

Chapter 24: Part Two - 11. The Essence of the Land

After escaping a violent downpour, Linden and her companions pause briefly to tend to their injuries. The Giants, including Kindwind, Galesend, and Coldspray, bear severe wounds from their recent battle, while Linden's allies—Liand, Stave, and the Ramen—suffer burns from skurj gore. Linden uses her Staff of Law to heal the most critical injuries but avoids treating the Humbled and Anele, respecting their boundaries. Despite her exhaustion, she pushes forward, aware that the skurj could attack again at any moment. The company resumes their flight, carrying the unconscious Longwrath, while the Giants and Haruchai remain vigilant for threats.

The group's progress is hindered by the dense jungle of Salva Gildenbourne, forcing the Giants to carve a path with sheer strength. Linden's fatigue clouds her focus, but her determination to reach Andelain and her son Jeremiah drives her onward. The Humbled scout ahead, yet Linden remains uneasy, fearing Kastenessen's next move. Coldspray takes charge, hacking through the underbrush to improve their pace, but the Giants' stamina wanes under the relentless strain. The loss of two comrades weighs heavily on them, though there is no time to grieve.

A sudden struggle erupts when Longwrath awakens and attacks the Giant carrying him. Despite her efforts to subdue him, he breaks free and flees to retrieve his abandoned flamberge. Coldspray halts pursuit, reasoning that their enemies will not harm him while he seeks Linden's death. Latebirth, the Giant tasked with restraining Longwrath, blames herself for Scend Wavegift's death, vowing to renounce her sword after their journey. Coldspray dismisses her guilt, urging the company to focus on survival. Linden, though sympathetic, remains silent, understanding the futility of recrimination in their dire circumstances.

As the terrain eases into a sloping decline, Coldspray and Latebirth lead the way, channeling their shame and anger into clearing a path. The jungle thins, offering hope for faster progress, but the threat of the skurj looms. Linden's thoughts linger on her son and Covenant, guided by the krill's beacon in Andelain. Despite Esmer's ambiguous aid and the constant danger, she resolves to press on, aware that her enemies fear her power. The chapter ends with the company's fragile unity and determination tested by exhaustion and impending peril.

