

# CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The chapter opens with a historical account of gryphon attacks, highlighting their first recorded incident near Resson in 1 AU. This event marked the beginning of a prolonged conflict over territorial control, especially around vulnerable border regions like the trading post. The ongoing struggle reflects the broader theme of territorial disputes driven by power and strategic advantage. The narrative situates these conflicts within a larger historical context, emphasizing the persistent threat posed by gryphons and the importance of border defenses in the ongoing war. This background sets the stage for understanding the strategic significance of the locations and the persistent danger faced by those defending these borders.

The story then shifts to a detailed depiction of a flight into Athebyne, illustrating the physical and emotional toll of aerial travel for the characters. As they traverse the Cliffs of Dralor and surrounding mountains, the narrative captures the breathtaking scenery and the inherent dangers of flying in such treacherous terrain. The characters' interactions reveal their familiarity with flying and the physical exhaustion that accompanies long hours in the saddle. The scene also introduces the characters' relationships, particularly the bond between the narrator and the dragons, Tairn and Andarna, as well as their comrades. It underscores the importance of teamwork and the reliance on dragon companions for survival and strategic movement.

The chapter explores the shift beyond the protective wards, emphasizing the change in magical dynamics and communication. The absence of wards causes magic to become more unpredictable, complicating command and coordination within the squad. This sense of unease is compounded by the strange, foreboding atmosphere as they approach Athebyne, hinting at potential threats and unseen dangers awaiting them. The characters' heightened alertness and cautious behavior reflect the unpredictable nature of the upcoming confrontation. Their careful preparations and the

sense of foreboding set a tense tone for what lies ahead, emphasizing the stakes of their mission.

In the final section, personal tensions and emotional vulnerabilities surface amid the group's physical exhaustion. The narrator reflects on the physical toll of the journey and her mental state, marked by anxiety and love for Xaden. Conversations reveal concerns about safety, responsibilities, and the unpredictability of the War Games, where a significant portion of first-years typically do not survive. The chapter concludes with a tense but intimate moment of connection between the narrator and Xaden, illustrating the complex blend of love, duty, and professionalism. This emotional undercurrent adds depth to their characters, highlighting the human side of the military and strategic challenges faced by the squad.