

Chapter 19: you get ready to rumble

The chapter opens with the protagonist reflecting on the passage of time and the recent death of Alabaster, setting a tense tone as Castrima-over faces imminent threat from Rennanis forces. The comm's tunnels are sealed off by orogenes, and the Strongbacks look to the protagonist as their last hope. Ykka, the headwoman, expresses concerns about the enemy's stone eaters and the vulnerability of Castrima's ventilation ducts. Despite their strained relationship due to the protagonist's earlier decisions, Ykka acknowledges her as a crucial asset in the coming conflict.

As the protagonist moves through Castrima-over, the devastation of the ongoing Season is evident: ash blankets the comm, and Rennanis soldiers, now a unified tribe, occupy the area. The protagonist stands out starkly amid the gray, their colorful attire and the mysterious spinel floating behind them drawing attention. The spinel's eerie behavior unnerves the enemy, hinting at the protagonist's latent power. The soldiers, though ordinary in appearance, are marked by their Sanzed heritage and tribal insignias, underscoring their collective identity and threat.

The protagonist arrives at the comm's central pavilion, now repurposed as Rennanis's operations center. Maps reveal the enemy's knowledge of Castrima's ventilation ducts, a critical vulnerability. The leader of the Rennanis forces, an unassuming yet formidable woman, greets the protagonist with cold indifference, instantly dehumanizing them as a rogg. This moment highlights the deep-seated prejudice against orogenes, contrasting with the protagonist's inability to reciprocate such detachment. The tension escalates as both sides prepare for a confrontation.

The chapter culminates in a stark realization of the stakes: the protagonist must fight not just for survival but for the survival of Castrima's people. The enemy's indifference and the protagonist's resolve underscore the emotional and strategic weight of the impending clash. The spinel's presence and the protagonist's unique abilities hint at a

pivotal role in the coming battle, leaving the reader anticipating the inevitable confrontation between the two forces.

