

# 013

In the early hours after a disturbing dream, the protagonist, who is sharing a bed with Eight, finds it impossible to return to sleep. Frustrated, he decides to head to the cafeteria for some reading. There, he encounters the emptiness of the corridors, which align with his craving for food he cannot afford due to zeroed-out rations. As he browses through archives, he stumbles across a file on New Hope, revealing a complex history of a colony that had collapsed after a brutal civil war decades ago over whether a native bird species was sentient or merely a food source. This revelation stirs thoughts on the fragility of societal constructs and the ease with which descent into chaos can occur.

As Eight and Cat contact him via message regarding duty shifts, the tension of their recent activities looms in the background. Cat expresses frustration about their security roles, lamenting the inhospitable conditions of their planet, Niflheim. The protagonist dismisses her worries about armor suggesting their situation could be worse, while Cat struggles with the nature of their dangerous duties, hinting at a deeper examination of personal survival instincts.

Later, while on patrol, the duo engages with a creature known as a creeper. Cat kills one, but the situation escalates when they perceive more approaching. Amidst the chaos, the protagonist experiences a seizure-like event, flashing between consciousness and blurry visions of humans, further complicating his grasp on reality.

After regaining consciousness in a medical facility, the protagonist learns from Cat that they survived a potentially deadly encounter only due to pylons and Cat's quick actions. The medical technician, Burke, expresses concerns over the protagonist's physical state, although there's no visible trauma, making it uncertain why the protagonist blacked out. Despite cautioning him about his ocular implant—a technology interfacing directly with his brain—Burke cannot offer immediate help.

As the protagonist contemplates his experiences and the implications for their mission on Niflheim, he receives messages about dinner plans, indicating a dynamic between him and Eight. This reflects the concern of maintaining normalcy amid the backdrop of perilous survival. The chapter closes as interpersonal conflicts about sharing resources emerge, foreshadowing how personal relationships will influence their survival in this harsh environment.