

By the light of Tony's phone Cary and Eve believed the tunnel-like basement's floor to be clear enough for the incoming group to safely land upon it at last. They had been in the dark about how many newcomers there were going to be, so they'd just had to move as much as they could into the adjoining passageways. Given that they'd had many hours before the Naemods were in position to be picked up, the task had been stretched out as much as possible. This was both to ensure that they had something to occupy themselves with and to make the effort of moving the copious amounts of debris less of a strenuous job.

With Tony and Philip having left but moments before, the pair stepped back out of the way of the makeshift landing site, slipping back into the thresholds of passageways, out of the way yet keeping the temporarily-bare floor largely in sight. Mere tens of seconds later the chamber before them was suddenly filled, first by rippling air then by a tightly-packed throng of leather-clad individuals. After what was probably their first journey in *transit*, many appeared dazed and confused. Yet despite their bewilderments, those who'd stumbled over in the direction of the passageways immediately caught a glimpse of the astonished girls, who were indeed so, having not expected such a vast number of new arrivals. Upon spying the wide-eyed teens these Naemods reached out with pale green hands, groping the air whilst emitting low-level pained cries from their stretching mouths.

Hearing their calls from within the heart of the huddle, Ezekial bellowed, "They are friends, of the Mancynn at least. Permit them to do as they wish, so long as we are in their debt."

Those Naemods on the outskirts never took their dry eyes off Cary and Eve, although they dutifully lowered their aching arms.

"Right..." Cary improvised, her uncertainty in the true nature of her situation leading to many pauses and stammers, "Well...if you would...Should we go upstairs...do you think?"

Exchanging an awkward look with Eve, she proffered a shaking arm in the direction of the passageway and by extension the foot of the crumbling staircase by means of guidance before leading the way herself, not looking back.

As for Tony, he was making triply sure that Philip had not heard or seen anything that could compel him to act in an unsavoury manner. But his old friend appeared to be calmed. This could have had something to do with him entering *transit* twice in quick succession, which always ran the risk of weakening a Mancynn.

He was brought out of his checking reverie by Ezekial who dropped a weary hand upon his shoulder, confessing, "Your friend has prompted us to face the error of our ways in serving the Brethren Lords, and has taken us from our home of so many years so that we may come to this place in freedom. Yet how better off are we? Perhaps if you were to escort us somewhere...more appropriate, we might work out the finer details of this arrangement."

The Naemod nudged Tony into the flow of people migrating towards what there was of the stairway, not really giving him much choice in the matter. Not fighting it, Tony focused only on keeping a firm hold on Philip, making sure that he was forever in his sights.

Already upstairs, Cary and Eve were somewhat aimlessly delegating Naemods into what rooms they could, separating the congregation into more manageable chunks. When Ezekial, Tony and Philip arrived at the top of the steps Eve guided them to the largest open space, one whose original purpose was not entirely clear, while Cary fetched the chair the Mancynn had been tied to, pushing her way through the throngs with great effort. Ezekial took in his new surroundings, which were hardly better than the ones he'd just left, and he in doing so thus also caught sight of the girl, whom he had only briefly met before in a containment cell. She was still very young, and yet she appeared to hold the respect of at least two of the others. His attention was then drawn to the decaying armchair being pushed out in front of him, complete with makeshift bonds, Jimmy also in toe. Before his eyes Philip was guided into the seat and, after some whispered words from Tony, allowed himself to be tied up, not struggling one bit.

Not interfering as such, Ezekial queried, "Was he so damaged on the station that this is necessary?"

"It wasn't that," Tony shook his head, "I don't think..."

As they finished confining their fellow to the fabric, the course of conversation fell into non-existence.

Breaking through the silence, Ezekial ventured, "Well?"

It sounded to the teens like he was expecting them to say something in particular, but for the life of them they couldn't think what.

"Well," Eve tried at last, "why don't we start by getting to know who's here?"

Ezekial stared down at her for a moment before conceding, "Very well. If you remember, our names are the combinations of those of our creators and other common occurrences in the human population at the time. I am of the designation Whitehead. From this designation we also have here Claire. I believe that over there are Bradley, Colm, Hana and Rosalind from the designation O'Brien. From Holt are Andre, Clifton, Echo and Tyler. I also ran into Leonard, Matthew, Olivia and Zak from Miller whilst on my way to the escape crafts. Of course there are far more in this building than I have just listed, however I do not know for certain who those individuals are."

When Ezekial had finished, Eve continued to look around for a moment or two, ensuring that her feigned understanding of his register was not spoilt by a hasty digression to a new topic.

Still unclear as to exactly who everyone was, Eve began with only a small hesitation, "Good to know...So, now that's out the way, do you...do any of you..."

“Do any of you know anything that could be used against the Lords?” Tony stepped in, saving her from further awkwardness.

Ezekial eyed the teen for a second, yet eventually bowed his head, now fully prepared to reveal the secrets of his former masters, “Although we Naemods were never privy to the finer details of any stratagems that might have passed our way, I happen to be aware of the locations of several facilities across the globe that are governed at least partly by Gryal’s followers. The Lords’ reach is far and wide, with a firm hold on many of this world’s political powers. Whatever their plan is, it would make sense that Gryal would want to have control over those who would pose as much a threat as humanity could to their assault.”

“Wait, wait...what?” Eve stopped him with a combination of an incredulous look and a raised hand. “You mean to say that the world leaders are working for aliens?”

“You’ve seen them, haven’t you?” Tony remarked slyly. “It would explain a lot of their decisions.”

“My understanding is that not all of your leaders are under the influence of the Lords,” Ezekial amended his previous statement, “but there are those who certainly have been directed in some way or another, whether they know it or not.”

“That’s great news,” Tony smiled ecstatically, before realising what he’d done. “I mean, not that were being ruled by extension by the enemy. I was only thinking that now we know where to go from here. If we can only find these people, we can stop them from doing...whatever it is they’re doing, and learn who else is working for them in turn.”

“I could list the ones I heard most often of back at the station,” Ezekial suggested. “I think I saw what looked like paper on the way here, and I’m sure there’ll be something to write with.”

As the Naemod began to push his way through the throngs of his kind back the way they’d come, Cary scoffed, “Not likely. Just take a look at this place. You think they’ll have that kind of thing lying around?”

Either not hearing her or choosing to ignore what she had said, Ezekial didn’t falter in his stride, leading the young group out into the decaying hall, which by now was mostly clear of wandering Naemods, and towards the remainder of the nearest staircase. Just to reach the next room they had to step with wide gaits over many lumps of shattered plaster and collapsed wooden beams, as well as having to ignore the thick smell of decay that seemed somewhat more pungent in this part of the house. Jimmy made sure to remain close to his peers for the same reason that was holding him back from talking for the moment.

Hopping ahead over a fallen door, Cary landed beside Ezekial, immediately initiating her interrogation.

“How do we know that you’re telling the truth, or that you’re not leading us into a trap?” she demanded, eyeing him with great and obvious misgivings.

Seeing her glance at the others, as though expecting them to share her mistrust, Ezekial rolled his eyes whilst still making his steady way to his destination, saying, “My kind were brought into this world already in servitude to the Lords. We have worked our existences away for principles and goals that we haven’t even been fully made aware of. But now your friend in the chair has given us the chance to explore what this world has to offer with the freedom we should have been afforded since our emancipation. Therefore the gratitude we feel for the Mancynn is strong enough that I am prepared to fully act against our omnipresent oppressors, for what have they truly done to warrant me not doing so in these circumstances. But if you are incapable of comprehending what we owe to him, and the price needed to repay it, then that is your problem, and perhaps your blessing, for it means that you have never known involuntary labour such as ours.”

Stunned into silence, Cary fell back through the group, retaking her place at the rear.

By the time she’d done this they were in what could have once been a drawing room. Ezekial was boldly striding over to an old desk in view of the doorway upon which lay what looked like sheets of paper. Further into the room another cluster of Naemods looked up to watch them suspiciously. As the youths gathered around him the Naemod pulled at the crumbling draws, failing to locate a writing implement to go with the paper.

“Oh well,” Ezekial accepted, instead proceeding to cut the tip of his index finger with a jagged nail, a steam of dark blood welling up on top of the worn flesh to stifled outbursts of alarm from certain individuals.

Now able to use his injured digit as he would have a pen, he pulled a sheet towards him and began to scrawl upon its aged surface. He started off with what they took to be a map of the world before going on to list the names of annotated countries on the diagram above.

“As well as providing you with these places,” Ezekial told them, “I, along with many of my people, will wish to help the Mancynn as best we can with what he is going through. So please, if you ever think of something that might be of use to his wellbeing, do not hesitate to ask for our assistance.”