

## **The Mech 6101**

Chapter 6101 Repressed Fire

Venerable Isobel Kotin was one of the many expert pilots of the Larkinson Clan.

She was not the most prominent among her kind.

She was not a trueblood Larkinson like Venerable Jannzi.

She was not an inspiring hero like Venerable Joshua.

She did not possess any leadership ability like Commander Casella Ingvar.

She also could not connect to ordinary soldiers as well as Venerable Vincent Ricklin.

As an expert rifleman mech pilot, Isobel could not even inspire a lot of other mech pilots with ranged weapon specializations.

Her power application was too weird and unusual for most. Few Larkinson mech pilots expressed an interest to play with fire.

Instead, a lot of rifleman mech pilots preferred to admire the skills and feats of Venerable Davia Stark or Venerable Brutus Wodin.

The two exemplified two different specializations in ranged combat.

Venerable Stark attracted a huge amount of admiration for the precision and power of her individual shots.

The Amaranto might not fire a lot of shots, but each pull of the trigger always produced a dramatic light show that either collapsed a transphasic energy shield or drilled a huge hole in the side of an enemy warship.

Many rifleman mech pilots dreamed of being able to launch attacks that were just a fraction as powerful!

The Star Dancer Mark II may be piloted by Gloriana's brother, but it was the epitome of the most common kind of rifleman mech. Its attacks might not hit as hard, but the machine was so fast that Venerable Brutus was able to outmaneuver every opponent.

His expert mech came close to achieving a perfect balance between firepower and mobility. The Star Dancer Mark II was one of the most self-sufficient ranged expert mechs in the expeditionary fleet. That mattered a lot to mech pilots that wanted to survive in the long run.

As for the Promethea, the expert mech possessed slightly greater firepower, but did not boast any exceptional mobility. The living mech performed rather mediocre in most aspects when compared to her peers.

The only truly special trait about the Promethea was her Ignitron luminar crystal assault rifle, but even this weapon lacked the flair that it used to possess. It was quite powerful when it first came out, but technology advanced so rapidly in the ensuing years that it had become dull and weak, just like the Everchanger's Vitalus luminar crystal rifle.

All of this brought a greater burden on Venerable Isobel Kotin's shoulders. The mech pilots of Task Force Solus all hoped that her outdated and underpowered Promethea would be able to burn an entire calamity plant down.

Did they know how ridiculous this sounded?!

More and more people compared the calamity plant to an ace pilot. The lack of a Saint Kingdom notwithstanding, just the huge amount of vitality and the ability to command an immense quantity of wood energy was too much to bear!

Even though Venerable Isobel was unable to observe the silhouette of the enormous Emperor Tree from the walls of Chimera Base, she studied enough footage and reports to get an instinctual sense of the enormity of her target.

Trying to challenge the Emperor Tree in her current state was like a badger trying to confront an elephant!

The difference in scale was so exaggerated that the larger party simply had to make use of its size advantages to remain impervious.

However, the badger that is expected to defeat the elephant was not an ordinary one. The smaller party just so happened to possess a special power.

"It's funny, Joshua."

"What is funny?" The other expert pilot asked as he continued to keep Isobel company during this relatively tranquil night on an alien planet.

"When I broke through, I never expected to become a fire wielder. I am certain that I never played that much with fire in the past. I was a city girl. I grew up in an urbanized center where no one had any desire to start a campfire. The only real flames I got to see were in the academy and the barbecue restaurants. Even then, I never felt any special attraction towards them. As a mech pilot, I used to think that my greatest strength was my analytical ability. I was good at spotting weak points on enemy mechs. It wasn't until I completed my apotheosis that I suddenly became 'blessed' with control over fire."

"That sounds like a blessing to me." Joshua remarked. "I admire your ability to punch above your weight. You can easily burn down entire alien battleships if you continue to spread your flames. I have to work much harder to tear down those big and hardy ships. The Everchanger's Heartsword is too weak while the Scarlet Ember is too energy hungry. There is no way for me to inflict lots of damage with so little consumption like you. As long as a fight lasts long enough, I have little doubt that every enemy we face will get burnt to ash by your powerful purple flames."

"Gaining fire abilities is not as pleasant as you think, Joshua. There are times when I think it is a curse. I envy your affinity to life. You not only get along well with living mechs, but you can also get much more out of cooperating with so many design spirits. As for me, my only strength is burning things down."

"Isn't that a good thing?"

It appeared that Isobel repressed her urges for so long that she couldn't help but vent her feelings tonight!

"Not if your own clan don't want you to burn their plunder." Isobel shook her head. "Every fight these days constantly centers around profit. Defeating enemy warships and monsters is not the main goal anymore. What we truly want is to plunder resources from them. A relatively intact but disabled capital ship can easily yield millions, tens of million or in rare cases hundreds of millions of MTA credits worth of phasewater, high-grade exotics, intact alien phasewater technology, cultural treasures and databases. Our clan has become so addicted to plundering all of these valuables that people are constantly telling me and ordering me to hold back and cool my flames."

This was not a normal complaint. Venerable Joshua could clearly sense the frustration from his fellow colleague's willpower.

It appeared that Isobel repressed her urges for so long that she couldn't help but vent her feelings tonight!

"I never noticed your distress. Why didn't you tell anyone?"

"Expert pilots aren't supposed to show weakness, you know. We are demigods. We are larger than life. To be honest, I feel trapped in my role. Becoming a powerful expert pilot is a dream, but when I can never fully unleash my power, it becomes a nightmare. Do you know how badly I want to fight a battle where I can burn to my heart's content? I am not made for restraint. Fire longs to rage without any inhibitions. The more I try to contain it, the more I feel as if I am trying to hold back a fiery explosion."

Venerable Joshua grew more and more concerned about the mental state of his fellow Larkinson expert pilot. Isobel served a vital role in tomorrow's operation. If she was not in the right state of mind when they started their assault on the Emperor Tree, then the upcoming battle could easily go sideways, just like what happened last time!

There was no way that Joshua could tolerate any further accidents. He even started to think about sending an emergency message to Ketis to postpone the assault.

However, Joshua did not want to break Isobel's trust. He felt honored that she chose to share her vulnerabilities to him. The best he could do was to serve as a good listener and allow her to vent her true feelings.

"Do you wish you would have gained a different talent upon your breakthrough?" Joshua asked.

"I... am not entirely sure." Isobel spoke. "There are times where I truly hate that I gained an unwanted affinity for fire. I felt that I was born in the wrong era during the Age of Mechs. It is only recently that I feel better about my power. The Age of Dawn is a new beginning for all of us. We have been fighting against so many alien fleets in the past few years that I always enter into battle with a quota on how many warships I am allowed to burn. The quota is always far too low in my opinion, but at least it is better than nothing."

"You still do not sound satisfied."

"Because I am not. Do you know that I have been thinking about leaving the expeditionary fleet? I don't want to become a source of excessive collateral damage and wipe out everyone's profits. Maybe there is an outfit or an army out there that doesn't care about preserving the wrecks of enemy warships."

Joshua grew alarmed. "Are you truly going to leave?"

"Maybe not. Everyone is afraid or apprehensive about the upcoming alien offensive, but whenever I think about it, I look forward to it. I feel guilty for reacting this way, but I cannot help it. I know that once human space gets flooded by thousands of alien fleets at once, we will become so hard-pressed that people will welcome my flames. The battles won't be about profit anymore. They will center around survival."

She made a reasonable point. It would become a lot harder to stay on the battlefield and salvage all of the wrecks. There may be times where the expeditionary fleet fought a hard battle, only to be forced to evacuate in a hurry, thereby leaving lots of valuables behind.

Few mech forces wanted to fight such a thankless and unprofitable battle.

Fortunately, the Red Two already announced that they would multiply the war merits issues to linefighters that held back the aliens during the upcoming period. That changed the equation just enough to attract more defenders.

"Since you love nothing more than burning as much stuff as possible, shouldn't you look forward to the upcoming assault? The clan is essentially giving you a license to burn down the entire the Emperor Tree."

Venerable Isobel gave Joshua a rueful smile.

"You would be right... if not for the fact that the tree is so strong. This is not a typical alien warship we are talking about here. All of the vessels I burned down in the past were nothing more than large metal tubs. Their transphasic energy shields are annoyingly difficult to break, but once their outer defenses are cracked, their hulls are all vulnerable to my flames. There is little these big but unwieldy ships can do to shake off my fire, especially if I send out my companion spirit."

"The Emperor Tree is made of wood. That is arguably a lot more flammable than those alien hulls."

"You would think that, but when it comes to E energy manipulation, there is no comparison. Warships upgraded with hyper technology are harder for me to burn down, but they are ultimately delaying the inevitable. I do not think the Emperor Tree will succumb so easily. It not only possesses a massive reserve of wood energy, but it is also able to wield it skillfully. I am not sure whether my flames are strong enough to overcome the tree's resistance."

"You don't think your attribute advantage is enough?"

"Who knows." Isobel shrugged. "We can only find out tomorrow. I will do my best to burn the Emperor Tree. I do not want to ruin one of the few opportunities I have to burn my enemies without any restraint from our clan. That said, if the power gap is too great, I will not be able to live up to everyone's expectations."

"No one will blame you for failing, Isobel. You are not the only one who is unable to harm the tree. My weapons can do even less against this outrageous tree. I should feel even more inadequate than you as far as I am concerned."

Why were the Larkinson Clan's enemies becoming so much more powerful and difficult to deal with? It became increasingly harder for their existing mechs to cope against the opposition in this new and brutal age.

Chapter 6102 Field Commander

Chimera Base came alive again at dawn.

Many mech pilots and support personnel woke up early and prepared for a hard day ahead.

Although many of the Larkinson soldiers were veterans of at least half a dozen battles, none of them took the upcoming challenge lightly.

The Emperor Tree loomed tall over Task Force Solus for numerous months. The calamity plant not only directed a huge amount of hostility towards the Larkinsons, but also showed a frightening capacity to learn and adapt.

Those who underestimated the capabilities of this evolved native plant organism had already paid the price. Venerable Taon Melin and Venerable Lanie Larkinson were among this blasted calamity plant's most prominent victims.

If everything went well today, the threat posed by the Emperor Tree should end before local sunset.

Everyone stationed in Chimera Base should breathe a lot easier once a threat that had been equated to an ace mech multiple times had finally met its end.

Nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of red humanity's desire to colonize the new frontier and exploit its natural resources.

Only by utilizing the bounty of planets such as Reticula Corein V would the human race gain the strength needed to survive the alien onslaughts in the future!

Every Larkinson knew what they were fighting for, so they did not harbor much if any misgivings about invading the Emperor Tree's territory and taking away everything it cherished.

Hours before the assault was scheduled to commence, Venerable Joshua frowned as he quickly walked up to the landing zone. His expression showed clear concern behind his transparent faceplate.

The reason why he felt so disturbed was not because he was worried about Venerable Isobel's mental state.

The talk last night had given him a better understanding of her condition. Though Isobel was definitely struggling to bear her burdens, she was not weak. Her willpower remained strong and stable enough to cast aside all of her doubts, if they could even be regarded as such.

The real reason why Joshua felt disturbed during this early mourning was because an unscheduled shuttle landing took place.

As he stopped before the landing zone, he just managed to catch the vehicle descend from the Solus Gas-covered skies with a dozen escorting mechs, mostly hailing from the Swordmaidens.

As the shuttle smoothly landed on the surface, the hatch slid open, allowing a single figure in a menacing-looking red combat armor to step onto the planet.

A floating greatsword of transcendent quality hovered right behind the newcomer. The strong willpower emanating from the blade showed that it was hosting Sharpie like usual.

The woman already spotted Joshua and made her way over. Once they came close enough, they hugged each other without reserve, though their respective suits made the gesture a lot more awkward.

"It is strange to be walking on a planet with 1.3 g. It will take time for me to get accustomed to my greater weight."

"I love you and I miss you, but why are you here, Ketis?"

The swordmaster lifted her chin. "I am a warrior. It is not in my nature to sit all the way up in orbit while letting the troops under my command suffer at my behest. I have decided to accompany the strike force in person."

"That is not necessary!" Joshua heatedly replied! "You are not a pilot! You don't belong on a battlefield of this scale! You shouldn't take unnecessary risks. Just because you are a swordmaster doesn't mean you have to accompany us at the front. What can you even do? It is not as if you can chop the Emperor Tree in half with your Bloodsinger."

"It is exactly because I am a swordmaster that I need to be involved! You do not understand, Joshua. My progress is much slower than yours. Part of it is due to the limited amount of times I can prove my courage. No swordmaster is ever able to grow stronger by spending her time in the rear. Training and sparring alone is not enough to forge myself into a stronger fighter. I need to participate."

"There is nothing for you to fight out there! The Emperor Tree is too massive for any single human to resist! Let alone its massive roots and branches, its wooden mechs alone can crush you under their feet. We no longer live in an age where swordmasters can kill their way through entire armies."

Ketis frowned, but she did not refute this argument. It rankled her pride that for all of her transcendent strength, she was still unable to beat a single ordinary mech.

Joshua was right that the age of swordmasters had already passed a long time ago. The human race had already entered an age where mechs could destroy entire cities while warships could crack apart whole planets.

Let alone a swordmaster, not even a sword saint could effectively compete against the might of modern technology!

That did not deter her from trying, though.

She readily admitted that swordmasters and sword saints only possessed limited value in the current age, but she believed that her status would undergo an explosive transformation if she managed to promote to a sword god!

According to the legends of the Heavensword Association, sword gods were so powerful that they could force entire armies to surrender before they drew their blades. They could traverse through space without relying on spacecraft and they could cut through the hardest materials as easily as slicing through pieces of fruit.

Although not even Ketis believed in these dubiously sourced myths, they were enough to inspire her and give her hope.

Even if sword gods were not able to match the power god pilots due to obvious reasons, Ketis did not believe she would be much weaker!

Besides, she was not just a sword practitioner. She was also a mech designer. As long as she worked hard enough to become a Star Designer, she would be able to design and forge the most perfect sword for herself.

The Bloodsinger had already accompanied her for a number of years. So long as she continued to baptize it with Sharpie's willpower and upgrade its material composition in accordance with her sword style, Ketis possessed a great amount of confidence that her blade alone would come close to matching the power of a god mech one day!

If she managed to make further progress from that point, it was not impossible to reach a magnificent future where she could cut apart god mechs with just her sword alone!

Ketis did not dare to share her ambitions with Joshua or anyone else. Her ideas sounded way too absurd and overconfident to others. They were all so awed by mechs and the majesty of god pilots that they literally could not foresee a time where they could all be defeated by a powerful enough sword.

While Ketis most definitely wanted to prove them all wrong, she knew she needed to work hard for a long time until she was able to realize her goal!

She not only needed to work hard as a mech designer, but also as a swordmaster. She already had a taste of what it was like to be a sword saint when she wielded the Heavensword a few years ago. She understood quite well back then that it took a lot more courage and conviction to strengthen her willpower to such a massive extent.

Compared to her insane ambitions, how could she harbor any fear and apprehension towards accompanying the strike force in the upcoming operation?

Ketis did not bother to argue with her husband anymore. "I am coming along. Period. You cannot stop me, Joshua. I need to be there not just because I need to experience the heat of battle, but also because I can be present to issue orders and improve morale. I can also pay closer attention to the troops and ensure they are not secretly being bewitched by the Emperor Tree."

"Does that mean...?"

"I am not going to ride in the Everchanger or the First Sword's cockpit." Ketis reassured him. "I will be riding in the cockpits of one of my Storm Swords instead. I have already modified one to accommodate an extra passenger and added a few additional command and control modules to it. The Storm Sword will be assigned to guard the ranged mechs that are tasked with taking potshots at the Emperor Tree from afar, so you can rest assured that I won't actually get too close."

Her husband indeed grew a little less alarmed over her decision.

There was still a risk that the Emperor Tree would dispatch a horde of minions to assault the mechs stationed in the rear, but this was not that big of a threat.

The powerful Storm Swords and other Larkinson mechs should easily be able to mop up a horde of rabble.

If the Larkinsons underestimated the troop numbers of the Emperor Tree and became beset by too many creatures, then the mechs could always take advantage of their mobility and fall back to Chimera Base.

It would be a shame for them to lose the ability to support the three expert mechs tasked with confronting the Emperor Tree directly, but at least the rest of the strike force would be drawing away an important component of the enemy's powerbase.

The ability to advance and retreat in a hurry was one of the essential demands that Ketis imposed. The Emperor Tree might still have surprises in store that made it unwise for the Larkinson mech units to maintain their positions.

It would be a lot harder to keep the mech units on the move if they were also responsible for escorting a squad of Transcendent Punishers.

It was times like these that the Larkinsons wished they had a more mobile artillery mech in their mech roster. A cannoner mech armed with an old-fashioned artillery cannon was perfect for this kind of mission.

In any case, Joshua no longer tried to stop his wife now that Ketis had made it clear that she did not intend to get close enough to the Emperor Tree to swing her sword at its trunk.

If she wanted to oversee this operation as a field commander, then so be it. He did not want to get in the way of her ambition to become stronger.

Time passed as every Larkinson prepared for the big operation. Even the ones that were assigned to stay behind all looked serious as there was a small chance that the Emperor Tree would attempt to strike their base.

Soon enough, all of the mechs assembled in front of Chimera Base. They were all accompanied by dozens of shuttles that carried additional energy cells, spare equipment and other supplies.

The Everchanger, the First Sword and most notably the Promethea all stood in front of the assembled machines.

Only the expert mechs received the privilege of fighting against the Emperor Tree within the danger zone. Bringing along other mechs was just asking for trouble. It was already a risk to bring along the other mechs given that the Emperor Tree may yet be able to deceive the minds of mech pilots.

Before the strike force set off towards the site of the Emperor Tree, Ketis chose to address her troops.

She had exited the cockpit of the Storm Sword and stood atop the head of the machine of her own design.

A thrill of excitement surged in her body as she was set to preside over a 'hunt' of a greater scale.

The Emperor tree needed to die. She wouldn't be able to gain the satisfaction of ending its life in person, but it must perish regardless.

She held her Bloodsinger in her hands and transferred Sharpie back inside her head.

From the moment her companion spirit returned to where she belonged, Ketis became filled with a strong conviction and sense of purpose!

The pursuit of power became her greatest obsession!

Chapter 6103 Guard Your Mind

"LARKINSONS!" Ketis roared as she dramatically raised her Bloodsinger above her helmet. "Are you ready to fell a tree?!"

"WE ARE!" Hundreds of voices simultaneously broadcasted from their mechs!

Not just the Larkinson mech pilots, but also the living mechs looked forward to taking down the Emperor Tree.

The third order living mechs especially harbored a lot of animosity towards the Emperor Tree. The heinous calamity plant served as the ultimate cause behind the downfall of the Zeal.

The masterwork mech was slated to become one of the leaders among their kind!

Even though the machine was much younger than many of the more prominent mechs, as long as venerable Taon broke through, the Zeal would definitely become a lot stronger!

The heavy artillery mechs of the Larkinson Army especially looked forward to the promised ascension of the Zeal. The elevation of a mech of their own 'lineage' should have been a celebration for both heavy artillery mechs as well as the glory of Ylvaine.

Instead, the tragedy that took place during the last minute ruined everything. Death through betrayal from a battle partner was one of the most dishonorable ways to lose one's life.

The Transcendent Punishers wouldn't have much reason to complain if the Zeal got defeated in honest combat against the Emperor Tree. The custom mech at least made a good showing and died in honor if that was the case.

Instead, the Zeal not only became stained with dishonor by striking a fellow living mech in the back, but died in one of the worst possible ways.

It was painful for the Transcendent Punisher mechs to think about the Zeal. Their entire mech line would bear the ignomy of this affair for many years to come. The loss of a champion mech also damaged their prestige.

Even now, the Transcendent Punishers of Task Force Solus were not allowed to participate in the upcoming action!

The Larkinsons did not trust them as much anymore. Ketis also did not want the strike force to get slowed down by the need to haul these huge and lumbering machines around.

Of course, mobility was just one of the reasons why she had to leave those lumbering machines behind.

"Each of you should know our purpose." Ketis continued to address her troops. "The Emperor Tree stands in the way between us and the ability to claim this piece of land. So long as that alien tree continues to threaten us, we can never let down our guard. I am confident that we can succeed, but that is no reason to take this battle lightly. If an expert candidate managed to get deceived by the Emperor Tree, how do you expect to do any better?"

That was a difficult question. Expert candidates were not as impressive as true expert pilots, but they had already proven that they possessed the makings of a hero.

Numerous mech pilots couldn't help but doubt whether they had what it took to resist the same insidious mind alterations.

Ketis slammed her gauntlet against her chest plate!

"Be vigilant, but do not be afraid! Last time, none of us suspected that the Emperor Tree was able to hack into your minds. Now we know! Forewarned is forearmed. We have implemented many measures to prevent the same incident from happening again. I have personally involved myself with the modifications to the hardware and software of the cockpits of your mechs. There are many more tripwires that will send out an alert if there are any signs of improper behavior. Aside from that, the clan has also shipped in living mechs that should be especially helpful towards warding your minds."

She gestured at the mechs that looked distinctly more out of place. The Sanctuaries and Pacifiers had not yet activated their glows at the moment, but everyone knew that these machines were able to calm every form of turbulence in people's minds.

"We think that these mechs will help ward off any subtle mental manipulation by the Emperor Tree. It is just a hypothesis, however! We have not proved whether this is the case, so this is no reason to be complacent! In addition, the mechs are instructed not to activate their glows at maximum power. It is too difficult for mech pilots who are unaccustomed to Lufa's glow to maintain enough aggression and focus in a battle. What I am trying to tell you is that you are ultimately responsible for guarding the sanctity of your own minds."

Ketis deliberately spoke those words to prevent the mech pilots from growing too complacent. It would be awful if they trusted all of the aforementioned safeguards to successfully keep the Emperor Tree's influence at bay.

"There are good reasons to believe that the Emperor Tree has become encouraged by its successful attempt to subvert Taon Melin and his then-living mech. According to its established pattern, the damn calamity plant has most definitely strengthened this specific ability. While we still believe that maintaining a distance of enough kilometers will weaken or invalidate his mind control capabilities, this is also not certain. We simply know too little about the tree. Since that is the case, you must always be alert and actively guard your mind."

A whistling noise originated from afar. Ketis frowned and turned around to look at the gas-obscured sky.

The noise grew louder and louder until numerous mech pilots eventually managed to connect the dots.

"INCOMING ARTILLERY STRIKE!"

"GET TO SAFETY, KETIS!"

BOOOM!

BOOOM!

BOOOM!

The ground shook several times as a trio of kinetic impacts slammed into the ground surrounding Chimera Base!

To their credit, the mechs that had previously formed up into columns had already spread out and lifted off into the air!

There were only two exceptions.

The Storm Sword where Ketis currently stood remained absolutely still. The veteran Swordmaiden pilot fought against her instinct and kept her machine absolutely still in order to form a stable platform.

The only action that Ketis had taken was to magnetize her greaves and to dig her Bloodsigner tip-first into the head of the mech.

As a quasi-first-class mech made out of salvaged and recycled alien warship debris, the material toughness of the Storm Sword was pretty good. It should have been more than capable of blocking a sword stab from an armored infantry soldier.

However, the Bloodsinger effortlessly dug into the armor plate as if there was hardly any resistance.

What was even more impressive was that its sharpness disappeared, allowing the massive blade to form a solid grip for Ketis to maintain her footing even as a few shockwaves almost threatened to blow her armored body away.

Not that she would have gotten far. The Everchanger had already approached with his hands stretched out to cover Ketis and catch her if she fell.

"You're vulnerable, Ketis! You need to head to shelter right away!"

"Not yet."

The swordmaster maintained a fearless and indomitable expression as she continued to hold on to the grip of her greatsword.

A sword aura had formed around her, making her look more heroic while also protecting her from anything that got too close.

As the Larkinson mech pilots quickly organized themselves into different formations, they soon learned what had happened.

"The Emperor Tree bombarded us with giant seeds!"

"We believe that the calamity plant has tried to replicate the Devora Cannon of the Zeal on a much larger scale. It has apparently succeeded. Though the tree equivalent of our super-heavy hyper-velocity gauss cannon is much cruder and not comparable in performance, its larger scale along with the power to lob giant seeds far enough to reach our base is of great concern."

"Have you taken a look how close those seeds struck our base immediately after launching the first volley. These seed artillery cannons are remarkably accurate! It shouldn't take much effort for the Emperor Tree to dial in Chimera Base. The estimated power of these kinetic seed strikes is formidable, so our base defenses can only endure the bombardment for a limited amount of time."

"How long?"

"Without any further reinforcements or changes to our base defenses, we will only be able to last up to three hours."

That was too short!

Ketis felt a greater sense of urgency.

"Do you see it, Larkinsons? The Emperor Tree is afraid of us. It wouldn't have resorted to bombarding our base if it was patient enough to hold back its latest tricks. At the same time, the Emperor Tree can reach much further than we expected. For the tree to begin its attack on our base at this very time suggests that it is able to monitor and detect our movements from this range. It knows we have gathered our troops to launch an assault."

Since a battle was inevitable, it made sense for the Emperor Tree to throw all caution to the wind and strike the first blow!

BOOM!

BOOM!

Another whistling sound approached from the same angle as before.

"Incoming!"

"Ketis, move!"

"No. Not yet."

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

This time, two of the massive seeds launched from far away had managed to strike the titan shield covering Chimera Base!

The powerful shield managed to hold on, but it was clear that it could not endure these powerful blows forever.

Ketis simply sneered even as a shockwave buffeted her armored form yet again.

The fact that she chose to stay in the open and brave the incoming artillery strike with the courage of a swordmaster inspired a lot of Larkinsons.

None of the mech pilots were willing to exit their cockpits and risk getting blown into splatters if a massive seed just happened to hit their bodies!

"Time is running out, my fellow Larkinsons. Do you want to let the tree's copycat artillery cannons tear down our base?"

"NO!"

"Do you want to let the Emperor Tree go unpunished despite masterminding the death of the Zeal and the exile of two of our heroes?"

NO!"

"Will you allow your fears and apprehensions towards the Emperor Tree's mind manipulation powers deter you from advancing!"

"NO!"

"Then set off and make the Larkinson Clan proud! We fight not only to secure our place on this savage planet, but also avenge the death and disgrace that happened last time! No matter how much

Venerable Taon and Venerable Lanie have come to hate each other, there is one enemy they both wish to kill. Let us fulfill their common desire and tear down the Emperor Tree ourselves! Who are we?!"

"WE ARE THE LARKINSONS!"

"What are we?!"

"WE ARE THE GREATEST!"

"What is our strength?!"

"OUR COURAGE IS OUR STRENGTH!"

"Will you allow this Emperor Tree to humiliate us again?!"

"NO!"

"Then go forth and show that damn tree what we think about its dying struggle! For the Larkinson Clan!"

"FOR THE LARKINSON CLAN!"

"For the Golden Cat!"

"FOR THE GOLDEN CAT!"

"Advance!"

Ketis finally pulled out her Bloodsinger and hopped back inside the cockpit of the Storm Sword.

Venerable Joshua sighed in relief, but still acted like a worrywart by hovering closely to the quasi-first-class mech that held his wife.

The procession of mechs advanced at a steady pace. None of the mechs tried to move too quickly, both because the visibility in the area was getting worse, but also because of the need to spare enough thrust power to dodge incoming artillery strikes in a hurry.

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

The Emperor Tree either was not able to track the advancing mechs, or simply chose not to bother.

It continued to launch ultra-heavy seeds at Chimera Base, perhaps knowing that getting rid of the Larkinson Clan's foothold on the planet would cause a lot of difficulties to the gas harvesting operation.

Despite sounding confident earlier, Ketis actually felt quite concerned about what she and her fellow Larkinsons were about to face.

The scouts never spotted any sign that the Emperor Tree had secretly managed to develop a vastly improved version of a kinetic artillery cannon. To be able to strike at Chimera Base at such a long distance and with so much precision was not normal!

Ketis already guessed how the Emperor Tree managed to develop a weapon of this potency so quickly.

"It learned from the Zeal..."

#### Chapter 6104 Threats From Above and Below

The journey from Chimera Base to the Emperor Tree was not particularly long, but the tension in the air was palpable.

Ketis sat in the rear of the cockpit of the Storm Sword. The relatively cramped conditions left her with little choice but to install her command seat sideways. Even then, the size of her combat armor left her with very little room to move.

The initial leg of the journey proceeded quietly. The Emperor Tree kept bombarding Chimera Base, making no attempt to launch any of its super-heavy seeds at the advancing mechs.

Even if the Emperor Tree was able to detect the mechs, the probability of hitting anything was extremely low.

The Larkinson mechs all flew in the air in a dispersed formation. It was extremely unlikely for three projectiles to strike any of the machines, especially when there was a significant delay between launching the seeds and having them reach their intended destinations.

Artillery cannons specifically fired explosive shells because it was so hard to land precision hits at moving targets at enormous ranges. Every projectile needed to explode upon contact or at a programmed height in order to have any chance of damaging enemy mechs!

The Emperor Tree had yet to learn this lesson or develop this specific solution, so the mechs had little to fear from above. So long as the mech pilots remained slightly vigilant and made sure they were not at risk of colliding directly against the enemy machines, there was no chance they would get struck by a giant seed!

"Be careful. Flagrant Vandals, make sure to scan for threats from above and below. I have a feeling that the Emperor Tree will not allow us to approach unchallenged." Ketis instructed.

As a swordmaster, her combat intuition was just as good as that of an expert pilot. It might even be better as Ketis often had to rely on her combat armor and her sword aura alone to resist enemy attacks.

As powerful as she may be, there were too many weapons that could kill her in an instant. Mech and warship-grade firearms could obliterate her body with ease, and so could bombs that had been planted in secret.

Perhaps to compensate for her much greater vulnerability to weapons that she was not properly equipped to confront head-on, Ketis had a better sense of detecting possible threats.

Right now, her intuition transmitted more warning signals to her mind. She became increasingly more convinced that the Emperor Tree had prepared a trap for the strike force.

From where did the Emperor Tree plan to strike? What sort of weapons did it prepare for the mechs?

Half a minute passed as she struggled to anticipate the danger. It was one thing to stumble into an ambush unprepared. It was another thing to expose it in advance.

After thinking about what the Emperor Tree had already exposed last time and what it might possibly be able to do next, Ketis eventually cast her eyes downwards.

"The ground." She suddenly realized. "Ascend! Beware of threats from below! I think the Emperor Tree is about to launch its root spikes at our machines!"

The mechs had been flying at a medium height up until this point. They needed to maintain enough vision of the ground in order to keep track of their coordinates. They also attempted to rely on the cover of Solus Gas to make themselves harder to detect.

However, now that there was a possibility of threats emerging from below, the mechs increased their altitudes right away.

From the moment they did so, the Emperor Tree launched its strike right away, proving that it was definitely able to monitor the strike force somehow.

The ground exploded as hundreds of long and sharp root spikes shot straight into the air!

Their length was astonishing! They extended so fast and so much that every mech was at risk of getting impaled!

Fortunately, the timely warning from Ketis alerted all of the Larkinson mechs in advance. Despite the heavier than usual gravity of Reticula Corein V, the powerful second-class and quasi-first-class mechs possessed more than enough mobility to react in time and evade any spikes that threatened to impale them from below!

"We're clear!"

Ketis let out a sigh in relief when she saw that the root spikes failed to touch any of the mechs.

To be fair, the veteran mech pilots and living mechs already had a good chance of evading the root spikes. They had fought enemy warships for years which forced them to become very sensitive towards warships that targeted them with their overpowering gun batteries.

Mechs and mech pilots that failed to evade in time after receiving an alert usually did not last long on the battlefield!

"The root spikes are sharp and strong, but they are too rigid to bend and move."

"Their length is astonishing! They can reach far above the Solus Gas cloud!"

"Be careful about crashing into them. They will snap when struck from the side, but they can dent or damage your machine if the impact force is high enough."

The Emperor Tree did not give up after failing to hit a mech. Another array of root spikes launched from the ground as the strike force advanced further.

This time, the density of spikes was considerably higher, making it hard to avoid collisions even if the Larkinson mechs managed to prevent themselves from getting impaled again!

It was easier to anticipate and dodge the spikes from a higher altitude. While the increasing concentration of Solus Gas made it harder to observe the ground, the simple use of scout mechs as observers solved this particular problem.

The only issue was that the Light Hunter mechs were in greater danger than the rest of the strike force. They needed to fly lower to the ground and continue to transmit sensor data to the other mechs.

"Careful!"

The Light Hunter mechs all boosted out of the way as the Emperor Tree appeared to target them specifically!

This time, the calamity plant tried to be a bit clever and attempted to impale the Light Hunter with angled root spikes!

Seeing them come from different angles forced the Flagrant Vandal mechs to dance around the extended roots while doing their best to make sure that none of the sharp ends of the root spikes impaled their mech frames!

This cycle repeated multiple times. The lack of any further variations caused the Larkinson mech pilots to relax, though they still maintained their vigilance towards the tree.

Eventually, the Emperor Tree ceased its attempt to impale the mechs from below. They were flying too high for the roots to have a decent chance of striking any of the elusive machines.

Ketis felt thankful that she and the staff officers all came to an agreement that it was better not to bring the Transcendent Punisher Mark III's along this time.

If the Larkinsons attempted to haul those big and heavy machines forward with the help of lifter platforms, there was no way this form of support would be able to maneuver fast enough to evade the root spikes!

Dozens of lifter platforms would have gotten struck from below, causing them to malfunction and drop a lot of expensive heavy artillery mechs!

The only other solution to evade the threat from below was to fly at a much higher altitude.

This was what the strike force was already doing. Though the airspace of the surrounding region appeared safe, Ketis grew more and more concerned about what kind of threats the Larkinsons would face next.

It may be a lot harder to strike at the mechs from below, but what about other angles?

Since Solus Gas was heavier than the local air mixture, its concentration was much lower at higher altitudes.

The mechs were even able to perceive the vague silhouette of the top of the tall Emperor Tree from their current vantage points!

However, Ketis did not feel secure at all while she continued to monitor the situation from the cockpit of the Storm Sword.

Several alerts suddenly sounded from one of her monitors.

Outside, one of the luminous fire fey of a Fey Fianna mech randomly opened fire onto a nearby Stormblade Samurai!

"My mech is hit by friendly fire!"

"It's an accident! I thought we were being beset by aerial exobeasts!"

"The Emperor Tree managed to compromise him somehow!"

It happened again!

Ketis initially held hope that her mech pilots would have been able to resist the Emperor Tree's insidious mind invasion, but one of them had already failed while they were still a fair distance away from their target.

This did not bode well for the upcoming operation!

"Initiating forced weapons lockdown." Ketis announced as she transmitted the encrypted command directly to the Fey Fianna. "Fall back, maintain your distance and clear up your mind. Sanctuaries and Pacifiers, please activate your glows."

Lufa's peaceful aura soon settled over everyone's minds. The mech pilots not only calmed down, but also became more confident in their ability to resist the Emperor Tree's tampering.

Yet just as everyone focused on the journey ahead, the Emperor Tree made another move!

"We are detecting rising activity from the Emperor Tree! Its heat signature is growing!"

"What is it doing?!"

"It is concentrating more energy at the top!"

"For what purpose?!"

"Perhaps it is preparing to launch an energy attack!"

The guess came fairly close to the truth, but it was not quite correct.

Everyone soon found out what the Emperor Tree had in store when it began to shine a broad spotlight at the mechs approaching from a distance!

Initially, the Larkinsons grew puzzled as the beam of light appeared to do little aside from lighting up the exterior of their mechs.

However, incidents began to happen just a dozen seconds later.

Crash!

A Ferocious Piranha suddenly flew off-course and crashed into a nearby Bright Warrior mech!

If not for the fact that the latter's energy shield resisted the force of the collision, the crash could have turned a bit uglier!

"Bastard! Get your mind together!"

Another accident occurred as all multiple luminous fire fey belonging to several drone mechs opened fire at random mechs, no matter whether they were in the front, sides or back!

"The living fey are all compromised!"

"Lock them down!"

"Why isn't Lufa able to protect our minds?!"

More and more friendly fire incidents occurred, making it clear that few of the precautionary measures stopped the Emperor Tree from messing with everyone's minds.

Ketis quickly transmitted many different lockdown commands that forcibly restricted the weapons and the movement freedom of the compromised mechs. Neither the living mechs nor the mech pilots were able to exert control anymore.

In order to make sure that the mechs did not turn into dummies, very simple AIs took over their basic control systems. The artificial intelligences might not be very clever, but they were so rigid that not even the Emperor Tree should be able to tamper with their operations!

The emergency measure successfully prevented the mechs from doing more damage, but it also neutered the machines and rendered them useless.

There was no reason to bring them along if they remained locked in their current states!

"It's that light source! The Emperor Tree managed to find a way to amplify its ability to manipulate the minds of humans."

"We can't block its influence! None of our energy shields or armor is able to prevent the light from worming into our heads somehow."

Ketis formed an intuitive guess about how the Emperor Tree's latest move worked. "Descend."

The mechs all lost altitude. The sight of the top of the Emperor Tree became blocked as the concentration of Solus Gas rapidly rose around the machines.

No further incidents took place. When Ketis cautiously deactivated the lockdowns and returned control to the mech pilots, they did not attempt to attack any of their compatriots.

"My guess is right. A high enough concentration of Solus Gas will shield your minds from the Emperor Tree's mind manipulation."

The Larkinsons felt relieved now that they did not have to worry as much about getting compromised, but they did not dare to let down their guards.

Ketis already began to doubt whether it was still wise to allow all of the standard mechs of the strike force to advance towards the Emperor Tree.

Did Solus Gas truly interfere with the Emperor Tree's mind manipulation abilities, or was it clever enough to hold back and lull the humans in a false sense of security?

Nobody knew the answer.

Chapter 6105 Greater Variations

Ketis struggled to make the right decision.

It became apparent that many of the precautions that the Larkinsons prepared in advance failed to stymie the Emperor Tree.

Its ability to affect the minds of humans was much stronger and more frightening than it had shown in the past!

It was doubtful that the Emperor Tree always possessed this capability. The much more likely possibility was that it had spent a lot of effort into improving it after seeing how well it sowed chaos among the human mechs last time.

Ketis frowned deeper. The Emperor Tree's threat level had grown too fast. It became a lot more adept at fighting against the human invaders from beyond the stars.

If the Larkinsons postponed their attack on the Emperor Tree for a few months, how much stronger and more effective would its measures have become?

"We cannot delay this priority anymore. The tree needs to die today. We will resort to orbital bombardment if we have to. Any solution is better than leaving it alive to develop more effective weapons against our race."

Orbital bombardment would lead to a lot of repercussions. If the rampant bombing truly managed to alert several other calamity beasts, then the Larkinsons would quickly evacuate from Chimera Base and return to orbit at worst.

Ketis was fairly confident that the other beasts had yet to evolve any specific adaptations against humans. They were much further behind in this regard. That reduced their threat level as far as she was concerned.

"We are approaching the checkpoint."

The mechs flew forward at an altitude that was neither too high nor too low. The concentration of Solus Gas should be high enough to block all sorts of strange influences, which unfortunately affected the connections between living mechs and their design spirits.

However, the top of the Emperor Tree was no longer able to shine on the machines like a lighthouse. That should keep their minds a lot safer if they were correct about its mechanisms.

The biggest downside was that the mechs all became a lot more vulnerable to impalement.

Ketis guessed that the Emperor Tree had secretly spread its roots far and wide.

Even so, the concentration and power of those roots likely grew the closer they moved towards the main trunk!

Ketis could not imagine how many root spikes were ready to break out of the ground and take the mechs by surprise!

Every mech pilot grew more stressed as they not only had to pay more attention to keeping a clear mind, but also be ready to move in an instant in case a lot of root spikes emerged from below.

It was quite doubtful that many of the mech pilots taking part in the assault retained their full combat effectiveness. They had yet to launch any strikes at the Emperor Tree, and already their adversary managed to shake their confidence!

Ketis considered whether she should hold another speech, but eventually decided against it. This was not the time for her men to get distracted. If they needed a second speech in order to regain their focus, then it may be better to send them back right away.

For now, she was willing to trust in their resolve and hope that their mental states recovered in the next few minutes.

"We have reached the checkpoint."

The terrain at this location was much rougher than elsewhere. Low hills and other terrain features provided enough cover for most of the mechs that took part in the assault.

The original plan was for the Larkinson mechs to hover near it with the expectation of taking shelter behind natural cover.

Nobody believed it was a good idea to follow the original plan anymore. Ketis and many others believed that the Emperor Tree had hidden a lot of root spikes underneath the surface.

It was better for the mechs to hover above ground even if they became more vulnerable as a consequence.

Their greatest priorities were to open fire at the Emperor Tree in the distance while simultaneously remaining on guard against any incoming attacks.

The melee mechs all spread out around the squads of ranged mechs.

Meanwhile, the ranged mechs all waited for more accurate targeting data to be transmitted back by the scout mechs that flew ahead.

The three expert mechs that had been leading the strike force patiently waited for the scout mechs to confirm that the Emperor Tree did not present any shocking surprises.

"The ground ahead is clear."

"The concentration of Solus Gas around the main trunk has remained consistent with past readings."

"The root structure at the bottom has become much denser than before!"

"Several thousand wooden mechs are hovering protectively around the trunk. Their appearances have not changed as far as our sensors can observe."

"We have detected over 70 purple wooden mechs hiding in the branches. There is a high probability that there are more hiding out of sight."

"Have the designs of the purple mechs changed?" Ketis demanded.

"Yes. Our sensors detect that the copies of the First Sword and the Everchanger have become larger and more refined. The composition of their purple wooden exteriors have also changed. They have likely grown tougher and more resistant to damage!"

That was bad news. The purple mechs had proven to be one of the few assets at the Emperor Tree's disposal that could put up greater resistance against two powerful expert mechs.

"The Emperor Tree just attempted to shine its light at my mech! I am falling back!"

The scout mechs could not observe the Emperor Tree long enough to provide more high-quality footage and sensor readings.

Despite the high concentration of Solus Gas, if the mechs were able to observe the details of the Emperor Tree, then it was only natural for their target to observe them as well!

The calamity plant threatened to mentally hijack all of the mech pilots and living mechs that lingered a bit too close.

The Flagrant Vandal mech pilots all erred on the side of caution and did not try to push their luck. They had already witnessed earlier what had happened when they thought that the Emperor Tree could not possibly subvert their minds at a further distance.

The premature withdrawal of the scout mechs prevented the three expert pilots from making too many last-minute preparations.

All they knew was that there were a lot of wooden mechs and much more powerful roots awaiting their arrival.

"Those roots almost managed to trap my expert mech." Venerable Dise spoke. "They aren't invincible, but there are so many of them that my Decapitator can't cut through all of them at once."

"The Emperor Tree managed to produce more purple wooden mechs than before." Joshua said with concern. "If they have grown tougher as the sensor data suggests, then they can pose a much greater hindrance than before."

"Do not overlook the possibility of other improvements. We have yet to spot the larger and much more powerful seed cannons." Ketis warned.

The expert pilots would have preferred to go in with a lot more up-to-date information at their disposal, but that was not possible.

"We should commence our assault." Venerable Isobel spoke.

Ketis immediately responded. "I agree. Do not give the Emperor Tree more time to make last-minute adaptations. Let us follow the second variation of our action plan. Maintain your distance from the tree and more specifically the large roots around the base of the trunk. Stay out of the range of the tree branches and focus on whittling down the wooden mechs first. If our suspicions are correct, it takes a great amount of energy, resources and time to produce a single purple wooden mech. The sooner we get rid of them, the easier it will be to attack the main trunk."

It was a good plan, but it relied on the assumption that the Emperor Tree was unable to launch effective attacks against the expert mechs at those distances.

That was anything but certain.

After a quick discussion, the three expert pilots quickly agreed on a strategy before they moved their powerful mechs forward.

The Everchanger and the First Sword both took the lead while the Promethea followed right behind.

The three expert pilots and their battle partners were on their own from this point onwards.

Communications with the mechs stationed further in the rear could only be established with unreliable light mechs acting as mobile relays.

The expert mechs had already moved deep enough to lose contact with their design spirits.

While the contingent of ranged mech stationed in the rear was still able to provide long-ranged fire support, they could only reliably open fire at the massive tree trunk.

There was not much point in relying on the targeting data provided by the scout mechs to land shots onto the wooden mechs. The lag times and other sources of interference would drastically lower the hit rate.

As such, the three expert mechs needed to carry most of the burden of this fight.

"Incoming wooden mechs! They are all standard ones! They are spreading out and making sure we cannot easily wipe them out with explosive munitions."

The three expert mechs automatically flew in another direction, thereby attempting to stay a few steps ahead of the intercepting wooden mechs.

The differences in speed were too great.

Now that the expert mechs were not forced to stay in the same place in order to retrieve a bunch of samples or protect a lumber heavy artillery mech, the high-quality machines were able to take full advantage of their superior mobility.

The Everchanger and the Promethea had already begun to fire while they continued to kite around the pursuing wooden mechs.

Fiery energy beams struck the wooden mechs one by one. No matter whether it was the Vitalus or Ignitron rifles, both of them possessed more than enough firepower to vaporize much of the torsos of the wooden constructs at once.

Even if that did not happen, the flames spread by the hyper laser beams soon made quick work of these machines!

The power of two luminal crystal rifles might not be that great in comparison to more modern high-end energy weapons, but the expert pilots were not dissatisfied with their killing speeds.

Dozens of wooden mechs burst apart or turned into burning wrecks.

In the meantime, the wooden constructs accomplished virtually nothing aside from soaking up firepower.

Their melee mechs including the ones modeled after the Flagrant Vandal mechs were simply too slow to catch up to any of the expert mechs.

The ranged mechs were all armed with relatively basic seed rifles. While the quantity of shots was impressive, it didn't really matter.

So what if the wooden mechs launched thousands of seeds at once?

Their trajectories diverged too wildly. Only a few seeds ended up hitting the expert mechs per salvo, and the damage was so negligible that the resonance shields did not even shake from the impacts.

Perhaps understanding that it was futile for the wooden mechs to hound the Larkinson expert mechs, the Emperor Tree wised up and changed their instructions.

"The wooden mechs have given up on attacking our expert mechs!"

"They are changing course. The wooden mechs are on their way to attack our rear elements!"

"Focus on repelling them first."

The enemy's decision temporarily reduced the fire support from the rear, but it had freed up the expert mechs from the annoying chore of mopping up all of the cannon fodder.

"The purple wooden mechs are on the move!"

The Emperor Tree finally decided to dispatch its elite minions!

Unlike the previous wave of enemies, the three expert pilots took the latest batch a lot more seriously.

Not only did they look tougher and much higher in quality, but the Emperor Tree had also experimented with their loadouts and other parameters.

The purple mechs no longer looked like strange imitations of the Everchanger and the First Sword anymore.

There were many among them that carried much more formidable ranged armaments. There were even purple mechs that looked like they struggled to hold an oversized cannon modeled after the Devora Cannon of the Transcendent Punisher Mark III!

Yet regardless of how much more of a challenge they posed, the response from the Larkinsons was the same.

"Burn them all down!"

#### Chapter 6106 Attribute Advantage

Venerable Joshua had been waiting for a rematch against the purple wooden mechs.

The Emperor Tree had invested a lot of care and attention in the production of its elite constructs.

It was rather obvious now that Joshua observed them for a second time. The Emperor Tree not only produced a lot of new purple mechs, but also went back and upgraded the older ones somehow.

"The purple mechs are no longer tethered to the main trunk. They have gained much more freedom of movement!"

The older purple wooden mechs used to function as direct extensions of the Emperor Tree. The flexible branches attached to their backs constantly channeled a lot of tree sap and wood energy into the elite constructs.

The existence of the tethers used to serve as a major boost but also a strong constraint to the purple mechs. Now that the powerful constructs gained the ability to move on an unrestricted basis, the three expert pilots wondered whether they still remained as strong as before.

"It's impossible for the purple wooden mechs to remain as tough as before." Joshua claimed. "They just can't. All of that power has to come from somewhere. I don't believe the Emperor Tree managed to develop a superpowerful organic power cell that can allow these wooden bastards to regenerate their entire bodies in an instant."

In order to put that to the test, the Everchanger raised his Vitalus rifle and fired a resonance-empowered fire beam at the leading purple wooden mech.

The wooden construct that should have suffered a nasty hit before catching fire actually managed to resist the attack!

"What?! That... that's an energy shield! It's an energy shield composed of wood energy!"

Joshua could feel the wood energy condensing into a strangely functional energy shield just before his expert mech opened fire.

Despite the obvious attribute relationship, the wood energy shield actually managed to do a good job at blocking the attack!

However, the wood energy shield subsequently winked out, indicating that its capacity was not a big deal.

The Everchanger fired another shot with his rifle. The subsequent fire beam finally burned a hole in the purple wooden mech.

The elite wooden construct quickly concentrated a lot of wood energy. The flames quickly died down while the wood already started to regenerate.

"It's regenerating faster than before." Venerable Joshua observed. "However, its energy reserves have dropped by a quarter. It won't be able to keep this up forever."

It would be much easier to take all of these powerful enemies down if that was the case!

The reason why Venerable Joshua and the Everchanger got stalled last time was because the purple wooden mechs regenerated far too quickly. It was impossible to accumulate damage back then as the direct tethers to the powerful Emperor Tree constantly fed them with sap and wood energy!

Now that those conditions did not exist anymore, Venerable Joshua grinned as he looked forward to taking revenge on these resilient but ultimately fallible wooden constructs.

"Let's kick their wooden butts!"

Venerable Joshua eagerly wanted to take revenge on these annoyingly resilient enemies. If they hadn't entangled his expert mech during the last fight, Taon or Lanie might not have been able to survive long enough to get exiled!

"You are the first of many!"

Yet before the Everchanger could finish off his first opponent, a surprising development occurred.

The Emperor Tree began to shine the same bright light onto the purple wooden mechs!

The expert pilots became surprised when they saw that the damaged purple construct recovered at a much faster rate than before!

What was even more remarkable was that it expended way more wood energy than it held in reserve.

"Where is the purple bastard getting its energy from?!" Venerable Joshua demanded. "Wait, is it because of the light?!"

"I think you are correct, Joshua." Dise spoke with a serious expression on her face. "The Emperor Tree has unveiled another trick. I think I know why the purple wooden mechs no longer carry tethers around their backs."

The Emperor Tree managed to climb up the tech tree and discovered a way to perform wireless energy transmissions!

Although the calamity plant's attempts to flood the purple wooden mech with more focused streams of wood energy was incredibly wasteful and inefficient, the Emperor Tree could easily afford the consumption!

As the Everchanger continued to launch fire beam after fire beam, the fire energy attached to the resonance-empowered laser beams only made limited progress in burning down the purple wooden mech.

The target was pretty resilient on its own, but now that it was bathed in the light of the Emperor Tree, its regeneration properties had skyrocketed!

The Everchanger's outdated high-end luminar crystal rifle did not have the power to inflict more damage than the purple wooden mech was able to regenerate.

In other words, attacking the purple wooden mech was like trying to attack the Emperor Tree directly. Any damage to the target instantly disappeared just seconds later!

"Isobel, help!"

"On it, Joshua."

The Promethea's Ignitron rifle was not that much newer than the Vitalus rifle, but the differences were still considerable.

The latter was smaller and more compact in order to make it easier to wield with a single arm. Its size limited its power. This was fairly common to the hero mech archetype.

The former was the primary and pretty much the only armament of the Promethea, so it had to be strong enough to carry an entire battle if necessary. It was larger, more powerful and more feature-rich than ordinary energy rifles.

When utilized by an expert mech specialized for ranged combat, the Ignitron rifle was able to output a lot more firepower by herself.

However, what truly made the Ignitron shine was when it was used by its intended pilot!

As a high-tier expert pilot, Venerable Isobel was able to generate strong enough true resonance to massively empower the purple fire beams!

While the energy beams fired by the Everchanger resembled thick needles that were controlled and contained, the energy beams fired by the Promethea appeared like thick fiery purple glowing rods!

The rods only existed for an instant, but as soon as they struck their targets, mayhem ensued!

The low-capacity but high-recovery wood energy shield collapsed in an instant.

No, collapse was not the right word to describe what had happened.

The energy shield actually burst into flames!

The wood energy that protected the target couldn't withstand the powerful heat and caught fire as if it was nothing but tinder!

Upon striking the exterior of the mech itself, the purple wooden mech demonstrated the resilience of its reinforced wooden frame by not instantly getting cored or vaporized.

However, the Promethea's single shot was so powerful that half of the torso was already destroyed!

This was not the extent of the Promethea's lethality. As every Larkinson knew, Venerable Isobel inflicted the most damage after she had fired her shot.

The flames transferred by the energy beam did not get doused by the abundance of wood energy that tried to stifle the danger.

Instead of making the situation better for the purple wooden mech, the huge infusion of wood energy instead made everything worse!

Under normal circumstances, it should have taken a bit more time for the purple flames to take root and spread throughout the entire wooden construct.

Yet now that the Emperor Tree had been generous enough to donate a lot of intangible 'tinder'. The resonance-empowered flames eagerly devoured all of the extraordinary propellant and surrounded the purple wooden mech in a blazing bonfire!

The wooden construct released a strange noise that must have been its death cry before collapsing into ash.

"..."

"..."

The entire demonstration of might rendered Venerable Dise and Venerable Joshua speechless.

Neither the First Sword nor the Everchanger could deal with these infinitely regenerating wooden constructs with the same degree of ease.

Whereas either expert mech needed to launch repeated attacks in the hopes of reluctantly overcoming their target's insanely strong regeneration properties, the Promethea only needed to fire a single shot to produce the same outcome!

Life wasn't fair!

"This is fun..." Venerable Isobel gradually began to grin as she saw her opponents in a new light.

The descriptions she heard about the purple wooden mechs had caused her to vastly overestimate the threat they posed against her expert mech.

Perhaps they were indeed difficult to deal with for other Larkinson mechs, but it was different for the Promethea!

In Venerable Isobel's eyes, the purple wooden mechs had turned from organic bulwarks into moving forms of tinder.

It only took a single spark to light them all ablaze!

The Promethea's resonance shield began to glow brighter as Isobel grew more and more excited.

She had come to the right place.

This mission was different from all of the other ones.

The Larkinsons no longer wanted her to hold back her destructive flames anymore.

Instead, they wanted her to go all-out and burn as much wood as possible.

If possible, the Larkinsons wanted her to set the entire Emperor Tree ablaze!

Though Venerable Isobel was not certain whether she possessed the raw power necessary to light up the entire calamity plant, she definitely possessed the firepower to deal with these smaller but still formidable purple wooden mechs!

"Joshua."

"Yes, Isobel?"

"Don't bother with shooting. Let me take care of that. If you want to help, then make sure that nothing gets close to my Promethea."

"Will do..."

With that out of the way, Venerable Isobel took a deep breath before she began to grin.

"Let's start a wildfire!"

The Promethea exploded into action!

It continued to fly away from the pursuing purple wooden mechs while tilting its frame sideways so that it could point its Ignitron rifle at a backwards angle.

The weapon did not pause to take aim, but began to fire a barrage of medium-powered purple fire beams at half a dozen targets.

Every single purple fire beam struck a wooden construct each!

The elite purple wooden mechs failed to withstand these single blows. The abundance of wood energy could not overcome the attribute restraint and the empowerment of Venerable Isobel's true resonance.

As long as the disparity in power was not too lopsided in favor of the Emperor Tree, none of the purple wooden mechs could resist the Promethea's firepower!

Just as Isobel expected, 6 purple wooden mechs went down with ease. The flames proved too much for the Emperor Tree's creations!

Even the wood energy transmission from the calamity plant was unable to reverse this outcome.

The purple wooden mechs actually burned down faster due to the injection of flammable energy!

Venerable Joshua had read theories about how specific E energy attributes were able to restrain each other, but he had never witnessed such an exaggerated effect.

The power of the Emperor Tree was obvious to everyone!

It was only after confronting Venerable Isobel and the Promethea that the murderous tree finally met its match.

The Promethea did not pause for long. She charged her rifle before outputting a sustained staccato of purple fire beams that struck one elite wooden construct after another.

Venerable Isobel already determined that her Ignitron rifle expended too much power in the previous barrage of shots.

She consciously dialed down the power setting so that the primary armament of the Promethea was able to fire a continuous stream of low-powered energy beams.

Although the intensity of every single shot had dropped, the firepower was still enough to burn through the defenses of the target and leave purple flames behind.

This was enough!

As long as the Promethea was able to transfer a large and strong enough flame onto the wooden exterior of the enemy constructs, they would all get burned down after a short delay!

There were no exceptions!

Venerable Isobel's grin grew increasingly wider as she started to have fun on the battlefield!

"Yes! This is what I sought! Burn! Burn it all down!"

Only a single minute passed, but the Promethea already managed to turn a hundred purple wooden mechs into short-lived torches!

Chapter 6107 Purple Wildfire

The assault against the Emperor Tree started off a lot better than any of the Larkinsons expected.

They already figured that the Promethea would be a lot more effective when fighting against the Emperor Tree than any other high-end machine, but this was something else!

The Promethea dominated the battle right now. The expert rifleman mech easily outpaced the purple wooden mechs while relying on her Ignitron rifle to set one purple wooden mech aflame after another.

None of the elite constructs were able to offer any effective resistance!

No matter how much wood energy the Emperor Tree transferred to its constructs by remote, it all turned into additional fuel to feed hungry flames.

If the Promethea's shots only spread ordinary flames, then the Emperor Tree should have been able to prevent its elite constructs from burning down.

However, Isobel spent a lot of time and effort strengthening her ability to light up the toughest and most inflammable pieces of exotic alloys.

With the help of her growing willpower, her King Killer Flames was able to burn down virtually every alien warship if she went all-out!

How could the wood developed by the Emperor Tree possibly perform any better?

Even if it was reinforced by a lot of metallic ores that the calamity plant managed to extract from the ground as well as exobeast corpses, the wood was still a lot more flammable than anything made out of pure metal!

Combined with the inability for the Emperor Tree to overcome the attribute suppression in this instance, its purple wooden mechs turned into nothing but flammable decoys that were just waiting to get burned!

Venerable Isobel constantly sought to increase her burning efficiency. She precisely dialed the power settings of the Ignitron rifle so that it inflicted the right amount of damage to light the purple mechs aflame.

Under her masterful control, the Promethea's efficiency grew, allowing the living mech to accomplish more while expending less energy.

Throughout this sequence, the First Sword and the Everchanger had been relegated to bystanders.

They did not even receive any opportunities to act as the Promethea's bodyguards as the VIP straightforwardly burned down any wooden threat that attempted to get close!

The sight of so many difficult purple mechs catching flame was awe inspiring.

The purple machines did not go down without a fight. The ones armed with ranged weapons attempted to bombard the Promethea with hardened seeds.

The organic kinetic projectiles traveled faster and hit much harder than before. The Emperor Tree had clearly managed to refine this tech.

Yet the performance of the seed rifles was only good when compared to the weapons of other standard mechs.

Against an expert mech piloted by a high-tier expert pilot, the incoming seeds inflicted virtually no discernable damage!

The purple resonance shield covering the Promethea easily resisted the seeds that managed to hit their targets.

Many more seeds failed to accomplish anything useful. The intelligences responsible for controlling the purple wooden mechs did not possess the skills, experience or intuition of professional mech pilots.

It was incredibly trivial for Venerable Isobel to track all of the incoming shots and evade most of them. If not for the fact that the density of projectiles was a bit too much, the Promethea could have avoided taking any damage.

As the Promethea continued to show absolute dominance against the purple wooden mechs, the remaining constructs abruptly ceased their attempts to pursue the powerful expert mechs.

Even the stupidest exobeasts would realize that continuing this futile pursuit would only lead to further losses!

The purple wooden mechs turned around in an instant and all flew away before they could get burned by the Promethea's disturbingly effective flames.

The Promethea tried to shoot as many of them as possible before they ascended into the leaves and branches of the Emperor Tree. Dozens more purple wooden mechs turned into torches, but Venerable Isobel grew disappointed when she was unable to wipe out the entire elite force.

If her expert mech had been updated, she would definitely have the confidence to wipe out all of those constructs!

"Amazing..." Venerable Joshua spoke in an admiring tone. "I tried so hard to burn the purple wooden mechs myself, but my luminar crystal rifle and plasma blade never managed to do the job."

This was the difference between an expert pilot who dabbled with thermal weapons and an expert pilot who earnestly wielded the power of fire.

"Focus, Joshua! Don't get distracted by drooling over Isobel's ability to burn wood." Dise admonished. "The Emperor Tree is still alive and well. It definitely has a lot more tricks in store."

She was right. Joshua quickly regained his focus and studied the calamity plant carefully through all of the Solus Gas.

After a short delay, the Emperor Tree decided to attack the expert mechs in a different way.

"The bark is moving again. The tree is about to unveil its improved seed cannons!"

The Emperor Tree clearly spent a lot of effort into improving its ranged armaments after witnessing how much they managed to get done when employed by human mechs.

Similar to last time, the Emperor Tree embedded a lot of seed cannons underneath its bark. There were hundreds if not thousands of cannons buried across the length and surface of the main trunk.

However, when the calamity plant finally unveiled its formidable array of cannons, the three expert pilots all set aside their contempt towards their opponent's ranged solutions.

Just like the three enormous seed artillery cannons that were bombarding Chimera Base from afar even now, the Emperor Tree had clearly increased the size and power of its other cannons.

Their predecessors failed to accomplish anything useful last time. The response from the Emperor Tree was therefore understandable. It switched from prioritizing quantity to prioritizing quality.

The alien tree straightforwardly built larger and longer cannons even if it came at the cost of reducing the total quantity of armaments that it could accommodate onto its bark!

Fortunately, the immense size of the main trunk played in its favor. The Emperor Tree was still able to direct hundreds of large muzzles in the direction of the three mechs.

Venerable Isobel could already sense how much these up-scaled seed cannons could pose a threat to her expert mech.

There were so many cannons that it didn't matter if their hit rates were low. They just needed to weave a dense net of seed projectiles to ensure that at least some of the projectiles hit their intended target!

The consequences of getting hit were doubtlessly greater than before. A dozen or so heavy seed impacts might not be able to compromise the Promethea's resonance shield, but what about a hundred impacts? What about a thousand impacts?

Even expert mechs could fall when attacked by enough firepower to match that of an entire mech regiment!

"We need to back off and make it more difficult for those cannons to overwhelm the defenses of our mechs." Isobel quickly determined. "Joshua. Dise. The two of you must shield my Promethea against incoming attacks. My mech's defenses are not that good, and it is impossible to evade every heavy seed."

"Roger."

"Let's move."

The three expert mechs backed off as there was no reason for them to stick so close to the Emperor Tree.

Visibility decreased rapidly due to the high concentration of Solus Gas, so the high-end machines did not retreat for long. They still needed to maintain an acceptable degree of visibility to allow for the sensor systems of their mechs to observe the detailed state of their target.

"Opening fire."

The Promethea aimed her large rifle straight in the direction of the enormous but faint tree silhouette in the distance.

The scorching hot purple fire beams cut straight through all of the Solus Gas and successfully struck the upper half of the tree!

Isobel ignored the roots and the lower half of the tree as she figured it would be a lot harder to light them all on fire.

She instead chose to spread her flames to the much more flammable leaves. The Emperor Tree possessed so many of them that it looked as if she needed to attack all day in order to manually light them all on fire.

However, it was not necessary for the Promethea to do all of that labor.

From the moment the first set of leaves caught fire, the surrounding ones began to burn as well!

The Promethea did not disperse her shots, but instead focused her attacks on lighting up all of the surrounding leaves and branches.

The small spark turned into a much larger blaze in a brief span of time!

Many of the purple flames spread too fast for the Emperor Tree to cut them all off. Even if it managed to sever branches before they could spread the deadly fire any further, the elevated heat levels in the surroundings made it easier for the Promethea to catch other nearby branches on fire!

The heat levels rose while the surrounding moisture quickly disappeared. The Emperor Tree shook and attempted to deal with the burning branches by forcibly severing them from the rest of its body, but it didn't help!

Many of the purple flames spread too fast for the Emperor Tree to cut them all off. Even if it managed to sever branches before they could spread the deadly fire any further, the elevated heat levels in the surroundings made it easier for the Promethea to catch other nearby branches on fire!

The Emperor Tree began to sway more violently as it tried to channel a huge amount of wood energy to suppress the flames.

It failed. Initially, it looked as if the abundance of wood energy may actually stifle the flames, but once the fires reached a large enough scale, it was no longer as easy as before to snuff them out with wood energy.

While the Emperor Tree was experiencing growing distress, the three expert mechs were not in a comfortable position either.

This was because the enlarged seed cannons had all begun to open fire!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The resonance shields of the First Sword and the Everchanger received numerous hard impacts as they tried their best to prevent the incoming attacks from interrupting the Promethea's rhythm.

"These seeds hit much harder!" Joshua exclaimed! "They're heavier, harder and are launched at much higher speeds than before. They're harder to avoid as well!"

The Emperor Tree comprehensively improved almost every parameter, ranging from muzzle speed to accuracy. With hundreds of these powerful cannons at its disposal, it was legitimately able to drown out the three expert mechs in a flood of heavy seeds!

The large seed cannons did not possess a high firing rate, but when hundreds of them were able to fire in a specific direction, the First Sword and the Everchanger immediately witnessed their resonance shields draining at a worrying rate.

"The Bastion should have come as well." Joshua said through gritted teeth.

Venerable Jannzi's expert mech excelled at this role. It would have been able to endure the incoming attacks a lot better than a pair of offensive melee mechs.

The Everchanger managed to endure the onslaught for the time being. The expert hero mech's malleable properties meant that he was able to reinforce his resonance shield and speed up its regeneration.

The First Sword was clearly worse off. Her defenses were never her highlight. The living mech primarily relied on evasion to keep herself alive, but now that she was on protective duty, she had little choice but to resist any heavy seed that sought to strike the Promethea!

Venerable Dise chose to utilize the Decapitator to deflect the incoming seeds!

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

The masterwork mech greatsword managed to divert at least a few seeds this way. The projectiles came so fast that the First Sword was not able to move quickly enough to redirect every threatening seed.

The mech also had to endure a lot of shock with every hard impact. In addition to that, Venerable Dise constantly had to maintain maximum focus in order to anticipate, detect and deflect every incoming heavy seed.

It was much harder for her to do so when there was a lot of Solus Gas interfering with her sight and intuition!

Still, this was nothing if not a challenge. Venerable Dise gradually managed to improve her performance as she began to adapt to the abnormal circumstances.

"How many more shots will it take for your Promethea to light the entire tree on fire?!"

"Too many!"

"Then try to burn those seed cannons instead! Our expert mechs can't withstand the seed attacks for long. We need to get rid of as many of them as possible!"

"We shall try."

## Chapter 6108 Drowning In Sap

It was a lot harder for the Promethea to light the seed cannons on fire.

They were directly attached to the main trunk, which meant that the Emperor Tree was able to support them and reinforce them to a much greater extent.

The Emperor Tree had learned its lesson from last time and made a conscious effort to reinforce all of the improved seed cannons.

Whenever the Promethea launched a resonance-empowered purple beam at the cannons, only the ones that got directly struck initially managed to catch fire.

The flames did not spread as easily as with the branches and leaves. There was nothing in the vicinity that was easily flammable, so the resonance-empowered flames had to put a lot of effort into lighting the adjacent seed cannons on fire.

In the meantime, the Emperor Tree not only channeled a lot of wood energy to suppress the purple flames, but also began to employ an even more effective measure to dose the flames.

"Its spraying water onto the flames!"

"That's not water. That's tree sap!"

A slightly murky liquid substance spilled out of newly formed cavities above the flames and relied on gravity to spill over the purple flames.

Ordinary water and liquids shouldn't be able to dose Venerable Isobel's resonance-empowered flames, but the tree sap was different!

They not only concentrated a lot of wood energy, but also channeled the formidable consciousness and vitality of the Emperor Tree.

The sap proved to be surprisingly effective at dousing the purple flames!

Venerable Isobel struggled to resist the fire-repellant properties of the sap, but the Emperor Tree was so immense that it could easily drown any fire with an outrageous quantity of liquids!

The Promethea attempted to start fires elsewhere by targeting the seed cannons positioned higher up the trunk, but the Emperor Tree simply employed the same solution again.

Isobel and her expert mech both grew incredibly frustrated at their opponent.

The Emperor Tree was bullying their efforts to start a fire by relying on its much more immense size!

Isobel had no idea how much sap was contained inside the tree. The trunk was larger than most titanic man-made structures built onto planets. Only orbital elevators were much taller and thicker than the aboveground portion of the Emperor Tree.

Yet that was only a fraction of what made up the calamity plant. According to the analysis of the samples taken from the Emperor Tree, the biotech researchers estimate that the root structure was much larger than the trunk itself!

All of that wooden mass could store a lot of tree sap and other liquids. Trying to outlast the Emperor Tree by hoping that it would run out of juice before the expert mechs reached their limits was a hopeless dream.

"What an outrageous alien tree!" Venerable Joshua spoke even as his Everchanger's resonance shield was struggling to withstand heavy impact after heavy impact. "How are we supposed to burn the entire tree when it has a huge reservoir of water and tree sap at its disposal?"

"We can't." Venerable Dise concluded. "Look at where the tree sap is falling. They are being reabsorbed by the Emperor Tree's roots. It is almost a closed loop. The tree is never going to run out of this stuff."

The three of them may be expert pilots, but Joshua, Dise and even Isobel could not possibly defeat the Emperor Tree in what amounted to a battle of attrition.

They needed to inflict greater damage than what the tree could regenerate, but that was difficult when it was just too damn big and rich with resources!

"Wait. This isn't my full power. I have yet to employ Kiroshi. Let's see how much more difficult it will be for the tree to douse my flames when my companion spirit is fanning them this time!"

"Ya ya!"

A purple flaming cat emerged out of her head and began to enter the Ignitronn rifle in a familiar motion.

The Promethea briefly took aim before pulling the trigger.

A considerably larger and more powerful resonance-empowered purple fire beam struck the main trunk!

A small fiery blast emerged from the impact site as the energy beam instantly blasted apart a heavy seed cannon.

Flames already began to spread from the impact site as Kiroshi immediately went to work. The companion spirit had already done this sort of job many times.

Compared to those instances, it became even easier for Kiroshi to enhance the surrounding flames while also channeling Isobel's formidable willpower.

Normally, Kiroshi had to do her work many kilometers away from her principal. Though the cat was still able to do her job under those circumstances, it was much easier for her to maintain a solid connection under the current circumstances.

What was even better was that the interfering effects of Solus Gas were completely unable to break the bond beyond human and companion spirit!

The two were essentially the same being, so the connection between them could not be blocked so easily.

"Ya! Ya! Ya!"

Kiroshi made an immediate difference by spreading the King Killer Flames a lot more effectively than before. The companion spirit wandered across the exterior of the main trunk, lighting every heavy seed cannon on flame whenever possible.

Of course, the Emperor Tree did not allow the companion spirit to have her way. More and more sap poured out of gaps from above. Many flames became suppressed before disappearing entirely, but Kiroshi herself was not that easy to suppress!

"YAAAA!"

The cat released more purple flames and redoubled her efforts to light the tree on fire even as tree sap constantly tried to drown the companion spirit.

A struggle ensued as the Emperor Tree's efforts reduced the spread of the purple flames, but found itself unable to prevent portions of its bark and heavy seed cannons.

With the help of Venerable Isobel's willpower, Kiroshi successfully kept its flames alive, but they could only remain alight in her immediate surroundings.

Any flames that broke out further away were fundamentally unable to sustain itself due to the tree's persistent efforts!

The Promethea wasn't making progress fast enough. The First Sword and the Everchanger were doing worse and worse. They needed to change their strategy in order to gain the upper hand!

"I have a plan." Venerable Joshua spoke.

"Explain."

"We can't stay here. We need to relocate to a position where most of those seed cannons won't be able to bombard us anymore. The only place I can think of is right next to the trunk. We should get so close that most of those cannons simply can't drain our defenses anymore because they can't aim in our directions anymore."

"That is dangerous. The Emperor Tree will most certainly lash out in order to keep us away from its trunk."

"Do you have any better ideas, Dise? If we keep lingering at this distance, our resonance shields and subsequently our armor will collapse!"

"..."

"We get close. We defend our position. We help the Promethea burn down this tree. What do you think, Isobel?"

"It is workable." The female expert pilot responded as she continued her efforts to spread her flames across the trunk. "We will see what the tree throws at us next."

The three expert mechs advanced forward. Their speeds were so high that they reached the trunk faster than the Emperor Tree could form a proper response.

The size of the calamity plant worked against it for once. Just like how mechs landing on the exterior of a warship could not be targeted by a lot of gun batteries anymore, it became a lot more difficult for the heavy seed cannons to target the three mechs!

"Let's try to drill or burn our way to the center of the trunk!"

Many heavy seed cannons had fallen silent as they were unable to angle their barrels to target the mechs that had come too close.

The First Sword and the Everchanger worked together to clear out the heavy seed cannons directly in front.

The Promethea began to burn the surrounding heavy seed cannons. With Kiroshi's help, the tree sap was unable to prevent all of the seed cannons that could pose a threat against the expert mechs from getting cut or burned down.

Joshua, Dise and Isobel did not leave it at that. The First Sword's Decapitator and the Everchanger's Heartsword began to dig into the layers beneath the bark.

"Yaaa!"

Kiroshi assisted in the effort by drying out and burning down the wood that was in the way.

It was difficult to make progress as the Emperor Tree released even more sap in order to stymie the efforts of the three expert mechs.

Progress was slow, but steady. Getting close appeared to be the right decision as the Emperor Tree was not able to do as much to stop the mechs from drilling into its massive trunk.

However, the calamity plant still retained a few options.

"Watch out! It's about to slap us with its branches!"

The Emperor Tree possessed a lot of branches, some of which were long and flexible enough to strike at the current position of the expert mechs.

Crunch!

The three machines hastily moved aside as a pair of long and leafy branches collided against the damaged and partially burned side of the trunk!

Though the branches ultimately missed, they successfully diverted the expert mechs, thereby stopping them from drilling any deeper into the trunk.

More branches began to slap down from above. The constant motions gradually forced the mechs to back away from the trunk.

That was not a good development for the expert pilots as their machines entered the firing angles of an increasing amount of heavy seed cannons.

Constant impacts drained the resonance shields of the three machines yet again.

"Isobel! You need to burn down those branches! I doubt the Emperor Tree is able to cover them all with sap!"

"On it!" The other expert pilot replied as her expert rifleman mech began to light up a lot of branches and leaves.

There was no need to divert Kiroshi away from his essential mission to burn towards the center of the trunk. Venerable Isobel and the Promethea alone were already sufficient enough to burn down the threatening branches.

The downside was that there were so many of them that it would take a significant amount of time before the Promethea had managed to neutralize these threats!

The Emperor Tree did not intend to give the expert rifleman mech the time to strip away its majestic branches.

"Incoming! The purple mechs have returned!"

Isobel frowned as her Promethea quickly redirected her firepower.

The branches needed to get burned, but the purple wooden mechs had to go as well!

Purple fire beam after purple fire beam began to blast and burn the elite wooden constructs.

Much to Isobel's surprise, the wooden mechs did not catch fire as easily as before. It was only after they received a second energy beam that they finally started to burn down in earnest!

"The Emperor Tree covered its purple mechs in tree sap. We need to evaporate that first before the wooden mechs are able to catch fire."

This was a small obstacle, and one that Isobel quickly adjusted to by dialing up the power setting of the Ignitron rifle.

The firing rate had slowed down, but every purple mech got taken down without exception!

At this rate, the Emperor Tree would quickly lose its elite mobile units. There was no way it could turn the tide if this was the extent of its measures!

A much brighter light shone from above.

Before the expert pilots could wonder what that was all about, the Promethea suddenly received a powerful blow from behind!

Isobel's concentration instantly broke as she hastily tried to put the Promethea on guard!

If the Promethea's resonance shield was not in good condition, that hit could have put a dent onto the expert mech's armor!

"AH! Who hit my mech?!"

"It wasn't me!" Joshua quickly said.

"My mech did not come close to the Promethea." Dize defended herself.

If those two weren't the ones that launched a sneak attack on the Promethea, then what in hell struck Isobel's expert mech?

Isobel tried to focus on threats that could come from every direction. Her eyes widened as her intuition completely failed to warn her about an ebony wooden mech that silently snuck from below and collided against the bottom of the Promethea's resonance shield!

"What is that?!"

Chapter 6109 New Wood Variant

The battle at the Emperor Tree had reached a new level of intensity.

In the distance, hundreds of ordinary Larkinson mechs either remained on guard or fired their armaments at the distant Emperor Tree.

The Fey Fiannas, Bright Warriors and Stingrippers all fired their weapons in a steady and monotonous fashion in the direction of the Emperor Tree.

The concentration of Solus Gas was very thick, and the outbreak of fighting had made everything a lot more chaotic.

It was only due to the help of scout mechs acting as data relays that the ranged mechs knew where they needed to aim their weapons.

The steady release of hyper laser beams that were aspected towards fire constantly bombarded the upper half of the Emperor Tree.

Many shots either ended up striking the thick trunk or one of the many branches and leaves.

Unfortunately, the massed firepower had a fairly limited effect. Not all of the weapons were transphasic, and the overall lethality of every individual shot was fairly modest at best in the face of a calamity plant that excelled at vitality.

None of the attacks inflicted a lot of damage against the resilient wood of the Emperor Tree.

The lack of true resonance empowering energy attacks also made it easy for the calamity plant to utilize its vast amount of wood energy to reduce or negate their impact.

Any fire that emerged as a result of the massed energy beam attacks quickly got suppressed!

The Emperor Tree easily mobilized an abundance of wood energy or tree sap to snuff out the relatively ordinary fires before they could ever spread any further.

Even the leaves proved to be difficult to eliminate on a large scale due to these measures!

Ketis scowled as she witnessed all of this happening from the cockpit of the Storm Sword.

Perhaps the only consolation was that the Emperor Tree's attempts to stop the ranged mechs were feeble at best.

Certainly, the rear element of the strike force initially grew apprehensive when thousands of wooden mechs assaulted their position.

However, the wooden constructs were too weak. While it may have been impressive for the Emperor Tree to figure out a way to mass produce wooden minions as strong as second-class mechs, that was not even close enough to confront a modern and highly developed mech force.

The tactics, fighting skills, coordination and many other parameters of the wooden mechs fell far behind!

Combined with the fact that the wooden mechs stood no chance in a direct confrontation against quasi-first-class mechs such as the Storm Sword and the Larkinson Edition of the Fey Fianna, dozens of wooden machines fell in droves from the moment the fighting began in earnest.

The fight lasted so short that the melee mech pilots hardly broke out a sweat before they ran out of wooden cannon fodder that they could chop with their blades!

While Ketis was glad that the wooden mechs posed no threat, she felt dissatisfied at how little the ranged mechs were able to contribute to the fight.

The Emperor Tree's greatest strength was its massive size and resources. It was impossible for Task Force Solus to beat it in a contest of consumption.

A part of her even felt that the ranged mechs did not even need to bother with their efforts to attack the Emperor Tree from a distance. They were like ants trying to kill an elephant.

Was it possible for ants to kill a much larger organism? Most definitely.

Were the Larkinsons equipped to do so? That was very much in question.

Ketis and the others gained a renewed appreciation of how terrible it was to fight against an enemy with so much vitality.

The best way to overcome such an opponent was to resort to overwhelming firepower, but that was not a preferred option at the moment.

It was best to rely on the three expert mechs to defeat the Emperor Tree in a contest between champions.

The Larkinsons placed a lot of expectations onto Venerable Isobel Kotin's shoulders as a result.

For the recently arrived expert pilot to struggle to burn the Emperor Tree to this extent was a disappointment.

The current outcome shouldn't have come as a surprise. The absolute power gap between the Promethea and the Emperor Tree was very evident.

Still, Ketis refused to accept that this assault was doomed to fail. There had to be a way to help Venerable Isobel and the Promethea burn down the tree one way or another.

The issue was whether she and the other Larkinson mech pilots could do anything to help.

Aside from maintaining position and continuing to fire energy beams at the Emperor Tree from a distance, what else could they do to make life a little easier for the expert pilots?

As Ketis pondered over this difficult question, she suddenly looked up in surprise when she observed the latest development.

The Promethea got struck by an invisible enemy!

"No. It is not invisible. It is another wooden mech variant!"

The Promethea had been busy with trying to burn a section of the Emperor Tree's massive trunk, only for her to get attacked twice from different directions.

The problem was that neither Isobel nor her battle partner had been able to detect the threat in advance!

Isobel's intuition provided no warning at all. The sensor systems of the Promethea was only able to detect the sudden approach of what appeared to be an ebony wooden mech when it had already come very close!

"Isobel!"

"Don't worry about me, Joshua. Keep the remaining purple mechs at bay. My Promethea can't shoot as freely as now if she is getting mobbed by too many of those machines."

The First Sword and Everchanger continued to repel all of the purple wooden mechs that sought to attack the Promethea.

Occasionally, all three expert mechs hastily moved away before a mass of tree branches attempted to slap them all down.

Heavy seed cannons embedded along the trunk kept pelting the expert mechs with seed projectiles. They fired in a relatively haphazard pattern, but that also made them more difficult to anticipate.

The seed cannons fired at the expert mechs regardless of whether there were any purple wooden mechs in the way!

Far more wooden constructs got struck in the back or sides as a consequence. The heavy seeds struck so hard that many of the purple wooden mechs cracked their torsos or lost their limbs.

The Emperor Tree didn't seem to care!

It simply shone down its radiant light from above and forcibly restored the damaged purple wooden mechs back to mint condition.

The three expert mechs were not able to keep up with this level of consumption. Their energy cells continued to drain while their resonance shields began to lose their integrity.

If they failed to make any progress before their resonance shields fell apart, then the expert pilots seriously thought about turning back.

The best way the Promethea could do to break the current deadlock was to eliminate the remaining purple wooden mechs.

Their impressive toughness and their amazing regeneration properties all came at a price. Taking them down meant that the expert mechs would remain unbothered by any remaining purple wooden mechs for the remainder of this battle.

Yet just as the Promethea raised her hot and steaming Ignitron rifle, a dark flash approached from above and attempted to collide against the expert rifleman mech's resonance shield!

"Hah! I have been waiting for you this time!"

Venerable Isobel did not expect to get attacked by a nearly undetectable opponent the first few times, but her adaptability was as good as that of any other expert pilot.

From the moment the ebony wooden mech attempted to get close, the Promethea quickly removed one of her arms from her luminal crystal rifle and began to spray a concentrated jet of purple flames above her head!

The Promethea was not a pure rifleman mech!

The designers of the expert mech anticipated the need for the vulnerable machine to defend against threats that managed to get within melee striking distance.

It was for this reason why the Promethea was equipped with a pair of wrist-mounted flamethrowers.

Isobel rarely had a chance to make use of them. The native aliens she fought against in the past never fielded anything comparable to melee mechs, so she mostly spent her time on attacking targets at a distance.

Now that the latest threat sought to chop at the Promethea's resonance shield with a sword made out of the same ebony wooden material, Isobel instantly tried to burn her target down with her King Killer Flames!

"Burn!"

The ebony wooden mech got caught by surprise as the Promethea never demonstrated this capacity in the past.

A very powerful wood energy shield quickly resisted the ferocious purple flame jet.

If the wood energy shield was as strong as that of the purple wooden constructs, then it should have collapsed in an instance.

However, the ebony wooden mech clearly existed on another level, because its energy defenses actually managed to hold against the resonance-empowered flames!

"What?!" Isobel reacted with shock as she realized that the latest enemy variant was a lot stronger than the other wooden constructs! "This is a champion unit!"

The ebony wooden mech managed to brave the King Killer Flames long enough to land a powerful chop onto the Promethea's resonance shield!

The expert rifleman mech's defenses became a little more spent as the culprit quickly dashed away before it could get sprayed by even more purple flames.

The surrounding Solus Gas seemed to swallow up the ebony mech in an instant. The Promethea lost track of her target and was unable to attack it for the time being.

Isobel quickly studied the data gathered on the elusive ebony wooden mech.

"This ebony wooden mech is at least two times larger than my Promethea." Isobel spoke. "Its mobility is as fast as our expert mechs. We have yet to discover how much damage the ebony wooden material can withstand, but it is probably a lot better than the purple wood. What is really weird is that there are no energy emissions at all. It is so quiet and subtle that we can only resort to visual detection at close range. This is outrageous!"

The ebony wooden mech was not a stealth mech, but pretty much functioned like one in this special environment.

There was one obvious explanation why the ebony wooden mech was able to hide its presence.

"I think the Emperor Tree stuffed a lot of Solus Gas particles into the ebony wooden mech." Joshua guessed. "It is too abnormal for a wooden mech with a strong wood energy shield to escape my senses until its energy defenses finally become active. How is it able to store so much wood energy without broadcasting its location all of the time?"

"I don't have any proof, but I do not think we are dealing with a mere upgraded version of a purple wooden mech." Dise remarked.

"What do you think is the case?"

"That ebony wooden mech... gives me the feeling that it is the proudest work of the Emperor Tree. The material it is made of is so precious that the Emperor Tree only produced enough of this dark wood to produce a single champion construct. My guess is that we are either dealing with the Emperor Tree's offspring or an avatar of the main body."

Although Venerable Dise's guesses sounded baseless, neither Joshua nor Isobel dared to underestimate the Swordmaiden's hunting acumen.

The theories sounded plausible. This was absolutely a special case, because it didn't make sense for the ebony wooden mech to perform so much better.

The Promethea remained on guard as she slowly began to light numerous purple wooden mechs on fire again.

Isobel along with the other two expert pilots patiently waited for the Emperor Tree's most powerful construct to perform another attack run.

Just as the Promethea was about to attack yet another purple wooden mech, the ebony adversary emerged out of the mist yet again!

"Behind!"

The Promethea raised her arm in order to spray the incoming threat with a blast of resonance-empowered flames, but suddenly jerked as the ebony wooden mech raised a seed cannon and fired a surprisingly powerful projectile!

BANG!

The seed projectile not only struck the Promethea's resonance shield with much greater force than its size suggested, but also exploded and inflicted further damage onto the expert rifleman mech!

Chapter 6110 Ebony

The Emperor Tree clearly tried to imitate the mechs employed by the invading humans.

There was a clear distinction between different generations.

The basic wooden mechs and the elite purple wooden mechs already granted the calamity plant a lot of versatility on how to handle a lot of threats.

When that did not prove enough to stop the most powerful human mechs, the Emperor Tree decisively invested more effort and resources to produce a small selection of the champion ebony wooden mechs.

The latest wooden constructs already demonstrated their power.

Just one of them was able to wear down the Promethea's resonance shield by a considerable extent with fast attack runs.

It was also able to attack from a distance as it apparently wielded a luxurious version of a seed cannon.

That made this enemy unit a lot harder to deal with as it was able to attack at any distance.

Now, a second ebony wooden mech made an appearance. This one was notable because it was clearly modeled after the Zeal!

Although the Emperor Tree's interpretation of a heavy artillery mech was very rudimentary, it did not change the fact that it had desecrated the Zeal's memory by building a crude imitation of the custom heavy artillery mech!

"Wait! Are those pieces of metal?"

"I think you're right, Isobel. The Emperor Tree must have salvaged the exploded remains of the Zeal and fused them into this powerful wooden variant." Joshua responded with a stupendous expression.

The Emperor Tree was more perverted than the Larkinsons thought! It did not break down the torn and deformed metal pieces of the Zeal, but instead reused whatever it could to form this unholy fusion between modern alloys and dark wood!

"Careful!"

Now that the ebony wood version of the Zeal had exposed its existence, it went all-out and aimed all five of its seed cannons at the Promethea!

Two explosive seed cannons and one much larger kinetic seed cannon opened fire at Venerable Isobel's battle partner at the same time!

Fortunately, Venerable Isobel had been paying close attention to the wooden artillery mech. She jerked her Promethea to the side, allowing her expert mech to evade four out of five ebony seed projectiles!

Unfortunately, Isobel's inability to rely on her intuition meant that she failed to anticipate that she had moved her expert mech directly into the path of the largest and most powerful dark seed projectile!

BANG!

The Promethea got struck so hard by the solid ebony seed that its resonance shield actually got damaged to the point of faltering!

Just another heavy impact would be enough to strip the expert mech of her most reliable form of defense!

The Promethea hastily tried to recover from the powerful blow, but the wooden clone of the Everchanger closed in and attempted to strike at the expert mech with its wooden sword!

"Not this time!"

Isobel did not attempt to bury the incoming ebony mech with purple flames. Instead, she activated a command that caused the Ignitron rifle to extend a pair of 2 fang-like alloy bayonets!

Clang!

Alloy clashed against metal-reinforced wood!

Though the incoming force was great, the Promethea successfully deflected the ebony mech by judging to the side!

"I need help." Venerable Isobel spoke with clear strain in her voice. "The Ebony Everchanger and the Ebony Zeal are ganging up on me. I can't deal with one of them while the other is constantly attacking my expert mech from another direction."

"Got it." Venerable Joshua responded. "Please take care of the remaining purple wooden mechs. There are less than a hundred of them or so left, but they are too difficult for us to kill. You are much better at this job. We'll hold back the ebony mechs."

The three expert mechs all switched gears. They began to circle around the tree trunk at higher speeds. The Promethea rapidly struck the purple wooden mechs with fiery energy beams while the other two expert mechs ignored the targets in front of them in favor of pursuing the more powerful wooden constructs.

"There!"

The Everchanger charged towards the ebony copy of himself while firing his Vitalus rifle at the wooden construct!

The powerful wood energy shield continually resisted the attacks, but when the real Everchanger sliced against it with the Heartsword, the energy barrier collapsed, allowing the blade to sink into the ebony wooden exterior!

Unfortunately, the charge attack ran out of steam a little too soon. The ebony hero mech managed to dislodge itself from the Heartsword before launching a counterattack with its own blade!

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The two mechs began to exchange blows with each other.

The differences between the two soon became apparent. The Everchanger demonstrated exquisite control. Joshua was hardly the best swordsman among the Larkinson expert pilots, but being married to a swordmaster still had its perks. His fundamentals were solid and his swordsmanship possessed very few flaws.

Whoever or whatever controlled the ebony Everchanger wasn't nearly as good.

What it did have was a complete lack of fear towards taking damage. The ebony Everchanger's swordsmanship was very inconsistent, as if the Emperor Tree did not even understand the concept of swordsmanship.

Nonetheless, there was nothing too complicated about stabbing, slashing, blocking, parrying and so on. The raw intelligence controlling the Ebony Everchanger learned quickly and visibly improved its swordsmanship.

Only a minute after the two Everchangers sparred, the ebony mech no longer received as many hits as before.

Even if Venerable Joshua managed to fool his adversary with a feint or other clever trick, any damage that managed to get past the constantly regenerating wood energy shield only inflicted modest wounds on the ebony mech.

This was practically meaningless as the Ebony Everchanger instantly absorbed a lot of wood energy from the Emperor Tree and restored its wooden frame back to its original condition!

Venerable Joshua had a feeling that this duel may drag out for many minutes if nothing changed.

He needed to find a way to break the game!

"Dise, can you lend a hand?!"

"I cannot. I have met my own match."

Two versions of the First Sword hovered in front of each other.

The original version held her Decapitator greatsword with a firm but emotional grip. Venerable Dise and her living mech both grew indignant at the third and latest ebony mech to appear from the mist.

The ebony wooden variant of the First Sword resembled its original to a much greater degree!

It appeared that while the Emperor Tree had chosen to apply a lot of creative variations to the Ebony Everchanger and the Ebony First Sword, it had chosen to stay true to the original in the case of the Ebony First Sword!

Although the calamity plant had done a good job at replicating the proportions and contours of the expert swordsman mech that Ketis had lovingly designed, the authenticity was still very much in doubt!

"I sense no heart or respect towards swordsmanship in you." Dise spoke, uncaring whether the Ebony First Sword and its creator could understand her speech. "Your existence is an insult. You not only defile Ketis' work, you also make a mockery out of my swordsmanship!"

The Ebony First Sword held its dark wooden greatsword in a stance that looked remarkably similar to that of the real expert mech.

However, there were many small discrepancies that ruined the effect and introduced flaws that Venerable Dise would never make.

The ebony swordsman mech also possessed another shortcoming that rankled Dise.

"You copied my old swordsmanship!"

Dise especially took offense with that. She considered her older self to be weak and incompetent. She did not want to be reminded by her past failures by seeing a mirror of her old swordsmanship.

"I will chop you to pieces!"

Both First Swords charged into each other and struck their greatswords with so much momentum that they bounced apart from the counterforce!

The original First Sword recovered faster as Dise was especially more attentive towards momentum and rhythm as of late. The metallic swordsman mech quickly began to suppress and push back the ebony copy as Dise's swordsmanship was simply better in every way.

Even though the Ebony First Sword was not weak, it was unable to prevent the real expert swordsman mech from breaking its guard.

Numerous heavy sword strikes struck the wood energy shield and cleaved through it before striking the ebony wooden exterior.

The Ebony First Sword soon began to bear the scars of multiple greatsword wounds!

Though the damage should have been serious if Venerable Dise faced any other mech-like opponent, the Ebony First Sword outright cheated in this bout by receiving a copious amount of energy from the Emperor Tree.

The ebony swordsman mech quickly reset its physical state to a pristine condition!

Dise initially thought little of it, but then she noticed that the Ebony First Sword was constantly copying her sword moves.

The learning efficiency was frighteningly high. Even though it remained clear to Dise that the Ebony First Sword only copied the mechanical motions but failed to copy the corresponding heart and feelings, there was no denying that it was leveraging its strengths more effectively.

The ebony mechs were too enduring! They possessed a huge amount of buffer that allowed them to make a lot of mistakes without suffering any major consequences.

The Ebony First Sword continued to improve over a minute until it had reached a state where it was able to block 80 to 90 percent of the original's sword strikes!

Venerable Dise grew angry at this point. "Take this, then!"

The original First Sword briefly disengaged, but this was only so she could circle around and charge at the ebony copy with much greater speed!

"Sword of Lydia!"

The Decapitator glowed with extraordinary power and momentum. The blade not only grew a bit sharper, but it also conveyed the desire to break through every barrier in the way at all cost!

Crash!

The ebony mech was not able to resist this extraordinary sword technique at all. The wood energy shield collapsed before the tip of the Decapitator punched straight through the torso!

The Ebony First Sword was impaled by the real First Sword!

Venerable Dise quickly wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to squash the construct that resembled her expert mech, but the impaled wood strangely grew softer before it managed to dislodge itself from the enormous blade!

Fueled by an abundant amount of wood energy, the Ebony First Sword quickly became whole and undamaged again.

Venerable Dise scowled. She had put a considerable amount of power in his special technique, but the Sword of Lydia failed to split apart the ebony mech in half.

Unless her swordsmanship improved dramatically, it seemed unlikely for her to defeat this ebony mech in a short amount of time.

She needed help.

Unfortunately, the Promethea had to take care of her own responsibilities. Not only was the living mech almost done with shooting down the purple wooden mechs, but she had also began to tangle with the Ebony Zeal!

More specifically, she needed Isobel's help.

Unfortunately, the Promethea had to take care of her own responsibilities. Not only was the living mech almost done with shooting down the purple wooden mechs, but she had also began to tangle with the Ebony Zeal!

Although the false Zeal was not particularly good at tracking high-speed targets, its projectiles hit with great force.

The Promethea's response to this latest adversary was the same as with her other enemies.

"BURN!"

"Ya ya yaaa!"

Venerable Isobel specifically dispatched Kiroshi towards the Ebony Zeal.

After burning her way through the wood energy shield, the flaming companion spirit reached the surface of the ebony mech and attempted to burn this exceptionally tough wood!

"Yaaa yaa yaa...?"

"Why isn't it burning?!"

Venerable Isobel grew shocked when her flames finally met an intangible object that she wasn't able to burn!

This wasn't supposed to happen! She had burned down many objects that also claimed to be fireproof, but this was one of the rare moments she had become stymied.

"Why aren't you burning?!"

As Kiroshi continued to wander across the large ebony construct, the Ebony Zeal ignored the threat posed by the companion spirit and continued to suppress the Promethea with its formidable seed cannons!