

Chapter 1 : The Landing

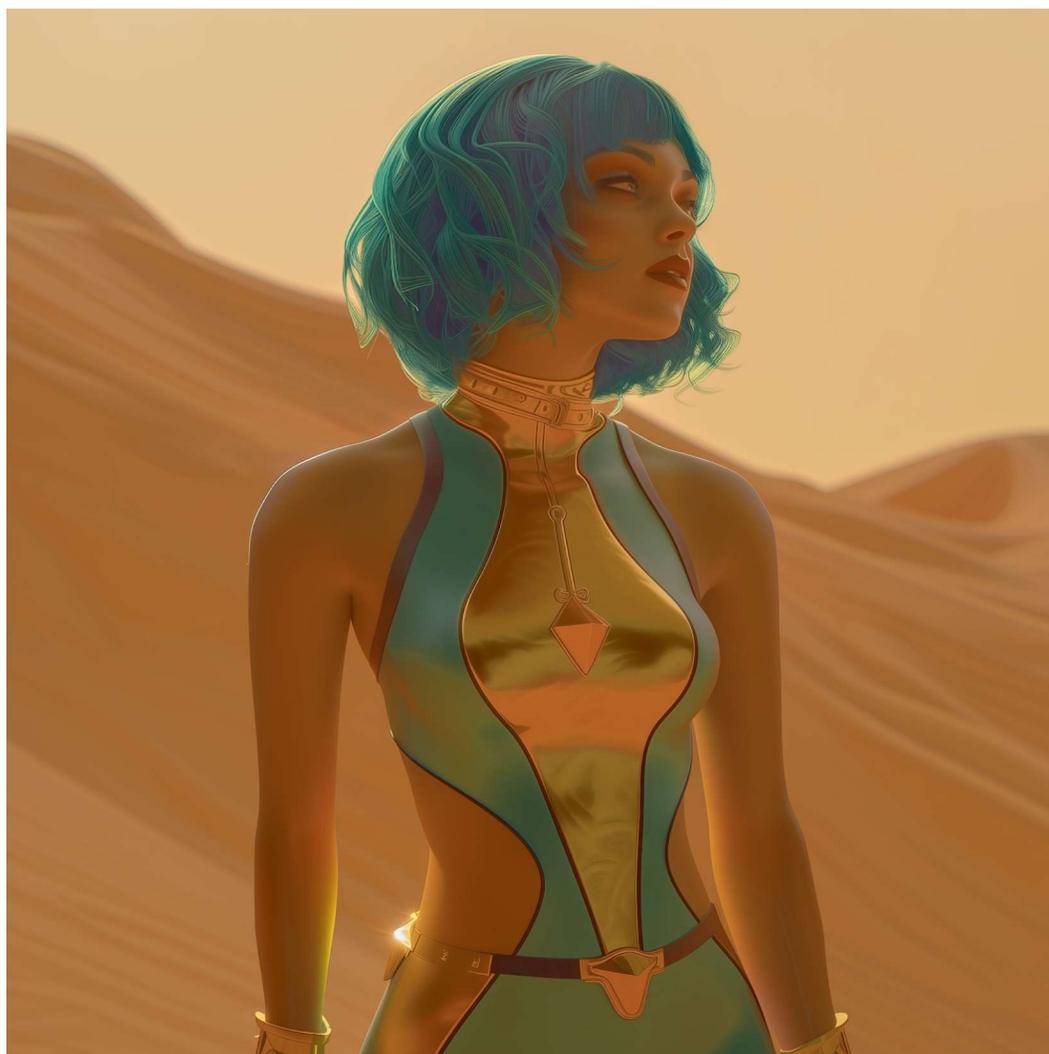


Crash! Like a meteorite, Leandra's soul essence slams into the middle of a vast, blazing desert. Sand and dirt explode high into

CHAPTER 1 : THE LANDING

the air, and a giant crater forms in the ground. In the blink of an eye, Leandra's soul essence begins to take solid form once again, and her body becomes fully visible.

Leandra lies on the ground on her side, semi-covered in shadow from the edges of the crater she just created. After a few minutes, she slowly awakens, feeling the intense heat from the yellow sun beating above her. She gently rises to her feet, feeling dazed and disoriented. She uses her hands to cover her eyes from the rays of the sun, unable to remember anything. *I don't recognize this place. What is this material in my hands?* Leandra watches as sand sifts through her fingers.



Leandra steps closer into the shadow of the crater's edge to get out of the sun. She holds out her hands in front of her and looks at the clothing she's wearing. *Who am I? Why can't I remember?* Leandra climbs out of the large crater and looks down into it as she reaches the top. *Did I make that happen? How am I still alive?* Leandra looks around and sees desert sands stretching as far as she can see, with hardly any plants in sight. Far off in the distance, she sees a thin pillar of smoke billowing from behind a dune. *Maybe there's someone over there.*

Leandra heads toward the smoke, noticing how difficult it is to move quickly in the sinking sand and extreme heat. After walking over a dune, she sees a signpost made of wood. Signs point in multiple directions with writing on them, indicating a fork in the road. Leandra focuses her eyes on the signpost and at first cannot decipher what the strange writing says. After a few moments, she sees flashes of images in her mind and hears different voices she's never heard before. She cannot remember when she's had this experience, but she feels as though this is not the first time. When Leandra looks again at the sign, she realizes that she can now understand what it says.

"Clan," Leandra reads aloud from the sign pointing toward the smoke. "Caves," she reads from the sign pointing to her left. "Cairo," Leandra reads from the sign pointing to her right. She walks for at least an hour to her right, thinking that Cairo must be the name of a city. Eventually, she approaches the edge of a cliff. Peering over a ledge, she sees that the road continues hundreds of feet down the steep cliff, but she knows she would probably die if she continued down that pathway.

"Who could go down a pathway like that?" Leandra says to herself with slight annoyance. She feels the incessant heat warming her skin. She takes a moment to feel a strong breeze blowing up from the bottom of the cliff, giving her a slight reprieve from the heat.

Back at the fork in the road, she decides to follow the direction toward the "Clan," where she can see a plume of smoke billowing in the distance. There she finds huge metallic gates covering a large rectangular building complex that looks pieced together from different types of metallic

CHAPTER 1 : THE LANDING

materials. Two men dressed in hodgepodge outfits made from different substances quickly spot her and wave their hands in the air. Leandra feels cautious but decides to move toward them.



“Over here!” one of the guardsmen yells at Leandra as she approaches.

“Where’s the shipment?”

“Shipment?” Leandra asks. “I think you might have the wrong person.” She still feels cautious speaking with them.

“Well then, what are you doing here?” the man asks. He becomes agitated and tells Leandra to leave. Rather than argue, she realizes she should go, and probably isn’t safe there anyway.

Back at the fork in the road, Leandra decides to try the last location labeled “Caves.” Halfway there, she hears loud vehicles coming up from behind her over the sand dunes. They roar in front of and all around her until she’s surrounded. A group of men get off their vehicles and begin to harass Leandra for whatever she has. Leandra recognizes one of the men from the Clan she visited earlier.

“Hey pretty lady, what are you doing way out here?” the guardsman from before asks. Instead of responding, Leandra remains quiet, looking around. “Aw come on, lady. You thought you could just stroll up to the Scorchers’ base and go tell everyone where we are? We know you don’t have any shipments, but what else ya got for us?”

“Please leave me be,” Leandra pleads.

“Well, maybe we could at least add another slave to our ranks,” the guardsman says. Suddenly, a red hovering vehicle, much larger than the Scorchers’, flies down into the fray. Wheels extend beneath the vehicle as it lands on the sand. The woman controlling it snaps it back and forth, knocking out Scorchers after Scorchers. The woman jumps off the bike and continues to fight them with a metal pipe.

WACK! The mysterious woman with short maroon hair jumps after the Scorchers, knocking them out with her pipe. ZAP! The Scorchers fire laser bullets from their guns, but the woman grabs one of the downed men and lifts him up as a shield.

“Here we go!” the woman shouts as she gets closer to the remaining men on their feet. She flings one of their lifeless bodies at another Scorchers, then throws her metal pipe at the head of the last man still standing. He falls to the ground with the rest of them, unmoving on the desert sand. More Scorchers come running up from behind a sand dune, ready to attack.

At first scared, Leandra feels a huge surge of energy and emotion flow over her. She remembers memories and experiences of fighting before. Her fear dissipates as she takes a battle stance. She joins the fight, using her fists and feet to drive back the Scorchers’ advance. The woman helping Leandra takes off her helmet and uses it as a weapon, knocking out the

CHAPTER 1 : THE LANDING

Scorchers one by one. One of the thugs recognizes the woman and yells, “Mava!”



“Ellis,” Mava says coldly to the man, stopping her attack. Leandra senses that they know each other very well. Mava yells as she runs toward Ellis.

Leandra and Mava take turns fighting the man named Ellis with their fists and feet. Mava throws her helmet at Ellis, but he quickly dodges it. Leandra is pushed to the ground by Ellis, but before he can attack again, Mava knees him in the face. Leandra quickly swipes her leg at his ankle, causing him to fall. Seeing that they’ve been defeated, the Scorchers jump back onto their hover vehicles and fly away as quickly as they came.

“You Scorchers are worse than sand in my boots!” Mava yells as the men fly away. “Get out of here while I give you the chance! And don’t think you can scare me just because there are more of you than there are of me! I know this desert better than the desert vipers! Get out of here!” Mava continues shouting even after the Scorchers are long out of earshot.

The man Ellis that Mava spoke to earlier limps to his hover bike and mutters under his breath, “We’re out of here, but you’ll be dead before you know it.” He pushes a button on his vehicle, turning it on, then flies away into the desert.

“That’s some pathetic fighting, but at least you didn’t get your butt killed,” Mava says after realizing the Scorchers are completely out of sight. Leandra is offended by Mava’s remark but more grateful to be alive.

“I don’t know how I was able to defend myself,” Leandra says, puzzled. “I stopped thinking and just moved my body.” She looks at her hands as though they were more powerful than before and realizes they can be like weapons. “Thank you for your help. Mava, is it?”

Mava holds out her hand toward Leandra. Leandra struggles to understand what Mava is waiting for. She wonders if Mava wants to clasp hands, so she stretches out her hand to meet hers. Mava looks at Leandra’s empty hand and swipes it away.

“I’m not looking for some lovin’!” Mava shouts. “I’m looking for some payment! Some crystals?” Mava loses the little patience she has. Leandra looks around as though searching for something to give her, but realizes she has nothing.

“I don’t have anything to give you,” Leandra pleads. “I don’t even know where I am.” Mava crosses her arms and looks at Leandra in disbelief.

“You’re probably lying like everyone else who ends up in this crazy desert,” Mava says. She forces her way past Leandra, frisking her and looking for something to take. Leandra is upset by Mava’s actions, but lets her check anyway, knowing she has nothing to give. Mava is irritated, realizing that Leandra is telling the truth.

“Well what do ya know?” Mava says. “The one time someone is honest with me, and I end up with the venom up my ass!” She doesn’t hesitate to

show her anger and disappointment in her tone and demeanor. She takes a moment to shake it off, then walks over to her flying vehicle and gets on.

“Wait!” Leandra shouts, running toward Mava.

“Don’t-” Mava says, interrupting her. “even try to bother me. I’m not your mom, and even if I was, I don’t even know what a mom is supposed to do with a helpless child like you.”

“But I’m not asking you to be my mother!” Leandra shouts, but Mava cuts her off before she can continue.

“Well good! I’m glad that’s settled!” Mava says assertively. She turns on her flying vehicle, drowning out any possible noise Leandra could make. Before putting on her helmet, Mava shouts, “Don’t die!” She veers away from Leandra and drives off into the desert.

Leandra feels puzzled by the whole situation. She considers that Mava probably was just trying to take something from her, as the Scorchers were. She lets herself have a moment to think before heading back on her way to the caves.



After a few hours, with the sun constantly beating down on her, Leandra arrives at the entrance of a cave. The only entrance she sees is blocked and locked by a large wooden door. By this time, Leandra feels exhausted, and the sun is beginning to set. She climbs into a small covered niche that is somewhat warm and falls asleep.

Leandra wakes up a few hours later when she hears men talking. When she looks, she sees they are dressed in brown robes, entering the cave door that was locked earlier but is now open. The men in robes don't see her in the niche she's sleeping in. After they enter the cave, Leandra climbs down and follows them. Dehydrated and sunburned, she feels like her strength has left her. *I need to find something...to eat or drink, now.* Her mind begins to wander.

When Leandra enters through the large wooden door, she notices the men are gone. She looks around a room filled with different colored crystals and gems that glimmer. It's a circular room with a stone column in the middle. She sees murals on the wall depicting the story of a mystical woman decorated in shining crystals and gems. She figures out a pattern in which the stones are to be lit that matches the sequence of the mural's story. When the gems are lit in a certain sequence, Leandra hears one of the doorways unlock. She heads through the now-unlocked door leading further into the cave. She finds a hallway with different closed doors on both sides.

Leandra looks around and sees what looks like books sitting on shelves all around her. *This is obviously some type of library, but what are these men reading?* She grabs a few books and skims through some pages. She finds sketches and an illustrated book about the woman in the murals, but she can't recognize the text. In a different room, there are beds with lanterns next to them on end tables.

In another room, Leandra finds a metal contraption with a lens at one end. She follows the path of the metal piping and notices it goes through the roof of the cave. She also finds maps of the stars and constellations. She feels a slight sense of déjà vu. *Why do I feel like I've looked at these sorts of things before?* She looks into the lens of the metal pipe and sees the current nighttime sky, with stars scattered about. She maneuvers the device until it's focused on the brightest star she can find. When she does this, she hears a click.

She leaves the room and tries to open the last door she hasn't entered yet. She places her ear against it and hears people conversing. *Well, here we go.* Leandra pushes the door open and sees the men in robes from earlier. The men all seem startled except for one; he stands up and introduces himself.

"How did you get in here?" says the eldest-looking man dressed in a brown robe. "This place is secret, and I do not know you. Does anyone else here know this woman?" All the Monks shake their heads.

"I'm Reswet," one of the younger-looking men tells Leandra. He, too, is dressed in a brown robe like the eldest man. Reswet stares at Leandra,

intimidated by her beauty.

“I’m sorry for coming in like this, really,” Leandra says apologetically. She explains how she couldn’t remember anything about who or where she is. After some time, the men in robes begin to believe her. There are five of them: Race, the eldest; Reswet; Wenem; Min; and Akha. They call themselves Monks living in the Monk Society. The Monks know by Leandra’s strange clothes that she’s not from there. They feed her different types of meat and plants and explain who they are. They tell her they’re a society of people hiding from dark forces and collecting wisdom from throughout Earth’s history to hopefully restore peace one day. Akha brings her to a bedroom.

“We study all the time, read books, make stuff. Nothing like Cairo,” says Akha.

Leandra is unsure of what he is talking about.

“What is Cairo?” she asks. Akha is startled by the question. Race tells the boy to attend to another task, so he leaves Leandra to sleep and says he’ll return in the morning.

Leandra thinks for hours. *Where am I? Who am I? Should I trust these people?* Before she knows it, she falls asleep. In her dreams, a figure visits her and speaks. This person is all light; no details of her body are visible. All Leandra can remember herself saying is, “Remember,” then she wakes up saying her own name, “Leandra.” She hears the clamor of people moving and talking in the other cave rooms. She gets out of bed and bumps into Min.

“Breakfast is in there.” He points to the last room, with a sign above the entry that says, “Convening room.” Leandra goes in and joins them for breakfast. They all enjoy conversation and laugh over jokes about their daily tasks. They also joke while guessing who she is, and Leandra tells them what she thinks her name is: Leandra.

“She’s a dream princess!” jokes Wenem.

“No, a fairy elf mistress from Gornelf!” says Min. Leandra joins in with the laughter. The jokes are new and unfamiliar, but she feels comfortable with these men. Reswet continues staring at her while remaining very

quiet.

“Is there a reason you keep staring at me?” asks Leandra.

Reswet smiles and says, “I’m not staring, I’m just thinking.”

“About me?” Leandra asks.

“Maybe,” Reswet says and turns away. Leandra leaves it at that and smiles back at him.

Race moves her toward the back door, which leads to a staircase. He wants Leandra to follow him to their village. He assumes she must be from Cairo, the largest city near them. He warns her that it is dangerous to get there from their village.

“I want to remember somehow. Can you help me?” Leandra asks. Race tells her about a very old woman many call The Oracle, who was last seen in Cairo. He explains that The Oracle might be able to help her.

Leandra and Race walk together to the heart of the Monk village. There are many Monks about, male and female, not all in robes like the first group she met. There are structures of all sorts made from wood and plants. Leandra meets many people, each with unique stories about how they ended up at the Monk village and how grateful they are. Some used to be part of a gang called the Scorchers. Others say they were part of a group called the Coilers. While other people tell Leandra that they used to be citizens of Cairo or stragglers traveling the desert to escape the dark agents controlling the major cities.

Race takes Leandra to a place he calls the main hall. There, they give her a backpack with a device that can morph into different types of clothing, and a note for The Oracle to give her when they meet. They also give her a map of Cairo, pinpointing The Oracle’s location in what is called the “Broadcasting District.”

Leandra takes a gulp of bravery and asks how she’s supposed to get to Cairo. Race tells her they have a boat that could take her down the Nile to the sewer entries of Cairo. Leandra feels unsure about her upcoming journey but assumes she can figure it out.

Leandra explores the Monk village before leaving. She meets many helpful people and learns skills like apothecary, how to mix items into

potions that could aid her on her journey. She finally agrees to go down the Nile on the ship Race mentioned earlier, trusting her new friends.

Down the Nile, she meets a roadblock of branches and rocks in a narrow part of the riverway. She breaks through the first batch of twigs and branches but eventually overturns, losing the ship, the letter for The Oracle, and her map.

Leandra swims ashore easily since she's not far from the water's edge. She looks around for a while but finds no one in the hot desert sun. The next thing she knows, she sees a hoverbike coming up the river. Leandra recognizes right away that it's Mava, the woman who saved her earlier from the Scorchers.

"Hey, it's you!" Mava shouts, sounding oddly welcoming.

"Long time no see," Leandra replies. "Maybe you could help me again?"

"Need a lift?" Mava asks.

They exchange words, and eventually Mava agrees to take Leandra to the city of Cairo. They ride on Mava's hoverbike to the Broadcasting District, which is the only thing she can remember from what she lost in the river. Luckily, Mava says she had planned on heading there anyway. As they fly toward the city, Leandra looks down and marvels at how it is mostly submerged in water. People live in gigantic buildings that rise out of the water, with additional buildings built on top of them. They arrive around 6 p.m., the sun still not set.



Leandra informs Mava that she doesn't really know where to start searching for The Oracle. Mava suggests a nearby bar where they can ask people about her. Leandra feels an aching sensation as she enters the first bar with Mava. She sees people who resemble the Scorchers she ran into in the desert. Mava whispers something to the bartender, and Leandra is unable to hear her.

"You stay here, I'll be right back," Mava says. She walks toward a room in the back of the bar, then turns to Leandra. "I mean it, this place is dangerous."

Leandra feels a surge of fear and adrenaline. The bartender hands her a drink and says, "On me." He looks away and wipes a dish with a towel.

Leandra looks at the drink for a few seconds, then gets up from her seat.

“I need to, um, you know,” she says, then pauses.

“Wet the bush?” the bartender asks. Confused, Leandra stops and stares at him for a moment. He points down toward his crotch, indicating something. *Please tell me he means what I think he means.* Leandra decides to play along and see where it goes.

“Yes!” Leandra says. “Where is it?” The bartender points toward the entrance.

“Many thanks!” Leandra says. She slowly moves out of the bar, then runs for the exit and leaves.

Down the street, Leandra explores nearby buildings but can’t find the woman known as The Oracle. Some people she asks have heard of The Oracle, but no one has a clear trail. Leandra passes what looks like a storage building, previously blocked by a truck, and hears a clamor behind the doors. She moves in and watches from a safe place upstairs, able to hear the conversation. There are three men who look similar to Scorchers, two small and one larger, monstrous and cat-like. An old woman sits tied up and blindfolded in a chair.

“You either succumb willingly or die here today!” the large cat-like figure says.

“Giving in to Chaos will bestow upon them my ability of foresight,” the old woman says. “Here’s a prediction for you.” Her face tilts upward as if looking at Leandra. “The Pharaoh’s and Queen’s reign will soon end!”

“Bah!” shouts the large thug. “Leave her be. She obviously can’t predict the future.”

“But the Pharaoh said he wanted her alive and transformed,” one of the smaller thugs says.

The larger thug smacks the smaller one on the back. “I know that! Come on, men!” The three thugs leave the room. Leandra climbs down through the open window to the old woman.

“You’re here!” the old woman says.

“Shh!” Leandra whispers. “What do you mean you’re here? Were you expecting someone?”

“My child,” the old woman begins. “I am The Oracle. I knew you would

find me here. That's why I let them capture me."

Leandra stands and looks at The Oracle. "I figured you were the Oracle. You knew I'd find you here? You're really putting your life at risk assuming I'd find you. What if I didn't show up?" *She's really confident in herself.* Leandra walks over and tries to free The Oracle from her binds.

"Leave me!" the Oracle says.

"But—" Leandra starts before being interrupted.

"Trust me, leave now!" the Oracle says, raising her voice. "Through the door behind you! Hurry!" Leandra thinks for a second, then trusts the woman and dashes out the door and out of the building. She ends up behind it next to a huge metal tower.

Back at the bar, Mava enters a barely lit room. A shadowy woman with long dark braided hair and a small black hat sits cross-legged on a chair. She looks up at Mava, waiting.

"She's here," Mava says.

"Good," the shadowy woman replies slowly.

"I'll retrieve her," Mava says, reassuring her. The woman turns her head away and says nothing more.

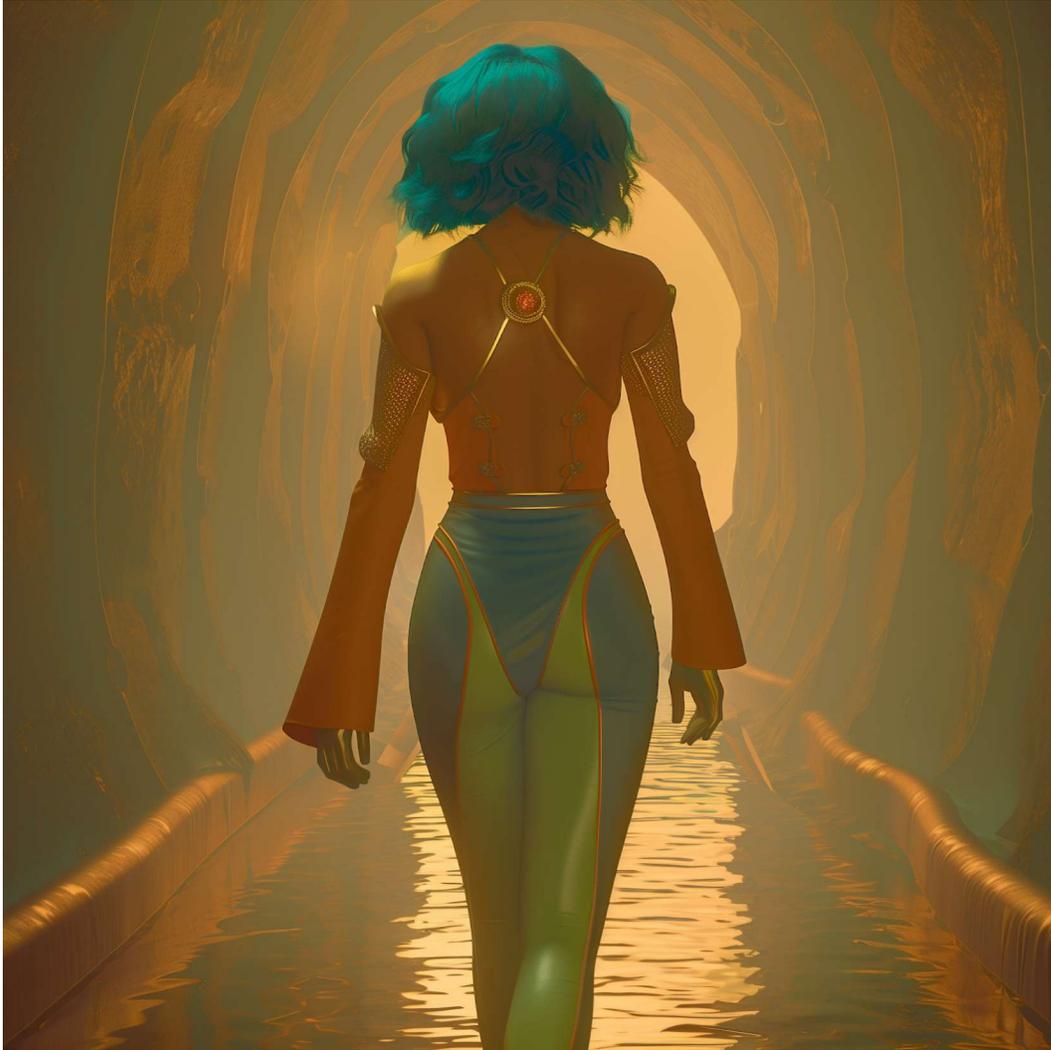
When Mava leaves the room and returns to the bar, she notices that Leandra is gone. "What!" Mava shouts at the bartender. "I don't know what this woman will do to me if I don't find her."

"Well, you know what to do then," the bartender says.

"Damn," Mava mutters. She storms out of the bar looking for Leandra.

Leandra finds a wooden plank under the tower, but it's screwed shut. "That woman told me to go this way for some reason," she says. She finds a toolbox nearby and tries a device labeled electromagnetic. Using it allows her to unhinge the plank easily. She lifts it to find a spiral stairwell leading deep down, where she can't see.

Leandra climbs further and further down. Bats flutter about until she reaches a tunnel echoing with the sounds of moving, dripping water. It is large enough for her to enter, so she does.



She lands in a sewer that carries her very deep and far. She swims to the side and climbs out. She looks around, marveling at the construction of the huge sewer system. Leandra notices the water gushing through looks clean.

“How do I get out of here?” she asks herself.

Wet and cold, she keeps moving through the corridors. Some doors lead nowhere, and others open to unknown tools and items. In one room, she finds a man who introduces himself as Widd. He is a willowy, thin man who wears glasses and a lab coat. Leandra notices his clothes are very dirty.

“Oh, you startled me. Who are you?” Leandra asks. She introduces herself, and they converse. Widd explains that he and his friends are hiding

from the Cairo rulership. He describes how he used to be a mechanic for the Pharaoh's army, but now lives in the sewers. He tells Leandra he found a way to grow food and filter the water so it's drinkable.

"Can you help me out of here?" Leandra asks.

"Hmm, that's tricky, but I can lead you to the outer city that connects to the desert," Widd explains.

"Alright, let's go," Leandra says.

They travel through the sewers, and Widd gives her insight on where to go and where not to. He also applies a green balm to her wounds, and Leandra notices how quickly she begins to heal. She also feels a boost in her energy. They continue until they reach a dead end.

"That's strange. My map shows a way out behind this wall," Widd says. A group of six people approaches from behind. Leandra notices they appear extremely dirty and have a strange, dark glow around them. *This is not good.*

"Come on, Widd!" Leandra shouts. She grabs him and dives into the waterway leading to the other side of the wall. The group follows and jumps in after them. When Leandra and Widd emerge from the canal, they seal the waterway before the group can reach them.

"Come on, Widd!" Leandra yells.

"Great survival skills!" Widd compliments her.

Before they enter the next room, a tall, mean-looking man bursts from the airway above them. He wields a huge metallic staff. He says nothing but attacks, swiping his weapon left and right. Widd and Leandra fight him off, though he seems very strong. They lure him into the next hallway, then release the water to flood him and run upstairs. Widd points to the manhole above them.

"This leads to the outer city," Widd says hurriedly.

"Come on, Widd!" Leandra reaches out her hand.

"I can't! This is the safest place for me," Widd says.

"You consider this safe?" Leandra asks, bewildered.

"I know, I know." Widd replies, waving at Leandra as he walks away.
"Good luck, Leandra!"

Leandra climbs up to exit the manhole. She sees the desert not too far ahead, just beyond some ruined buildings. Behind her, she can see the towering city of Cairo she had just left. Mava rolls up in front of her on her hover bike, as if she were waiting.

“Mava!” Leandra shouts. Mava crosses her arms.

“You’ll never make it back before nightfall, and at night the desert is a death trap,” Mava says. Leandra doesn’t know how to react.

“How did you find me?” Leandra asks.

“Hmmm, well, I live just over there. I guess it is lucky you happen to be here just as I am coming home,” Mava replies. Leandra peers at the building, a huge twelve-story apartment complex, looking half destroyed. She looks up and notices the sun is almost completely set.

“Come on, Leandra, you can stay at my place,” Mava reassures her. Leandra is hesitant but follows. Mava asks about The Oracle, but Leandra keeps her lips sealed, diverting the conversation.

There is almost no talking before they go to bed. Inside Mava’s apartment is a bed, a kitchen, everything spaced out, and the windows are huge open spaces in the walls. Mava pushes some buttons on the wall, triggering an electric force field around the room.

“I can take you back to the Monks tomorrow, if you want,” Mava says.

Leandra, not trusting a word Mava says, replies, “Alright.”

They go to their separate rooms; Leandra sleeps on the bed in the living room. A few hours later, she wakes to the sound of marching feet outside. She notices that the sun is just beginning to rise. She looks outside and sees a child playing in a courtyard. She looks around the room and finds some useful items, including some books. She sees the panel Mava activated earlier. She hears a whispering voice in her head: “Careful.” Leandra removes the power cells from the panel, and the force field deactivates.

She leaves through the front door, goes downstairs, and eventually reaches the courtyard. She thinks of going into the desert but has no idea which way to go. She finds the child she heard earlier. The child doesn’t speak but prances around. Leandra follows the kid to another building. Here she meets some of the Outer City residents and gets a

better idea of what is going on in the Cairo area and the world. One person reveals the way back to the caves: follow the stars. Leandra decides to leave, but again Mava is waiting, this time with a gun in her hand.

“What is that?” Leandra asks.

“Ha! You really must be from another world!” Mava replies.

“What?” Leandra says angrily.

“If I pull this trigger, you’ll be scorched and fried. Now, I’m sure you don’t want that to happen,” Mava says.

“What do you want?” Leandra asks.

“Go to bed and stay there,” Mava commands.

Leandra follows and doesn’t say a word. In the apartment, she sees Mava do something to the force-field panel. Leandra falls asleep again, and so does Mava in her own room. She wakes again to footsteps and notices that it is daylight. When she looks outside, she sees the thug she saw earlier with The Oracle. He is again accompanied by his two smaller thugs.

Leandra panics. She sees that Mava’s room is open, and she is gone. The thugs are headed toward the apartment. She can’t leave through the front door as before because there is some kind of code lock. She finds that Mava’s bed lifts and reveals a secret staircase that leads downward. She goes inside and puts the bed back down to cover her tracks.



Atop Mava’s apartment building, she sits on the roof watching the thugs approach. “Dabu,” Mava whispers to herself.

Leandra follows the path back into a sewer. She moves through unfamiliar rooms and locks. She finds useful items, like wrenches and clothing. She enters one hallway where she sees the six people from before in the sewers, minus the guy who was washed away. They see her and begin to run after her. A guy wearing a hard hat, wielding a wrench, and a woman in tattered clothes, wielding a crowbar, come from behind her. They knock out two men, then turn to Leandra.

“Run!” the woman shouts. Leandra considers running, but then stops.

“No!” Leandra raises her arms, ready for battle. Widd comes from behind her, too, with a weird slingshot weapon.

“You’re back!” Widd shouts. They battle the thugs and win. The thugs withdraw into the waterways. Leandra sighs and rests for a moment while Widd heals her wounds with some type of device she has never seen before.

The woman turns to Leandra and asks, “Are you ok?” Leandra notices that her voice is sweet and reassuring.

The man in a hard hat hands her a flashlight, saying, “I’m Angel.”

“And I’m Rachel,” the woman says.

“These were the friends I was talking about,” Widd tells Leandra.

Leandra thanks them, and they converse for a few moments. They explain that these people were tormented by darkness and somehow ended up in the sewers. They don’t know exactly how it happens. Leandra is unable to explain who she is but says she needs to escape.

“Escape?” Angel asks. “This is our home.”

“You could stay with us since you’re in trouble and all,” Rachel tells Leandra. Leandra shakes her head.

“I’m worried.” Leandra explains what has happened since she woke up in the desert with no memory. She also tells them about the Monk Village.

“Another city?” Widd asks. “We have never considered that. Is it safe?” Widd makes a perplexed expression.

“I hope so. Nothing seems certain here, but I know it’s safer than the sewers,” Leandra assures them.

“Let’s go! I can’t live like this anymore either!” Rachel says.

Angel resists for a few moments but eventually says, “Alright.” Widd finds a map of the sewers that lead to the open Nile River and leads them in that direction.

“Let’s go,” Leandra says to the group.

They pass through more mazes and arrive at an open sewer. “No!” Leandra hears someone screaming above them. There is a staircase leading to a manhole opening.

“You’ll get her, I promise!” the woman shouts. Leandra recognizes Mava’s voice.

“Please! No!” Mava yells. Boom! Leandra hears more ruckus above them.

“Let’s go, Leandra!” Angel shouts.

“No! I can’t just leave her,” Leandra says while looking up.

“Who?” Rachel asks.

“Mava, she’s in danger,” Leandra says as she starts climbing. “I know it has something to do with me.”

“Wait for me! You can’t do this alone!” Widd yells.

“I’m in,” Rachel says, climbing up the ladder.

“You’re all crazy!” Angel says as he follows.

They arrive above ground to find Mava’s hover bike destroyed and Mava being held by the two thugs. They have guns pointed at her. Mava’s gun lies on the ground.

“Leandra!” Mava shouts. The large thug looks at Leandra. “Dabu, don’t!” Mava yells. Dabu reaches for Leandra, but Rachel jumps in front of her.

“Hmm,” Dabu says, pondering. “Hahahaha! Give yourself up now or she gets it!” Dabu points at Mava.

“Why do you want me?” Leandra yells. “How did you find me?”

“Don’t ask questions,” Dabu replies. “Just do as I say.”

Leandra looks at Mava, noticing her staring at the ground, then says, “No.” She feels a powerful sensation within her body.

“Raaarr!!!” Dabu roars, rearing up to attack Leandra.

“Ahhh!” Leandra yells. She holds her hands out as wide as possible. Dabu flies back from a powerful gust of wind she summons. “Free her, now!” Leandra yells at the other thugs. They point their guns at her and fire their energy weapons, but the blasts absorb into the green aura around her body. A huge funnel of wind surrounds Leandra, blowing the remaining thugs away.

“Remember.” The voice in Leandra’s head returns. Leandra closes her eyes, safe within the wind funnel. She opens her eyes and notices the aura of light glistening from her body. Rachel, Angel, Widd, and Mava look at Leandra in shock, along with the thugs. Mava sees her chance and wiggles free to join Leandra and her new friends.

“So you really are special!” Dabu says, rising back to his feet. “You’re coming back one way or another.” Dabu comes roaring at Leandra, lifting

his claws, ready to swipe at her.

Without thinking, Leandra pushes her hands forward and sends powerful winds at Dabu, holding him back. He grabs his laser pistol and fires it toward her. Angel jumps in front of Leandra with a metallic shield that absorbs the laser blast.

“We’ve got you,” Angel says kindly.

“Down goes the feral cat!” Rachel yells. She throws a metallic ball that explodes into a rain of electricity around Dabu.

“Insects,” Dabu roars.

Mava runs from behind Dabu and kicks him directly on his spine, causing him to bend over in pain. He reaches over and swipes at Mava, but she’s sent backward by Leandra channeling wind at her. Widd throws a silver crystal at Dabu’s feet, causing the ground to become slippery and wet. Once again, Dabu falls to the ground, this time face-first. Dabu’s thugs come from behind and surround them, their laser pistols trained on the group. Angel, Rachel, Widd, and Mava hold up their hands in surrender.

“Enough!” Leandra yells. She pushes out her hands, and a gust of wind blows the thugs into buildings, knocking them unconscious. She sees Dabu rising again, reaching for his weapon. Leandra holds her hand out in anger and sends winds so powerful that Dabu flies into a dilapidated home. The building collapses on top of him. Everyone stares at Leandra as her green aura glows bright at first, then slowly fades until it disappears.

“What was that?” Widd asks.

“That is awesome!” Rachel says. “She just blew them away!”

“You saved our cans, Leandra,” Angel says graciously.

“Thank you, guys, but we have no time. You should head to the sewers!” Leandra commands. The group agrees. “I’ll follow shortly.” Widd, Rachel, and Angel all go back through the manhole into the sewers. Leandra confidently walks up to Mava.

“What the suns do I do now?” Mava asks angrily.

“Come with me,” Leandra suggests. “Back to the Monk village. We can escape this place.”

“Easy for you to say,” Mava replies. “If I join you, I’ll be sought after

just like you. There's no turning back. The Pharaoh's army won't restrain itself."

"We can worry about that when it comes," Leandra reassures Mava, patting her shoulder. *I know I shouldn't trust this woman, but she seems pretty desperate at this point. She knows her way around and can defend herself. Maybe I can use this to my advantage?* Mava shakes her head in acknowledgment.

"Don't you hate me?" Mava asks.

"There's no point in that," Leandra states. "We can get out of here together and leave all of this behind." Leandra waits for Mava's reply while she looks at her hover bike.

"Damn! It's destroyed!" Mava yells, stomping her foot.

"I know another way back, through the sewers," Leandra says.

"Alright, Leandra, let's make them pay for this," Mava says vigorously. Leandra watches as she heads down the manhole, then follows closely. She notices the trio isn't there when they arrive at the bottom of the ladder.

"They must have already left," Leandra says in a bewildered voice. Leandra and Mava move down the waterway until they arrive at the Nile opening. She notices her boat, which she lost the day before, is docked at the river bend.

"Your boat!" Mava exclaims.

"I guess Rachel, Widd, and Angel went somewhere else," Leandra says. She looks away and feels saddened that her new friends are nowhere to be found.

"Look down," Mava says.

Leandra looks down and sees writing in the sand. "Leandra, we made it. We must leave, but hopefully we will see each other again. Thank you for running into us - Widd, Rachel, and Angel." Leandra looks up toward the sky. *I hope I see you again.*

"Wow, you've made some friends already," Mava says as they move toward the ship to escape.