PROJECT RIFT

REAL WORLDS • OTHER REALITIES



PART V

THE CORRUPTED REALM

THE SPREAD • THE INFECTION • THE COST

A CINEMATIC LITERARY EDITION

FL GAMING | FL ECOSYSTEM

PRIVATE CREATIVE WORKING EDITION

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Prologue — A BLADE OF GRASS

The red light returned to the passive camera seven nights after the frozen frontier expedition ended. Its first appearance had been brief. This time it ran across the horizon like a scar, illuminating a landscape of black stone, slow rivers and fragile bands of green. The crossing on Earth remained narrow and natural; no one had opened it.

An automated sensor beside the seam recorded a small plant bending as crimson dust settled on its leaves. The plant darkened and curled. A few hours later the dust moved on, and the leaf lifted again. For days the footage was dismissed as an insignificant ecological observation. To the Mage, it was the most important detail on the screen.

"We've seen corruption reverse before," the Mage said. "Not always. Not completely. But sometimes."

The Soldier watched the recording twice. There were no cities to evacuate and no visible enemy to fight, only a living thing almost overwhelmed by its surroundings. The Titan placed the red pulse beside the readings from the frozen world's ancient conductor. They shared a rhythm, but their effects were opposite. One system had carried strain away from a valley. Here the disturbance entered the ground itself.

Project Threshold authorised a short reconnaissance through the seam, with full environmental precautions and a withdrawal order triggered by any acceleration in boundary strain. The Nexus Stone remained secured. The team would not bring unknown material back to Earth, and it would not classify every altered creature as an enemy.

At departure the mentor studied the screen. "The first mistake is to believe that a place is ruined because you have only seen its wounds," they said.

On the camera, the blade of grass trembled again. Behind it, the red horizon brightened. The trio prepared to cross.

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ACT 1

THE RED HORIZON

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PROJECT RIFT CONCEPT ARTWORK · NOT AN IN-GAME SCREENSHOT

Chapter 1 — The Country of Ash

The natural seam opened over a plateau of rough black stone. Air passed through it in uneven gusts, carrying a metallic taste that the team's filters identified as several ordinary minerals suspended in an unfamiliar mixture. The Soldier went first and surveyed the landing ground. The Mage followed with a small protective field held close to the body. The Titan came last, setting a passive marker beside the crossing.

Red clouds spread across the distant sky. Under them stood basalt columns broken like teeth and a plain threaded by shallow crimson streams. Yet the landscape was not dead. Low silver plants clung to cracks. A flock of pale birds crossed the ridge without turning toward the newcomers. Farther away, a dense stand of dark trees followed a river that reflected a normal blue beneath the red light.

"It isn't all corrupted," the Mage said.

"That's why we map the differences," the Titan answered.

They followed the boundary between black stone and living soil. The first altered animal stood motionless beside a stream, one flank traced with luminous veins. When it saw the trio, it backed into the shade and made a soft distress call. The Soldier kept a weapon lowered. The Mage knelt and felt no direct aggression, only a body struggling against an influence it could not understand.

A pulse came from the red clouds. The animal shuddered. The glow in its flank brightened, then faded when the pulse passed. It ran into the trees, leaving no sign of pursuit.

The Titan marked the timing. Whatever was moving through the landscape did not affect every living thing equally. It arrived in waves. That distinction gave the team a question worth answering, and a reason to keep its distance from anything it had not yet learned to protect.

Chapter 2 — The Unbroken River

The river ran through the dark country like a line drawn by a different hand. Its water was clear, and plants along the banks grew in dense clusters. Across the plain, the crimson dust accumulated on exposed rocks and vanished whenever strong wind carried it above the water. The Titan measured the change, careful not to sample anything outside the containment equipment.

The Soldier discovered an old footbridge leading to a shelter beneath the trees. There were signs of recent passage: woven cord, a fire pit lined with stones, and a cluster of tools made from the surrounding black rock. No people were visible. The bridge looked maintained, not abandoned.

"Someone still lives here," the Soldier said.

The Mage called softly from the open ground, using no spell and no unfamiliar gesture. A figure appeared between the trees. It wore layered fabric and carried a staff with a broad, flat end. It watched the trio in silence. Another figure moved beyond it, keeping a smaller person behind a trunk.

The strangers had no language in common. The Titan lowered the scanner. The Soldier set a water container on the ground and stepped away. The figure examined it but did not approach.

A red pulse passed over the valley. Everyone took shelter at once. The local figure raised a cloth over the smaller person's head. The trio followed its example and crouched beneath the bridge. Above them, dust struck the timbers like light rain.

When the pulse passed, the figure pointed upstream to a stand of trees and then towards the red horizon. Its meaning was unclear. The warning was not. The river offered protection, but the protection had limits. The trio remained beneath the bridge until the locals moved again, respecting the distance the strangers had chosen.

Chapter 3 — No Enemy in Sight

A second contact took place at dawn. Three local figures approached the far end of the bridge, unarmed but watchful. One carried a small bundle wrapped in green leaves. They set it down beside the river and retreated. Inside lay a damaged plant, half its roots bright with the same crimson veins seen in the animal's flank.

The Mage examined the roots through the suit's clear shield. The red glow rose and fell with the distant pulses. It was not a parasite that could be removed with force. It behaved more like a change in the conditions the plant needed to survive. When the bundle rested close to the unbroken water, the veins faded slightly.

The Titan's sensor confirmed a fall in the local disturbance. No conclusion was possible about why the river dampened the effect. The team could describe only what it measured.

The Soldier used a series of simple drawings to explain the limits of their visit: three travellers, a short stay, no claim to territory. The local elder studied the drawings and added a red band around a circle. The band touched the trees near the bridge, then stopped short of the river.

"A boundary?" the Titan said.

"Or the way they remember a danger," the Mage answered.

The elder placed a hand over the damaged plant and held it there until the final glow disappeared. The action seemed ordinary, almost ceremonial. Then the smaller person came forward and retrieved the bundle. The plant was still damaged, but it had not died.

In the afternoon a distant mechanical sound crossed the plain. The locals became alert, turned the younger ones away from the bridge and moved toward a deeper shelter. The trio followed at a respectful distance. Whatever the sound meant, the people beside the river had learned to survive it, and the newcomers had no right to ignore their warning.

THE FIRST DISCOVERY Project Rift I Part V

Chapter 4 — The Stone Orchard

Beyond the trees lay rows of stone pillars that rose from the ground like petrified trunks. Each contained a narrow hollow filled with dark mineral dust. The locals passed among them with practiced care, placing small coverings over the hollows before the next red pulse. The Soldier watched and understood that the orchard was a defensive system maintained by people rather than a machine.

The Titan discovered that the pillars' shadows shortened during a pulse while ordinary shadows remained unchanged. Something in the air bent the visible red light without changing the position of the sun. The pillars did not stop the distortion entirely. They reduced its intensity along the route to the shelters.

A young local guide gestured for the trio to help cover the nearest hollow. The Titan hesitated, unwilling to alter an unfamiliar system. Then the guide demonstrated the task again: lift a woven screen, set it over the stone, secure the cord. The action affected only the cover, not the pillar. The Soldier helped with the next screen.

The Mage noticed a patch of grass recovering behind the covered stones, while another patch remained dark. The distance between them was small enough to cross in a few steps, yet the difference in exposure was enormous.

"They aren't fighting the whole sky," the Mage said. "They're protecting places where life can recover."

The next pulse struck the orchard. Several screens snapped against their cords. The stone shadows shortened, then held. Beyond the final pillar, crimson dust swept across the open plain and obscured the road.

Afterward the guide touched the Soldier's sleeve in thanks and pointed to a trail leading toward the source of the mechanical noise. The elder shook their head. The message was plain even without words: the trail existed, but it was not safe.

PROJECT RIFT

REAL WORLDS · OTHER REALITIES



ACT 2

WHAT CAN BE SAVED

PART V | RIFT UNIVERSE

PROJECT RIFT CONCEPT ARTWORK · NOT AN IN-GAME SCREENSHOT

Chapter 5 — The First Recovery

The injured animal appeared near the river again. Its glowing flank had darkened, and one leg dragged behind it. The locals kept their distance, not because they feared its teeth but because the red pulses made its movements unpredictable. The Mage waited until it settled beneath a tree.

The Soldier prepared a safe retreat. The Titan watched the environmental readings. The Mage held out a hand and formed a field no stronger than the one used to steady falling debris in the living valley. The field did not enter the animal's body. It shielded the area immediately around it from the next wave of dust.

The animal calmed. Its breathing slowed. The glow faded along the outer edge of the wound, though a deeper line remained. The Mage stopped after a few minutes, exhausted by the work of holding the field without allowing it to spread.

The local elder approached with the bundle of leaves. They placed it beside the animal and watched as the creature pushed its muzzle toward the fresh scent. By morning it could stand.

"We didn't cure it," the Mage said.

"We gave it a chance," the Soldier replied.

The Titan's report used the same careful language. The observed condition had improved after reduced exposure, rest and local care. Nothing showed that the effect would last, or that it would help a more severely altered creature. The world held evidence of recovery, not a universal remedy.

When the animal walked away, the young guide ran a short distance beside it before returning to the orchard. The Mage watched them go and remembered the corrupted human encountered during the first Earth awakening. This was the reason they had resisted calling an entire realm irredeemable.

Chapter 6 — The Old Causeway

A low road of fitted stone crossed the plain toward the dark columns. The locals had blocked its entrance with woven barriers and a line of warning signs. The Titan examined the road with binoculars and found repeated damage: scorch marks, displaced slabs, and small pools whose surfaces moved against the wind.

They did not remove the barriers. Instead the trio followed a safe ridge beside the river and used passive optics to study the causeway. At its far end stood a broken tower whose top was surrounded by a

permanent red shimmer. A thin beam ran from the tower into the clouds, appearing only during the strongest pulses.

The Soldier asked whether the tower was causing the spread. The Titan refused to guess. The tower might be an ancient instrument, a victim of a larger instability, or a structure built after the disturbance began. A correlation was not an explanation.

The Mage sensed discomfort from the far-off shimmer. It was a pressure similar to a Rift, but disorganised, as if countless tiny boundaries were being pushed out of place. Behind the tower, a region of living trees seemed to struggle under a red mist.

The team returned to the orchard before nightfall. Their local guide pointed to the tower, then drew a line across their own chest and opened their hands in a gesture of loss. The Soldier could not translate the story. They understood that people had been hurt there.

At the bridge, the Titan overlaid old measurements from the frozen frontier. In that world a damaged conductor had passed strain away from a valley. Here the strongest pulses appeared to run along the tower's broken spine and into the earth around it.

The similarities were worth noting. They were not permission to operate a machine the team did not understand.

Chapter 7 — The People of the River

Over several days the locals permitted the trio to remain near the outer shelters. Communication grew through repeated gestures and objects rather than any sudden magical translation. The Soldier helped maintain the causeway barriers. The Titan repaired a broken hand tool without adding foreign components. The Mage learned to sit quietly while the elders prepared plant coverings for the next storm.

The community had not surrendered to the red sky. It continued to cook, mend, teach and argue. Children raced between pillars whenever the clouds cleared. One elder made small carvings of the bright-winged birds that still nested along the river. The place was a home, not merely a disaster zone.

The Soldier noticed that the locals moved certain injured people into the deepest shelters during red pulses. Some improved after days of clean air. Others remained marked by luminous veins and needed continuous care. The Mage did not offer miracles. The team recorded the differences without naming a disease or suggesting that everyone could recover.

One evening the younger guide showed them a wall of pictures inside a shelter. The earliest images depicted the river and the black columns beneath a clear sky. Later pictures included red lines in the clouds and figures carrying the wounded. The sequence did not establish when the change began. It established that the people remembered a world that had not always looked like this.

The Titan copied the pictures with permission. The final scene showed several groups linked by a line of water, moving toward a broad enclosed valley. The guide pressed a hand against the picture, then pointed toward the causeway.

"There's somewhere else they want to protect," the Soldier said.

The elder's expression sharpened at the mention of the road. Whatever lay beyond it could not be reached by force without putting the river community at risk.

Chapter 8 — A Door Left Closed

The broken tower began to pulse more frequently. A red haze moved closer to the orchard, dimming the clear strip of sky above the river. The locals doubled their coverings and moved their children toward the deepest shelters. The Titan's readings showed the protected ground losing its margin of safety.

The obvious intervention was to cross the causeway and shut the tower down. The Titan had no evidence that doing so would work. The tower's fractured surfaces might be carrying pressure away from some unseen region. Destroying it could release more strain than the valley could absorb.

The Soldier brought the team to the boundary markers. The Mage held the familiar warning from the ancient city in mind: do not open the barriers. Here the temptation was different, but the principle was the same. They could not risk other people's lives to satisfy their need for a decisive action.

The Titan proposed a smaller response. The river's side channel could carry cooler, clearer air into the damaged orchard. The locals already used shutters to change airflow during storms; the team might help move the larger ones without touching the tower.

The guide listened to the plan through drawings. The elder agreed to try one shutter at the edge of the community, leaving every other barrier intact. The Soldier moved the heavy panel, the Titan monitored its effect, and the Mage watched for dangerous changes in the local pressure.

The haze thinned across one narrow path. It was not a victory over the red sky, but it gave the locals a route between shelters. The other shutters remained untouched until the first could be observed through another storm.

When the next pulse passed, the trial path remained safe. The elder led the children through it, and the team understood that restraint could create room for practical courage.

PROJECT RIFT

REAL WORLDS · OTHER REALITIES



ACT 3

THE SPREAD

PART V | RIFT UNIVERSE

PROJECT RIFT CONCEPT ARTWORK · NOT AN IN-GAME SCREENSHOT

Chapter 9 — When the Wind Turned

The wind changed direction overnight. Red dust swept toward the river from the far plain, bypassing the orchard's first line of stones. Several smaller shelters became unsafe before dawn. The locals moved quickly, following procedures practiced long before the trio arrived.

The Soldier helped coordinate the withdrawal without taking command of people who already knew their home. The guide pointed out paths between the pillars while the Titan tracked dust concentration. The Mage shielded one narrow crossing as families passed, using only enough force to protect the path. The field trembled at the edge of the next pulse, and the Mage released it before it could amplify the disturbance.

A child fell near the last covered stone. The Soldier retrieved them and passed them to the elder. The small act drew no applause; everyone was too busy making room for the next person. When the families reached the deepest refuge, the guide returned to the bridge with the trio.

The tower's red beam now reached a little farther into the sky. The Titan could trace a sequence of pulses leaving its broken upper frame, but could not determine whether the tower generated them or merely reflected pressure arriving from elsewhere.

The bridge itself began to darken. The unbroken river lost some of its protective effect as dust collected along the banks. Fish-like creatures surfaced in the shallows and moved upstream, away from the exposed water.

"We can't save the valley by standing in one place," the Soldier said.

"And we can't save it by destroying what we don't understand," the Titan answered.

The Mage looked at the community huddled beneath the trees. They needed a safe route, a stable refuge and time. The team began drawing a plan to protect those three things first.

THE BURIED WARNING Project Rift I Part V

Chapter 10 — The Shelter Chain

The local drawings showed several refuges connected by narrow channels and covered paths. The largest lay beyond the orchard, uphill from the river. Reaching it required crossing two exposed sections, one already under the red haze. The locals knew the route but had not used it since the tower's pulses intensified.

The Soldier worked with the guide to mark short stages of movement. The Titan set passive sensors along the route, none transmitting beyond the immediate area. The Mage surveyed places where a small shield might be useful without exciting the surrounding disturbance. They prepared for rescue, not for an assault.

The first group left as the clouds briefly cleared. The second followed with the injured, moving slowly between the covered stones. The young guide carried a bundle of water plants for those whose skin had been marked by red veins. Every time a pulse approached, the procession stopped beneath shelter and let it pass.

At the second exposed section, a retaining wall failed. The Soldier braced the falling timber. The Titan cut a broken support free. The Mage held the drifting dust away from the path long enough for the last group to cross. The field collapsed the moment they reached safety, and the clouds above the tower brightened in answer.

They did not repeat the spell. The team completed the final stretch with ropes, coverings and careful timing.

By dusk the community was inside the hill refuge. Its old water channels still worked, and its walls stood beyond the strongest red line. No one claimed it was safe forever. The elder placed the injured plant by a clear pool, where its remaining green leaves began to open.

The guide drew a new line on the shelter map: not toward the tower, but between the places where people could live.

Chapter 11 — A Second Pulse

The Titan's sensors detected a second pattern beneath the first red pulse. It was slower, rising from the ground near the tower after the main disturbance had passed. On the team's map it looked like an aftershock, but its timing matched a weak signal observed at the frozen frontier months earlier.

That similarity unsettled the Titan. The damaged conductor in the frozen world had carried strain away from living ground. The tower in the corrupted realm might be doing the same thing imperfectly, or it might be feeding the instability. Without better evidence neither theory could be trusted.

The Mage sensed the slower pulse from the hill refuge. It felt not like a strike, but like pressure being held back by something strained to its limit. The elder watched the Mage's reaction and led them to an old diagram carved into stone. It showed parallel lines bending around a dark central shape, then breaking apart when one line failed.

The Titan compared the diagram with passive measurements. Several paths carried red energy away from the protected valley. One had become blocked by debris. Clearing it might allow the system to settle without altering its central machinery.

The Soldier considered the risk. "We can remove loose stone from a drainage route. We cannot decide what the entire machine is supposed to do."

They returned to the orchard with local permission and cleared only the obstructed channel. During the next pulse, the slower pattern spread more evenly through the ground. The tower's beam remained, and the red sky did not clear, but the pressure on the valley dropped.

The recovery was modest and measurable. It was also the first sign that help did not require control over a whole world.

Chapter 12 — The Wounded Guardian

An ancient guardian emerged from the rock near the causeway after the pressure change. Its body was fractured, red light bleeding through the joints where blue patterns had once moved. The machine staggered toward the channel the team had cleared and stopped before the new flow.

The Soldier ordered no attack. The guardian was large enough to crush the party, yet its posture resembled the machines that had protected boundaries in the empty city and the frozen frontier. The Titan watched its attempts to stabilise the cracked limb. The mechanism failed, reset and tried again.

A wave of red energy arrived. The guardian braced itself between the tower and the valley, absorbing part of the pulse. Its damaged joints glowed brighter. The Mage felt the field around the machine shiver with strain.

The team could not repair its internal systems. They could, however, keep loose stones from falling into the cleared channel as it moved. The Soldier and guide shifted the debris while the Titan recorded the

guardian's behaviour. The Mage held back a small rockslide, releasing the spell before it could interfere with the guardian's work.

When the pulse passed, the machine lowered itself against the hillside. Its lights dimmed to a faint blue at the edges. The tower remained broken. The valley still carried corruption. But the guardian had held the line.

"A wounded thing defending other wounded things," the Mage said.

The Titan saved the recording without naming the machine's maker or purpose. One action did not prove a history. Yet the sight stayed with them: not a monster created by the red realm, but a protector enduring the same harm as the life around it.

PROJECT RIFT

REAL WORLDS · OTHER REALITIES



ACT 4

THE COST OF A CHOICE

PART V | RIFT UNIVERSE

PROJECT RIFT CONCEPT ARTWORK · NOT AN IN-GAME SCREENSHOT

Chapter 13 — What We Leave Untouched

Threshold headquarters demanded a clearer account of the tower. Its directors wanted to know whether it could be dismantled, copied or brought under human control. The Titan's reply was short: no safe operating method had been identified, and the team's instructions did not authorise invasive action.

The Soldier reported the condition of the hill refuge. The locals had survived the worst pulse, but their former homes and much of the orchard remained exposed. The new drainage route was helping, though no one knew whether the pattern would remain stable through another season.

The Mage supplied the observations of early recovery: the plant, the injured animal and several people whose symptoms eased in protected air. The report also recorded serious cases that had not improved. It did not promise a cure. Compassion, the Mage wrote, was not made less real by admitting its limits.

The community's elder met the trio at the outer path. Through drawings and gestures, they asked that the travellers leave the tower alone. The people who lived beneath the red sky had endured its danger for generations, and they did not want strangers deciding the fate of their valley in a single expedition.

The Soldier agreed. The Titan withdrew every active tool. The Mage left no enchanted object that might fail after the team departed. They gave the guide practical records of the safe shelters, water routes and measured pulse timing, in forms the community could use without understanding Earth's technology.

At sunset the crimson horizon remained. Yet a strip of clear air had widened over the hill refuge. Small birds crossed it, and the first evening lamps appeared in the shelters below. The team had not defeated the world. They had helped people remain in it.

THE ANCIENT DEFENCE Project Rift I Part V

Chapter 14 — The Last Crossing

The return seam narrowed sooner than expected. A red pulse crossed the plateau while the trio prepared to leave, and the air on both sides of the boundary shimmered with an unstable second horizon. The Titan halted the crossing and measured the cycle. Forcing passage might carry disturbed air or material into Earth.

The Soldier secured the retreat path, marking a line of clean stone where the group could shelter. The Mage watched the red dust move around the valley and did not attempt to push it away with a powerful spell. The local guide waited with them at a respectful distance, carrying a small basket of green plants.

After several hours the pulse eased. The seam widened naturally for a short interval, just enough for one person to pass. The Titan secured the records and crossed first to check the Earth-side air. The Soldier followed with the equipment. The Mage remained until the final cycle, watching the guide return to the protected hill.

"I wish we could promise them it will get better," the Mage said.

"We can promise that we won't pretend to know," the Soldier answered from the far side.

The Mage crossed. The seam narrowed without tearing. Filters and containment measures showed no transfer of unknown material. The team returned to headquarters tired, uncertain and unwilling to turn another community into a symbol for their own ambitions.

The Nexus Stone continued to stabilise the existing boundary system in its secure frame. The Titan's final measurements from the corrupted realm showed a slower rise in the dangerous pulse. It was not enough to declare a permanent repair. It was enough to justify continued observation and no forced intervention.

Chapter 15 — The Pattern Across Worlds

At headquarters the Titan laid five sets of recordings on one table: the ancient city's map, the living world's observatory, the concealed shore, the frozen frontier and the corrupted realm. None was complete. The measurements had been made by different instruments under different conditions, and the ancient signals might not even share a common cause.

But a pattern persisted. When strain rose sharply in one location, a smaller echo appeared elsewhere after a delay. The fourth light had marked the frozen conductor. The red pulses carried a related but altered rhythm. Now a faint movement appeared near the boundary of the living world, where the old observatory had been disabled.

"Are these places connected?" the Soldier asked.

"Some of the measurements suggest a relationship," the Titan answered. "We don't know whether it's direct."

The Mage thought of the riverside community and the animals rescued from snow. A change in one world could threaten life in another without any of those lives choosing to be involved. That was reason enough to study the pattern carefully, not reason to control it.

The mentor listened to the data and asked a question no director had raised: "What happens if every line reaches its limit at the same time?"

The Titan could not answer. Simulations based on incomplete data produced contradictory results. Some showed the disturbances fading. Others showed multiple horizons pressing together. None proved what would happen in reality.

The Soldier requested practical precautions for the regions already known to be vulnerable. The plan began with evacuation routes, independent instruments and strict limits on intervention. No new machine or battle plan would solve uncertainty. Prepared people might survive it.

Chapter 16 — The First Convergence

The first convergence was small enough to escape notice outside the monitoring room. Four distant stations recorded brief pulses in the same minute: one beneath the frozen glacier, one near the river in the corrupted realm, one by the ancient city's silent map and one along the living world's recovered valley.

No Rift opened on Earth. The Nexus Stone's stabilising light remained steady. Yet the Titan saw that the delays between the signals had shortened. Whatever linked the observations was changing.

The Soldier checked the emergency reports. The river community was safe according to the last passive image. The frozen valley's guardian remained at its post. The living world showed no new damage. The ancient city continued its routine, its inhabitants still missing, its deliberate concealment intact.

The Mage stood beside the Stone's sealed chamber and felt a vibration like several notes arriving almost together without forming a chord. It was not a voice, a message or proof of any hidden enemy. It was a warning that boundaries could be strained in more than one place at once.

The mentor forbade anyone from using the Stone to search for the source. Its known purpose was stabilisation. Turning it into a key would repeat the very mistake that had broken Earth's barriers in 2022.

The Titan prepared a simple map showing only measured danger, safe routes and emergency contacts. The Soldier rehearsed the response with the authorised crews. The Mage recorded the sensations separately from the instrument data.

That night the fourth light shone beside the red pulse and two other marks. For one moment all four brightened together, then returned to their separate rhythms.

No one called it a final battle. No one knew what came next.

Epilogue — THE RIVER AFTER RED

The river in the corrupted realm continued to run clear through its narrow valley. The hill refuge sheltered its people, and the stone orchard held against a passing dust storm. A young guide checked the woven covers and found a small plant lifting green leaves toward the morning light.

Far away beneath blue ice, a guardian absorbed a slow pressure wave and returned to stillness. In the ancient city, the transit platforms crossed empty bridges. Along the living world's hills, animals moved through a valley scarred but alive.

The four distant stations recorded a common interval. For one breath the marks on the Titan's map appeared close enough to touch. The instruments did not show a route between them. They showed only that the strain was arriving together.

On Earth the Nexus Stone held its steady light. The trio watched the reading and prepared not to open the barriers, but to protect what lived on either side.

THE END OF PART V

THE STORY CONTINUES

THE NEXT JOURNEY AWAITS

TO BE CONTINUED

Source & Canon Notes

• Primary story authority: FL Ecosystem Source of Truth — Game

Blueprint; supporting story: Project-Rifts-Story / STORY-BIBLE.md.

• These volumes extend the proposed illustrated literary story from Parts I, II and III, preserving the

Soldier, Mage and Titan and their shared past.

• The Nexus Stone is a dimensional stabiliser, never an all-purpose weapon or key. Project

Threshold was established in 1962; the 2022 Scottish Highlands disaster was deliberate; the main

campaign is set in 2040.

• Unresolved in these creative proposals: the vanished civilisation, barrier and guardian makers, the

concealed region, and the identity and nature of the greater ancient presence.

• All additions in Parts IV-VI are unapproved narrative proposals only. The current offline Alpha

plan and future online multiplayer blueprint are not changed.