

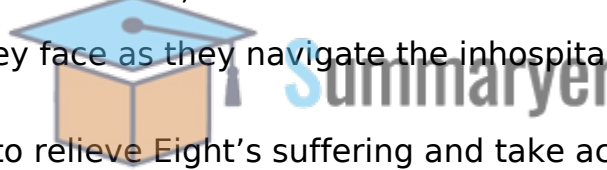
Chapter 15

Chapter 15 opens with the characters Seven and Eight enduring the harsh realities of a food shortage in a survival-driven atmosphere. Eight, visibly distressed by the severe rationing, openly expresses his frustration, reflecting on the drastic change since he woke up from the tank. The contrast between his dismay and Seven's level-headed approach highlights the strain their circumstances are placing on their minds. Seven, while sympathetic to Eight's struggles, tries to remain pragmatic, continuing to ration their limited resources with a sense of responsibility. The bond between them is evident as they share this tension, with Eight even joking about the hunger-induced madness, hinting at his growing desperation. Though the exchange has moments of levity, the weight of their situation is undeniable, creating a complex emotional landscape where humor and hardship intertwine.

As their conversation continues, Seven receives a message from Black Hornet, a fellow crew member, who informs him of a change in flying duties and expresses a desire to meet. Eight, seeing the need for Seven to take a break from the grim environment, encourages him to go, offering a temporary respite from their struggles. This interaction sets the stage for Seven's reflection on the broader challenges of the colonization mission, particularly the historical failures of past expeditions. The tragic history of the *Ching Shih*, a ship that failed in the face of resource depletion, looms over their current situation. The crew of the *Ching Shih* perished, trapped in space with dwindling supplies, and their demise serves as a reminder of the dire fate that might await them if they cannot overcome their current challenges. This historical reflection underscores the gravity of the current crisis and foreshadows the difficult decisions the crew will face moving forward.

Seeking solitude, Seven retreats to a small dome that, unlike the bustling spaces they once enjoyed, offers little comfort or distraction. This barren, isolating environment

echoes the emotional and psychological toll that the prolonged crisis is taking on the crew. In the dome, Seven encounters Highsmith, a history enthusiast, but instead of engaging, he withdraws into his thoughts. The comparison to past colonists who perished under similar conditions weighs heavily on him, reinforcing his sense of isolation. This moment of introspection leaves Seven pondering whether their colony will meet the same tragic end as those who came before them. The looming question of survival hangs in the air, making it clear that their situation is becoming increasingly dire. As he continues to reflect, Seven feels the immense weight of history and the uncertain future they face as they navigate the inhospitable planet.



Driven by a desire to relieve Eight's suffering and take action, Seven reaches out to Mickey8, confirming their location and timeline. With the urgency of their situation becoming clearer, Seven heads to the gym, hoping to find a brief escape. However, his encounter with Cat, a fellow crew member, leads to an unexpected yet meaningful conversation about grief and loss. Cat opens up about the recent loss of a bunkmate, a moment that resonates deeply with Seven as it highlights the emotional toll the mission has taken on everyone. The connection between them grows as they share their mutual struggles, and for the first time, Seven feels a sense of relief. This conversation offers a moment of vulnerability and understanding amidst the cold, isolating reality of their mission. The shared experiences of grief, isolation, and the constant struggle for survival create a bond between them, providing comfort in the face of the overwhelming challenges they face. As the chapter concludes, Seven's growing connection with Cat offers a small, but significant, glimmer of hope that emotional connections can still be formed despite the harsh environment they inhabit.