

CORRUPTED BLOOD LORD

Chapter 3 - 2 – Roots

Forming a mana circle at the age of six was remarkable — a feat only the most talented of noble children could usually boast.

But with his mature mind and tireless work ethic, Teclos shattered that boundary between a commoner and noble. Of course, it helped that he had parents like Talmir and Saldia, who pushed him every step of the way.

The day it happened began like any other cold spring morning — the kind where mist hugged the ground and birds sang lazily in the trees. Teclos sat cross-legged on the moss behind their cottage, back straight, eyes closed, hands forming a diamond shape as he breathed calmly. It was a posture Talmir had taught him, meant to help with gathering mana.

Inside the cottage, Talmir sipped his tea and quietly observed the boy's mana flow through the wooden wall. It was already showing signs of taking shape — the faint beginnings of a circle.

"Focus on your breathing to draw in more mana!" Talmir called out. "Mana follows the rhythm of your breath. Draw it in... then guide it to your core."

Teclos inhaled — slow, deliberate.

He had practiced this thousands of times. He could feel the mana in the air—the cold thrum of it, the strange tension lurking in the shadows. He drew it in, pulling it toward his chest like threads of invisible silk.

Today something felt different.

The darkness didn't just respond — it resonated.

It surged.

And this time, instead of scattering or slipping away, it began to spiral before it even merged with his core.

Slowly at first, then faster and faster. He guided the gathered mana from his lungs, threading it downward toward his core.

Once there, it fused with the madly spinning mana already present in his core.

With a sudden pulse, it merged with his very being. Every muscle in his body tightened.

Mana rushed through him freely, and then—

Boom.

A surge of energy exploded within him. His skin tingled. His senses sharpened. The world dimmed, yet every sound — the birdsong, the rustling grass, even Talmir's steady breathing inside the cottage — rang crystal clear in his ears.

Talmir watched closely. At first, he assumed it was another failed attempt, but Teclos proved him wrong.

The mana began to spin, slow and unstable, just like before — until a sudden pause broke the rhythm. Then, in a violent flash, it erupted into a whirlwind throughout his body.

Talmir's eyes widened. This was surprising. Normally, the process was far gentler — what he saw now bordered on mana corruption, a dangerous condition that could shatter the body instead of strengthening it.

He was about to intervene when, to his astonishment, the chaos stabilized on its own. The mana steadied, condensed — and then began spinning in perfect harmony.

Talmir thought that he was hallucinating.

A circle was formed.

Teclos opened his eyes, panting.

"I can feel it," he whispered, breathless and exhausted. "I formed a circle in my core... hell yes!"

Talmir smiled now that everything seemed fine — a rare, subtle twitch at the corner of his mouth. He stepped out of the cottage, still holding his tea, and said calmly,

"Nicely done. Congratulations, son."

"It felt like... my body was going to explode. But once it calmed down, everything became clearer. I can't even describe it..."

'It almost felt like I was high on something,' he thought to himself.

"Not just the mana outside, but inside me too. It's like I've gained another sense."

"At first it was a bit dangerous, son," Talmir said, scratching his beard. "If you ever feel that exploding sensation again, stop immediately and calm the mana — even if it ends in failure. That feeling could lead to mana corruption, so be careful. But generally, the first circle opens a new sense — something between sight and touch. It's your body accepting mana as its own."

Teclos stood up, wobbling slightly. His limbs trembled from the strain.

"Now what?"

"Now you learn how to control it," Talmir said, handing him a small waterskin. "And endure it's power. A circle gives many benefits, yes — but it can be unstable without discipline, control, and a strong body."

Talmir leaned against a tree, thinking for a moment. "Let me explain it further. This is the basic guideline of how mana behaves in different parts of the body. First, we have the core — where you formed your first circle. It's a mana pool that strengthens your body and distributes mana throughout it. It's also larger than the other two, which means more mana to spend. You can do things like this with it."

After saying that, he crouched down and jumped — soaring nearly eight meters into the air.

Teclos's eyes sparkled. 'Damn, that's cool!'

Landing lightly, Talmir continued, "Then there's the heart. It can detoxify poison and push mana outward — creating an aura that can coat your body as protection, or your weapons for greater power."

He paused again, picking up a tree branch. It was nothing more than dry wood, but when he channeled his aura into it, the stick shimmered faintly. Then, with a sharp swing, he struck the ground — the branch carving a deep mark into the earth like a blade.

Suddenly, Saldia appeared around the corner.

"Talmir! What the hell are you doing!? You're cleaning up this mess as soon as you're done teaching him — you hear me!?"

Startled, Talmir straightened immediately. "Yes, dear..."

'Pffft... hah! Guess pops is on a tight leash for a few days,' Teclos thought, snickering to himself.

After a moment, when Saldia was gone, Talmir continued.

"And lastly – the head. It strengthens your vision and willpower, and sharpens your reflexes. Now, go to your mother. I'll clean this up."

"Okay, dad."

The rest of the day passed quietly – just new books, new lessons, new expectations.

When evening came, there was a small celebration for Teclos's achievement. Saldia called him to the table and laid out a hearty meal, smiling proudly as she patted his head.

Talmir emerged from their room carrying a finely carved wooden box. Inside rested a beautifully made dirk like dagger – Teclos's first real weapon. They ate, laughed, and played cards long into the night.

Life in Kolma had settled into a steady rhythm and teclos turned eight.

The mornings and late evenings were filled with mana drills, light workouts, posture and form practice.

He'd stretch by the apple trees behind their house before the sun climbed high, mimicking the stances Talmir had taught him and running through his drills—breathwork to gather mana, and a new skill he'd developed: weaving darkness through his body and projecting it outward.

He'd even learned to sense the shadows around him — the ambient darkness in places where light couldn't reach. It made him dizzy sometimes, being able to see and hear faintly through the dark, but the range was short — less than five meters.

Teclos always tried to remember Talmir's words: "Never forget to train the basics — a strong body comes first."

He'd taken that to heart.

Midday meant chores — sweeping, chopping wood, collecting herbs — followed by lessons with Saldia in her herbal room. She had him grinding roots into powders, measuring tinctures, learning how different plants smelled, healed, or harmed. Her patience and quiet instruction made the lessons feel... warm.

He liked that.

It gave structure to his days — something for his thoughts to cling to when they drifted too far into the past. He still thought about his previous life and family, but it had become bearable now.

Afternoons were different. That was when he stepped out of the quiet home.

That afternoon was a bit different, Ralph's voice echoed across the clearing.

"Teclos! You coming or what?"

Teclos looked up from the dried leaves he was sorting into jars. "Where to?"

"The the training grounds! Gillard said he's gonna wrestle someone smaller than a baby wild hog today."

Teclos raised a brow. "So... you?"

"Very funny. Get over here!"

With a half-smile, Teclos put the jar down and followed him along the village path, through the back trails behind the forge. The sunlight filtered through the orchard, catching glimpses of children gathered around their usual sparring spot – a ring of worn-down dirt beneath the apple trees.

"What is all this?" Teclos asked.

Ralph snickered. "Oh right, you being a loner wouldn't know. Haha."

Frowning, Teclos grumbled, "Then explain it already, Mr. All-Knowing."

"All right, all right – calm your horses. This is a village tradition. A sparring ring for kids – especially those who want to become hunters someday."

"I see some older kids here, though. Isn't Barry over there fourteen already?"

"Yeah. The adults allow spars for kids from eight to fourteen, but you can only fight someone a year older or younger. The older ones keep watch, and there's always a parent nearby, so don't worry."

Looking around, Teclos noticed there were a lot of aspiring hunters.

"Why are there so many? Even Tilia's here — doesn't she hate fighting?"

"Ah, yes. You recluse who never goes outside unless it's with Gillard or me... listen, buddy. We don't just fight here — we hang out, play around. Not everyone's into brawling."

"Hm. I think I'll spar with you today... maybe shut that mouth of yours."

"Haha, you're welcome to try!"

In the center stood Gillard, arms folded — calm and watchful as ever. Dressed in a short tunic and linen pants, he looked every bit the village's wild boy.

He gave Teclos a nod.

Teclos arched a brow. "So, who's he gonna spar with?"

"It's Loric," Ralph said. "His dad's the guard captain, so he's trained — but I'm trickier to fight than him. You'll see how he gets beaten today!"

They stepped into the ring.

No magic. No weapons. Bare fists only. Those were the rules for kids under thirteen.

Gillard relaxed into his stance, weight centered, hands low. Loric crouched loosely, one foot back — then darted forward.

The opening charge was a bluff.

Loric feinted left, then swung wide to the right.

Gillard ducked, pivoted, and caught him with a sharp backheel kick that sent Loric staggering.

Loric coughed. "Ow."

Amused, Gillard said, "You're too predictable."

Gritting his teeth, Loric lunged again, faster this time — a high punch paired with a low kick.

Gillard turned his hip and blocked with his leg, catching Loric's arm and spinning him over his shoulder in one smooth motion.

Loric hit the ground with a solid thud.

Dust puffed up around him as he groaned.

The match was over. Gillard stepped forward and offered a hand.

"Anything broken?"

Loric grinned weakly. "Just my pride."

But as Gillard helped him up, Loric suddenly lashed out — a quick jab that grazed Gillard's cheek.

Gillard staggered back, anger flashing across his face, but before he could react, the older kids stepped in to stop the fight.

"Next time you pull a sucker punch like that," Gillard growled, "I'll kick you in the head before anyone saves you, you little shit!"

Loric just huffed and walked off.

Gillard brushed the dust from his tunic, still fuming.

Teclos and Ralph walked over.

"Hey, you all right?" Ralph asked.

"It's just a scratch," Gillard said. "That wuss couldn't hurt me even if he tried."

Ralph laughed. "He's a real sore loser for pulling that stunt..."

Teclos grinned. "Don't worry – next time, just knock him flat and leave him there."

They spent the rest of the afternoon talking and watching the other matches.

Later that evening, at home, Teclos ate quietly while the fire crackled low. Saldia hummed softly as she stirred a pot of tea nearby, and Talmir sat beside him sharpening a hunting knife in preparation for the next day's outing.

Teclos stared at his plate, feeling strangely melancholy again.

Eight years.

Eight years since he'd died.

Since he'd lost the world of lights and engines and bloodied concrete. Since the nights of factories and stale air, and dreams that ended in fire and ruin.

He hadn't forgotten that world – or the friends and family he'd left behind.

He still remembered the good and the bad... but the details were slipping.

His mother's cooking.

His father tinkering in the garage.

Messing around with his brother.

But all of it was starting to blur.

'Am I really going to forget them someday?'

His new life wasn't bad — he'd adapted well — but it lacked the little comforts. No burgers or pizza. No games, no TV, no beer, no running water or electricity. Life here could be so... dull.

"I guess I'm shallow for thinking this," he muttered to himself, "but I'm just so bored when I'm not learning magic. And I'm thirty-five — well, technically forty-three...." he shook his head "and I'm still hanging out with eight-year-olds. I can't even drink beer yet."

Sighing, he pushed his chair back and went to bed.

Before sleep took him, he practiced a bit more mana manipulation — weaving darkness through the air until his eyelids grew too heavy to keep open.