

## 520 Toxin In Blood

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### *Ironwall*

They returned, taking over the skies once more in a macabre display. There was no pause, no build-up. The assault was instant, and Ironwall responded in kind. It was the usual deadly dance of prey and predator.

The world was alight with the sounds of artillery fire, the growling of wolves, and the roaring of vampires.

Kael coordinated his men, their first priority the domes. If the vampires reached the specially made domes imbued with Eve and Hades's individual essences, damaging them in any way, it would spell damnation for the civilians within.

They didn't get this far into the Bloodmoon and close to the finish line only to fail.

**"CONCENTRATE FIRE ON THE VANGUARD!"**  
Kael roared. **"DON'T LET THEM NEAR THE DOMES!"**

The artillery swiveled, unleashing hell.

Vampires exploded mid-flight—wings shredded,  
bodies torn apart by silver-infused shells.

But more kept coming.

Always more.

They descended like a plague—claws extended,  
fangs bared, eyes burning with hunger.

Ironwall's wolves met them on the ground.

Tooth and claw. Blood and fury.

The battlefield became a slaughterhouse. 1

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Kael fought in the thick of it—shifting between  
wolf and human, rifle in hand one moment, jaws  
tearing flesh the next.

A vampire dove at him from above.

He fired. Caught it in the chest. It spiraled down,  
crashing into the snow.

Another came from the side.

Kael shifted, twisted, caught its wing in his jaws,  
and ripped .

It screamed—a high-pitched, inhuman sound—  
and fell.

But the cost—

Gods, the cost.

Around him, gammas were falling.

Not just wounded.

Taken.

Vampires would swoop down, grab a wounded gamma, and drain them mid-flight.

Kael watched in horror as one of his soldiers—a young gamma named Petra—was lifted into the air, struggling, screaming.

The vampire sank its fangs into her throat.

Her screams cut off.

Her body went limp.

The vampire dropped her—an empty husk—and dove back into the fray, energized, replenished. 3

**"FALL BACK TO DEFENSIVE POSITIONS!"** Kael bellowed. **"DON'T LET THEM ISOLATE YOU!"**

But it was chaos.

Pure, bloody chaos.

The vampires were feeding on the battlefield.

Using Ironwall's own dead and wounded as fuel.

And still, Ironwall fought.

Still, they held.

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Then—

That presence .

Kael felt it before he saw it.

The crushing weight. The suffocating pressure.

He looked up.

And there it was.

The vampire from before.

Larger. Darker. Wings spread wide, blotting out the crimson sky.

It descended slowly this time. Deliberately.

Its eyes locked on Kael.

Kael shifted back to human, raised his rifle.

Fired.

The vampire moved —faster than Kael could track.

The bullet missed.

And then it was on him.

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The impact drove Kael into the ground. 1

Claws raked across his chest, tearing through armor, shredding flesh.

Kael roared, twisted, threw the vampire off.

It landed on all fours, wings folded, eyes burning.

Kael shifted—bones cracking, fur erupting.

They collided.

Wolf against monster.

Kael's jaws snapped at its throat. It caught his muzzle in one clawed hand, squeezed.

Pain exploded through Kael's jaw.

He twisted, raked his claws across its chest.

Black blood sprayed.

The vampire snarled, threw him.

Kael hit the ground hard, rolled, came up snarling.

They clashed again—brutal, vicious, neither giving ground.

But Kael was tired.



Hours of fighting. Wounded. Exhausted.  
And the vampire was fresh.  
It got past his guard.  
Claws slashed across his ribs. His vision blurred.  
He stumbled.  
The vampire didn't hesitate.  
It grabbed Kael by the throat, lifted him off the  
ground, and slammed him into the earth.  
Once. Twice. Three times.  
Kael's vision whited out. His body screamed.  
He couldn't—  
Couldn't fight back.  
Couldn't move. 1  
The vampire leaned in close, its breath rancid,  
hot.  
Then it bit.  
Fangs sank into Kael's neck, it crushed bone.  
Kael's body went rigid—pain lancing through  
him. 2  
The vampire suctioned, sucking.

For three seconds, everything was agony.

Then—

The vampire shrieked.

It jerked back, releasing Kael, its mouth smoking, sizzling.

Black blood and saliva dripped from its lips.

Blisters erupted across its tongue, its throat.

It clawed at its own face, gagging, convulsing.

Kael collapsed to the ground, gasping, clutching his neck.

The vampire staggered back, eyes wide with shock and rage.

Around them, other vampires noticed.

Saw their leader reeling.

Saw the smoke rising from its mouth.

Saw the black veins spreading from its throat.

One of them landed nearby, staring. "What—"

The lead vampire spat blood, its voice a strangled rasp. "The blood—poisoned—"

Panic rippled through the swarm.

The vampires who had been feeding—draining the wounded gammas—suddenly stopped.

Looked at each other.

At the bodies they'd drained.

What if more of them are poisoned?

What if we've already drunk tainted blood?

The lead vampire snarled, wings flaring.  
"RETREAT!"

The order echoed across the battlefield.

The vampires pulled back—abandoning their prey, abandoning the assault.

They rose into the crimson sky, fleeing because of paranoia.

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Kael lay on the ground, gasping, blood streaming from his neck.

Voss appeared at his side, dropping to his knees.  
"Commander! MEDIC!"

"I'm—" Kael coughed, spat blood. "I'm fine."

"You're not fine, your neck—"

"Silver," Kael rasped. "In my blood. Thea's idea.

Weeks of injections. Building tolerance."

Voss stared at him, eyes wide. "You poisoned yourself?"

"Made myself a weapon." Kael's vision swam. "It worked."

Around them, Ironwall's forces were regrouping. The vampires were gone—vanished into the red sky.

"They're afraid now," Voss said quietly, watching the sky. "They don't know who else might be poisoned. They'll be paranoid. Cautious."

"Good." Kael forced himself to sit up, wincing. "Buys us time."

A Delta arrived, dropping beside Kael, hands already glowing. "Hold still, Commander."

Kael gritted his teeth as the Delta worked on his neck, sealing the wounds, stemming the bleeding.

But the damage was done.

Not to Kael but to the vampires. They'd come expecting easy prey. They'd found poison.

Even if for Kael it had come at a price.

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Getting injected with silver however little had been torture.

But now the vampires would retreat to regroup, wondering if the rest of the gammascarried the same toxins and when they realized that they did not react to the blood, they would return, wary but ready to put a final end to it all.

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