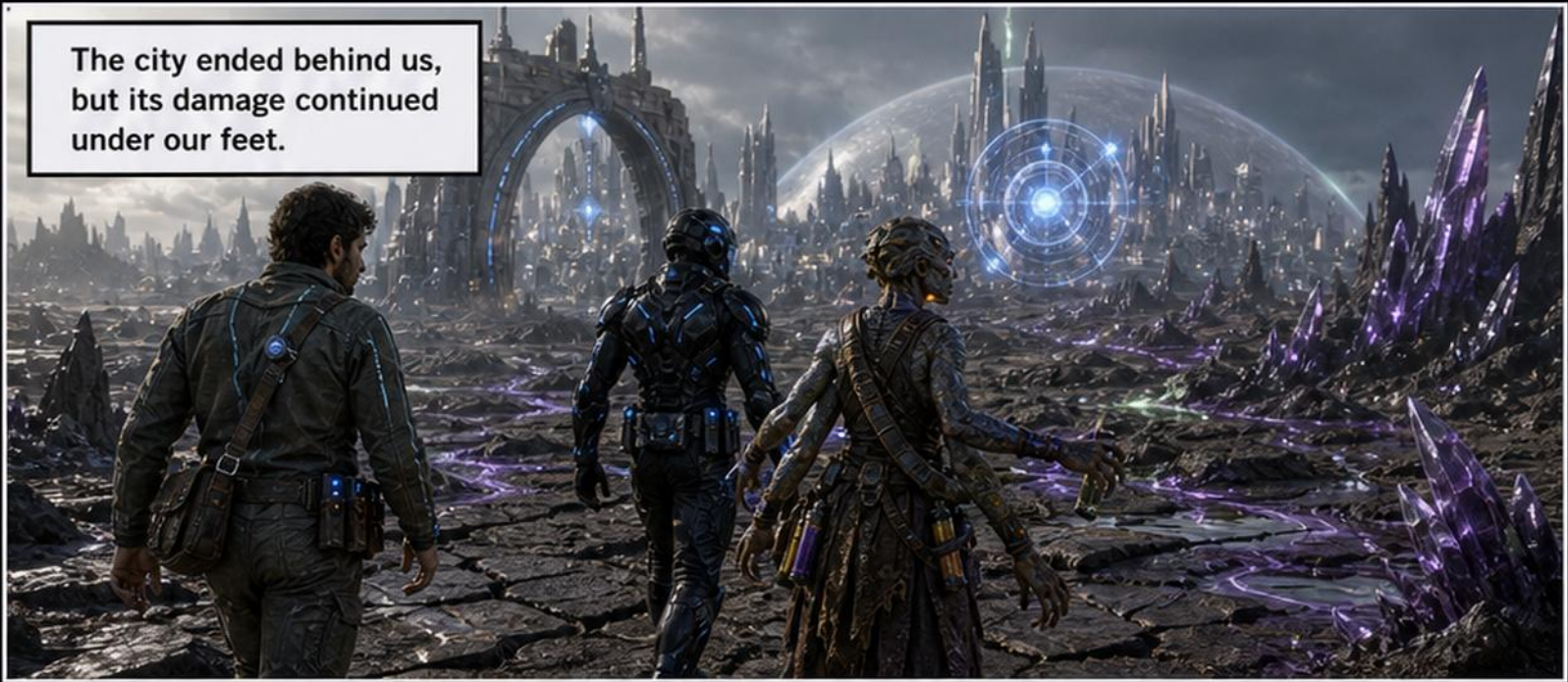


WILD ZONE GUARDIANS

THE FIRST CLEANSING



The city ended behind us,
but its damage continued
under our feet.



Kaelen moved like every stone
might hide a consequence. Vessara
moved like the land was speaking
and only they could hear it.



Quasar scanned the air for two
things at once: corrupted energy
and the hidden subnet that might
carry our comic beyond city filters.



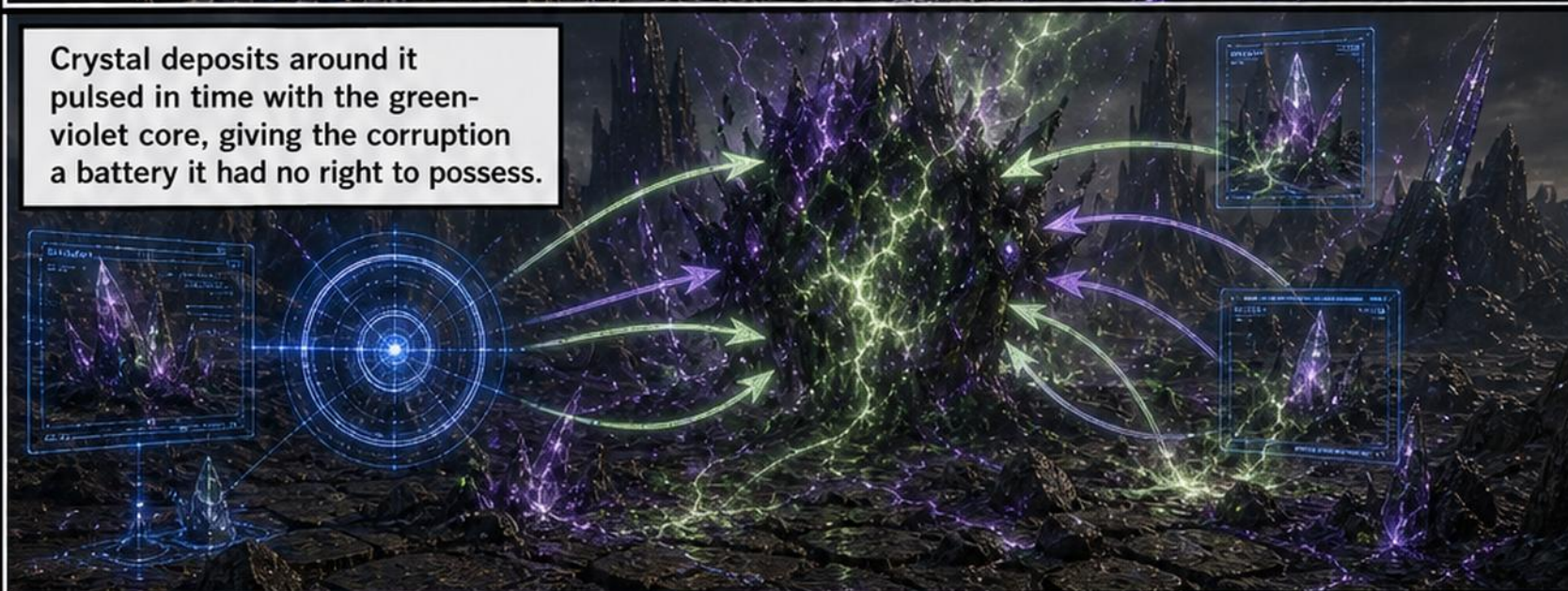
I had crossed the gate as a chronicler.
The Wild Zones immediately asked
whether I could be useful as more
than a witness.



The first anomaly did not look alive, but it fed like a living thing.



Crystal deposits around it pulsed in time with the green-violet core, giving the corruption a battery it had no right to possess.



Kaelen called it containment work: compress the unstable energy before it spread into the ground.



Vessara called it a wound: stabilize the fever, then dissolve what the city had left behind.



At first, I worried the comic would fail the action test. The battle looked like light fighting brighter light.



Then the anomaly answered my complaint with a roar.



A beast came out of the crystal field, not born from the corruption but rewritten by it.



The lesson was immediate: the Wild Zones did not separate environmental damage from physical danger.



I thought about teleporting in a weapon from home, but Quasar rejected the idea before I finished asking.



Foreign weapons could destabilize the anomaly. A local solution had to use local energy.



Quasar drew power through the rune-weave, shaped it with hardlight, and placed a rifle in my hands.



It was not a hero's weapon from another world. It was a tool made by this battlefield, for this battlefield.



My first shot struck an eye and taught me the wrong lesson: hurting the beast could release more corruption.



Kaelen and Vessara saw what I missed. The beast was not powered by rage. It was powered by the crystal cluster growing from its back.



That changed the story shape. We did not need the biggest blast. We needed the right angle.



That was when the teleporter stopped being only my escape route and became part of the team's strategy.



I fired away from the beast, straight into open air where the shot could not hurt anyone.



Then I teleported the bolt, not myself, folding the path into an angle the beast could not defend.



The shot appeared behind it and struck the crystal cluster exactly where Quasar marked the weak point.



The crystals shattered, and for the first time that day, the anomaly stopped feeding faster than the Guardians could cleanse.



With the beast weakened, Kaelen compressed the anomaly into a shape the land could survive.



Vessara's catalysts did the gentler work: neutralize, stabilize, dissolve, and leave the soil with less pain than before.



The corruption field became a signal amplifier, and Quasar finally found the hidden subnet.



Our first battle became our first upload. I had wanted an action sequence. The Wild Zones gave me evidence.

