

## Chapter 6

When morning came about, I had not gotten a ton of sleep. I wasn't grumpy about that, since this new body of mine apparently didn't need sleep to function perfectly, but the long dark stretch of the night had been filled with thoughts that just wouldn't stop niggling at me. Weirdly I spent more time worrying that Seren was lonely back home than I did about the whole spy and assassination mission that I was heading off on. Or the whole fortress full of people that had been trying to murder me earlier in the day. Or the super powerful ancient eternal who might decide I was a heretic in need of burning at any moment. Or the dark god of destruction that could talk to me if I touched the magic sword bits I'd collected. Or...

It was amazing I didn't spend more time worrying, let's be real.

I had expected there to be some pomp and ceremony when it was time for me to head out into the blighted lands beyond the Bastion, but it seemed that whatever dramatic scene I was picturing was not going to happen. If there had ever been big old gates in the big old wall, then they'd been part of the smashed up parts that had been patched over. When anyone on this side of the Bastion wanted to go down into the Ashlands, they did it by rope. Even a lift would have been nice, but our boy Leo thought that anything that might aid and abet enemies trying to surmount the wall was a bad idea and honestly, he was probably right.

Abseiling down the Bastion to land ass-first in the ash wasn't my idea of a good time, but given all the falling from high places I'd been doing recently, I was mostly just happy about how strong the rope felt.

Asher and Mercy had come to see me off, of course. As had Leo and Orphia, though I couldn't help but think their waving was definitely a lot less enthusiastic. Leo, who did not appreciate being called Leo, informed me of the direction where his scouts assumed that the Faun were massing. Orphia gave me a glare like I was trying to steal her man. Then away I went down the rope.

From what Leo's scouts had reported back, and from the number of scouting missions to certain areas that had just not come back at all, it sounded like there was a ridge a few days out that was my best bet. Which meant hiking. Walking through this big pile of dust. Strolling. I love hiking so much. It is my favorite thing. Dying halfway through a hike definitely wasn't a welcome relief from the living hell of hiking.

I just had to keep putting one foot in front of the other and remember I was on an epic fantasy adventure, not walking for no good reason. As long as it was an epic fantasy adventure, the bit of my brain that was screaming about how boring hiking was would shut the hell up.

The shifting ash beneath my feet did not make the journey easier. Every step forward, I'd slip half a step back while I was going up the slopes, and on the way down them, it was a constant struggle to get my feet unstuck quick enough so I didn't tip over and land on my face. Between the horns and the shoulders for days, I was pretty top-heavy, and this place was giving my sense of balance a real workout. It almost made me miss Seren's stumps in the jungle. At least they stayed more or less in the same place instead

of moving around underneath me. On the other hand, when I slipped out here I didn't get a stump to the crotch and a disapproving Seren stare.

There was not a whole lot in the way of scenery. The ashes had banked up into dunes and slowly but surely the Bastion slipped down under the horizon behind me leaving me with nothing to look at but yet more ash dunes in every direction. I had my footprints behind me and the sun in the sky to keep me right as far as directions went, but a gust of wind wiped my tracks clean and the sun was dipping down towards the horizon before I knew it.

I'd been walking all day, and the only thing that had changed were that some of the lumps under the ashes were slightly bigger than some of the other lumps. Were they just piles of ash? Was there still some solid land underneath that was making them hump up like that? Did I actually care or was I just so bored looking at heaps of ash that I was inventing things to think about?

It was the last one. I was going crazy. Just shutting my eyes and stretching out my sphere of influence could have told me exactly what was under the ash, but the sun was down before it finally occurred to me to try it.

As it turned out, there was nothing under the ashes, or at least there was nothing that my Artifice could sense. It was like the scarred parts of the Bastion; completely absent from my extra-senses. On the one hand it was kind of novel, being able to wander around without the imperceptible presence of all the world pressing in around me, on the other hand, it meant that Artifice was basically useless out here. I'd be able to remake what I'd brought with me, but everything else was inert.

My initial plan to slap together a quick cottage for the night was ruined, and I didn't actually need to stop, thanks to the whole Faun never getting tired thing, so I just kept on plodding on. And on. And on. The stars filled up the sky and I did not know them.

I wasn't an astronomer or an astrologer or whichever one it was that looked at the stars through a telescope instead of telling people the stars were why they kept having bad days, but I'd gotten familiar enough with the stars in the sky through my years back on earth. These ones were wrong. I didn't even know enough to say how they were wrong, they were still up there, twinkling away like they were meant to in every direction that I looked, but I couldn't recognize a single consolation.

This was why travelling with other people was better. On my own, I had too much time to get sappy and weird about stuff that didn't really matter. When the sun was up I didn't care that this was a different planet from the one I grew up on, so why was I getting all misty-eyed thinking about good old earth now? Earth wasn't that great. It didn't even have dragons. Or hot elf girls. Amaranth was definitely better. Sure everything was trying to kill me, but so was everything on earth, the stuff here was just more up-front about it, and I had a chance to fight back.

All day long as I'd been hiking, something had been itching at the back of my brain. Something that I knew that was important about now. Something about this place that I'd learned sometime since I arrived here on Amaranth that was on the tip of my tongue. Well, the tip of my brain. Something about

the Ashen Wastes? Something that one of my new skills had popped into my brain fully formed without me actually learning it. What was it?

I could see just fine in the dark, and there wasn't a whole lot to see, but I had been keeping my eyes peeled for any hint of the Faun. From what I'd been told by the dude who thought they were all evil and out to get him, they claimed this whole place as their territory, and patrolled regularly. I had not made a good impression when I came crashing and smashing into the Bastion, but so long as I didn't screw up too badly, the Faun might actually like me. So long as I got a word out before they shot at me and I had to kill them right back.

So I listened as hard as I could for anything but the silky sound of shifting ash. I stared over the top of every dune as I mounted it. I even caught myself sniffing the air, hoping for some campfire smoke. That last one was a mistake, I got a nose full of drifting ash and started sneezing. Not little delicate snuffles either. Those big booming dad sneezes that made you think the guy who was sneezing might actually turn inside out. The dudes manning the walls of the Bastion probably heard me. Guess I wasn't getting the drop on any Faun out here.

I was straining all the regular senses so hard that I didn't even catch the blip on my Lifesense until it was too late. At the same moment I noticed something alive down underneath the ashes it was bursting up out at me.

Back in Witchglass Overlook, a chompy little worm had latched on and chewed a chunk out of me. This thing was that thing's big brother. And by big, I mean about a hundred times as big. This thing was as wide around as me, and I couldn't even guess how long the slick red body, coated with clumped ash, actually was.

I only got a brief glimpse of that body writhing up out of the ground before the plume of ash it had thrown up blocked all vision. If I was a standard issue Eternal, I probably would have been screwed, but Lifesense took over when I had to clamp my eyes shut against the shower of grit. Lighting the thing up in glowing green. Every channel of life-force flowing through the thing shining.

Training with Seren paid off again. My sword was in my hands and swinging before I even knew the thing was coming at me.

[66 Damage]

My rough hewn blade might have struggled against armor plates, but this thing was all squish. It bit into the meat, and I watched as every channel of life-force that it crossed blinked out. It wasn't a killing blow, but it was enough to hurt.

The Dhole reared back, hissing and spraying me with that same viscous ichor that coated its body, letting it slip easily through the ashes. Thanks Bestiary skill, shame you didn't help out before the thing was already trying to eat me.

The cloud it had thrown up when it first emerged was blown clear by the thing's breath and now I got a glimpse of the big angry sphincter it called a face, lined all around with barbed and hooked lamprey

teeth. Even with a gash cut right across it, making the lower half loll open and leak, I did not want to go in there.

“Wow, you are one ugly dude.”

The insult probably didn't make it attack me again, but it probably didn't help.

Lashing forward with all those teeth rippling out towards me, I had to appreciate how straightforward the Dhole was being. It was kind of like a batting cage. It threw its weight forward and met my sword's edge once more.

Was I the smartest guy in Amaranth? No. The fastest? Nope. The prettiest? Probably not. Was I strong enough to smack a charging Dhole in the face and make it stop? Hell yes.

The whole body doubled up behind what I'm charitably calling its head, a six-car pileup of worm, rucking up in a heap like it had just run headlong into a solid object. There were moments when I questioned my choices since arriving on Amaranth but this was not one of them.

“Did I just make you even uglier?”

The maw of the Dhole was gaping even more now, crisscrossed by my two blows, all four quarters of it flapped open, curling back like flower petals. It stank like old blood inside that ruined mouth. Rust and rot. I grinned. “You want some more?”

I shouldn't have gotten smug. Pride comes before a giant worm vomits up dozens of its writhing babies in your face.

They latched onto me before I even knew what had hit me. Khorkhoi, like the one that had chomped me back in Witchglass Overlook, but with none of the lethargy that lying in wait for years had instilled in that one. Like their big daddy burrowed through the ash, these little charmers started digging into my flesh. Slowed just enough by my armor that I wasn't turned to swiss cheese on the spot. All of them except the one latched onto my forehead.

I grabbed it by the tail, but it was slick and slippery, flapping about and twisting in my grip as it ate my face. In the end I gave up trying to pull it off and just squeezed as hard as I could. It burst like overripe fruit in my hand. Red sludge bursting between my fingers. Still the head went on chewing until it finally realized it was dead and dropped off.

That one worm trying to eat my brain was enough of a distraction that it had given the rest of them time to wriggle their way into the gaps of my armor, squeezing in and chomping everywhere they could reach.

Pain assailed me from every side. Nipping, buzzing teeth digging into me. Grating over my ribs. Burrowing down into my muscles.

[621/890 Health]

I was not dying like this.

With a roar, I split my sword into cleavers and set about myself, hacking one worm in half after another. They were pinned in place by their own hold on my flesh and while I couldn't swing at them with all my strength in their awkward positions, I could hit them hard enough to make them pop. One by one, the little chomping jaws stopped, and the dead worms heads slipped back out of me, surrounded by a fresh wash of my blood.

Wiping blood and worm guts from my eyes, I turned to give Daddy Dhole a sneer.

It wasn't there.

Two ton of worm didn't just vanish. Stretching out my Lifesense to its limits, I caught the last hint of a tail vanishing out of range. It ran away. The giant murder worm ran away. I threw my cleavers down in disgust. It had stolen my kill! I mean, sure, it had saved itself from inevitable death, but worms weren't meant to be smart. They were worms. Bestiary had not said anything about them being smart. I couldn't believe that after bleeding all over the place and getting gnawed on by babies I wasn't even going to get...

My grumbles stopped when I felt the ash beneath me shaking. Maybe we weren't done yet. A quick flex of Artifice reformed my great-sword in my hands and I waited, stretching out my senses to their limit.

Deep down beneath me, just where the ash gave away to the null I guessed was stone that I couldn't touch, I caught a hint of movement. The dhole brushed the edge of my sphere of influence for just a moment, then it was gone. Then again on the other side. It was circling underneath me. Faster and faster. The ash that had been packed so solid beneath me just a moment before seemed to soften, then it began to twist. My feet sank in, then my shins. I tried to fling myself clear of the sinkhole the Dhole was making, but I had nothing solid to kick off and I ended up just flopping over into an ever deepening pool of ash. I sank like a stone.

The ash closed over my head with that same soft hissing I'd been hearing all day and those alien stars went out. The Ashen Waste's gently reset itself as if I'd never been there.

I couldn't breathe, I couldn't see, everything was black. Despite that I could still feel myself sinking down, deeper and deeper into the ash. Anywhere else in the world all it would have taken was a quick burst of Artifice to launch myself back to the surface but here in this dead place I was powerless.

Down into that deep dark nothingness, I went on sinking until the reach of my sphere of influence was extended out far enough to encompass the Dhole's circuit. It was slowing now, whatever senses let it track the movement of prey on the surface had told it that the trap had snapped shut on me. It made one last slow circuit before wiggling my way. Could worms gloat? The languid swish through the ash felt pretty smug to me.

It should have known better, I was going to puke my babies on its face. Okay maybe I wasn't going to literally do that but, something with the same vibe.

Vibrations in the ash would have warned me it was coming, even if my Lifesense didn't have it lit up – the only thing in the dead darkness. It took all my willpower to stop struggling, to stay still and play dead.

If it really waited until I'd suffocated then it was out of luck. My body was going to blink out of existence when I respawned and it was going to go hungry. But if I could get it to come for me now, it might still get a taste of me, and I might still have a chance.

My lungs burned in my chest. I could feel my health ticking down with every passing moment. Death was coming for me, a lot quicker than that sneaking nervous Dhole. Maybe he wasn't hungry. Maybe he was leaving me down here for later. Joke was on him, all he'd get to eat was half-chewed eel-skin armor. Not that he deserved any better. Kill stealing jerk.

Just when I thought I was doomed to pop back up in Tropical Dvergar Town, the Dhole decided it was snack time. It came on in a mad rush, tattered mouth flopping open in anticipation just before it reached me where the ash held my feeble mortal frame completely immobile.

Even with my potency surged, it felt like I was moving through molasses. So slow there was no chance I could actually deal any sort of damage with the swing of my sword. Good thing damage wasn't the goal. As the mouth flopped open, my sword came around, not slicing anything but wedging those jaws wide open.

I clung to the blunt back side of the cleaver blade as the impact of the Dhole against it rocked me. The ash that had encased me vanished down the thing's throat but I stuck there in its craw like a chicken bone, gasping in the foul and fetid air. All around me the vibrant red flesh pulsed and flexed as it tried to close those wretched teeth into me, but it couldn't. It could contract at the sides, but the top and bottom couldn't. It couldn't snap shut and puncture me.

The big angry hose was not pleased with this. It bucked and rolled, trying to dislodge me. More ash billowing in through its open mouth and covering both me and the Khorkhoi that were slithering out the ducts in between its teeth. I was a big guy, I could take a little bit of ash plastered onto me. The teeny Khorkhoi couldn't. The ash and drool and blood all mingled into a paste as thick as concrete, trapping the baby murder worms where they lay.

More and more ash came flowing in, choking the Dhole, setting it retching, hissing and pulsing all around me as it tried to dislodge it, and me. It wasn't built to travel down here with its mouth open. It needed open air, just as surely as I did. It had to go up.

We burst through the surface and my roars of laughter rolled out over the dunes. The worm had done exactly what I wanted it to. Now it just had to do one more thing like I wanted. It had to die.

I leapt clear of the mouth, tumbling back to my feet on the dunes and leaving the sword in place for now. The Dhole was flinging itself back and forth, tossing up huge clouds of dust, but making no attempt to dip back under the surface. It would have choked itself out if it had.

Once I had my breath back and the Dhole was lying limp on its side, half-exhausted and half-choked, it was time for a killing blow. I crept up on it, nice and slow, but even as careful as I was coming, it felt the vibrations through the ground and started flopping around like a beached fish all over again.

Guess there wasn't going to be an easy way to do this. I gave up on stealth and just walked right up to the thing. Ducking under a couple of wild flails it made in my general direction. When I was close enough to lay a hand on its rubbery hide, it was time. I called my sword back to me, deconstructing it from inside the thing's mouth and into my hands in one smooth flow of liquid metal.

I took a breath to get my balance, then I swung.

Even with a sword as big as mine, and all my strength behind it, it wasn't enough to take the Dhole's head off. It was enough to cut more than halfway through, but I had to elbow into the oozing wound to bring the blade down again and again before finally I was all the way through and the hissing abruptly stopped.

*Legendary Foe Defeated!*

*165 Experience Gained*

*150 Glory Gained*

Silence again. Just my ragged breathing, the distant stars, and the smooth drifting of the dunes.

I'd won, but that didn't mean I was any less screwed. With all of the chaos, the burrowing underground, the bull-ride inside the Dhole and my less than stellar sense of direction at the best of times, I was now completely turned around.

When the sun came up, I'd remember which side of me it was on when I set off in the morning and have a vague idea of the right way to go, even if I might have been sidetracked by miles by this point. I had no idea how far the Dhole dragged me around before surfacing. Yeah, this sucked.

I spun around on the spot a few times, hoping I might catch a glimpse of something familiar. I even looked up at the sky and tried to remember what the stars had looked like when I was headed the right way. It was hopeless. They were a random collection of dots in the sky. How were they meant to tell me anything?

Waiting until morning. All alone with my thoughts. Maybe roaming in a random direction was a better idea. If I got lucky some other wildlife might pop up and try to murder me.

I almost did it too, but then I heard a nagging voice in my head that sounded like Mercy calling me a dumbass. There was a little snippet of Seren, commenting on my lack of patience, too. Why couldn't Asher be my conscience. He would never dunk on me like this.

The dead Dhole was the only landmark in miles, and the only thing resembling furniture, so I clambered up on top of its squishy body and lay down. Sinking in an inch as it expelled liquids and gasses that I really did not want to think about. A quick brush over it with my Artifice revealed nothing of value. The only solid bones in the whole thing were the teeth and even they were too small to be much use, unless I really wanted to patch up my poor battered eel-armor with lots of spikes all over it. As much as that would look badass, and it would look so very badass, I would end up stabbing myself about nine hundred times a day, and nobody has time for that.

That reminded me to use Restoration on myself. It was definitely more useful when you were in a group, since everybody seemed to have their own cooldown timer before they could be healed again with the power. Good thing I had all night to wait out that timer and heal myself until I was pristine and factory fresh again.

Sinking another inch into the Dhole, I let out my own long sigh. I was glad that my hair had finally grown in, but that did mean that it could soak up all the lovely fluids that I seemed to encounter on a daily basis. Back at Talon's Keep, I got my daily swim to shuck off the worst of the grime, but out here in the middle of nowhere... let's just say you don't appreciate modern plumbing until it is gone.

So there I was, lying on a stinky cushion, staring up at the stars, with nothing to do for hours and hours and hours. Nothing to occupy my thoughts. No sign of any living thing for miles. I couldn't sleep, obviously, there might have been more Dholes just waiting to pop up and make me their midnight snack. So I was just lying there. Bored.

I don't do well with bored. Give me life-threatening monster attacks over bored anytime. When I am bored, I make trouble for myself. Back home, the amount of trouble I could make was pretty limited, but here in Amaranth with all the powers of a demigod I could do some real damage. Which was why after about a half hour, I had the shards of the rusted blade out of the pockets inside my armor and I was trying to fit them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

Some bits slipped together perfectly, but others didn't seem to go together at all. I was definitely missing the hilt piece, which I guessed was welded into Leo's sword. The Alvaren piece was the tip. Talon's piece attached just beneath it. Still sharp along its edge. That meant that the Faun piece that was completely missing from history, and the two bits that Tsangaanax had hoarded were other lengths of the blade. Put back together I guessed it would be a longsword for anyone else, a short-sword for me. That wasn't ideal, but judging from Leo's Lucis, I could always strap some more metal onto the thing to make it bigger without it losing too much mojo.

Mercy and Asher hadn't really spoken about it, but I think we were all kind of assuming that I was going to be the one swinging the Rusted Blade around once we got it back together. Neither of them had shown any inclination to get up close and personal with the monsters, and while the image of Mercy shooting a sword out of her bow was always going to bring a smile to my face, it probably wasn't super practical. This was going to be my burden. I was going to have to be the one to kill the Voidgod. Maybe if Leo hadn't been a completely nut I might have handed the quest over to him, but he was, so I couldn't.

Unfastening the clips that I'd added to keep them firmly in place, I pulled off my gloves and let the night air breeze between my fingers. Sweaty palms. Gross. I almost wiped them off on myself before I remembered my current slimy state.

Almost without a thought I picked up the shards again. One in each bare hand.

***"So we have found our courage again?"***



Araphel's voice didn't come from the shards in my hand. It didn't echo to me from a great distance through Psychometry, the way that most of the ghosts that power showed me. He boomed in my head, like his mouth had snapped open on the inside of my skull and he was yelling every word.

My mouth was dry when I answered, "What do you want, Araphel?"

***"You are the one who communes with me. Surely the real question is what you want."***

It took me a moment to get over that reverberation in my poor brain. There was something uniquely unpleasant about Araphel's voice. You know how really good music can make you feel like your soul is getting bigger? His voice did the opposite.

I didn't even have to think about my answer. "I want to kill you."

***"Yet, I do not wish to be killed."*** That awful voice was easing now. Like he was trying to dial it back and make himself more palatable. It wasn't better, it was just a different kind of suffering to listen to him. It set my teeth on edge. I lay there with my eyes clamped shut so I wouldn't have to see him as well as hearing him. The idea of him looming over me as I lay here was just too much to bear. ***"So let us seek a compromise."***

"What? I only kill you a little bit and we call it quits?" I probably shouldn't have snorted with laughter in the figurative face of the Voidgod, but nobody has ever said I was smart.

***"Abandon your quest. Keep the shards far from one another."*** The more he tried to ingratiate himself to me, the more it made my stomach heave and my head ache. Like nails on a chalkboard, except the chalkboard was the inside of my skull. ***"Keep them as trophies or cast them in the sea for all that I care, but do not let them all come together."***

It took some effort to ease my grip on the shards enough that they weren't drawing blood from my palms any more. Touching most things with Psychometry bombarded me with images and sounds from the whole history of the object, but the presence of Araphel was so overpowering that nothing else got through. I'd never know who struck the blow that felled him. I'd never know who forged the sword. I'd never know whose hands each of the shards had passed through. All of that was gone. Replaced by him. His looming, aching, presence. Just like the Bastion and this desert and everything else, it was tainted so thoroughly by the touch of the Voidgod that it would never be anything but his leftovers again.

I took a deep breath. I really wasn't holding up my end of the conversation here. "So what's in it for me?"

***"Your court shall reign supreme over what is left of this world. Those you call kin shall survive my coming. You shall survive it. This is a greater charity than any I have ever offered."*** He really though he was making me a good offer here. Like I cared about team moon getting the scraps of the planet when he was done chewing on it. My friends not dying would be nice, but if they were willing to stand back and watch everyone else in the world drop dead to save themselves, I wouldn't have wanted to call them my friends.

There was nothing that he could offer me. There was no compromise that would be enough. For this world to survive, Araphel couldn't.

I licked my lips. "How about this. I put this sword back together, then I lift up your tail and shove it right up your shiny black..."

There was no restraint now. No subtle inveigling his way into my brain. His voice hit me like a sledgehammer. **"I am a god."**

"You're a dick." I roared back into the empty night. "You wrecked this world. You'll wreck it even more when you come back. There are people trying to live here and you just..."

Araphel pummeled me with his voice. Every word nailed into my brain. Sharp and cruel and agonizing. **"You will do as I command or I shall..."**

It took all my will to growl out, "Hanging up now."

Then I let the shards fall from my hands to splat on the worm below.

I groaned all the way back up into a sitting position, then put my head in my hands. Like I could crush the ache behind my eyes into submission. I even gave my horns a few gentle rubs to see if that would help. It didn't. Just felt weird.

Pulling my gloves back on made me wince with pain from where the shards had dug in. Even the places they hadn't broken the skin looked rust red. Perfect impressions of them on both my hands. Once they were fastened back into place, I stowed everything back away where it belonged and flopped back all over again.

That had been stupid even by my usual standards, and my usual standards were right down there with eating the silica gel pack in my bag of jerky and buying things from infomercials. Antagonizing the dude who already wanted to destroy the world. Good job Maulkin. Good job. Although, maybe it wasn't actually the real living Voidgod who I'd just threatened to prod in the rear. Maybe it was just the echo that was still attached to the shards. Maybe this wasn't going to have terrible repercussions later. Yeah, I was just bugging a ghost. Not a god of destruction. Maybe.

I lay back and stared up at the sky again. All those stars, yet the black between them was still there, and so much bigger than any one of them. The sun, the moon, they were just tiny blips in the universe in comparison to the spaces between. The void. It seemed to stare back at me. All that darkness pressing down, unstoppable. Endless. I blinked. Maybe brain to brain contact with ancient evil gods wasn't good for me. I didn't usually get this weird while stargazing. Not without tequila.

There was anxiety gnawing at my guts as the implacable darkness stared down at me and it was almost enough to make me pick up the shards again, to try talking Araphel down from the thing he was born to do. The thing that he desperately wanted to do more than anything. To offer him some real compromise that we both might accept. I knew it wouldn't work. Just like I knew I couldn't trust Leofric, or any of the gods we'd met so far. They were all cut from the same megalomaniacal cloth. They'd all do whatever they had to, say whatever they had to, so that their team won. Even if it cost the lives of everyone on Amaranth.

The sensation of the fear, dangling in my guts like a lead weight, made me stop and wonder. I do stupid things without thinking them through, that is the complete opposite of anxiety. This was not my anxiety. Someone had put it in me. Araphel had put it in me.

Once I knew that it wasn't mine, it was easy enough to ignore it, and it fizzled away to nothing almost immediately, but that had come from him. Touching the shards had let him sneak those feelings into me without me even noticing. I needed to be even more careful to keep my gloves on.

But here was the thing that stuck with me. He had to have gotten that anxiety from somewhere. He had to know what it felt like, to inflict it on someone else. He had to have the recipe. And what's more, despite being the all-powerful dark god of evil or whatever, he'd come to me and he'd tried to cut a deal. He was running scared. He was scared that I was going to put the sword back together. He was scared that I was going to kick his ass.

He was right to be scared I was going to kick his ass, because I was going to kick his ass.

