



# The Iron Ember

Caleb Fraser



Kael stands amidst the towering ruins of a forgotten world, his stitched body small against the backdrop of rusted metal and gray skies. He clutches a fragment of an old map, searching for the lair of the beast that has silenced the surrounding lands.



High above the jagged skyscrapers, a shadow stretches across the ground as a dragon made of gears and tattered wings circles the air. Its eyes glow with a cold, mechanical blue light, scanning the debris for any sign of life in the silent city.



Kael discovers an ancient workshop where he finds a long, sharpened needle that glints like a silver blade in the dim light. He binds it to a wooden handle with scraps of sturdy twine, forging a weapon capable of piercing iron scales.



The dragon descends with a deafening roar, its metallic claws tearing through the asphalt and sending sparks flying into the air. Kael rolls beneath a rusted car, his heart thumping against his burlap chest as the monster searches for him.



A stream of sapphire flames erupts from the dragon's maw, melting the iron beams around Kael's hiding spot. He realizes he cannot win by hiding and prepares to leap from the shadows into the heat of the fray to defend his home.



Using a grapple hook made of copper wire, Kael swings onto the dragon's tail as it takes flight once more. He clings to the cold, vibrating plates of metal, climbing upward while the wind whips fiercely around his small, determined frame.



On the dragon's broad back, Kael battles against the lashing winds and the creature's violent attempts to shake him off. He stabs his needle-sword into the gaps between the grinding gears, slowing the beast's movements as they soar above the clouds.



Kael reaches the base of the dragon's neck, where a pulsing core of orange light glows behind a cage of reinforced steel. This is the heart of the machine, the source of the fire and the terror that has plagued his world for generations.



With a final, desperate cry, Kael drives his silver needle deep into the glowing core, shattering the glass and releasing a surge of energy. The mechanical dragon lets out a final, grinding shriek before its lights begin to flicker and fade forever.



The dragon crashes softly into a field of tall grass, its reign of terror finally at an end. Kael stands atop the silent giant, looking out at the horizon as the first rays of a true sun begin to break through the heavy smog.