

THE TREE



J.R. STRANGE

AND THE LIGHT

The Tree and the Light

J.R. Strange

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Book One

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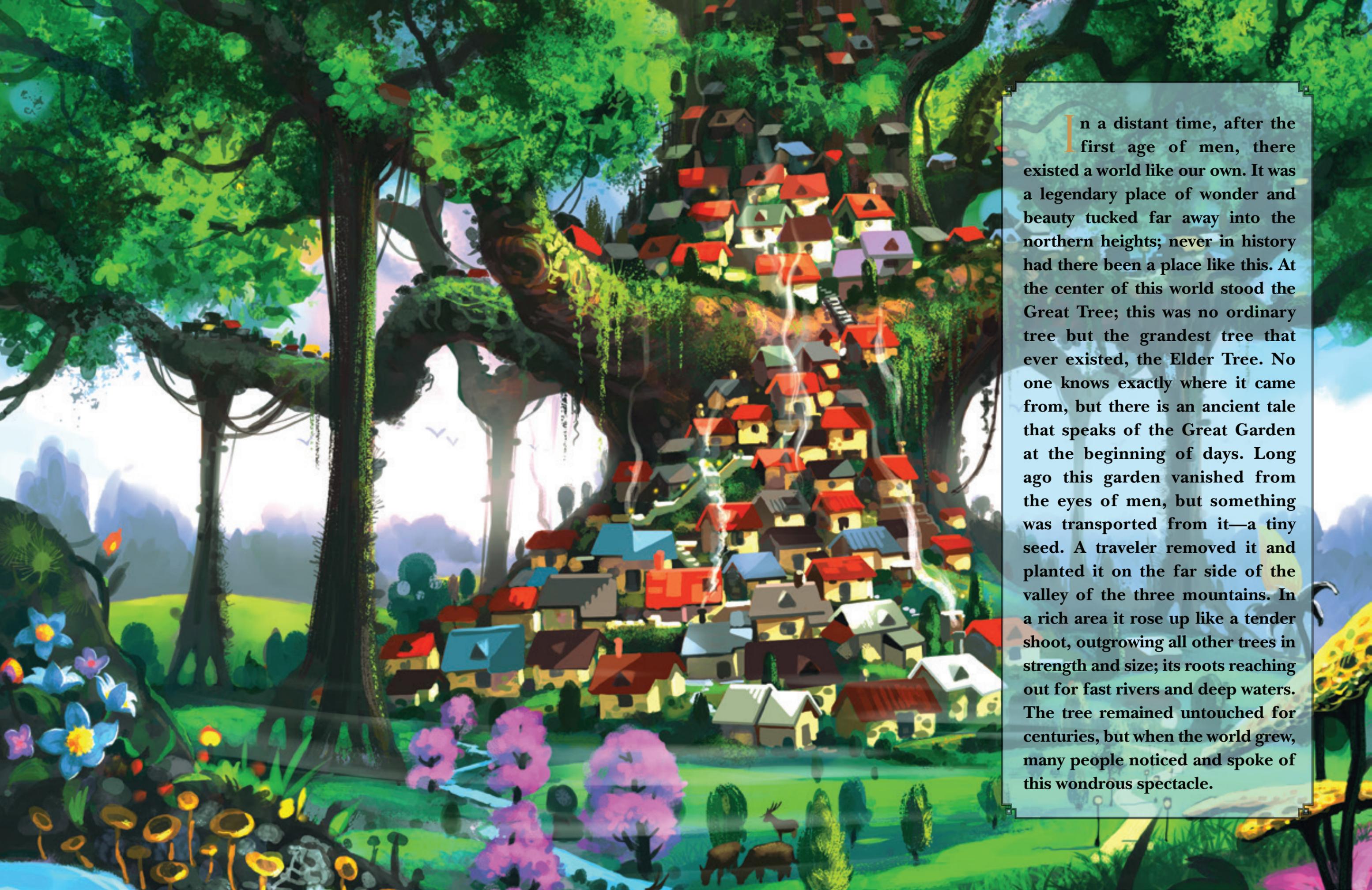
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ISBN: 0988721406
ISBN 13: 9780988721401
Library of Congress Control Number: 2012955387
FiresideNook, Miamisburg, OH

To my children, Noah, Selah, Seanna, and AJ.
Daddy loves you very much.

*“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”*

—Matthew 4:16



In a distant time, after the first age of men, there existed a world like our own. It was a legendary place of wonder and beauty tucked far away into the northern heights; never in history had there been a place like this. At the center of this world stood the Great Tree; this was no ordinary tree but the grandest tree that ever existed, the Elder Tree. No one knows exactly where it came from, but there is an ancient tale that speaks of the Great Garden at the beginning of days. Long ago this garden vanished from the eyes of men, but something was transported from it—a tiny seed. A traveler removed it and planted it on the far side of the valley of the three mountains. In a rich area it rose up like a tender shoot, outgrowing all other trees in strength and size; its roots reaching out for fast rivers and deep waters. The tree remained untouched for centuries, but when the world grew, many people noticed and spoke of this wondrous spectacle.



This ancient tree was colossal. It was so tall that at times it brushed the clouds. The tree was wide enough that seven thousand people barely could hold hands and circle around it. It had countless massive branches that extended past what the eye could see. It was a great resource for food, water, shelter, and shade. It was so large that some people built their cities underneath its canopy, while others built their homes within it, high up in the tops. Every kind of vegetation, fruit, herb, and grain grew around the tree. Its splendor was unsurpassed; it was regal in stature, varied in color, and majestic in its beauty. Hundreds of species of flowers rolled out from the tree's base in cascading colors and gave off a sweet aroma. Some claim that one could smell the Great Tree's fragrance from far, far away. On a clear day, visitors could see the tree from distant lands, and they described it as a heavenly vision. All rivers twisted and moved to find their way to the Great Tree. Every kind of animal found its habitat within its branches and along its base. The birds sang songs never before heard, melodious tunes in charming accord. Everything good and beautiful flowed in abundance from the tree and to it. This was the renowned Tree City.

The people of the tree were known as the Tree Lords. They were the guardians of the tree who had received a gift, and they worked hard to care for the Great Tree and manage the land. They were a joyous people, always laughing and singing. They enjoyed the good of the land and took delight in reaping its rewards. As a sign of their identity, they proudly wore the symbol of the Great Tree on all their garments. Near dusk, when the day was ending, the entire community gathered together and sang aloud. The echo was such that it rang throughout the valley, and even the wild animals were charmed into a state of quiet restfulness.

In the midst of this serene setting and vast beauty, however, something was wrong; there was a deep, dark secret among people. Their hearts were filled with fear, a fear they never discussed, a fear that enslaved them. It was this fear that soon would reveal itself.



No one thought this dark day would come, but when it did, it blew over the land like a great gust of wind. From a faraway country came a vast army of wicked men known as the Sinagains. They were an ancient people consumed with glory and fame. They were workers of metal and stone who sought to build vast cities as monuments to their greatness. These men were skilled builders and fierce warriors—short, sturdy, strong, and built for war. The Sinagains had unusually large hands, which gave them great strength for building and battle. Wherever they went, they carried packs on their backs filled with tools of destruction: Double hooked tree slicers, earth movers, and ground-shaking thunder sticks. They were a fearless people, always conquering and never conquered.

They stood out among all other peoples because they were born with an image of a serpent wrapped around their arms. It was said they bore the mark of an evil curse the first travelers of the New World had passed on to them. It was the Sinagains who had led the rebellion and brought in the first corruption. To them the serpent was not a curse, but a sign that they should strike down all nations and rule over them.





Through their curious explorations of the world, the Sinagains heard reports of the great Tree City. They began their march in the cold season from the south. Moving with furious force, the Sinagains made their way through the ice forest and the plains of the Seven Woods and descended into the valley of the Great Tree. They were so numerous that the ground shook, and as it did, terrible songs filled the air—songs of power, victory, and battle.

WE MARCH AGAIN FROM FAR AWAY.
THE GROUND BEGINS TO SHAKE!
UNSTOPPABLE, UNSTOPPABLE, WE COME TO YOU
TO TAKE!
FEAR US, O' LANDS! FEAR US, O' LANDS.
OUR POWER IS SO GREAT!
GIVE IN TO US! GIVE IN TO US!
YOUR CITY WE WILL BREAK!





They came with all kinds of war machines and weapons; some even rode upon strange looking beasts never seen before. The guardians of the ancient tree met them with opposition, but the Sinagains' power and strength were far too great for them. Throughout that night many wept for those who had fallen, and those they loved. The Sinagains forced many of the tree people into slavery, and the women and children were imprisoned in a nearby cave to work the metal mines. Few had escaped and those that did ran for safety and took shelter at the foot of the White Mountains. They were now a homeless people, uprooted wanderers, and they longed for the day when they would return.





Many nights after the Sinagains began their reign, the unthinkable happened. By evil machinery made up of double blade saws, ironclad stump smashers, and mountain movers the final chop sounded; they cut down the Great Tree. And what no one thought was possible occurred, the tree came down with a thunderous crash that shook the world. The Sinagains celebrated with snarls and scowls, clashing their swords upon their shields. They heaped laughter and abuse upon their prisoners. To make matters worse, they collected giant piles of wood from the Great Tree and set them ablaze in their sight.

Throughout that night their songs echoed across the land.

With one blow, the tree fell down.

With our saws we sawed it down.

The greatest tree came crashing down.

Down...down...down...

We crush our foes. We have no friends.

We live to sin. We're Sinagains.

Our fame is great. We're conquerin'.

Down...down...down...

Soon after, in a mysterious and unexpected way, the land began to die and all the people scattered to the four corners of the world. The wilderness it left behind grew like a shadow, moving, devouring towns in its deadness and darkness.





It had an appetite to consume until nothing was left. Men hated other men; wars, crime, and greed abounded. Rivers looked for new outlets; birds no longer sang songs of joy but took flight to strange lands to find relief. All creatures cowered in fear and hid themselves from men.

With the destruction of the Great Tree, mans hopes came crashing to the ground. People wandered aimlessly, looking for a new country they could call home before the darkness crept in and took over, ravaging the land and plaguing their hearts and minds, for this darkness was alive.



After many years, as this black shadow crawled across the land, the world went pitch black. Darkness shrouded every inch of it and filled every heart with sadness and pain. All people despaired of life, and many evil and dark things lurked about, influencing their wills. In a sense the world ceased being a world. It turned into something else that was unimaginable, a darkened desert of lifeless dust. Disease, pestilence, and drought afflicted everything and everyone. All people groaned under the weight of this darkness, for it was thick and relentless.



On the stump of the Great Tree was a section with an engraved inscription, an ancient message written by the first ones for a time yet to come. It read:

THE DARKNESS WILL LIFT WHEN HE COMES UP
OUT OF THE EAST, SHINING AS THE SUN. HE
WILL BRING MANY SONS TO GLORY AND LEAD
THE PRISONERS TO FREEDOM. NO LONGER WILL
THERE BE DARKNESS, DISEASE, OR DEATH,
FOR THE FORMER THINGS WILL HAVE
PASSED AWAY, AND, BEHOLD,
ALL THINGS WILL HAVE BECOME NEW.

Many years passed in the blackened night. No songs could be heard; no laughter could be found. People made their way through the barren lands with lanterns and torches in hand, always on the lookout for the creepy things that scurried about. Food was difficult to find, and everyone searched under every rock and crevice in hopes to stay alive.



Once the light had departed, time also vanished. But in the midst of this timeless night, when all hope was gone, a Great Light began to burn out of the east. It was a hot golden light that pierced the darkness. Those who were drawn by the warmth of the light were amazed at what they saw. This Great Light was a man. He was dressed in a beautiful white robe that reached to the ground and had a symbol of the Great Tree upon it. It shimmered with green and golden colors. He carried a shepherd's staff, and written upon it was the word "Logos." A bag filled with seeds of glowing light hung over one shoulder and across his chest.

The eyes within the darkness flickered about in a fearful panic as their weakened kingdom began to fade. The Kings light was too bright and too strong. He was altogether wonderful, and all creatures gazed upon him in curious wonder.



As he walked he sang a song known as, ‘The Kings Rescue’, and dropped sunlit seeds wherever he went. Almost immediately these seeds sprung up and came to life. All species of plants, flowers, and trees bloomed with sonic speed. He was changing the landscape and with every step new life sprang forth. Rumors spread quickly, and the people that were hiding in the valley of the shadow quickly ran out to see this Great Light. Those who flocked to him sensed in him a deep peace that radiated with joy. He warmed their hearts, and the truth of it burned within them.



In his wake he had gathered a sea of people who sang and played music with every kind of wind and stringed instrument. The Sinagains heard a beautiful song as the vast army of singing soldiers drew closer to the battlefront.

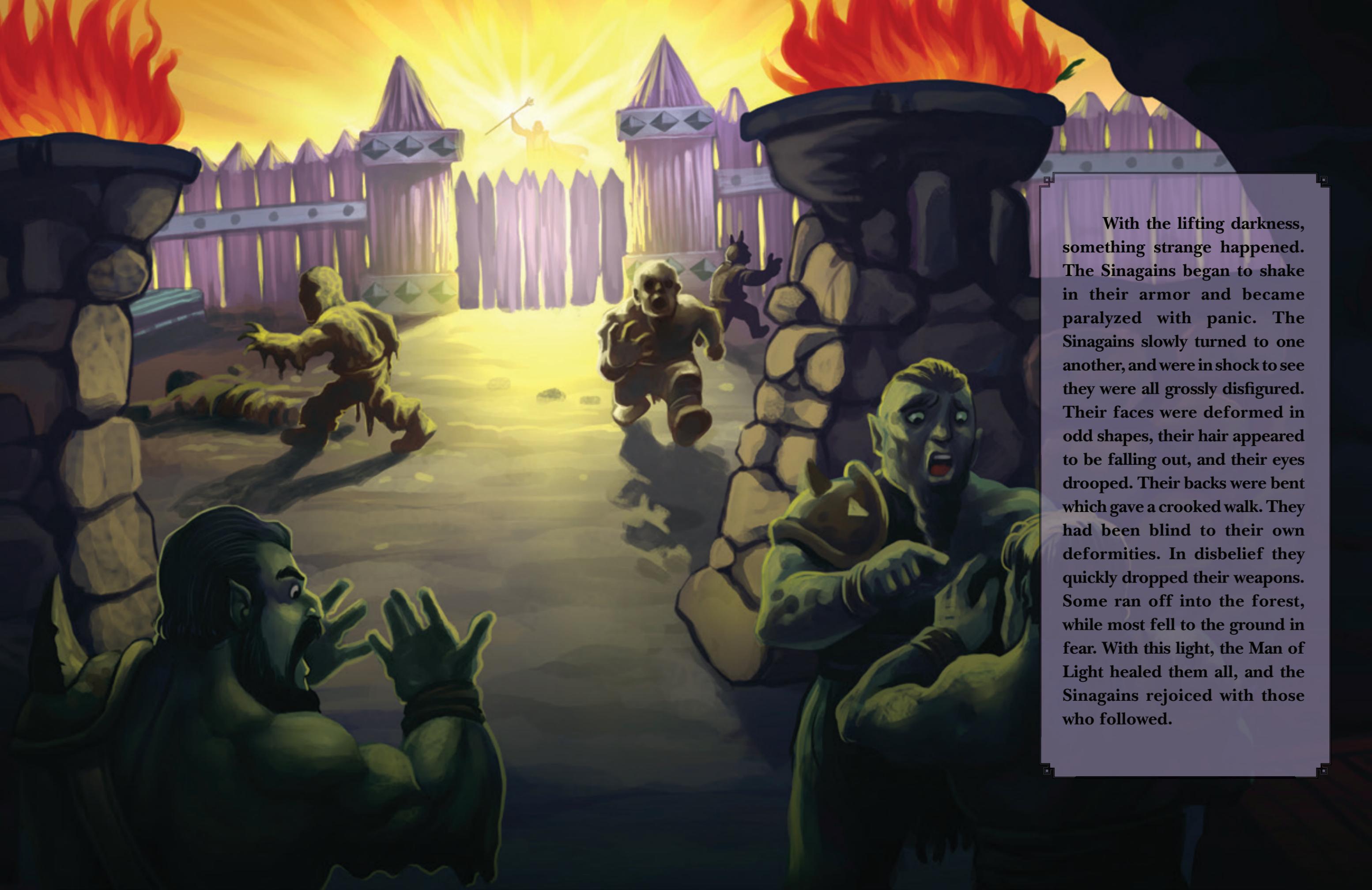




The Sinagains had grown fond of their darkened kingdom and heard rumors of this “rising sun.” They planned rebellion and declared war against this so-called Light. After amassing a great army, they huddled in the cold, dark shadows with weapons in hand. Out across the valley, they saw a pinpoint of light that moved closer and closer, a burning and blazing star, a blinding light, growing brighter and hotter. The Man of Light’s eyes were fixed as he marched toward the site where the Great Tree once stood.

As they entered the land of the Sinagains, the Great Light stood upon the western slope, and for a moment all became silent. He slowly raised his staff, and the people gasped as beams of white light shot forth, slicing through their black kingdom. His light cascaded outward like that of a great lighthouse, revealing the land and its decay. Trees split in two, buildings crumbled, and smoke rose from burning homes. A place where animals once grazed was now a valley of bones, a useless barren land.





With the lifting darkness, something strange happened. The Sinagains began to shake in their armor and became paralyzed with panic. The Sinagains slowly turned to one another, and were in shock to see they were all grossly disfigured. Their faces were deformed in odd shapes, their hair appeared to be falling out, and their eyes drooped. Their backs were bent which gave a crooked walk. They had been blind to their own deformities. In disbelief they quickly dropped their weapons. Some ran off into the forest, while most fell to the ground in fear. With this light, the Man of Light healed them all, and the Sinagains rejoiced with those who followed.



The Man of Light was the King of Light, the Restorer of broken worlds, the Healer of savage sins, the Great Storyteller. Now was the time when he would reclaim what was rightfully his. He owned this world, and he was taking it back.

Then suddenly something most amazing happened. He made his way and stood upon the stump of the fallen tree and he took his staff and slammed it down in the middle. A blast of wind shot forth in all directions releasing all those who were in prison and bound in chains. All rivers once again twisted back to find their way to him. All animals that once had settled under the Great Tree migrated back to be near the great king. The beauty of the land far surpassed its former beauty; it became a garden-city paradise of pristine splendor. An abundance of crops, lush fields, dark rich soil, fruits of all kinds, the best the land had to offer—all was plentiful. All these sprang up in praise to the King of Light, and the land rejoiced in his presence. From that moment on, all darkness fled from his beaming presence. He pushed the last shred of night over this realm's edge and into deep uncharted caves.



The people came together and gathered all the wood from the Great Tree and built a new kingdom. The King of Light decreed that the leftover wood be used to build a great and glorious table. Upon its completion, the table was massive and spanned the entire length of his garden. It had beautiful carvings pressed into it that were reminders of the goodly land. Invitations were sent out, and on that day a great feast took place, and all peoples sat with eagerness to eat with their king. Many of the pardoned Sinagains received new names, and they too joined their brothers and sisters and were invited to dine. The king announced to them all that his table would be forever open to his people.

On this day he commanded his people to be glad and filled with joy, and with all their might they were made merry.





The King of Light ruled in love, and all peoples came to him and praised him. The words that he spoke removed the fear and war from their hearts. They wrote and sang songs to him and rejoiced in his light. He set up his kingdom upon the stump of the Great Tree and established his throne there forever. A blazing fire burned at the top for all to see as a reminder that his light would be forever with his people. Like a great shepherd, the King of Light cared for them, and they proudly wore his symbol of the tree and the light. He gave some of his people bags of seed like his and told them to take them to the four corners of this realm. So they went rejoicing with a new song in their hearts, partakers in a new creation.





The King of Light has come. His people are safe. The darkness has lifted. The old order of things has passed away. He has purchased peace for his people, and the Sinagains are no more. Now begins the third age.

An ode to the King of Light:

IN THE MIDDLE OF A LONG COLD BLIGHT,
HIS STAR SHOT FORTH TO STEAL THE NIGHT,
AND IN HIS STRENGTH AND HIS MIGHT,
HIS EYE CAUGHT YOU IN LOVING SIGHT.
AND NOW WE ALL WITH UNSTAINED ROBES
LOOK TO HIM WHILE TRUTH UNFOLDS
AND AT HIS TABLE INVITED TO DINE
IN A KINGDOM MADE NEW IN ETERNITY'S TIME.



About the Author

J.R. Strange (Jason Robert Strange) is an emerging Christian author who is a dedicated husband to Joannie and a father to three beautiful kids. He served in the United States Air Force and earned a degree in radiologic sciences. He also graduated from Moody Bible Institute with a degree in biblical studies. For several years he served on staff with the Navigators in Europe, where he ministered to single soldiers. He writes in his free time and loves both fiction and nonfiction. He lives in Miamisburg, Ohio; works at Kettering Hospital; and serves in his church, Clearcreek Chapel. He writes at FiresideNook: Redeeming the Imagination (www.firesidenook.com).



Acknowledgments

I want to first thank King Jesus, who rules and reigns in the hearts of his people. My wife Joannie, for her continual support, encouragement, excitement, love, and patience through this whole process. She has been my biggest fan. Thanks also to my twin brother Max, for his feedback and ideas. The elders at Clearcreek Chapel, whose teachings have helped shape this story, grounded many of my ideas in a redemptive framework, and sanctifying my imagination.





Treeology

I invite you to visit www.firesidenook.com and read my post on Treeology, where I unpack the story behind this story.