. Here, I’ll prove it to you. I give you the first ever Fira Ellias Battle Coupon. If you ever meet me again, just present this letter, and I’ll be sure to battle you.

Even if it was only a few days, thanks for putting up with me.

Fira

P.S. The box is for you. You can use the stuff in it, but don’t mess it up.

P.P.S. You can keep the toolbox. I doubt I’ll be using it.

He stopped reading. What was this? She had gotten him into gunpla building, then just left without a single battle?

“That’s all she gave us? A box and a IOU? What’s in the box?”

Johann tried to open the second box, the lid of which was unsecured. Inside were two small objects: a GP base and a blue mobile suit.

A GP base is a Build Fighter’s soul. If they lose that, they might as well give up on gunpla.

That was it. The tools, the GP base, the suit; she’d given everything away. For some reason, Fira had chosen to quit fighting.

EPISODE 3: Team OGM

Seven Years Later

A bright pink line traced its way across the laminated shield, scorching but not penetrating. The clawed shield held as the camouflaged mecha raised its machine gun, pulling the trigger as it dodged around the enemy Gaplant. His opponent was a middle schooler, only one year younger than him, but the boy had talent. This battle was running the very real possibility of going over the time limit. *That can't happen. I have to win in order to get enough points.* Tournament rules stated that a victory was worth five points, while a tie worth only three. Unfortunately, due to a miscalculation in a previous battle, he was now down to the wire, with a four point difference between him and the current first-place team. To advance, he had to win absolutely.

The bullets impacted the top part of the Gaplant's backpack, forcing the lanky latino boy to eject it. He raised one of his shields and fired a shot from the integrated beam rifle. This time, the shot scorched his shoulder armor as he dove for cover. *This guy's good. I guess normal tactics won't work if I want to get in range.*

David looked around for the enemy suit. His Gaplant Maximum wasn't transformable, but instead had heavier weapons. If he could get a solid lock, it'd be over in a rain of

missiles. But his high school counterpart was clever, and used ruined metal structures to confuse his sensors with echoes. Suddenly, he saw a shape in the sky, which then expanded into a circle. A parachute! He zoomed in, but the large shape appeared to be floating down by itself. *A decoy!* He quickly scanned his surroundings, but couldn't see the shape of the enemy. *Is he trying to snipe me? No, he has the parachute, not the weapons pack, and he wasn't carrying the artillery cannon earlier.*

Suddenly, red alerts blazed on his console as he was struck by bullets. *Direction is from above?* He looked up in time to see the parachute in tatters as the EZ-8 fired through it, attached by its back clamps to a building.

It wasn't a decoy, it was cover... David moved his orbs in different directions, but the spray of lead had already destroyed the Gaplant's legs. It was a sitting duck as Johann switched to his beam rifle and fired a single shot through the suit's cockpit.

"BATTLE ENDED"

"Who wants the piece with the balloon on it?" Several hands around a plain wooden table shot up as Joseph started to divide the cake into roughly equal pieces. He moved around the table and started handing slices out, and despite his previous statement, he handed the slice with the candy topper to Johann.

"Thanks."

“No problem, Jo. We wouldn’t have had enough points without your win in the final round. Now we’re going to the national competition!”

“That’s right, we’re proud of you.” A short, slightly chubby brunette sat next to Johann, leaning into him slightly. She tousled his hair.

“Mia, cut that out!”, protested the much taller boy, but he didn’t do anything to stop her.

“She’s right, though. I seriously didn’t think we’d come back after that loss in the third round. Missiles are so cheap.” The tall, blond boy finished serving and popped open a soda.

Johann raised his hand as another two cans came hurtling in his direction. He and the girl next to him both caught one. “Hey, man, that’s dangerous.”

“Don’t give me that. I know how good your reaction time is.”

Johann rolled his eyes, but the captain was right. there wasn’t really a case where he wouldn’t have caught the can, other than his hands being full. “How about one for Leah?”

A short girl with wavy silver hair was sitting near the wall, not at the table. A small figure rested in her hand; a navy blue and dark grey GM with a compact beam sniper rifle and a strange backpack. She perked up as she heard her name. “One of what?”

Joseph rolled his eyes. “Do you want a Coke?”

“Oh, yeah, sure. Thanks.” She got up, carefully placing the model back into a small box next to her and took the red can from Joseph. He made no attempt to throw it.

“What’s the Ranger look like?” Mia leaned forwards, her eyes tracing over the gunpla in the box.

Leah finished her sip and put the can down, then picked up the plastic figure. “Well, it’s mostly in good shape. I think the right arm is moving a little loosely; maybe an abraded polycap.”

“Yeah, I was about to ask you. Is it gonna be hard?”

“Nah. It’s an external joint, no more than a half hour to replace and reseal. These new High Grades are pretty modular.”

“Yeah, I remember the old Endless Waltz HGs.” Everyone at the table shuddered at Johann’s interruption.

“Oh god. They were so bad. I’d barely use them for parts.”

“Yeah, but they’re cheap because of that.”

“Good thing they released the RG line for them,” Johann chimed in.

“True.” Leah went back to inspecting the arm, tugging gently to release it from its socket, then using a magnifying glass to inspect it. “Oh, there it is. There’s a tiny nub on the peg that hooks the arm on. It’s scratching away the material.”

“Oh, geez. Can you--”

“Who the hell do you think I am. Johann, pass me my toolkit.” Johann reached towards an army surplus backpack near the far wall. He pulled out a tackle box, but instead of lures, weights, and bobbers, the clear compartments on top were verniers, polycaps, and various other small parts. He passed over the box, which Leah opened, removing a small file. She ran it over the peg, then used a worn piece of sandpaper to buff out any scratches. “I’ll have to take this home to replace the polycap. Is that okay?”

“Oh, that’s fine. You’re the mechanic.” Mia waved her hand dismissively.

“Next time, don’t let it get this bad. I like doing this, so it’s not a problem. I’d rather spend a few hours working than watch you lose because of shoddy construction.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“As long as you understand.”

After the party, Johann said his goodbyes, then left. *It’s only going to be harder from now on.* The battles at the National Tournament were fought at Model Damage A, so Leah would be working overtime, and everyone would have to pitch in between matches. His best option to fight was to avoid combat wherever possible. *Maybe it’s time. I’ve always wanted to mod this thing a bit more.*

The sun had just dipped below the horizon, and streetlights were now flickering on. *I can't believe it's almost nine o'clock. It gets dark so late in the summer.* Though there was the occasional mosquito, the walk home was fairly uneventful. The streets were laid out in a grid pattern, so it was nearly impossible to get lost.

He turned the corner, and reached 351 Pinebrook Lane, where stood a plain brick two-story house. Strangely, neither a pine tree or a brook were present. *I guess you could count the ditch. Oh well. It's not that important.* He walked through the front door. A tall, plump brunette was standing there when he opened the door.

"Congratulations, Johann!" She gave him a big hug, then pulled back. "Your dad was watching the whole thing on the internet. I guess this means you'll be going to the national tournament?"

"Yeah, that's the plan. I'll have to upgrade my gunpla."

"I'm sure you'll do fine. Your models are always so cute!"

"Mom!"

"I'm kidding."

"Well, I'm going to take a shower, then go to bed. Love you."

"I love you, too."

Well, the shield seems intact. I'm going to miss Damage Level B. Probably need to stock up on replacement parts, too. Do I have putty? He opened up his drawer, but it only opened half an inch. He reached inside and found a pair of nippers that was jamming the mechanism. He removed them and opened up the container, digging through to retrieve the small tube. *Nearly empty. I'll have to put that on the list. Weathering isn't that important, so I can do without the markers.*

He yawned as he started to write everything down, going through his list of needed tools and parts. *Pin vise, check. X-acto and extra blades, check. Files, check. 1500 and 2000 grit sandpaper, check. I wonder if I'll need different grits? Maybe I'll ask Leah. Oh well. I'll worry about that tomorrow.*

Elliwod High School was a fairly new building, having been built adjoining the old elementary school in response to increased population in the surrounding community. Elliwod had been growing in recent years, as a suburb of the nearby influx to the county of the same name. *Probably something to do with Bandai's manufacturing plant. Well, at least it means we get the direct outlet.* There was a store near the campus of the plant that sold gunpla, even stuff like P-Bandai, for fairly good prices, sometimes as much as 25% off retail.

The front of the building was mostly red brick, with white concrete creating accents in certain places. A stonehenge-like structure made from pillars and concrete stood

outside the main entrance, with the school's seal, two crossed rapiers behind a steel buckler, carved into the ground.

"Johann!" A bubbly voice echoed from behind him, and he turned to meet the flying hug coming in towards him.

"You're up early, Mia." Johann accepted the hug, smiling. The brunette's small nose twitched as she tried to pout, but failed miserably.

"I slept in once! Once!"

"More like once a week!"

"Johann, you idiot. Don't you know not to argue with a woman?"

"Oh, how could I have forgotten? I must make amends at once."

"Well..." She pretended to think, then thrust her face inches away from Johann's.

"Maybe you can take me to Bandai Source after school. I need another couple scout drones."

"Sure. I need to pick up a builder's pack anyway."

"Well, see you after class then. I don't have student council duties, either."

"Then I'll get you at your classroom."

"Sure. See you then!" Mia ran off, waving at Johann as she almost ran into several people.

She really needs to stop being so... quick? Belligerent? Energetic? Oh well. Maybe I'll ask Mrs. Wade.

With that thought, Johann entered the building, his first period class awaiting.

"You know, I'm really glad I live here." Mia kept close to Johann as he browsed the stacks of Gunpla boxes. Bandai Source kept its stock recent, and it had a booming online trade.

"I need to go over to the parts section."

"Sure. I'll be over here." She went back to thumbing through boxes. Johann made his way through the smaller Non-Gundam Plamo section, which featured stuff like Macross and Valvrave. Past that was a display case for the newest Real Grade model, the Ground Gundam. In addition to the parachute pack, the kit came with the weapons pack, the artillery cannon, and the missile launcher. It was possible to replicate the combat configurations of any of the 08th team. *I want that so bad. Too bad I don't have the time to deal with it right now.*

On the far side of the building was the section he sought: row after row of small boxes. System Weapons, Custom Packs, Builder's Parts--everything you could need to make your gunpla whatever you wanted it to be.

There were a few other people looking through the boxes, and he surveyed the selection. *Armor Packs? No, the EZ-X has enough already. What I need is a long gun of some kind. I wonder if they have--huh?*

Sitting next to a set of traditional Japanese weapons was a backpack which had several thrusters on the back.

This is perfect! It looks like it'd be easy to adapt to my current suit, as well. Is there anything else I need? He looked around, found the items on his list, including a spare EZ-8 kit, and grabbed two of the packs. His total was around forty dollars, but he paid it willingly. Mia walked up behind him as he finished checking out, her basket full of boxes and packages.

"Hey, Johann. You found what you were looking for?"

"Yeah, I think so. You?" He saw another GM Sniper, but also an SD kit, as well as a few pots of navy blue and dark gray.

"Yeah, I've got the parts for another couple Nadesicos."

"Awesome. I found this thing." He held up one of the Builder's Packs.

"Huh. I guess that means no weapon pack for you?"

"At least not one where everything isn't available straight away. I'm not sure what to do with the current backpack."

"I'm sure you'll figure something out. I'm gonna go home and start building."

“We’re going the same direction. I’ll wait for you.”

Mia giggled. “Well, aren’t we gallant?”

Adopting a theatrical voice, Johann made a dramatic bow. “What kind of man would I be if I didn’t escort a young lady home?”

“And what if that young lady can take care of herself?”

“Then you can escort me. Ready?”

Mia finished paying and grabbed her bag. “Ready.”

“Hey, Johann, this actually looks pretty good.”

“I thought it would be a nice addition. It’s going to be super fast now.”

The Elliwood High Gunpla Battle Clubroom was in the west wing of the building. The built-in shelves had been converted to storage for models and tools, and one had been lined with white paper and served as a lightbox. In the middle of the room was a plain wooden table, covered in plastic dust and drops of paint. A bright light illuminated the room well, though the large windows provided enough light that it was usually unnecessary to have it on. At the table, Leah was looking over the freshly upgraded EZ-X.

In addition to the normal rifle and machine gun, the suit’s shield proudly displayed the emblem of Team OGM, a big number 79 in black stencil. The axe now mounted on the

right gauntlet was painted tan in order to maintain the Desert Camo color scheme. The new backpack added several thrusters, including lateral and reverse boosters. The only notable addition to the suit itself was the the visor that covered the eyes, making it look like the EZ-8 was wearing sunglasses.

"Yeah, I can see this working. I'll do some modifications to the Base Command to accommodate your new parts."

"Thanks. Sorry about making you do this so soon before the tournament."

"It's nothing. I don't think Joseph will change much; the Titan is already pretty close to optimized, but Mia flits from idea to idea so fast, it'd be hard to keep up."

"She told me yesterday she's making a spare Nadesico or two."

"Good, so she is preparing. I was worried I'd have to do an all-nighter. I don't get enough sleep as it is."

"Well, I'll leave you alone for now. I have to pack for the trip."

"Oh, Johann!" Leah reached into her army-surplus backpack and pulled out a couple of printed pages. "Here's the official tournament rules. Besides the normal changes from state level, there's also a few things that might play into our strategy."

Johann took the packet and started looking it over. "Huh. I knew we were going to a 3v3 format, but I didn't know you could switch team members. I guess that's why they have the 4-member limit per team, so you can have 3 and an alternate."

"Yeah, but most of the time, the alternate is just a mechanic. They don't specialize in combat."

"Well, to be fair, you don't either."

"Specialize? No. Capable? Yes."

"Well, I'll see you later, whatever we do. Remember, gate seven."

"Got it. See you there!"

Johann saluted. "Yes, Ma'am!"

EPISODE 4: The National Tournament

The Mississippi sun was brutal near the Medgar-Evers International Airport. The heat rippled off the tarmac, and would likely burn anyone who touched the runway.

"Johaaaannn!" Mia slammed into Johann like a linebacker, her short stature being the only thing preventing him from falling down. She was wearing a brown T-shirt that said "Those who live by the sword are often shot by those who don't", with a picture of a medieval knight with an arrow sticking out of his helmet.

"Mia! You're gonna break something!"

"Sorry, Johann." She didn't seem at all sorry. "You're ready?"

"Wouldn't be here if I wasn't."

"Well, now we just have to wait for Joseph." Leah's luggage, an army tote, contrasted heavily with the light blue and white floral print sundress she was wearing.

"Oh, hey, Leah. I called him earlier, and he said he'd be here before we had to leave, but he hadn't left the house yet."

"Well, we should at least get our stuff on the plane. Joseph will arrive sooner or later."

Joseph had arrived only half an hour later, after the three other members had already checked in. Fortunately, he only had a carry-on, so the process was much quicker.

The plane left after only a fifteen minute delay, and the flight to John Wayne was fairly uneventful.

Due to the explosion of Gunpla's popularity in America, a manufacturing plant had been set up in Anaheim, only 14 miles from the airport. Though the Bandai America HQ was still in Cypress, the Holy Grail of American Gunpla could be said to reside in this city. Of course, the name's similarity to the famous mobile suit manufacturer had no small part in deciding the location.

But the reason high and middle schoolers were gathering here was standing tall in the middle of a large park, with a massive fountain in front.

"That's it! We're here!" Like a massive crystal dome, it stood tall above the ground, with people of all ages walking around in the area. Workers were performing last minute maintenance on the grounds, setting up food stands and shops. He saw a couple news stations setting up vans, the media section looking like a forest of metal trees. This was the Bandai-Trustmark Anaheim Gunpla Battle Stadium, the location of the 18-And-Under Gunpla Battle National Championships.

"Hey, Johann, Leah, get over here." Joseph took his phone out of his pocket. "Let's get a photo."

"That's a great idea! I guess you can have them occasionally." Mia grabbed Johann and Leah, and pushed them both towards Joseph, crushing poor Leah between the two boys.

"Ouch! Guys, give me some room!" She managed to get loose, and everyone smiled as Joseph took the photo.

"Let me see!"

The picture on the screen showed Johann and Joseph colliding into each other as Leah wriggled free, and Mia clinging to Johann's arm as she pushed into frame. "Let's take another one." Joseph moved to delete the photo. "No, don't. This is fine." Mia took the phone from Joseph's hand and pressed a few buttons. Suddenly, Johann's phone vibrated in his pocket, and he heard beeps from Leah and Mia.

"Well, if you're satisfied." Joseph took his phone back and slipped it into his bag. "Anyway, let's get inside the stadium and register."

The inside of the dome was brightly lit by the shining California sun, and the outer rim of the building seemed to be a massive hallway. Dozens of people were already here, dressed in various outfits. Some wore cosplay from various series--Johann recognized several Zeon uniforms, but also a few ZAFT and Federation soldiers, and there was even someone wearing a beautiful Strike Gundam costume, complete with glowing eyes. Several of the cosplayers were lining up to take photos with him/her.

Stands populated the hallway, making it look like a large, circular convention. Vendors were selling Gunpla, tools, toys, keychains, anything and everything Gundam. *Well, at least I won't have to go far to find parts.*

"Johann! Over here!" Joseph motioned for everyone to come over. Johann apologized to the people he pushed out of the way, and they reached the sign in table. A woman wearing a Yajima Trading uniform took their application and entered some data into their computer.

"All right, we've got you in the system. Team OGM, is it?"

"That's right."

The woman passed them each a small plastic bag with the Yajima Trading logo on it, as well as nametags and lanyards. "This card contains your meal pass and room key for the hotel. It'll also serve as your identification as a member of your team. Be careful not to lose it."

Johann nodded, as did his comrades. They took the badges and put them on.

"The elimination round begins at 10 AM tomorrow, so be there or you'll be disqualified. Have fun until then." As the three of them walked off, Leah nodded her head over at a group of approaching teens, all of whom wore matching uniforms: wine red trench coats with silver trim. On the collar, a silver beast roared, a strange mix of a dragon and a lion.

Leah's voice grew hushed. "Nergal Academy. They represent Virginia, and never place below third. The only way to get in is to defeat one of the senior students."

"Why are we whispering?" Joseph had a curious look on his face.

"Because you have to whisper when the main villains enter."

"Main villains? Seriously, we're not in an anime." Johann rolled his eyes.

"I'm kidding. Just watch."

Leah walked slowly by the the red-clad team members, then suddenly stopped in front of the tallest member of the group, a blond boy with a stoic expression. He was at least a foot higher than she was.

"So, what do you think you're doing here?" Leah asked in a manner that could only be called inflammatory.

"Well, I was in the area and I thought I'd stop by and pick up the trophy."

"You're talking a lot of shit, but can you back it up?"

"Well, I have a secret weapon that will completely destroy you. So devastating that nobody dares to use it."

Leah smiled smugly. "And that would be?"

The taller boy began to smile himself, but in a cruel, twisted way. In a deep, menacing voice, he growled, "Tickling."

Then he reached out and started to tickle her neck. Leah began to giggle, and as she started to laugh, the boy swept Leah up in his arms and twirled her around. "It's so great to see you, Leah!"

Johann walked up with a puzzled look on his face. "You know him?"

As the older boy put her down, Leah seemed to remember her circumstances. "Oh, right. Michael, meet Johann, Joseph, and Mia. Guys, this is Michael Sandon. He's the captain of Team Shadow Force."

"Pleased to meet you." Michael, now smiling broadly, shook the confused hands of everyone on Team OGM.

"He's also the best little nephew a girl could ask for!"

"Huh? Nephew?"

Michael turned slightly crimson. "Leah!"

"Yeah, it's a bit odd. Remember, I'm adopted. My parents were over fifty when they took me in, and their only other child, my older brother, already had a family. Michael is their son. He's my brother's kid, so he's my nephew."

"Huh. Sounds complicated."

"It kinda is, so consider me her older cousin. Everyone else does." Michael stepped back. "This is my team."

"Margaret, charmed." A girl with bright gold curls and a sunny smile that contrasted heavily with her dark attire bounced forwards.

"You can call me Samuel." A lanky boy with dark, wavy hair adjusted his glasses.

"His name is Sammy. He just hates it." whispered Michael.

"I heard that!"

Michael ignored him. "And this is our newest member, who just made the team this year. Fira?"

Wait, what? Johann stood up straight. Walking out from behind Michael was a girl about his height, with raven-black hair and a face with slight middle-eastern features.

It was her.

The person who had introduced him to gunpla, then vanished without a trace, leaving behind only a tool kit and a GP base.

After nearly eight years of absence, Fira Ellias had returned.