

In a moment of desperation, the narrator contemplates his regrets while facing a disassembler field interface that threatens to reduce him to slurry for Niflheim's colonists. Despite this harrowing situation, he reconciles with his past decision involving Gwen Johansen, which led to his current predicament. Stranded in Kiruna and on Darius Blank's bad side, he reflects on his friendship with Berto. They had become close during school, sharing a passion for flight simulators, while Berto excelled in everything. Berto's talent led to a successful career in pog-ball, but years later, as Berto prepared for a comeback, he unknowingly put the narrator in a dire financial situation.

Despite warning Berto of his chances, the narrator placed a bet on Berto's eventual failure, leading to overwhelming debt that left him vulnerable to Blank's threats. Berto, feeling guilty, suggested the narrator join him aboard the *Drakkar*, but the odds were against him considering his lack of qualifications. After receiving an immediate rejection from a Security position, the narrator tried to downplay his debts, thinking Blank wouldn't kill him simply because he owed money. Yet, he soon learned the harsh truth when confronted by a thug who tortured him using a neural inducer.

Surviving that encounter unsettled him, but he sought an escape route through a position on the *Drakkar*. When he discovered only an "Expendable" slot was available, Berto voiced his concerns but ultimately left the decision to the narrator, who was determined to escape his current circumstances. As he prepared for the interview, the narrator felt a sense of resignation towards the potential dangers that awaited him, reflecting that the fear of death had already manifested in his earlier traumatic experience. Thus begins his journey towards the unknown aboard the *Drakkar*, a path paved with risks and a flicker of hope for a better future .