

The Alpha's Forbidden Bite #Chapter 2: A Pack on Edge - Read The Alpha's Forbidden Bite Chapter 2: A Pack on Edge

Morning came grey and cold to Ashveil.

The kind of morning that felt like a warning overcast sky pressing low against the treeline, the air carrying a dampness that wasn't quite rain but wasn't quite not. The wolves of Ashveil Pack were accustomed to cold. They lived in it, trained in it, ran under it in their other forms without complaint. But there was a different quality to the chill that settled over the grounds that morning, and most of the pack felt it in the way animals feel things not with the mind, but somewhere beneath it.

Axel was already awake when the dawn came. He had slept three hours, which was more than he'd managed most nights in the past month. He stood at the window of the Alpha's quarters looking out at the grounds below, a mug of black coffee in one hand, studying the space with the particular attention of a man taking inventory of something he hadn't seen in a long time.

The training yard was empty at this hour. The outbuildings weapons storage, the infirmary, the supply house sat solid and quiet in the grey light. Beyond them, the forest rose up thick and dark along the northern ridge, the treeline as familiar to him as a face he had known all his life. He had run those woods for the first time at age six. He had fought his first real fight at the border of those trees when he was sixteen. He had buried his father in the earth at the northern edge of that forest four years ago, during a winter harder than this one.

He didn't feel sentimental about any of it.

He felt responsible.

There was a difference.

The briefing started at six sharp, in the war room. Daren was there with four senior warriors, Petra Halvs, Soren Blacke, Calla Mourné, and Russ Yodin. They stood as Axel came in. He waved them down without ceremony and took the head of the table, and Daren began.

The full picture was worse than the summary from the night before, and the summary had already been bad.

In the fourteen months of Axel's absence, Ashveil had absorbed three separate border incidents along the southern line. The Halvern Pack newly aggressive under their young Alpha had tested the perimeter with increasing boldness, moving from minor encroachments to outright confrontations. Ashveil's warriors had held the line. But holding a line had costs. Injuries, resources, morale.

The eastern situation was harder to quantify. Daren laid out the incidents chronologically patrol anomalies, strange sounds in the Dead Corridor, the episode with the two young wolves who had lost their memories. There had been other things too,

smaller things. A scout who came back from the corridor boundary with scratch marks she couldn't explain. A patrol dog that refused to approach the eastern treeline for three days running, then returned to normal as suddenly as it had started.

"Nothing definitive," Petra said, from her seat two down from Axel's left. She was a compact, capable woman in her mid-thirties with close-cropped red hair and a directness that Axel had always respected. "But consistent enough to be a pattern."

"Has anyone crossed the corridor and come back with information?" Axel asked.

"We've tried." Soren shifted in his chair. He was the oldest warrior present, a grey-bearded man of fifty with arms like bridge cables. "Our best tracker, Finn, made it halfway through two weeks ago. Said the air changed. Pressure dropped. He felt watched." A pause. "Finn doesn't spook easily."

"No," Axel agreed. "He doesn't."

"The Voss Clan has been quiet for almost eight years," Daren said. He had a file open in front of him, though Axel suspected he had most of it memorized. "The truce our fathers negotiated held through all of that. But eight years is a long time. Things change inside a clan just like they do inside a pack."

"Do we know if the current Voss leadership still honors the truce?"

"We don't know who the current Voss leadership is," Daren said flatly. "The clan doesn't exactly hold open elections."

Axel absorbed that.

He asked about the pack's internal situation next. Population, resources, emotional temperature. This part was harder for the warriors to speak about; wolves were not naturally comfortable discussing the softness of things, the way fear moved through a community like weather. But Axel pressed until he got honest answers.

What emerged was a picture of a pack that had held together through discipline and habit rather than confidence. The elders had maintained order. Daren had made the necessary decisions. The warriors had done their jobs. But the absence of their Alpha had left something unfilled, a specific kind of gravity that a pack needed around its center, and without which everything drifted, just slightly, in ways that accumulated over time.

He could see it now that he was looking for it. In the way the warriors at this table sat solid, competent, but careful. Like men and women who had been managing weight that wasn't theirs to manage and weren't sure how to set it down now that he was back.

He let them set it down.

"I'm not leaving again," he said. He didn't say it loudly. He didn't add anything to it. He simply stated it with the same matter-of-fact certainty he used for patrol schedules, and then moved on.

He saw Petra's shoulders drop a fraction.

After the briefing, he went to see the two young wolves who had lost their memories.

They were brothers.. Eli and Cord Farrow, nineteen and twenty-one. They had been

brought to the infirmary as a precaution after the incident and had since been cleared for regular duties, but Axel found them in the yard together, running drills with the kind of excess energy that young wolves developed when something had unsettled them and they didn't know how to talk about it.

They stopped when they saw him. Both of them went still the way young pack members tended to do in the Alpha's presence not from fear, exactly, but from the instinctive recognition of hierarchy that ran deeper than manners.

"Walk with me," Axel said.

He took them around the training yard perimeter and listened as they told him what they remembered, which wasn't much. They had gone to the corridor boundary on a dare the stupid, reckless kind of dare that twenty-year-old wolves issued each other when they were bored and the night was long. They had crossed the marker. They remembered the first twenty or thirty steps into the corridor. The change in temperature. The way the sounds of the forest shifted.

Then nothing. Three hours. Then the border again, morning light, their clothes damp with dew, their heads aching like the inside of a bell that had been rung too hard.

"Did you smell anything?" Axel asked. "Before the gap."

Eli....the younger one hesitated. "Something cold," he said finally. "Clean. Like the air before a storm, but not the same."

Axel said nothing.

He thanked them and sent them back to their drills.

He stood for a moment in the middle of the training yard, the grey sky pressing down above him, and thought about what clean-cold meant in the context of the Dead Corridor. He thought about eight years of quiet. He thought about things that moved in silence and left no footprints and could strip three hours out of a man's memory without leaving a mark on his skin.

He thought about the Voss Clan.

His jaw tightened almost imperceptibly.

Around the edges of the packhouse grounds, the forest stood dark and patient and indifferent, holding whatever it held in that deep, old way that forests always had.

Axel turned and walked back inside to begin the work of rebuilding what had drifted.

He had a feeling he would need his pack at full strength very soon.

He had no idea yet how right he was.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.