

## The Blood - Torin - Chapter 1

By:

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## Chapter 1 - Discovery

Torin sat apart from the other mourners. Rodienn was in a simple open box, his face calm, but showing the mark of winters he had never seen, and now would never see. He looked as someone many winters older than the eleven Rodienn had actually lived. Torin knew not how, but of one thing he was sure; he was responsible.

He glanced around, sensing eyes focused upon him. An old man was watching him, expressionless. Torin held his gaze until the old man looked away and kept looking as the old man made his way out of the building, the bright morning sun swallowing him as if attempting to consume him. Torin looked back at his friend. He wanted to cry. He wanted to scream. Most of all, he wanted to understand.

The next day, horses made their way into the center of the village. Horses carrying men wearing expensive cloth, and sporting bright swords at their sides. As curious people made their way to the

square, the old man ambled up to the horseman at the front of the group. They spoke, and the old man pointed at Torin.

The man on the horse dismounted and strode toward Torin and his parents.

"He is of The Blood."

The man's voice carried even as the exclamations from the crowd tried to drown the rest of his words. "The boy will come with us."

They had it half right, and yet so incredibly wrong. Who could blame them? Torin's existence could not be imagined even by anyone knowledgeable in such matters.

One survived a forgotten raid, escaped into the woods, and eventually stumbled onto a farm. The couple farming that remote piece of land kept to themselves and, more important, were childless. They took her in as their own.

The other was presumed lost when the convoy he traveled with was ambushed. But he was found, barely alive, by a trader chancing on the remains of the caravan.

One of The Blood and one of The Spirit, descendants of The Elders, lost to lineage records meticulously kept since The War. Without training, without guidance, they grew as normal people do, facing the turns of fickle fate. One of those turns had them meet, fall in love, and bring forth a child. He was a cute boy, quite smart, and not at all the monster described by legends. Legends handed down through many generations and eventually codified into

irrevocable laws. Laws with one purpose: to ensure that someone like he, Torin would never be.

And yet here he was, despite many futile pleas, riding off with the men of the bright swords.

Ledanei had taken him under her tutelage, and a new world had opened up to Torin. His formal training began on the passing of his thirteenth winter.

"First of all, it's not something we do. It's something we take. We harness lifeforce from people, focus it through us, and use it to do Magic." Ledanei patiently explained, her voice low, yet amplified in the sealed training room. The double doors would not open until the lesson was over, and until then, the extra thick walls ensured no words escaped to unintended ears.

"Why?" Torin had asked other questions, absorbed the answers, but was most bothered by this one.

"It's what we are, who we are. It is our destiny." Ledanai said it almost like a chant. It might as well have been, as it was oft repeated, drilled into every child of The Blood from the time they manifested the ability.

Ledanai paused. Torin was a late bloomer, nearly past the time of awakening. Any longer, and he would have grown into adulthood as one of the people, his abilities dormant forever. She had never trained one so old, nor so inquisitive. Her usual pupils were delighted to be considered special, privileged, and above the rest.

Those who did not would not survive long. Some never made it out of this training room. It had been debated Torin should never even be allowed to enter it, but rather be put down. But Torin was an enigma. A blank in blood lineage records spanning nearly a thousand winters.

The Blood Council wanted to know more about him, even as his existence weakened their authority. They had directed the Ruler to take him in, and in turn the Ruler directed Ledanai to begin his training.

"Long ago," Ledanai continued, "in a time lost to memory, two competing factions of The Elders fought for control of the world and its inhabitants. Those of The Spirit wanted to abandon the way of Magic and rely on their own resources and abilities. Those of The Blood wanted to harness and use Magic to help shape the world, as The Elders had done for countless winters."

"Why would the Spirits turn away from the benefits of Magic?" Torin's question was framed relative to recent evidence he'd seen the good Magic could do. During his short stay in the Ruler's compound he saw people healed from injuries, crops yields shored up, and even bad weather abated, all with Magic.

"They argued the cost was too great." Ledanai stopped to carefully frame her next statement. She knew of the history of the boy, and this was a critical juncture. "Magic uses up the lifeforce we harness. In people, it is not replaceable. It shortens their

lives, and if abused, it kills them." She stopped, letting this sink in.

She watched his expression carefully, noting the drop in the light emitting from the focusing stone. Part of the lesson was for Torin to keep the stone lit by tapping into the life force of the hundreds of people who served the Ruler's compound. This was a test, and she tensed; should he fail, she would have no choice but to end him.

His worst fears confirmed, Torin registered Ledanai's channeling, and correctly guessed the reason. He upped the Magic on the stone, returning it to its original shine. As he did so, Torin pondered what he had learned so far.

For one, he had killed Rodienn. It may have been unintentional, and he had saved Eviera from certain death, but it did not change the outcome for his now dead friend.

He also knew this particular Ruler stressed restraint. Under this Ruler's direction, Ledanai taught how to take small portions from everyone, not taxing anyone above any other. That made channeling particularly difficult, as one had to identify individual life forces and draw from them equally. In time it would come naturally, but for now it required effort. The natural tendency, as he sadly now knew, was to "grab" whatever was closest and easiest.

Not all Rulers were as considerate as this one.

Some Rulers viewed people as little more than energy sources; candles to be used and discarded. They were heavy-handed in their rule, and forcefully promoted breeding lest they ran out of resources to fuel their lifestyle. Others concentrated mainly on thieves, liars, and unpleasant individuals. Over time, those had been "used" out of the general population, a selective breeding of sorts, and they were now scarce. Many were like his Ruler; they directed the Bloods under them to conserve. But still, Magic was used to live a privileged life. The Blood saw it as fair payment for the benefits they provided in return.

In larger population centers, Bloods had thousands of lives to use and their impact on individuals was minimal. The Magic those Bloods could wield was multiples times greater than that available in these small communities. Torin correctly deduced there must be rulers who were both abusers and lived in huge population centers. They would be nearly untouchable.

He knew one more thing; something he did not share with anyone. As he sat there, he could sense Ledanai's own lifeforce. Were he of The Blood, he should not have been able to do so. While they fought with each other for positions of power using swords and Magic, members of The Blood could not tap into the lifeforce of their kind. Having tentatively, and furtively, drawn tiny amounts from both Ledanai and other Bloods, Torin knew he was not of their kind.

"What happened to The Spirits?" Torin asked. He registered that the question eased Ledanai's tension.

"They were defeated, and scattered." Ledanai resumed in her normal teaching tone. For a moment, she had felt something amiss but could not focus on it. Now relaxed, she dismissed it as stress and continued with the oft-repeated version of ancient, and not-so-ancient history.