

The soil of the forest was composted mountains of the dead world. Remains of junk from before the demons arose and nearly destroyed humanity. Decades of weathering had exposed some of the trash beneath. Boxes, bags, plastic totems, some trees were still marred from human meddling, wires nailed to the bark taught and outstretched towards towering ruins in the distance.

Birds drifted along the breeze overhead as I ventured deeper into the forest, minding my step as I went. If there was anything worth hunting I did not want to risk losing out of food. Also, demons have been spotted within the woods on occasion and I would rather not make my presence known just yet.

Especially when I only have one chance.

A local scientist needed help testing a new kind of weapon, one that could potentially kill a demon in a single blow. She couldn't get any locals to help her, now here I am wandering these woods hunting for demons.

My breathing was shallow and quiet. My sated belly is quiet and my head a foggy mess from dehydration. A noise caught my attention. A rabbit scurried across the path, running east. Singed fur striped its back.

Then came another noise. A bronze beast whipped through the bushes after it. The demon's belly bulged as it dug its rubbery sickle-legs into the dirt and trotted eastward after the wounded rabbit. Its crackling tendrils scratch and burn the environment, occasionally sparking when they collide with old world junk. The beast's spindly, boxy head fixated on the rabbit. It paid me no mind.

It always struck me as odd that the demons never ate, but they endlessly attacked wildlife and humans alike. Someone once suggested they were put here to destroy life. Though I believe they must have some higher purpose.

I quietly tailed the demon, following its messy trail and guttural clicks and whirs. I pulled the bolt from my pack, the scientist's invention. I loaded it into my crossbow. The demon's unshielded back was towards me. I fired, aiming at its back. Misfire.

The string pops under the bolt knocking it off the rail and tumbling to the ground. The demon's head whips around, its large, black eye focusing on me. A smaller, brighter red eye glows lifelessly. Its stance widens. I draw my sword in time to knock one of its tendrils away. It twisted its body and flicked the other tendril at my leg, only to spark off my shin guard. I'm knocked to the ground as it wraps around my ankle. I manage to slice the tendril in two before it can electrocute me. The demon recoils the damaged limb into its body. I rise, grabbing the bolt as I do. I let it wrap its remaining tendril around my sword, fling it to the side and exposing the beast's back. I stab the bolt into something important-looking and step back in time for a surge

of sparks to envelop the beast. It cries out with hisses and clicks that slowly fade into nothing. The red eye fades to blackness. I waited, slowly stepping over to untangle my sword from its coiled grasp. If the demon was with a pack, its members would be upon me soon.

Nothing came.

The sun was beginning to set, and I decided to camp within the forest. The town wasn't far, but I wanted more time in nature, away from the noise of civilization. The aggressive roar of people.

The demon was bulky and heavy, but I could drag its corpse to town in the morning. I had the mechanical body wrapped up in its own tentacle. I doubt it could come back to life, but wanted it restrained just in case.

I managed to find a clearing with a familiar, homely feeling. Piles of things I remember from my childhood spent exploring the scrap hills near my grandfather's home. Vision-screens, mini mainframes, withering jars of pliable material. Styrofoam that my grandfather would use to bulk up fertile soil and place under rugs to alert of trespassers. Metal rods with plush tubes bolted to the end, with leaves and dirt caked on them.

After gathering a bit of wood for a fire, I used the few hours of light I had left to search through the scrap. Hoping to find something of value or at least something to make transporting the demon a bit easier. Suddenly, a warm, crackling sound popped into my ears. It hung in the air, a dull noise peeking through the cacophony of background sound.

A vision-screen lit up. Then another. And another. An arch of screens burning to life, buried in a mess of old-world junk. Then came a rumble. The piles shifted. An awful screech drove wildlife from the forest as the bright arch pulled from the earth its mechanical innards and shook them loose. The mossy piles adorned with foamy masses jostled causing another awful screech from within the beast. Restraints burst and became weapons propelled by its heft. With each step, the pikes bounced, and the beast screeched. The demon was in pain, possibly in its final moments, and determined to take me with it.