

CHOOSE YOUR CLAN



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Welcome to the fantasy world of the Spectra! The native inhabitants are divided into six clans that determine their magical abilities. Which clan do you fit into?

This story is about you. One week ago, you were kidnapped by a stranger who insists that you are Spectra, not human, but he cannot tell which clan you are. You'll try to escape him—watch out for traps, underground rivers, and hostile soldiers! Your choices will determine which clan fits you best.

To skip to an overview of the six Spectra clans, turn to page 29.



Darkness, so thick you cannot tell if your eyes are opened or closed, curls around you. The air is thick and moist. Almost a week ago, soldiers barged into your home and marched you away with no explanation. Now you've been imprisoned in a cell carved out of solid rock, its rough surface cold to your sliding hands.

Something glimmers in the darkness. A man's face appears, lit by a handful of flames that dance unnaturally on his palm. "Forgive the rough treatment," the man said. "I need a companion for my princess. I'm having her brought here next week, to protect her, and you can keep her company. What clan are you?"

If you reply...

"What is a clan?" turn to page 2.

"I don't know my clan yet." turn to page 3.



His eyes widen. “You’re human? I could have sworn...” Then he studies you more carefully. “No, I can sense you’re Spectra. You must have been brought up human, somehow. I’ll try to explain. Spectra always lived on this continent. Most humans don’t know we exist. There are six clans, and which clan you are born into determines your abilities. Have you ever shaped or stone? How about summoned lightning? Changed to animal form? Controlled water? Sent someone else your thoughts? No? You can do one. My abilities say you are Spectra.”

You answer...

“There is no way I’m a Spectra.” Page 43.

“I don’t know my clan yet.” Page 3.



“I don’t know my clan yet. Which are you?” you ask, studying the fire burning without fuel on his palm.

“I was born a Nome. Now I am a Stygian. I have all six abilities.” He gives you a careful look. “I was planning on holding you here, but if you’re interested in Stygians, I can tell you more. We’re looking for volunteers.”

“To do what?” you ask suspiciously.

“Gain power. Becoming a Stygian gives you all six of the Spectra powers. All you have to do is sacrifice a royal. I’ll take care of everything else.”

“Sacrifice,” you say. “Like, kill them?”

A smirk crosses the Stygian’s face. “I’ll find one who deserves it. So, what do you say?”

“I don’t kill people.” Page 4.

“Sure, find me a royal.” Page 42



Is this man even sane? “I’d better be going now,” you say.

“You will stay here!” he snaps. “No matter your clan, I can stop your escape.” The fire in his hand winks out. He opens a door. For a second you get a glimpse of his silhouette, framed by dark blue. Then the door shuts and even that tiny light is gone.

For a few moments you hold still, waiting. When nothing happens, you edge forward until your searching fingers discover the door. The wood is thick and heavy and will not budge, even when you throw your shoulder against it. You hesitate, then feel around the edge. The hinges protrude into your cell. You cup your hand around one of them. To your shock, it gives way. How did you do that? You can’t stop to experiment now, so you shove the door and slip through the gap.

You run blind through a large cavern, listening to the echoes of your own feet.

A new sound reaches your ears—the rushing of an underground river. The current sounds strong, but you might be able to follow it to the surface.

Do you...

Follow the sound of the river. Page 6.

Avoid the river at all cost. Page 5.



You're not approaching a dangerous river in the dark! You reach for the stone walls and wander on, letting your hand slide against the rock. You have to pause and press close to the cliff every time you hear someone, but eventually a bright spot appears in the ceiling. You find that the cliff walls are not as smooth as you thought, and you are able to climb up.

You emerge into a world of color. You're standing among rocky hills, interspersed with straggly desert pines. You set off at a quick walk. Before long you find yourself at the bottom of a wash. Huge boulders speckle the bottom, placed at unnaturally precise intervals. You don't want to continue down the canyon—there's no way those rocks are natural. The edges of the wash are sheer rock, but a small, scraggly pine is growing near one side. Which do you climb to get out?

You climb a tree. Page 8.

You climb the rock. Page 7.



The sound of water draws you toward it. You trot faster, eager to get out. Suddenly the earth beneath your feet crumbles. You tumble into water, shockingly cold. The current holds all power over you. It whips you around, and you can only draw breath in those rare moments your head is flung above the surface.

Something hard slams into your stomach.

Your eyes open. You're in broad daylight now, and you've crashed into a log. You wrap your arms around it and manage to pull yourself out of the water.

You hurry on, too aware that there may be soldiers behind you, searching.

You find yourself walking down a dry wash, with boulders spaced at unnatural increments. A tree growing at the edge of the wash would let you climb out, but you'd be up high where soldiers might see you.

You climb the tree. Page 8.

You slip through the boulders. Page 9.



Climbing the rocky edge was easier than you thought. You find handholds right where you need them, and scramble out. At the top, you glance back. Behind one boulder, you catch a glimpse of a shadow. A man stood hunched behind it, watching the mouth of the wash where you had been. Suddenly he sees you. He points. Soldiers jump up from among the rocks, whipping slings around their heads and sending rocks flying. You run away from the edge.

In your hurry, you fail to notice a net stretched between two trees. You hit it at full speed. Black chords tighten around your body, and you are lifted several feet into the air. Struggling is useless.

The ground is covered with small rocks. If you could reach a sharp one, you may be able to cut through the strands, but you'd have to twist to reach the ground, tightening the threads. The loops of the net twirl around you in a predictable pattern. Maybe you can untangle it.

You reach for a sharp rock. Page 11.

You try to untangle the net. Page 10.



You climb the tree. Your hands slide over the rough bark and soon you reach the top of the wash. You glance back. Behind one boulder, you catch a glimpse of a shadow. A man stood hunched behind it, watching the mouth of the wash where you had been. Suddenly he sees you. He points. Soldiers jump up from among the rocks, whipping slings around their heads and sending rocks flying. You bolt into the hills.

Looking over your shoulder, you don't notice a net strung between trees until you hit it at full speed. Strands loop around your legs and arms, and tighten around your fingers. You hang a few feet from the ground, helpless. The tiny black threads are not so tough by themselves. You might be able to break them, one by one. They loop around you in a predictable pattern. Maybe you can untangle it?

You try to untangle the net. Page 10.

You try to break through. Page 12.



You ease into the strange terrain, walking as gracefully as you can. Your footsteps make no noise in the soft sand. Halfway through, you notice a bird perched on one boulder. You release your breath, certain you were overreacting.

Something zings through the air. The bird falls, dead. You panic and run. Instantly the air fills with tiny stones. Somehow, the boulders were hollow! Now soldiers emerge. A sharp pain hits your back. Then another hits your calf. You put on a burst of speed, though your lungs are already burning and a stitch grows up your side. You pass the last of the rocks and plunge into brush. Shouts echo behind you but you rush further into the scrub where they cannot see you.

You turn to look over your shoulder and crash headfirst into a net. The threads tighten around you. You are hoisted several feet off the ground. You wriggle until your arms are at your sides, then peer through. The threads loop together in an intricate pattern.

You try to untangle the pattern. Page 10.

You try to wriggle out. Page 13.



You follow the weave of the thread with your eyes until you find the beginning, high in the tree but within your reach. You stretch through the net, take hold of the end of the thread with your fingers, and tug. Row by row, the net unravels, leaving a pile of kinked thread at your feet. Soon you're free.

You hike on until you reach the end of the mountains. A rocky overlook shows you the plains below: arid desert. The sun is directly overhead and those plains will be scorching. The mountains behind you are full of soldiers, but you figured out their trap so easily. You're smart enough to slip past them again.

You enter the desert. Page 14.

You stay in the mountains. Page 18.



You stretch down. The shift in weight makes you flip backward, and you yelp as you hit the ground. The fingers of your left hand close around a smooth rock. You discard it, then choose another. Finally you find one sharp enough to cut with. Each cut is easier, as more of your body is free. At last you fall to the ground. You stand up and hurry on.

You hike on until you reach an overlook that reveals the land beyond the mountain: desert. The sun is in the middle of the sky, and the land below will be hot now and freezing cold at night. The mountains have large rock formations that provide shade and regulate the temperature, but they also leave you closer to the soldiers chasing you.

You stay in the mountains. Page 19.

You go into the desert. Page 14.



You reach for the first strand, wriggle your fingers through, and tug. The thread snaps with ease. Encouraged, you try two at a time, then three. Within a few minutes, you've snapped enough to make a hole, and you wriggle free, snapping threads as needed. Soon your feet touch the ground. Either you are stronger than you realized, or the net was weaker.

You hike onward until you reach an overlook that gives you a spectacular view of the desert plains beyond. The sun is at the center of the sky. The desert will be hot, and the scruffy bushes that dot the land will provide no cover from soldiers, who could see you for miles. Staying in the mountains will give you cover, but they also leave you close to the soldiers. You'll have to be on your toes every minute to make sure they aren't sneaking up on you.

You stay in the mountains. Page 20.

You descend into the desert. Page 14.



With your arms at your side, you believe you can slip out of the net. You wriggle, keeping your limbs carefully together, until you slide out of the net and land in a heap on the ground. You stand and hurry on.

Hiking on, you find yourself descending into desert. The sun is at the center of the sky, and the desert will be hot. You see no sign of drinking water. If you stay in the mountains, you'll have to remain closer to the soldiers, and there's a chance they'll find you again, but if you enter the desert, you may become dehydrated.

You descend into the desert. Page 14.

You stay in the mountains. Page 21.



The desert plains are hot, but you can handle it. You make your way among the brush, putting as much distance as you can between you and the soldiers who captured you.

Soon the sun begins to set. You'll need a place to hide for the night. Not far away, you spy the entrance to a large, black hole. That would be the perfect hiding place—if you can handle the pitch darkness and whatever might be hiding in it.

You enter the tunnel. Page 15.

You sleep under the stars. Page 16.



The darkness doesn't bother you. You slip down the tunnel and find an empty chamber. It's a bit cramped, but you can curl up inside without difficulty. You finger the walls and realize that they are solid stone, not earth. No animal made this tunnel. The Stygian mentioned stone-shaping as a possible ability—someone must have shaped this cave. Whoever they were, they don't seem to be here now. You spend the night in relative comfort, with the walls like a shield around you.

Go to page 19.



Who knows what creepy-crawlies might be hiding in that tunnel? You'd much rather brave the elements. You find the largest bush you can and lie under it. The temperature drops. You curl into a tight ball to stay warm. Crickets seem defining in the silence, the hard ground makes your back ache, and you spend a miserable night.

Go to page 17.



As you travel on, you notice black spots in the distance. You edge nearer, keeping a close eye on them. The spots grow larger and soon you realize you're facing a group of people on horseback. They carry swords, wear matching uniforms, and sit straight like soldiers. They don't look like the people who arrested you. Maybe they could help you?

You approach the strangers. Page 22.

You hide in the desert. Page 25.



You slip back into the mountains. After a few minutes you stumble onto a path and follow it. Maybe it leads to a city!

You haven't gone far when you hear horse hooves ahead. The soldiers who arrested you didn't have horses. These people are heading up the path, but their expressions are hostile. They carry weapons and they don't look like people you can trust. The path behind them looks better maintained than the one in the other direction. If they came from civilization, perhaps you can slip around them and follow their trail back.

You approach the strangers. Page 22.

You slip around to follow their trail. Page 27.



After a few minutes of travel, you hear horses in the distance. You hesitate. The soldiers that arrested you didn't have horses. You climb a boulder for a better look. The strangers are sitting ramrod straight with swords at their side. Their expressions are all business.

You approach the strangers. Page 22.

You hide in the rocks. Page 28.



You duck behind a large bush, then work your way back into the mountains. You haven't gone far when you hear the sound of horse hooves in the distance. You're confident you can get closer without detection, so you edge nearer and then peer out from behind a tree. Strangers ride the horses, men with swords at their sides and riding with practiced ease. They don't look like the men who arrested you, but they are tall and intimidating.

You approach the strangers. Page 22.

You avoid the strangers. Page 26.



You slip back into the mountains and find a cool mountain stream. Totally worth it, you think as you take a long drink. Someone behind you clears their throat. You whirl around and find a group of strangers leading horses. "You must be lost," one says with an accent so thick you can barely understand it. "We'll guide you back to the nearest village." Journeying with these men would give you an opportunity to ask questions, but you're not sure you can trust them. You answer:

"Thank you, I'm fine," and remain beside the spring. Page 23.

"I'll join you," and take an offered hand. Page 22.



At first, the strangers seem pleasant enough, but you detect something unpleasant in the way they stare at you. At last, one asks, “Are you a native?”

He must mean Spectra, you think, but you’re not sure how to answer. The Stygian said you were Spectra, but how would he know for sure? And how would these people react to the news? “I can’t say,” you answer finally.

They laugh at you. “If you can’t talk to us, we can’t help you,” one says. You’re trying to figure out what to do when you realize that a cheerful rushing sound is growing louder, drowning their voices. You’re about to cross a river. It would be the perfect time to get away from these men... if you can brave the current.

You slip into the water, hoping to escape notice.
Page 23.

You remain with the men. You can handle them.
Page 24.



You remain beside the water until the strangers have gone. That was a close one! Before you can look too relieved, someone else jumps out from a ravine. You weren't the only one waiting for the soldiers to leave—this is the Stygian from the cave! How long had he been following you?

He strides toward you. You back up until you feel the cold water seeping into your shoes. Then, suddenly, a roar makes you both jump. The surface of the water is thrashing, and you can feel your connection with it. You gesture, and a huge wave sweeps up the ravine, heading straight at the Stygian. The man screams as it bowls him over.

“This way. Quick!”

You whirl around. A pair of girls have emerged from the brush—one dark featured, one tall and red-headed. “Good work,” the darker one says, “but I’m afraid he’ll recover quickly.”

“Come on, move it,” the red-head adds. “We’ll explain as we go.”

You're a Mer! Turn to page 38.



The men agree to guide you to the nearest settlement. You strike up a conversation with the nearest, trying to learn more about the people who live here. You've gone several miles when the horses stop. You peer forward, and your heart freezes. The Stygian you met in the underground caves is standing in the middle of the path. "Thank you for finding my friend," he says to the others. "We were separated in the woods. Come on, now. Let's get back... home."

Your brain is working fast. You saw him using fire in the cave. You don't know what else he can do, but he's talking to these strangers instead of fighting them, which may mean he respects them. "This man is dangerous," you say. Your voice rings with confidence you didn't know you had. Your companions don't ask questions. They turn on the Stygian. Several raise swords. The Stygian flinches. He gives you one last angry look, then slips away.

"Well done," whispers a voice beside you. You turn and see a young woman with dark black hair and huge friendly eyes. Behind her, a tall red-head gives the soldiers a suspicious look. "Thanks for caring for our friend," the darker girl tells the strangers. "We'll manage from here."

You're a Muse! Turn to page 40.



You find a ravine that will give cover and slip to the bottom of it. You wait in silence until the sound of horse steps fade. Then you climb back out.

You aren't alone. The Stygian from the cave is standing a few feet away, staring with a smug expression. You raise your arms. A tower of flame bursts to life at his feet, shocking both of you. He cries out, and you start running. You saw him using fire in the cave—he won't be stopped long.

“This way!” cries a voice. You see a young woman with red-orange curls sprinting toward you, followed by a much slower girl with darker features. “You've blinded him for a few minutes at least,” the red-head says with relish. “I'll explain everything when we're further away.”

You're a Cole! Turn to page 30.



You slip into the brush and take off, running so fast that the wind whistles in your ears. By the time you slow for breath, the strangers are long gone. You're preparing to run again when a voice says, "That was impressive running. You must be a Sprite." It's the Stygian you met in the cave!

The man walks toward you. You remember the fire he controlled in the darkness. What if he throws that at you? Almost panicking, you look around for a way to defend yourself. The Stygian walks under a pine. You touch the trunk. The branches writhe like snakes. Under your control, the wood encircles the Stygian. He yells. He'll be able to burn his way out in a minute, but it gives you a head start.

"This way!" cries a voice. You see a young woman with red curls sprinting toward you, followed by a much slower girl with darker features. You're not sure you trust them, but anything's better than that Stygian. You follow them deeper into the mountains.

You're a Sprite. Turn to page 36.



The path leads to an abandoned village. You peer into every cabin but find no one. Next you walk into a barn, a large, dusty building with sunlight streaking in through cracks in the roof. A pulley hangs from the ceiling, holding up a heavy hay bale.

A creaking door warns you that someone else has entered. You turn, but your smile of welcome dies. It's the Stygian from the cave.

He strides forward. "Broke my prison, did you? I'll fix that!"

Your eyes fasten on the pulley. You pull a lever. The hay bale falls. The Stygian cries out as it lands on his head. He's unconscious, for the moment. You run for the door and see a pair of girls looking at you. The red-head says, "That was clever."

The darker girl adds, "If you want to come with us, we'll explain everything. I'm afraid he'll awaken soon."

You're a Lectran! Turn to page 34.



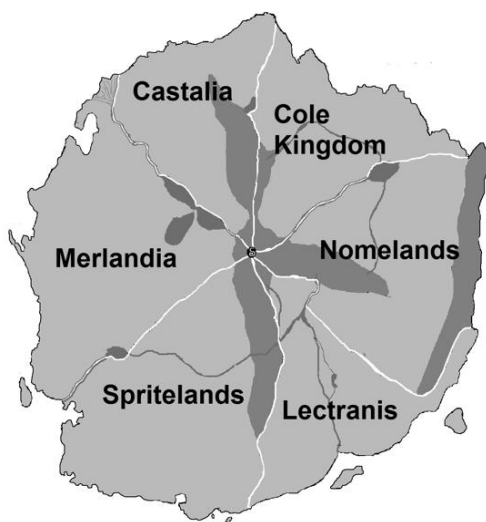
The strangers ride by. You slip back out, but you've only gone a few paces when the Stygian from the underground leaps out from behind a boulder. You touch the rock beside you. It immediately grows, shaping itself into a wall between you and the Stygian. For a moment you think you're safe. Then he appears at the top of it. Had he jumped that far up? "So you're a Nome," he said. "That makes me your king, you know. And I can shape rock just as well as you do."

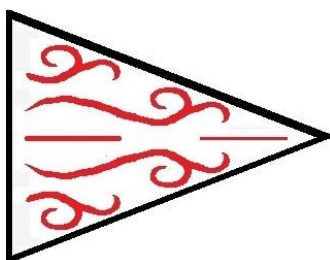
You're still touching the wall. You focus, and the stone crumbles. Startled, he slips behind it. Before he can recover you bolt down the hill. That man is your king? Well then, you'll need to find some rebels who can oppose him.

"This way!" cries a voice. You see a young woman with red curls sprinting toward you, followed by a girl with darker features. You're not sure you trust them, but anything's better than that Stygian. You follow them deeper into the desert.

You're a Nome. Turn to page 32.

MEET THE CLANS





COLE

Kingdom: The Cole Kingdom, northwest.

Capital: Kelvin Canyon

Characters:

- Scarlett Kelvin “Carli”, *Keita’s Wings series*
- Griffin and Reid Pensier, *Keita’s Wings series*
- Runa and Eldinn, *Mira’s Griffin*
- Smiddy Filsona, *DreamRovers trilogy*

Books set in this kingdom:

- *The Spectra Upended* (Keita’s Wings 5)

Relationship with other tribes:

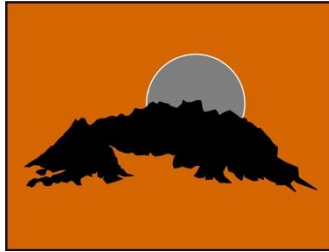
Coles are a dominant clan, meaning that they have an advantage over Sprites. Two Coles will not have crossover children (children born with different abilities than either parent).

The red-head sits down with you when you've reached a decent distance away. "Hi! My name is Scarlet Kelvin, and I'm a Cole like you. We have the ability to transfer heat. Usually that means controlling fire, but check this out!"

She raises her hands and winds swirl around her. They launch her several feet into the air. Then she touches back down, grinning. "I know some people who are better at cooling things down. Creating wind is a really rare ability, though."

You raise your hand and fire sparks to life on your palm. "That's awesome!" you say. "Can you show me more?"

She starts to answer, but her friend makes a small cough to interrupt. Scarlet frowns. "I've got to get going. That stupid Stygian ran off with one of my friends and we've got to make him pay for it! But you can find other Coles. Our kingdom is straight north of us. It's mostly desert, but you should run into someone who can help you. It's nice to meet you. Being a Cole is the best!"



NOME

Kingdom: Nomelands, west

Capital: Arens

Characters:

- Sienna Agate, *Keita's Wings series*
- Tanner Smelt, *Keita's Wings series*
- Garth, *Mira's Griffin*

Books set in this kingdom:

- *The Spectra Unearthed* (Keita's Wings 1)

Relationship with other tribes:

Nomes are a nondominant clan, meaning that Mers have an advantage over them. Two Nomes can have crossover children (children born with different abilities than either parent). Crossovers can be Coles or Lectrans.

The darker girl sits at the edge of a ravine and dangles her legs into it. “Did you know this was made by water?” she asks. “Fast water tore through after rain and created this little wash.”

The thought makes you uncomfortable. That took a lot of power.

The red-head paces around you. “So, you didn’t even know you were a Nome?” she asks. “That explains why you don’t like water. You can shape rock and earth, but it doesn’t work if you’re not touching the ground—so if you’re swimming or flying, it doesn’t work.”

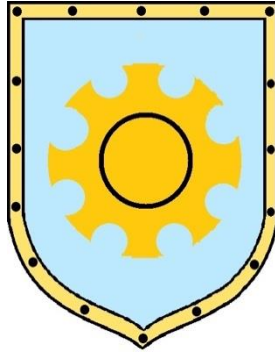
“Don’t worry,” the darker girl says. “I won’t hurt you.”

You study the sand beneath your feet, then reach down to touch it. Under your fingers, it fuses together into solid sandstone.

“This is Nomelands,” the redhead says. “It’s mostly desert, some mountains. I’m a Cole. Our kingdoms have been at war in the past, but I won’t hold it against you!”

“You’re not far from home,” the darker girl continues. “We would like to escort you, but we do need to get going.”

You weren’t sure you wanted their company. Their staring is making you uncomfortable. You thank them as politely as you can and then set off into the desert alone.



LECTRAN

Kingdom: Lectranis, southwest

Capital: Telosa

Characters:

- Savanna Sage, *Keita's Wings series*
- Wyatt Tesla, *Keita's Wings series*
- Lector, *Mira's Griffin*
- Tilda, *Mira's Griffin*

Books set in this kingdom:

- *The Spectra United* (*Keita's Wings 2*)
- *The Seventh Clan* (*Spectra Crowns 1*)

Relationship with other tribes:

Lectrans are a dominant clan, meaning that they have an advantage over Muses. Two Lectrans cannot have crossover children (children born with different abilities than either parent).

The girls lead you to an old road cutting through the desert. “Follow that south,” the red-head says. “That’ll take you home to Lectranis.”

“Did you know you were a Lectran?” the darker girl asks.

“I don’t even know what that is!” you say.

“Oh, it means you’re from the Lectran clan,” the darker girl answers. “I’m Zuri, by the way, from the Mer clan, and this is Carli from the Coles.”

Carli paces around you. “Talk fast, please,” she says. “We’ve got people to save here.”

You have no problem talking fast. All in one breath, you say, “But what do Lectrans do? I used a pulley back there—that wasn’t anything special.”

“Abilities are varied within clans,” Zuri answers patiently. “Lectrans are especially good at innovation, and some can call lightning. I’m afraid I don’t know how it all works.”

You’ll have plenty of time to experiment. The road seems to go on forever. “What’s Lectranis like?” you ask.

“There are lots of cities, divided into regions,” Zuri answered. “They’re a bit war-torn at the moment, especially the northern ones, but I think you can find a place to be comfortable.”

Civilization? Perfect. You thank the girls and set off as fast as you can down the road.



SPRITE

Kingdom: Spritelands, southeast

Capital: the Inner Vale

Characters:

- Keita Sage, *Keita's Wings series*
- Ket and Tapiol, *Mira's Griffin*
- Auralee Pensier "Allee", *Spectra Crowns*

Books set in this kingdom:

- *The Spectra Uprooted*, (Keita's Wings 3)

Relationship with other tribes:

Sprites are a nondominant clan, meaning that Coles have an advantage over them. Two Sprites can have crossover children (children born with different abilities than either parent). Crossovers can be Lectrans or Mers.

The girls seem to be walking very slowly, but they're panting for breath.

"You're a Sprite all right," the redhead says. "That's why you're so fast. You use life energy to increase your physical stamina, or something like that."

"You... walk... fast," the darker one pants.

The redhead smirks at her. "You're betrothed to one. Get used to it."

You roll your eyes at the teasing, but the darker girl does straighten up and attempt to cover her breathlessness. "I'm Azura," she says. "You're lucky. Sprites are amazing."

You nod uncertainly.

"You have abilities over living things," Azura goes on. "That can manifest in a huge range of skills, depending on your talent and training. Harvesting sunlight, tracking, changing to animal form, growing plants, speaking to animals... you'll have to try them out and see what you're good at!"

You already used the tree to get away from the Stygian. The other ones sound interesting too.

"I wish we could take you to Spritelands ourselves," Azura continues, "but we're on a mission right now. If you head east long enough, you'll reach the Great Mountains. Spritelands is on the other side. There are a lot of habitats there—you should find a place to call home."

Settling down does sound appealing. You thank them with a smile and then rush past, eager to find a place to call home.



MER

Kingdom: Merlandia, east

Capital: Jaladi

Characters:

- Azura Neried “Zuri”, *Keita’s Wings series*
- Calder, *Mira’s Griffin*
- Carina and Lyra Filara, *DreamRovers*

Books set in this kingdom:

- *The Spectra Unfurled*, (Keita’s Wings 4)

Relationship with other tribes:

Mers are a dominant clan, meaning that they have an advantage over Nomes. Two Mers cannot have crossover children (children born with different abilities than either parent).

The girls follow the river westward until the ravine disappears behind you. “I’m Azura,” the darker girl says, “Zuri for short. I’m surprised to find a Mer here.”

You explain about the soldiers and the Stygian.

“He wanted a companion for his princess?” the redhead repeats. “That revolting black-hearted icicle! I’ll give him...”

“The princess is a friend of ours,” Zuri interrupts. “We’re on our way to find her. You’ll want to head to Merlandia, though. I suggest following the water down to the coast. Once you find a port, you can arrange passage home.”

“Can’t I swim or something?” you ask. What if you could surf all the way home?

“I wouldn’t recommend that kind of distance until you have more practice,” Zuri answers, “and your talent may lie with ground water or water in the air instead of tides and currents. You’ll be able to breath if you go under, but you’ll tire eventually.”

“Better get going,” the red-head interrupts. “You’ve got a long journey ahead.”

Zuri frowns at her friend’s rudeness but doesn’t contradict her. “I hope to see you again,” she says. You say your goodbyes and then separate.



MUSE

Kingdom: Castalia, northeast

Capital: Castalia City

Characters:

- Brian and Teague Pensier, *Keita's Wings series*
- Mira, *Mira's Griffin*
- The Bridgley family, *DreamRovers*

Books set in this kingdom:

- *The Spectra Undaunted*. (*Keita's Wings* 6)
- *Mira's Griffin*
- *DreamRovers* trilogy

Relationship with other tribes:

Lectrans are a dominant clan, meaning that they have an advantage over Muses. Two Lectrans cannot have crossover children (children born with different abilities than either parent).

The girls walk beside you, but still within earshot of the soldiers. “I’m Scarlet,” the red-head says, “Carli for short. Did you know you were a Muse?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know what that is,” you answer.

“Seriously? Muses have abilities over communication. You’re good at sticking your thoughts in other people’s heads...”

“Carli, don’t be rude,” the darker girl interrupts. She gives you an apologetic look. “She has cousins who are Muses, and they don’t get along.”

Carli’s manner had suggested that she had some unpleasant past with Muses, though you hadn’t guessed the exact connection. “What does ‘abilities over communication’ mean?” you ask.

“Well, it depends on your training and your innate talents,” the darker girl says. “Some create art, some influence crowds, a few amplify emotion...”

Carli shudders. “I’ve heard stories about some that can travel through each other’s dreams.”

“You’re far from home,” the darker one says. “You’ll want to head north...”

“No problem,” you say. “I’ll talk to travelers and find a group heading the right direction. I’m sure I can convince one to let me come along.”

Carli gives you a dark look. “I’m sure you can.”

STYGIAN

Kingdom: Any

Characters:

- Jasper Smelt, *Keita's Wings series*
- Donovan Sclera, *Keita's Wings series*
- Calder, *Mira's Griffin*

Stygians can be born into any clan, but they complete a series of oaths and rites, including a royal sacrifice, which gives them additional abilities. They cannot be sensed by any of the other abilities, such as the Sprites' life-sensing and the Muses' emotion reading. They have all of the defenses from every clan, making them extremely difficult to kill.

Thank you for joining us. We can use someone like you.

HUMAN

Kingdom: Any

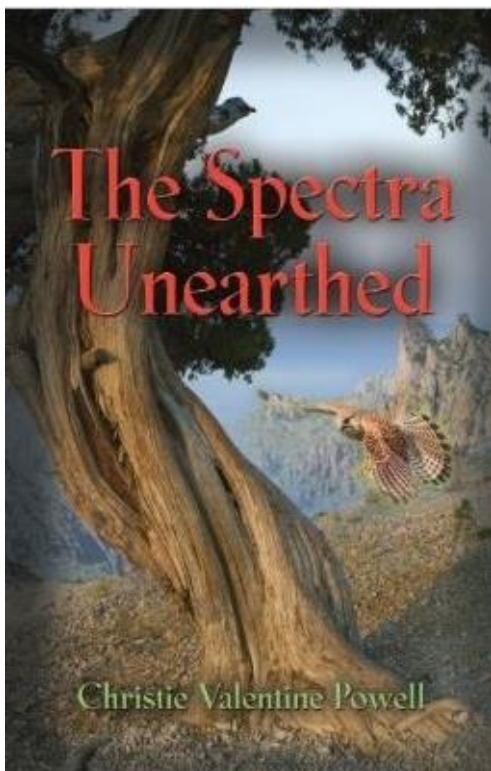
Characters:

- Bill Andros, *Keita's Wings series*
- Elisabeth Jonson, *Keita's Wings series*
- Asmund, *Mira's Griffin*
- Niles Andres, *Spectra Crowns*

Humans include anyone without Spectra abilities. A large group, sometimes called Vespuicians by the Spectra, arrived on the Spectra continent four hundred years after the clans were established. They call the Spectra “natives” and are mostly unaware of their abilities.

This is all fiction anyway. Everyone knows Spectra don't exist.

The adventure continues! Join Carli and Zuri and their friends in “The Spectra Unearthed”, available on amazon.



Continue reading the first chapter...

Chapter 1: In the Dark

Most girls would be afraid to wander dark tunnels, but Keita Sage did her best to seem fearless. The soldiers who had dragged her into the underground maze were far behind. She could avoid the remainder with ease. Now she just needed to find an exit and she'd never have to feel the damp, oppressive air again.

This was turning out more difficult than expected.

A soldier's steady footfalls echoed through the stone passageways. His surety must come from experience, not sight—no clan could see in the dark. Keita began to creep after him. On the way in she had caught a glimpse of a concrete building, a squat toad at the mouth of its burrow. Surely the soldiers used it, spending their nights or their mealtimes in the open air. It might take a while, but eventually this one would lead her to the surface.

Her skin was tingling, a sign she'd been without light for too long. She was in no danger, not yet, but worry lurked. Without either light or food, she would starve. They didn't mean to kill her. The soldiers had passed up countless opportunities for that on the long trek here. If she gave up, let them capture her again,

they would provide light, or at least food. But the thought of trading freedom for life was repulsive.

Keita sensed a knot of men approaching her soldier. She growled, a sound that never left her throat. Dodging one or two would be easy when she could feel their presence, down to the least motion of twitching fingers, but a large group was too unpredictable.

The darkness pressed against her eyes until she could no longer tell if they were open or shut. Even the chill in the air had a dreamlike quality, and the thought tickled her brain. Maybe last winter, the whole complicated season, was nothing but a bad dream. Any minute now she would wake up and walk out into the dappled sunshine and soft piney smell of the Inner Vale. Father, alive and well, would be bustling around the courtyard, and her biggest concern would be avoiding the escorts he insisted accompany her everywhere.

She was almost crazy enough to believe it.

The group of soldiers she had sensed were standing further up the tunnel. Sneaking past so many would be difficult, but a group like that might mean that they were guarding something—like the exit. Maybe she could risk making herself smaller and attempting to pass.

A boot bumped a piece of gravel behind her. A tiny noise, and yet Keita whirled around. She had

sensed nothing behind her—no man, not even a rat or a toad. Sprite sensing was not easily fooled, and yet the feeling of being watched spread down her spine and tingled in her bare feet.

“You’re safe. I’m here.”

Keita jumped so badly that her head slammed into the rock ceiling. Jasper Smelt, leader of her captors, was the last person she wanted to meet in a place like this.

A gloved hand grasped her shoulder. “You all right?”

She jerked away, even as her mind, sticky as spring mud, registered that he wasn’t groping in the dark, that he had seen her jump. Somehow, impossibly, he could see through the blackness.

He could see her now.

“You don’t have to be afraid,” Jasper said. “I rescued you.”

To remain silent would prove her fear. “You call that a rescue? To have soldiers drag me across the kingdoms?”

“I had to. I needed to get you before the other Stygians did.”

She grimaced. Competing to catch their prey sounded exactly like something a Stygian would do. They’d murdered her father and most of the royal families and were hunting down the remainder. They had conquered Spritelands and the other five Spectra

kingdoms with no thought for the inhabitants. Little more would surprise her.

“I’ve got things under control,” Jasper went on. “You can trust me.”

“Trust you?” She tried a derisive laugh, but it came out shaky. “I know what you’ve done. You joined the Stygians so you could take your father’s throne. Why would I trust you?”

“Because we were friends.”

It wasn’t quite true. They’d met during the four days of the annual Summit Council meeting, and she hadn’t seen him since. She could still remember the worst moment, standing alone except for the snow-tipped mountains peering over the great stone wall. Their fathers were closeted together, deciding her future, and she could do nothing but wait. In her worry she did not hear the footsteps or sense his presence. The whisper in her ear came from nowhere: “It isn’t my fault.” By the time she’d turned to look, she saw only his back, clad in the bright colors of royalty, disappearing behind a hut. Two months later, all six rulers were dead.

He was waiting for a reply. “You were closer to my brother,” she said. “If this was really about saving old friends, why didn’t you track him down?”

“He’s too...” Jasper hesitated, and then went on, “Glen is too well protected. Stygians can’t enter the Summit after we take our oaths. You know that.”

She did, but she hadn't realized he knew her brother's whereabouts.

His hand returned to her shoulder, and his grip was stronger this time. He steered away from the soldiers still milling around in front of them, apparently unaware of their prisoner so close. For a second she considered breaking free, charging through those men with everything she had... but even if she could fight so many, she didn't dare test Jasper's Stygian abilities.

She turned to him again. "If I can trust you, will you tell me where we are?" she challenged.

"Sure. We're in Nomelands, under the Scissor Point Outpost."

She stiffened. Unless she was mistaken—which was entirely possible, curse her useless tutor—they were deep in the Nome kingdom, over a hundred miles from the city where she'd been captured. She'd known they'd been traveling for days—every time she regained consciousness, the scenery had become browner and drier—but she'd had no idea they'd gone so far.

As if reading her thoughts, Jasper added, "You're safer this way. The others won't look for you out here."

"I was avoiding them fine on my own."

"Donovan entered the search."

She stopped.

“He’s coming in person. Even you can’t hide from him.”

Keita wasn’t sure about that, but she did know that the mention of Donovan’s name caused panic among the royals who had met him. But Jasper wouldn’t betray the Stygian leader. Would he?

“Why did you join him in the first place?” she demanded.

Jasper stopped walking. She turned in his direction, eyebrows uplifted—maybe the expression wasn’t useless, despite the darkness—and waited. At last he spoke. “Donovan didn’t tell us everything. He made a lot of promises. And he kept them too, just not... not like we expected. He doesn’t care about us. He’d turn on any of us in a second if he weren’t so busy chasing the remains of the royal families.”

Keita turned before her expression could reveal her thoughts. That must be why he’d captured her. He didn’t care about old friends. He was after a royal, any royal, so that Donovan would never stop hunting. She’d just been the unlucky one the soldiers had found first.

Jasper took her shoulder again and directed her onward. “You’ll be all right here,” he went on. “I know you don’t like the dark, but Donovan wouldn’t look for you here. And sometime, he’ll have to return to his own kingdom. You can come out then. We’re up in the mountains, just like where you live.”

Mountains? She remembered seeing tiny purple blobs on the horizon, but nothing that looked like proper mountains.

“You’ll see,” Jasper said, as though he could feel her doubt. “Glen told me all about your home. We’ve got pine trees, climbing rocks, everything. You can grow all the plants you want. I know you like that kind of thing.”

Telling Jasper all of those details did sound like something Glen would do. He never did know when to keep his mouth shut.

“It sounds nice,” she admitted, “but I can’t stay here. I can’t...”

“Don’t you want to be safe?”

She stopped walking. What would that be like, to be safe? To stop looking over her shoulder for the soldiers that always seemed to be chasing her no matter how many times she dodged them? To leave the cluttered city behind, with its human gangs and sharp debris waiting to stab at her feet? Could it be possible to lose all the worry, all the fear? Would imprisonment be worth it?

Jasper’s hand slipped from her shoulder to her hand. His grip was stronger than she’d expected, even through gloves. “You’ll be safe here. I promise.”

Keita had to remind herself that he was just looking for a hostage. She'd left the safety of the Summit to help her friends, and they still needed her.

"You don't need me. Donovan will never find all of us."

"He'd find you."

She waved this aside. "He can't get the ones at the Summit."

She felt his shrug through his fingers. "For now."

"Not just for now! You said yourself, the walls repel Stygians. And they've got defenses—the traps and things—and he doesn't even know where it is."

"He knows."

"He's not royal. Only the royals ever knew..."

"I told him."

For a moment she couldn't speak. Then she leapt back, yanking her hand from his grasp. "You betrayed us!"

His hand guided her a few steps further and then retreated. "I had to. The other royals wouldn't let me forget what I did. If Donovan doesn't stop them, they'll come after me! They're dangerous!"

"They'll be even more dangerous if you don't let me go! I bet they're coming after you right now."

His pregnant pause drained her show of bravado. "I didn't think of that," he admitted. A strange jangling noise filled the empty tunnel. He was

shuffling around in front of her, boots scuffing the stone floor. Keita took a step back. Whatever he was doing, she wanted nothing to do with it.

“I can handle it,” Jasper decided. “I’m stronger than those girls you were with. Donovan wouldn’t suspect I’ve got you if I get rid of them. Or maybe I could barter, trade them for keeping you...”

Keita leapt. Her outstretched hand hit an unseen wall seconds before her body crashed into it. Metal jangled as wire links dug into her skin. Then she bounced back, landing hard on the rough floor. Shaking, she reached for the barrier. Jasper must have been hanging it while he was talking. The wire mesh seemed to grow straight from the rock, woven so finely that not even a mouse could squeeze through.

This changed everything. Nomes like Jasper could break through stone. Those who could not would be held in by a simpler door. No, this barrier was designed for a Sprite. He didn’t grab the first royal he could find. He was after her.

Jasper was breathing fast. “You tried to hurt me.”

“I won’t let you harm them.”

She shouldn’t be surprised he’d treated her that way. Her heart had no reason to be squeezing as though the feet of stone overhead were falling on it.

“You shouldn’t try to hurt me. I’m protecting you.”

Something sparked in the darkness. Then a face appeared, glowing sickly yellow. Keita had to edge close to the glinting copper chains to see but then wished she hadn’t. The flickering light made his face leaner, his eyes more menacing.

“You can’t fight a Stygian,” he growled. “We defeated the kings. We’re picking off the heirs one by one. Your friends are cowering at the Summit. They don’t dare stick their noses beyond the walls.”

He opened his hand. Flames danced on his palm. The flickering light captured her gaze, pointing upward with no fuel to feed it. He shouldn’t be able to do that.

“Stygians have the abilities of all six clans. You can’t hurt me. You can’t even hide. We know your weaknesses. We know how to use them. Sprites are afraid of fire, aren’t you?”

Keita stepped back into a solid rock wall. She shouldn’t be showing weakness... but she couldn’t help it. Her memories were dancing in those flames. Grand trees, burning, toppling, dead. Sprites running, screaming, panicking before the blaze. And Father’s face, and what the fire had done to him...

“Don’t you see?” Jasper asked. “This is the only safe place for you. But you can’t try to hurt me. Then you’re no better than they are.”

Keita took a deep, shuddering breath, and forced herself to stand. Her trembling legs barely held her. “What do you want from me?” she asked.

“I told you. I want to keep you safe.”

A door opened. In the rectangle of bluish light, Keita saw a dark form. Without the glinting eyes, his silhouette was familiar. For a second, she saw the quiet, reserved boy she thought she had known. Then the door shut, and the light was gone.

Excerpt from Keita’s Wings 1: The Spectra Unearthed

Other Works by Christie Valentine Powell:

Keita's Wings Series

Mira's Griffin

DreamRovers Trilogy

The Spectra Crowns series

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