

321 Lumina Dot Com presents

The Last Fast Train to the Past

Episode 2



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Episode Two

World 5839 · Summer 2025 → World 47310 · Spring 1656

The lemonade was exceptional.

Thad hadn't expected that. World 5839 had surprised him in small ways all afternoon — the particular quality of the light, the easy friendliness of strangers, the way the town had arranged itself around its park as though the park were the point of the whole enterprise, which perhaps it was. They had played their pickleball match, won it without drawing too much attention, and spent the rest of the afternoon the way Thad liked best: moving slowly, noticing things, letting a world show itself.

The kiosk was a yellow cart near the edge of the park, run by a man in his sixties who squeezed the lemons himself and did not apologize for the price.

"This is remarkable," Thad said.

Ramona looked at him over her cup. "It's lemonade."

"It is the best lemonade on any world I have visited. I want to make a note of it."

"You're not going to make a note of it."

"I'm making a mental note."

She smiled and looked out across the park — the broad green lawn, the families on blankets, a kite climbing clumsily into the blue summer sky. Thad watched her watching it and thought, not for the first time, that Ramona had a gift beyond portals. She could be entirely present in a world. Some Travelers never managed that. They were always already somewhere else in their heads, scanning for the next jump. Ramona could sit in a moment and mean it.

Her hand rested on the small table between them, close to his. Neither of them mentioned it.



He was about to say something — he wasn't sure what, something that had been sitting at the back of his throat for eleven months — when he saw them.

Four of them. Moving in from different angles across the park, the way a net moves when someone draws it closed. Long sleeves despite the heat. That particular walk — unhurried, deliberate, each step placed with the confidence of people who expected the world to hold still for them. His cloaked detector had gone warm in his breast pocket a moment before his eyes confirmed it.

Keeper Police.

The target was a young man sitting alone on the grass near the fountain — nineteen, maybe twenty, dark-haired, wearing the slightly-too-casual expression of someone trying very hard to look like he belonged somewhere. He had a paper cup of something cold and a phone he wasn't really looking at. His eyes kept moving in the careful way a Traveler's eyes move when they're watching for threats and hoping not to find any.

He hadn't seen them yet.

Thad had been on enough worlds, in enough times, to take Keeper Police in stride. They went where Travelers went. That was the nature of things. But here, on this cheerful Saturday afternoon with families and kites and a man selling exceptional lemonade, they were barely pretending. No cover. No attempt to blend. They were simply closing in, in broad daylight, as though this park and everyone in it belonged to them.

That was new. That was something worth noting more than the lemonade.

"I see them," Ramona said quietly, without looking at him.

"The boy hasn't."

"No." A pause. "There's a portal. About two hundred yards, past the bandstand, along the east fence."



"Open?"

"It will be." She set down her cup and stood, smoothing her coat with the air of a woman who had somewhere to be. "I'll be at the fence when you get there."

"Take your time with the lemonade."

"I haven't finished mine."

"Take it with you."

She picked up her cup and walked away across the grass without hurrying. That was the thing about Ramona — she never looked like she was running even when everything depended on speed.

Thad dropped some bills on the table, a little more than the cups had cost, and walked toward the fountain.

The Keepers had maybe forty seconds on him. The boy had less than that before one of them got close enough to make a quiet scene in the middle of a public park on a summer afternoon — which they would do without hesitation, Thad knew, because they always did. They had long since stopped worrying about witnesses.

He angled his approach so he came at the boy from the side, away from the nearest Keeper, and sat down in the grass beside him with the relaxed ease of an old friend arriving late.

The boy's eyes went sharp immediately. Good instincts.

"Don't look around," Thad said pleasantly, as though commenting on the weather. "Four of them. They're about thirty seconds from making your afternoon very unpleasant."

"I don't know what you—"



"Yes you do." Thad reached into his jacket. Smooth, unhurried, the way you reach for something you've reached for a thousand times. He opened his hand just enough for the boy to see what rested in his palm — a small device, dull gray, no bigger than a pocket watch, emitting the faintest pulse of light that no one without the right eyes would notice.

The boy went still.

"Modern?" he said, barely a breath.

"Very." Thad closed his hand. "I have a portal waiting. Two hundred yards. My partner is there now." He looked at the boy directly for the first time. "I'm going to cloak us both and we're going to walk to that portal. Not run. Walk. Running draws attention that a cloaking device doesn't fully cover. Do you understand?"

The boy nodded once. His paper cup crinkled in his grip.

"What's your name?"

"Eli."

"Thaddeus." He didn't extend a hand — no time for that. "Stay close. Match my pace. Don't look at them."

He activated the device.

The cloak didn't announce itself. There was no shimmer, no dramatic effect — just a subtle shift in the air around them, the way a room changes when someone closes a window. The world kept going. Children laughed. The kite dipped and rose. The man at the yellow cart squeezed another lemon. And four Keeper Police closed in on a patch of empty grass beside the fountain, their purposeful walks stuttering, their eyes moving across the space where two people had been sitting with the flat, contained frustration of professionals confronting something they couldn't explain but absolutely recognized.

Thad stood up.



Eli stood up beside him.

They walked.

Past a family setting out a picnic. Past a dog asleep in the sun. Past a little girl who looked up briefly with the unfiltered curiosity of someone very young, then lost interest. Children sometimes caught the edges of a cloak. Thad had always thought that said something worth knowing.

"Eyes forward," he said quietly.

"I know," Eli said. His voice was steadier than Thad had expected. Good.

Behind them, one of the Keepers said something short and sharp to another. Thad didn't turn around.

The bandstand passed on their left — white painted wood, a small stage empty on a Saturday afternoon, bunting left over from something civic and cheerful. The east fence came into view ahead, a low iron thing with trees pressing against it, and Ramona was there, standing in the dappled shade with her cup of lemonade and her not-a-compact open in her other hand, looking for all the world like a woman enjoying the edge of a park on a summer afternoon.

Her eyes found Thad's as they approached. She glanced once at Eli. He saw the slight nod she gave — assessment, acceptance — and felt the particular satisfaction of watching two capable people recognize each other without needing words.

"Thirty seconds," she said.

The portal was there. Thad couldn't see it — he never could, that was her gift, not his — but he trusted the way she angled her body toward a specific gap in the air between two oak trees, the way her hand moved almost imperceptibly with the not-a-compact, the way she tilted her head with that listening expression.



Behind them, raised voices now. The Keepers had figured out the direction if not the method.

"Eli," Thad said. "Have you jumped before?"

"A few times. Old tech."

"This will feel different. Smoother." He glanced at Ramona.

"Now," she said.

The summer afternoon folded.

The cold hit first.

Not bitter — spring cold, the kind that carries the memory of winter without the weight of it. A breeze with something clean in it, grass and soil and somewhere nearby, something in bloom.

They were standing on a bare hill.

Not bare in the way of a park lawn — bare in the way of a place that had never been asked to be anything other than a hill. Rough grass, pale green, moving in long waves under a wide sky. Below them, a shallow valley, a thread of river catching the light. In the far distance, the dark suggestion of a forest. No roads. No buildings. No sound except the wind and, somewhere below, a bird making an argument with itself.

World 47310. Spring, 1656.

Eli turned a slow circle, taking it in. His paper cup was still in his hand. He looked at it, seemed to register how absurd that was, and set it carefully in the grass.

"Where are we?" he said.

"Somewhere safe," Thad said. "For the moment."



Ramona had already moved a few steps down the hill, looking out over the valley with the particular attention she gave to new places — reading the land the way she read everything, looking for the soft wrongness that meant a portal, or the lack of it that meant they were on their own here for a while.

"Any company?" Thad asked her.

"Not nearby." She turned back. The wind moved her hair. "We have time."

Eli was looking at both of them with the expression Thad had seen before on young Travelers — that specific mixture of relief and vertigo and the dawning understanding that the world, or rather the worlds, were considerably larger and stranger than even a Traveler expected when they were starting out.

"You're a Rescuer," Eli said. Not a question.

"I am."

"I've heard of you." He looked at Ramona. "Both of you."

Ramona glanced at Thad with an expression he couldn't quite read, though he was getting better at it.

Thad settled himself on the hillside grass, unbothered by the cold, and looked out over the valley of World 47310 in the spring of 1656 — untouched, unhurried, entirely indifferent to Keeper Police and pickleball courts and the best lemonade on any world he had ever visited.

"Sit down, Eli," he said. "Tell us how you found yourself alone on World 5839 with four Keeper Police taking an interest in your afternoon."

The young man sat.

Below them, the river caught the light, and the bird made its argument, and the hill held them all without asking any questions of its own.



About the Time Keepers Universe

A multiverse of countless worlds. Portals between them, small and rare and often hidden. Most people walk past portals without ever knowing they were there. A few find them.

Thaddeus Templeton is a Traveler. Ramona is a Finder. Together they cross from world to world for reasons that, in time, become clear.

The Keeper Police would prefer they didn't.

Each Episode of The Last Fast Train to the Past is a stop along the way. Some are quick. Some take longer. All of them are real.

Welcome to World 5839. Welcome to World 47310.

Welcome aboard.

Coming Next

Episode 3

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