
Episode 2: A Changing World

After standing there in shock, someone who looked like a security guard came up to her and told her to follow him. She obliged, more out of shock than anything else, though she saw the large stun rifle he held. *Is Aunt Emily somehow involved in this? She can't be ignorant of this; she told me to go here and there's a tunnel from the house to here.*

As her thoughts raced, she found herself in front of an elevator. The guard opened it up, motioning for her to step inside. She walked nervously inside as the doors closed and the car started to rise. *Is this where Aunt Emily is? Is she going to explain what's going on?*

The door slid open, and she could see a security guard standing next to a door. He looked slightly surprised at the teen girl in jeans and a t-shirt with messy hair that was attempting to enter, but a voice over a hidden intercom said, "Let her in, she's with me." It was Emily's voice, and all hopes of a coincidence were suddenly dashed.

With a heavy heart, she walked through the door the guard held open for her. *He's got a stun rifle as well...everyone here seems to be ready for battle.*

The room she walked into was semicircular, and one wall seemed to be a massive television screen, displaying video footage of what looked like police forces firing the yellow beams of stun rays, as well as blurry shots of other people firing what looked like missiles and returning fire with--

Are those machine guns? How? Where do you even get this kind of thing? The missiles too!
There's no company on Earth that makes them!

Other than the harrowing imagery, it was an office nearly identical to the one Aunt Emily had in her own house, including the old woman herself, who now wore what looked like a military uniform, which was dark and light grey, with gold buttons on the lapels and light blue trim. Lyra suddenly realized that it, along with most of the color scheme of the workers and guards, were imitating the color scheme of the mecha in the bay outside.

Her elderly relative had her back turned to her as she entered, but quickly swiveled around in her chair. A sullen look appeared on the old woman's face. "Are you safe? Did you get hurt?"

"Ah, no. Aunt Sharon got me to come down here before anything bad happened."

"Good." She seemed a tad less stressed now, but still very worried. Suddenly, a large shock echoed through the complex. Emily grimaced. "They're trying to break in."

"Wait, terrorists?"

"It seems like it. They've probably found this location."

"Why is this here?"

"Why is what here?"

Something inside Lyra snapped. "Why is a mobile suit inside a hangar with a tunnel directly to our house? In a residential area, with thousands of people around? No, scratch that, Why the fuck does this thing exist? Why is there any kind of combat robot in existence?"

Emily was shocked at the sudden burst of profanity. “Well...I suppose I should start from the beginning.” She slowly stood up and walked over to the screen, lifting her hand as a keyboard appeared. She cleared the screen, and then pulled up a [symbol](#). “This is the headquarters for the Gemini Defense Force. The organization was founded to protect the orbital elevators and orbital stations by armed terrorists and other individuals. Several years ago, SHARON determined that since there were several groups that didn’t support the dissolution of the world’s political powers, and submitted her findings to the Supervisor Council, who decided it was necessary to create a way to defend ourselves.” She pressed a button and suddenly, the images fell away, the holographic screens having been covering a window into the bay. The large mobile suit was at about chest height from their current elevation. “Their solution is what you see outside: Defense Mecha Geminar Platinum. The resources of the Brighton Foundation were needed, and the AIs wanted it constructed in a place where they could supervise it. Thus, this secret underground base.”

“Defense Mecha--look, whatever your ‘motives’ were, you guys built a mobile suit, a *weapon*. I can’t believe I have to stress that point. You brought something like this into the world, and there’s no excuse for that.”

Emily gripped the back of her chair, causing her knuckles to go white. “You’re right. This machine not ought exist, but it does, and it’s needed, right now. I hoped that you’d never find this place, but I had no other option when they attacked the house.”

“Why? Because you’re ashamed of it?”

“Partially that. It feels like responding to their force with force of our own means that we’ve given some of our moral high ground.” She looked up, her face determined. “However, that’s not the

main reason. The real reason is because I'm afraid that you're our best option to pilot the machine."

"Wait, what? When was that even proposed? I never said anything like that. Why would I want to get inside that robot?"

"Because right now, we have no pilot who's compatible. The machine is operational; it can fight. But without a pilot, we're still nowhere close to fielding it."

"Why? Can't you train someone to fight inside it? Or use an AI like Aunt Sharon?"

"The main problem is how the controls for the Geminar Platinum work. The pilot inside is human, but there's also an AI who has access to the controls. Without cooperating, the pilot's can't make the machine move. And the AI we chose has a certain personality aspect that makes finding suitable pilots difficult."

"What is that?"

"She's a pacifist."

Lyra stopped. "A pacifist?"

"She doesn't want to fight or kill. To her, human life is the most sacred ideal, and must be preserved at all costs." She then turned to the window, pressing her long, wrinkled fingers on the glass. "Which is why we've never found someone who's able to bridge that contradiction. To be able to fight while hating it, who'll never decide that fighting is fun or correct, who will never willingly take a life. In other words, an idealist, a person who knows about the dark parts of the world while simultaneously retaining the belief that moral decisions can be black and white, instead of varying shades of grey."

“Isn’t that just naivete?”

“You can call it that. But what we can guarantee is that the Geminar Platinum cannot move while someone who wishes to use it to hurt others sits in the cockpit.”

“And yet it’s a combat machine.”

“And yet it’s a combat machine. I believe you see the inherent contradictions this machine provides. It fights while hating it, kills while holding life above all else. The only people we’ve found who were capable of piloting the machine quit after facing the reality of what they were being asked to do, and anyone who makes light of the task is incompatible with the AI. Geminar Platinum has never moved off of that slab under its own power.”

So the pilot has to be reluctant to do the job in the first place. Well, that certainly doesn’t disqualify me. But why do it if you don’t want to? She asked as much.

“Because if you don’t, more people die. The terrorists are getting bolder and bolder. If they achieve their goal of destroying the orbital elevators, the ones who back them will claim that it’s the fault of the AIs for not preventing it. They’ll then call for the removal of the AIs from power. But aside from all that, if the elevators fall, millions of people will die. Removing a spoke from the wheel that is the orbital stations could cause sections to break off, sending them crashing into each other or simply flying into the void. And with how densely populated some of the rings are...”

Lyra could imagine the catastrophe, but didn’t want to. “So let me get this straight. You want me to--”

“No, I want you to go home, or at least to stay here until we can get you somewhere safe.”

“Then why even bring it up?”

“Because I know that’s not an option anymore. Before you arrived, I received word of several work machines that had been armored and outfitted with weaponry that were inbound, with an estimated time of arrival of about ten minutes from now. Effectively, the terrorists now have mobile suits of their own.”

“Who’s providing them with this? How do you make weapons like this without anyone noticing?”
Lyra stopped as she realized the irony of her statement.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have anything resembling an army anymore, and this has escalated beyond what mere police officers and stun guns can handle. We need to deploy Geminar Platinum, or the entire area will be destroyed in their search for this bunker.”

Suddenly, Lyra had a horrifying vision of her peaceful home in flames, with Zakus or Grazes or whatever walking through it. *So this is what it feels like to be in Gundam...* “So if it does turn out that I’m compatible, will I be able to stop them?”

“Of course. Geminar is the most advanced machine on the planet. You can’t lose.”

“So if I fight, I can win, but if I want to fight, I can’t. Who designed this?”

“SHARON and the Supervisory Council. They know full well the dangers of letting someone who wants to fight inside a mobile suit near a populated area, and thus want someone who values human life above even victory to pilot it.”

A contradictory existence, but right now, a necessary one. She had made her choice. *If I don’t fight, even more will die. I’ll disable the enemy mobile suits and then return.* “Aunt Emily. I don’t want to, but I’ll do it.”

She winced, but nodded. "I was afraid of that. You have far too much of your father in you. I suppose there's no choice. I'll approve you as a temporary pilot for Geminar."

Why are pilot suits always skin tight? Lyra slid her arms through the silver jumpsuit, accented with the normal grey and blue. After pulling her limbs through, she pressed a button on the wrist, and the back closed up automatically, making her feel odd, as if she were being squeezed. The material was temperature and humidity regulated, and actually felt really good, but still unnatural. She put on the gloves and stepped into the boots, both of which automatically locked on and formed an airtight seal with the pilot suit. Finally, she slipped on the helmet, which did the same. As it locked, Lyra realized that she was entirely locked off from the outside world. She could be teleported to space right now and probably be fine until the air ran out. The thought made her shiver.

"You ready?" A voice echoed from outside the changing room.

"Ah, yes!" She ran to the door and opened it, and one of the facility's guards sized her up, checking whether or not she had correctly put on the suit. He nodded and gestured for her to walk with him.

He said nothing as she reached the foot of the massive machine. This close, it was even more obvious how large it was. She wouldn't have been surprised if it exceeded twenty meters to its head. However, she noticed something was different about the suit--two one-handed swords, edged with some kind of clear blue material that glowed softly, were attached to the suit's hips, one on each side. *Are these the suit's armaments?* She was guided over to a small lift, which carried her up to a catwalk that led up to the suit's cockpit. A tall, dark-haired woman in a lab coat stood nearby, who walked up to Lyra and offered her hand.

“I’m Vanessa Quinn, the head of research and development for the GDF. I doubt we’ll be working together for long, but, for now...” She held out her hand, which Lyra took. “The controls for Geminar are fairly simple. In fact, we borrowed them from Gunpla Battle, mainly because the layout is familiar to most people nowadays, and is easy to learn.”

“All right. So what do you need me to do?”

“For right now, just come with me, and we’ll see if ARIA is willing to help”

“Aria?”

“The Absolute Restriction Intelligent Arbiter, or ARIA for short. She seems to prefer that, so call her that if you would.”

“I’ll do that.”

Vanessa leaned in and whispered conspiratorially. “If you ask me, the name is kinda dumb. They just liked the acronym.” She slapped Lyra on the back. “Well, we’ve got no time to lose!”

The cockpit of the suit was a dark maw. There were a few running lights, but nothing enough to illuminate the interior. Lyra climbed through the opening, sitting down into the seat inside. *No seatbelt or harness?* However, as she adjusted her position, four hard knobs on the back of her suit locked into four identical sockets on the chair, holding her in place.

“I’m closing the hatch. If she doesn’t accept you, press this button to open it.” Vanessa pointed towards a large blue one to the left of the opening. “Good luck.” She pressed a button on the outside and a sheet of what looked like smooth metal slid over the cockpit entrance, and she could hear the armored exterior locking her safely inside the mobile suit.

She looked around, but the AI mentioned didn't seem to appear. "Um, Miss Aria? Are you here?"

Suddenly, a small control panel rose up from between her legs, locking into place. On a small circle, a glowing figure of a [girl](#) appeared. "Hello, nice to meet you!" she said enthusiastically.

"Um, hello. You're Aria, I assume?"

"That's right! I'm the artificial intelligence in charge of this mobile defense weapon."

"I heard you don't like to fight."

"Well, nobody wants to. That's why the Supervisors made it so that nobody has to fight."

"But some people still want to."

"I know, and it's sad. It's why this thing exists, even though I don't want it to."

"Seems like we feel the same way. I don't want to pilot this thing either."

"If you don't want to pilot it, why do it?"

"Because if I don't, even more people will die. Standing around and letting the terrorists do as they please won't bring us peace. Fighting for peace is necessary."

"But if you fight, you're certain to kill someone."

"If I kill someone, it's going to hurt. I don't want to kill. But if I stand by and do nothing, then the ones who will die will be the people who have nothing to do with this." She sat silently for a second. "I think I understand why this machine exists. It's so that the people who truly fight for peace can survive long enough to do it, so that we can get closer to a world in which weapons

like this aren't needed. But right now, they are." She bowed her head. "So please, Miss Aria, give me your power!"

"Raise your head. You've said nothing to be ashamed of." She looked up, and Aria was smiling. "I've thought about why this machine exists for years now, and you've just given me the answers I came up with. If you're honest in your determination, I believe that we can use the Geminar as a tool for saving lives."

Suddenly, the cockpit lit up, showing a 360 degree view of the outside, displayed on the inside of the spherical walls. The seat was suspended in the middle, with a pair of spheres that floated in the air next to it. She grabbed onto one with each hand, and several menus popped up. She moved her arms to ARIA's instructions, until the suit had been recalibrated for her use. After about a minute, all the boxes had closed.

"I'll tell them we're ready." ARIA disappeared from the console, and she saw the catwalks moving out of the way. Vanessa gave her a cocky salute that Lyra felt compelled to return, though she knew the older woman couldn't see her. The slab underneath her began to rise, cords explosively detaching from the machine as they reached the end of their length. Before the head rose into the roof of the hangar, she looked over at the bay window where Aunt Emily's office was. The elderly, kind-natured woman was standing perfectly still, her arms crossed. Then, her vision was reduced to a few meters in front of her as the suit went into a vertical shaft, lined with steel plating and industrial lights.

After a few seconds, a door slid open above her, and the lift sped up. The Geminar Platinum burst through a grassy hill, the shock of stopping so quickly knocking the mobile suit's chin upwards. Lyra surveyed the chaos. It was still the middle of the night, but the sky was crimson as the battle waged. She seemed to be on a peninsula, and she recognized the area as being a

rarely used park outside the city limits. A young couple sitting in a bench nearby ran off screaming as a 20 meter glowing robot rose from the ground.

ARIA appeared on the console again, her petite form magnified by her inches-tall stature. "The enemy mobile suits should be arriving within a few minutes. They'll likely advance on this position; destroying this machine is most probably their objective. Be on your guard."

"Thanks."

"For now, try to move. I know you've played Gunpla Battle, the controls are similar."

"I've heard." She pressed her foot down on one of the floor pedals, and the right foot lifted up. She released it slowly, and it moved back down. She tried the other foot, then moved forwards a step by pushing the pedal forwards as she depressed it. The lurching motion surprised her, and she almost lost her balance. *Gunpla Battle doesn't prepare you for this kind of feedback. Even the ones with realistic motion can't simulate inertia.* However, she quickly got the hang of walking.

Moving the arms was much easier, and more what she was used to. She moved her fingers in the slots, and tabbed through all the weapon menus, most of them blank. The only ones intact were "Gemini Pulse", "Gemini Shield", "Gemini Beam", "Gemini Blade" and--

"Why is everything 'Gemini'?"

"I believe it had something to do with the name of the project that developed this mobile suit, as well as most of the technology involved. Unfortunately, I can't tell you much since you don't officially have a very high clearance within the GDF right now."

“Oh well. As long as they work, it doesn’t matter what they’re called.” She scanned the horizon, the sensors in the suit tracking her vision and displaying information on what she was currently looking at. “Could you put the estimated arrival location of the enemy MS on the map?”

“Sure. They’re right...here.” She gestured towards a red area on a simplified map of the town. A cone spread out from their current location, which was over the water, approaching the town.

“Let’s go, then.”

“Lead the way, Miss Lyra.”

The strike leader wiped his forehead. “They should have installed better cooling along with the added armor. The cockpit is too damn hot.”

“You’re not lying. So what’s the mission?”

“We’re supposed to help find a robot they’ve been developing and destroy it.”

“A robot? Really? So the council has started making mobile suits?”

“I suppose so.” The burly man flipped the comms on the dingy control panel. “Hey, kid, how are you holding up?”

The voice that returned was flat and even. “I’m fine.”

“All right. If you piss yourself, don’t blame me.”

“It won’t be a problem. I’ll do the mission.”

“Well, alright, then.”

A signal came over on his console, indicating that his second in command wanted to talk to him without the third member hearing. He changed the frequency settings. "What is it?"

"Who the hell is that kid? Why is he being chosen to pilot a mobile suit?"

"Well, I'm not sure, but the orders came down from higher than I know. Apparently, he's some kind of ace."

"Really? Him?"

"Look, I just said I didn't know. Ask them yourself when we get back." A beep went off on his console, and he returned to the general comms. "Look alive, people! We're approaching the target."

"Uh, commander, isn't the enemy suit supposed to be under development?"

"Yeah, that's what they told us."

"I think they got the intel wrong. It's waiting for us."

The strike leader zoomed in on the large machine standing stoically on the hilltop. Its burning blue eyes flashed once, as if in confirmation, then started to run at them.

ARIA's voice came over her comms loud and clear. "We're detecting three enemy suits, all modified workers. The cockpit is located near the top, towards the front."

"Got it."

The enemy suits were short and stumpy, with only basic improvements to what was at its core a construction mech. They had no head, only a small slit in the chest to indicate a cockpit. They each had a large machine gun attached to their left arms, and had a gripping claw on the other. These impromptu MS were only just humanoid enough not to be called a discount mobile armor. The leader called out, "Open fire on the enemy target!" and pulled the trigger of his gun.

"Lyra! The shields!"

"Got it!" The instant the enemy lifted its gun, Lyra flicked the menu open, selecting "Gemini Shield". Geminar lifted its arms and crossed them over its chest, the two clear domes clearly visible. They lit up, glowing with an unnatural hue of blue, and the bullets that lanced towards the suit flattened themselves on the air, the ripple they left the only indication that anything had been fired at the suit in the first place.

"Now make sure to miss the cockpit!"

Lyra switched to "Gemini Blade". The suit's arms uncrossed, then reached to its waist and drew the twin blades, each of which began to glow even more, as if the blue material around the edge was some kind of beam. She started to run, and leapt into the air at the lead suit, swinging the blades easily.

The glowing edge sheared through the metal, neatly cutting the bottom half of the robot off at the hip joint. The now legless machine struggled to right itself as its thrusters weakly fired, not doing much to stop its motion.

Quickly, Lyra sheathed one of the swords and flew after the falling machine, grabbing its arm. She lowered it onto a hill, careful not to tear the suit's arm off, until she got to the ground, at

which point, she used the sword to dismember the robot, leaving it for the police to pick up.

The second in command was aghast. *That weapon is incredible. Our informant wasn't lying when he said that the Supervisors had technology that far outstripped anything available to the public. There's no way we can win against that thing.* "Kid, the thing's too strong. We've failed the mission, let's cut our losses."

"Are you telling me to run?"

"Yes, now come on." The lieutenant turned around and flew back the way he had come.

However, the boy didn't follow. "Hey, what are you waiting for! Come on while it's preoccupied!"

"I'm not going back. I'm going to defeat it."

"Are you fucking insane?"

"This is our mission. Failure is not an option."

Tch. Have it your way. He flipped on the radio. "Mission has been failed. Returning to base. One to pick up."

Suddenly, his body was engulfed in flames as a small bomb went off in the cockpit. He screamed for a second, then the machine fell beneath the waves.

The boy in the third suit ran his fingers through his hair. He looked only about sixteen or seventeen, but was incredibly well cut for his age, though his height could leave something to be desired. His dark hair glistened with sweat, but that wasn't enough to keep it from sticking out in random directions, though the headset he wore did act as sort of a hairband. *Idiot. You know what happens to traitors, and running from battle is treason.* He raised his machine gun

and pointed it at the enemy machine, the glowing lines that covered its body making it an easy target.

A bolt of pain shot through Lyra's head, and she felt...a scream? She winced for a second, then ARIA's voice cut into her thoughts.

"Lyra! Detecting massive heat signatures from the cockpit of the second target. It seems that the pilot has self destructed."

"Shit!" She would have slammed her fist on the console if there was one. "And the third?"

"It appears to be readying an attack. The shields should be able to deflect it."

"This is kinda inconvenient. Having to switch weapons just to block."

"Well, there are voice commands that can be used in tandem with the manual controls. In fact, now that I think about it, it's probably why everything is named 'Gemini'; so that you don't accidentally fire a weapon while talking."

"All right! Gemini Shield!"

As the words left her lips, the Geminar again braced its arms and activated the bullet blocking barrier, which again rendered the barrage ineffective.

If bullets won't work, maybe close combat? The young pilot charged at the enemy suit, which was nearly half again his size. *No matter what, I'll execute the mission.*

"It's coming straight at us!" Lyra barely had time to take a step before the smaller machine

barreled into her. If she hadn't been attached by her suit to the chair, she'd have been thrown into the wall. She stepped on the pedals, fired her rear thrusters, and managed to keep herself upright, but the construction mech withdrew its fist again.

"No you don't!" Lyra reached her arm out and grabbed onto the descending limb.

"Now! Use Gemini Pulse!"

"Gemini Pulse!"

A stone set into the palm of the machine's hand began to glow, and after charging for half a second, it fired, sending a shockwave of energy into the arm. It broke in half immediately, gears and pistons raining down.

Freed from the enemy's grip, the worker suit swung its remaining arm, the machine gun still welded to the hand.

"Now use Gemini Beam!"

"Gemini Beam!"

The stone in the palm suddenly released a thin beam that sliced through the descending limb, causing it to keep going in its last direction. The beam dissipated after a short period, disintegrating into blue particles that flickered out of existence.

"Now, get him!" Lyra nodded, then grabbed hold of the suit, lifting it into the air.

This isn't good. I only have one option left. He pulled open a hidden compartment in the console and entered a four digit code. After it confirmed, a ten second timer appeared on the screen, and he hit his fist on a button that opened the cockpit hatch. He leapt out, rolling as he landed in

the grass nearly fifteen meters below. The shock winded him, but he scrambled to his feet and ran as far as he could before the mobile suit exploded.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" The entire screen was covered in flame as the worker's batteries self destructed, causing the brightness dampeners to turn on automatically. The blast knocked the Platinum down, causing her to fall unceremoniously onto the hilltop, creating a minor tremor in the immediate area. Shards of metal rained down on the park, several landing on the reclined Geminar with a loud ping.

After a second, she regained her composure. "Aria, where's the enemy pilot?"

"I'm looking over the footage from before the explosion, but he seems to have made it out of the cockpit before the explosion. However, most of his face was covered as he fell, and the subsequent explosion has temporarily overloaded our sensors. In other words, probably alive, but no idea where." The small AI avatar smiled. "I've just gotten word that the police have captured the terrorist in the first suit you fought. That makes zero casualties, other than the enemy pilot whose cockpit exploded for some reason. Good work."

Lyra laid back. *I was able to avoid killing anyone. Thank god.* "Oh, how is the Geminar?"

"Only superficial damage. The charge wasn't shaped, so it didn't penetrate, and the lines that cover the suit generate a weaker version of the shield on the arms. So we weren't hurt badly, but let's try to avoid taking more of those."

"Wiseass."

"Well that's not very nice of you."

“So what now? Do we wait for recovery, or do we go back to where the elevator is?”

“The latter, since the elevator seems to be undamaged.”

“All right.” Lyra pushed the pedals while firing thrusters, slowly rising to her feet. She walked over to the location where she had emerged.

“I’ll send the signal.” Within seconds, the ground opened up and the platform slid into view. Lyra moved the Platinum onto the lift, stepping onto the foot locks, which clamped her to the slab. It descended below the surface with her inside, the door closing above her, erasing any sign that the grassy patch was somehow unique.

“It appears that the mobile suits we’ve sent to destroy the enemy facility have all been defeated.” A man with a brown ponytail and square glasses looked over a virtual clipboard, which emerged from a metal device on one end. He looked up and the holographic screen disappeared, and he folded the device in half, reducing it to about the size of a deck of cards, which he then slipped into his pocket. “Your orders?”

A man who appeared to be wearing a long black robe sat in a chair at one end of the room, but the shadows in the area apparently conspired to keep his face hidden. “With this machine operational, we’ll be unable to attack the elevators with mobile suits. It must be destroyed.” He stood up, and stuck out his arm. “From here on out, I’m making the elimination of this new mobile suit our top priority. These are your new orders.”

The bespectacled man smiled and nodded. “As per your will, my lord. For the freedom of mankind.”

“For the freedom of mankind.”

The assistant walked out of the room, leaving the robed man in partial darkness. *So, they've made a fairly large obstacle to our goals this time...However, don't underestimate us. Midgard will not be stopped by something like this.* He rose to his feet, turned around, the cloak billowing around him, and walked towards the back of the room, his form fading into the black.