

**Children of
Exousia**

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Chapter 1

Athena was having a fantastic, yet devastatingly confusing day. It wouldn't have been a lie to say that her life up to this point was one that would have been considered abnormal. But even to her, the day's events breached on lunacy. The morning had started just like any other. Athena had woken up in her cramped little cell, the wonderful smell of juvenile prison filling her lungs, and waited motionless in bed until the door was electronically unlocked for breakfast. The food was atrocious and, in her opinion, branched on child abuse, but never the less she ate it. No one sat beside her, as was customary, and as soon as her food had disappeared she was back to the blazing white cell, sleeping. It wasn't like the other girls were all self absorbed arrogant pieces of work, just most of them. And to be honest Athena simply didn't care to make friends. Her experiences in that area were more than grim, so her disposition reflected as much, leaving her alone on an island of her own making. During her first year some of the older girls had tried to mess with her, but that stopped once they realized they were not messing with a basic ten year old girl but a manipulative monster. Athena hadn't raised a finger, but six of the old bullies ended up in the infirmary after beating each other half to death. Last year had honestly been better in Athena's opinion, because she hadn't been bored twenty-four-seven. From that point on however, she was labeled as an 'unapproachable', which she didn't mind. Violence was a nasty business and so was friendship.

At that point she was just waiting to shrivel up and die, so there was no use in giving herself any false hope or sense of joy when it would inevitably be taken away. Nevertheless, she slept silently on her thin little cot until her scheduled 'therapy', if it could even be called that, began. You would think that humanity would have discovered a better method of

attempted rehabilitation by 2028, but alas, some shrink trying to wrought out your emotions was all she got. Athena didn't mind her therapist as a person. She was kind and genuinely tried to help people, and in many cases, succeeded. But when she cried she would do it alone, and that was that. To her, therapy was a pointless waste of time. Or at least, it was, until a once in a lifetime opportunity landed itself right in her waiting lap. The white walls lined with terrible modern artwork seemed to come to life as Ms. Tina leaned forward in her big leather chair to break the news.

"Athena dear, I know you try your best to be kind to me, but we both know you care very little for our sessions, and frankly, have made no progress towards rehabilitation." Her tone was motherly, as usual, but there was a slight undertone of nervousness that piqued the young girl's interest. It was true she was troubled on the inside, but she was the opposite of unpleasant, which made Ms. Tina all the more inclined to help the little darling before her. How such a wonderful little girl had ended up behind bars was beyond perplexing, and unlike most of her cases, Athena's file was sealed, so she had no means of figuring it out.

"I'm sorry Ms. Tina, I am trying my best, but I'm not sure anything can save me." Athena's voice conveyed a sad desperation, but she was more resigned than despaired by now. The act was more for Ms. Tina's sake, as she would crumble at the sight of a truly lost and hopeless child. In her mind she could still reach a disappointed one.

"I know dear, and that is why I have a rather," she paused uncertainly, allowing her already plain nervousness to shine through, "unique opportunity, that may be better for your future." Ms. Tina's fear didn't bother Athena in the least, as she knew that her vulnerable therapist would never endanger her in any way. It did make her curious however, as it was possible that there was something she didn't know.

"What kind of opportunity?"

“Well, I don’t know exactly, but it’s a special government school that, if you pass, will erase your sentence.” At that point the world stopped moving and everything dull and gray was ignited into vibrant color. Electricity seemed to pump through Athena’s veins as her normal line of indifference was bent into the slightest smile, a sign of hope. Ms. Tina didn’t miss such a crucial break in character, and that sign from heaven seemed to set her mind at ease.

“I don’t know anything about the school, but if you accept, you will travel overseas to the facility. It is a big change, but placed against the alternative, I think you should accept.”

The rest of the day was a blur of emotion and thought. For the first time in years Athena was excited about something. Maybe there was a chance for a fresh start, a new life. No one there would know about her past, about how she was abandoned, about how she was a right idiot and criminal. What she had believed to be a fantasy for so long had become a reality. She skipped lunch to sit in the wreck room alone, but as she began to dream, her analytical side began to question.

Why would they choose me? Maybe it’s because I’m expendable? I don’t have anyone out there who would care if I was gone. No one would bat an eye if I disappeared. Perhaps I’m destined to die the guinea pig of some terrible experiment?

Though there was more merit to her concern than even she could realize, the simple conclusion she reached was that anything was better than the dull and meaningless prison life. She believed, though it was an unpopular opinion, that pain was better than the simple absence of joy. She hated floating on the slow current of existence, patiently watching as life moved along at its own pace. She needed to feel something, she had to serve a purpose in order to be alive. Her mind was hungry, and though no one knew it, she loved to learn. Her

cell was sucking the joy and color out of her world, which left only one option, and that was to accept.

As soon as Athena signed her way through the mountain of paperwork before her, having no legal guardian to aid in doing so, things began to move rather quickly, in fact, she didn't even get a chance to return to her room. The moment Ms. Tina exited, the suits entered in a clean dark line. It was almost comical how well they fit the stereotype. Dark glasses, small comlinks sticking barely visible out of their ears, black suits that looked straight off the iron, and a completely dead stare. Athena was used to referring to herself as dangerous, something she had been repeatedly labeled as, but in that moment she realized she wasn't so bad afterall. She hadn't killed anybody, but these guys most certainly had. They didn't speak a word, simply standing in silence. After a minute of uncomfortable mouth breathing, the door opened and a final gray haired suit waltzed through the door. Athena had a good eye, and her analytical mind missed nothing. It took but a moment for her to measure this man's presence against the others, to determine that his stature was far above. The old man had the same murderous and unnerving vibe about him that the others had, but he seemed more at ease than they were, as if he did this every other day and that nothing in the world could touch him. It was an intimidating facade. Athena gulped as her nerves began to run away from her.

"Transport leaves in ten minutes, and unfortunately, you can't be conscious for any of it." The man's voice was gravely and hinted at a cough every time he inhaled. Likely because he was a smoker. Athena couldn't smell it, but he rested his hand on the edge of the table aimed upward with his middle finger slightly raised. If she had a cigarette handy she would

have bet anything that it would have been a perfect fit. She had seen the same hold a thousand times at old Maddocks bar back home.

“What that means little girl, is that you need to take this.” He dropped his right hand into his pocket and brought out a dry white pill. “There will be no questions. No time wasted. You wrote your own will and signed it, so there is no turning back now. This little baby will knock you out cold in a matter of seconds, so you won't feel a thing.” He smiled evilly as he finished the sentence, his perfectly white teeth glinting ever so slightly in the pasty white light. “The only side effect is a two day hangover that could kill a thousand pound bull.” Athena nodded and silently took the glass of water left on the table to swallow the pill. Her mind was elsewhere, identifying the fact that the old suit was southern born, and by his accent, likely hailed from Alabama, somewhere near Quail Valley as they had large bulls like the one he had used in his analogy. She shook her head as the pill slid unpleasantly down her throat, the feeling distracting her thought process. It didn't matter anyway as it was all ill founded conjecture. He could have fabricated the accent for all she knew. Athena waited for something to happen, but then her body stopped working and everything went black with the blink of an eye.

She was unconscious for eighteen hours, and the stingy suit didn't lie when he said the hangover was a killer. When Athena finally raised her head she felt like she was fifty feet underwater. Her every movement was slow and sloppy, her head had pins driving straight through her skull, and she couldn't stop her ears from ringing every other minute. It took somewhere around an hour for her to finally gather herself enough to evaluate the situation. Her first reaction was not what any of the observing scientists expected. Athena broke out in hysterical laughter. Her worst fears were right, she was in a new cell, in a newer nowhere, except for the fact that this cell had walls of shiny metal and double sided glass. That only

meant one thing, and that was government experimentation, it had to be. After a good minute of teary chuckles Athena got to her feet and waltzed over to the glass, smirking as she solidified her plan. The only way to make the situation better would be to make it interesting. She had to fight until the bitter end. She was preparing to throw her insults against the wall when the cell door slid smoothly open. A middle aged man in a lab coat strutted through the door, his over six foot frame barely squeezing underneath without ducking. He had a clean sandy brown stubble beard that would be expected from a man of his profession, and slightly darker waves of hair that fell just below his ears. His white lab coat was stamped with a strange black symbol on the left pec and his shining eyes were covered by thin circular glasses. Athena had expected torture, but the man who entered didn't seem to bear any ill intentions. She was wise enough to reserve judgment, but she couldn't deny that his appearance was working in his favor.

"I'm glad you are awake Ms. Bell. I apologize for all the theatrics you had to endure, but we can take no chances when it comes to security." Unlike the old man from before, his voice was crisp, it seemed to bounce off the walls and demand attention. It was a little annoying but she was too focused to realize that. "I'm sure you have many questions, and I want to assure you that we will answer as many as possible when the time comes. But for now, we have to complete some basic health tests. Would you mind following me to your next location?" Athena remained steady and from the outside her eyes appeared emotionless and calculating.

"Of course. Though I respond to the name Athena only. Please don't make that mistake again." Her voice sounded melodic and smooth, so sweet and innocent. But her posture was haughty, and her silk words wove a tight noose that immediately put the doctor on edge. He chuckled nervously and promised to use her preferred name. Athena accepted

that there was nothing else to do but follow him, so she motioned with her hand for him to lead on. With a slight adjustment of his glasses he did so. The moment Athena left the cell she was relieved. It only took one look around to realize that she would have no problem being entertained, and though it was still a lab, the odds of torture seemed to diminish greatly.

Whatever military base she had stumbled into had saved no expense. Every hall she passed was filled with bustling scientific activity that she couldn't understand. The rooms were occupied by touch screens, displays and other technology, or marching soldiers who carried the most elite looking weapons she had ever seen. It all passed in a blur as she was rushed into what appeared to be a state of the art gym, the technological kind that only pro athletes got to use. Before she could take it all in, the doctor disappeared into another room and she was swarmed by nurses who somehow changed her clothes, tied up her hair, and kindly fixed the hangnail she had been picking at. Then as quickly as they had arrived they disappeared and the doctor was back. She felt a little dizzy after the whole experience but had no time to recover. The following two hours were grueling and pushed her rather short patience to the limit. The doctor was nice and all, but after attaching wires and pads to her body and forcing her to do physical labor while a line of clipboards watched her through the second story glass room, she didn't feel exactly warm towards him. Once the tests were finished the nurses reappeared and changed her into what could only be described as leisure wear, which was strange after all that had happened. Athena was then forced back into her little cell and told to wait, which she hated more than any test, as her mind tended to wander. No more than a half-hour passed before the doctor returned. He had a goofy smile on his face that she wanted to remove with her foot.

“Congratulations. You have passed all the necessary tests thus far. Your interview with Doctor Casmier will commence in an hour. He will answer as many of your questions as possible, and if he passes you, you will depart tomorrow morning for the academy.” Without giving her a second to respond the man scurried out the door. Athena was left to her thoughts, trying as best as she could to make sense of her crazy experience. She had no idea what would come next, but she knew no matter what crazy dream she conjured up, the reality would somehow be more strange. There was a mystical sense about the people in the base, an assurance in the way they spoke, speaking in a language she could barely understand. Every other word was equivalent to scientific gibberish. But they were working on something magnificent, something dangerous. No, they were already a part of something dangerous. And now she was too. She had wished for her boredom to end, and that wish was granted. Her only grievance was that she had no clue what was going on, and by the looks of things, her situation would not get any easier to understand.

Chapter 2

“The next student is ready, doctor.”

“Excellent. Bring her file.”

“Right away sir.”

Doctor Casmier watched lazily as the soldier exited his office, sighing with great discontent. Experimental Classroom MX1 and MX2 while presenting some merit, had both failed miserably, and though this was the most interesting group thus far, their uniqueness was almost uncanny and made them all the more likely to fail. He rose slowly from his old leather bound chair to stare out the magnificent glass windows of his office, gazing out over the Icelandic coast. Doctor Casmier had been tasked with winning the longest war in man's history, a war that his many ancestors had failed to end. It was reassuring in a sense that his forefathers had already failed. It would ease the pain when he inevitably followed, because it was impossible after all. The magnitude of the conflict was so great yet so entirely one sided. Not to mention it was perfectly concealed from the common man, who knew nothing of it. It was remarkable in its own right, he had to applaud the Archan Council and their ability to conceal the truth. But his family name would remain unknown until the war could be closed, and that was why, though the task promised difficulty the likes of which he could barely imagine, Doctor Casmier would not give in. Silence reigned supreme until the wooden double doors to his office were gently pushed open. The young soldier from before entered

with no small amount of reverence, quietly approaching the stunning dark leather chair and the intimidating man standing behind it.

“You may leave it on the desk,” Casmier said softly, every word spoken as if it had a lifetime to reach the ears of the listener. The soldier gulped down his nerves and gently placed the tablet on the smooth wood. Doctor Casmier was truly a force to be reckoned with. Young for his position, coming in at thirty years, Casmier was the epitome of power and control. His black hair was always perfect, slicked back into sharp icicles on the back of his head, his pale sun deprived skin was unblemished, his suit was perfectly pressed, and he towered over any man with his height. He was simply above mankind, above their enemies, he was simply *more*, and to speak with him was to waste his time. Upon hearing the electronic device make contact, Casmier turned back to the front.

“Thank you. You may take your leave.”

“Of course, sir.”

Once the door had glided shut for the third time, Casmier leaned ever so elegantly down to pick up the device, the image of a vibrant young girl staring at him, eye to eye. The Doctor knew all his students as if he had raised them himself, but he made it a habit to check his knowledge before every interview. There was no use to carelessness, especially when some of his students had the potential to level both him and his enemy. Now, Alice Bell, or as she decided to rename herself, ‘Athena’, was the final student to enter the program, completely unplanned the doctor would add. To Casmier, Athena was perhaps the most intriguing and mysterious of the lot, which was peculiar considering that she was human... or at least, was supposed to be. Looking at her childhood by the official US Government records made her appear as nothing special. Her parents were supposed to be poor Americans living out of Denver Colorado. Upon her birth, the father, Nicholas Bell, abandoned her mother and

left for New York. Unable to care for her, the mother, Vanessa Bell, had entered her into the newly established Governmental Parent Program otherwise known as the GPP. Alice Bell had then grown up in a government house and escaped at the remarkable age of ten where she then renamed herself to the singular name 'Athena'. Little of that record was true. Alice Bell was indeed her true name, but her parents were anything but normal, and she didn't enter the GPP or any Government facility until just under two years ago when she was arrested. The character known as Athena had practically no traceable history. Even with his connections Casmier had found little to nothing, but summed up in his file was the little he knew for certain.

Athena's parents were unknown, and she was actually raised by a librarian named Martha Young, who after interrogation, admitted to having found the child abandoned on her doorstep, and knowing she would never get approved for adoption, took the child and raised her in secret along the California coast. Apparently the little girl had been a rabid learner and absorbed practically everything in the library. It was rather strange, but after many years of reading and placid life, a rather recent publication about drug cartels prompted Athena to enter the second stage of her life. As an orphan herself the little girl wanted to help the children stuck in poverty and fear. She abandoned her adoptive mother with a simple note, promising to return, and went on to enter a world of crime. This was where the trail became more clear, and ever more unbelievable. Unlike most children who run away and return minutes later, Athena didn't return for months. From what he could verify, she had first played the part of a young con artist, abusing her status as a child to make money in the slums of Del Rio, living out of an almost abandoned orphanage as she observed the inner workings of the crime world that had infiltrated the city. She was then taken on as an apprentice and proceeded to make a name for herself as an Architect by the age of nine, a term widely used

in the underworld to describe criminal strategists. She never showed her face, and instead took requests and sent out her plans through her mentor, who acted as a medium at an old bar called Maddocks. The culmination of her short career was the Zurich Heist, where her mentor was hired to help the South American crime group known as 'Hombres del Infierno' to rob a Swiss bankers vacation home. It was a rather ambitious idea that they had initially refused, but the plan was perfect and the team escaped with upwards of four million USD from the man's private vault; or at least, they would have.

It was said on record that Athena orchestrated a cunning betrayal via anonymous information to the FBI, taking all the money and successfully abandoning the others to the authorities. It was also said on record that her choice to target the Swiss banker was a premeditated calculation, as the heist was on such a large scale that it would be difficult to trace back to her as a young Architect, giving Athena the perfect opportunity to disappear. The only flaw in her plan was that the criminals were more than happy to talk, and with the information they gave, the FIS and FBI were able to track her down near the Californian coast and lock her up. She was indeed a young genius, but still a child in an adult world. The money was traced to multiple humanitarian organizations and returned. After an easy capture she was destined for a high security prison, but as a minor, they could not circumvent the law to put her in adult high security or solitary confinement. They were forced instead to place her in a detention center. In order for maximum security possible, they located the most remote Juvenile Detention Center they could find, placing her in an all girls prison in North Dakota.

Casmier sighed once again and closed out the file. She was extremely intelligent for her age, that much was apparent. But it was not the intelligence required to rob such a prestigious banker that bothered him, or the fact that she managed so much at such a young

age. It was the fact that Athena had appeared without a trace, in California, eleven years ago, at the end of spring that bothered him. The timing was either an incredible coincidence, or Athena was possibly the most valuable girl in the world. In preparation Casmier had sent a man to consult Athena's therapist before considering her for the class, and the woman had nothing but good things to say. 'She's an angel', 'terribly misunderstood', 'kind hearted and considerate', every answer was the same. To ensure that she didn't say the same for all her girls, he sent in a second agent undercover as a parent of one of Athena's fellow inmates, but her words were far from the same, she was almost critical in her analysis, like a prosecutor before a judge. Athena's power was not solely in her intelligence, but in her pure innocence and ignorance. She had orchestrated the whole facade in order to rid the city of a dangerous gang, and likely didn't realize the extent of her own planning, much of it being natural to her. He did note that being involved with gangs and living within a prison had created a strong, almost icy side to the girl, which by all appearances was unnatural to her. Casmier scratched at his chin in thought. It was entirely possible that Athena, though nothing but a child, had been double sided from the start. Casmier stopped and laughed to himself at that. If she was holding on to two separate natures that would make her quite like the other strange beasts he had brought in, even without his crazy ideas about her past. What a thought that would be. Perhaps mankind wasn't so different, so inferior, to the Others. Doctor Casmier sank into his chair with a rare smile written upon his lips. Though it would likely fail, and he had sworn to succeed, this class would be interesting indeed.

The small intercom on his desk lit up and emitted a stiff and robotic female voice.

"Subject is here to see you sir. Awaiting permission."

"Granted," Casmier replied, sitting up straight as the doors opened once again.

As was custom, the doctor did not wait to begin his work. Before Athena had even cleared the doorway he had obtained a further understanding of who she was. Tall for her age, young with the promise of beauty written through her features, silky brunette hair, a rather docile and cute aura that befit her as a child, and a visible nervousness. Casmier had no doubts that she could have obtained money by innumerable means. Yet, she had chosen a life of crime, to try and fight crime. There was certainly a motive there. Possibly something to do with her past? A grudge against the system that ruined her childhood? He wouldn't make assumptions. Athena's appearance was something she rather neglected, which was not a surprise for one so young. Her hair was unkempt and messy, and from the few pictures in her file, she almost always wore leisure clothes, and from what his intelligence had gathered she had no connections to anyone or anything beside that ignorant librarian. The girl, though terrified, walked with self assurance, which was also no surprise, and her eyes bathed the room in analysis. Casmier decided at that moment that he liked her more than the others. It would be interesting to see what she asked. Athena reached the small chair opposite of the Doctor and slowly took her seat, feigning calm while her mind was ablaze.

"Ms. Athena, correct? It's a pleasure to finally meet you face to face." Casmier made sure to force his presence through every word. It was crucial that all his students both feared and respected him, and in his educated opinion, that mission was best to begin and end upon their first meeting. He had left a gap of silence to allow her a response, but she simply sat, silent as the grave. Though he couldn't be sure of it, he would've sworn by his family name that the girl didn't blink. He decided to continue.

"It happens that I know quite a lot about you, and you know nothing of me, or your present circumstances. I make a point of meeting all of my students and establishing a well," Casmier dragged the last word with a sinister edge, "personal, relationship." Athena tried to remain stone cold, but she had never been more terrified in her entire life. This 'doctor' or

whoever he was, gave her nothing. He had no accent, no idiosyncrasies, no show of emotion other than those he chose to show. She couldn't decide if he was a monster or a man, or even, which was which. She was excited about the future that was for sure, but only because it was the best option she had left. Athena's true dream was to go to college somewhere nice, and die with a book in her lap. Not enter into an experimental school run by a madman.

"Now is the time for the great unveiling," Casmier continued, "the answers to the questions hanging on your lips. You have entered my world, child, and so there is nothing outside of my knowledge and control. Ask and you shall receive."

Athena gathered herself together and killed the butterflies rising in her chest, slowing her heartbeat and freezing any sweat threatening her brow. This was a crucial moment. She had walked unknowingly into a whole new world, a dangerous world by the looks of it, and this was her only chance to shed light onto it. With careful consideration she lined up her questions.

"What is this?"

The question was so broad that it took the Doctor by surprise, raising one eyebrow slightly.

"That is a broad question my dear. It would be quite difficult to answer, so would you mind specifying what exactly it is you are questioning?" His response played directly into Athena's plan. She would overwhelm him, and therefore gain control of the conversation.

"What is this fortress that no one can find? Who are you, who stands above the governments of the world? What or who are the 'Others' that the careless soldiers keep referring to? What is the point of this classroom? Why is it that every man and woman is armed to the teeth to oversee a mere school? What are Achions and Hephions? Archans and Artemites?" Athena was prepared to continue her bombardment, but a simple raised hand

from Casmier was enough to end her assault. To her great dismay, the man before her was completely unfazed. Nothing she had observed caught him by surprise. Though it was a trivial thing, her ego took a hit. Casmier found pleasure in the fact that she had at least tried to garner control and relevant information, but the attempt was poor, that of a little girl. But he could already see himself forming her into a sharp double edged sword.

“Those are all great questions, my dear. But I cannot answer them if you do not give me a chance.” A sly smile grew on the Doctor’s dry lips. Athena would get the answers she desired, but what had mattered more, control over the conversation, was outside of her reach. Athena realized that she was entirely out of her depth. She was used to dealing with idiots, and in that moment she realized that the world was a lot bigger, and more complicated, than she realized.

“To answer your first question: this ‘fortress’ as you called it, belongs to the Exousian Council. And before you ask what that it is, I shall explain.” Athena had raised her head to question him, almost right on que, which left her embarrassed as he so easily predicted her. “The Exousian Council is an organization dedicated to the preservation of mankind, and as it so happens, that goal comes hand in hand with information, with knowledge.” He clenched his fist with emphasis and Athena had to admire his appreciation for learning, as she shared his care. “The Council has operated for thousands of years, dating back to the time of ancient Egypt. However, the title was created during the times of ancient Greece, after the first Apithian War. And no, we do not have time to cover that subject.” Athena frowned and almost pouted, something she tried to avoid, seeing herself as ‘too old’ for such things. “This base, getting back to the question, is used by the Exousian Council for research purposes.”

Athena nodded in understanding, though she now had more questions than ever.

“As for your second question: I am Reginold Atlas Casmier, one in a long family line that has served the Exousian Council. Our family is in charge of researching the enemies of mankind and locating their weaknesses. Since you are bound to hear about it, the first Casmier created a book known as The Casmian Index, which contained research on more than fifty Others.” Athena waited for him to ask her not to question his statement, but he didn’t, so she went right ahead.

“What do you mean by ‘Others’?” Casmier smiled and leaned back, obviously preparing for a longer conversation.

“That was your next question was it not?” Athena frowned again as she realized she had followed his path. It wasn't necessarily a bad thing, but it bothered her nonetheless. “The term ‘Others’ refers to any form of semi intelligent life that is not human, or, any form of life that surpasses a danger index of four.” He paused to allow the news to sink in. Athena prided herself on composure, but nothing could have stopped her mouth from hanging open in disbelief.

“Intelligent life other than humans? Are you playing me for a fool? You aren't suggesting that there are aliens living among us? Are you?” Casmier chuckled deeply and grinned ear to ear at her shock.

“Of course not my dear. The Others are not aliens, many have actually been on Earth longer than we have.” Athena’s head was swimming, what did that even mean? “Due to your choice of name I would assume you are familiar with Greek mythology are you not?” Athena gently nodded her head, she was sitting desperate in his hands, practically pleading for answers. “Well, to put it plainly for you, every ancient civilization has attested to the existence of other beings. And while the foolish public have believed the lie that they were *all* somehow mistaken and deluded, those beings are in fact very real and very dangerous. I don’t use this example to claim that all mythology is correct, as much of it falls short or

exaggerates, but there is some truth within each history.” At this point Athena’s breathing was getting shallow, there was no way that it could all be true. Without thinking she began twirling a strand of her hair, a nervous habit that she had beaten out of herself years prior.

“Do not panic my dear. It is a lot to take in, but once you come to terms with the truth, it will all begin to make sense.” Casmier watched intently as the ten year old girl before him harnessed the craziest news she had ever encountered and returned to a wall of intelligent indifference. It took no small amount of willpower, but somehow she managed. She was stronger than most of the other human students, that was for sure.

“Please continue,” she whispered. Impressed, Casmier moved on, though he was reaching the limit of what he could divulge. And by Athena’s quivering lip he didn’t want to push her limit so far as to elicit despair.

“We are running low on time, but I can answer one more question, so choose carefully.” Athena bit her cheek with the intensity of her thought, scrunching up her face. She had to make the most of this chance, it was the only advantage she would have going into whatever maddening and apparently *mythological* mayhem was awaiting her.

“This academy, what will it be like?” Doctor Casmier took a moment to formulate an answer that was both concise and mysterious.

“You are entering a war, Athena. Struggle awaits you outside of this office. But victory is not outside of your reach. It all depends on what *you* decide to do, how *you* decide to fight.” With that their time came to an end.

Chapter 3

Kane didn't mind. He didn't mind at all. Most people would mind, but he didn't. In fact, he was rather happy about the whole thing. Being a prisoner was better than being alone in his opinion. He missed his friends, that was for sure, but talking to real people was different. The wolves were loyal and the birds made him laugh, but unless he ordered them to stay they would move on, and he could never bring himself to do it, it was just too cruel to tame that which was wild. Kane laughed to himself at that thought. The humans thought he was wild and they were taming him without any remorse. It was cruel, but again, he preferred it to being alone. They weren't *all* terrible after all. Doctor Jenny was always nice, she brought candy and didn't treat him like some kind of lower life form. The others weren't quite so courteous. Their sharp objects and electric devices were administered with little tact or care, and would often leave purple bruises or trails of blood along his skin. Kane's mind wandered back to Jenny, he hadn't seen her in quite some time. He didn't mind though. Not at all. Kane lay his head back down on the pillow of his white cot, the almost blindingly white walls of his cage all but normal to him by now. According to the last time he saw Jenny she had told him that he might be moving to a new home soon. That would be nice. He had grown accustomed to the constant brightness, but he preferred sunlight. Man, he did miss the sun, the breeze, the clear blue skies. Kane wiped away a silent tear, he was fine, he didn't mind.

"I don't know if this is a good idea Jen. He might very well be the last of his kind. And you know very well what happened to Experimental Class MX2." The doctor turned his

pale bald head to stare at the tall and intimidating form of Doctor Jennifer Alis Sky. Her red lips were pursed in a thin line of thought. She reached into her white lab coat and removed an old and well loved pen, using it to scribble a quick note onto her clipboard. Unlike the other doctors she absolutely refused technology unless absolutely necessary. It wasn't so much a moral ideal, more of a personal preference that had blossomed into a strong opinion. Jenny toyed with a strand of her silky blonde hair, still thinking.

"I have made up my mind. The poor boy is suffering, and I refuse to allow any further torture." The other doctor opened his mouth in indignation, preparing to protest. The boy was an Artemite, it wasn't as if he were human. But a one eyed glare from Jenny clamped his mouth shut. With a sigh he acknowledged her decision.

"Very well, I will have the men prepare a transport. Though I will warn you once again doctor that you are getting too attached to our subjects. THEY ARE NOT HUMAN." The middle aged man ended with a note of superiority that made Jen gag. It was true, they weren't human, they were nothing but wild animals. And yet, she just couldn't hold herself to that idea. Outside of his remarkable powers, distinct appearance, and strong instinct based actions, Kane seemed no different to her than a human child. With a great exhale she refrained from striking back. He was right, and she had to get it through her thick skull.

"What are you standing around for? Get the men moving. Doctor Casmier wants all the students at the compound by tomorrow night." The man gave a start and quickly nodded as he scurried off, yelling out orders to anyone who would listen. Jenny looked through the glass at Kane's resting form, and decided she would give him a visit. It wasn't protocol, but she was allowed free reign. She was Doctor Jennifer Alis Sky after all, no one knew Other biology like she did. Descending down from the iron stairs she came to the thick oval door, and with a tap of her ID, the lock turned green and the gears rotated open. Kane's pointy fur ears shot up at the near almost inaudible beep of the scanner and sat up with a hopeful smile.

His light brown almost sandy mess of hair bounced around as he moved, his vibrant blue eyes wide open. The sight warmed Jenny's heart. At age twenty-one she was a little too young for children, but working with subjects like Kane made her more than open to the idea, that is of course, if she were ever able to find a man intelligent enough to match her. Kane watched the door slowly swing open and grinned ear to ear as his only true companion entered, her glasses shimmering and hair flowing like a hero of old.

"I knew it was you Jenny!" Kane cried out, jumping to his feet. Without hesitation he ran over and hugged the young woman. She was taken by surprise. Over the past year she had grown close to the boy, but he had never embraced her before. The doctor allowed herself to return the gesture, her mind somersaulting. But then it clicked. She had been so busy with all the other new subjects that she had neglected to visit. How long had she been gone? Casting that thought aside she gently pushed Kane away. He was her favorite subject by a mile. Coming in at the current age of eleven, he was thought to be the last of his kind. It was only at that moment that Jenny realized just how alone the poor kid was. The fact that he had allowed himself to be taken captive with no resistance struck a new chord. He had been so desperate for connection that he had given up his freedom for what was the equivalent of experimentation.

"I'm sorry K, I didn't mean to be gone for so long. I simply had other work to take care of." The boy sighed and looked forlorn at the ground, but his grin quickly returned.

"It's okay Jenny, I'm just glad you came back." His genuine joy forced a smile onto the doctor's face.

"Well, I return with good news!" Jenny gently guided the boy back to his cot and motioned for him to sit down, he followed her every direction with ease.

"What kind of news?"

“Shhh, just let me finish.” Kane nodded in understanding, folding his hands on his lap. “I told you before that you might be moved to a new home, right?” Kane nodded vigorously, his excitement growing with every second. “Well, though it took a little convincing, you have been cleared to move!” Kane’s smile that was already glowing somehow grew in size, but Jenny quickly raised a hand as she had more to say. “Not only that, but in this new compound you won’t be alone anymore. You will be attending a school, a school for special kids just like you.” Kane’s smile had completely disappeared as his face contorted into one of complete disbelief.

“You mean... no more white walls?” Jenny tilted her head and laughed.

“Yes. No more white walls.” Kane knocked her over this time with his tight embrace, laughing with pure joy as he realized the impossible was happening. He only released her to ask a final question.

“Are you coming with me?” Doctor Jenny utilized the opportunity to get back on her feet and smiled down at Kane.

“Of course. Do you think I want to stay here without you?”

The following hours seemed to pass in a blur for Kane. After Jenny left he was quickly moved into a room he liked to call ‘the cave’. ‘The cave’ was a small square room with three gray walls and one double sided glass view window. While in ‘the cave’ a man would ask him a bunch of random questions. He had only met the man twice before but he was probably his second favorite doctor after Jenny because he cracked all sorts of jokes and never seemed nervous or judgmental. This time was different than the previous two however, as his questions had nothing to do with Kane and his abilities or previous life, but more, what he wanted. It was strange. He asked about clothing and food, likes and dislikes, the sort of things you tell a friend not an interrogator. Nevertheless, Kane enjoyed that part, as he had a

sneaking suspicion that things were about to change for the better in more ways than one. After his time in 'the cave' some of the more typical doctor's did measurements while glaring at him with distaste. There was one nurse who smiled at him and scratched behind his ear when no one was looking which made it bearable, but the measurements didn't take all that long anyway. Once they were satisfied Kane was sent back to his room where he slept for a couple hours. He was woken up by a squadron of guards. Kane thought the escort was unnecessary, as he was still wearing his Subjugation Band, or SB. It wasn't like he could do anything, but the guards were there nevertheless. The group walked slowly through many winding halls, most of which Kane knew by heart, until they reached a place he had never seen. Two massive metal doors with numbers and symbols painted upon them bared the way and were unlocked by not one card, but the combined effort of two doctors and the head guard. The metal plates grinded loudly as they slid painfully slow to the sides. Behind the doors lay the largest room Kane had ever seen. He didn't know a lot about human architecture, but the books Jenny had brought him had mentioned something like this, it was called a 'hanger' or something like that. The vast room was lined with iron stairways and grated platforms, and the floor was covered in all kinds of aircraft. Kane's curiosity got the better of him and he began to wander, but a slight kick from one of the guards and he was back in the dead center. The men guided him towards an especially large cargo plane. To Kane's great relief he saw Doctor Jenny standing inside the plane, a clipboard in her hand.

"They are all secure?" Doctor Jenny asked, staring intently at her organizer.

"Yes ma'am," the captain replied, standing at attention.

"I have on record that the Achions and Hephions have already been moved. I didn't authorize that."

“Yes ma’am, it was by order of Doctor Casmier.” Jenny sighed with relief, it wasn’t a mistake.

“The humans are already there,” she muttered under her breath, “so we should have a total count of three.” The captain wasn’t sure if he was being addressed as the doctor's eyes had yet to leave her clipboard.

“Uh, yes, ma’am. And the last one should be on its way.” Jenny raised her head and looked out onto the floor and sure enough, Kane was waving as he walked forward. The captain turned as well, a mix of disgust and uncertainty clouding his glance.

“Are you sure you don’t want that one in containment?” The soldier nodded back into the plane at the two white boxes, each containing a sleeping student. Doctor Jenny smiled confidently and handed the man her clipboard.

“That one will be fine with me. He poses no threat.” The captain didn’t seem convinced, but she was far above him on the chain of command, so he saluted her and exited the plane, hollering orders at the airmen to prepare for departure. Kane was escorted to the doctor who motioned for them to leave the rest to her, like the captain they were skeptical, but turned to leave. Jenny put a hand on Kane’s back and brought him over to the side of the plane where many seats were lined up against the wall. She gently fastened him in, as he got confused by all the different latches, and took her seat beside him. The plane door closed shut and red lights came to life, illuminating the cargo deck. The combined forces of darkness and the violent shifting of the plane forced Kane to grab a hold of Jenny’s arm as they rose into the air. By the time they reached cruising altitude he was fast asleep on her shoulder. Jenny watched his chest rise and fall with deep breaths of sleep. The poor thing had no idea what lay ahead of him, and truthfully, neither did she. The new academy was located in a restricted section of the Bialowieza forest in Poland, and though it was equipped with state of the art technology and staffed by the most capable men and women from around the globe, she

couldn't help but feel that something would go terribly wrong. After all, Experimental Class MX1 and MX2 had ended in pure disaster. If she was told correctly, the net total survivor count for both was less than fifty percent.

By the time the plane touched down, Kane had been awake for some time. The flight was upwards of ten hours from their undisclosed location in America, and after slumbering for six of those, the young Artemite was full of energy. As the cargo door opened streams of vibrant orange and pink light fired in, the setting sun casting a beautiful painting across the skies. Kane stood inches from Jenny, inhaling deeply as the fresh free air filled his lungs. The boy wanted to cry but he decided better of it. He had to be stronger than that. Though the sky greeted him like an old friend and the sun warmed his pale underground skin, he could sense danger on the horizon. It was one of his peculiar traits that the scientists had yet to isolate and understand. He simply knew when things were going to happen, it was instinct. Kane looked up at Doctor Jenny, who was also enjoying the pleasures of nature and vowed in that moment to protect her from whatever danger was coming. He didn't realize it was a sad reality, but the doctor was the closest thing he had to family. A bird's sweet song echoed out from the distant trees and Kane's ears twitched with anticipation. His thoughts were brought to a halt as the glowing white boxes behind him began to hiss and release waves of fog from the opening cracks in the cage. Blue lights flickered on the sides as scientists, doctors, and soldiers messed with the electronic controls. Kane tried to lean forward and peer into the case, but his view was obscured by a mass of bodies. Jenny gently tugged on his sleeve.

"Don't fret, you will meet your classmates in due time. For now, let's get you settled in your dorm. Daylight is fading." The way she spoke of the impending darkness with such worry implied that there was more to be said, but Kane harnessed his curiosity and followed Jenny's billowing white coat towards the distant buildings. He had no idea what was in store

for him, but to be honest, he was excited. A new life, with new friends, a life with no pointy things or angry doctors, a life where he could be free and not be alone. Kane smiled as he continued to bask in the sunlight. With a sigh he decided: this would be his new home.