

# Chapter 23

The chapter opens with the group of fugitives—Miriam, Julian, Rolf, Luke, and Theo—making frequent stops during their journey due to Julian's late pregnancy. Rolf grows impatient, but Miriam explains the physical demands of pregnancy. During a break, the group experiences a moment of quiet under a starry sky, with Theo noticing the lingering warmth of summer. Rolf seizes the opportunity to confront Theo, asserting his desire for leadership and control over the expedition. Theo responds with skepticism, mocking Rolf's preoccupation with dominance despite the larger stakes of Julian's impending childbirth.

Rolf reveals his ambition to leverage Julian's child as a source of power, believing it will elevate him above the current Warden, Xan Lyppiatt. Theo challenges Rolf's motives, pointing out the hypocrisy in replacing one dictatorship with another. Rolf remains confident that the people will support him if he can provide the key to repopulation. Theo probes further, questioning Rolf's plans for governance, including his stance on the Isle of Man prisoners and the Sojourners, but Rolf's answers mirror the Warden's policies, revealing little substantive difference in their approaches.

Theo subtly tests Rolf's confidence by raising the possibility that Julian's child might be abnormal, a fear Rolf briefly acknowledges but dismisses. Theo refrains from voicing his darker thought: that Rolf's life could be in danger if the Warden sees him as a threat, regardless of his role as the potential father of a new race. The tension between the two men underscores the precariousness of their situation, with Rolf's ambition clashing against Theo's pragmatism and skepticism.

The chapter concludes with the group reuniting after the break, and Rolf asserting control by taking over the driving. The exchange highlights the power dynamics at play, with Rolf's determination to lead contrasting with Theo's wary neutrality. The scene sets the stage for further conflict, as the group's survival and the fate of Julian's

child remain uncertain amidst the broader struggle for power in a dystopian world.

