

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The chapter begins with a reflection on the relationship between a dragon's strength and its rider's signet power, emphasizing that a more powerful dragon correlates with a stronger signet manifestation. It warns about the dangers of unbonded cadets seeking to bond with dragons, highlighting the risks of ambition and the potential for manipulation. This sets a tone of cautious awareness about the dynamics of power and loyalty within the dragon-rider hierarchy, illustrating the importance of careful alliances and the potential consequences of overreach in their society.

The protagonist experiences a shift from the communal barracks life to the privacy of their own room, which feels both luxurious and somewhat surreal after months of crowded quarters. Their interactions with others, particularly Sawyer and Rhiannon, reveal underlying tensions and unspoken feelings. Sawyer's awkwardness suggests unresolved emotions, while Rhiannon's teasing hints at a budding romantic curiosity. The protagonist's internal conflict over a perceived lack of mutual feelings with a squad leader underscores themes of hope, disappointment, and the complexities of relationships amid the pressures of their training environment.

As the day progresses, the narrative details social interactions among the first-year students, including exchanges about bonding and the significance of relics, which symbolize their connection to their dragons. Ridoc's playful banter about relics and the camaraderie among the students underscore the camaraderie and competition that define their daily routines. The mention of the "riders" title signifies an emerging sense of identity and belonging, contrasting with the earlier hierarchy and emphasizing the importance of bonds, status, and shared experiences in their communal life.

The chapter concludes with a tense encounter during breakfast, where the protagonist's awareness of underlying threats becomes palpable. The hostility from Oren, who harbors resentment and animosity, hints at ongoing conflicts and dangers

lurking beneath the surface. The protagonist's cautious choice of food reflects a strategic mindset, while their interaction with Ridoc and others illustrates the fragile alliances and the constant vigilance required in their environment. The chapter closes with a sense of anticipation, as the characters prepare to face the challenges ahead, both physically and politically, within their dangerous and unpredictable world.

