

007

In this chapter, the protagonist, Mickey Barnes, reflects on his situation as he faces a meeting with Hieronymus Marshall. He is apprehensive about being late, especially considering the potential consequences on his food supply. Upon entering Marshall's office, he encounters his colleague Berto and is immediately placed on the defensive by Marshall, who questions his iterations as an Expendable.

Mickey admits to being the eighth iteration, and Marshall interrogates Berto about how Mickey's previous iteration ended up "lost." Berto explains that Mickey7 fell into a deep crevasse during a reconnaissance mission, which leads to Marshall's frustration over the failure to recover Mickey's body. Marshall emphasizes that their agricultural section is struggling, and the loss of Mickey7 has resulted in a significant hit to their food supplies. As a penalty, both Mickey and Berto's rations are docked by twenty percent, which leaves them with insufficient calories.

Once out of the meeting, the tension between Mickey and Berto boils over. Mickey confronts Berto about not being truthful regarding the circumstances of his last death, revealing feelings of betrayal and distrust. Berto attempts to defend himself, explaining that he would not have left Mickey to die intentionally, even if he felt it was risky to attempt a rescue. Their interaction highlights the fraught relationship and ongoing dynamics between their friendship and the harsh realities they face.

Later, Mickey returns to his quarters and finds his new iteration, Eight, sprawled in bed. They engage in a discussion about their operational duties and rationing dilemmas. Mickey reveals their recent repercussions regarding caloric intake and the necessity of planning for any hazardous assignments. Eight proposes that he should handle the next dangerous task while Mickey takes it easy, but Mickey asserts his unwillingness to take on all perilous jobs. Their conversation signifies a shifting

partnership as two iterations must coexist, share responsibilities, and navigate the complexities of their existence in a harsh environment.

As the chapter concludes, Mickey receives an urgent command from headquarters, suggesting that whatever awaits him may challenge the fragile cooperation he has begun to establish with Eight.

