That Metal Voice Quavers (Already on Peaks, the Green Gleams)

The hum of the drones stutters in and out, their signals fraying, as though struggling to bridge a growing distance, an unseen rupture in the air. The landscape resists coherence, its rhythms fractured, its pulse misaligned with the world it once belonged to. Shadows stretch at odd angles, not belonging to any clear source. Puddles of water remain still even in the wind, their surface thick like jelly.

Part 1

I came here for work, like many others. In my old job I already worked with remote controlled equipment but here the pay is better. They tell us safety comes first, but production always comes first. We get protective gear, but it's not always enough. Fimbulite is not like other minerals. People don't talk much about what it does to you when you work with it every day. I started forgetting things—not just little things, but big things. Some days, I wake up and struggle to remember what I did yesterday. Other times, I remember things that don't feel real, like I dreamt them, but I know I was awake. Some of the others say they see things at the edge of their vision that aren't there. The first thing you notice is the taste—it feels like you're eating it when the fumes get in your mouth. It tastes like battery acid. Sour and tangy. The bitter taste drips down your throat and pours into your stomach in a wave. Even if you wear a mask near it, your throat burns. It lingers, like something inside you is corroding, and no amount of water washes it away. Then comes the numbness. It starts small, crawling along the skin, appearing in patches, disappearing and reappearing like it has a mind of its own. Some say it's nothing, just in our heads. But when you see others rubbing their arms at the same time, shaking out their hands like they're trying to wake them up—you know it's real.

The air tastes metallic, charged with something imperceptible. The silence is not an absence of sound but a fullness, pressing against the ears like static before a storm. Even in the dead of night, there is a glow—pale and directionless, not moonlight, not artificial, just something hanging in the air. A dim, uncanny radiance lingers, seeping from no discernible source, casting neither shadow nor warmth. A pale gloom that clings to the edges of vision.

Part 2

Observation is the key word. The effects aren't always immediate, nor are they necessarily dramatic at first. If you were to look at a person exposed to Fimbulite, or at the land it's extracted from, you might not notice the changes right away. But they are there. In humans, exposure to Fimbulite creates a cascade of neurological and sensory distortions. Miners and workers near the extraction sites describe a taste—sharp, metallic or acidic. It lingers even when they eat or drink something else. There's a tingling sensation in the extremities, a numbing that comes and goes, almost as if the body is forgetting its own boundaries. Some report a flickering in their vision, a sense that the world is shifting slightly at the edges, like looking through heat haze. Memory is another issue. People don't just forget things; they misremember them. They recall events that never happened. Time itself feels unstable to those affected. Whole days can pass in an hour, at least that is the impression described by those affected. They walk through a street they've known all their life and feel, inexplicably, that something fundamental is missing. Not just a building or a landmark—

something deeper, a presence they can't name. The changes are very subtle. The usual rhythms of nature—seasonal growth, flowering patterns, the return of certain species—begin to falter. As if time no longer works the same way for plants and animals. Usual migration patterns have changed or no longer take place at all. And then there's the soundscape analysis. It started as a side project, but now it's one of the most revealing tools we have. We set up acoustic monitors in different areas—places untouched by mining, places currently being excavated. The results are unsettling. The frequency profile of the land changes. Entire frequency bands are missing where mining has taken place. I suspect that Fimbulite isn't just a passive mineral; it might be something more—an imprint, a kind of geological memory. It doesn't just form in places of historical significance; it seems to absorb something from them. The way we tell stories, the way we structure myths to make sense of the world—they are acts of shaping reality. What if Fimbulite is the physical residue of that process? A condensation of all the interpretations, all the narratives that have ever tried to pin down the meaning of a place. And now that we're extracting it, removing it from the landscape, we may be unspooling those narratives, pulling apart the fabric that held reality together in these places. That would explain why people near extraction sites experience distortions of time, memory, and perception. It's not just an environmental loss—it's an ontological one.

The wind carries whispers, fractured and indistinct, as though passing through spaces that no longer exist. The grey sky sits flat on liquid surfaces that glisten more than they should. A silence that feels hollow, muffled rather than an absence of sound.

Part 3

First and foremost, Fimbulite is a naturally occurring crystalline compound that is exceptionally rich in rare earth elements—key materials that energize our society and drive modern technology. These elements are not just valuable; they are essential. Given its unique composition and high concentration of rare earth elements, we are prioritizing advanced research into its extraction, refinement, and application. Our teams are working on refining extraction techniques that maximize efficiency while minimizing environmental impact, ensuring that we can meet the growing global demand for these critical resources in a responsible and sustainable manner. Well, you can't learn without making mistakes. The key is to learn from them and not let them define your future decisions. You can't keep looking backward, constantly dwelling on past errors, because that only slows progress. You wouldn't drive a car over bumpy, tortuous roads by looking in your rearview mirror the whole time—it's not practical and you'll miss the opportunity to navigate better paths ahead. Mining has to evolve into something I call 'bionic.' By 'bionic,' I mean integrating technology in a way that enhances human capabilities rather than replacing them, ensuring that people still feel they have a place in this industry. We have a huge amount of data, and to help understand that data, we use AI to assess data in a way we've never done before, improving the way we run mines remotely, exposing people and the environment to fewer risks, and greatly enhancing our ability to be more responsible when it comes to mining. Rather than replacing human workers, these systems enhance safety by taking over the most hazardous tasks, allowing our workforce to focus on higher-level decision-making and operational oversight. We take all concerns seriously, and we are constantly refining our methods to ensure the most responsible extraction process possible. That being said, the human experience of change can sometimes be unsettling. Any major industrial operation can create sensory and environmental shifts that people notice. It's important to distinguish between natural adaptation to new conditions and unfounded speculation. As with any new material, ongoing research will continue to deepen our understanding, but at this point, we have no reason to believe that Fimbulite extraction is causing anything beyond what is expected. Balancing profitability with ethical mining practices is an ongoing challenge, but it's one that we take very seriously at Astralyx. To get there, we need to work our way forward in a responsible way. It's nothing new, but culture eats strategy for breakfast every day.

It is the quiet of something missing. Even the echoes behave strangely. A voice, a footstep — sometimes they don't return, swallowed by a space that refuses to give them back. Nothing follows a straight line, not even time.

Part 4

Initially, the indicators of disruption were subtle. The landscape did not immediately collapse into ruin. Official reports characterized the process as "controlled extraction," but my observations on-site revealed an insidious transformation—gradual but relentless. The ecosystem displayed signs of distress that were not always immediately apparent or easily measurable. One such indicator was the shifting migration patterns of certain bird species. Initially, their seasonal movements deviated by only a few days each year, gradually extending to weeks. Now, any semblance of regularity has vanished entirely—these birds arrive and depart at unpredictable times, disrupting established ecological rhythms. I spend a lot of time in the affected landscape itself, observing and sensing. The most elusive aspect to capture is the experiential dimension—how the environment itself feels. Within extraction zones, the air seems qualitatively different, depleted. The soundscape is altered too; beyond the all-present drone of machinery, there are intervals of oppressive silence, as though the land itself is missing something intrinsic.

The classification of Fimbulite as a "resource" is a completely one-dimensional perspective that fails to consider its integral role in maintaining stability. Its extraction not only degrades ecosystems; it also appears to induce spatial-temporal instability, a factor that has not yet been acknowledged in official discourse. If these extraction projects continue at their current scale, the affected regions may not only become ecologically uninhabitable but alter our understanding of what landscape even means. Of course, they do. Their methods measure standard environmental factors like soil toxicity, air pollution, groundwater contamination. But how do you measure the loss of shared memory? How would you tune a device to detect a rhythm or a change in a sense of time? I've recorded cases of people waking up thinking they're in their childhood homes. Miners describe moments of disorientation, staring at empty spaces where they swear something once stood but in another time. If such experiences are dismissed as anecdotes, maybe it's because our scientific tools aren't built to handle them.

A street bends at an impossible angle; a row of houses repeats itself as if trapped in a stutter. A building stands in the distance, only to disappear as you approach, slipping just beyond reach.

Structures appear in the periphery of vision, too distant to confirm, too persistent to ignore. There is no telling whether these are echoes of the past or fragments of something yet to come.

Part 5

It started with the hum. A low, vibrating sound, just at the edge of hearing. At first, I thought it was the city, maybe construction somewhere far off. But then it grew louder, layered with the hissing of the drones and a sort of deep, mechanical grinding. It is relentless. Even at night, the air is still buzzing with it – like static that won't go away. Numbness on the skin also. And then there's the metallic taste in the back of my throat.

Sometimes, I swear I can feel everything sinking. Not all at once, not in a way you can measure, but in tiny shifts—cracks in the pavement that weren't there before, doors that don't close quite right. And then the next day the cracks are gone again. Like you only remember the cracks. And then there's the glow—a restless, inescapable luminescence that makes it hard to sleep. It's not moonlight or artificial lamps, but the night is never truly dark. There is always a dim glow coming from nowhere and going nowhere. I also have a lot of memories now that I didn't have before. I know that doesn't sound out of the ordinary but it's memories of places that I think I've never been to and of people I have never met.

Performed by (in order of appearance): *Ivanna by Eleven Labs*, Louis d'Heudières, Nina Kuttler, Amin Motallebzadeh, Marie Lucchetta