



**CROSSING
REALMS**

— JOURNEY BEYOND THE VISIBLE —

Book One

Gus Kazem



By: Gus Kazem 2/10/2026

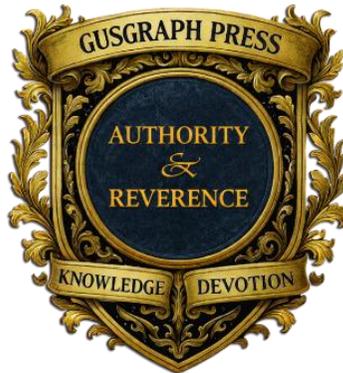
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One

Flight into the Unknown

I left the ground without apparatus or preparation. One moment my feet were planted, the next they were no longer bearing weight. The lift did not come from wind or structure. It came from deliberate motion upward, sustained once begun. My body adjusted as altitude increased, limbs stabilizing as if balance were relearned in the air rather than on land. A small animal clung to my back as I rose. Its weight was real, its grip firm, fingers locked into my clothing. It was a monkey, compact and alert, its eyes open wide and tracking everything around us. It did not make a sound. When I shifted, it adjusted with me, tightening its hold when speed increased, loosening when motion steadied. It did not direct me by gesture or voice. Its presence alone altered my pace, keeping ascent controlled rather than abrupt. We passed through cloud layers that thickened instead of thinning. Visibility dropped in stages. Light dimmed, not abruptly but as if filtered through successive barriers. Air resistance changed, becoming denser, forcing correction in posture and speed. I angled upward through it, maintaining forward movement until the cloud mass broke apart ahead. Beyond it, space reorganized. The sky no longer opened outward. It enclosed. Structures appeared below streets laid out without pattern familiar to me, buildings rising low and close together. I descended gradually, slowing enough to observe without landing. Figures moved beneath me, people I did not recognize, dressed in unfamiliar styles, and engaged in ordinary actions: walking, carrying objects, stopping to speak. Some looked up as I passed. Others did not react at all. I remained suspended above ground level, drifting forward along the line of the streets. The surface below responded faintly to proximity, vibrating underfoot where people walked, as if energy moved through it rather than beneath it. No guards approached. No signal marked my



arrival. The monkey shifted on my back, tightening its grip once more as we moved deeper into the settlement. I adjusted my height and continued forward, still airborne, still unchallenged, entering fully into a place whose boundaries had accepted me without explanation and whose inhabitants had not yet decided what my presence required. Forward motion slowed until it stopped entirely. Air resistance dropped away. I no longer rose or descended. I remained suspended at a fixed height, neither drifting nor falling, held in place by a force that did not require effort to maintain. The monkey on my back loosened its grip slightly, reacting to the sudden stillness. A figure appeared ahead without approach or sound. One moment the space was empty, the next it was occupied. He stood as if on solid ground, though no surface was visible beneath his feet. Above him spread the branches of a fig tree whose trunk could not be seen, its limbs extending into open air, leaves motionless despite the resumed wind around us. The figure wore a long robe darkened like evening cloth. Its seams caught light only when my eyes moved away from them. He faced me directly. His attention did not shift to the settlement below or to the animal on my back. He spoke once, his voice steady and unraised.

“Turn your hands over,” he said.

I did it without thinking, palms up, fingers spread. The air around my wrists tightened, not painful but firm, as if a band had closed. I tried to pull my arms back to my sides. The pressure held them open. The monkey shifted higher on my spine to keep from sliding. *“Let go,”* he said, and when I curled my fingers into fists the pressure increased, pinning my forearms wider until my shoulders burned. I opened my hands again. The pressure eased. He lifted his hand. Between his fingers formed an object without substance. It held its shape like a ring but cast no reflection. It pulsed at a regular interval, responding to proximity rather than touch. He held it out without offering it forward.

“Do not take it,”



he said. The pulse quickened when I leaned in. I stopped short and held my place. The ring steadied. I moved again, testing, and it flared once, sharp and bright, then dimmed. I pulled back. The ring returned to its slow rhythm. He lowered his hand. The object dissipated immediately, leaving nothing to fall. He turned slightly and pointed behind me, toward a horizon line I had not yet observed.

“Go that way,” he said. “You will meet one who calls himself a guide.” He stepped closer until the edge of his robe nearly brushed my toes though my feet still hung in open air. *“When he speaks, put your feet down before you agree.”*

He tapped the air once with two fingers, and my body dropped a few inches as if the hold beneath me had been cut and caught again. The monkey clenched hard, nails biting through fabric. The instruction ended there. No further detail was given. The wind resumed full pressure at once. My body reacted automatically, adjusting balance. The monkey shifted and tightened its grip again. When I looked back toward the figure, he was no longer present. The fig branches had vanished with him, leaving open air. Below, the settlement continued its activity uninterrupted. I regained forward motion and resumed flight, now oriented toward the direction he had indicated, and each time my hands began to curl tight again, the ache in my shoulders returned fast enough to make me open them.

A figure stepped into view from the far edge of the settlement as I crossed above the outer streets. He did not approach at speed. He moved by closing distance deliberately, each step placing him closer without urgency. People near him shifted their paths to give space, though no signal was given. The air around him tightened slightly, enough to alter my balance and require correction. He was cloaked in a garment that did not conceal his outline. It marked him instead. The fabric hung heavy and still,



