Neon Genesis Evangelion: (Not) the End
by Fyrstorm

Summary

Another Eva AU. The Angels are late, the Eva series finally finished. Unfortunately, this doesn't mean life's any nicer to poor Shinji Ikari, thanks to terrifying monsters, semi-psychotic Brits, and countless other problems. Hopefully, this is as bad as it gets. Probably not. Contains sarcasm, bloody combat, liberal cussing, and awkward hormone stuff.

Notes

Here it is, folks! For the first time on AO3, I am proud to present NGE: (N)tE! Hope you guys like it!
Out, in the deep, blue-green oceans, something awoke. Sediments billowed up, the being slowly rising from the sea floor. Skin, dark and verdant, sheathed its massive form in an impenetrable coat. Armour, white and chalky, flashed the faint glimmers of sunlight off its surface. And among this darkness and paleness, a gleaming gem glowed, one single point of light sparking in its heart.

It rose, a dual set of fins breaching the surface and rushing towards the shore.

Giant.

Demon.

Devil.

Monster.

Daikaiju.

These were all words that sprang to mind, in the heads of the soldiers waiting on the beach. But they were not its true name.

Up ahead, on the shoreline, wave after wave of tanks, MLRS systems, and assault VTOLs sat and hung, weapons trained on the advancing shape, waiting to open fire.

Waiting for the Angel.

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 001: This is (Not) a Good Idea

- 2017 AD. T+17 years, Second Impact.

“'We’re sorry,'” came the calm reply of an automated voice. "Your call can not be brought through, due to the ongoing state of special emergency. Please try again later.”

Click.

.
The boy sighed, and hung up, stuffing the useless cell phone back into his pocket. First the pay phone, now his personal one as well?

“‘Special emergency’?” he asked aloud. “What does that even mean? What am I supposed to do now?”

Irritated, the sixteen-year old Shinji Ikari shoved his hand into his other pocket, rummaging around. The boy, at first glance, seemed… rather average. Brown eyes, dark brown hair, and a fairly lithe build weren't exactly uncommon phenotypes in Japan. A small, red half-leaf charm was pinned up on his left breast-- a gift from two years ago.

Shinji's hands finally came up, the contents of his pockets in tow. They weren't very impressive; a wallet containing some meager cash and his ID card, a small key ring, two hard candies, and several neatly folded pieces of paper. Among the latter was the reason why Shinji was in this mess; a letter from his father. The boy flipped it open, and read the message once more.

Shinji, I have need of you.

Come to the third-to-last stop on the train as soon as you can; a woman by the name of Katsuragi will be there to pick you up.

Do not worry, everything will be explained later.

- Ikari Gendo

Shinji let out a breath, folding up the slip of paper once more.

~“Have need of you.” That's just as bad as this nebulous “special emergency”~

This day could not get worse.

With a mechanical scream, a pair of jet fighters swooped over top! Missiles and cannons fired, the supersonic roar of the planes’ engines shattering windows and forcing the boy to cover his ears!

“Gah! Wha-what the hell? What's going-”

Moments later, an unearthly howl cut over the weapons fire, as a giant monster loomed above the buildings, visible even from where the boy stood. It must've been truly giant-- fifty or sixty meters at least. Its skin was smooth, dark green-- and somehow completely unscathed by the weapons peppering it. Fins ran down its limbs and back, terminating in a whip-like tail that lashed out at the offending aircraft. A face like a bird’s skull protruded from the front of its torso, just above a ribcage covering a shining red sphere.

Whatever the hell this thing was… it looked pissed.

And it looked even more pissed when a missile the size of its arm slammed into its back, throwing the monster face-first into a building. The cloud of shrapnel stopped barely a block before Shinji, but the shockwave knocked him off his feet. Hands smashing into the remains of the building, the monster reared up against the fiery backlight, howling ag-
-a car screeched to a halt between Shinji and the thing, side door flung open in an instant.

“Get in!”

Panicked, Shinji scrambled into the vehicle, shutting and locking the door behind him as fast as he humanly can. The driver put the pedal to the metal, and the car tore away down a side street.

The boy had questions. And now, in the relative safety of the vehicle, he could finally ask them.

“I-who are you? What is that thing?! What’s going on here?”

The driver-- Shinji noticed-- was a woman somewhere in her late twenties, with purple-accented hair and an outfit that his teenaged mind can’t help but notice is a bit tight in certain places. However, giant monsters and repeated explosions put a considerable damper on the boy’s hormones. Instead of her figure, he focused on her face, desperate for some answers.

“Misato. Misato Katsuragi,” she grunted, just barely steering her Alpine around a gunship crashing into the middle of the road. “That big monster back there? We-- NERV, that is-- call it an Angel. That one back there’s the Fourth Angel, to be precise. Codenamed ‘Sa-” Katsuragi. NERV.

“W-wait, NERV?” Shinji interrupted. “Where my father works?”

Misato nodded. “Yep. Your dad sent me to pick you up; you’re needed.”

Shinji blinked. Well, that’s one mystery solved. “Sorry, but... needed? I know we’ve talked a bit, but what does father need me for?”

“He- oh, shit!” Misato’s eyes widened. The woman slammed on the brakes-- just as the Angel’s foot smashes into the pavement, its unearthly howl echoing through the air! Luckily for Shinji, he’d buckled up about halfway back. Unluckily for him, the giant, airplane-killing, missile-proof monster is right in front of them.

The two shrunk back from the monster, hoping that it doesn’t look their way, doesn’t notice them, just keeps moving along.

As if the universe were trying to spite them, the Angel turns their way, its empty eye sockets twisting to look down at the small, blue car.

In unison, Misato and Shinji swallowed.

“Well, kid…” the woman muttered, half to herself. “I’m not entirely sure what the technical term is for this situation, but I’m going to go with ‘absolutely f-’”

*ring ring*

Misato’s eyes dropped to the electronic tablet set into the dashboard. Displayed on it was a telephone
number. For her, a very familiar telephone number.

“...Shit.”

The woman’s eyes shot up, past the top of the Angel.

“Shinji,” she said. “We might want to duck and cover. Backup’s here.”

High above the city, a Delta-wing aircraft more than twice the size of the Angel soared. Clamped to its underside, an elongated, mechanical shape.

“First stage activated. Plug depth set at 3 meters. LCL Ionization beginning.”

An intake of breath. The primordial liquid tastes deliciously like iron-rich blood, the electric crackle sending a shiver up her spine. God, she loves this feeling. It’s been far too long since she’s indulged herself like this.


The wire frame inside her garment buzzes from the conductive charge, the thick red visor clears from the inside. Pupils in a sea of turquoise dilate, electric green flickering in the coloured ring of muscle. Here it comes.

“Secondary stage successful. Final stage connections activating in three... two... one...”

Awake returned you’re back you’re here I’m so happy are we going to do it yes god yes we will me and you and us we’ll kill it together rip it apart rip it apart bones and blood and meat and metal claws and teeth and blades and feet and now as one

WE ARE ONE.

The pilot shudders, the green cables clipped along her arms igniting along their lengths with an inner fire. Red letters ignite on the surface of her helmet. Lips draw back in a predatory grin.

“Final stage successful. Synchro holding at 76.1%.”

Explosive bolts in the carriage detonate in sequence, and the mechanical shape drops down, unfolding spider-like limbs in preparation for combat.

“Evangelion Unit-05...”

“...has activated.”
Chapter 002: This is Completely (In)sane

Warning: probably contains some odd tenses. I'm basically just pasting over the stuff I already have written.

The monster stares down at them with empty eye sockets. Points of light spark in the depths of its skull, a warbling rumble coming from deep in its body.

“Shinji, we might want to duck and cover. Backup’s here.”

The sixteen-year-old’s mind is, at this point, simply screaming what the hell, what the hell, what the hell over and over again. In the last few minutes, he’s nearly been killed three times, asked a few questions and gotten some rather confusing answers in return, and-- oh yeah-- the city is under attack by a giant monster. Shinji was just about ready to give up all together, and didn’t even resist when Misato shoved his head between his knees.

A moment later, the Angel’s rumbling is cut off-- as a 30,000 ton blur of silver and green rams it at sufficient velocity.

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Chapter 002: This is Completely (In)sane

The Fourth Angel crashes into the ground, concrete and steel shattering around it! Sixty meters of daikaiju continue down the street, until its claws bring it to a stop. The Angel rises up, eyes sparking with rage at this interruption! Where is this foe?! The Angel will tear it to pieces!

It doesn’t take long at all to spot the one responsible.

An equally massive monster waited for it, body tensed for combat. Four spidery legs grew from its undercarriage, each sheathed in dull green and grey armour, and tipped with a treaded wheel, while still-glowing rocket thrusters sprouted from under its thighs. A muscled body rose up from this base, covered in silvery segments of plating, chest pointed like a ship’s prow. Its shoulders were just as broad as its foes, covered in more dull green armour. From each angular arm sprouted four hooked claws, bared for combat-- while a large plate extended up from the top of each shoulder. The thing’s head was more like a helmet, with a long, conical forehead and a golden v-shaped visor.

Was the Angel scared? No-- it had not been scared before, and had no reason to start now. But was it uneasy?
Yes it was. This thing held itself like a beast, limbs waiting to tear into its foe’s flesh, to destroy utterly. A palpable sense of malice exuded itself from the metallic being, demanding combat.

Very well.

The Angel’s tail lashed behind it. If this monster wanted a fight, it’d get it.

The world had stopped shaking at last. Cautiously, Shinji drew his head up, Misato following soon after. Slowly, the two of them peeked over the dashboard. Shinji’s eyes widened.

Another giant monster. Why. Why did the universe hate him so?

“M-Misato…” the sixteen-year-old stuttered, pointing at the four-legged monstrosity towering over them.

Strangely enough, Misato didn’t look nearly as terrified as Shinji had expected. If anything, she looked miffed.

“Fucking idiot. She’s landed right above us,” Shinji swore he heard her mutter, before Misato reached for the dash’s tablet. The woman punched the ‘receive call’ button, and fixed the tablet—currently displaying the image of some foreign girl Shinji didn’t know—with a death glare.

“Mari!” she snapped, making Shinji tense up. “What the hell were you thinking? You nearly crushed us under Unit-05, you irresponsible psychopath!”

“Mya mya mya, you’re such a stick in the mud, Miso. Not even gonna say hello to little ol’ me? Fine; but weren’t you supposed to be out of here a few minutes ago? Or did you get lost again?” a British-accented voice purred back mischievously.

“Yes, I got lost! So what?! I’m not in the mood to listen to your yammering commentary, Mari! Get us out of here!” Misato barked in reply.

The screech of metal gets Shinji’s attention, as the monster’s hind foot shifted away. Misato glances up, a look of horror passing her face.

“You’re kidding me.”

“Misato? What’s it do-”

“Alrighty! Have fun!” the girl on the phone interrupted, sounding far more enthused than anyone should be in this situation. The foot swung out, caught the car in its backside, and shoved it away! Through some miracle, Misato managed to start the engine midspin, boosting away from the two monsters.
As the slightly battered car rumbled away, leaving the city at last, Shinji spoke up.

“...Misato?”

“Yes, Shinji?” the woman replies.

“...What the actual fuck was that?” Shinji demanded.

The woman slouched, looking back to the road. “It’s a long story.”

Shinji arcs an eyebrow. She’ll have to do better than just that.

Misato sighs. “Fine, I’ll explain.”


“That second monster? The one that kicked us? We call it a Multiple-Purpose Decisive Battle Humanoid Weapon Evangelion-- or Eva, for those of us who don’t fancy using a soup of words each time we want to talk about them. It’s a giant bio-robot, designed to fight and kill Angels. As of three months ago, there are six-- seven, depending on how you count things-- Eva Units stationed around the globe. Now that one,” Misato jerked a finger back towards the city. “Who simultaneously saved and kicked our asses back there? It’s designated as Evangelion Unit-05.” Misato purses her lips. “Unit-05… well, it’s a bit… unique, I guess you could say.”


“Come on, fight me!” Mari screamed, Unit-05 slamming its forefeet into the ground. The Angel-- identified as ‘Sachiel’ by her HUD-- screeched back, tail lashing. Another light flashed, showing a vertically flipped ‘not-equal’ sign.

The girl’s eyes narrowed into slits.

“Phase space neutralized. Fine then, mister birdy. I’ll come to you then,” she grinned. “But I’ll warn you… I don’t come with safe words.”

Unit-05’s horns roar, the Evangelion throwing itself at the Angel! In the matter of a few seconds, the cyborg was upon it, ramming a titanium fist into Sachiel’s mask!

“Dagger!”

The Eva reached across, its shoulder fin unfolding. The fingers closed on a handle, and Unit-05 slashed out! The rapidly extending blade sliced through the unbroken green, spraying its wielder with indigo blood! Sachiel staggered back, the flap of skin falling down to reveal slimy black musculature. The wound’s warping, orange and blue fluids soaking out and rapidly regrowing into the green covering.

Mari’s eyes twinkled maliciously.

“Healing factor, mm? Fun.”

The duo charged each other once more, Unit-05 lashing out with its knife--

The Angel’s tail wrapped around its wrist, and yanked the Eva’s arm to the side.
Sachiel warbled, throwing a fist into the Eva’s left shoulder! With a crunch, the shoulder pylon crumpled, a set of spiked wires coming loose. Unit-05 stumbled, crashing to the ground from the blow’s force, as Sachiel’s tail released its hold.

Not a second later, the bio-mecha’s head snapped back up, as thrusters along its thighs and under its shoulder blades ignited! The engines roared, Unit-05 surging back upright with a muffled snarl!

In an instant, Sachiel was upon it, claws ripping into machinery and armour! Unit-05 drives a knee into Sachiel’s ribs, equalizing their ground again. The Angel stumbled back, only to glare up.

Its eyes flashed white.

The beam of light slammed into Unit-05’s stomach like a train, melting through layers of armour! A chunk of plate fell off, revealing steaming pink flesh crossed with smouldering wires. Mari doubled over, clutching her own stomach in pain.

Blue-green eyes burn with hatred beneath her suit’s visor. The girl looked up.

“You have just pissed me off.”

“So, just wait a second. Let me get this straight,” Shinji said. He’d been listening to this explanation for the last half an hour, and the boy really wanted to make sure that this wasn’t just some made-up fever dream.

“So, the Earth is being threatened by giant alien monsters, who want to wipe out all of humanity because… you don’t know why. Because even N2 weapons can’t slow them down, a team of scientists-- including my mother and father-- had to come up with a solution. And they came up with…” Shinji paused for a breath. “...Giant. Robots.”


“Bio-robots, yes. But- so, my mom and dad and a bunch of other people made NERV, which my father is in charge of, in order to make and use these giant ro-” Shinji stops himself. “These giant bio-robots. NERV’s base is in somewhere called the ‘Geofront’, which is underneath Tokyo-3 in Hakone.”

“Furthermore-- and stop me if I’m getting this wrong-- these giant bio-robots can only be controlled by teenagers for some reason. And now, with these giant alien monsters attacking, my father-- who, mind you, I have not physically been face-to-face with for ten years, save one occasion-- decides that I need to get over to NERV, and get in one of the giant bio-robots in order to fight the monsters in hand-to-hand combat to prevent the extinction of humanity?!”

Misato nodded. “Yep. Sounds about right.”
Shinji’s hand was formally introduced to his face.

“That is the most contrived thing I have ever heard. D-do they know how much this sounds like an anime? Because next thing, you’ll be telling me that I’ll be living with the other pilots, that I have to wear some ridiculous outfit to pilot, or that-- I don’t know-- you’re going to be my guardian instead of my father!”

“Er…”

Misato chuckled weakly. Shinji stared in horror.

“No. Which… which ones?”

The woman bites her lip. “…all three.”

Shinji’s head fell into his lap. “Oh my god.”

The only bad thing about piloting Eva, Mari reflected, was the feedback. For instance, the very realistic feeling of blood loss and agony that came with having one’s stomach blasted multiple times by a giant, skull-faced monster’s eye lasers. Unit-05’s reptilian hindbrain has been hammering inside her skull for a solid five minutes, driving up a pounding migraine that’s making it really goddamn difficult to focus on the Angel, even if she doesn’t have to worry about running out of power for another thirty minutes-- thank you, battery pack!

“Alright, you son of a bitch, die already!” Mari roared, throwing Unit-05 forwards again! The Eva released its knife, reaching out with hooked fingers in an attempt to tear open the Angel’s ribcage, to reach its Core, to kill and eat rip and tear it all to sh-

A set of three-fingered talons wrap around Unit-05’s hands, jolting Mari back to reality! The girl bares her teeth, struggling to free her Unit’s limbs-- but the Angel held fast, tightening its grip until the metal appendages started to buckle. Unit-05 was completely immobilized.

Snarling in animalistic frustration, Mari’s eye twitched.

“You’re kidding me.”

Seemingly in response, the Angel’s eyes flashed with something resembling contempt.

It’s then that Mari noticed the spikes on its elbows-- they’re glowing. And lengthening. All too late to do anything, she notices what’s happening.

“…oh, fuck me sideways.”

With an electric scream, the spikes shoot down the Angel’s arms-- and come out the other end, spitting through Unit-05’s arms! Mari screams, her suit’s sleeves flaring as the circuitry overloaded catastrophically! The spikes withdraw… and fired again.

Eeeeee-EEE-shunk!
And again.

Eeeeee-eeshunk!

And again.

Eeeeee-eeshunk!

Unit-05 was shaking and crumpling, only held up by the burning spits running through the center of its melting arms. Contemptuously, the Angel spread its arms, ripping the mechanical limbs off at the elbow! With an unnervingly human scream, the Evangelion collapsed to the ground, convulsing as orange blood and electric sparks gushed from its wounds.

Satisfied with its work, Sachiel turned away, moving out. It didn’t even care that its foe was still barely alive-- soon, nothing will.

-
The battered Alpine rolled up to the immense blast-doors, and halts. A camera zoomed in, verifying that yes, this is indeed Captain Katsuragi, and yes, she does have Shinji Ikari with her. The doors slid open.

They’re here. Finally.

With the long car ride, Shinji managed to get most of the utter disbelief that this was actually happening out of his system— and actually learned a few things.

Such as the fact that Mari, the girl who was piloting Unit-05, is-- in Misato’s words-- ‘completely batshit insane’.

**Neon Genesis Evangelion:**

*(Not) the End*

**Chapter 003: This is (Not) Happening**

The car sits, trundling down what’s essentially a giant escalator for cars. Finally, Shinji pops the question.

“There’s… really no way to avoid having to pilot, is there?”

Misato shakes her head. “The Commander personally requested it. But don’t worry! You’re not by yourself in this!”

Shinji sinks into his seat. “Yeah.”

With that, the two of them simply sit, waiting in silence.

Eventually, the car is shunted from the escalator to a moving road, heading deeper and deeper underground. There’s no radio reception, and Shinji’s SDAT needs new batteries, so Misato and Shinji’s only real outlet would be talking to each-other.

Misato decides to speak up.

“It’s orange, just so you know.”

The sixteen-year-old boy turns, blinking in confusion at the non sequitur.

“…orange? What’s orange?”

“She Eva you’ll be piloting,” Misato replies. “Evangelion Prototype Unit-00. It’s orange.”

“I’m… piloting the prototype?”
“Yep. Normally, we’d have you pilot Unit-01… only she’s out of commission; went berserk a few weeks ago, hospitalized the pilot. So Unit-00’s gonna be yours for a while.”

Shinji swallowed. These things could hospitalize their pilots?! That didn’t bode well.

Catching the worry on his face, Misato waved her hands. “Don’t worry! Unit-00’s a lot more mellow than Unit-01! You’ll be perfectly fine with a little training! In fact, I bet you’ll be ready to fight the Angel by tonight without… you know…” the woman trailed off.

Shinji calmed, nodding. Then the words sink in.

“W-wait, tonight?!”

Mari gritted her teeth, struggling to resist clawing at her arms. Her sleeves had been completely torn off immediately after Unit-05’s recovery-- but the overloaded circuits had left some hellishly painful burns criss-crossing up and down her arms. Thankfully, a few shots of painkillers had started to finally take effect, meaning that Mari could now move without risking screaming in agony.

As she was wheeled down the hallway, the Brit cursed under her breath; cursing the Angel, cursing her arms, cursing the screwed-up world in general. What a way to make an entrance into Japan.

Damn. This really, really hurt.

She was going to need something to distract her. And… now that she thought about it… wasn’t there supposed to be a new pilot coming in? Maybe that was why Miso was so cheesed with her. Hm.

Looked like she might have something to do after all. Mari’s burns brushed against the side of the trolley, and the girl bit back a vivid curse.

Maybe after the damn pain meds kicked in all the way.

The room was very dark, Shinji noted, standing between Misato and the head of the Research Division, Doctor Ritsuko Akagi. As there wasn’t an ongoing power loss, Shinji thought, this must be for… dramatic… reveal. Crap.

“And here it is,” Akagi announced, clicking a remote. “The Prototype Bio-Robot, Evangelion Unit-00!”

The lights flicked on, a massive head appearing only a few meters from the trio, red eye staring them down. The boy yelped, backpedalling a few steps away, before Misato catches him.

Unit-00 is kinda imposing, though-- at least the bit that protrudes above the orange liquid that it’s partially submerged in. Its armour is a combination of pale orange, creamy white, and matte blue-grey, the orange wrapping around most of its head like a helmet. In the middle of the thin face is a single camera eye, dull and crimson, aperture closed. On each cheek are extended plates-- which seem to be built to snap together across the face-- and twin sockets, metal gleaming in their centers.

Shinji holds his chest, panting. While Unit-05 was certainly big and scary, it at least wasn’t right in his face when it showed up.
And this was the robot he was supposed to pilot.

Shinji swallowed, looking around.

“I-er… wha-what now?”

It wasn’t Misato or Dr. Akagi who answered. No, someone else replied. “Now, son, we prepare for battle.”

Shinji looked up, above Unit-00, to a viewing box built into the wall.

Commander Gendo Ikari looked back.

“It’s been a while, Shinji…”

How was he supposed to feel about this? His father-- whom he hadn’t been face-to-face with in three years-- had finally met up with him, and then immediately told him to fight daikaiju. Granted, Misato had explained this to him beforehand, but…

One word came to his lips.

“Why?”

Gendo raised an eyebrow.

“Why? Why must you pilot Unit-00? Why are you the one selected to do so? Why is the first thing I do to command you to perform such duties?”

The boy nodded, whispering a ‘yes’ under his breath. The Commander adjusted his bronze-tinted glasses.

“It’s simple. Of the now three Evangelion Units that NERV Headquarters currently possesses, Unit-00 is the only one not in stasis or heavily damaged. As such, it will be able to operate at optimal performance in combat against the Angels.”

“Similarly, you are the only Child who has not sustained lasting harm as of yet; The First Child is hospitalized, the Fifth-- while less severely injured-- is in no way in adequate shape for piloting duties. It’s only for those reasons that you and Unit-00 will be seeing combat.”

And here, Shinji interrupts.

“But father, why am I even supposed to pilot in the first place? Why choose me, of all people?! I-I get you need someone who isn’t hurt, but there’s got to be hundreds of other teenagers out there more fit to pilot a giant robot in the first place! Hundreds of others who’d look forwards to doing it! I’m certainly not!”

Gendo looks down, seeming calm and collected.

“Son,” he begins, “I require your trust on this. We may not see eye-to-eye, but I do, in fact, need you. I can’t explain to you why, but you are the only one who is able to do this. Only a handful of special people can possibly pilot Eva-- you are one such special.” His tone hardens, as Gendo the Father slips back, and Gendo the Commander steps forwards.
“However, I am the Commander of NERV. I can’t simply focus on my family, and make allowances for them; I have every life under myself to take into account. So when I tell you this, it is not a request. It is an order. Shinji Ikari, you will pilot the Eva. You will fight the Angel. And you will defeat it, or else humankind will die. That is all.”

As Gendo turns away, disappearing from view, he says one last thing, barely audible through the speaker systems.

“Good luck, Shinji.”

It had taken about half an hour of contemplation and Misato’s assurance before Shinji had finally gotten into Unit-00 for a test activation. Getting into the Eva in itself was pretty weird. Apparently, Shinji had to sit in an ‘Entry Plug’, on some seat that sort of resembled a stretched-out saddle with enlarged control grips. The Plug was then inserted into a cavity at the back of the Eva’s neck, which was normally protected by a retracting armour plate.

Shinji sat, hands on the control grips, reclining against the back of the seat. A few lights spaced around the Plug’s circumference provided light, but the walls stayed dark and grey.

“Er… hello? Doctor? Misato?” Shinji asked, hoping that the Eva had some sort of-

“Yes, Shinji?” came the slightly electrified voice of Dr. Akagi. Good, the Evas did have some sort of comms link set up.

“Um, Doctor… Is… is something wrong? The Eva… Unit-00’s not doing anything. Should… should that be happening- er… not happening?”

“Don’t worry, we’re just about ready to fill the Entry Plug with LCL. Then we’ll get started.”

Shinji blinked. “LC what now?”

Suddenly, minute panels along the interior folded open, a series of nozzles extending! Almost as soon as they were out, an orange liquid that was definitely not orange juice started gushing out, pooling at one end of the Plug! Shinji yelped, watching as the fluid level began to rise dangerously close to him.

“Shinji, calm down!” Misato spoke up.

“C-calm down?! Easy for you to say, you’re not the one who’s about to-to-” Shinji’s speech cut off as he took a deep breath; the LCL had reached his head.

Unfortunately, Shinji had never really taken swimming classes as priority, and his breath was starting to run out.

“Shinji, it’s breathable!” Dr. Akagi came in. “LCL is oxygenated; you’re in no danger of drowning!”

Well, not like he had a choice anyways. Out of air at last, Shinji reflexively took a breath-- or rather, a big gulp of LCL. The boy coughed, choking down the orange fluid, lungs burning.

Coughing, Shinji took another breath-- and his eyes opened. He… he could breath! He wasn’t drowning, wasn’t choking to death, though he had nearly had a heart attack.

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Breathing heavily, Shinji collapsed back, hands falling to his sides.

“Wha… why did we have to do that?” he asked.

Again, it’s Doctor Akagi who responds.

“The LCL is an important part in synchronizing your mind with the Eva’s body; it’s impossible to control one without it.”

Shinji groaned. If this turned out to be a regular thing… well, then this wasn’t going to be enjoyable. Not one bit.

“Let’s… let’s just get this over with,” he sighed, waiting for the next part.

“Alright then. Maya, begin Unit-00’s test activation sequence.”

Another voice came in, younger than either of the two women.

“Yes, Doctor. Beginning Unit-00 test activation sequence.” Shinji wriggled upright, unconsciously noting that his clothes were soaked with the orange stuff-- luckily, his SDAT was waterproofed just in case.

“First stage activated. Plug depth set at 3.2 meters. LCL Ionization beginning.”

A static charge disperses through the liquid, turning it transparent. It’s not a painful shock for Shinji, but it certainly gets his attention.


Gripping the control grips, he leans upright, watching as the walls start to flicker with light. The console’s buttons illuminate with colour, a low whir filling the not-quite-air.


“Secondary stage successful. Final stage connections activating in three… two… one…”

Shinji nods, and then-

It-it-it-it

it’s in his head.

New new new is it a new master what is it so small and pink look watch poke it prod it mind and body tall tall as sky orange white the armour hurts everything hurts pain pain rage fear curious sleep wake feed who are you who are you

who

are

you.

Shinji shakes, begging for the voice the voice the voice to go away leave me alone. He can feel it
looking searching climbing into his brain.

*Please... please... please...* he thinks, breathing heavily.

Reluctantly, the interrogator fades away, leaving a lingering presence in the back of his mind.

For what seems like the tenth time today, Shinji curses.

“What. The f***. Was that.”

From the chatter going on over the comms, he’s guessing something’s happened. Then Maya speaks, and everyone else is quiet.

“Final stage successful. Synchro holding at... 28.3%.”

“Eva Unit-00... has successfully activated.”

With that, cheers break out on the other end of the line, several different people trying to aim congratulations at... *at him?*

“G-guys?” Shinji tries to say. “N-no, seriously. Wh-what the actual hell just happened? Guys?!”

Misato takes the comms this time. “It worked, Shinji! You’re in control of Unit-00!”

Doctor Akagi follows up, clarifying. “Don’t worry Shinji, the first time you synchronize is always the toughest. These things have a vestigial mind, and it usually takes a ‘look’—so to speak— at a Pilot’s psyche the first ti- Captain Katsuragi, alcohol is not allowed in Central Dogma! You know that!”

As the chatter continues, the boy reclines back into his seat.

“So... guess I can start one of these things,” he mutters.

“Wonderful. Now, actually being able to move it would be just peachy.”

---

Luckily, the control tests didn’t require Shinji to get out of Unit-00— he really didn’t want to have to transition from air to LCL, or vice-versa, and more times than he had to.

Apparently, the control grips were more of a mental focus— quite a bit of control was simply done by the Pilot thinking about performing the action. But that didn’t mean they were useless— the grips were important for targeting, firing the weapons systems (weapons systems!), and generalized movement— not to mention they were quite handy for an inexperienced Pilot like Shinji.

After nearly an hour of basic training and stumbling around the Geofront’s field, Shinji was now able to get Unit-00 to walk, stand back up, and throw an adequate punch. As the giant bio-robot stepped back to the hangers, the comms started back up.

It was Misato, sounding like a Captain.

“Shinji, quick change of plans. The Angel... it's here!”

“It... the Angel’s he-”
Above, two socketed eyes flashed.

The center of Tokyo-3 burst into flames, buildings swallowed by the massive cross-shaped burst of energy.

Though it is burnt and bruised, the Angel has not fallen.

Unit-00 staggers, losing its balance and crashing to earth.

“Shinji, get to the launch chute!” Misato barked. The boy nodded, pushing to get the bio-robot upright again. With poor balance, the orange-plated humanoid managed to approximate a run, grabbing desperately at the rectangular framework extending up from the ground.

A minute later, Unit-00’s arms and legs were clamped in place, Shinji breathing deeply in the Plug.

Though he tried to focus, his father’s order kept popping into his mind.

*You will defeat it, or else humankind will die.*

Shinji shook his head, Unit-00 mirroring the action sloppily.

*I’m… I’m not going to let that happen,* he thought, trying to look determined. *I’m not going to run away.*

“R-ready.”

“Alright then,” Misato confirms. “Charge the rail catapult! Prepare blast doors!” Electricity climbs up through the rails, putting the new Pilot on edge.

This is it.

No turning back now.

“Evangelion Unit-00, launch!”

With a clap of thunder, the capacitors in the rail guides discharge, and the Eva goes from 0 to 170 meters-per-second, the shockwave throwing up a cloud of debris as Unit-00 rockets skyward at half the speed of sound!

For two seconds.

Almost immediately, the electromagnets reverse, just in time for the Evangelion to jolt to a halt on the surface. It takes Shinji’s stomach a few more seconds to sink back to its normal position.

The Angel’s there, just a kilometer or two away. Shinji’s determination starts sinking under fear.

But then he feels the weight, the size, the *power* of the body that is not his. Of Unit-00.

And he pushes back against the fear.
Chapter 004: You Have (Not) Won

The Angel is in front of him.

The Angel is right in front of him. And it’s getting closer.

Shinji has no idea why the hell he’s not screaming, why he’s not cowering in terror. He knew he should be, for certain.

But maybe it’s because of this body-- the one he controls, the one that isn’t his, the one that’s 40 meters tall and weighs tens of thousands of tons.

Maybe it’s because Unit-00 isn’t afraid.

Maybe it’s because, if he runs away, everyone dies.

~I won’t run away,~ Shinji thinks again.

And Unit-00 balled its hands into fists.

Neon Genesis Evangelion:
(Not) the End

Chapter 004: You Have (Not) Won

The Angel looked... different. Physically, it seemed considerably more beat up-- the dark green covering was tattered, exposing black, glistening musculature; its tail was half the length, ending in a burnt stump; the massive fins on its back were gone. But in response, Sachiel had gotten a whole lot scarier. As it advanced, Shinji swore he could feel the fury radiating off it, like heat boiling off an oven. Where fins used to be, spikes of bone have torn through the flesh, long and curved like teeth. A long crack runs down its face, the beak lengthened into a dagger. Its eyes almost continually burned with light, sparks flickering in the pits.

“Alright, Shinji!” Misato says over the comms. “Unit-00’s armed with a Progressive Knife in its left shoulder pylon. Get it out, and take this ugly SOB down!”

“Right!” the Eva’s hand comes out, the armour plate opening for the handle to slide out. With remarkable smoothness, Shinji drew the blade, pointing it at the Angel.

The monster responded, pace quickening into a charge. As the Angel bore down on him, Shinji struck forward, impaling its arm on his knife! The Angel connected a moment later, throwing an open hand at the Eva’s chest. Balance thrown off, Unit-00 stumbled back, the blade left behind in its foe’s flesh.

Nonononono don’t fall over don’t fall over! Shinji thought desperately.
Along the Eva’s back, rocket nozzles ignite, gently pushing it back upright! Shinji furrowed his brow, planting his feet to steady himself. The Angel is snarling, trying to dig out the vibrating blade embedded in its arm, but without much luck.

Shinji sighed heavily, keeping his focus on the Angel. He had to win.

“M-Misato. Anything else we’ve got?”

“Unfortunately, you’re not experienced enough with firearms, so no guns. But we should have a few melee weapons ready for you. Those take some time to send up, but if all else fails, you can-”

Misato was cut off, as the giant monster reasserted itself, pouncing at Shinji and Unit-00, claws extended!

“Not again!” the boy shouts, trying to brace for the impact!

… An impact that didn’t come. At least, not the one he’d been expecting.

A horn rips through the air, accompanied by a muffled howl. Looking up, Shinji saw a very familiar green and silver Eva body-slam the Angel, driving its knee into the monster’s head!

Mari really shouldn’t be doing this.

She should be in the hospital, getting her arms treated for the burns. Not piloting a psychologically scarring, 30,000 ton hunk of meat and metal that doesn’t have arms into battle.

Yeah, fuck that.

Though she could feel every blow the Angel deals-- every punch that shakes her skull, every rip that tears at her skin, every jab that doubles her over, every brush against her unit’s non-existent arms that sets her nerves on edge-- Mari wasn’t giving up.

“Mari, what the hell are you doing?!” Misato screamed through the radio.

“The fuck’s it look like!?” the Briton snapped back, keeping her gaze on-target.

With another furious howl, Unit-05 ignites its rockets, driving a pneumatic knee into the Angel’s stomach with a wet crunch!

“You’re in no shape to pilot! Get out of there!”

“Miso, if I can outrun my goddamn guards and start Unit-05 without the use of my arms, I don’t think I- oh fucking shit!”

Howling in fury, the injured beast strikes, latching onto the stumps of the Eva’s arms and cutting off escape! Sachiel heaves, and Unit-05 smashes through a building.

“N-no! You can’t fail this t-time! We c-can’t fail this time!” Mari screamed, as the battery box still affixed to Unit-05’s back finally snapped.
The Angel looms above the fallen Eva, and raises its arm, spreading its hand. Light flickers down the lengthening spike on its elbow, as it prepared to finish its troublesome foe off, once and for all.

F-zzzzzmmm...  

The Angel paused, upper torso swiveling towards the humming.

Unit-00’s second Progressive Knife promptly tears through its protective rib cage.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAA-” Shinji screamed, swinging the blade in a broad arc! Somehow, the glowing blade ripped through the bone shell like paper, shards flying from the splintered edges! Sachiel screams, a mix of fury and agony colouring its voice, and retaliates!

Bony talons rips lines down Unit-00’s armoured skin, the fiery pain mirroring itself on Shinji’s body! The boy’s screaming comes to a strangled halt, shocked by the pain. The Angel draws another arm back-

“Oi, arsehole!”

Unit-05 tears itself out of the building, spinning, and smashes a leg into the remains of the Angel’s ribs! The armour crunches, falling off in chunks as the Angel staggers back.

Unit-05 gets up, standing beside Unit-00. Its head is partially busted in, its visor half-shattered, but it’s still running.

“Hey there, Third Child,” Mari chuckled, wishing her hands didn’t hurt so much so that she could rub her aching head. “The name’s Mari Makinami-Illustrious, but just Mari works. How’re you?”

Shinji blinks.

“Um… I… I could be better. I’m… Shinji?” Unit-00 shifts, one eye glancing at the green Eva.

“Nice meeting you, Shinji.” nods back Unit-05, before its head whips back towards the Angel.

“Now, let’s do this!”

“Right!” The orange Eva’s cheek plates slide forwards, clamping together into a blast visor!

With that, the two Evas charge, not planning to let the Angel get any sort of opening!

Sachiel is back on its feet, the cuts on its armour and torso already covered over with bubbling flesh!

Unit-00’s knife swings around, stabbing into the exposed, black musculature! Blue blood showers from the wound, and the Angel delivers a ringing blow to the Eva’s head in retaliation! Before it can follow up, the other Eva’s mechanical knee drives into its face, a splintered crack coming from the half-shattered mask! Swiftly, the leg shoots down, crushing the Angel’s foot under the spinning tire.
The Angel’s eyes flash, an energy beam melting the front of Unit-05’s armour, spraying droplets of liquid metal! The Eva stumbles away, torso steaming and dripping.

An uppercut from Unit-00 comes out of nowhere, knocking the monster backwards into the building. Howling, the Angel turns its rage on the orange one, a burning spike firing through its hand, punching a hole through the fortified plates and out the other side!

In the Entry Plug, Shinji screams, holding himself tightly and trying to work through the agonizing pain of having a superheated spear pushed through his lungs. In the edge of his vision, he can see a warning of ‘Umbilical Cable Disconnected’, and some sort of countdown ticking away, going backwards from ten minutes…

“Thg-t-that c-can’t be good…” the boy mutters, stumbling back as the Angel’s other spike starts to glow.

“No you don’t!”

This is, quite possibly, the stupidest thing Mari has ever done. Stupider than body-slamming the Angel, stupider than getting back in Unit-05 after her injury, stupider than… than a lot of things.

Mari had clamped Unit-05’s forelegs around the Angel’s shoulders, straining to pull it back and away from Unit-00!

~And this is the part where Princess would chew me out for being stupider than usual,~ the part of her that wasn’t screaming in pain/rage/bloodlust thought with a chuckle.

“Struggle all you like; I’m not letting go!”

The Angel bellows, swinging its arms in an attempt to strike the annoyance, only for Unit-05 to yank harder, pulling the Angel nearly off balance.

Hopefully, Shinji can gut this pig, and end it.

It hurts.

Shinji can’t see any blood, any indication that he’s been physically wounded, but the pain he feels seems incredibly real.

The boy shakes, trying to get his mind onto other things. Like the Angel. Mari’s holding it back, albeit just barely. After this, he really ought to thank her for saving his sorry hide three times. Maybe later. Time to end this.

Shinji wraps Unit-00’s hands around the blue-stained Progressive Knife, and holds it as steady as his two shaking hands can manage.

And he charges.
In one smooth motion, Unit-00 drives the Prog Knife into the heart of the Angel.

The crystalline structure splinters, blue blood spraying out like a busted fire hydrant! Sachiel’s cries jump to nearly ultrasonic, the Angel writhing like a mad thing from the fatal wound Shinji’s dealt.

Surging forwards against its captor, the Angel’s flesh liquefies, preparing for one last act of vengeance!

Unit-05 dives through the Angel, placing itself before Unit-00 just as the Angel connects. The dying monster’s flesh wraps around the duo, crushing them together as the exsanguinating core begins to glow white hot!

Boom.

A second later, the Angel explodes, a massive cross rising into the night sky.

When the fires have dimmed, the two Evangelions lie collapsed in the blast crater, armour steaming and melted, stained with the blue of the Angel’s vapourized blood.

“I…” Shinji’s voice comes shakily over the comms. “I don’t want to do that again.”

“Yeah… me neither,” Mari sighs in response. She doesn't even want to move right now. “Good… good job, Shinji. Good job. Now we’ve just got to face the music.”

Misato was waiting for them as soon as they’d gotten out of their Entry Plugs. The woman walked up to the duo, the scraggly boy in the soaked clothing, and the glasses-wearing girl in what’s basically a skintight suit of armour.

“First things first… good job out there. Even though this was only the first time you’ve fought an Angel-- or second, in Mari’s case-- you… you did it.” Being right in front of them, it’s not hard for Misato to reach out and embrace them, which she promptly does.

“No matter what happens, I am incredibly proud of you two,” the woman whispers, squeezing them tightly.

“M-miso! Arms!” Mari squawked, Shinji futilely wriggling against the Captain’s grip.

At the sounds of protest, Misato releases, letting the two retract themselves.

“Ehe… sorry,” she chuckles, before recomposing herself.

“Shinji, you’re free to go. Make yourself to the garage and wait for me; I just have to talk with Mari a bit.”

Tired, Shinji nods, hoping that there’s somewhere he can change into clothes that aren’t stained with LCL. The elevator door shuts behind him with a cheerful ding.
“Well, Mari,” Misato looks towards the girl, and sighed, brow furrowing. “What am I going to do with you? You dove into combat with reckless abandon; you purposely fled the personnel tasked with keeping you safe; you further crippled your Evangelion, which will take at least a month to fully repair; and worst of all, you displayed utterly no regard for your personal health, your safety, not even your own life!” Misato’s worked herself up, shouting as distress and frustration boil off her.

“Before you head off to the hospital, and stay there until you’re fully recovered, I’ve got one last thing to say, Mari. Personal biases aside, I’d like you to tell me why the hell you decided that this was an acceptable course of action?!”

To Mari’s credit, the girl doesn’t back down or do something completely irrational. Instead, Mari replies as bluntly and directly as possible.

“Why? Simple; if the Third Child had died, we’d be screwed. Unit-01’s in cryo-stasis, Units-02, 03, and 04 aren’t even in Japan, and there’s no way Unit-05 could have killed the Angel in its condition. Add that to the fact that the Third Child’s a rookie, and our chances weren’t looking good. But Unit-05 was still perfectly capable at supporting Unit-00 in combat, as you could easily see!”

The fire dies in Mari’s eyes, the girl slumping onto the gunnery set out for her. “Guess I just figured the world’s a bit more important than little ol’ Makinami’s boo-boos. That reason enough, Miso?”

“Mari, I…” The young woman starts.

“…Fine,” she sighs. “We’ll talk later. For now, just focus on getting better. Get… get well soon, Mari.”

Lying down in wait for NERV personnel to arrive, the ghost of a smile plays across Mari’s lips. “Don’t want my stuff in your apartment, mmm?”

Finally dried off, Shinji waited for the elevator to start up again. With a cheery chime, the doors opened up.

His father was inside.

Swallowing, Shinji stepped inside, the doors sliding shut behind him a few seconds later. As the lift began moving, Shinji and Gendo stood next to each-other, facing the door.

“Shinji?” his father asked, eyes flicking behind the amber shades.

“…Yes, father?”

A light nod. “Well done. For a first deployment, you… yielded quite an impressive result, even considering the Fifth’s assistance. Good… good job.”

…praise.

His father, the commander of NERV, has praised him. Though it’s awkwardly phrased, to say the least, it still leaves Shinji speechless for a good minute. Eventually, however, he responds.
“Th-thank you, father.”

Gendo turns back to the door.

“So, where are you heading?”

“The garage. Misato told me to... wait for her there. Er, father? Am I really going to be staying with her?”

Gendo nods. “Indeed; I am unfortunately far too busy. Captain Katsuragi’s quarters would be far more preferable, and she is there considerably more often than I am at my own.”

“I’ll see you later, Shinji.”
Chapter 005: An (In)Correct Assumption

A pair of brown eyes fluttered open, wavering for a moment before focusing on the ceiling above; a greyish plaster with a light fixture hanging down from the middle.

“Rise and shine, me,” Shinji Ikari muttered, reaching up to rub his eyes. A dull ache hung behind his eyes, as if someone was squishing his brain inside his skull.

The boy grunted, and swung himself upright. He reached perpendicular, passed it, and slumped forwards. Shinji twisted, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed. His feet touched down on the carpet, the soft fringes compressing under the pressure.

Shinji rolled his neck, wincing slightly at the crackle. There was work to be done, and caffeine to be had. Preferably in the opposite order.

The boy walked out into the hall, vaguely recalling where the kitchen was.

Did Shinji want coffee? No. Coffee was alright, but the bitter drink wasn't his preferred way to start the day.

Shinji wanted tea.

Neon Genesis Evangelion:
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Chapter 005: An (In)Correct Assumption

By the time Misato’s biological clock would have started to bother her about getting up, Shinji felt much better. Tea was… somewhat nostalgic for him. Its scent carried memories of better times to him; memories of a happy family, of a mother and father who loved him very much, of when everything was good.

The boy set the cup down, a faint shimmer of wetness tinting his eyes.

~If only...~

He was glad Misato hadn't woken up yet, that he'd had this bit of time to himself. As thanks-- for a variety of things-- he'd left his new guardian a thermos of the remaining tea, and a heat-sealed container of breakfast out on the countertop for her. He'd also filled up the empty food bowl that had been lying around, despite the woman not having mentioned anything about a pet.

As Shinji sat on the couch, sipping at his tea, his mind drifted from the past, drawing back to the events of the previous night...
After the two had made it to the apartment building, they’d taken the elevator all the way to the top floor, and walked all the way down to the end. Not promising for fire safety, Shinji had reflected.

“And here we are, Shinji!” Misato had announced enthusiastically. “My home! And as long as you’re here, this place will be your home as well!”

The door had slid open, and Shinji had simply stared at the mess inside.

With near-perfect comic timing, Misato had rubbed the back of her head with embarrassment.

“...Admittedly, I’m not used to having many people over, so the place may be a little messy.”

Had Shinji not just been through the most hellish experience of his life, he might actually have replied with a snide remark.

Instead, he just stared at the train-wrecked interior with the same sort of horror that should have been reserved for the Angel.

“Well!” The woman had announced. “No sense in standing out here! Let’s go!”

With that, Misato had dragged him inside, the door sliding shut behind him.

Once inside, he’d gotten an even better look at the disorganised mess. It could easily have been worse-- there weren't any large clumps of mold, nor a particularly great number of flies, and at least he could see some attempt at keeping things accounted for-- but the place was just… bothersome.

Had Shinji been less worn out, he might have insisted on cleaning up; but all he’d managed was a request for dinner and a bed.

The former had been a fairly normal event; just a small meal of various microwaveable instant foods. At the very least, it was filling.

After that? Well, he'd simply collapsed onto the guest bed, and gone to sleep.

Shinji shrugged, and drained the last of his cup. When one has recently fought a giant monster, small things like that seem to pale in comparison.

“I smell foo~ood,” came a sleepy, sing-song voice from down the hall.

~Well, Misato's up,~ the boy thought.

“Oh on the counter, Ms. Katsuragi,” he replied, glancing over. The woman strolled in, her dark hair tied back in a bun.

“Thanks, kiddo,” she yawned, stretching as the boy looked away. “But just call me Misato. ’Ms. Katsuragi’ makes me feel old, and I don’t need to be called ’Captain’ unless we’re in a fight.” The young Ikari nodded.

“If you insist… Misato.”
There was a pop, as the container lid was pulled off, followed by the sound of munching.

"Shinji, thish is really goob!"

The boy sighed, brushing the comment off.

"I just used what we had in the fridge, Misato."

"Yeah, but you made it delicious! If you cook this well, I may just keep ya around for good!" she joked, walking over with the container in her hands. Shinji rolled his eyes at the comment.

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding!" Misato chuckled, plopping down on the couch. The young woman smiled, and sighed.

"Just so you know, I'll be leaving for work in a bit," she said. "Cleaning up the crime scene, as it is. You think you're fine by yourself for the day, Shinji? I can't exactly take you with me here."

"Because that's how things work here? I make the messes, and you clean them up?" Shinji deadpanned. Misato snorted.

"More like we don't have a biohazard suit that fits you," she snarked back.

"That, and it'd break the laws against child endangerment even more than NERV does normally. Seems like Angels are the messy kind." Misato took a drink of the tea.

"...Huh. That's new." She blinked, and looked over at Shinji. "What type is this?"

"Family blend," the boy replied. "I... I'll be fine here. I'm used to being alone."

The woman smiled, a far more sympathetic expression than before.

"... alright."

With a lurch, the Captain rose to her feet.

"Okay, then! So, just so you know, somebody's probably going to drop off some paperwork later today; it's related to your new position at NERV. Feel free to start reading through if I'm not back home by then."

The woman turned back towards the hallway, pausing just at the transitional point.

"Good luck, Shinji."

It had been about two hours since Misato had left.

Shinji lay on the couch, staring up at the ceiling. Next to him was his SDAT, Track 24 playing through his earbuds. The boy raised a hand, studying it with an air of boredom.

"..."
Shinji sighed, hand falling back to his side. As Track 24 ended, and Track 25 began, the boy’s eyelids slid shut, his mind beginning to drift off to sleep…

“Wark?”

A single eye fluttered open, looking to the side. The second quickly followed, as Shinji found himself staring into the face of…

...A penguin.

“...what.”

The penguin blinked, head tilting in curiosity. Something jingled around its neck, catching the boy's attention. Around the penguin’s neck was what could only loosely be referred to as a collar, the words ‘Pen-Pen’ engraved on a metal tablet.

“...Pen… Pen?” Shinji asked slowly.

“Wark.”

The boy sat up, still focused on the red-crested penguin. He seemed surprisingly calm.

Then again, Misato apparently having a penguin in her house was really nothing when compared to giant monsters.

Still under Shinji’s gaze, ‘Pen-Pen’ waddled off towards the fridge. The bird looked at the handle, and made a noise that sounded curiously like an exasperated sigh.

*Shink*

The penguin raised a flipper, and a trio of claws slid out, wriggling and grasping the handle.

Shinji’s eyes widened.

“...what. The hell.”

The clawed penguin paid him no heed, opening the door and pulling out a can of beer with another set of talons. The bird promptly popped the tab, took a straw from a holster on his side of the fridge door, and waddled off, drink in flipper.

Thump thump thump.

~...Misato?~ the boy wondered, standing up from the couch.

Shinji walked to the door, and tapped the ‘open’ button. The door slid open, revealing someone that Shinji had never seen before.

“Hello there!” the curly-haired boy said. “Say, do ya know if Misato’s here? I’m supposed to drop off some papers, somethin’ about a new student…”
Shinji blinked.

“She’s at work.”

“...Oh, right,” the boy chuckled, scratching the back of his head. “Makes sense she’d be busy after all that commotion last night! Sounded like some serious operations were going on! Listen, if ya could take these papers, that’d be really useful.”

The Third Child nodded, accepting the offered papers from the boy.

“Sure… but, just, well… who are you?” Shinji asked.

“Oh, me? I’m Kensuke,” came the reply, alongside an open hand. “Kensuke Aida.”

“Shinji, Shinji Ikari,” said Shinji, stuffing the papers under one arm to take it. “I’m the new student.”

The kid blinked.

“Wait, Ikari? Like Commander Ikari?”

Shinji’s brow furrowed. Despite his father’s attempt to mend bridges last night… he forgiving him in a day won't happen. The boy was less than happy at the mention of him.

“Yes,” Shinji replied flatly. “He's my father.”

“... That… is so cool!” Kensuke exclaimed, looking like a kid in a candy store. Evidently, Aida must be completely deaf to social clues. Shinji sighed heavily.

“I mean, it’s-it’s NERV! You must get to see all the cool tech up close; the MAGI, the geofront, not to mention the Evas!”

Kensuke paused, having made a connection.

“...wait a minute. Are you a pilot?”

“...I’m not sure if I'm authorised to tell you. Or how that sort of thing… works,” Shinji replied. “But... yes?”

Kensuke’s eyes widen.

The curly-haired boy promptly disregarded any concept of personal space, giddily closing to just a few centimeters.

“Ohmygosh ohmygosh ohmygosh ohmygosh ohmygosh this is so cool! I mean I’m completely heartbroken that I wasn’t chosen but still, I’m going to school with two Eva pilots! This is amazing! You have to tell me everything, Shinji!”

Shinji leaned back, away from the questionably stable teenager. No snarky remarks came this time.

“Uh…”

“Don’t worry, I’m a friend of Rei! You’re not gonna get in trouble for talking with little ol’ me!” Kensuke smiles.
Shinji and Kensuke sat on the couch in the living room, the glasses-wearing boy on the edge of his seat. By comparison, Shinji laid back on the couch, SDAT in his pocket.

“Alrighty, first things first,” Kensuke started. “You gotta tell me about Unit-00!”

Shinji swallows, clearing his throat.

“...Okay, like... what?”

“Give me some specs! Height, build, weaponry, colour scheme, I don’t care! Just gimme something to work with!”

“All... alright then.”

And so Shinji went to work describing the giant of metal and flesh; its height of nearly forty meters; the varied armour plates of orange, white, and grey; the plates on its helmet that extended into a blast visor; the racks of thrusters on its back; even how the Eva mirrored its pain onto him.

But one thing he didn’t talk about was the first synchronization. The presence inside his mind, looking at him, looking into him.

That was too personal to share.

“...but... yeah. That’s... that’s Unit-00, I guess.”

“Hm,” Kensuke looked up from the pocket notepad he was writing in. “Interesting. Sounds like your Eva’s actually pretty different from Rei’s! That’s always cool-- I mean, Unit-01’s neat an’ all, but I think it’s a lot cooler when it’s un-”

“Um, excuse me,” Shinji said. “But... who’s Rei?”

Kensuke blinked.

“Wait, what?! You’re saying you don’t know who Rei is?”

Shinji shrugged.

“Like I said, I’ve only been here a day. I barely know anyone in Nerv. But, um, my father did mention something about a First Child…”

“Yes, that’s her!” Kensuke chirps back. “Rei Ayanami, the First Child, pilot of Unit-01! I’ve seen her in action a bit during the Jet Alone incident! That grace and power, that decisiveness, those sleek, silvery, sexy curves…” the boy freezes mid fangasm, realizing just what he’s saying. “I-I mean, the Eva’s curves! Yeah, th-those!”

Shinji leans away, raising an eyebrow.
“Did… did you just say that the giant robot was sexy?”

“Wh-I-no! That-that’d-” the boy clears his throat, chuckling awkwardly. “That’d be ridiculous.”

“So… you’re calling Rei sexy?”

The other boy chokes, sputtering back a reply.

“S-stop backing me into corners, man! I’m the one interrogatin’ you, not the other way around!”

Kensuke pouts, facing away from Shinji. “‘Sides, there’s nothing wrong with admiring somebody.”
Chapter 006: Very (Ir)Responsible

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry about the pun. It's awful.

~Someone else is here.~

Her eye opened, glancing to the right. Nothing.

Her head rolled to the left, compensating for the patch covering her left eye.

In the cot next to her, a brown-haired lump softly snored, arms hanging from casts.

Rei Ayanami tilted her head.

~The Fifth Child? An interesting development.~

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 006: Very (Ir)Responsible

Five-ish minutes after waking up, Rei was nearing the end of her first recovery exercise session. After a week, she’d completely memorized the routine, no longer hindered in performing it by her arm or her still-regenerating eye. As such, the First Child was able to dedicate a portion of her mental faculties to contemplation. Yesterday, Doctor Akagi had told her that it should only take six more days for her to be healed enough to rejoin school. However, now that the school was undergoing repairs, Rei had four days with no planned activities other than necessities, perhaps three— if Sunday featured a Synchro Test for her.

~Although, that is unlikely,~ Rei thought to herself. ~Unit-01’s recent... malfunction will not make Doctor Akagi or Commander Ikari particularly inclined to reactivate her for quite some time. Perhaps that is why the Fifth is here; to serve as a replacement for me, until Unit-01 becomes safe for piloting.~

Rei rolled her neck and stretched, each stiffened joint popping and cracking loudly. That was the last of it.

Shrinking back from the stretch, the girl walked back to her cot, and sat down. Automatically, Rei checked the atomic clock; fifteen minutes until lunch would be delivered.

And so, Rei sat. And waited.
Fifteen minutes passed remarkably quickly. Or at least they did for Rei.

The doorbell chimed, warning anyone inside that someone was going to enter. Rei sat up, and turned towards the door, perfectly calm and expectant. Soon after, the doors slid open, a member of NERV staff wheeling in the lunch cart.

“Good afternoon, Ms. Ayanami,” he cheerfully said, picking up one of the trays. “How are we today?”

“...Adequate,” Rei answered coolly. “If somewhat curious.”

“That’s nice. Here you go,” replied the staff member, setting the tray down on a stand that arched across Rei’s lap. “One meal for the First Child. Enjoy.”

The girl gave a quick nod of thanks, before turning to the tray. Investigating the Fifth Child can wait. For now, there’s food to deal with.

Mari stirred, eyelids flickering.

The brunette groaned, sinking down into the bed.

~God, my arms hurt. F***in’ Angel,~ Mari thought, blowing a chunk of hair out of her eyes-- and noticing something else. The ceiling was… incredibly blurry. And while her arms were probably immobilized, Mari didn’t need them to feel the lack of a familiar weight on the bridge of her nose.

The Briton rolled her eyes.

~...and they took my glasses, so I’m half blind. Good job NERV, good job.~

Mari’s ears perked up at the sound of movement to her right.

“Mm? Anybody there?” she asked, worming her way upright, blue eyes glinting with curiosity.

She didn’t have to wait long.

“Yes,” replied a soft, calm voice-- if she had to say, Mari’d guess the owner to be a girl, probably one around her age.

Mari looked over, only to be greeted by shortly cut silver-blue hair-- not something one sees on normal people.

“...’n that case, Blue, mind getting my glasses? I can’t exactly see without them.”

The blur nodded, bending forwards.

A few seconds later, the world finally cleared up, the familiar weight of her glasses on her nose. Mari blinks, watching as the blue-haired girl leans back upright. Other than the unusual hair colour, there’s quite a few things that pop out to her. The girl’s smaller than Mari, her build slim and sleek, her skin pale where Mari can spot it-- almost unnaturally so. The plain white cast on the girl’s arm and the grey patch over her left eye clearly point out just why this girl’s in the hospital-- though they certainly
don’t detract from her-

“You are staring.”

Mari blinks, snapping out of her in-depth examination of the girl.

“. . .Heh, sorry,” the brunette chuckles. “Got a bit distracted. It’s just that you’re quite the eye-catcher, you know?”

“Mari Makinami-Illustrious, Fifth Child. Pilot of Unit-05,” Mari states, introducing herself. “I’d shake your hand, but it looks like neither of us’d be able to accomplish much of that.”

The other girl nods.

“I am Rei Ayanami, the First Child. I piloted Unit-01.”

Mari grins, sitting fully upright.

“Well, nice to meet you, Rei.”

A day had passed, and the sun was beginning to peak.

Mari was bored.

Due to her arms being basically immobilized, there wasn’t anything physical the girl could do, and talking by herself had lost its appeal after a while.

“Say . . . Rei,” Mari started.

Rei turned her head.

“What is it, Pilot Illustrious?”

“. . . I was thinking… how about we swap stories?”

Rei blinked.

“Stories?”

“Yeah, stories!” Mari nodded, grinning. “I’m pretty bored, and I bet you’re also kinda bored.”

The blue-haired girl paused . . .

. . . and nodded.

“I. . . suppose that I would enjoy stimulation…”

“Right then, it’s settled!” Mari replied. “Now, all we’ve gotta do is figure who goes first!”

“. . . I would prefer to listen. You may begin, Fifth Child.”

Mari shrugged.

“Eh, fine with me. Now . . . hm. How does the story of my fight with the Third Angel sound?”
“That would be… adequate,” replied Rei.

“Alrighty then,” Mari grinned. “Here goes.”

“It was a cold and snowy morning in January. The Third Angel-- Hofniel, we called it-- had just been discovered, asleep in the Arctic ice. They’d just gotten it to the nearest NERV branch in order to study the thing, when… well, let’s say it wasn’t as asleep as had been expected.”

_The dragon ripped apart its steel cage, blue blood dripping from between the plates of frost-bitten chitin._

_More armour stood between it and its goal. This was not acceptable._

_A pair of apple-green eyes sparked, and the armour vapourized._

_Hofniel, Fighter of God, Angel of The Sons of God, was f***ing pissed off._

“As you can guess, nothing really slowed it down. The Cocytus Anti-Angel Containment system wasn’t fully completed, and the Russians’ tanks couldn’t pierce the Angel’s AT Field. Unless something crazy happened, we were pretty much screwed.”

“Luckily for everyone, I happen to have an Eva.”

“EAT THIS!”

_At the last second, Hofniel whipped to the side, two hundred meters of bone and chitin sliding aside from the main shaft. Unit-05 barreled past, momentum betraying it._

_“God f***ing dammit!” Mari cursed, yanking on the controls. Unit-05’s wheels shifted, the Eva spinning a hundred-eighty degrees in an instant._

_“Shock anchors, FIRE!”_  

_The Eva’s pylons snapped open, exposing racks of metal spikes. With a roar, the spikes shot out, trailing heavy metal cables behind them!_  

_The cables wrapped around Hofniel’s hind legs, the Angel letting out a squawk of surprise as its own momentum cancelled out the runaway Eva’s, bringing them both to a halt!_  

_“DISCHARGE!”_  

_Moments later, the entirety of Bethany Base’s pantograph wire grid was shot down through Unit-05’s pylons and cables. Hofniel’s hind legs cooked and burst at the joints, blue ichor spraying across the concrete walls._
"Unfortunately, I cooked the entire power grid with that attack, leaving me with only six and a half minutes of battery power."

"...I am beginning to doubt your tactical intelligence."

"You and half the other Children in the world."

The lance tore Hofniel’s body—ribs, exoskeleton, and AT Field all shredding before the weapon ripped out the other side.

Unit-05’s fist swung around, landing a ringing blow into the side of the Angel’s head.

Hofniel snarled, and struck back, driving its claws into Unit-05’s breastplate. Snarling, the serpentine monster ripped the armour plate in two, the Eva screaming in pain.

“No! Don’t you f***ing quit on me!” Mari snapped, yanking on the grips, despite her burning ribs.

“I don’t give up, you don’t give in! That’s how this works!”

Hofniel’s eyes flashed, vapourizing Unit-05’s left shoulder, and punching a hole through the outer wall. The tail swung around, knocking Unit-05 off her feet.

The Eva crashed to the ground, Hofniel planting a taloned hand on the bio-robot’s chest.

“Fight!”

The Angel’s eyes flickered, the beams beginning to charge up.

“FIGHT BACK!”

Unit-05 shook, power bleeding from the sparking wounds.

“FIGHT B-”

Hofniel fired.

Right into Unit-05’s face.

That elicited an emotional response. Rei actually winces—granted, it’s more like a muscle twitch, but it’s the most Mari’s gotten out of the girl.

“Yeah… it wasn’t fun.”

Unit-05 screamed, jaw no longer held tight. The upper half of her helmet had melted, the molten metal sizzling into the raw, scarred flesh of the Eva.

In the plug, Mari could barely focus. Everything hurt—her chest, her arms, her head…
This damn Angel… just…

Why.

Wouldn’t.

It.

Just.

Fucking.

DIE.

Unit-05’s eyes ignited.

“Impossible! Unit-05’s artificial synapses are locking!”

“Neural interface offline! We can’t read the plug interior!”

“The Eva’s acting on its own! Sir, Unit-05’s been confirmed!”

“It’s gone berserk!”

Roaring, the burnt and bloodied Eva lunged, slamming Hofniel into the concrete ceiling. The Angel screeched, voice spiking in octaves as soon as the berserker locked her jaws around its throat!

Metal teeth crushed the Angel’s windpipe and armour in a spray of ichor, the Eva’s eyes still glowing like spotlights.

With a mighty heave, Hofniel was thrown into the snow, throwing up a spray of powder.

Unit-05’s jaw unhinged, the battered Eva stomping out after it.

Hofniel hissed, eyes flashing again. Unit-05 just raised a hand. The beam splintered against a purple octagon.

Unit-05 bared her teeth, and lunged.

“-the end.” Mari finished.

“Well? Thoughts?” She asked, raising an eyebrow at Rei.

“… On the event, or your rendition of it?”
Mari blinked.

“... Both, I guess.”

Rei took a breath.

“On the event; I… am intrigued. Unit-05’s berserker incident… is interesting. I had thought Unit-01 to be the only berserker of the Units. Apparently, I was wrong.”

“However, I do think that you embellished your story too much.”

“Hey, I was half-conscious at the time!” Mari playfully complained. “Cut me some slack!”
“You want me to do what?!” Shinji screeched.

Mari grinned wider.


The sixteen-year-old flushed furiously.

“I-I-I-” he sputtered, stumbling back a step.

In all honesty, Shinji barely knew what was going on. While on his way to some sort of training session, Mari had jumped him, and dragged the boy into the nearby locker room. Next thing he knew, the brunette was demanding that he… well, disrobe. And with the combination of hormones, Mari’s… figure, and Shinji’s annoyingly spotty timidness, he was having a hellish time managing a reply.

“-I- T-that’s not decent!” the boy finally stammered out, voice ending in a squeak.

Mari’s lips pulled back…

--and the girl burst out laughing.

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Chapter 007: You’re (Not) Very Funky

“...”

Shinji stood frozen stiff, watching the Fifth Child double over in laughter. After about half a minute, the girl slowed, glancing up with a Cheshire grin on my face.

“...Oh, my god! Third, I swear, your face was j-just… f-f-goddamn priceless!”

The boy blinked in confusion, face awkwardly frozen. Mari caught a glimpse, and held a hand over her mouth, muffling her mirth.

“Oh, oh Third… I- did-did you really think that I was actually trying to put the moves on you? Pfffttt! Ahaha… oh, oh that's just rich.” The girl backed up, letting Shinji have some room, and casually leaned against one of the lockers.

“But nah, I'm- I'm not trying to get a piece of you, Ikari. I've got enough on my plate to deal with already. Don't worry,” Mari chuckled, waving it off.

Shinji visibly relaxed, shoulders slouching down with relief.
“W-well, at least that’s a-”

“But in all seriousness, I really do need you to strip down, Third.”

Shinji paled, choking off mid-sentence.

“It’s for a reason, Third.”

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”Gah- how do you manage-”

“Other leg, Ikari,” Mari calmly added.

“M-Makinami! Y-you said you weren’t looking!”

---

Five minutes (and several teasing observations from Mari) later, Shinji finally left the locker room. Still shaken up from the ordeal, the boy was clad in a white outfit that looked like it had been painted on.

This... ‘plugsuit’, or whatever it was, was almost completely skintight, vacuum-compressed to perfectly fit his skinny frame. Apparently, it was supposed to help him pilot the Eva, though Mari hadn’t explained how. The form-hugging suit also had the effect of making Shinji feel very, very uncomfortable as he shambled down the hallway.

Fortunately, Shinji’s thoughts provided a decent— if not completely adequate— method of distraction.

Ten days.

That's how long it had been since the Angel.

Ten days since Shinji and Mari had fought the monster. Ten days since its fiery death. Ten days since he’d last piloted the Eva.

Shinji heaved a sigh.

And there were supposed to be more of these things.

~That’s obviously why they’re having me train,~ he thought, continuing down the hall.

“Wonder what it’s going to be now,” Shinji muttered to himself. “Who knows. I mean, the Evas use knives… maybe they’ll make me learn how to use a giant gun?” the boy decided to grant himself a little smile. “Heh. That’d be-”

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“-absolutely ridiculous,” Shinji muttered, feeling the weight from twenty-odd meters of massive fricking Gatling gun pulling down on Unit-00’s arms. The orange-and-grey Eva stood in the Geofront, boxes of sensors and simulation equipment affixed to both the mecha and its comically oversized weapon.
“Mis-er, Captain? Why… why am I training with a Gatling gun?” the boy asked, looking over at the hologram of Misato floating next to his head.

“Simple; Nerv needs you to be able to operate any weapon in our evangelion arsenal-- the GAU-34 just happens to be the most difficult to use.”

“And I've got the toughest one to use because…”

“If we start you off with the most difficult, all the others will be a lot easier to compensate for, and you won’t need as much training with them! Now give it a try; and don’t worry, it’s loaded with blanks.”

Shinji frowned at Misato’s reasoning, but said nothing. Instead, Unit-00 shifted, lifting the weapon, and angling it to parallel the ground. The boy took a deep breath…

…and pulled the trigger.

Ten seconds later, Unit-00 was on its back, shoved over by the weapon’s massive recoil.

Shinji groaned, raising a hand to his head. Even with as low a synch as 32.5%-- apparently the plugsuit did make a difference-- he could still feel the shuddering and aches of Unit-00 imprinting on his nerves.

“Guess I’m going to have to keep doing this,” Shinji muttered, pushing on the control grips.

Grumbling, the orange Eva pushed itself upright, spinal rockets pulsing to provide extra lift. Regaining its balance, the cyclops’ chest heaved, eye scanning for the fallen Gatling.

Shinji reached down, and lifted the absurd weapon once more.

“Alright, Shinji. Let’s take it from the top. But this time, use a wider stance.”

Shinji sighed, and nodded.

- The next day, outside Classroom 3-A.


The sound of twenty students standing up and sitting down was audible outside the door to the trio. Shinji waited, nervously awaiting the announcement. Mari leaned up next to the door, lazily humming to herself. Rei just stood.

“Alright, students,” came an elderly voice. “Before we get started today, we have some new students joining us from out of the city, who will introduce themselves to you.”

“You may come in now.”

Shinji swallowed, and Mari grinned. This was it.

“L-ladies first?” offered the boy.

“Eh, sure,” shrugged Mari, taking the door handle.
“I’m Mari. Mari Makinami-Illustrious. I only recently got over here from Britain, but I hope we get along well!”

“A-and I’m Shinji Ikari. It’s nice to meet you all.” The boy said, looking out at the class. From the front of the room, he could see Kensuke’s telltale grin, along with a myriad of other faces he hadn’t yet met.

Not all of which seemed happy to see him, he noted.

“Thank you. You may sit.” said the teacher. Grateful to be out of the spotlight, Shinji walked down between the desks, finding an easy seat next to Kensuke, while Mari took one of the window seats, lazily glancing back to the front.

“And now for one final announcement. Ms. Ayanami has returned from the Nerv hospital, and will be returning to us for class at last. Miss Ayanami?”

Rei entered silently from the door, waited a few seconds, then headed over to her own seat by the window.

The teacher cleared his throat.

“Now, class, let’s begin with the lesson. Please open your devices, and we’ll start off with a review from last time.”

“More than seventeen years ago, a massive explosion occurred in Antarctica…”

The rest of the school day was mostly uneventful. History, math… the classes passed fairly quickly for Shinji. During lunch, Shinji and Rei had mostly sat by themselves and ate, while Mari attempted to strike up a conversation with some of the other students.

While it wasn’t the most exciting, the day hadn’t been bad, Shinji reflected on his way back to Misato’s apartment.

As the elevator doors opened onto the top floor, Shinji was greeted by the sight of the walkway cluttered with several bags and suitcases.

“…Uh…”

“Oh, Shinji!” Mari popped out from behind the pile, giving a quick wave.

“Sorry about the mess, Third! Just have ta’ get this stuff into my new flat, then I’ll be out of your hair! Uvidimsya, Shinji!”

The boy just nodded slowly, and inched his way around the pile. Encouraging Mari probably wasn’t the best idea, given the… oddness, she’d shown the last few days. Especially after the… plugsuit incident.

Shinji suppressed a shudder, and moved on. What Mari did with her free time wasn’t something he needed to concern himself with.
“...aaand chat invite sent!”

Mari bit down on a cracker, chewing noisily. So what if she was lying on the floor at an hour when she should probably be asleep? It was her flat; she could do what she wanted to! Besides, it wasn’t like Misato was going to bust down the wall from the flat over and yell at her or anything.

Not to mention Mari had more important things to take care of.

>>ihr3_hoheit has joined the chat.

>ZaBeasto: Oh your highness, it’s meee~

>ihr3_hoheit: Four Eyes?

Mari smirks.

It’s been a month since they’d talked face-to-face; too long for the Fifth’s tastes. But text will have to suffice. For now.

>ZaBeasto: No, the other stunning brunette you know who pilots Unit-05.

>ihr3_hoheit: Ha ha, very funny Mari.

>ihr3_hoheit: Good to know your sense of humor wasn’t lost when your arms got burnt off.

>ZaBeasto: Oh, your concern is so touching, your highness.

>ZaBeasto: Now tell me; how’s my favourite little krasnaya koroleva going? Hope it’s not too cold, being so far from me~

>ihr3_hoheit: Stop speaking Russian, Mari.

Of course, the girl can’t help but tease her dear friend.

>ZaBeasto: Nyet. Vy ne mozhete sdelat’ menya.

>ihr3_hoheit: Mari.

Even through text on a screen, her partner’s warning carries across. Mari giggles, typing out a reply as she fishes through the cracker box.

>ZaBeasto: Fine, fine.

The girl’s eye glints with mischief. The keys click again.

>ZaBeasto: Ya ostanovit’.

>ihr3_hoheit: You can’t tell it, but I’m sighing with exasperation.

>ihr3_hoheit: At you.

>ihr3_hoheit: Because you’re really not as funny as you think you are.

Mari’s response is-- well, it’s neither short nor quick, but it’s to the point. Sort of.
>ZaBeasto: Humor’s in the eye of the beholder, Princess. And I plan on having my eyes on you very soon.

>ihri3_hoheit: Goodnight, Mari.

>ZaBeasto: ‘Night, my Princess!

>>ihri3_hoheit has left the chat

Mari smiles, and closes the computer. The Brit’s eyes flit over to the digital clock, checking the time.

~Eh, I’ve still got a few hours before I really need to sleep.~

The girl lay back, hands interlaced behind her head.

“And it’s not like an Angel’s gonna show up tomorrow or anything, right?”
Chapter 008: You Are (Not) Ready

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the wait! I'm kinda busy with stuff, so chapter uploads may take a while to get down. As another note, these older chapters are... kinda full of errors. Tenses, perspectives, far too many exclamation points... I promise, it gets better.

Something churned under the surface of the ocean, shedding red that stained the seas.

A hundred legs thrashed, again and again, pushing the thick body forwards with each stroke, while the bladed front cut through the water like a sword.

In its path, the ocean darkened, turning the colour of blood. An iron stench hung in the air, drowning out the natural putrescence and salt. The corpses of fish floated to the surface, their bodies choked and stained with red.

Shamshel continued onwards.

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 008: You Are (Not) Ready

“Hm hm hmm…”

Shinji hummed to himself as he worked on breakfast. Grabbing a pre-measured cup of flour he’d set on the counter, the boy poured it into the mix, making sure to get an even spread.

Off in another room, Shinji heard something groan.

“Breakfast will be ready in half an hour, Misato!” he called, keeping his focus on the half-made meal before him. Zombie-like, the boy’s guardian poked her head around the corner, looking disheveled and half-asleep.

“…tea’s already brewing,” Shinji added, catching a glimpse of her.

Breakfast was a fairly simple affair, but it was enjoyable nonetheless. Misato did most of the talking, while Shinji was content to listen, occasionally replying to a question. Other than that, the duo mostly just ate.
Until Misato’s phone rang.

The woman blinked, bringing the device up to her head.

“This is Captain Katsuragi, how can I help you?”

Misato’s eyes widened. Shinji looked up from his meal, worried.

“You’re sure?” Misato asked, all semblance of humour gone from her voice. “The Fifth Angel’s here?”

---

Missiles swooped down, slamming into their target again and again. Cannons roared, hundreds of heavy, armour-piercing shells thrown across kilometers in an instant.

Onboard a nearby ship, moored at an artificial river, a weapon rotated on its turret. Electricity crackled along its barrel, building up a tremendous charge!

“Rail-Cannon fully charged! Fire!”

All other sounds were drowned out as the weapon discharged. Half a second later, the target crashed into the side of the hill, thrown from the sky by the hypersonic slug.

As the crew celebrated their hit, the being rose, red-purple dripping down its side.

The cannon didn’t get a chance to fire another shot.

---

"Dammit!” Misato cursed, striding down the hallway.

“Mis- er, Captain?” Shinji asked, dressed in his white plugsuit.

“Sorry Shinji, just…” Misato flared her nostrils in irritation. “…things aren’t going well. The only weapon that’s actually hurt the damn thing— some experimental railgun— just got vapourized; and nothing else is even scratching it. And now I learn that you’re the only Eva we can actually use!”

Shinji started. “W-wait, what?”

~This just isn’t fair,~ he thought to himself.

“Afraid so. Unit-01 hasn’t been reactivated, and there’s no way Unit-05’s getting out of repairs fast enough to sortie,” Misato replied, before her voice dropped to a mutter. “Not to mention Unit-05’s pilot decided that she didn’t need sleep, and she could barely stay awake when I found her.”

“So I’m just going out by myself?” the boy asked.

“Not quite. You’ll have the entire Tokyo-3 Intercept System at your back.” The duo reached a fork in the corridor, one end travelling to the Eva Cages, the other heading up to Central Dogma. Misato turned to Shinji.

“Alright. This is where we split.” The woman reached out, and put a hand on his shoulder. “Good luck, Shinji.”
The boy took a deep breath, letting the LCL fill his lungs.

~Okay, second Angel fight. I-I can do this. I can do this.~ Shinji thought to himself, trying to keep it in check. This was just like last time-- except now he'd been trained. Now he could take the monster on, even if he was all by himself.

“Alright, Shinji, just take it slow. We have no idea what this Angel is capable of,” Misato said.

Make that almost all by himself.

“R-roger.”

“Okay, good. Get ready, Shinji.”

Shinji swallowed, and nodded, anxiously waiting for the electromagnetic catapult to fire.

“R-ready, Misato.”

“Now! Evangelion Unit-00, launch!”

In an instant, the rails discharged, shooting the Eva up to the surface with incredible speed! Shinji grunted, forced into his seat by the acceleration! Metal screamed against metal, beginning to brake the bio-robot’s ascent to a manageable speed.

Within a few seconds, Unit-00 came to a halt among the architecture of Tokyo-3, its body shivering in the catapult's restraints. The locks opened, and the Eva slumped forwards, adopting its typical hunched posture. Shinji looked around, making sure he wasn't immediately in danger. Nothing immediately jumped out. Cautiously, the Eva took a step forward… then another, and another...

“Shinji, the GAU-34 is to your right. Take it,” Misato said, her tone of voice making clear that this was an order. The side of a nearby building slid open, revealing the oversized Gatling gun, mounted on its own set of rails.

Shinji nodded, Unit-00’s head mirroring the confirmation.

“Y-yes ma'am.”

The orange Evangelion reached out, grabbing the massive weapon with both hands. It was just as heavy as before, but a bit less unwieldy-- due to the lack of the test equipment. Unit-00 adjusted its stance accordingly, carrying the Gatling close to its body in readiness.

Shinji pushed the control grips forwards, urging Unit-00 around the next building...

And there it was, at the edge of the city. The Fifth Angel; or-- as it had been codenamed-- ‘Shamshel’. It might not be in his face like the last one-- ‘Sachiel’-- had been, but Shinji couldn't help but feel his heart sink into his stomach at the sight of it. Because while Sachiel had been terrifying, it was at least humanoid. Shamshel was no such thing.

The monster hovered above the ground, supported by nothing at all, wreathed in a dim, red mist. Its body was elongate, vaguely looking like a cross between a worm and a lobster, including a thick, candy purple carapace. A plethora of insectile legs dangled below its torso, writhing at the air, while two great limbs rested together under its ‘neck’.
Shamshel’s head looked like the head of a shovel, or possibly a spear, coming to a sharp point at its tip. Massive spots that crudely resembled eyes looked to be painted on the head, though the Angel showed no other means of sense.

Even without true eyes, Shamshel seemed to spot Shinji. The Angel paused, and began to tilt back, changing before the boy’s eyes. Its legs retracted, folding up into a ribcage; its arms split apart, reaching out to its sides; its head swung down, forming a hood directly above a frosty red ‘core’. Thus altered, the Angel began to advance, a pinprick of light forming in the centre of the core, focusing on Unit-00.

This was it.

“Shinji! Fire!” Misato’s shout came, snapping the boy back into action.

Unit-00 stepped back, raising the GAU-34 parallel to the ground.

~Centre the target, pull the trigger, fire in bursts. Centre the target, pull the trigger, fire in bursts. Centre the target, pull the trigger, fire in bursts,~ the boy repeated in his mind.

Shinji pulled the trigger.

The Gatling gun roared, firing second-long blasts of armour-piercing slugs into the Angel! Smoke and fire billowed from the ends of the weapon, shells spraying from the ammunition port and crashing to the ground. The Angel was almost completely enveloped, barely visible to Shinji.

“Shinji! Stop!”

The roar stopped, the GAU’s barrels slowing their revolutions. As the haze began to clear, Shinji swore he could hear something…

Zzzmmm!

Something in the haze ignited. The boy didn’t need any orders this time around to make a decision. Unit-00 lowered the gun, backing away as fast as it could without tripping over the cable on its back.

A glowing pink blur lashed out from the half-obscured Angel, cutting a burning slash through several buildings, before falling a block short of the Eva.

Shamshel floated forwards, a crackling whip of plasma extended from the tip of one arm. The Angel was almost completely unscathed, the only damage on it a reddish stain along a crack near its waist--where it had been struck by the short-lived rail-cannon.

“Oh no,” Shinji muttered, watching the monster advance.

Shinji could swear the Angel’s core winked at him, before it swung its other arm around! Another whip came shooting out, aiming to catch the bothersome Eva!

Frantically, Shinji dropped the gun, and threw himself to the side! As the whip cut into the weapon, the orange Eva smashed through an abandoned building, crashing to the ground in a shower of debris.

“...Ugh,” the boy brought a hand to his aching head, dazed by the impact the Plug had taken. He could make out a shape… something tall and purple and- oh dear.
~Do something!~ The boy thought frantically-- he didn’t care what happened, just so long as he didn’t die!

Shamshel drew back its right arm, whip blazing pink-

*BRAKKAKAKKAKKA!!*

From the sides of the Eva’s head shot a panicked barrage of lead! Unit-00’s chain-guns were next to worthless for actually hurting the Angel, but they did a fine job at irritating it!

Distracted, Shamshel’s whip cut through several chunks of debris before contacting, saving Unit-00 from the worst of the damage-- though the Angel’s attack still threw the Eva bodily down the street!

“Shinji!”

The boy groaned, pushing his Eva upright.

“I… I’m f-fine, Misato. I-I can keep… I can keep going…” he panted, watching the Angel turn towards him. The monster was several blocks away-- if he could just stay out of range of those whips, he might stand a chance.

“…Shinji, if you really think so…” Misato replied. “We’ll keep going. Stand by for incoming fire support-- we’ll send you another weapon!”

From the tops and sides of buildings extended a myriad of cannons and missiles, which swiftly trained themselves on the Angel, and fired!

Shamshel’s attention fell away from the Eva, the Angel hissing as it swiped at the nearest weapon emplacements! Buildings fell, torn apart by its whips, the other emplacements unloading their ammunition into the monster!

To Shinji’s side, a building unfolded again, revealing a tubular weapon with a boxy magazine on top; the EM75 Hand Bazooka. Without hesitation, Shinji grabbed it, tucking the magazine into Unit-00’s armpit, and taking aim.

“AAAAAAAA!” Shinji yelled, pulling the trigger again and again! Four rockets erupted from the rifle’s end in rapid succession, slamming into Shamshel’s back, knocking the Angel to the ground!

As the Intercept System died down, Shinji waited, breathing heavily as he waited for the smoke to clear.

A shape rose up from the debris, a fiery glow coming from the core. As the scene cleared, the Angel hissed, reigniting its whips as it floated upright. The air shimmered around it, distorting its image slightly, but it was still clear.

The Angel was still unharmed.

“G-guys?” the boy asked shakily. “P-please tell me that this t-thing isn’t invincible.”

“Just hang on Shinji,” replied Misato into the microphone. “We’re working on a solution as you speak.”

“Ibuki, what do we have?” the captain asked, standing upright.
“Its AT Field’s strong-- very strong!” reported the young woman. “It’s in some sort of… ablative layering or something!”

“That’s how it’s taking all our firepower! The composite’s stronger than the Fourth’s!” added a bespectacled man from his own station.

“Wait,” Misato said. “You’re saying our Eva-scale weaponry can’t get past it?!”

“Right! The field needs to be eroded by something just as strong before we can even scratch it with our guns!”

“Pity we lost that railgun,” the third bridge worker added.

“Damn,” muttered Misato, before grabbing the microphone again.

“Alright, Shinji! You’re going to have to erode the Angel’s AT Field!”

“How do I do that?!”

“Just… I don’t know! Think about eroding it!” she replied. “It’s a barrier; break it down!”

~Break it down, break it down, break it down…~ he thought furiously, trying to picture the barrier worn away by something like sandpaper.

The shimmering around the Angel began to die down, even as Shamshel closed in, readying its whips again.

“Shinji, you’re doing it!” Misato exclaimed. “Now open fire!”

The boy grunted an affirmative, and raised the Hand Bazooka again.

“T-tank this!”

The rifle barked, firing a single rocket at the Angel! Shamshel didn’t move to stop it, confident in its AT Fi-

The rocket slammed into Shamshel’s ‘ribcage’, exploding in a fireball! The Angel shrieked, blackened and burnt legs falling from the cavity as it staggered back. The monster hissed, lashing its whips against the ground as it-

Shinji screamed, emptying the rest of the magazine’s rockets into the Angel! Shamshel’s whips slashed, cutting apart several rockets as it advanced, despite the impacts and explosions that shook its frame! Head cracked almost in two, the insectile monster shrieked, and launched its own attack!

The first whip sliced through the rocket launcher like butter, throwing Unit-00 off balance! Then the second whip cut around, tossing Unit-00 to the side- and severing the Eva’s cable!
On the wall of Terminal Dogma, a timer popped up, beginning to count down from ten minutes!

Misato stared, putting the microphone down.

“...well, f***.”

A light pulsed on the wall. Blearily, Shinji shook his head, trying to focus. He’d been winning… and then the Angel had…

Shinji’s eyes snapped open, focusing on the timer that counted down mercilessly on the wall.

“...oh dear.”

“Shinji?! Shinji, can you hear me?!”

“I- y-yes, Misato!”

“Shinji, you’ve got less than ten minutes before Unit-00 shuts down!” Misato said. “Make them count!”

“R-right!” For the second time, Shinji pushed himself upright. Unit-00 creaked, orange blood leaking from a half-melted cut down its front, but it followed.

~K-knife. I need the knife.~

Unit-00’s shoulder pylon opened, the handle folding out of its depths. The Eva reached over, pulling the weapon from its sheath. As soon as it was comfortably in the Eva’s hand, the segmented blade of the Progressive Knife extended, edge beginning to glow.

“B-blast visor, down.”

The plates on Unit-00’s cheeks slid forwards, clamping together over most of the Eva’s face.

“Rocket engines, ig-ignite.”

Along the Eva’s back and elbows, the engines spark, readying to fire.

“Let’s… let’s do this.” Shinji’s grip steadies. If he can just pull off what he did last time… but nothing’s holding Shamshel in place, and if those whips get a solid hit on him…

“Now!”

Unit-00 charges, dorsal rockets flaring! The knife swings back, before the orange bio-mech drives it-into thin air?

Shamshel’s whip cuts into Unit-00’s back, melting through the armour plating! The Eva stumbles, barely managing to regain balance-

The Angel lashes out again, throwing the Eva onto its backside. The Progressive Knife twists, and the blade snaps.
Unit-00’s other pylon folds open, the Eva-

Shamshel’s whip slices clean through the metal, burying itself in the Eva’s throat! Shinji screams, releasing the control grips! Unit-00 thrashes, orange blood spraying from the melting wound!

A hand clamps around the plasma-sheathed whip, squeezing tight, despite how the whip burns at it. Shamshel hisses in surprise, before the arm *yanks*, pulling it up close to the half-dead mecha.

Shinji’s teeth grit together, barely keeping back his pain as he stared the Angel dead in the core.

“I… I’ve had just about *enough* of y-you…” the boy growled, clenching his right hand into a fist.

The Eva’s arm swings back, the arm pylons unfolding as the ignited rocket thrusters extend! As the engines build to a roar, Shinji screams!

“Take *this!*”

His fist, strength boosted by the rockets, drives into Shamshel’s core! What little AT Field the Angel’s recovered shatters from the blow, the red surface of the core cracking and buckling!

Shamshel screams, and tries to lash out with its other whip! Unit-00’s hand latches on, holding the Angel at bay!

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!” With as much force as he can muster from the Eva, Shinji rams Unit-00’s skull straight into the core!

*Crack.*

The wedge-shaped visor digs deep, the entire gem-like structure splitting down the middle, almost in half. The light is almost instantly snuffed out, Shamshel’s body freezing up.

A second later, the Angel crashes to the ground, whips already auto-extinguishing as it slumps over on Unit-00.

---

The one unfortunate thing about headbutting an Angel core is the splitting headache one gets from it. And it’s the straw that breaks the camel’s back for Shinji. Worn down by aches, pains, and imaginary blood loss, the boy simply can’t take anymore.

With a sigh, Shinji Ikari slips into unconsciousness.

-  
-  
-
Chapter 009: You Are (Not) Okay

A presence.

Blue… something blue was there…

“Hello?” Shinji called to the darkness.

“Hello…” came the whispered reply, faint and directionless. The boy strained, struggling to make out the speaker among the vague darkness. Nothing can be seen, but something certainly sees him. Shinji shivered, walking forwards slowly. The white outfit didn’t keep out the cold, and it made the boy feel like a sitting duck.

“What… what is it?” He asked. “Who are you?”

Something moved, off to the side. The boy’s eyes flicked over, pupils dilating. Darkness fell away, sliding and dripping off the figure’s body. Its skin was grey, and its hair was dull. A red and blistered hand rose up, and brushed aside the shaggy curtain. Two eyes stared out, one milky and scarred, one clear and sharp. Their lips drew back, teeth narrow and numerous.

“Someone who needs to talk.”

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 009: You Are (Not) Okay

Shinji’s eyelids flickered, slowly sliding open. The boy blinked at the light, wanting to clear away the dazzling glow.

With effort, the boy was able to get past the worst of the glare and the pressure in his skull, and focus. His surroundings resolved themselves into recognizable shapes; walls, a door, a bed, and two colourful figures sitting on a bench opposite him.

“Pilot Ikari is awake,” the blue-haired one stated, nudging the other with her elbow. The two stood, and began walking over. Shinji shook his head, finally getting his vision to clear properly.

Rei and Mari stopped at the foot of the bed, the former watching him with curiosity, the latter with a smirk on her face.

“So, how’s Mr. ‘I-just-killed-two-Angels’ feeling?” she asked.

A hand scratched at his head absentmindedly “Er… what?”

“You successfully terminated the fifth Angel in melee combat yesterday,” Rei replied. “Subsequently, you were hospitalized, due to a concussion you sustained from an… unorthodox tactic.”
Shinji blinked.

“I… headbutted the Angel?”

“Hell yeah you did!” Mari grinned, landing a playful punch on his shoulders. “Purple sod never even saw it coming!!”

The boy winced, the combination of noise and blow bringing the headache back up.

“Ah- S-sorry, it’s just… my head…” he said, massaging his forehead.

“It’s fine, no harm done,” Mari waved it off, taking a step back

“If you require further rest, we can leave, so that you aren’t distracted,” Rei chimed in.

The invitation is a godsend for Shinji. Time by himself to reflect on what’s gone on and recover is something he’d gladly agree to. The boy nods, shoulders slouching in relief at the exit Rei’s provided.

“Very well then,” the pale girl replies. “Pilot Makinami, let’s go.”

“All right, all right,” the brunette answers, following Rei to the door. As the two of them exit the room, Mari pauses, and turns to shoot Shinji a finger gun. With that, the two are gone, leaving the boy to his own thoughts.

Shinji sinks back down into the pillow, and sighs.

“Now, just what was that?..”

The Angel’s body hung, locked into a cage of steel, suspended above the ground to offer up a full view of it to the people below. The core of the monster was partially removed, held in place by multiple hydraulic braces. A jagged crevice ran down it, cracks running out from the edges, marring the otherwise perfect surface with fractures and scratches.

“Well, at least we don’t have to worry about the thing waking up and going rampant,” Misato deadpanned, looking up at the dull corpse. Ritsuko and several other scientists looked over from mobile stations, and raised eyebrows at the woman.

“What? It was perfectly valid for the Third Angel!” The Captain replied.

“...Captain,” one of the scientists began. “We are in the middle of quite a lot of work, and we'd appreciate it.”

“Nakamura, don't worry yourself about it, “Ritsuko said. “If Captain Katsuragi wants an overview, I can give it to her. Just focus on your work.”

The scientist shrugged acceptingly, and turned back to his station. Meanwhile, Ritsuko headed over to her friend and colleague.

“I suppose you want to know what we've found, Misato?”

“Is there any other reason why I'd be here?”
“I can think of a few,” answered the doctor. Misato sighed.

“I'd meant work-related reasons, Ritz. Now, I'm sure you've found something weird. Could I get the report now?”

The other woman nodded, and motioned for them to move over to a different area, closer to Shamshel’s battered core.

“As with the last Angel we’ve had access to, there are some distinct similarities. Its body is made of the same type of matter that Evangelions are made of-- somewhere between a particle and a wave. Of course, you’re already aware of the near-perfect genetic match the Angels have to the Evas-- this simply reinforces that.”

“Unfortunately, some of the findings aren’t quite as benign.”

Misato blinked.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well,” Ritsuko answered. “It appears that Shamshel’s… equivalent to blood, has a high concentration of what’s essentially liquid Core. The fluid binds to conventional biology, and breaks down the cells’ Ego Barriers. Inorganic materials are unaffected, as are organisms protected by an Eva’s AT Field, but…” the woman sighed. “Well, let’s just say that cleaning this mess up is going to be long and tedious at the least. Shinji’s kill wasn’t exactly clean.”

The two stood, watching the dead behemoth in silence.

A magenta droplet fell from a wound, hissing as it struck the concrete.

~It's been three weeks since I came here, and I'm already going insane,~ Shinji sighed. ~Lucky me.~

The boy looked around. Nothing really to do…

~I wonder how long it’ll take before I’m allowed to leave,~ he wondered.

Two hours.

Given that he’d been asleep for a bit more than a day in order to heal his concussion, Shinji… well,
he frankly didn’t know if that sort of time was too long or too short. Whatever the case, the Third Child was done with his stay in the hospital.

Now all he had to do was get back to the apartment.

There were only a few problems with that.

Such as the fact that Misato wasn’t here to drive him.

And he had no idea which way to go to walk back to the apartment.

The boy sat on the hospital bench, waiting. Nothing. Nobody came through the door, his phone didn’t ring, nothing.

“Where is she?”

Pen-Pen opened the door to his room, and slid out. The miniature freezer provided a pleasant escape from the warm summers of Japan, but it was mostly just a place to sleep. All the food was kept by his roommate in the big fridge, beyond the penguin’s reach.

Said owner was currently sitting at the dining room table, drinking her third can of beer. Oh well, maybe that boy would-

-huh. That was odd. Where could he be?

Pen-Pen waddled over towards his plastered pal, tilting his head in inquiry.

“Wark?”

“Huh?… who?”

Pen-Pen narrowed his eyes.

“Wark.”

Misato paused, mid-sip.

“...Wait, r-run me by that again. I’m mighta had a biiiiit too much to drink.”

“Wark.”

The woman’s eyes widened as she processed what the penguin was saying.

“...Shit. I forgot about Shinji, didn’t I?”

“Wark.” deadpanned the bird.

A second later, the can slammed into the tabletop with a crack.

“Goddammit!”
The door swings open. Shinji looks up, attention drawn by the arrival of someone. Who could it be? “Hey there, Third!” Mari says cheerfully, poking her head through the door. “H-hey there, Mari,” he replies. “Er… what are you doing here?” Mari’s brow flattens. “Somebody got drunk and completely forgot that you needed picking up.” Shinji blinks. “Misato?” “She’s got just the teeniest little alcoholism problem,” she answers. “Now, do you fancy leaving? I do have my driver’s license.” On one hand, Mari and a car do not sound like a good combination. But on the other, another moment not spent here is a moment which could be spend at the closest thing he has to a home in this city. And the girl’s nice enough, even if she’s a bit… eccentric. “Well… sure.” Mari breaks into another grin, and pumps her fist in the air. “J-just try not to kill us or anything, please. I’d rather not die in a car crash.” “No worry. I’m a very responsible driver.”

-Ten minutes later.

Shinji steps out of the Alpine. The drive over… was actually fine. Mari exits the car, cracking a particularly catlike grin to the boy. “Told ya I was a good driver. Or were you expecting me to do some crazy shit and try to jump a ramp or something?” Shinji’s slightly embarrassed expression is all the answer Mari needs. “…Oh my god, you did,” she giggles, holding a hand up to her mouth. The red tint to Shinji’s face only intensifies. “Well, just goes to show… probably something really clichéd about books and covers. Whatever, right?” The boy nods awkwardly in return. “S-sure. Right.” Mari claps him on the back, directing them towards the elevator. “Come on, Shinji. Let’s go.”
Chapter 010: This is (Not) Easy

Chapter Notes

My apologies for not getting the rest of this stuff posted. It's been a while, but since a lot of people seem to like this, I've finally managed to get off my butt and upload. Yay!

On another note, I will admit that there are some elements of these earlier chapters that I'm not particularly satisfied with. This has been my first long-running fanfic, so it's bound to be a bit shaky in some places. Still, it definitely improves with the later chapters.

The Evangelion hung in the Cage, bars of heavy grey metal overlaying its silver-white armour. Its eyes were dim, the single horn on its forehead glinting softly in the dull light. Its limbs, sheathed in flexible composite and titanium, were limp, hanging down by its side. The only imperfections that marred the Eva's surface were a blackened patch around an eye, and a gleaming mesh down its right arm.

Eva Unit-01, the second Evangelion ever built, slept.

A voice broke the silence.

"The reactivation test will commence tomorrow morning, correct?"

And soon after came another, in reply.

"...Yes sir."

"Good. We can't let a little setback like this discourage us. After all, there is still much to do."

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 010: This is (Not) Easy

"Miso, I'm back with Shinji!" Mari announced, poking her head into the apartment, before bringing her voice down to a more respectable volume. "And don't worry, I didn't leave any dents in your car."

"Wooo-hooo..." a half-conscious voice cheers from the living room. An exasperated 'Wark' follows after it.

Mari sighed, and turned to Shinji.
“Well, I guess I’ll be leaving ya here, Third. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Yeah,” Shinji replied. “I’ll see you then as well.”

Mari nodded.

Shinji looked around, and coughed.

“Er… you... you were leaving, right?”

The girl blinked, awkwardly realizing that she, in fact, was still standing at the doorway.

“I- er… Yeah, of course!” Mari sputtered. “I’ll just… yeah…” the girl gestured, trying to make up for the poor speech, as she slowly stepped back.

“I’ll be going now.”

Finally finished with completely embarrassing herself, Mari left, retreating to her own apartment.

Somewhat reluctantly, Shinji turned towards his own. Fortunately, it didn’t seem like Misato would be… troublesome to deal with, even if she was drunk.

He hoped.

The next day was school. Curiously enough, Rei wasn’t there-- though her standoffish attitude meant that Shinji didn’t really notice it until halfway through the class, when Kensuke pointed it out to him over the computer.

((Evangelgroupie: This sorta thing happened two months ago, back with Unit-01.)) came the message.

((Evangelgroupie: They were conducting… I’m not sure. Some sort of test. From what I’ve heard, it didn’t go very well.))

The silver giant screamed, ripping through its restraints.

“Berserker!”

“Eject the power cord!”

Eyes an angry red, the primal being lunged, tearing at the walls. Sheets of metal fell, even as the containment network activated.

From the ceiling dropped and array of turrets, firing in an attempt to distract it from escape. It worked. Technically.

Unit-01 rounded on the guns, bullets bouncing off the titanium composite armour. It roared again,
And then a bullet struck it in the eye, ripping through the delicate shell and piercing the surface. The Evangelion screamed, a disturbingly human sound, as mechanics all over it whirred to life.

“Weapons systems are activating!”

“How much longer until it’s out of power?”

“About a minute, sir!”

The right arm raised, locking into position. Plates retracted, the entire wrist dislocating as the gun assembly twisted and unclamped, shifting into firing position.

“It’s dumping excess power into the caster!”

“Is Unit-01 trying to bring down the facility?!”

Lightning wrapped along the unfolded arm, the air starting to overheat as the plasma charge formed.

Now only 30 seconds…

29…

28…

27…

“Deploying special Bakelite!”

Nozzles in the wall flipped open, spraying red fluid at the silver giant. And when fast-drying liquid meets superheated oxy-plasma…

The results aren’t pretty.

((Evangelgroupie: ...I never got to actually see it, but you’d know it was bad. Rei was in the hospital for… well, more than a month,)) Kensuke finished. From where he sat, Shinji could actually see Kensuke tapping his fingers together in worry.

((ZaBeasto has joined the chat))

((ZaBeasto: So, you’re worried about her, mm?))

While Shinji admittedly hadn’t been expecting Mari, Kensuke wasn’t exactly off-guard.

((Evangelgroupie: Well…))

((Evangelgroupie: I mean, who wouldn’t be worried bout one of their friends doing something that hospitalized them last time?))
Admittedly, that was complete, gibbering nonsense, but Rei sometimes liked to think she had a poetic streak.

The pale girl sat, listening to the hum of machinery and the pump of a massive heart around her. Unit-01’s fury had calmed from last time, though she could tell the Eva’s beastiel mind was waking.

Still, that could be dealt with soon enough. The security measures had been increased, Unit-01’s berserker rage shackled until use could be found for it.

Rei took another breath of LCL, letting the primordial soup diffuse directly into her lungs.

“Second stage complete. Activating synchronization in three… two… one…”

She was inside Unit-01’s head.

And Unit-01 was inside hers. The snarls of the Beast shoved themselves into her mind, gesturing with a thousand accusing talons, a thousand fanged maws spitting words of bile and hate.

Copy copy not me not original prey prey eat it pain eye arm destroy regrow.

Rei didn’t give in to it.

No.

Will not obey submit give in small false go away leave.

No.

Explain question give answer why shouldn’t I just kill you now.

.

We need you.

.

In an instant, the presence froze to metaphorical ice.

Rei waited. Waited for a response, waited for the Eva to make up its mind, waited for any number of things to go wrong…

(Synchronization active at 30.41%) cheerfully chimed the computer. (Evangelion Test-Type Unit-01 has been successfully activated.)

Had it not been for the continually-oxygenated environment, Rei might have released a breath that she could have been holding. The dark passion of the horned giant remained, but confusion flickered across it, flashing like thunder.

... explain, asked the Beast.

.

And so Rei told it.
Far away, a consciousness stirs.

Entombed within a man-sized sphere of impossibly hard material, it has slept for seventeen long years. Memories of its brethren flood its mind.

Father, slain by his own strength.

One, torn apart by a spidery freak.

Two, gutted by an orange giant.

Three, pulled down and broken.

This shall not happen. Not to them.

Ramiel, Thunder of God, would not let it happen.

A day later.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA-”
Chapter Notes

I think I put too much gratuitous German in this fic. It's just a feeling.

Once again; these early chapters could probably have been redone a lot better by myself, but I'm going to upload them as is to preserve the original version of the fic. For better or for worse.

NERV Berlin, the day before.
.
He was being annoying again.

For some reason, he just had to bring it up. How he'd actually found out was a mystery. An annoying mystery.

She didn't know if he was actively trying to get on her nerves, or if it was an accident. But honestly, she didn't really care either way. Annoyances didn't tend to go well when the Second Child was involved.
.
“Care to repeat that, Nagisa?”

The target in question shrugged, unruly silvery grey hair bouncing with the movement.

“I'm not sure why repeating myself is even necessary. Surely I said it clearly enough the first time?”

A pair of vibrant blue eyes stared.

The boy sighed.

“Fine, if I must. I'd said that you looked rather… irritated, to say the least.”

Not quite enough to satisfy. The girl planted hand on hip, a single eyebrow swooping up.

“... And I'd suggested that perhaps it was due to the unavailability of a certain pilot who you appear to have a rather close bond with. But given the emotional state I've seen you in during the times that you have been with her, I don't see how mentioning it is in any way in-”

The words of Kaworu Nagisa, Provisional Second Child, were cut off in an instant as the red-headed girl most definitely violated his personal space.

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End
“Three things, Nagisa,” hissed Asuka Langley Sohryu, nose to nose with the other pilot.

“One; shut the hell up. Two; shut the hell up. And three--”

“Does three involve you yelling at me to ‘shut the hell up’? asked Kaworu, head tilting. “Because that would say marvels on both your tenacity and repeatability.”

Asuka’s eyes narrowed.

“Nobody likes a smart ass, Nagisa.”

It was then that Kaworu made the second worst mistake of his life.

“You do.”

Elsewhere in NERV-Berlin, a ponytailed man winced, and looked away from the security camera monitor.

“Yeah… just gonna focus on something else,” he muttered, turning away.

Half an hour and several blows later...

Two giants stood on an empty field, one red as blood, the other grey as ash, identical in almost every other way.

Kaworu licked the last bit of blood off his lip. That last punch had caught him a little off guard.

“Are you sure this is necessary?” he asked. “Perhaps you're simply overreacting.”

“And perhaps you’re simply a dummkopf, but that won’t stop me from kicking your skinny, provisional arse across the field,” Asuka replied in turn, the red giant folding its arms.

The grey one rubbed the bridge of its face in exasperation.

~Why must my birthplace be in Germany of all countries?~ thought Kaworu. ~I could have gotten along with any of the other Children, but Ms. Sohryu seems determined to make this entire process irritatingly difficult.~

The two armoured titans launched themselves at each other, drawing knives from their shoulder fins.

~I mean, I certainly don’t have anything against the country itself… but blaming it all on her… well, that’s not exactly fair, even if she is a little--!~
The red one struck first, driving a blade through the grey one’s left eye. Grimacing, Kaworu swung down with a hammer-fist, but Asuka dodged, relinquishing the knife to the other Eva’s skull as she skipped away.

“Hah! Take that!”

“I’m not out of the fight yet,” the boy replied coolly. “Eva Mark.02, launch Shredder Missiles!”

The grey giant’s shoulders unfolded, exposing several racks of spike-tipped projectiles. With a roar of fire, every single one launched, all homing in on Mark.02’s opponent!

Of course, when you work with someone for two years, you tend to pick up on their habits. There was next to no doubt in the Provisional Second’s mind that Asuka would get past his missile smokescreen with minimal damage. But that left him with at most half a minute free.

Mark.02 retracted the blade of one knife, and lobbed it into the fray. The red Unit-02’s own shoulders opened, firing off missiles in a bid to start a chain reaction.

As explosions ripped across the field, nearly destabilizing the simulated terrain, Kaworu yanked out the knife in his Eva’s eye, purple-red blood pouring down its face.

“Nice try, Nagisa! But not good enough!”

Her Unit-02 was glorious. Even with other thoughts distracting her, and the Provisional Second having the social skills of a dying starfish, the Evangelion always shone bright.

She rushed out of the holographic smoke, ramming an elbow into the Mark.02’s solar plexus! The next blow slammed into the side of its head with a crack, downing it.

Assured of her own victory at this point, Asuka raised her Progressive Knife…

...

And then the screen went dark.

The girl blinked, staring at the words that displayed on the surface of the simulated Entry Plug:

“WARNING. PATTERN BLUE DETECTED. SIXTH ANGEL IDENTIFIED.”

For a second, the girl was silent.

...

And then she spoke.

“...Soll das eine verfickte Verarschung sein?”

Well, any good mood she might have had was gone. Good job, ‘Sixth Angel’. Asuka stood in the Eva hanger alongside Kaworu, waiting for instructions.
Kaworu’s tongue slithered out of his mouth, running over the busted lip. Asuka huffed, and looked away.

It wasn’t that she wasn’t justified in her actions-- at least, not in her mind. But there was a small chance that she might have overreacted just a little bit. The girl winced, as her conscience finally started to call foul.

~Verdammt, stupid four-eyes. You’re starting to rub off on me,~ the redhead thought.

“...So.”

The boy turned, attention caught. Asuka coughed.

“I… have come to the conclusion that punching you… might not have been the best idea I’ve had. N-not that my ideas are bad; this one was just… less good.”

A corner of Kaworu’s mouth turned up slightly.

“Sohryu… would you care to repeat that?”

Asuka leveled a glare at him, and crossed her arms.

“Don’t push your luck, Nagisa. All I’m saying is that I won’t be aiming at your face anymore.” The Second Child turned away again, mouth screwed up. “Besides, all I’d accomplish if I did would be hurting my fist, and there’s no way that your stupid face is worth it!”

~Honestly, how long does it take for NERV to narrow down the Angel's trajectory? Am I deploying or not?! ~

The silence continued for a few minutes, before she finally got an answer. The Angel’s destination was not in Europe. It was, once again, Japan.

~... Verdammt.~

“At least I’ll be transferring in a few months,” Asuka said to herself, drumming her fingers on the desk. “At this rate, I’ll have to be in Japan in order to get a shot at an Angel.”

~Plus,~ said her subconscious, chiming in with a tone that the Second Child would never have used nowadays. ~There’s always-- “No, shut up,” Asuka muttered, shoving that particular thought back into the depths. She didn't need those sorts of things distracting her.

“... Stupid cat-faced weirdo. “
Chapter 012: You Will (Not) Survive

He’d died.

That’s what they told him. That his heart had actually stopped for several minutes.

He could believe it easily enough. Still shuddering from the pain of having his ribcage melted open—or rather, Unit-00’s ribcage—Shinji sat, crumpled on a bench.

Misato had some harebrained scheme to kill it, as he might have suspected. Something about a gun powered by Japan…

He didn’t want any part of it. He didn’t want to pilot anymore.

Of course, he’d have to. Shinji didn’t have any say in the matter.

The boy lay down on his side, curled up into a ball, reliving the nightmare of a few hours ago.

Neon Genesis Evangelion:
(Not) the End

Chapter 012: You Will (Not) Survive

“Eva Unit-00, launch!”

Once more, Shinji sped upwards, before Unit-00 reached the cloudy surface. The clamps unlocked, and the orange Eva took a step forward, looking across the lake on the edge of the city.

What happened next wasn’t pretty.

The rolling clouds split, exposing the Angel in all its glory. Nearly a kilometer wide, the being reassembled a massive octahedron carved from solid blue crystal. Above each face was a triangular plate, floating several meters away.

“High energy reaction detected!” Someone shouted over the radio, far too late to help.

The crystal’s edges ignited, turquoise fire coursing to a single point on its tip.

Shinji’s eyes widened.

And then Ramiel opened fire.

After that, Shinji didn’t remember much of anything. The only thing left was the unrelenting, burning
pain-- not just from the feedback, but from the LCL boiling in the plug.

Needless to say, unconsciousness was swift.

But the memories weren’t.

“Alright then!” Misato announced. Gathered around the table were a number of people, including the NERV bridge crew, a few members of the JSSDF, the heads of the other NERV subsections, and—most noticeably—the First and Fifth Children.

“Here’s the plan.”

“The Angel-- Ramiel, we’re calling it-- has started drilling through our armour plating, and will reach us in an estimated maximum of twenty-four hours. If that happens, we’re all screwed.”

“Ramiel’s AT Field is the strongest we’ve seen yet-- we’d be absurdly lucky if a single Eva could neutralize it. Additionally, it has an area of denial that covers the entire city and then some; it locks onto anything hostile within this radius, and destroys it with a high-power particle beam, thus rendering conventional Evangelion combat and tactics useless.”

“There’s only one way we can destroy this thing: hit it with something hard enough to break its AT Field, and do that from outside the area of denial. Fortunately, NERV and the JSSDF have been collaborating to build such a weapon for the last few years. Rits, if you will?”

Doctor Akagi sighed at the informal nickname, but stepped up nonetheless. With the flick of a switch, the table’s projectors flipped up, rearranging into hologram-projection mode. A shape flickered into existence, before solidifying about a foot above the surface.

It was clearly a weapon, with a very long body and barrel, a wide stock, two handles— one on each side— and a number of cable connection ports along the body.

“This is the Long-Range Positron Sniper Cannon, the result of NERV and the JSSDF’s collaborative efforts. Aside from the Evangelions, this is the most powerful weapon we have available. It has a long enough range to be fired from outside the denial zone, and can take an extremely high-energy charge.”

Ritsuko stepped back, letting Misato take the reins from there.

“We’re setting up a series of capacitors and transformers to focus the entirety of Japan’s power grid into the cannon, in order to penetrate Ramiel’s field. This means that we can’t continually move the weapon— but we should be able to keep some maneuverability from our firing platform. Mari, Rei, up here.”

At the mention of her name, Mari perked up further, leaning closer. Rei just blinked, waiting for the woman to continue.

“You two are the key to our operation, given that Shinji’s…”

“--Completely traumatized?” suggested Mari.

“--In less than ideal condition to pilot?” suggested Rei, at the same time.

“...yeah,” Misato sighed. “Mari, because of your high synchronization and the stable platform Unit-
05 provides, you’ll be in charge of aiming and firing the positron cannon. Rei, you’ll be in charge of defending Unit-05 from attacks using one of several electro-reflective heat shields. If one shield gets damaged, discard it and take another, that’s why we have spares. And as for Shinji… well, we’re setting him up as emergency backup, in case one of the Evas is too badly damaged."

“Is that understood?”

The reply of ‘yes ma’am’ was resounding, causing a grin to sneak across Misato’s face.

“Alright then! We’ve got twenty four hours to make this happen! Let’s do this, people!”

T-17 hours, Operation Yashima. 2:00 AM.

Ramiel hung in the air like a monolith, the floating plates slowly orbiting it. The lower four had elongated, a pair twisting through the ground like a drill, while the other two continually shoveled out material. The upper four tilted as they orbited, turning towards moving objects within the denial zone. The Angel’s main body didn’t move, except for the occasional flicker of teal along an edge.

A few missiles swooped in from an out-of-view launcher, aimed in the general direction of the Angel. The response was immediate; one of the upper plates broke orbit, flying forward to block the explosion. Ramiel’s edges ignited, before a thin, blue-green beam lanced out from a point, spearing the second wave with ease.

A minute passed, and Ramiel’s edges cooled down, the Angel resuming its steady burrowing.

T-11 hours, Operation Yashima. 8:00 AM.

Unit-05 climbed up the mountain, low to the ground. Its new arms were plenty strong, boxy limbs with five taloned fingers on each hand, all painted in military green, with a few yellow highlights.

The Eva paused, helmeted head turning to stare at Ramiel, illuminated by the rising sun.

~...Bloody blue bastard,~ thought Mari. ~Let’s see who’s really the better gunner, e-?~

Something poked Unit-05 in the rear.

“... ‘scuse me?” Mari asked, turning the Eva’s view downwards. Unit-01 retracted its finger, and put the hand back on the lower concrete step.

“Pilot Makinami,” came Rei’s voice. “If you could refrain from sightseeing and internal monologues until both Evangelions have reached the top, I would greatly appreciate it.”

“Ah. Right. Sorry, Rei!”

Somewhat awkwardly, the larger cyborg resumed its climb, closely followed by Unit-01.
At the bottom of the hill, Unit-00 was still walking, each step heavy and shaking. With its chest barely reinforced with steel plating, and the way it carried itself, the Eva looked like it was struggling under the weight of the world.

Or perhaps that was its pilot who was.

T-6 hours, Operation Yashima. 1:00 PM.

The Evas had done most of the work, carrying the heavy cannon up to the top of the mountain where the firing platform rested. Unit-05 had been set up, holding onto the cannon with both hands, pressing the wide stock against its reinforced sternum. An N2 reactor was attached to the backpack, offering not only an exceedingly long time limit, but also a power boost for the actual weapon, and a counterweight for its great mass. Of course, Mari wasn’t actually in the Eva-- there wasn’t any reason for her to be at this time.

No, Mari-- along with the other Children-- was busy eating lunch on a separate platform.

Rei sat quietly, focused passionately on her salad. This was the first time the other two had seen her in her actual plugsuit-- a dark indigo garment with gunmetal and white detailing on the top half around her shoulders and chest. A bit of an odd colour choice for Unit-01’s pilot… but then again, the 00 plugsuit also didn’t quite fit colour-wise.

Shinji, if at all possible, was quieter than Rei-- or would have been, if his meal wasn’t instant ramen.

Mari was eating a sandwich. A cheese, ham, and mustard sandwich, to be precise. She’d sealed it in a container, and brought it with her in the entry plug. Typical Mari.

Finally, Mari decided to do something about the silence.

“So,” she said, taking a break from her lunch. “This is… different. Eh?”

“…”

“…”

Neither Rei nor Shinji replied. Mari sighed.

~This is going to be a long six hours, isn’t it?~

T-2 hours, Operation Yashima. 5:00 PM.

Time was almost up. The last few checks were being made; checks on the Evas, checks on the power lines, checks on the positron cannon. Everyone who wasn’t making checks was at their stations-- including the pilots.
Unit-05 shifted back on its haunches, the closest that the wheeled Eva could get to sitting down at the moment. To its right, Unit-01 sat, hands resting on one of the massive, triangular heat shields. Unit-00, due to being purely backup in this situation, sat further back.

With two hours to spare, Mari decided to give it another shot.

The light in Shinji’s Plug blinked, a small text alerting him of an incoming transmission. Reluctantly, the boy flicked a switch on his console, accepting the transmission. A video link snapped up, floating in the LCL thanks to the projectors.

“Ikari. We need to talk.”

Much to his surprise, the face that appeared wasn’t Mari.

It was Rei.

“I… Ayanami?” the boy asked, voice cracking as it started up. “What… what is it?”

“You don’t want to do this, correct? You’re retreating, in fear of being hurt.”

A slow nod came in reply.

“Understandable. Fear is a natural reaction to things that harm people. However…”

Shinji looked back up, the uncertain wording drawing him in. Rei drew in a breath, still expressing the same calm as always.

“… I believe this point was where the Fifth recommended I begin talking about ‘kicking aside common sense’ and ‘seizing life by the horns’… but that’s her method. I do not believe that such ideals would work well for you in any manner, as you have not exhibited her hotheaded attitude, nor the masochistic tendencies that I suspect she has. So my own method will be different.”

Shinji blinked.

“Ikari. You have been hurt; this is correct. However, you are not the only one at risk here. As much as she will deny it, Pilot Makinami and I are putting ourselves in far more danger than you are. Captain Katsuragi is putting herself at risk, along with the lives of every other human being in the city. At the moment, however, there are only three people who can put that risk to a use; and those three are us.”

“But that’s… that’s just as bad!” Shinji replied. “You’re saying that everyone’s in danger, but you’re also saying that I’m one of the three people who are responsible for them? After… after what happened?! That’s crazy!”

“You’ve already been that responsible before. Remember the last two Angels? The ones that you killed?”

“That-- I had back up!” he protested. “T-the first one, Mari was there! And the second one, Misato was there with the intercept system! All I did was--”

“All you did was enter combat with beings twenty times your size, wielding godlike powers, and slay them with minimal loss of life,” Rei interrupted. “You could do, despite the odds. Despite the fact that your training has been minimal at best, when compared to the other Children. Despite the
fact that you were piloting the least advanced Evangelion at NERV’s disposal.”

“I- but-”

~But that was different! If I’d had time to properly think about it, I never could have done that! I-

“Shinji Ikari.”

Rei stared at him intensely.

“Like it or not, you have proven yourself to be successful in your efforts, even when severely
disadvantaged against superior opposition. You are an Eva Pilot; and the Evas are the only thing that
can save humanity. Yes, you have the largest responsibility of effectively everyone on the planet, but
so do the others.”

“I am not asking you to be a hero. I am not asking you to sacrifice yourself for mankind’s sake. I am
not asking you to act as if everything is alright, because it is clearly not.”

“What I am asking for you to do... is trust us.”

“Unless Unit-01 or Unit-05 are disabled, or otherwise unable to perform their intended function, you
will not have to do anything. You have had backup before; now you are backup. You are not the
trump card, not the focus of the plan; you are the card NERV will play if everything else has started
to fail.”

“If that offers any consolation, trust me when I tell you that,” Rei finished. “Goodbye, Ikari.”

The transmission ended, leaving Shinji to mull it over.

Mari leaned back in the saddle, sliding open her helmet’s visor. The girl made a few gestures in the
fluid medium, letting her synchronization deal with the intent. As easy as that, the video link with
Unit-01 opened up.

“So... how’d it go?” Mari asked.

“It was... within acceptable parameters,” answered Rei.

Mari’s eyebrow rose up.

“Did ya’ use my speech thing?”

“No.” The reply was blunt and simple.

“...why not?”

“I found numerous flaws in your argumentative style,” answered Rei. “You made assumptions that
would not mesh well with Ikari’s psyche, least of all motivate him. I simply laid out the truth of the
matter for him.”

“... Huh.” Mari blinked. “... Well, just so long as it works.”
T-0 hours, Operation Yashima. 7:00 PM.

Operation Start.

All was silent. The diamond floating over Tokyo 3, the Evas waiting on the mountain top, everything. The last rays of the sun flickered over the mountain top, dazzling on Ramiel’s body.

~This is it,~ thought everyone.

Far below the city, the silence was broken.

“Commence Operation Yashima!”

All over the country, power was shunted off into special cables, designed to withstand the massive amounts of energy flowing through them. Like a system of roots, every power station intertwined with each-other, finally linking to the ‘trunk’ of the special power grid; a series of transformers that led up to the top of the mountain, where they’d funnel into the Positron Sniper Cannon, held by Unit-05.

The bridge was a cluster of activity, crew reading out displays or monitoring instrument panels.

“Coolant systems at maximum output!”

“All power links are accounted for, and ready for usage!”

“Positron generators spinning up! Particle storage at 50% capacity and rising!”

“Non-Nuclear cyclic fusion reactor’s feed is performing optimally!”

“Connections from power grid to Mt. Futago are nominal! We’re ready to go!”

Misato smirked. Everything was going according to plan.

“Alright then!” she shouted, voice rising above everyone else’s. “Disengage the safeties! Output to the positron cannon!”

“Disengage the safeties! Output to the positron cannon!”

Mari grinned, bringing up the HUD inside her helmet.

“Disengaging safety locks!” she called back, as one of Unit-05’s massive fingers flipped a switch on the weapon’s side. “Positron cannon, receiving full output!”

Mari shrugged back her shoulders, tugging the control grips lightly. The Evangelion pulled, raising
the massive rifle to near parallel with the ground.

“Beginning targeting procedures!”

Three targeting triangles appeared on the visor, inching towards the Angel in the middle.

“Weapon fully charged. Lock-on and discharge in five seconds…” Mari muttered into the microphone. “…four… three… two… on-”

Ramiel’s mind sharpened.

A threat, it thought. The fire of its passion built up in an instant, ready to lash out at those who dared attack it.

Destroy.

“High-energy output in the Angel!” Someone yelled, cracking Mari’s concentration.

“-Shit!” the girl gasped, reflexively pulling the trigger.

With an earth-shaking roar, the Positron Cannon discharged, throwing a meter-thick beam of anti-electrons at Ramiel!

Ramiel’s edged flashed, its own beam firing in retaliation with a scream! The two attacks, one blue-green, one pink, flew towards each-other-- only to wrap around each-other, their identical charges repelling themselves! But even with the distortion to each-other, the beams still flew towards their targets-- it’d take more than repelling charges to stop them!

Each side had their own defense, brought up frantically to save them.

Rapidly, Unit-01 shoved into the path of the Angel’s beam, raising its shield! The shot dissolved into a spray, superheated plasma and anti-particles deflecting off to the side, carving a trench through the earth before it cut off.

At the same time, Ramiel’s plates dropped from orbit, flying into the path of the Cannon’s beam! The pink discharge pooled against the surface of the triangular plate for a moment… and then the center of the crystal cracked, and the blast shattered it, punching through the other three plates with its remaining charge before Ramiel managed to raise its AT Field, diffusing the scraps of the beam.

“Dammit! Get the next shot ready!” Misato yelled, as if she could speed up the cool-down cycle with sheer volume. Fortunately, this wasn’t too bad of a screw-up; they still had a few more minutes before the Angel--
“Penultimate armour plate destroyed!” someone called. “Captain! The Angel’s drilling is speeding up! We have less than sixty seconds left until it penetrates the final plate!”

The Positron cannon took twenty-five seconds to charge. This was going to be close.

Unit-01 stumbled back, the heat shield dripping onto the dirt. Mari gritted her teeth, yanking on one of the gun’s grips to eject the spent fuse.

~C’mon, c’mon…~ the girl thought anxiously, eyes flicking to the reset timer! ~Just a little faster…~ And then she heard someone say it. Four words that promised nothing good.

“High-energy reading detected!”

Ramiel’s edges ignited, energy coursing towards a single point on its surface!

“Fuck!” Mari cussed again, leaning away from the Angel. Not that it would help.

With superhuman reflexes, Unit-01 dove in front of her once more, bracing its massive shield!

Not a second too soon.

With the scream of an Angel, a spike of energy lanced out from Ramiel, slamming head-first into the AT-reinforced shield! The electro-reflective coating did its job, diverting some of the positrons away to slide around them like water— but with the shield already half melted from the previous shot, it was only a matter of time before their defense fell.

“Makinami, how much longer until you can fire?” Rei asked, digging Unit-01’s heel into the dirt.

Mari’s eye flicked down to the timer.

“Crap! Fifteen seconds?!” In this situation, fifteen seconds could be a death sentence.

Just then, Ramiel, hurt and very, very pissed off, decided to go the extra mile. The plates that had formed its drill retracted, and combined, sliding in front of the beam.

Just like a lens.

Magnified by the focusing plates, the shield didn't stand a chance against Ramiel’s beam. The layers of metal and ceramic buckled, liquefying in an instant, leaving only Unit-01 itself to protect Unit-05--
The blinding light cut off.

.

.

Mari’s eyes widened at the shape interposing itself before the beam. Unit-01, hands steaming and dripping metal, watched as well.

.

Evangelion Unit-00 stood, bracing one of the spare heat shields against the ground, as it held off Ramiel’s onslaught.

“W-what are you waiting for?!” Shinji grunted, as the barrier began to melt away. “J-just shoot the damn thing already!”

Mari shot a glance down at the timer; four seconds until charge.

“Right!”

Once more, Unit-05 raised the Positron Cannon, as Unit-01 helped the orange Eva with the swiftly-disintegrating shield.

“Target lock in three seconds!” Mari shouted. “Two! One!”

“Everyone, move!”

The pair of cyborgs gave one last shove, before dropping to the ground.

Howling to the world, the Positron Cannon discharged once more!

The pink beam cored the Angel’s attack, breaking through its defensive plates and AT Field, before striking! Ramiel’s back half erupted, the anti-particle attack tearing a ragged hole right through its body!

With a feeble call, the dying Angel’s levitation gave out, and several thousand tons of sizzling crystal crashed to the ground.

.

The Angel was dead.

.

The rifle dropped to the ground with a clatter, Unit-05 forcibly ejecting the power connections from its back as it hunched over to look at the others.

Unit-01’s hands were completely exposed, mottled flesh still steaming. The rest of its armour was marred, drips and trenches dipping into its surface, and the umbilical cable had dissolved into molten metal and rubber.
Unit-00’s jury-rigged chestplate had already begun to melt, even in the short time it had been using the shield. Its red mono-eye sparked, the camera most likely overloaded by the brightness.

“Rei! Shinji! Are… are you guys okay?” Mari asked.

“Affirmative,” came Rei’s reply, Unit-01 giving a slow nod. “I am… unharmed.”

Mari nodded, before turning to the other Eva.

“Shinji?”

Unit-00 creaked, pushing itself up with shaky arms.

“I’m… I’m fine,” the Third Child said, breathing deeply. “Just… one thing. Please don’t ever do something that stupid again. I’d rather not have to play hero again.”

A smile of relief crept onto Mari’s face. Spontaneously, the girl surged forwards, Unit-05 pulling the two other Evas into a crushing hug.

“No promises, you guys.”
Chapter 013: This is (Not) in Error

{MAGI.GABRIEL:ONLINE}

{...}

{(USER:TOKITA.SHIRO) has entered interface.}

{(transcript):'Hello, Mr. Tokita.'}

{(transcript):'How are you today?'}

{(input):'Same as always, Gabriel.'}

{(input):'And you?' command:status_report}

{command:status_report, acknowledged}

{(transcript):'I am in excellent condition. All recent software patches have been examined and
installed, as per protocol. Antivirus equipment has functionality:99.99%. 00.01% failure rate within
acceptable parameters. All files have been backed up in
(sub)MAGI.GABRIEL(designation:backup_storage).'}

{(input):'That is very good. Are you prepared for the scheduled events?'}

{(response):AFFIRMATIVE.}

{(transcript):'I am ready.'}

{(input):'Excellent. I’ll see you then, Gabriel.'}

{(USER:TOKITA.SHIRO) has exited interface.}

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 013: This is (Not) in Error

It had been a week since Ramiel’s defeat, and the Evas were back in their cages. While Unit-05 had
suffered minimal damage, except for boiled-off paint, the other two were under more intensive repair.
Both Unit-00 and Unit-01 were undergoing a full-armour refit, which-- at the moment-- left them
almost completely unarmoured, except for their emergency restraints and internal weapons. But
while the Evas were inactive, their pilots were anything but.
Misato glanced over the letter again.

No, she wasn’t dreaming, much as she’d like to.

‘‘Captain Misato Katsuragi and Third Child Shinji Ikari, Japan Heavy Chemical Industries hereby invites you, along with the other pilots of the Evangelion units, to a demonstrative activation of our second Anti-Angel weapon’? Seriously? They didn’t learn from last time?!’’

Shinji shrugged. He hadn’t exactly heard much of anything considered an ‘Anti-Angel weapon’ besides the Evas. Except perhaps…

“Um, Misato?” he asked.

“Yeah, Shinji?”

“Kensuke’s mentioned to me that Rei’s gone up against a ‘Jet Alone’. Would… would that be the ‘last time’ that you’re referring to?”

Misato tensed up a little at the name, before sighing.

“…Yeah. I have no idea how they’re even still in business after that fiasco, let alone how they have the funding for another one of those things."

“So, I take it we’re not going?” asked Shinji flatly.

“Hell no,” came the reply. “I’m not going to head over and listen to that sexist bastard ramble on how much ‘better’ his robot is compared to the Evas again. I’ve had enough of that for one lifespan, thank you very much!”

“…Oh.” Shinji sounded a little crestfallen. Truth be told, he wouldn't have minded seeing something giant that wasn’t an Eva or an Angel, even if only to get his mind occupied by something else.

~...Darn it,~ thought Misato.

“Of course…” the woman sighed. “It might be worth heading over.” Of course, she wasn't just going to let herself cave in that easily; she had a reputation to uphold! “If only just to see how badly they screw up this time.”

Another thought. Misato blinked, then turned towards Shinji.

“…Since when have you been a fan of giant robots?” Shinji coughed, and averted his gaze.

“Mari, uh… invited me and Kensuke to her place on Tuesday. We did our homework, and… kinda watched the entirety of Gunbuster afterwards. I…” Shinji coughed, and looked back at her. “I liked it.”

“...Huh.”
Mari, as expected, had been quite thrilled to learn about the invitation, as even if the entire event turned out to be a disaster, she'd still get to see an actual giant robot-- and possibly fight one if it went rogue. Rei, who had actually helped stop the first Jet Alone, was a little less passionate about the idea-- while the letter had promised consolation for the Jet Alone incident, she didn't think that that would automatically make the new machine safer or more likely to succeed, unless it was radically different from the first one. She'd described her feelings on the matter to the others as what was essentially distrust.

A valid point, Mari had admitted, though that didn't change the fact that it was a giant robot.

Rei failed to see how that argument was at all relevant to her concerns.

The exhibition started on a Sunday, and ran for a few days afterwards, but NERV could easily afford to have the pilots miss a few days of school. The drive itself was initially uneventful, which prompted Mari to comment how different this was to Misato’s normal habits.

Five minutes later, and Mari admitted that she may have made a mistake in tempting the woman. Three consecutive ‘rotary side-spins’-- as Misato referred to them as-- in a souped-up Alpine could manage to make even the Fifth Child-- who tended to throw her Eva around like nobody’s business-- a little bit queasy.

Fortunately, the rest of the two-hour ride gave ample time for everyone to regain their bearings, and for their hearts to sink back down their throats. No further comments on Misato’s driving were made, by Mari, or anyone else.

The blue car pulled up at the exhibition center, whose parking lot-- somewhat unsurprisingly-- was significantly less crowded than the first time Misato had been here. Finding a spot wasn’t a concern, even though there was already a defined spot marked for NERV members.

~So, this is the place we’ll be staying at, huh?~ Shinji thought to himself, shouldeering the small pack of equipment that he’d brought with him. ~Seems pretty nice.~

The other similarly looked around, with varying expressions; Misato with weary displeasure, Mari and Rei with what mainly seemed to be indifference…

..and Pen-Pen with curiosity.

“Wark?”

Shinji blinked, turning to face the penguin.

“...Misato, why did we bring Pen-Pen again?”

“Because.”

“Captain,” said Rei. “I… have a hard time believing that your reasoning is at all valid.”

Misato shrugged.
“Hey, the letter didn’t say anything about not bringing penguins.”

Both Rei and Shinji’s brows furrowed simultaneously.

“But that doesn’t…”

“Katsuragi, I really don’t…”

“Ah, if it isn’t Captain Katsuragi!” The voice caught everyone’s attention, causing all five heads to turn in near unison. In the doorway of the building, tall and confident, stood the chief executive of the Japan Heavy Chemical Industries’ Jet Alone project, Shiro Tokita.

“It’s been awhile since last time, hasn’t it, Captain?”

Shiro Tokita, despite a slightly-too-wide suit and a patch of stubble that had sprouted from his chin like lichen, exuded the same aura of charisma that he had two years ago. He grinned a cheerful businessman’s grin, careful to keep a nonthreatening posture. This was, after all, the head of NERV’s tactical division he was dealing with.

“And I see you brought the Children with you as well,” Tokita added, giving a nod towards the three teens. “Why don’t you finish getting your stuff, and I’ll show you around?”

“...fine,” Misato grunted, shouldering her rucksack, before stuffing Pen-Pen under her other arm. She hadn’t stayed here long last time, so a tour would be rather useful... even if it was being done by someone like Tokita.

Packing up-- or was it packing out? Packing down? Whatever it was called, it didn’t take long. Rei’s stuff was both minimal and efficient, and Mari had no trouble with her own stuff, despite the rather cumbersome shape it was in.

“Mari, mind reminding me why you decided to bring your synchronization helmet of all things?”

“Oh, sure. Just as soon as you remind me why you decided to bring Pen-Pen of all things? No offense, Pen-Pen.”

“Wark.”

Misato sniffed, and shifted the topic.

“Oi, Tokita! Where’s that tour you promised?”

The man in question sighed.

~This had better pay off. Gabriel,~ thought Shiro.

The building itself was nothing to sniff at.

Since the last showcase it had held, the exhibition room had grown, offering an even better view of
the testing area for the new product. Not only was there a set of massive windows, the ceiling had also been fully repaired, meaning that there was no longer a robot’s giant footprint punching through the building’s roof.

There were other luxuries here as well, meant to entertain anyone who was staying here. Among them were several deluxe suites-- one of which the five would be staying in-- a spacious dining hall, a newly added gaming center, and-- of all things-- an indoor pool. It was a lot to take in at once, at least for Shinji. Shiro continued to narrate; the unfurling of the new product would take place in two days, so there would be ample time for NERV’s representatives to enjoy themselves-- a fact that relieved quite a few of them. However, there was one more thing that he requested they see before retiring to their suite; something only for NERV.

Did this sound suspicious? Oh, yes.

Were they going to see it anyways? Oh, yes.

“Our product’s pilot has requested to meet you before the exhibition,” explained Shiro, leading the quintet down the hallway. As they arrived at a large wooden door, Misato’s brow furrowed.

“Pilot?” she asked. “Wasn’t your entire argument for Jet Alone that it didn’t require an actual human to be out in the field?”

The executive nodded, and grabbed the handle.

“You’ll see.”

The door creaked as it swung open, letting the sounds of piano escape the room.

It wasn’t very good piano.

“Ah, Mr. Tokita!” exclaimed someone from inside. The voice was odd… Shinji couldn’t quite place it. It didn’t sound particularly familiar, but he could tell something was off about it.

“I’m glad you’ve came,” it continued. Or was it he? The voice itself was androgynous enough, but with enough of a ‘thrum’ to it that the whole was lent a barely detectable male-ness to it. “I’m experiencing some difficulty with this. No matter what I try, I simply cannot play this... confounded musical device! I don’t know how, but this piano eludes me. It’s almost infuriating. Perhaps it is my fin—”

“Gabriel, I brought NERV,” Shiro interrupted, pushing open the door all the way, giving the five a good view of the room as the awful piano playing cut off.

It wasn’t terribly big, but it was impressive, with marble floors, bright lighting, and several... mechanical interfaces? Shinji wasn’t quite sure what they were for, until his eyes trained over to the piano leaning against the right wall, and its player.

Unconsciously, Shinji’s breath caught in his throat.

The speaker stood up softly, pushing in the bench, before giving a respectful bow. They stood about
the same height as Mari, with a rather clean-cut build.

They were also made of metal.

Each limb’s joints were defined, hydraulic cables and pistons exposed where the semi-glossy maroon-black plates didn’t cover. A few lights pulsed gently, highlighting the simultaneously smooth and angular body of the… being. Their face-- if it could be called a face-- consisted of a thin vent running across either cheek, and a set of six small cameras for eyes.

“Ah, excuse me,” the being said, the hidden hint of synthetization in their voice now audible to the boy. “I request an audience with the women and adolescents responsible for combating the greatest threat to our planet, and they run into me whilst I’m preoccupied with a troublesome instrument. How embarrassing of me. Truly, I must beg your apologies.” Their head drooped, shaking in disappointment, before glancing back up. The mechanical being straightened up, standing at attention.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am MAGI-class bio-supercomputer AI ‘Gabriel’, operating system and pilot of the Mark 2 Anti-Angel Mecha, ‘Jet Alone 2. It’s a pleasure to meet you all.”
Chapter 014: This Was (Not) in Error

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For a second, everyone stared at the being before them; some, like Mari, with explicit interest; some, like Rei, with confusion.

Shinji and Misato? They stared in shock.

Several lights on the robot’s face flickered, before their head tilted to one side in concern.

“...I’m sorry, is... there some sort of problem?” MAGI Gabriel asked, inflecting curiosity into his voice. The artificial intelligence turned to Shiro, inquiring. “Mr. Tokita... you did remember to explain to NERV that I am a MAGI, correct?” Shiro coughed. Gabriel’s upper ‘eyes’ dimmed, giving the impression of a furrowed brow.

“...I’m going to interpret your vague response as a negative, Mr. Tokita. Honestly, I would sigh-- if any of my bodies possessed a suitable pneumatic system.”

The AI’s camera eyes whirred, sliding in their sockets to fix the NERV team with a bright gaze.

“My personal apologies. You may retire to your suite without interruption-- I was simply curious. Please, enjoy the exhibition. Perhaps I will be able to speak with you later.”

Misato, Shinji, and Mari gave slow nods, while Rei blinked a few times.

“Y-yeah. Maybe later,” Misato said, before the group walked out.

Gabriel’s electronic gaze followed them until the door shut. Components whirring softly in his chest, the AI sat down on the piano bench.

“Mr. Tokita,” he asked. “Do you think I made an error in calling them to see me so soon?”

Shiro sat down on the bench beside the robot, leaning back against the instrument.

“It’s hard to tell with organisations like NERV,” he commented, businessman personality fading away.

“But still, you know what they say; to err is human.”

Gabriel’s head twisted at that, giving Shiro a decidedly unamused look.

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 014: This Was (Not) in Error
“Okay, three-- no, four things!” Misato practically shouted, pacing back and forth in the suite room she’d designated as her own. “One; what the hell? Two; what the hell? Three; how the hell did JHCI of all organisations get a MAGI-class AI working for them?! And four…” At this point, the woman’s steam ran out, and her pacing slowed. “Four; I’m really glad I brought my beer. God knows I’m going to need it.”

There was a click, as Misato popped the tab on the can.

Mari lay back on her chosen bed, grinning like a cheshire cat.

“First a giant robot, rebuilt from a failed test two years prior; then an old acquaintance of Miso’s, who she clearly has a grudge against; and now a MAGI that can’t play piano properly? Heh, looks like this visit’s gonna be even more interesting than I’d hoped for!”

The girl rolled over onto her side, facing her laptop. Mari giggled with glee, and tapped out rapid-fire onto the keyboard.

“Very interesting indeed.” If anything, her grin grew, propping up her head with one hand as her other typed away. “Let’s see what my be-aufiful Princess thinks of this development, mmm?~”

>>ZaBeasto has joined the chat.

Shinji sat, hunched over at the foot of his bed, as he lazily watched Pen-Pen read a magazine.

He honestly had no idea why Misato had sent the penguin to bunk with him, but it wasn’t disagreeable. At least he had a distraction-- one that was something else than his thoughts about Jet Alone and its… interesting AI. ‘Gabriel’, he’d called himself.

Now, Shinji was never particularly religious-- and certainly not interested in Christianity of all things- but the name sounded… familiar.

“Gabriel…” he muttered, keeping his gaze on the penguin. “Isn’t that an Angel’s name?”

“Wark,” answered Pen-Pen incomprehensibly.

The boy sighed, and lay back on the bed.

“It’s probably nothing. After all, Angels can’t be built like they’re a machine. Right?”

“Wark.”

“… You know, this conversation would be a lot more interesting if it was with someone who actually spoke Japanese. No offense, Pen-Pen.”

Rei Ayanami stood, deep in thought. But not just about Jet Alone, or its so-called ‘pilot’ AI. No, the
girl’s mind jumped back and forth, pausing trains of thought to add onto others, before returning to the previous ones.

~The AI… a MAGI-class bio-supercomputer. MAGI run on the same system as the Evas.~

~Eva Unit-01. I told it we needed it. The truce was tenuous at best… will it still accept me?~

~The PT subsystem. Used to build the MAGI. Melchior, Casper, Balthasar. And now Gabriel is among their ranks. If MAGI-01 uses her signal as a base, who does Gabriel use?~

~Will it accept me again? If it does not, I will not have any other options, except for Unit-00. But Unit-00…~

~No matter his donor, it is clear why Gabriel is used. The last Jet Alone was immensely complex; this new one is likely to be even more so. The first one’s supercomputer could not bear the stress, but a MAGI could do it with ease. A MAGI could control an army, if it was organized correctly.~

~…Unit-00 is different. The other me… it could be dangerous. My self might become lost within me. Unit-00 is curious, and lonely…~

~But no more dangerous than Unit-01 is. A fierce Beast, one that should not be tested to its limits. The Commander has seen what happens when that occurs.~

~And now we will see what happens to Jet Alone, once and for all.~

____________________________________________________________________________________

The next day.

.

Precise as always, Gabriel’s fingers worked, pressing the keys rapidly. The sequence was working fine…

The AI attempted to shift his hands to another part of the board, only to send a finger flying down a second too soon, driving in an error. Had his telepresence body possessed an expressive face, the MAGI would have winced in irritation. Annoyed by the failure, Gabriel moved his hands back over the first set of keys, ready to begin again.

*Cree~eak*

The door opened. As he had yesterday, the MAGI turned, and stood up.

“Yes?” There was a slight crackle as the external speakers activated, before Gabriel’s artificial voice resolved itself into its partially synthesized but otherwise perfectly ‘human’ norm.

The visitor was, interestingly enough, none other than the First Child.

“Ah, Ms. Ayanami,” said the AI, giving a quick bow. “I take it that you’re here because of my suggestion the previous day?”

Rei nodded.

“In that case, have a seat.” The MAGI replied, gesturing to a stool nearby. “There are a few things I wish to speak to you about, before tomorrow.”
As Rei took the offered seat, Gabriel shot his first question.

“Why do you pilot an Eva?”

Why, indeed?

Rei Ayanami had not asked herself that question many times, for she already knew the answer. Or rather, the answers, plural; for it wasn’t just a single reason that Rei piloted.

Of course, some she simply couldn’t say-- the MAGI wasn’t permitted to know those. But there were some she could share with others.

So Rei told him those.

.

And Gabriel listened.

The meeting finished, Rei sought out the others once more. While her timing had been odd, there shouldn’t be any issue.

Equipped with one of the keys to the suite, Rei entered, and looked around. Everything was silent, aside from the rustle of paper coming from the suite’s living room. Curious, the blue-haired girl walked in, peering over the arm chair.

Pen-Pen sat there, reading a magazine.

“…”

Rei turned away, heading to check the others’ rooms.

Misato and Shinji weren’t there either…

Odd.

Rei went to try the third door… only to find it locked. Since the rooms she’d checked only seemed to lock from the inside, this was promising.

*knock knock*

On the other side of the door, somebody groaned.

“Makinami, are you awake?”

“No,” came the indistinct mumble. Rei rolled her eyes, and continued anyways.

“I am in need of assistance. Could you please help me?” she asked.

“Insert tab A into slot B,” the Fifth Child grunted. Rei blinked, the expression not being something she’d heard used before.
“That... doesn't help much with my problem.”

Mari sighed, and walked up to the door. The door opened part-way, and the Briton stuck her head out.

“Alrighty, what's the trouble, Rei?”

“The Captain and the Third Child aren't here. I'm curious where they've gone to.”

“I don't know,” she answered. “They left while I was taking a catnap. Given that it's...” the girl paused, looking behind Rei at the clock on the wall. “...Around lunchtime, I'd say that they're probably down getting lunch.”

~That would make sense,~ Rei reflected.

~Come to think of it,~ Mari thought to herself. ~I could do with a bite myself. And, well, I’m not sleepin’ anymore, so...~

“Say, Rei...”

The girl in question blinked. Mari pushed open the door a bit more.

“How’d you like to grab some lunch with me? Just see what they’ve got and whatnot, eh? Maybe see if we can spot Miso and Shinji?”

“... That would be fine.”

The Fifth Child grinned, and pumped her fist in the air.

“Sweet! Just let me get the keys and some proper clothes, and we’ll be off!”

JHCI might have been spending most of their money on Jet Alone 2, but they clearly had enough left over to have some good food. Rei was by no means a connoisseur of taste-- most of her concerns were on the nutritional value of food and the possible presence of allergens-- but she could at least agree with Mari that the cooks knew what they were doing, even if they were having very different dishes; Rei herself was having a plain bowl of rice, while Mari busied herself with a bowl of tempura udon.

As for Shinji and Misato? They either hadn’t been there, or they’d finished before Rei and Mari arrived. Whatever the case, they weren’t in the dining hall; the only other people there were a few military types from the JSSDF and other countries, and what Rei could only assume were private contractors. An interesting bunch, that came nowhere near to filling up the hall.

Though considering the state of the parking lot, that wasn’t exactly surprising.

Shunting that train of thought away, Rei dug back into her rice bowl.

Meanwhile, Misato had taken Shinji down to the entertainment room, in hopes of wasting an hour or two.
As it turned out, most of said entertainment consisted of fairly old Pre-Impact arcade games. Which the two of them were routinely tying against each-other in. Neither could figure out how, but Shinji couldn’t manage a decisive victory over Misato, and Misato couldn’t thoroughly trounce Shinji.

“...And we’ve tied again.”

“...Up for a seventh round, Shinji?”

“You know, why not?”

This was it. The day of the exhibition.

The five (for Pen-Pen would not be left out) sat in the designated NERV seating area, getting a good view of the testing grounds through the massive windows.

Up in front of the windows, Shiro Tokita was speaking.

“Ladies and gentlemen, you may remember the events of two years prior, where our Jet Alone experienced... a rather dire malfunction. You may remember this, and think that the same thing will happen today. You may think that Jet Alone is an untrustworthy robot, completely inferior to the current Anti-Angel weapon; the Evangelions.”

Misato raised an eyebrow, almost daring Shiro to challenge her on the latter point.

“I am here with you today to lay those thoughts to rest. This weapon that you will see today is a vast improvement over its ancestor in every way! It is the pinnacle of combative mechatronic engineering, using only the best that JHCI has to offer.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said the man, depressing a button on his pocket remote. “I give you all... **Jet Alone 2**!”

The massive engineering building split, sliding open on electrical rails to reveal the mech inside. It was, to say the least, impressive.

Standing a full 45 meters tall, Jet Alone 2 retained none of the awkward, lanky, top-heavy proportions of its parent mecha. Instead, the entire robot radiated strength, with broad shoulders, trunk-like legs, and great, box-like arms. The mech was painted a matte grey, with thick sections of maroon, orange, and indigo breaking up the monotony.

The feet were flat and simple looking, nothing more than functional parts. The legs themselves were thick, triple-segmented plates covering the enlarged knee joints. Panels and vents ran along its calves, lying almost flush with the rest of the armour.

JA2’s body was far more well-balanced, shaped more like a wedge than a brick atop a soda can. Massive hydraulic rams could be seen under its ‘ribs’, running down its side before swiftly disappearing under a triple-segmented stomach. The robot’s chest came to an edge, reinforced with extra armour like the bow of an icebreaker, while yet more panels lay against its pectoral region. As with the first Jet Alone, JA2 had a boxy ‘hump’ on its back– but this was far less pronounced, more like a backpack than the ridiculous reactor casing of the first. Nothing at all protruded from the top;
no antennae, no handles, no control rods-- everything was self-contained safely inside.

The arms were their own affair. Unlike the first, this Jet Alone’s arms were far more traditional, without any serpentine segmenting. The limbs started at the shoulders, each capped with a few launcher tubes on its end, before dropping down into the boxy upper arms, and to the even boxier lower arms. Each one was as thick as the robot’s legs, cAPPED with a massive piston on the elbow, and a giant hand on the wrist. The hands were thick, and gave the impression that just a single one could crush an Eva’s neck with relative ease.

Its head was almost recessed into its body, a thick moving collar surrounding where its neck would be. As the people watched, nine black windows along its ‘face’ ignited, each shielded camera cluster emitting a soft white glow as the mech started up.

Smoothly, Jet Alone 2 turned its head towards the viewers’ building, before the rest of its body twisted to face them. One leg took a cautious step forward, coming down with a thud.

Arms lying at its side, JA2 bowed.

To say that the audience was stunned would be a misnomer. In fact, a group of cement blocks with faces crudely carved on them would have been more active than most of the people there-- not including Shiro and NERV, both of which knew the real reason behind JA’s actions.

“...”

“...”

“...well, that’s new,” someone muttered.

Shiro grinned, and continued his commentary.

“Jet Alone 2’s control systems are run by an onboard MAGI-class AI, offering far more competence than the old supercomputer in the first one. This lets the new Jet Alone 2 make complex tactical decisions or execute advanced maneuvers on the fly, letting it compete with a human pilot with ease.” Under view of everyone, the mech turned away, and dropped into a combat stance. “Not only that, but Jet Alone 2 runs off a Stellarator, rather than a fission reactor, providing more power, at less risk. It may not have an N2 reactor’s extremely high discharge, but it’s far safer to operate than one.”

“Now, the original Jet Alone prototype was armed only with its fists and feet. This model keeps those, enhances them, and adds several other integrated weapons systems, stored in its chest, shoulders, and legs.” Jet Alone opened its stance, offering a view of its chest. The panels on its torso and legs slid open, revealing several auto-cannons, rocket launchers, and what Rei, Mari, and Misato recognized as plasma focusing apertures. “Of course, none of these weapons are currently armed, except for the plasma casters-- though that’s only due to how they draw their power.”

“But Jet Alone is not just built to fight from far away, ladies and gentlemen. No, not at all. Jet Alone 2 is fully equipped for melee combat, and it packs quite the punch!” As if to accentuate this, the panels slid shut, and the mecha threw a blow at the empty air. The motion, Rei reflected as JA2 pivoted into its next punch, was slower than an Eva’s, but still incredibly smooth, and well balanced.

Jet Alone 2 continued to deliver a beatdown on the empty air, throwing punches, knees, and even elbow jabs with its massive piston caps. The robot spun a full 180 degrees, and threw an especially forceful blow-- only for the piston in its arm to depress, sending its lower arm flying several meters
past its normal reach!

A few people turned from the spectacle to face Shiro again.

“Erm, Mr. Tokita, did you add piston fists to your robot?” someone from the JSSDF asked.

“An excellent question, Major. In truth, we did much more than that. We- Captain Katsuragi, is there something you’d like to add?” For Misato had raised her hand as well.

“Yes, actually, I do,” she replied. “I’d like to know your plan on dealing with the Angels’ AT Fields. And don’t even try denying their existence.”

Shiro put up his hands.

“Why, Captain, you wound me. I was just about to get to that.” Shiro grinned.

“Not only does Jet Alone 2 feature advanced hydraulic systems in each arm, it also mounts a high-energy electromagnetic puncher down the middle of each one, which leads into its palms. We call these weapons ‘Impact Hammers’. Each one uses the same DUCT-- that’s Depleted Uranium Carbide Tungsten for those unfamiliar-- alloy found in NERV’s Pallet shells, except with a larger size and a different propulsion mechanism. Jet Alone 2’s Impact Hammers are able to fire their DUCT bolts at Mach 3; two of them together have been calculated with a high enough yield to greatly damage one of your Eva’s AT Fields, if not outright destroy it. And once weakened, JA2 can simply tear through the field with its bare hands. We’ve done many calculations.”

Well, that was different. Last time, Shiro had simply denied the AT Field’s existence, and made some sexist comment about the Evas. Maybe, Misato thought, there was some hope for him after all. It wouldn’t be much, but at least he was just an arrogant businessman, rather than a stupid, sexist, and arrogant businessman.

So at least that was a start.

After a little longer, the entire demonstration was over, and simple discussion began while the mech returned to its hanger. Shiro took questions from everyone, more than happy to answer anything that anyone had to ask; with the resounding success of the demonstration, could you blame his enthusiasm?

Of course, what was good news for JHCI was not necessarily good news for NERV.

The fact that Jet Alone 2 seemed to be drawing success meant that funding might get cut from NERV; though, with the Eva Series finally complete, that might not pose as big a threat as it would have two years ago. Still, budget cuts were something that NERV-- and Misato especially-- would rather not have to deal with. Still, with the entire exhibition having gone by so quickly, there was little she could do about it.

Still, at least the Children were happy.

As they were leaving, Gabriel appeared once more, this time having clothed his telepresence body in a long coat. A card was offered, with contact information-- ‘just in case’, the AI told them, before saying his goodbyes, and heading back into the building.
An interesting few days indeed.

Chapter End Notes

This concludes the (incredibly short) Jet Alone sub-arc. Gabriel himself will show up later again, but he’s more of a side character than anything.
With the hiss and clang of metal, the locking clamps detached, falling away on hydraulic armatures from their cybernetic captives.

Maya Ibuki sighed to herself, taking a good, long drink of her coffee. The refit teams-- which she’d been in charge of-- had been busy for a few days, and their schedules’ timing was… more than a little straining for the young woman’s sleep schedule.

~Still,~ Maya reflected, looking out the plexiglass window, ~At least it’s all done with.~

Unit-00 and Unit-01 stood in their bays, outfitted with their new armour.

The former was dressed in Production-type Plate, having been completely upgraded to match the latest advances in the Eva series. While Unit-00’ looked similar to its previous state, a few upgrades were easily noticeable; namely, the enlarged shoulder pylons and a slightly modified helmet that featured four cranial gatlings, rather than the previous two. Another change; rather than orange and white, its armour was a soft grey-blue, with patches of dull grey and deep blue, and dark orange light piping replacing the original green lights.

Unit-01, by comparison, wore the Test-Type Mk II Plate, with next to no changes in its actual structure. The Eva’s body armour was a candy-purple-indigo, with swathes of warm black and dark green on its torso and limbs. The old light piping still remained, a soft, but no less vibrant green.

In her numerous years of working with them, Maya had to admit that the Evas were some strange beasts, Unit-01 especially. Even at rest, the young woman could almost swear that the massive, horned cyborg was still aware, looking down on the workers exiting the gantries with the same fascination that a child watches ants.

Lieutenant Ibuki shook her head, and took another deep drink. The Evas might be weird, but that idea was a bit too weird.

~I need to stop working so late,~ Maya thought, as she turned away from the cyborgs.

Unknown to her, Unit-01’s eye turned slightly as well.

**Neon Genesis Evangelion:**

*(Not) the End*
commanding presence. For the most part, this was accurate. The Commander tended to remain distant from everyone, and retain professionalism in almost every situation.

However, there were a few people that Gendo let down his guard for. One of them was Vice-Commander Fuyutsuki, an old friend of his.

The other was Rei Ayanami. She was... a special case.

And right now, she wanted to talk with him.

“Commander?”

As she usually did, Rei stood before his desk at attention.

“Yes, Rei?” he asked, clasping his fingers intently. The girl’s expression didn’t change much, but Gendo felt an air of nervousness from her. Troubling indeed.

“I… have a concern,” she said. “It revolves around the Evangelions; specifically, Units 00 and 01.”

“A concern?” Rei nodded.

“Yes. The last time I piloted, I… convinced Unit-01 to cooperate with me.”

“I am unsure if it will continue to maintain that obedience to me.”

Gendo nodded. While Rei had performed exceptionally well in Unit-01, the fairly recent Berserker incident and the repeated neural readings detected during her time piloting did not have good connotations.

“And the concern of Unit-00?” he asked. Rei took a breath, and continued.

“If I return to Unit-00… I think I could lose myself in it. Unit-00 reacts well to your… to the Third Child, but it is…”

“It's hard to explain, Commander. Unit-00 won't Berserk out of rage, but it's still… dangerous for me. Does this make sense?” Rei asked.

~Ah. She's talking about that.~

Gendo leaned forwards slightly in his chair.

“Of course it does. However, you still know that you will have to pilot one of them.”

“Of course,” she repeated. Gendo sat back upright, folding one arm across the other on the table.

“Then I know you'll trust me to make the right decision.”

Rei nodded.

“Thank you for seeing me, Commander.”

The girl gave a bow, and turned to leave. As the doors to his office closed, Gendo exhaled.

“Back to business it is.”
“Shinji, we need to talk.”

The boy practically jumped-- ever since the Sixth Angel, he’d been a little more easily startled by things, a trait already wearing thin on the boy. Shinji took a step back, while Gendo thumbed the ‘open’ button on the elevator. The younger Ikari took a deep breath to calm his nerves, and stepped inside.

“You really didn’t need to do that, you know,” he muttered under his breath.

“I did nothing out of the ordinary,” replied his father, looking straight at the door. “If you wish to blame someone, blame the Angels. Focusing your efforts on destroying them will be far more productive than petty frustration aimed at me.”

“…”

Shinji sighed.

“What do you want, Father?”

“What I want is simple. I want you to pilot another Eva.”

Shinji raised an eyebrow, silently asking for an explanation as Gendo looked over his shoulder at his son.

“There have been changes to the current scenario. Henceforth, you will be the pilot of Evangelion Unit-01. Rei shall take your place as the pilot of Unit-00.”

Well, he wasn’t expecting that.

“I- Unit-01?” the Third Child asked incredulously.

“Is there a problem?”

“I’m sorry, but… isn’t Unit-01 the one that went berserk and hospitalized Rei for a month?”

Gendo looked away.

“That problem has been fixed. You will have no problem controlling the Evangelion.”

The elevator dinged as it stopped at a floor. Ending the conversation like that, Gendo exited, leaving Shinji by himself.

The doors shut.

~At least there isn’t any real trouble at school,~ thought Shinji, sitting as the Class Representative finished the standard opening procedure for the class. Other than the news his father had dropped on him yesterday, and the annoying jitters that still persisted after weeks, things were going alright; No Angels had appeared, Mari hadn’t said anything particularly flustering to him, and his schoolwork was still pretty good-- despite Shinji missing a few days for one reason or another.

At the moment, the class was engaged in math, so he could reasonably assume that neither of his bespectacled associates would be pestering him for at least half an hour or so. Mari might be a born fighter, and Kensuke was practically a genius in regards to anything military, but neither of them
were actually particularly good at math—so they’d be plenty occupied.

Shinji, by contrast, had far more trouble with the sciences than he did with calculations like these. Math was pretty easy for him, and this—combined with his occasional tendency to just keep doing things until he was told to stop—meant that the boy usually ended up finishing up earlier than the other students did. It was just how he worked.

- Two days later.

It was happening again.

Someone new was coming to Tokyo-3, and they were bringing a giant robot with them. Last time, it had been Mari. This time, it was the Second Child, coming over to provide fighting power. Frankly, if she happened to be anything at all like Makinami… well, Shinji wasn’t sure whether he should be glad for the extra support, or scared for his own safety. Possibly both.

He, Misato, and Mari were on a transport helicopter, heading out to meet her out somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, while Rei stayed back with Unit-00’ in case the Seventh Angel showed up. Fortunately, Misato wasn't flying the thing.

They sat on opposing sides, Mari and Shinji on one, and Misato on the other.

“So, Shinji…”

“Yes?” Came the cautious reply. Mari grinned, scooting a little bit closer.

“You haven't met the Second Child yet, ri~ight?” The boy nodded, wary of anything that the Briton might be trying to pull.

Mari’s grin softened, becoming something far less toothy than usual, though still exceedingly enthused.

“Oh, goody!” The girl clasped her hands, holding them to her chest with excitement. “We can get you two all introduced and everything! It’ll be great!” she said, with almost childlike-- perhaps Fifth Child-like?—glee. “Oh, this'll be brilliant!”

“Sounds like someone's got a crush~” came the teasing tone of Misato’s voice.

The Fifth Child’s mirth comes to an awkward halt, tripping over itself in confusion and embarrassment.

“M-Miso!” the girl twisted, turning to face her guardian with a mortified expression. “H-how did- I mean, what are you- I”

~Huh,~ a corner of Shinji’s mind couldn’t help but think. ~That’s new. Usually I’m the one
If there was a fault to Mari’s mind, it would have to be either her overactive imagination, or her
tendency for her thoughts to run away with her.

That or the masochism. But that wasn’t so much a flaw as it was a quirk.

As it happened, Mari had caught herself in a particularly… appealing series of thoughts, and lost her
cool as a result when Misato’d brought it up.

“C’mon, Mari!” the brunette thought to herself, embarrassed. “It’s just been three months, and you
chat all the time. Can’t keep yourself in one f-goddamn piece when your… when she comes up?
Really?!”

The girl shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts.

“...Ha ha, Miso. V-very funny,” Mari pouted, before the vehicle lurched. She blinked, before turning
to the window on the side. A fleet of vessels lay out beneath them, interconnected by massive cables
and wires.

Misato blinked, and looked out her own window.

“...We’re here already?” the woman wondered aloud, as the helicopter descended towards the
massive carrier in the center of the fleet-- the Over the Rainbow, Mari remembered. “That’s odd.
Thought they’d have radio’d in or something.”

The cargo heli set down gently, releasing its pallet-carried umbilical cable onto the deck. The door
opened, a stairway folding out for the occupants. The three stepped out, blinking in the harsh
sunlight.

“Misato! Four-eyes!” someone calls, clipped accent cutting through the sea air. Mari knows that
voice. She turns towards it, a giddy smile resurfacing.

“Princess!”

Shinji’s head turned, tracking the direction of the voice. Whomever he’d been expecting to see
wasn’t her.

The Second Child-- at least, he assumed she was, given that someone her age would have no other
reason to be onboard a ship like this-- was, to say the least, stunning. Shinji was perfectly
comfortable admitting that to himself. The days of sea salt and sun didn’t seem to have left any sort
of mark-- the most he was aware of was an almost grid-like pattern of faint white scarring running up
her bare arms; he would have guessed a sympathetic wound from the Eva, considering Mari had the
same markings, albeit more scabby and red than this girl’s were.
Of course, the rest of her was a lot to take in all by itself; the fierce blue eyes, the virtual wave of golden-blonde hair that hung back in a loose ponytail, the sheer confidence in her posture.

And then her gaze turned to him. An eyebrow rose, the smile dimming a little.

“...and you are?”

The boy blinked.

“Oh, um, me?” he asked without thinking, before common sense reminded that it’s obviously him. “I’m... Ikari. Ikari Shinji. Third Child.”

“Mm,” the girl grunts in affirmation, before the smile starts to come back. “Well, I’m Asuka. Asuka Langley Sohryu. Nice to see that I’ll have someone beyond just Four-Eyes watching my back.”

“Priinncceeeess...” Mari fake-pouts in reply. Asuka smirked, sticking her tongue out teasingly.

“Nyeht!”

The action itself was kind of ridiculous, coming from the girl. Mari couldn’t keep the pout up, cracking a grin at her fellow pilot’s actions. Shinji couldn’t help but smile as well, and Misato wasn’t even trying to hide hers.

Asuka chuckled, folding her arms across her chest.

“Alright then. Wir sind alle gut?” she asked. “Ready to go in?”

“Actually,” Misato said, drawing their attention. “There’s one thing I’d like to know first.”

“Shoot.”

Misato took a breath.

“I noticed a few weird things on the way here, Asuka. Like how we weren’t hailed in the helicopter, even when we should have been; or how the fleet’s apparently decided to tether themselves together. I’d kind of like an explanation.”

“Oh, that?” Asuka replied, smile dying down again. “Easy.”

“That’s the Angel’s doing.”

Chapter End Notes

And thus, our fourth and final main pilot is here! Hurrah!
Chapter 016: Blood(less) Red Sun

Chapter Notes

I'll admit that this chapter has a bit of gratuitous German. That's really all I have to say here.

“That’s the Angel’s doing.”

The words struck all of them, grins fading away in an instant.

“...Angel?”

“Ja,” Asuka replied, eyes narrowing. “Angel. Showed up two days ago, and started jamming our radio with its AT Field. We haven’t been able to outrun the bastard and contact anyone, and it hasn’t gotten close enough where I can kill it with my Unit-02.” A slight smirk perked up at the edge of her mouth. “Luckily, you guys are here.”

All three blinked, confused. Asuka sighed, and motioned for them to follow her, heading towards the door.

“Come on, I’ll explain on the way.”

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 016: Blood(less) Red Sun

“I’ve been talking with Mr. Kaji for a bit, and we came up with something,” explained Asuka, leading them down a hallway. Misato, several steps behind, furrowed her brow, while Mari simply arched an eyebrow.

“Wait, Kaji’s here?”

“Kaji again, Princess?”

“Oh, calm your tits, Four-Eyes. He’s my Gott verdammt guardian. Of course we talk sometimes,” the Second Child snorted, brushing off the topic. “Anyways, we had a plan.” Reaching a certain door, Asuka knocks a few times, and glances behind her.

“Four Eyes, Ikari, you two are going to be Angel bait.”
“...What.”

“What?!”

The door opened, and a scruffy, ponytailed man stuck his head out.

“Asuka, what are you--” the man pauses, noticing the older woman. “Ah. Katsuragi.”

Ryoji Kaji, legal guardian of the Second Child and Chief Inspector to Nerv-02, cracked a grin.

“I wasn’t expecting to see you quite so soon.”

“Kaaaji! Flirt with your ex later, we’ve got plans!”

As Asuka explained it, the idea had— as much as she’d hated to admit it— been partially inspired by something the Provisional Second— another pilot that Shinji apparently hadn’t heard of before— had mentioned.

Every human projected an AT Field; that was how everyone stayed in their shape. The difference was that Eva Pilots had their fields enhanced from regular exposure to the Evas. If human souls were candles, Childrens’ souls were spotlights.

This came in with one of the hypothesized abilities of the Angels; AT-sense. One common theory in NERV was that the Angels could locate the ‘glow’ of a living thing’s soul, and map its surroundings with it. If this ended up being true, then the three of them together on this one boat would be a big, fat, shiny lure.

Still, the Seventh was a cautious beast. It didn’t rush immediately to locate them— especially not after they’d clipped it with one of the fleet’s atomic railguns. It’d probably be about an hour, if not more, before the Angel dared come closer to investigate. But when it did...

“...then that’s when I’ll activate Unit-02, and gut that verdammt fish!” Asuka concluded triumphantly, pumping her fist. The group hadn’t actually headed to the bridge yet— Asuka figured that the ship’s crew might not exactly appreciate her plan to lure a monster the size of an aircraft carrier into the middle of the fleet.

Everyone agreed on that point, even if they were a little hesitant about acting as a lure for such a beast.

The Roaring Beast of God swam, black eyes glittering in the depths. Something had changed. The Light of Her Soul was no longer unchallenged in brightness. Something aboard the Lilin craft, though still insignificant, shone brighter than the others.

A challenger? The Angel was not the best hunter for nothing.

No, she would be cautious. It would not do to act rashly. Make sure that the challenge is of no threat,
and then obliterate it.

A tail longer than a battleship twitched, propelling the vast bulk of sky grey flesh forwards.

Those who challenged Gaghiel had rarely lived long enough to regret it.

.

The Angel was back on the hunt.

.

“Well, at least you’re here, even if it’s not going to help with our little Angel problem,” Admiral Thompson grunted, leaning back in his chair. “I take it that after all this, you’ll finally be taking that damned cyborg off our hands at last?”

“Yes sir,” Misato replied.

“Good,” the man nodded. “Now, all we need to deal with is the Angel. Unfortunately, that’s the hard part. It’s too fast for us to outrun, and too-”

“-far away to attack back,” the woman finished. “The Second Child explained it to us.”

“Yes… well, then you understand; we either have to draw the Angel close enough to fire on, or slow it down long enough to make a break for it. Otherwise, we’re sitting ducks out here,” Thompson said. “I’ve got our top strategists working on a solution as we speak.”

Misato nodded.

~So do we, Admiral. So do we.~

Technically, that wasn’t correct; Asuka had already finished the plan. Now she was just filling up the forty five minutes until the Angel arrived. Seeing as she’ll have plenty of time to see what the deal is with the Third Child, Asuka had decided to catch up on things with her fellow Euro Pilot. After all, she needs something to do.

And there's something she hasn't done in a long time...

.

There are a lot of things to like about Mari. She's loyal, bold, and protective, all things that she values. She's good enough at her job to offer a consistent challenge. And she can actually match her wit.

But one of the best things about the girl, in her opinion, is just how warm she is. It's like being hugged by a space heater. A soft, squishy space heater who-- while very physically fulfilling in every other way -- has shoulders that are just a bit too bony for Asuka's comfort.
“... Four-Eyes.”

“Yes?” the Briton purrs, eyes closed with contentment. Of course she's happy; Mari always is.

“Your stupid shoulder's jabbing me in the windpipe,” Asuka grunts.

The bright yellow fabric rumples and shifts, as Mari moves her arms down a few more centimeters. The offending joint retracts from Asuka's throat.

“Better, Princess?”


“Mmmmm... I missed you, Princess.”

Asuka nodded, tightening her grip.

“Missed you too, Four-Eyes.”

---

*That was relaxing.*

Half an hour of... well, of cuddling, of all things, had done wonders for both Children's mental states; it didn't take a genius to figure out that this was a good thing when going up against a carrier-sized Hell-shark. Mari was *very* affectionate, and her general attitude had rubbed off a little bit on the Second Child.

“Four-Eyes?” Asuka asked, walking down the metal hallway to the retrofitted Eva hanger. She'd decided to change early, so there'd be ample time to get ready.

“Mmm?”

“No blabbing. Not one word.”

“Oh, but of course, my Princess. I wouldn't want to risk losing my favor-”

<Shut it, Four-Eyes,> the Second Child replied, switching over to her native tongue. Mari couldn't speak German to save her life, but it wasn't a hard message to guess.

Mari shut up.

---

*Shwip.*

The air rushed out of the plugsuit, causing the entire outfit to compress to perfectly fit her body. The 02 plugsuit, much like the 05 model, featured built in trauma plates around its torso, a flexible internal skeleton, and ego stabilizers that kept the body's integrity even in the case of a hypothetical triple-digit synch score. It was a deep maroon, with crimson and orange plating and black detail work.
And, as Mari had pointed out a few times, it really showed off her figure. Though that didn’t really matter at the moment.

Asuka didn’t bother with the A10 clips-- she already had them on, and kept them as such in case of an emergency.

The other two Children were waiting for her outside; Kaji and Misato were busy with other work.

Asuka Langley Sohryu flashed a smile at them. This was it; the plan was in full swing.

“Alright then!” Her hand shifts, planting confidently on her hip. “You two stay inside-- preferably somewhere with a good view. Then you can see what my Unit-02’s really capable of!”

Manual startup is nothing fancy. Evas weren't intended to launch solo, so the sequence was made as simple as possible in case the pilot had to activate their unit in an emergency.

Not like Asuka needed it to be simplified; she knew her Unit-02 like the back of her hand.

<First stage, activate. Set plug depth at 2 meters,> Asuka said, holding the control grips tightly. <Begin LCL ionization.>

The orange fluid crackled, before turning translucent as the static charge swept through it. Asuka took another breath of the stuff, settling further into her saddle.

<First stage successful,> she muttered, the instruments on the plug’s dashboard blinking green. <Prepping for secondary stage connections. Set neural language to German.>

The creases in the plug walls flicker, a rainbow of light bleeding through the seams. Holograms pop into existence, orbiting the girl's head.

<Secondary stage successful. Activate final stage connections in three… two… one… now!>

The walls shatter, rings of colour flying past as wriggling white nerves grasp at the saddle. The Eva's mind awakens, its piercing gaze present at the back of Asuka's skull, looking through her eyes as she looks through its.

The framework solidifies, panels showing a view of the hanger’s interior. One of the holograms blinks, displaying a readout. Asuka grins.

<Final stage successful. Synchro holding at 86.7%.>

Out in the ocean, the Angel swam.

For a second, she sensed something even stronger than the others, before it faded back down. That was interesting.
The Angel's tail lashed, propelling her closer and closer.

Whatever this challenge was, Gaghiel would surely defeat it.

Shinji and Mari had taken to the bridge to meet up with Misato. The woman snuck over to them, and raised an eyebrow.

“Asuka?”

“She’s ready,” answered Shinji.

Misato grinned.

“Great. How much longer?”

“Should only be a few minutes or so. With Unit-02 active, the Angel should-”

His voice is cut off by several alarms going off at once. Crew members shout from their stations, looking over their shoulders at the man in charge.

“Admiral, the Eva Unit is active!”

“Controls on hanger bay seven have been overridden! It’s opening on its own!”

“Sir, the Angel’s just reached our line of sight!”

The man twists, and barks out a single word.

“What?!”

They could see it, only a couple kilometers from the edge of the fleet. The Angel.

Gaghiel, even half submerged, was still the largest Angel anyone had seen. Over three hundred meters from snout to tail, the Roaring Beast of God was covered in sky grey scales, with glossy black fin membranes skimming just under the surface of the water. It resembled a fusion of a shark and an eel, albeit a truly massive one. Two dots, white and red, winked on top of its head—had any of the trio had a pair of binoculars, they would have seen that these were bony masks, eerily similar to the Fourth Angel’s.

Thundering towards the Over the Rainbow, the Angel breached the surface, toothy mouth opening in a thunderous howl! Frantically, radio lines were cut between ships, falling into the sea as the vessels raised their semaphores and morse lights instead. The fleet spread apart, not wanting to be in the way of a bloodthirsty Angel-

—but before they could notice anything else, something caught everyone’s eyes. The front of the Over the Rainbow’s deck was slowly opening up, a massive, cloaked figure rising up out of the depths!

A pair of finned shoulders shrugged, dropping the tarpaulin to the deck.
Evangelion Production-Type Unit-02 Beta Model, to use its full name, was impressive.

Over forty meters and fifteen thousand tonnes of maroon and crimson cyborg, armour plating etched with bright orange and white lines stood on the deck, arms crossed determinedly over its angular chest. Bulky sub-pylons were locked solidly into each limb, wrapping around the arms and legs with bands of titanium plate. The two main pylons stood straight up, an array of vents and thrusters protruding just behind the shoulder mounts. A set of triple turbines-- explained to the other pilots as part of the Eva’s C-Type Aeronautical Maneuvering gear-- sprouted just under the cyborg’s primary rocket engines, their blades spinning up to speed. Topping this all off was Unit-02’s helmet; a boxy shaped chunk of armour with a protruding chin and four green eyes that burned like fire.

Clouds of steam snorted out of the nostril holes of Unit-02’s helmets, the Eva shifting in its spot just slightly. Its arms unfolded, splaying back as the biomech moved into a runner's crouch.

Asuka grinned.

“This is it…”

“Now! Unit-02! Let’s do this!”

The Eva pushed off, charging straight across the deck! The thrusters and C-Type turbines ignited, launching Unit-02 off the edge of the ship like a rocket!

Water sprayed up around the crimson mecha, boiling into steam as the two charged each other. Gaghiel leaped out of the water, jaws gaping to bite down on the Eva-- in reply, Unit-02’s rockets flared, the mech jumping up to drive its sharpened kneecap into the Angel’s unarmoured throat! Four hundred meters of alien shark crashed side-first into the sea, as the Eva twisted away from its scaly bulk. The C-Type turbines whirred, bringing Unit-02 to a halt above the waves.

The Angel thrashed, righting itself for a return strike!

Unit-02 thrusted to one side-- but Gaghiel twisted midair, catching the Eva with the edges of its jaw! In seconds, the red Eva was yanked off-balance, dragged alongside the Angel. Just before the monster bit down, Asuka noticed something-- Gaghiel’s teeth had extended, wrapping around Unit-02’s arm with fleshy tendrils, and digging in with their serrated edge-

The mouth slammed shut.

Even through the glass, they could hear the howl. Even held fast by the high-tech armour, Unit-02 screamed its pain as its arm was mangled by the Angel.

Asuka’s arm burned in the plugsuit, feedback from her top-level synchronization transmitting everything that her mech felt into her nerves. The girl’s face contorted, lips drawing back into a snarl.
“D-Dragon Fangs!” Asuka spat, firing off the neural command.

Unit-02’s right arm swung out, hand splaying. Each of the fingertips slid open, five serrated claws jutting out from the ends! The Dragon Fangs were meant to be used for climbing-- but that didn’t mean that they weren’t weapons anyways.

Blue blood stained the Angel’s hide, as the Fangs ripped through what little of its AT Field the Angel could spare, and tore into its snout!

“That’s what you get for wasting your strength on fucking boats!” the Second Child roared, as Unit-02 shoved its hand deeper into the Angel’s wounded head!

Gaghiel roared back, thrashing and lashing--

...before slamming its left side into a battleship.

The vessel didn’t stand a chance, practically falling to pieces around Unit-02 and the Angel. The two separated, leaving the red Eva lying in the rapidly sinking wreck of the battleship. Blue blood gushing from the tear in the side of its face, Gaghiel turns away, swimming back towards the Over the Rainbow-- though far slower than before.

“…”

“Ugh…” Asuka groaned, rubbing her temples. “Stupid Angel… that one hurt.” Blue eyes opened, focusing on the flickering screen.

“Alright, just have to-” Asuka started, before noticing the flashing red alarm orbiting her head. The C-Type equipment, unprotected by her Eva’s AT Field, hadn’t survived the collision. With no functioning C-Type…

...There was nothing keeping Asuka and Unit-02 afloat.

“Schiesse!”

The girl’s eyes widened, instinctively grabbing out for something. Unit-02’s hand closed around a chunk of metal-- only for the slab of deck to give way under its weight! The ruined battleship couldn’t support the crimson cyborg any longer, falling to pieces and plunging the pilot and her mech into the ocean! Unit-02 kicked and pulled-- but to no avail.

With a very real fear tugging at her heartstrings, Asuka Langley Sohryu and Unit-02 sank; down, down, down, into the cold Pacific Ocean.
When Eva Unit-02 disappeared under the waves, struggling to stay afloat, Mari’s heart sank like a stone. Evas weren’t built to operate underwater without extensive equipment… which meant that Unit-02 would sink to the bottom of the ocean, without an external power feed of any kind. Sure, low power mode could let its internal systems work for up to about three days, but after that…

Mari didn’t want to think of what would happen.

Unfortunately, she noted, her Princess wasn’t the only one in danger of being sent to a watery grave. The Angel had turned around, and was heading towards them, the bloody wound across its face staining the sky grey flesh with blue.

The Admiral gave the command to open fire, sending waves of firepower sloppily crashing into the Angel. Orange planes flashed in and out of existence, the Angel’s diminished AT Field still rendering it completely impervious to the fleet’s guns, even as it continued to jam their communications.

Relentlessly, Gaghiel closed in, four empty eye sockets staring at the bridge.

At the Children.

Neon Genesis Evangelion:

(Not) the End

Chapter 017: You Are (Not) Going to Die

It was Misato who acted first, grabbing the two by their wrists and pulling. The Children stumbled, though Shinji was quick to respond. Kaji followed soon after, briefcase in hand. Engrossed in combatting the approaching Angel, nobody else noticed their exit.

“Katsuragi!”

The woman slowed momentarily, glancing over her shoulder. Kaji huffed, catching up to them. Any trace of the easygoing, good natured attitude he'd showed was gone; now, the inspector didn't have a single hint of humour on his face.

“Head right at the next corridor, it'll take you to the VTOL hanger. Once you get out of the jamming bubble, contact the commander, and tell him about the Angel.”

“What about you? What about Asuka?” she replied.

“I'll do a flyover of the site, just in case she's ejected. Even if she hasn't, Asuka's a smart girl, she'll
come up with something. Don't worry, I'll be right behind you!”

With that, Kaji turned, heading down a separate passageway. Misato gritted her teeth, looking back at the path in front of them.

The engines roared, lifting the boxy aircraft away. Misato had taken the pilot's seat, and set Shinji in the copilot's; of the two Eva pilots she had left, he seemed to have a more stable head on his shoulders than Mari. As they flew away from the fleet, Misato's thoughts turned to the girl. The girl herself had been uncharacteristically quiet in their escape, strapping herself into one of the passenger seats without so much as a remake. Misato knew that the Second and Fifth Children had known each other for a while, and that the girl took her friendships very seriously, but this was…

...Actually, when Misato thought about it, the girl's reaction to this was perfectly reasonable; it was just due to the fact that Mari didn't usually take anything with this sort of seriousness that was throwing her off.

Still, it'd be for the best if she just let Mari cool off for a while.

Turning her focus back in front of her, the woman clenched the controls, leaning the yolk forwards. The engines rotated further, increasing the craft's speed. Out of the corner of her eye, she could barely spot the lone harrier circling above the fleet; Kaji conducting his search for Asuka.

Hopefully it'd all work out.

Nothing had worked.

The C-type was broken, manual swimming couldn't overcome Unit-02's weight in any meaningful way, and the rockets had burnt out a minute ago. Now her Eva was sinking, falling to the bottom of the ocean with no means of escape, save rescue.

But Asuka still kept her composure. After all, it wouldn't do to have a panic attack or something at this point. She just had to stay calm. At the very least, she still had almost her entire twenty minute battery le-

"Warning. C-type power reserves have been fully depleted," reported the computer. "Ejecting extraneous equipment. Evangelion Unit-02 is now operating on internal battery power. Ten minutes of operational time remaining."

...shit.

Eyes widening in horror, the redhead slammed her fist down on a button, switching her Eva to low-power mode. The 00:10:00 timer flickered, rearranging itself to 36:00:00, before it resumed its countdown. As non-essential systems shut down, the Eva's limbs became heavy, and the cyborg fell limp in the water. Asuka's breathing slowed for a second. With low-power mode active, she'd be able to survive for a day and a half until rescue arrived. That should be enough time for someone to come. Even if they didn't, she could still eject hers-
“Warning,” the computer chimed in. “External pressure has exceeded Entry Plug tolerances. For the pilot’s safety, the Entry Plug’s ejection system has been completely disabled.”

“...n-no...”

Her breaths quickened, catching in her throat. She was stuck here. The Eva wouldn't work. The Plug wouldn't eject. The Angel was up there. The fleet was probably already gone. It was going to come for her. Going to come, and she'd be defenseless. Even... even if rescue came, it'd be there. If... if they didn't come... if they didn't get to her in time...

She was going to die.

“N-no, I can't. I can't be stuck here. I can't-”

Her heart throbbed, shaky breaths speeding up. Through her synchronization with Unit-02, Asuka could start to feel the overpowering cold of the sea, gnawing away at her nerves.

Even... even if the Angel didn't do her in, Asuka was still going to die. The life support would give out, and that'd be it. With barely a struggle, she'd be gone.

Here.

Alone.

At the bottom of the ocean.

All by herself, with not one single person as company.

And why?

All because she'd failed.

“I-”

She couldn't kill the Angel.

She couldn't win the battle.

She couldn't save the fleet.

“I...”

She couldn't even save herself.

“Warning. The-”

Asuka screamed, and drove her fist into the console.

“...and then Inspector Kaji insisted on staying behind, on the off chance that the Second Child had ejected,” Misato finished. “We... haven’t been contacted by him yet.”
The pixelated image of Commander Gendo Ikari frowned.

“This is... troubling. Eva Unit-02 was expected to be a valuable addition to our forces; losing it, especially against an Angel, will have serious political ramifications.”

From the copilot’s seat, Shinji stared. Gendo, projected on both screens, had no problem noticing the boy’s expression.

“Of course... the loss of the Second Child would have a devastating effect on morale; which should go without saying. The death of an Eva pilot is something that we should... try to avoid.” Gendo cleared his throat.

“With that said, we are outfitting Unit-00’ for underwater combat, and a Delta-Wing has already been prepared. JHCI has offered the usage of their ‘Jet Alone 2’, as a... show of peace. We have decided to accept said offer on this occasion.”

The small smile on the commander’s face might have been a little worrisome-- if Shinji wasn’t so relieved. Rei and Gabriel would be there soon, and they’d save Asuka. Yes, he hadn’t known her for very long, but Mari seemed to like her-- even if the girl was crazy, she was a pretty good judge of character-- not to mention that Shinji wouldn’t wish death by drowning at the bottom of the ocean on anyone, especially not someone he’d just met. Even if he hadn’t liked Asuka that would just be obscenely petty of him.

His father’s transmission ended, as Shinji pulled out the VTOL’s operation manual, looking through it for a certain control. It wasn’t too hard, and soon his fingers met the button.

“Um… testing, testing?” he asked into the receiver. A mumble on the other end confirmed that the intercom worked. “Hey, Mari? I’ve got some news that you might be interested in.”

Rrrrrrrrrooooommmhh...

The Delta Wing’s engines rose to a roar, before being drowned out by the thunder of its solid rocket boosters. The eighty-meter-wide aircraft shuddered, picking up speed as it slowly, slowly climbed into the sky. Clamped to the underside was Eva Unit-00’, outfitted with M-type equipment and a storage container.

As the Eva flew away, stomping could be heard coming down the runway. Thundering along the road came Jet Alone 2, a massive arrangement of wings and rockets sprouting from its back. The modified S-type gear activated, the giant robot leaping into the air after Unit-00!

Both of them aloft, the odd duo soared out towards the ocean, ready to fight.

“Dammit, dammit, damnit!” Asuka cried, punctuating each word with a punch to the plug’s wall. Unit-02 had hit the ocean floor hours ago, hammering home just how trapped she was here even further. To say that it wasn't doing Asuka's state of mind any good in the slightest would be like saying that the Pacific Ocean was big and wet; a massive understatement.

The only thing remotely comforting was the fact that the Angel hadn't attacked her yet.
Asuka reflected glumly, letting her hand slide down the wall. The girl glanced towards the front of the plug, where the timer slowly ticked down. Just over thirty hours were left until her Eva's power supply ran dry, and life support shut down. Doing the math, the girl easily translated that to about eight minutes of power in combat mode, probably less due to the dense medium she lay in. If the Angel actively wanted her dead, it'd just have to survive the eight minutes and she'd end up killing herself. It wouldn't be hard, not the way she was right now.

“Pathetic…” she muttered, shifting back into the center of the plug. The girl wrapped her arms around herself, trying to keep warm against the cold seeping in. Still, what little resolve, what little drive she had left was slowly fading. “Dying from a stupid mistake you couldn't undo… good job, Asuka.”

“Good job going out just like your m-“

Something struck Unit-02, jolting it abruptly. The Second Child's words cut off in a startled yelp, as she was knocked into the plug wall. Eyes widened, hopelessness turning into dread.

“The Angel?!”

Almost reflexively, Unit-02 responded, shuddering frantically despite barely having enough power to move. The screens flickered, rushing to form an image as the Eva came out of low-power mode.

Unit-02’s spotlights came on, illuminating the massive blue-plated cyborg towering over her fallen Eva. The bulbous orange pods of M-type equipment were dotted across its body, and a hexagonal storage container was tucked under one arm.

Her breathing quivered, heartbeat slowing from the blind panic it had worked itself into.

“A… a rescue? T-they sent an Eva?” Even saying it aloud, she could hardly believe it.

The console, cracked and flickering, beeped. An incoming transmission. Without hesitation, she thumbed the ‘accept’ button, a small rectangular holo marked ‘EVA-00 KAI - SOUND ONLY’ popping up.

“Pilot Sohryu,” came the whisper soft voice of the First Child, the blue-grey cyborg kneeling down to look Unit-02 camera-to-camera. “Are you unharmed?”

A choking sound pried itself from the girl's throat, scratchy and depleted. Unit-00 tilted its head in concern.

“...Pilot Sohryu? Is that… a negative? I cannot see your face, are you alright?”

Unit-02 dropped its head, tilting its helmet side to side slightly in response. Speaking was… just too much for her at this point.

“Pilot Sohryu?”

Asuka swallowed, and nodded.

“I have with me a pair of external battery packs and a floater. You are to equip these items to your Eva, and ascend to the surface. I will escort you until surfacing, but after that you must keep yourself and your Eva out of harm’s way. Under no circumstances are you to attempt combat with the Angel.
This is an order from headquarters; do you understand, Pilot Sohryu?"

No revenge. No second chance. Just run away, and don't get hurt. Let the others deal with your failure. Even if it's the most reasonable option, the insult still leaves its mark on Asuka's pride.

But she doesn't have any other options, and she doesn't have any more fight left in her.

“...y-yes…” she muttered to the holo.

Unit-00’ nodded back, and popped open the container’s lid, releasing a flurry of bubbles. The Eva grabbed two long rectangles with one hand, and swam around, clamping the batteries to the back of Unit-02’s pylons. The timer, having dropped to four minutes, rises back up with each pack; 00:19:00, 00:34:00, before it begins counting down again.

The bright orange floater is easy enough to attach, wrapping around Unit-02’s torso. The other Eva yanks a handle, releasing the compressed gas into the garment and lowering its density.

As the red cyborg floats up towards the surface, followed by the swimming blue one, Asuka leans over, and puts her head in her hands.

The two reached the surface, splashing as they bobbed out of the water. Unit-00’ grabbed its fellow Eva, paddling towards a half sunken ship that looked intact enough to hold the red Eva for a while. Unit-02 tried to assist, though waterlogged and with a single working arm, it didn't make much of a difference. Reaching the vessel quickly, Rei released the other unit, and swam off.

Unit-00’ functioned well, thanks to the recent upgrades. The blue Eva clamoured aboard a shredded battleship, looking around for-}

There it was. Gaghiel. Or rather, what Gaghiel had turned into.

The Angel was wrapped in a cage of steel, reconstructed from about half of the fleet. Its neck had elongated grotesquely, the sky grey flesh stretching into a stalk that rose above its body, ending in the double masks that had been its face.

The Angel's body had stretched even further, its mouth and tail having merged into a tooth-studded ovoid that hung down like a pendulum. Its fins grew outwards, serving as hubs for the two massively tall metal legs it had formed, each balancing on an AT Field that stretched over the water.

As Rei watched, Gaghiel's eye sockets flashed, sending twin beams cutting through the sky. The tiny shape of JA2 dodged, releasing yet more missiles at the mutated Angel, only for them to burst ineffectively against its AT Field.

Rei turned away, focusing on the three other containers embedded in the ruined deck.

Popping the lid off one, the Eva reached in, and pulled out a bullpup rifle, cradling it under her arm as she long jumped over to another, closer ship.

Jet Alone crashed down on a third boat, S-type harness steaming.
“Rei, I'm drawing its attention. Shoot it while its AT Field's occupied,” Gabriel's synthesized voice said over the comms, as Jet Alone unfolded its weapons systems, and opened fire! Bolts of boiling plasma, clouds of bullets, and swarms of missiles erupted from the robot, forcing Gaghiel to focus its AT Field to block the attacks.

“Roger, Gabriel. Opening fire.”

Rei raised her rifle, centering it on the Angel's throat. The crosshairs tightened… now!

The MM-99 Pallet Rifle barked three times, launching off a three-shot burst of gyrojet shells! The rocket-propelled bullets accelerated, aiming for the Angel's neck. The first hit the AT Field, the second as well, but the third tore through the remains, blowing a chunk out of the being's flesh! Gaghiel rumbled, second mask turning to face the Eva.

Instantly, Rei took off down the ship, feet leaving craters in the ruined hull. Twin beams of light slashed overhead, barely deflecting off Unit-00's AT Field. The Eva fired burst after burst, tearing at the framework of the Angel's neck. Blue blood sprayed, staining the metallic web that grew up around it as the Eva leaped from ship to ship.

Howling in frustration and pain, Gaghiel's counterweight split open, a swarm of bone-tipped tendrils spilling out! The spikes launched, splitting in two directions! On the far ship, Jet Alone’s fire cut off, the mecha leaping back into the sky before the bone darts tore the vessel’s remnants to scrap metal. Unit-00’ turned and jumped, diving into the sea. The darts punched through the ship and into the water, a few slicing into the cyborg's calves. Rei winced; her synch ratio was significantly higher in Unit-00’ than it had been in Unit-01, so while she could control it better, she also felt its pain a lot more. Orange blood leaked from several cuts along the Eva’s legs, the salty sea burning its way in.

Rei pushed down the pain, and kicked the M-type into full power, sending Unit-00’ dashing under the surface.

---

Shink!

Stay out of the fight.

Chink!

Don’t get hurt.

Shink!

Orders from headquarters.

Chink!

Yeah, no.

Shink!

Asuka grunted, Unit-02 groaning as it dragged its heavy, damaged body up the side of the vessel.
The journey up had been just as damaging as the descent, and the pressure-fracture lines through her Eva’s armour ached like she’d run a marathon through freezing cold rain. One arm hung dead by the cyborg’s side, occasionally sending a jolt of pain up her own when it bumped into the hull of the ship. Thankfully, the Dragon Fangs still worked, five sprouting from the ends of each of Unit-02’s three functioning limbs.

Eventually, the girl dragged herself to the deck, letting Unit-02 collapse there for a few minutes. Asuka took a few shuddering breaths, slumping in the plug saddle. Hearing the rapid burst and whine of weapons fire, the Second Child glanced to the side.

“Oh Gott what the hell.”

The monstrosity that Gaghiel became howled, firing its bone tendrils at Unit-00’ and Jet Alone 2. They both escaped intact, but the vessels they’d been on didn’t. A hexagonal container on Unit-00’s ship was struck-- and exploded in a shockwave of purple fire, throwing shrapnel everywhere. Only one thing could have gone off so volatily.

~A positron weapon?! What id--~ Unfortunately, Asuka’s thoughts were cut off, as the final container smashed into the deck a few meters from her Eva’s head. The impact cracked the container, a dark red shape glinting within.

Asuka’s eyes narrowed, scanning the item.

“...that’ll work.”

Rei threw her Eva out of the water in a spin, rolling onto another ship deck. Jet Alone was back in the air, losing the occasional burst of fire against Gaghiel. Rei lifted her pallet gun, firing off another gyrojet spray! The rocket-propelled shells smashed into Gaghiel’s AT Field, but couldn’t pierce through. Rei pulled the trigger again…

Clack.

Unit-00’ glanced down, and pulled the trigger gain. Nothing; the rifle was out of ammo.

“Rei?” Gabriel asked, maneuvering their body around another line of darts.

“The pallet rifle is out of ammunition, and the Type-20 was destroyed,” Rei answered, easily interpreting the rest of the question. “I do have the flechette pistol, however-- though it will not be very accurate at this range.” The Eva dropped the spent rifle, drawing out a simplistic handgun from its shoulder pylon.

“Just try and get closer,” the AI replied. “I'll keep the Angel's at-” Gaghiel’s eyes flashed, and this time they didn’t miss. The eye-beams sliced into the mech’s arm, and slashed across its head, burning lines in the armour! Metal squealed, the heavy arm ripping itself clean from the damaged section! Unbalanced, Jet Alone 2 fell into a spiraling dive, S-type equipment firing frantically in order to slow its descent! The mech barely pulled up in time, crashing into a deck and rolling down the length. Thrusters and fins snapped off under the robot's weight, before JA finally came to a stop, its flight harness almost completely destroyed.
Rei took a sharp breath in as her backup crashed, before whipping her gaze back to Gaghiel. The Angel's neck tilted, barely held upright by the frame. But it was still mostly in one piece, and she was down to her last gun. After this, all Rei would have left was Unit-00's integrated weapons— and she doubted they'd be effective at this range.

The girl raised her Eva's arm, firing off a snap shot from the flechette pistol. The bird masks turned, the red and the white glaring down at Unit-00'. Octagons of orange light sprang up to meet each shot, halting them in their flight before they reached it.

Creaking and squealing came again, the metal-built legs flexing as they strode towards the blue figure. Its tendrils retracted, bunching up and hiding in the ovoid pendulum between its legs.

Fearlessly, Rei stood, firing shot after shot at the advancing Angel, trying to wear down its defense. Unit-00’s quad vulcans spun up, dumping their ammo into the translucent octagon.

*Pwang! Pwang! Pwang! Click.*

The pistol ran dry, lacking any more darts for its electromagnet to propel. She tossed it aside without a glance, still spraying the vulcans.

This wasn't going well; she'd depleted all her weapons, Jet Alone 2 was out of action, and the Delta Wings wouldn't be able to retrieve them as long as the Angel was still around. Things were very grim indeed.

Gaghiel bent forwards, its four eyes flickering white as it brought its heads closer and closer to the Eva. The glow in its sockets rose, light beginning to bleed out-

“**HHRrrRooOOOUAAaagGGHH!!!**”

A raging howl split the air, the Angel and the cyborg turning to find the source of it.

On the wreck of what used to be the *Over the Rainbow*, clutching a blood red lance almost as tall as it was, stood Eva Unit-02.

---

Minutes prior...

Asuka groaned, struggling to pull out the weapon from its container. At thirty-five meters long, the Anti-Angel AT Negation Longinus-Base Lance of Cassius was hard enough to handle accurately with a normal Eva. With only one arm, it was damn near impossible to even *lift* the thing.

~*Dammit, dammit, dammit! Why can't I just do something?!*~ Asuka cursed to herself, dragging the lance to the middle of the deck.

Above, Jet Alone was shot from the sky, falling away. The girl strained, pulling as hard as she could with her single arm. The lance lifted up… before the arm gave out.

Asuka snarled, clenching her fists in frustration.

“C-come on, *work!* Why won't you just *goddamn work*?!” she screamed, slamming a fist down on
The thought that flickered through the girl's head was not her own.

[I am not a doll... ] The tone was slightly curious, its presence deep and warm.

“Y-yeah?...” her own reply is accusatory and caustic, biting back at whatever this thing is. Asuka's eyes are red and bleary, her posture showing all the weight of the day's agony on her. Her patience is gone, her fuse burnt out. Asuka isn't going to take any more shit.

“...prove it.”

The presence pauses.

[...Can a doll do this?]

In a flash, she's not alone. She can feel the Eva's body, but she's not the only one in it! Unit-02 moves on its own, rising up to its full height. Its helmet splits, four yellow eyes igniting in the gaps!

The entry plug shudders, holograms flashing into existence around with new data; neural activity, physical integrity, cybernetic systems! But one holo in particular stands out among the rest:

[SYNCH RATIO: 100.00%]

The Evangelion flexes, raising its broken arm in front of it. The flesh and metal warps, closing the wounds as new muscles bubble and swell into place. But the arm's not the only thing healing; throughout the Eva, Asuka can feel the reparation, pressure fractures sealing, dislocated joints popping back into line, the entire cyborg restoring itself back to the prime of its being!

Asuka laughed, the joy and elation coursing through their perfectly synced body overshadowing the panic and fear of the unknown that would otherwise have taken hold. Reaching out as one, Asuka
Langley Sohryu and Evangelion Unit-02 grabbed the fallen lance, leveling it at the Angel! Together, the two roared, screaming their joy to the world!

“HHRrrRooOOOUAAAaagGGHH!!!”

The Angel turned, and they could sense its AT Field, rising in alien fear.

Asuka/Unit-02 pulled the lance back, aiming for the dense bulge at the base of Gaghiel's throat.

“Hey, arseloch!” Asuka shouted. “Eat this!”

With perfect unity, the duo threw the lance, sending it rocketing forwards with a resounding crack! A line of fading hexagons followed the weapon, the Eva's AT Field propelling it faster than muscle power alone could. Gaghiel's AT Field sprang into being-- but it was a fruitless gesture. Cassius Lances were literally built to disrupt the strength of ego barriers; at the speed this one was travelling, the Angel's failure was certain.

The octagonal barrier only lasted for half a second, before the gold-banded cone punched a hole through it like a nail through plastic wrap. The lance stabbed through the steel frame, the layers of meat, piercing the gleaming red Core-

Gaghiel's shriek was cut off with the destruction of its Core, flesh melting into orange LCL from the wound and out. Buckling under its own weight, the metal framework collapsed, crashing into the ocean.

[...well?] The presence asked, warm and reassuring.

Asuka panted, slouching over.

“...guess I was wrong. You're something... something better.”

Though they'd been healed, the rapid exertion had sapped the last of the girl's energy. Unit-02’s legs quivered, before the Eva took the reins back from its pilot, slowly lowering to the deck.

[It has been a long day, with many challenges. Rest, Asuka.] it said, her eyes closing as her breathing slowed. [I will see you again... just rest...]

Completely drained, the Second Child faded into unconsciousness.

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