

CORRUPTED BLOOD LORD

Chapter 5 - 4 – The Hunt

Before the sun stirred the sky, before even the roosters dared break the silence, Talmir was awake.

The chill of dawn settled over Kolma like a worn woolen blanket. Inside the modest cottage, all was still – save for the low creak of a floorboard as Talmir rose from his bed. He didn't bother with a lantern. His feet knew the path, and the dim light from the hearth embers was enough.

He moved with precision, like it was a ritual – silent, practiced, methodical.

He fetched water from the barrel just outside the door, then poured it into a small pot to heat over the embers. The steam curled slowly as he prepared a simple mix of herbs: willow bark, lavender, and sage – Saldia's blend. Good for the joints and nerves, she'd once said, though she'd given up on trying to get him to drink it regularly. Today, though, he had a long day ahead.

While the tea steeped, he knelt beside a small chest near the foot of the bed and opened it.

Layer by layer, he dressed for the hunt.

Fine leather armor, reinforced at the shoulders and thighs with scaled plates — the hide of a fire bear he'd felled years ago. A dark green cloak, folded and tied across his back. His boots were thick-soled, fur-lined, and worn to the perfect flexibility. His belt held a knife, a water flask, and a compact iron shovel at the back, with an empty sword holster. The rest — a coiled long rope, sealed oil jars, a folded tarp, a map, and a first aid kit — were all packed neatly into a rucksack slung behind him.

Finally, he strapped on his bow and quiver, then placed his shortsword at his hip. Not flashy, but sharp, balanced, and carved so that his Wind mana could easily flow through it.

He poured the tea into a carved wooden mug, stepped out into the pre-dawn air, and took a deep breath.

The village still slept. Fires still low. Only the gentle hum of distant insects and the whisper of leaves stirred.

"Hmm, I'm a bit early still."

Sitting down on the porch stairs, he leisurely drank the tea with no hurry. After a few moments, when he finished it, he left the cup on the stairs, picked up his gear, and left.

Walking some distance, a figure stood near the edge of the fence, a bit before the gates — arms crossed, leaning against a post.

It was Kosak, a friend of Talmir's and a hunting partner.

Talmir walked over, greeting him with a wave.

"You're early," he said quietly.

Kosak greeted him back and shrugged. "Couldn't sleep. Wife was snoring again. And the kid kept kicking — after a shot to my balls, I woke up."

Talmir smirked. "Uff, still — some would say you're a lucky man."

Kosak stretched. His curly ginger hair was bound under a leather cap, and his armor — slightly heavier than Talmir's — was dyed in deep browns and mossy greens. His short sword hung on his back beside a compact bow. On his belt, several stone-carved sigils rested — Earth-enhanced tools. The rest of his gear was identical to Talmir's.

"Luck, my ass. You drink that herb piss again?" Kosak asked, eyeing Talmir.
"Smells like shit."

"Saldia says it's good for the blood."

"Your blood's fine. Your breath, though..."

"Shut it," said Talmir, punching his shoulder.

They walked in silence after that, toward the village gates.

At the gates, a bored-looking guard straightened up as the two approached.

"Morning, lads," said Dave, a wiry man with a crooked nose and easy smile. He looked them over with a trained eye. "You two early today, eh?"

"Team four," Kosak confirmed, handing over a small wooden token marked with the village crest and their team number.

Tom took it and checked a crude roster nailed beside the gate. "Team two's already out. Three left an hour before dawn, the rest are still here."

"How many teams today?" Talmir asked.

"Six. That new blood — Ulmak's cousin — got paired with Darnel. Hopefully, they don't stab each other by accident."

"Let them, it's not our problem," Kosak muttered.

Tom circled them slowly, glancing over their gear. "Good blades. Pack looks balanced. No visible injuries. You two look disgustingly healthy, actually." Checking over the hunters' equipment was standard procedure — if they had missing gear or damaged weapons, he'd send them back for safety reasons.

"Try harder next time," Talmir said, deadpan.

Tom chuckled. "Well, no one's coming after you if you get gored. Keep your fire signals on you, and if you're not back by tomorrow morning, we report you missing. Better not worry your wives. Stay safe, lads."

Kosak waved him off, and Talmir nodded. "Thanks. See you later."

And with that, the gates creaked open.

The forest welcomed them like an old friend – wild and untamed. Sunlight filtered through the canopy in golden shafts, dancing on the moss below. Birds chirped, invisible but everywhere.

They moved quickly – same pace, but differently.

Kosak walked at first, but soon knelt. His palms pressed to the dirt, whispering something low. His body began to sink slowly into the earth – disappearing fully. The only sign of him was a small lifted earth mound moving forward. His legs and body moved beneath the surface as though swimming through packed soil with almost no resistance.

Trained Hunter's trick of Earth magic – a movement technique useful for scouting, ambushes, or simply passing unnoticed.

Earth mages could also feel tremors through the soil, locating beasts, monsters, or humans. Capable ones could feel everything around them – even the smallest vibrations.

Talmir, on the other hand, leapt into the sky.

First, he took light steps, building rhythm.

Then he activated his mana – it flowed from his body, and the air thickened beneath his feet.

After that he jumped – and the wind caught him. With practiced control, he glided to a tree branch, barely rustling the leaves.

Like a shadow between the trees, he jumped from branch to branch, silent and fast.

He could fly if needed, but for now, conserving mana this way was better. Also, Kosak knew where he was every time he landed on a tree.

They didn't speak. They didn't need to.

Half a day passed like that – signs of moss deer, a horned hare or two, but no large prey.

At midday, Talmir regrouped with Kosak by a rocky stream. They shared a brief meal of dried meat and cheese, checked the map, and continued.

It wasn't until mid-afternoon that Kosak resurfaced near a patch of torn earth.

"Found one," he said simply. "Big bastard."

"A stone boar or something else?"

Kosak nodded. "A boar — at least two meters at the shoulder. It's probably building a nest. Ground's all rutted from its tusks, and there's a tall rock wall behind the nest."

Kosak crouched, eyes narrowing. He brushed his hand across the dirt. It vibrated faintly.

"It's close — on the north ridge. About one kilometer away."

"Okay, mask your presence in the earth so it doesn't notice you. I'll take flight."

They moved fast.

Within a minute, they spotted it.

A stone boar — as wide as a wagon, covered in thick, bristled hide. Its tusks curved like sickles, its hooves cracked the stones it stepped on. It got its name because of those armor plates of stone covering its joints and back.

Its eyes gleamed faintly brown — not too intelligent, but aware and dangerous.

They watched from a distance as it pulled at the base of a tree, tearing through roots and swallowing clumps of earth whole. It seemed to be in the process of building a shelter. The mana around it pulsed with pressure — not a monster, but close in power to one.

Stone boars were hard to beat in a head-on fight, with their stone charge and earth control. The beast hadn't noticed them yet though, so with a well-planned ambush this fight could be resolved easily.

"Any plan how to take it down the easy way?" Kosak asked.

"I'll attack it from the sky and blind it. Meanwhile, you should lock its legs in place — and when it's immobilized and blind, we finish it fast," replied Talmir.

"Okay."

With that, Kosak disappeared into the ground.

Talmir stood up and took flight. Once he was approximately one hundred and fifty meters above it, he nocked an arrow.

He focused all of his power, gathering it into the bow and arrow. The wind started to spiral along the shaft and the ends of the bow.

A thin layer of air wrapped around the arrowhead, sharpening it to a whisper-fine edge. He aimed at the boar's right eye.

Although a storm-like vortex brewed around the arrow, there was no sound. A heartbeat later, he released the string.

The arrow flew.

It was faster than the speed of sound – not only fast, but also guided like a missile locked on to the boar's eye no matter how it moved.

The next second, there was a loud boom. It struck the boar in the eye with a wet crack, slamming its head to the ground.

The beast screamed — a sound that echoed through the trees like stone grinding against bone.

Right after that, Kosak erupted from the ground about ten meters away, both hands slamming together in a clasp. The earth around the boar cracked, and rock spikes pierced the creature's legs, pinning it in place. A rock wall rose behind it, blocking its retreat.

Talmir then dove down like a hawk, wind circling his feet as he gained speed — twisting in mid-air, he drew his sword.

The blade sang as wind gathered along its edge.

Passing the beast's head, he brought the sword down in a crescent arc.

A slash of compressed air followed.

Landing, he sheathed his sword and stood back up. "Hunt completed. Let's skin it and return to the village."

As he said that, the head rolled cleanly from its shoulders. Blood sprayed across the grass.

With a loud thud, the beast collapsed, and the earth stilled.

"Okay, let's move it. I have an appointment with the tavern," Kosak replied.

They worked quickly.

The boar's body was massive, but they were veteran hunters. Kosak lifted it using mana, shaping a stone table so they could more easily peel back the hide.

Talmir severed tendons and split bones with his wind-infused knife, while Kosak cut the meat into portions.

The tusks, bones, and armor plates went into the tarp — valuable for making weapons, armor, or tools, and good trade in Lupos a city nearby.

The meat was wrapped tightly in oiled cloth. The hide would be dragged back whole – good for making winter clothes.

After they were done, Kosak began moving the stone platform. He made stone-like wheels beneath it and pushed it like a cart toward the village.

They didn't celebrate the kill; it was just like any other day. It was duty – their work.

They were halfway back when some pesky wolves tried to steal their prey. Kosak's job was transporting the boar, so protection fell to Talmir.

A small fight broke out. Dire wolves were smart – they were just testing the waters.

Most distracted Talmir while two tried to steal, but Kosak encased himself and the boar in a stone wall, so that plan fell through.

Once they realized Talmir wasn't easy prey either – with all the flying around – they retreated.

By the time they saw the glow of Kolma's lanterns through the treeline, the stars had begun to blink awake.

"Pesky little runts," said Kosak, spitting on the ground. "I had to use more mana for nothing. Now I'll have to drink one more beer to replenish my strength. By the way, you coming as well?"

"No, not today. I promised Saldia I'd finish building that fence."

"Meh, fine. More for me, I guess."

"Just don't drink too much, or Marie is going to rip your ears off." Said Talmir.

"Yea, yea don't worry about me."

They safely reached the gates.

Talmir looked up at them — thought of Saldia. Of Teclos.

A small smile escaped his lips. He was home.

After the checkup by the gates, they brought the spoils to the warehouse and split afterwards.

One went drinking. The other went home.