René Kaiser

Julian and the Guardians of the Elements

Book 5

The Forest of Wandering Paths



Book 5 · English edition

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Earth · Water · Fire · Air

A Path That Works for Everyone

Dear children and everyone reading aloud,

the doors of the little tree point downwards. Nela brings news from the forest between the realms: paths are changing direction, and even familiar places are hard to find. Julian and Lio join her search.

In the first four Elements books, Julian and Lio met earth, water, fire and air. Four little rune echoes travel with them: a pebble, shell, clay shard and feather. The compass's ten golden stars still remember their first journey.

This time, the right direction is not enough. Olo knows the ground, Piri the crossings, Nela the roots and Lio the world from fox height. Julian needs to learn to ask the others properly.

The 25 chapters tell a complete woodland adventure and continue the series. Reading in order is recommended; important connections are explained here too. Pictures and conversation questions invite you to think about different needs and shared decisions.

Enjoy the Forest of Wandering Paths!

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CHAPTER 1

The Doors Point Downwards



In the morning, the little tree was still standing in its cup. Only its leaves hung the wrong way. The tiny doors in them pointed towards the desk.

“Where is our home?” asked a voice behind one of them.

Julian laid his cheek on the tabletop. Nela sat in the doorway. Her red plaits were scarcely longer than two crumbs.

“You've shrunk!”

“No,” she said. “You're far away. Please hold this.”

A green thread dropped out. Julian took the end. At once, the door grew larger and Nela stood beside him. Her green cap was crooked.

Lio raised his head from the rug. “That does explain the exceptionally small cry for help I just heard.”

Nela pointed to the blade of grass they had brought back from the cloud city. “The roots can't find the garden. The paths between the realms are forgetting their directions too.”

Julian packed his map, the compass and the four rune echoes. He left the Stillglass shard safely wrapped inside its closed box. He did not need a shard for this journey.

Nela checked the doorway and fastened her thread to the cup's handle. Julian put his button beside it.

“So we can find the beginning again.”

Then they stepped through together.

CHAPTER 2

An Impolite Piece of Ground



Beyond the door, the air smelled of wet leaves. Broad roots formed a firm little terrace. In front of it, woodland paths slid slowly through the grass like long ribbons.

Lio placed a paw on the nearest path. The ground carried it sideways.

“An exceptionally impolite welcome.”

He withdrew his paw before stepping all the way across.

Julian was already reaching for his earth pebble. Nela raised a hand.

“Let's look first. This terrace stays where it is. The path doesn't.”

They attached three short green ribbons loosely to their bags. Each had a wooden ring. A shared search cord ran through the rings. Nobody was tied to it; everyone could let go.

“To help us stay together,” Nela explained. “Not to pull anyone out of a gap.”

Julian checked that there was enough room between them. Lio examined his ring.

“A necklace would have been rather inconvenient.”

When the path passed a large stone, they waited for Olo, whom Nela had already called. The forest keeper needed to check the crossings.

Far away lay a round clearing. Grey threads gleamed between the trees.

Julian opened his map. Four coloured paths still ended before a grey centre.

“That way,” said Nela. “But not simply straight ahead.”

CHAPTER 3

The Tree with the Wrong Branches



Beside the terrace, a tree stood upside down. Its roots felt their way through the air, while its branches were stuck in the soft ground.

“I woke up the wrong way,” it said.

Nela walked as far as a flat stone. “We'll stay here, Arvo. You need room.”

Julian showed it the earth pebble. A green square with a dot shone on its surface.

“Can you feel your living roots again?”

One root moved. “Yes. But I don't know where to put them.”

Nela dug a little hollow at the firm edge. She poured some water into it. With the shell, Julian guided a thin thread of water towards the nearest root. Nothing more was needed.

“Here's the earth,” Nela said.

The root touched the damp patch. Arvo paused. Then he carefully moved more roots towards it. Julian and Nela stepped back. Lio moved behind the stone.

Very slowly, the tree turned. Soil trickled from its branches. Soon it was standing the right way up again.

“That feels like down.”

An arrow appeared on its trunk. It pointed towards the clearing, but immediately turned away again.

Arvo sighed. “My feet remember. Unfortunately, my path doesn't.”

Julian drew both things on his map: the tree and the turning arrow.