René Kaiser

Julian and the Guardians of Time

Book 4

The Train to Tomorrow



Book 4 · English edition

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Moments · Questions · Routes · Time

Until the Next Stop

Dear children and everyone reading aloud,

A train stands in the station. Nils has a book full of possible routes. He wants to leave only when he knows everything that might happen on the way. Julian and Lio join him over a plan that keeps growing new questions.

Across 25 illustrated chapters they meet a cloud under a roof, a real bridge and a shortcut that is only a picture. Possibilities can look very clear. That doesn’t make them reliable current reports.

This story continues the first three books of “Julian and the Guardians of Time”. The Chrona begins with Moment, Insight and Memory. Reading in order is recommended for the continuing story arc.

The future windows are imaginary. Driver Elin and the adult conductor check routes, loads and connections. The children help with maps and light objects; they don’t carry responsibility for an entire train.

Read together and leave room for questions. This adventure doesn’t promise a perfect tomorrow. It tells of a next step, a message and a little tree somebody intends to check again.

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CHAPTER 1

A Ticket Without a Destination



The next morning the guardian checked the crossing. Julian and Lio arrived on a broad platform. The train stood still with its doors closed.

Four clocks hung above the roof. One showed sunshine, one clouds, one stars and one an empty sky. None told Julian the time.

He took out his pale yellow ticket. It said TOMORROW. A space beneath the word remained blank.

“The destination is missing,” he said.

Lio studied the different tracks.

“Perhaps the decision is missing.”

In the last carriage, a boy sat over a thick book. He turned pages so quickly that a loose sheet slipped from the table. When Julian knocked, the boy held up a sign: DO NOT DISTURB. CALCULATING DEPARTURE.

Lio sat beneath the window.

“If you open the door, we won’t need to speak any louder.”

The boy looked at the fox. His pencil stopped above the page.

“You can talk?”

“It was working a moment ago.”

The boy smiled briefly. Then he opened the carriage door. The conductor joined them and let them board only after checking the solid crossing.

“I’m Nils,” the boy said. “But the train mustn’t leave yet. We don’t know what will happen on the way.”

Julian held up his ticket.

“Everything on the way?”

Nils nodded, as though that were a perfectly ordinary requirement before a departure.

CHAPTER 2

Nils and His Book



Maps, lists and a rubber almost as small as a bean lay on the table. Nils cleared a place for Julian.

Lio settled on the floor beside the seat. Secured crates stood in the passage. From the next carriage Julian could hear a dog drinking.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To Morgenau. They’re planting orchards there. We’re taking water containers and tools.”

Nils showed him a map. One route crossed mountains, another a river. Little question marks appeared everywhere.

“If there’s snow in the pass, we can’t get through. If the river rises, we can’t reach the bridge. If the trees have already dried out, we’ll be too late.”

Julian didn’t know what the trees looked like. He had never seen them.

“Has somebody reported that they’re drying out?”

Nils stroked the book’s spine with his thumb.

“No. But they could be.”

“Who drives the train?”

“Ms Elin. I help her with the maps.”

He said the last sentence so quietly that Julian leaned closer.

“Then you don’t have to decide by yourself whether we leave.”

Nils looked towards the locomotive.

“If my map is wrong, it still won’t be enough for somebody else to know the controls.”

Julian nodded. He didn’t push the book away. Somebody worried about an entire train needed more than a quick “It’ll be fine”. First he wanted to understand what Nils was actually reading.

CHAPTER 3

What the Book Can Show



Nils opened a page showing the river. A wave was drawn so high that it almost touched the top edge.

Julian caught his breath.

“Did that happen?”

“Not yet.”

“Has somebody seen a wave like that today?”

Nils shook his head. He turned the page. In the next picture the same river lay calmly between green banks. A boat was tied at a jetty.

Lio lifted his muzzle.

“And that?”

“Also possible.”

Julian looked back and forth between the two pictures.

“Then they’re two possibilities. Not news about what it looks like there now.”

Nils laid his hands on the table.

“But the wave is much clearer. I can even count the white patches of foam.”

Julian thought of the hug in Ada’s memory. A bright picture could look very convincing. That didn’t make it a confirmed record.

He fetched his own notebook and drew two boxes. Above one he wrote POSSIBLE. Above the other, REPORTED NOW.

For the moment, the second stayed empty.

Nils looked at it.

“That isn’t particularly reassuring.”

“No. We could ask what belongs inside it.”

A woman in a navy work jacket entered the carriage. A streak of chalk lay across her nose.

She held a dry paper strip in her hand.

“We can,” she said. “I’m Elin. And I’ve just received the first report about the line.”