

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 opens with the protagonist, Mickey, reflecting on the unsettling situation that has led him to a disassembler field interface, a device that threatens to reduce him to a slurry for the colonists of Niflheim. In the face of this life-threatening reality, Mickey grapples with the weight of regret over past decisions, particularly those surrounding his initial choices involving Gwen Johansen. This moment of despair prompts a series of reflections on the series of events that pushed him toward his current predicament. He recalls his time on Kiruna, a place where he had been stuck, both emotionally and financially, and how the looming presence of Darius Blank had made every day feel like a struggle for survival. Mickey's thoughts naturally turn to his past friendship with Berto, a relationship that had begun in their school days and which had defined much of Mickey's life. Their bond had been rooted in a shared passion for flight simulators, with Berto quickly excelling in all areas. Though Mickey had always admired Berto's skill and achievements, it was Berto's success in pog-ball that truly propelled him to fame. Yet, years later, Berto's attempt to revive his career, unknowingly, placed Mickey in a financial crisis that would have lasting consequences.

Mickey recounts how he had placed a bet on Berto's inevitable failure, despite his warnings to Berto that the comeback attempt would likely be unsuccessful. This bet, born from a mixture of doubt and misguided hope, spiraled out of control, and Mickey found himself overwhelmed by debt. This financial strain drew the attention of Darius Blank, a figure whose reputation for ruthlessness made him a constant source of fear. Mickey had tried to convince himself that Blank's threats were mere posturing, that he wouldn't go as far as to take his life over money. However, this illusion was shattered when a thug, sent by Blank, confronted Mickey, using a neural inducer to torture him in an effort to break him. This traumatic encounter marked a turning point for Mickey, forcing him to confront the reality of his situation: his life was at risk, and without a

way out, survival seemed impossible. The fear of Blank's growing influence and the brutal consequences of his debts left Mickey with little choice but to search for a way to escape.

In a desperate attempt to escape his dire circumstances, Mickey set his sights on a position aboard the *Drakkar*, hoping that joining the crew could provide the fresh start he so desperately needed. However, when Mickey discovered that the only available position was that of an "Expendable," the reality of the situation hit him hard. The Expendable role was inherently dangerous, reserved for individuals who would carry out the most hazardous tasks, often at the cost of their lives. Mickey had no qualifications for other roles, and with no other viable option, he reluctantly accepted the position. Even though Berto expressed concern for his safety, he ultimately left the decision up to Mickey. The choice, though fraught with danger, seemed to be the only escape from his current life. As Mickey prepared for the interview, he couldn't shake the sense of resignation that filled him. The fear of death, which had been instilled in him by his torture at the hands of Blank's thug, seemed inevitable, but at least it was a way out of the crushing despair he had been living in. This decision set Mickey on a path that was uncertain and full of risk, but it also provided a glimmer of hope, a chance to break free from the cycle of debt and fear that had defined his life for so long.

As the chapter progresses, Mickey reflects deeply on the choices that led him here, acknowledging that his decision to become an Expendable was not driven by desire but by necessity. His past had closed off all other options, and while the dangers of his new role were undeniable, it seemed to be his only way to escape the crushing weight of his debts and the threats that loomed over him. Mickey realizes that his survival on the *Drakkar* will depend on more than just his ability to avoid death; it will require him to reconcile with his own sense of purpose and the grim reality of what he has become. The Expendable role, though a potential death sentence, also represents a final chance at freedom from the life he had been shackled to on Midgard. Mickey's journey into the unknown is not just about physical survival, but about grappling with the existential questions of identity, worth, and the sacrifices one is willing to make to

escape a life of desperation. This chapter sets the stage for Mickey's continued struggle for survival, where the boundaries between hope and despair are constantly shifting, and the ultimate question of whether he can escape his past and redefine his future remains unanswered.

