

# Chapter 5

Chapter 5 opens with Seven, the protagonist, facing a daunting and uncomfortable task: using the cycler, a device designed to disassemble organic matter. The thought of being forced into the machine causes him significant anxiety, as he finds the idea far worse than any danger he's faced before. This heightened fear stems from the already precarious situation in which Seven and his companion, Eight, find themselves—living as multiples, with a single registered identity. The constant threat of exposure weighs heavily on their minds, knowing that their existence as clones could lead to deadly consequences if discovered. Despite this, Eight expresses deep concern for Seven's well-being and intervenes, trying to prevent him from making a hasty decision in his fear. The emotional and psychological pressure of their situation continues to build, as the two grapple with the risks and limitations they face in their struggle for survival.

Their conversation shifts to their dwindling food supply, which further adds to the tension. Eight suggests that they start rationing more creatively by consuming cheaper paste, a solution that Seven resists, unwilling to accept such a desperate measure. They both understand that the severity of their situation requires careful thinking, yet Seven remains adamant about not resorting to something that feels like a compromise. They briefly consider asking Berto, a mutual acquaintance, for additional resources, but after weighing their options, they realize that Berto may not be a reliable source of help. This realization deepens their sense of isolation, as they recognize that they have few allies and even fewer viable options to secure their survival. Their continued struggle to obtain food is just one aspect of their much larger fear: the threat of exposure and the unpredictable wrath of Commander Marshall, who would surely react harshly if their secret were uncovered.

As the two continue to discuss their options, Seven reflects on the fragile relationships they have with others in the colony, especially the delicate balance of trust in such a high-stakes environment. The sudden news of Gabe Torricelli's disappearance heightens the already tense atmosphere. Seven recalls seeing Gabe not long before his vanishing and begins to consider the possibility that the creatures they previously encountered might now pose a direct threat to the colony. This realization brings a sense of urgency, as the threat from the creatures grows more immediate. The disappearance of Gabe amplifies the uncertainty and danger that looms over the colony, forcing Seven and Eight to confront the fact that survival may require more than just careful planning—it might require luck, vigilance, and the ability to act quickly in a situation where everything seems stacked against them. The urgency to create a reliable and foolproof plan intensifies as they face the grim reality of their existence and the very real danger of exposure.

As the chapter progresses, Seven is summoned to meet with Commander Marshall, signaling a potential escalation of the already strained atmosphere within the colony. The meeting with Marshall represents a crucial turning point for Seven and Eight, as the Commander's reaction to their existence as multiples could dramatically change the course of their survival. The summons is a reminder of the precariousness of their situation and the ever-present threat of discovery. Seven knows that this meeting could be a decisive moment, one that could either secure their safety or lead to their undoing. The chapter ends with rising tension, as the protagonist must now prepare for an uncertain conversation with someone who holds the power to determine their fate. This interaction encapsulates the deep themes of trust, identity, and survival in a hostile and unforgiving environment, highlighting the characters' emotional and psychological struggles as they navigate the complexities of their existence.