

# Chapter 20

Chapter 20 begins with a palpable sense of tension as Mickey, Nasha, and Eight are escorted through a cold, desolate corridor by two intimidating goons. The oppressive atmosphere only grows as they descend a flight of stairs, the harsh steps echoing through the otherwise silent space. Nasha, ever defiant, challenges the legality of their treatment, but the larger goon dismisses her challenge with a cold, hostile response, showing no regard for her words. The group expects to be taken to a prison cell or a dungeon, but instead, they are led into a Security ready room—an odd choice for prisoners. This room, filled with various weapons and snacks, offers an unsettling contrast to the seriousness of their situation. As the goons leave, they sternly warn the group to stay away from the equipment, but Nasha, ever curious and rebellious, attempts to access a nearby locker. Unfortunately, her efforts are futile, leaving the trio to stew in the uncertainty of their circumstances.

As the group contemplates their current position, they share fleeting moments of camaraderie in the face of their dire situation. Nasha, trying to cope with the gravity of the moment, jests about the possibility of their impending demise, a nervous attempt to lighten the mood. However, Eight, ever pragmatic and calm, reassures her that, as a key atmospheric pilot, her role makes her vital to the mission's success, thus ensuring she is not in immediate danger. This small comfort, however, does little to ease the underlying anxiety that all three feel. Mickey, more reflective, considers the immutability of their situation, realizing the cold reality that they are stuck in a dome that has become less a safe haven and more a prison. This dome, situated on the unforgiving planet of Niflheim, is meant to protect them, yet it now feels like a trap, with no escape in sight. Nasha's attempts to joke about her fate reveal the tension that hangs heavily over them, a constant reminder of how precarious their lives are and how little control they have over their destiny.

As time passes, the arrival of a new figure, a goon named Lucas, deepens the tension. Lucas delivers grim news, revealing the full scope of the group's predicament—Marshall, the head authority figure, is furious about the existence of two versions of Mickey. This unsettling revelation leads to a confrontation in Marshall's office, where his anger is palpable. Marshall accuses the group of theft and of making serious miscalculations regarding their existence as multiples. His harsh words and accusations underscore the grave nature of their situation. The conversation grows even more tense as Marshall demands that both versions of Mickey be sent to the cyclor, a fate that none of them want to face. His declaration hangs heavily in the air, confirming that their lives remain at the mercy of Marshall's decisions. At the same time, suspicion begins to grow around Nasha, suggesting that her role in their situation may not be as clear-cut as it first appeared. The mounting suspicion and tension add a new layer of complexity to their already fraught predicament.

The chapter escalates further as Marshall's cold command and the threat of death loom over the group. The reality of their existence, intertwined with the possibility of being erased for the sake of order and control, becomes all too apparent. Mickey's reflection on their lives reveals the cyclical nature of their existence—constantly in peril, yet always fighting for survival. This realization deepens the existential dread that has been building, as Mickey and the others face the possibility of their lives ending abruptly and violently. They are not merely fighting for survival in the physical sense but also confronting the moral implications of their identities and the meaning of their existence. As Mickey considers the gravity of their situation, the question of what it means to be human becomes increasingly urgent. Their struggle is not just one of survival but also a fight to retain their autonomy in a world that seems intent on erasing them. With their fate hanging in the balance, the chapter closes on a note of uncertainty, leaving the group to face an uncertain and dangerous future, where the very nature of their existence may be the ultimate obstacle they must overcome. This chapter paints a grim picture of their survival, marked by constant fear and the looming presence of authority, leaving the reader to wonder what, if anything, can be done to alter the course of their lives.