

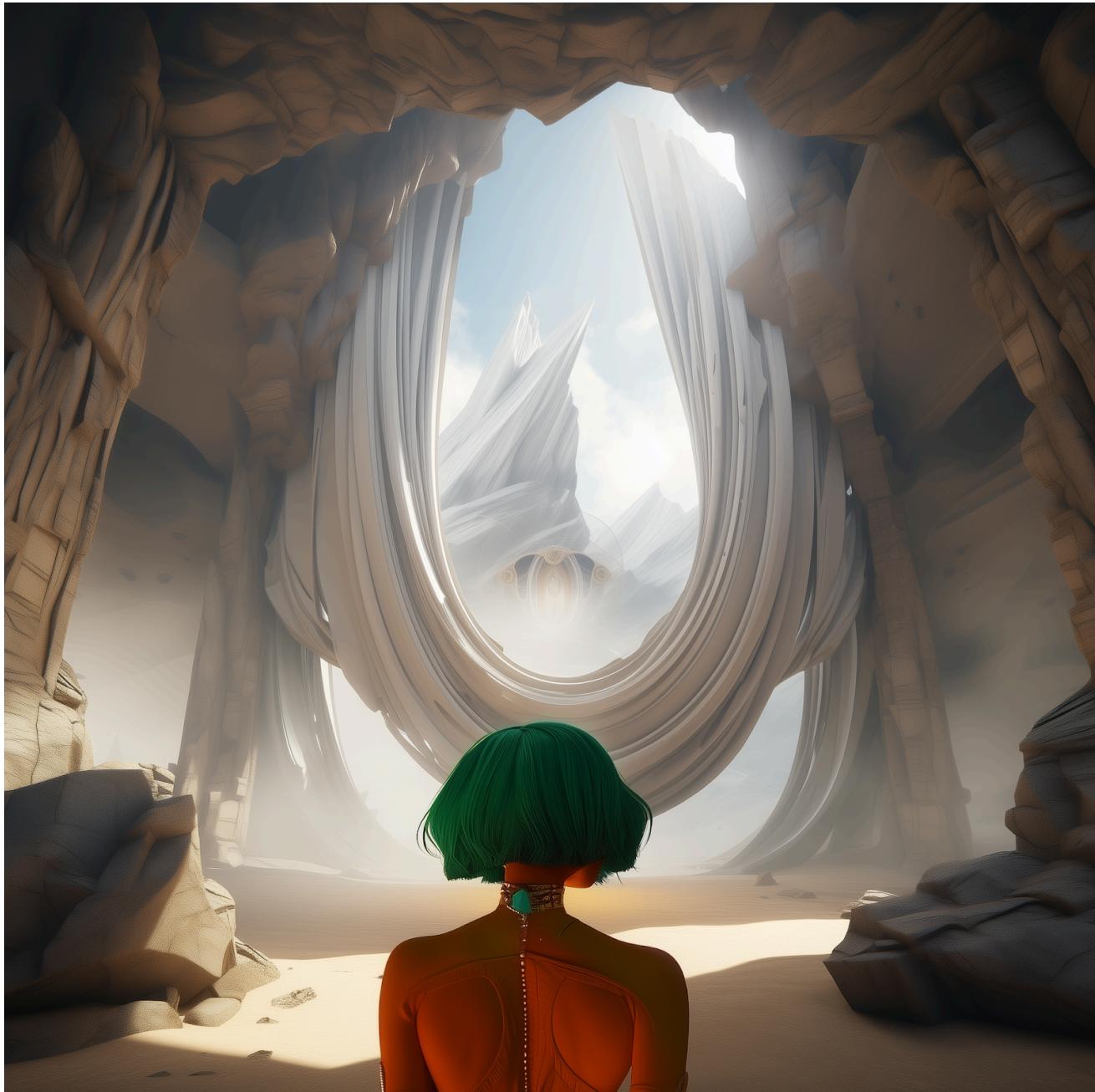
Chapter 0 : Not All Birds Are Free

Leandra walks through the breezy silk grass covering most of her planet, Yanna. She carries an eavesflapper bird tightly in her hands without hurting it. The eavesflapper flutters its wings feeling some anxiety, anticipating what shall become of it.



Regardless of this, the bird still trusts Leandra's hands remembering she took care of it since it broke its wings so many months ago. Leandra approaches the pebbled pathway leading to the pillared gust temple on top of the tallest hill within sight of the palace. Inside of the temple, she looks around to see that things are still intact and untouched just as she thought they would be. The temple, made of stone and decorated with silk,

howls lightly as the winds blow through the large openings on both sides of Leandra.



Still holding the bird tightly, Leandra walks towards the end of the rectangular gust temple, and looks up to see the sky above, revealing itself. She opens her hands and lifts them, releasing the bird into the air. Crying in delight, the eavesflapper flaps its wings, taking the gust with it as it leaves through the sky window.

"I will cherish the time you gave to me to be with you." Leandra says. She looks up and watches the birds far above as the eavesflapper joins them and disappears into the dark blue sky. She wonders if she did the right thing and if the bird will have a better chance

living without her mending its ailments. The thought quickly passes. She realizes the giving has been completed, and she couldn't turn back the wheels of time even if she wanted to.

"I trust that you will accomplish everything you came here for. You can take care of yourself, beautiful creature." Leandra says to herself in a subtle soft voice.

Leandra continues to stare up into the sky long after the birds have passed. She uses this rare opportunity of being alone to ponder what direction she wants to take her people moving into the future. After some time Leandra turns around and is startled to see one of her advisers behind her.

"Klonn, I wasn't expecting you." Leandra says to her adviser.

"I've only come to let you know that your lunch is ready." Klonn tells Leandra.

"Thank you Klonn, I appreciate it, I will meet you back at the palace." Leandra says to Klonn with slight impatience. She watches as Klonn bows then leaves the temple in a vehicle and heads back towards the palace. *It's not like him to come to the temple while I am here. He knows this is one of the few times I do not want to be disturbed.*

Leandra starts to walk out of the temple when she notices above her a shooting star strikes across the sky. She feels an unfamiliar energy move through her body, then she looks up to see many other shooting stars dart through the atmosphere. *What is this?* She moves quickly out of the temple and looks up at the sky as it suddenly becomes dark and full of clouds. *This cannot be happening.* She sees a flash of memories run through her mind, only seeing brief images of times when she was a child living on an enslaved planet.

Leandra lifts her hand towards the sky and a gust of wind blows away the dark clouds. As the clouds dissipate, she sees another shooting star move through the sky and fall towards the ground not far behind her. She turns to investigate the anomaly but at first can only see a shadowy shape take form. *Are the shields not up? How could this be happening?* The unknown figure continues to form and Leandra can see it's a living being slowly walking towards her.

"Those winds." the shadowy figure says. She moves closer towards Leandra. Immediately recognizing the woman's voice, Leandra stances ready for battle. The shadow lifts from the woman and Leandra confirms what she thought to herself.



“Cogwa.” Leandra says. She’s loud enough for the woman to hear with shock in her voice.

“You couldn’t bring yourself to completely shut me out, could you?” Cogwa asks in a condescending tone.

“Come here!” Cogwa yells. She flies towards Leandra with her hands sprawled in front of her. Leandra glides to the side, barely missing Cogwa’s claws.

“I don’t want to fight you Cogwa.” Leandra states. A yellow aura glows off her body.

“No, you’d rather banish me.” Cogwa shouts. She flies forward a few times, attempting to swipe at Leandra with her fists. Leandra moves as quickly as the wind, dodging all of Cogwa’s attacks. She lands on both of her feet, then blows Cogwa back with a powerful gust of wind. Cogwa flies back far away from Leandra and towards the capital city, steadyng herself in the air floating.

“I am counting on that.” Cogwa yells. She looks over Leandra’s shoulder at the Capital city behind her.

“Cogwa, no!” Leandra shouts. She runs as quickly as the winds could take her towards Cogwa and the Capital City. She feels a sense of regret that she left Cogwa with a key to pass through the planetary shields, knowing that she could come back being hostile. *The throne room!* Leandra thinks in her mind, remembering that Cogwa can still access it. *I’ve hoped for so long Cogwa would return, but not like this!*

“Klonn!” Leandra yells. She taps the communicator on her wrist, signaling her adviser. “Can you hear me?” She says louder this time hoping to get a response. *He was just here earlier, why isn’t he responding?*

Leandra arrives at the entrance of the Capital city, hearing screaming not too far ahead of her.



“Please help us!” A woman screams while running towards Leandra. “Empress!” The woman runs a few steps then falls to her feet, unconscious.

Leandra touches the side of the woman’s neck to ensure she still has a pulse. She notices a pollen-like material covering the woman’s face. *Cogwa’s doing, I assume. Where are the guards?*

“Guards!” Leandra yells looking around for someone to respond. She notices an eerie silence as more people appear to fall to the ground. She uses the winds to glide through the city towards the throne room, noticing her people including the guards passed out

on the ground.

As Leandra glides through the city she continues to think about Cogwa, pondering why she's come back after so many years. She lowers herself to the ground when she reaches the towering throne room. She looks around to see more of her guards and some of her other advisers, sleeping. After passing through the main corridors, Leandra finally arrives at the main door of the throne room. She notices that the doors don't open immediately as they normally would.



Leandra shakes her head in disbelief then finds a control panel hidden behind a rock near the bottom right side of the door. She pulls open the panel and places her hand on top of

it, hoping it will read her signature. All Leandra can hear is a beep sound, indicating to her that her signal is denied entry.

“Damn!” Leandra shouts. She puts the control panel down onto the ground. She looks around her seeing if she recognizes any of the people in the corridor. She sees one of the security guards, Mintelle.

“Mintelle.” Leandra says. She lightly shakes the guard to awaken him, but he does not respond. She notices the same pollen-like substance covering his face. Leandra stands up and holds out her hands, summoning a gust of wind that blows away all of the pollen on his body.

“Uh...” Mintelle says softly. He shakes his head as he awakens.

“Guardsman.” Leandra says respectfully. She kneels down and supports his back with her hand, holding him up.

“Empress.” Mintelle says in a weary voice. “A strange woman with wings came flying through here. Our weapons seem to just absorb into her, like we’ve seen happen to you.” He slowly rises to his feet, steadyng himself on Leandra’s shoulder.

“I know who she is.” Leandra says. “This is something I should have taken care of a long time ago.” Leandra tilts her head down for a moment, knowing in the back of her mind she left this part of her life fragmented.

“Mintelle.” Leandra says as she grasps Mintelle’s shoulder. “I need to find a way into the throne room but Cogwa must have found a way to lock me out. I wonder if she’s threatened Klonn and forced him to lock me out of here.”

“Yes, Empress.” Mintelle says. “I work the security through every corridor of this palace, and one of my crewmen found something that might be of importance. Please come with me.” Mintelle chauffeurs Leandra through the castle into a narrow passageway, where on the other side is a room Leandra doesn’t recognize. A large archway with a door beneath it stands in front of them. The archway is covered in gems and jewels that light up the room.

“Hundreds of years have passed, how could I have not known about this room?” Leandra asks.

“We only discovered it recently.” Mintelle responds. “The two walls seem to have opened

on their own, revealing the passageway into this room. But if my palace schematics are correct, the other side of this wall should lead to the throne room.”

“Great work guardsman.” Leandra says. She lightly taps Mintelle on his shoulder showing gratitude. “Now how do we open this? I don’t see any handles or contraptions to open it. Only these crystals in the archway.” She lays her hand on top of the colorful crystals in the archway, and it lights up, illuminating the room. She keeps her hand on the crystals while covering her eyes with her other hand. A beam of light covers the doorway and makes a humming noise.

“Empress?” Mintelle asks. He covers both of his eyes with his arm.

“You’ve done great work.” Leandra states. “This is a portal. Watch over the castle for me while I’m there. If I don’t return, you are to lead the security forces and take back the castle by force.”

“Understood Empress!” Mintelle yells back.

Leandra walks through the portal of light and appears in her throne room. She looks around and sees her advisers scattered about the floor, appearing to be asleep. Leandra notices the same pollen-like substance she’s seen before, covering their faces. Up ahead she sees Cogwa at the main control panel, working hastily at something.

“I see all of my advisers here asleep on the ground.” Leandra says. “All of them but one.” Cogwa turns around with an angry scowl.

“I only needed one.” Cogwa says. She continues working her hands on the main control panel.

“You didn’t need any of them, Cogwa.” Leandra states. “You know that I left the shield key unlocked for you. You could have returned home anytime. But why now? Why like this?”

“Ha.” Cogwa attempts a laugh but quickly returns to her scowl. She continues to work on the main control panel, tapping on buttons. “Klonn!”

“Yes my dear.” Klonn says from above. He slams to the ground in front of Leandra.

“I don’t have time for this and I’ve never cared for reunions.” Cogwa says. “Get her out of my way, I think I’m almost there.”

“Of course my dear.” Klonn replies. He locks his eyes onto Leandra.

“Klonn.” Leandra says in a hesitant tone. “You know you are no match for me.” Leandra’s aura shines a bright green. “How could you have done this Klonn? Stand down.”

Leandra takes a few steps back as Klonn transforms into a large monster with huge claws protruding from his hands.

“Klonn.” Leandra says with disappointment in her voice.

Klonn, in his new form, swipes at Leandra with his gigantic claws. Leandra twirls through the air through Klonn’s claws, dodging all of his attacks.

“Stand down!” Leandra shouts. She shoots Klonn with a gust of wind knocking him back. Leandra moves at an intense speed pointing her foot at Klonn, knocking him directly in the face. Klonn falls to the ground, destroying some control panels but quickly gets back up to his feet. Leandra can hear some garbled noises coming from Klonn’s mouth but nothing she can understand.

Leandra raises her hands and a miniature tornado sweeps up Klonn and slams him to the roof. Klonn falls face first hundreds of feet to the ground, creating a small crater in the floor. Leandra watches as Klonn’s body slowly morphs back into his original form. She looks over at Cogwa and notices that she has stopped her motions on the main control panel.

“You’ll never stop Urvit.” Cogwa says.

“Urvit?” Leandra asks. “Is that someone working with the Befallen? Where have you been all this time?” Cogwa looks away from Leandra and back down at the main control panel. “You’ve indoctrinated Klonn to work with you? To get you into the throne room? To take down the planetary shields? Why?”

“BEFALLEN!” Cogwa laughs. “Their minds are weak. But yours. You might be of use.”

“You’re deranged Cogwa.” Leandra says. She takes a few steps closer to Cogwa. “This isn’t you.” Leandra looks at the main control panel and notices a green notification. She’s accessed the shield controls. She can see Cogwa moving her hand towards the green symbol.

“Cogwa, no!” Leandra shouts. She raises her hand and a gust of wind blows Cogwa up and

away from the panel, locking her in place hovering above Leandra. She sees Cogwa's hands attempting to reach and grab the control panel, but Leandra's wind funnel prevents her from moving away.

"I've lost you, again." Leandra says in a sullen tone. She turns her head away from Cogwa and walks to the main control panel. She turns off the shield shut down program, making the green symbol disappear. She then selects another program to open the sky way doors above the throne room, revealing the sky. "Goodbye, Cogwa." Leandra tilts her head down while holding out her hand and blows Cogwa through the skyway doors into space until she could no longer see her. She slowly lowers her hand and looks back over at the control panel.

Feeling distraught, Leandra remembers when she had first met and taught Cogwa. Cogwa, born from another planet, was left on her doorstep as a baby. She took Cogwa in as her own child, never knowing why or how she was left at the palace door steps. Later in Cogwa's life, she realized that she was also a guardian, tapping into her own innate powers. She remembers being overjoyed that she had found another guardian but still was guarded, remembering all of her slain brethren she used to rule the planet with. She can see images in her mind of training Cogwa and regaining her sense of trust in the universe in the process. She sees darker memories of when she caught Cogwa communicating with who she thought to be the Befallen, and would not return to her senses. She remembers funneling Cogwa into space before, just as she had done a few moments earlier. She assumed at that time it was a familiar enemy, the Befallen, but now she is not so sure. *It must have been this force called Urvit that she mentioned.*

Leandra reawakens from her memories and she disables Cogwa's signature from the shields, no longer allowing her to come back. She then opens up the throne room doors where she sees Mintelle waiting outside.

"Mintelle." Leandra says. Mintelle runs towards her with other security forces joining him.

"Empress!" Mintelle shouts. He moves up the stairs to the control panel and places his hand on Leandra's back. "You're ok."

"I am, and thank you again for your help Mintelle." Leandra says. "You just helped save us all."

"Of course Empress." Mintelle says.

Leandra takes a moment, attempting to figure out what's been happening. *I know that*

there is something bigger happening here. Cogwa must have been involved, and most likely just a decoy, to distract me from something. I sensed that those other shooting stars were entities too, probably headed somewhere important if they wanted to distract me.

Leandra looks at her other advisors on the floor with the pollen-like substance on their faces. She extends her hands out and summons winds to blow off all of the pollen from their bodies. The advisors all start to awaken one by one, with Mintelle's security team coming up to them to ensure they're okay. She walks up to one of her advisors and helps her to her feet as she awakens.

“Leandra.” The advisor says to her in a worried voice.

“Don’t worry Cellis.” Leandra reassures her. “Cogwa is gone. I’ve banished her again and blocked her from ever returning.”

“Empress.” Cellis says with a sullen expression on her face. “She was like a daughter to you. That must have been difficult.”

Leandra tilts her head down, with tears pooling up in her eyes, then she raises her head back up to say, “It isn’t easy. But I need you to hear me right now. There were others in the sky that passed by when Cogwa came to our planet. I need to find out where they went and stop this threat once and for all. Otherwise Cogwa may return one day, but with an army.”

“We can gather some of our troops to go with you.” Cellis says.

“We could, but I am going to go alone.” Leandra replies. “I should be back quickly. Whatever those energies were, flying across our sky, may be the ones that were controlling Cogwa. Maybe I can save her, and stop this once and for all.” Cellis looks at Leandra and slowly nods her head.

“We will watch over the people while you are gone Leandra.” Cellis says in a shaky voice. “We will be awaiting your return.”

“I will come back, Cellis.” Leandra says. She turns to everyone else in the room, her advisors and security team. “To all of you, I will return. I trust you can watch over this planet without me for a short while.”

“Yes, Empress.” The advisors and security teams all say in unison.

Star Empress Trine : The Search for Unity - Volume 1 : Freedom

Leandra leaves the palace and heads back towards the tallest hill where she visited the Wind Temple earlier. She looks at the Capitol City one last time, then looks up and disappears into the sky as a beam of light. She flies through space in her semi etheric form, glancing at the beautiful stars far off, light years away.

While flying, Leandra senses a powerful force coming from a large, uneven asteroid floating in space. *Why haven't my scouts seen this before?* She stops moving for a moment, then flies towards the asteroid to investigate. She finds a giant crater where the energy signal gets stronger. *I sense something familiar down there.* She moves in closer and finds an entrance to a gigantic temple-like structure, carved inside the asteroid itself.



Star Empress Trine : The Search for Unity - Volume 1 : Freedom

Leandra lands inside the temple and discovers gravity with breathable air. She is startled to come across such an amazing find. *What a magnificent structure, way out here in the middle of space. How could we not have known about this place before?*

Leandra walks around Inside the temple where she finds carvings of people she doesn't recognize and of symbols she's never seen before. *There are carvings of art from other worlds here, but why does this feel so familiar? I've never been here before. Or have I? Did the previous guardians on Yanna come here before? Is this them?* Leandra lightly touches the carvings on the walls, as though touching their energies, then continues investigating.



In another room, she finds a large green crystal, in the middle, hovering slightly above the ground by itself. For some reason Leandra feels drawn to it, thinking she can almost hear the crystal talking to her in her mind. She moves in closer and touches the large green crystal with her hand. Instantly, she sees foreign memories in her mind and can hear and see almost a thousand different things at once, not quite sure what is being said or being shown to her. After a moment she pulls away her hand, clearing her head. Not realizing what had just happened, she continues moving through the temple.

Leandra finds many stone doorways that do not have any apparent locks or openings, except for some small crystal shards at the sides of the entries. She touches the crystals in an attempt to open the path but notices nothing happens, unlike the large crystal she had found before. She blows some wind through the crystals and when she does, the doorway slowly opens for her.

Leandra moves through every entry she can find, and passes by even more rooms and carvings of places unfamiliar to her. She arrives at a large room where she can't find a way to move further. Ahead of her though, she finds two shrouded figures in the dark, hidden from the natural glowing lights in the room, emanating from the crystals on the walls. One of the figures turns around when it hears Leandra enter. Leandra is startled for a moment as she sees a massive red creature with horns protruding from her head and hooves for feet, turn around. The other figure stays in the shadows making them indiscernible to Leandra. The figure in the shadows walks off, deeper and out of sight, but before she leaves she says, "Inferno, take care of her."

Startled, Leandra stances for battle, as the large red creature slowly turns around looking at her.



“Inferno?” Leandra asks suspiciously. “Is that who you are? I sensed you earlier passing over my planet. Where is Cogwa?” Inferno holds out her hand, unresponsive to Leandra’s questions, and a ball of flame appears just above her finger tips. Inferno doesn’t waste a moment and shoots the fireball directly at Leandra.

Leandra ducks and weaves away from Inferno’s fireball. She continues to dodge her balls of fire until one large explosion knocks Leandra off her feet.

“I don’t want to fight you!” Leandra yells. She summons a huge gust of wind to blow back Inferno. She notices Inferno smiles, unmoved by the winds. A large, red, fiery ball

emanates from Inferno's body until it envelops the entire room.

Leandra falls to the ground, and can feel her life force starting to leave her body. *No. I must get up.* Leandra attempts to move her body, but realizes she cannot. As she feels her life force leaving her, Inferno walks up to Leandra and holds out her hands.. Just as Inferno is about to touch Leandra's green life force, a spark zaps away her hand.

"What, is this?" Inferno asks. She attempts to grab Leandra's energy, but again, her hand is blown away by the spark.

Deep down below them, in a different part of the temple there is a powerful guardian in an iridescent robe decorated with stars. She waves her hands summoning a field to protect Leandra's life force from being stolen by Inferno.

Inferno attempts multiple times to destroy the barrier with her powers. Even as Leandra's body fades away, and only her essence remains, Inferno can not break through the barrier.

"Continue along your journey." The guardian in the temple down below says to herself. She casts a spell that sends Leandra's soul essence back on her original journey. Inferno looks puzzled as Leandra's life essence flies out of the temple. Inferno leaves the temple, following Leandra's energy, but she's gone from her sight, lost into the vastness of space. Inferno spends time flying around looking for Leandra's but eventually gives up, realizing she's gone from her grasp.