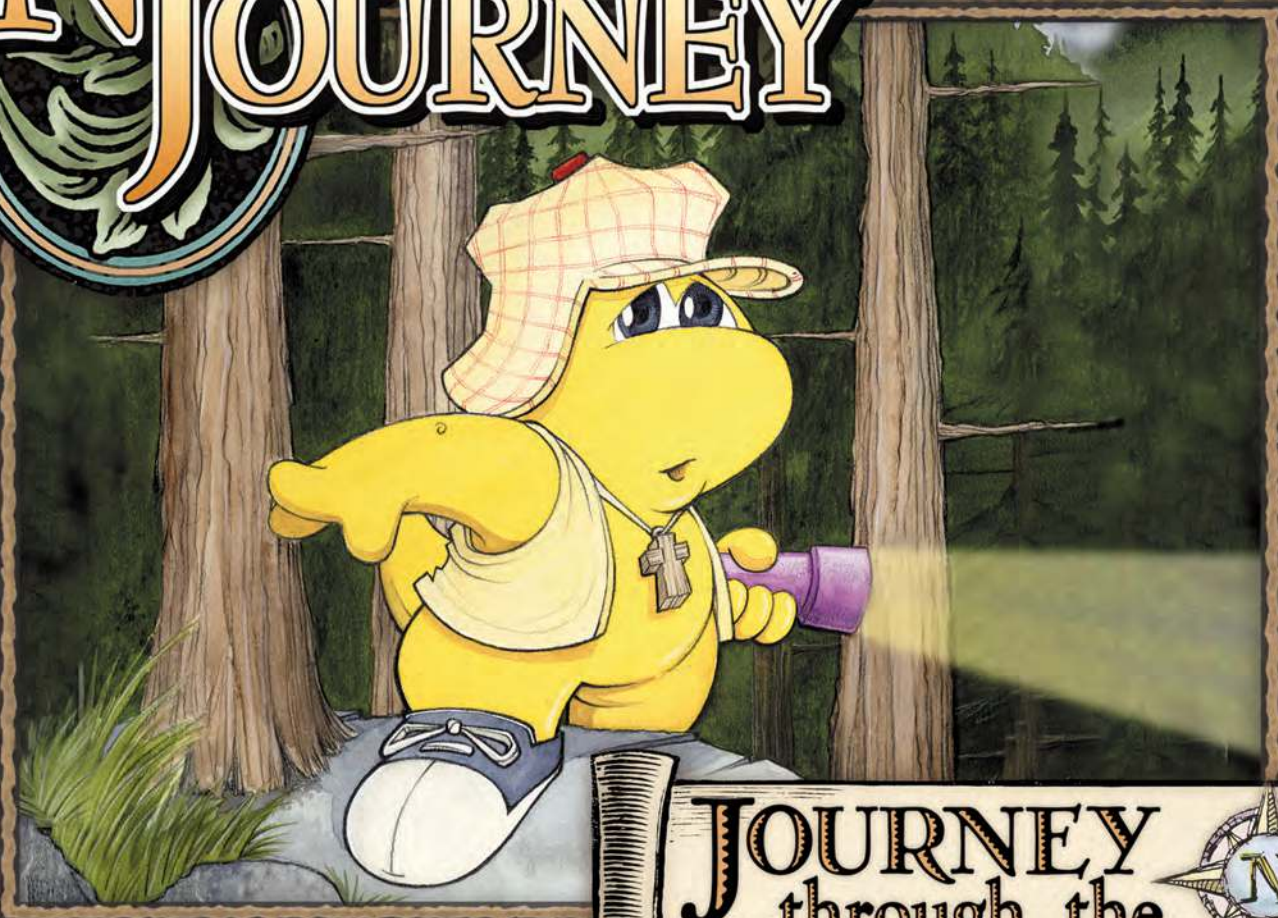


NATHANIEL'S JOURNEY



JOURNEY
through the
GREAT WOODS



A LIFE CHANGING ADVENTURE FOR ALL AGES  by TOM KELBY



A Special Gift for

From



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Published by Hands to the Plow, Inc.
P.O. Box 567, Webster, WI 54893

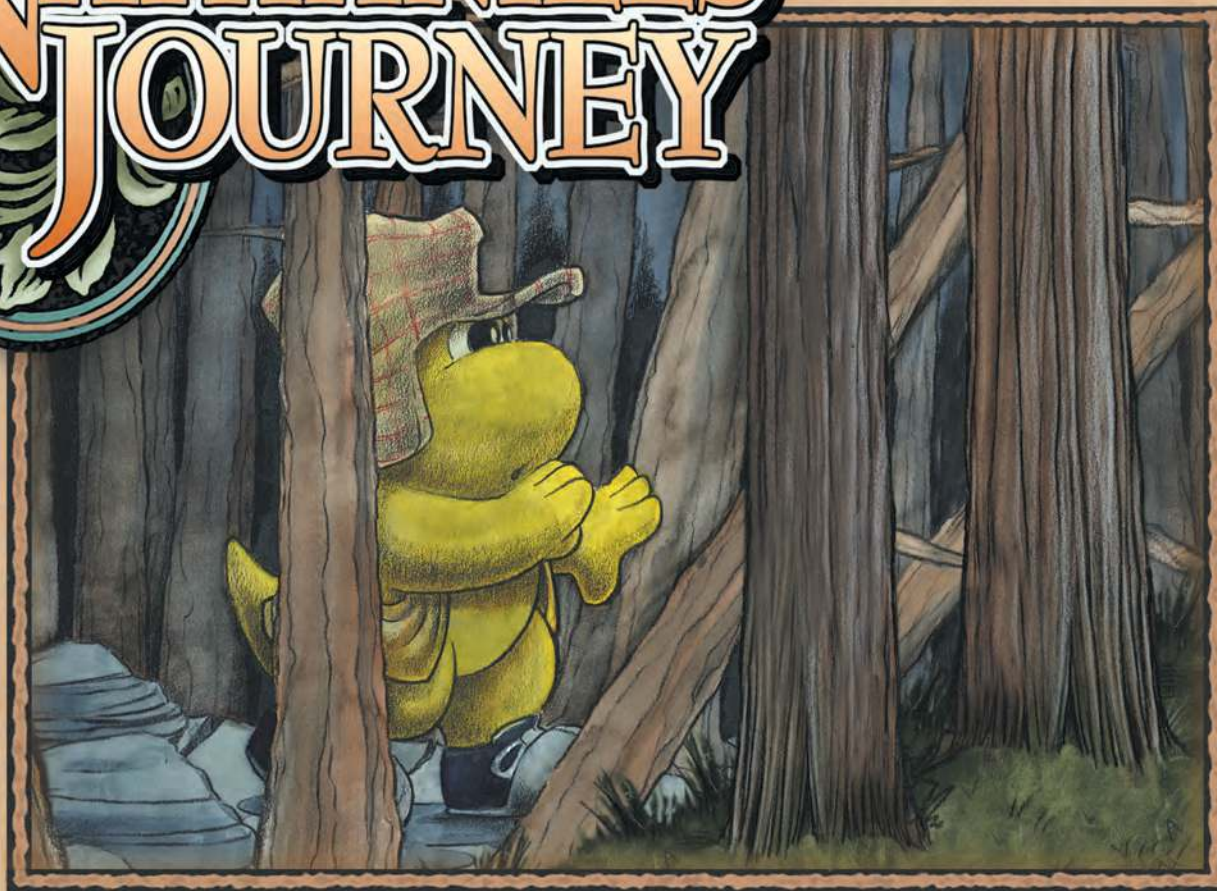
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 00-110000
ISBN: 1-930914-01-6

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First printing, 1998
Expanded edition, 2000

Printed in the U.S.A.

NATHANIEL'S JOURNEY



JOURNEY *through the* GREAT WOODS

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WELCOME TO NATHANIEL'S JOURNEY

If you read this parable for enjoyment only, it has not met its purpose. Nathaniel's Journey is designed to teach children foundational truths about God in a way that they will understand. We believe children can and will embrace more about God than we often give them credit for. God's promises of wisdom and understanding are not exclusive to adults. We pray that you will prayerfully read this book to the children God has entrusted to you and will use it as a starting point for many discussions about the Good News of Jesus Christ. Nathaniel's Journey is very much like the journey we must make through this Great Woods we call the world. God bless you as you take a child with you on this journey.







o tell the tale of Nathaniel's Journey we need to go way back to when he was just a little boy, visiting his grandfather.

During these visits, Nathaniel's grandfather filled his mind with wonderful stories about a mighty kingdom that existed beyond the northernmost borders of the Great Woods.

Nathaniel's grandfather told him that the King of this land is not like most kings. He treats everyone who lives in his land as a family member - just like his own sons and daughters. He takes such good care of his subjects, that no one ever gets sad there, no one ever gets sick and no one ever dies there, either. It's perfect.

Nathaniel didn't know if the stories were true, but as the years passed, his desire to find out grew until one day he was ready to go see for himself. There was only one problem. How was he ever going to make it through the Great Woods?



While Nathaniel had grown up in the woods, he had never traveled very far from his home. Of course, on hot summer days it wasn't uncommon to find him swimming in the swimming hole with his friends. And once he had even traveled to the top of Lookout Mountain, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Kingdom Beyond the Woods. But he certainly had never ventured into the deep woods beyond the thickets. Everything he'd ever heard about that part of the woods was bad. There were strange sounds that could be heard coming from the deep woods. And many people who traveled there never returned to their homes. Unfortunately, Nathaniel knew that there was only one way to get to the Kingdom Beyond the Woods. And that was by traveling straight through the very deepest part of the woods.

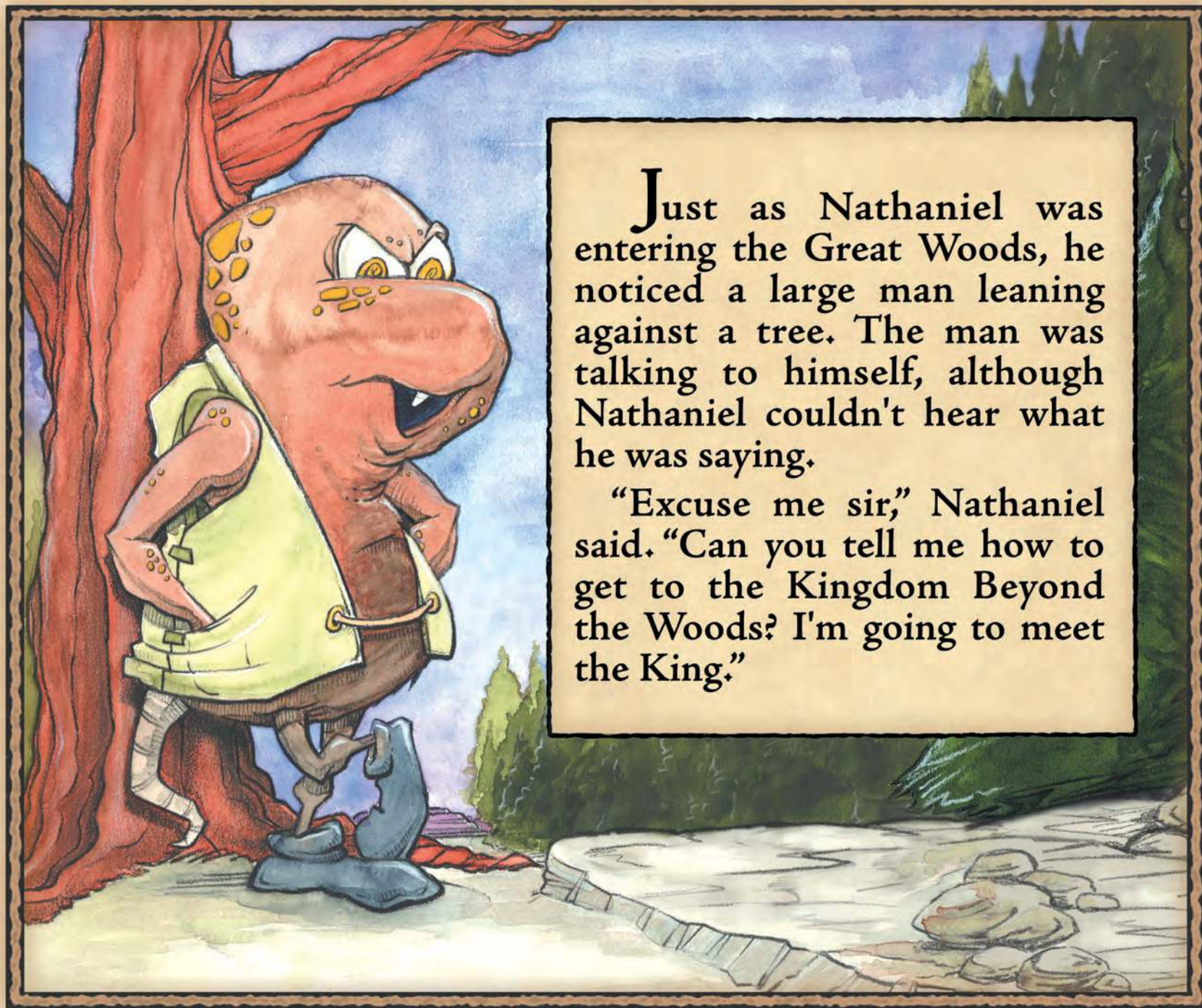




After months of planning, Nathaniel started his journey toward the Kingdom Beyond the Woods.

"This doesn't seem so bad," Nathaniel said, trying to ease his nerves. "I should be there in no time."





Just as Nathaniel was entering the Great Woods, he noticed a large man leaning against a tree. The man was talking to himself, although Nathaniel couldn't hear what he was saying.

"Excuse me sir," Nathaniel said. "Can you tell me how to get to the Kingdom Beyond the Woods? I'm going to meet the King."



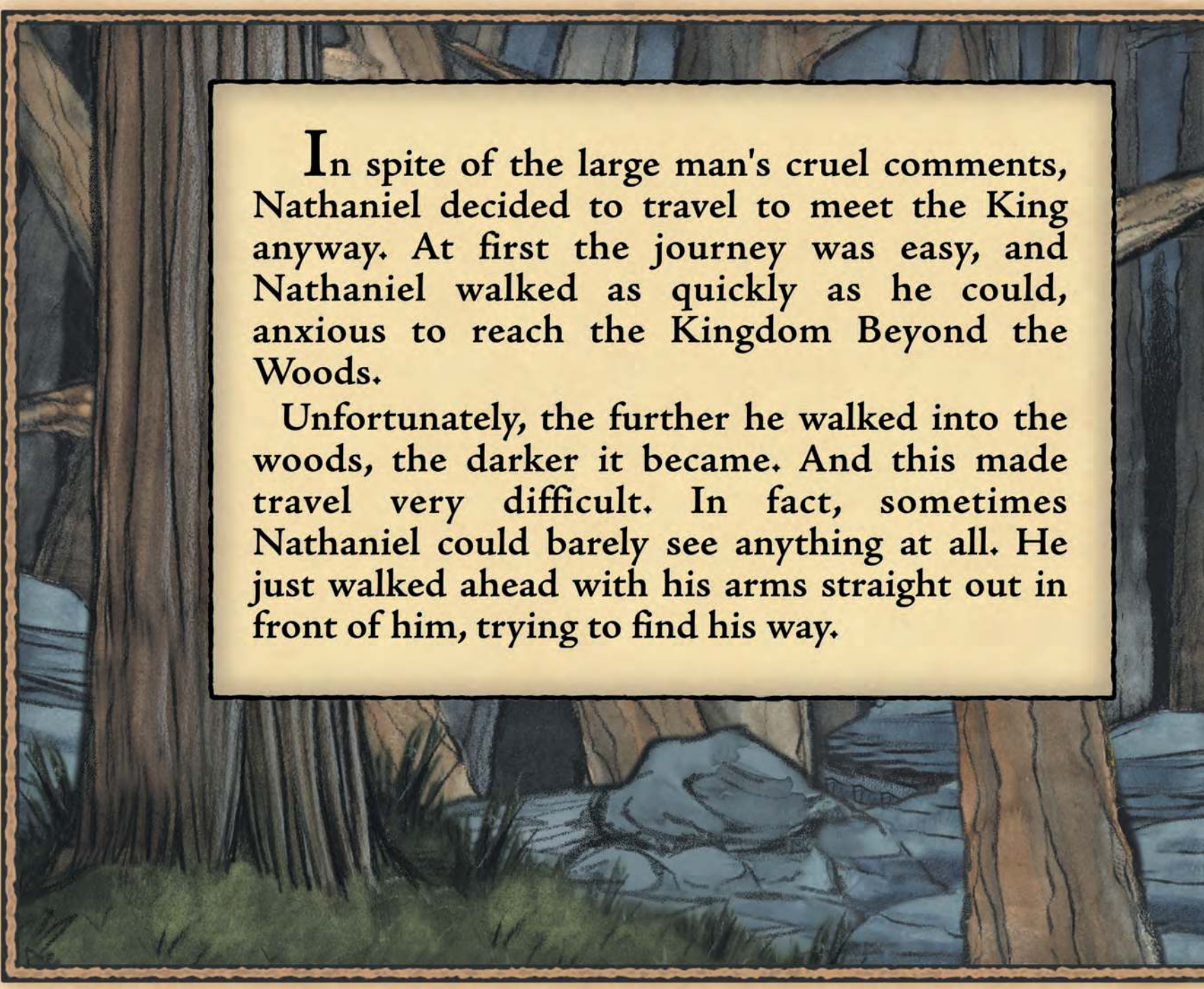
The man rammed a long, crooked finger into Nathaniel's chest and laughed. "You've got to be kidding me. You're traveling to the Kingdom Beyond the Woods so you can meet the King? What would he want to meet you for? You're of no use to him. You're too little. You're too young. You're too weak. I could name a thousand reasons why the King wouldn't want to meet someone like you. The King wants warriors. Not nobodies like you."

A tear trickled down Nathaniel's face. "But my grandfather told me that the King loves everyone."

The man laughed even harder. "Well your grandfather must have heard wrong."

With a cruel sneer the man pushed Nathaniel aside. "Now get out of my way. I've got more important things to think about than your problems."





In spite of the large man's cruel comments, Nathaniel decided to travel to meet the King anyway. At first the journey was easy, and Nathaniel walked as quickly as he could, anxious to reach the Kingdom Beyond the Woods.

Unfortunately, the further he walked into the woods, the darker it became. And this made travel very difficult. In fact, sometimes Nathaniel could barely see anything at all. He just walked ahead with his arms straight out in front of him, trying to find his way.



Nathaniel was walking like this when he bumped into a man who was crawling on his hands and knees. The man seemed to be searching for something.

"What are you looking for?" Nathaniel asked.



"A pass into the Kingdom Beyond the Woods," the man answered.

"A what?"

"A pass into the Kingdom Beyond the Woods."

"But I thought the King let everyone into his Kingdom," Nathaniel said.

The man shook his head. "No, the King won't let you into his Kingdom unless you have a special pass. That's the law of the land."

"Where can I get a pass?"

"Sorry," the man answered, "I wish I knew. I've been searching everywhere for three years, and I haven't found one anywhere. Maybe I should just quit looking."

Nathaniel's heart sank. "Maybe I should just turn back too," he thought. "I'll never find a pass."





Nathaniel sat down on a stump and started to cry. Now he didn't know what to do. After all, the woods were so dark he couldn't even see the trees in front of him, so how was he ever going to find a pass in the darkness?

Just then, a ray of sunlight broke through the trees and a woman stepped into the clearing. She was the first friendly face Nathaniel had seen in weeks.

"Hello there," she said, as she walked up to Nathaniel. "I heard

you crying, so I hurried over as quickly as I could. I can help you."

Nathaniel shook his head sadly. "Thanks for coming, but I don't think you can help. You see, I want to go to the Kingdom Beyond the Woods, but I don't have a pass. And the King won't let you in if you don't have a pass."





"But I know the King," the woman said with a smile, "and I have an extra pass into his Kingdom. Would you like to have it?"

"Of course I'd like to have it," Nathaniel shouted as he counted the money from his pockets. "How much does it cost?"

"I'm afraid you can't afford it. It is far too expensive," she answered.

"But how can I ..."

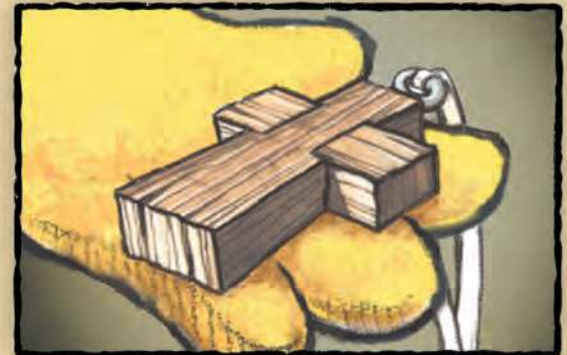
The woman cut him off with a wave of her hand. "Just think of it as a gift from the King," she said as she handed him a pass.

"You mean I can have it? For free?"

"Of course, all the King's gifts are free."

"Then we should bring one to that man I just bumped into," Nathaniel exclaimed. "He said he's been looking for a pass for three years. He'll be excited to know about the free pass."

The woman shook her head. "The King has already sent many of us to talk to that man and offer him a pass, but he doesn't believe we're telling the truth." Then she added, "Nathaniel, be very careful with your pass. Guard it with your life. Many people would love to steal it from you."





Nathaniel was still admiring his pass into the Kingdom Beyond the Woods when the woman handed him a flashlight.

"What's this for?" he asked.

"This is a special light. The King gives it to everyone who has a pass. It's important that you keep it turned on all the time. Never turn it off. The path through the woods is very narrow. If you turn your light off, you'll get lost."

Nathaniel turned on the light and shined it into the woods. Every tree in the area was instantly illuminated. "This is great," Nathaniel exclaimed. "Now I'll be able to see where I'm going."

But Nathaniel's smile quickly disappeared and was replaced with a look of concern. "But what do I do when the batteries wear down? Maybe I'll just use it in the really dark places, but then I'll turn it off in the places where I can see."

"Nathaniel, this is a very special light that doesn't use batteries. As long as you use the flashlight, it will never grow dim. But if you quit using it, and start relying on your own eyesight to find the way, then it will grow dim and won't work as well in the dark places."



“To get the most power out of the light, you need to use it everywhere, even when you think you can find the way on your own. This light will show you many things you won't be able to see with your own eyes.”




Nathaniel took the woman's advice seriously, and kept his flashlight turned on all the time. It saved his life more than once. One time, he was about to take a step when his light shined on a deep hole right in front of him.

Another time, he was about to sit down on the ground and rest when his flashlight revealed a large snake coiled right where he was about to sit. Nathaniel learned to use his flashlight to search the woods for danger before he took his next step. As long as the flashlight showed him the way was clear, Nathaniel felt confident that he was safe to continue.





A yellow cartoon creature with a red and white checkered hat and a backpack is walking through a dark forest at night. The creature is holding a flashlight that is shining a beam of light onto the ground. The background is a dark, misty forest with tall evergreen trees.

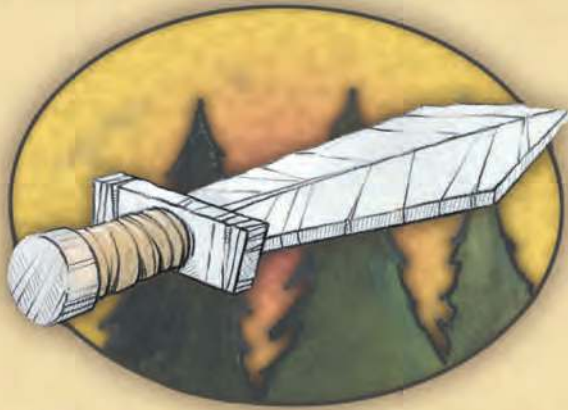
One particularly cold, dark day, as Nathaniel was walking through the woods he heard what sounded like an evil laugh.

"Th-th-that was just my imagination," he stammered fearfully as he fought the urge to run.

But for some reason, Nathaniel knew it wasn't his imagination. He knew there was something in the woods. And he knew that whatever it was, it was watching him.

"Turn off your flashlight," a low voice whispered, "and come over and talk to me."

Nathaniel quickly turned his flashlight in the direction of the voice, but when he shined it on the tree, the creature let out a hideous scream and flew away. Once again, the flashlight had saved Nathaniel's life.



The next day, as Nathaniel was getting ready to start his journey again, a man with a black eye and several bruises staggered up to Nathaniel and handed him a sword.

"The King wants you to have this," he said, as he gasped to catch his breath. "He told me to bring it to you as soon as possible."

"A sword?"

"Not just any sword. It's a magical sword. The more you use it, the stronger you'll become."

"Are you sure you're supposed to give this sword to me? I mean, why would the King want me to have this sword? I'm not a warrior. I'm just Nathaniel."

"He must think you're pretty important. He had me risk my life to bring it to you. Whatever you do, don't lose it."

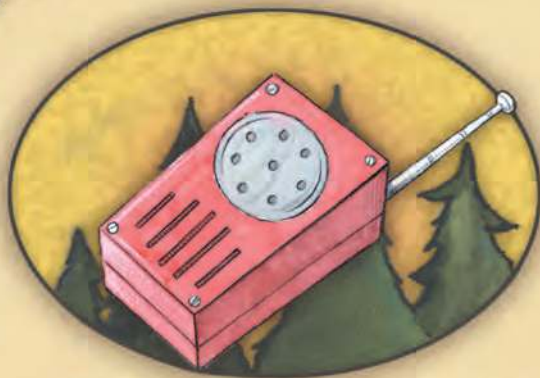
"But I've never used a sword before," Nathaniel said. "And this one seems so big and heavy."



"You don't have to worry about that," the man replied. "The King made this sword just for you. Once you start using it, you'll see that it's just the right size."

"Best of all," the man continued, "your enemy doesn't have any weapons that can defeat this sword. There is great power in it."





Before he left, the man reached into his bag and pulled out a small object. "The King also wanted me to make sure you got this."

"What is it?"

"It's a two-way radio. It allows you to talk to the King."

This really confused Nathaniel. "But why would the King want to talk to me? I've never even met him. Now I know you've got the wrong guy. I'm ..."

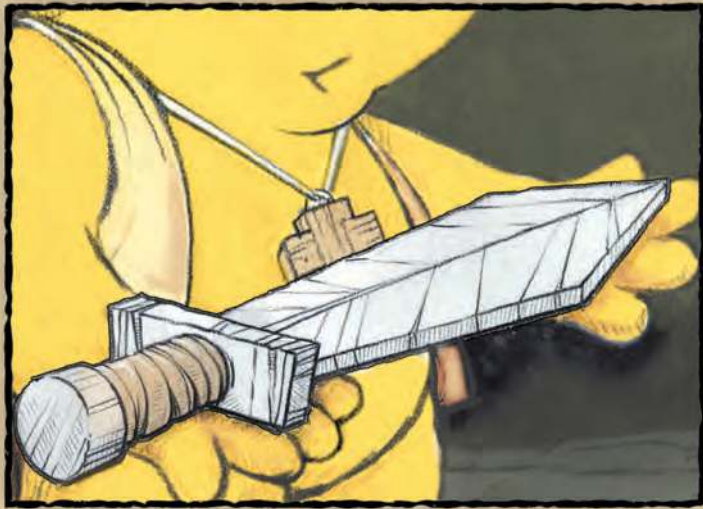
The man shook his head. "No, I'm sure we have the right guy. The King specifically asked that I give you this radio."

"How do I turn it on?" Nathaniel asked as he studied the radio. "There's no on or off switch."

"Just talk into it," the man answered. "It's always turned on."

"When should I use it? Just when I'm in danger? I don't want to bother the King."

The man laughed. "No matter how much you talk to the King, you'll never bother him. Remember, the woods are very treacherous. The King wants to be able to talk you through them and give you instructions. The more you talk to the King, the more it will help you."



After the man left, Nathaniel placed the radio in his pouch and, holding the sword awkwardly in his hand, continued his journey toward the Kingdom Beyond the Woods. The sword had a very rough appearance. It looked very old, as if it had been used

in many battles. The handle was crudely wrapped in leather. The blade, though very sharp, was plain and simple. Was this sword truly as special as the warrior had said it was?

"You're not planning on using that sword in battle are you?"

Nathaniel nearly dropped his sword in fright. He didn't know anyone else was on the path. He turned and noticed a man sitting in the hollow of a large oak tree.

"Who ... who are you?"





“Mac's the name, swords are my game. And I'm telling you, that sword you're holding just isn't made for battle. Why not try one of my swords?”



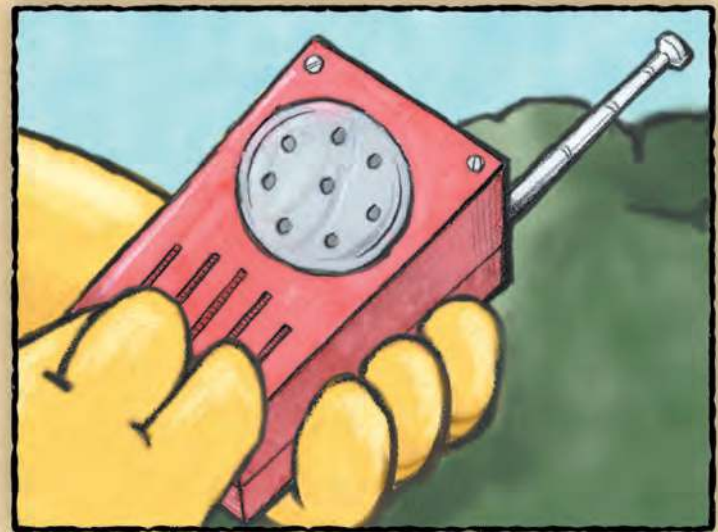
The man motioned to a large collection of swords hanging from a branch. Many of the swords were decorated with jewels. All of them looked much more powerful than the simple sword Nathaniel held in his hand.



"I, ahhh, I was given this sword by the King," Nathaniel stammered. "He made it just for me."

The man laughed. "You don't believe that do you? These swords are much better. Here. You hand me your sword and try one of mine."

Nathaniel eyed the swords. They were beautiful. But for some reason, he didn't want to hand his sword to the man. Instead, for the very first time, he took out his radio and spoke into it.

"Ahhh, this is Nathaniel. I need to speak to the King... that is, if he's not too busy."





Nathaniel stopped speaking and waited. A second later, he heard the strongest and most loving voice he had ever heard.

"Nathaniel, this is the King. I'm never too busy for you. I'm so glad you called. What do you need?"



"Well, sir, ahhh, your Majesty, I received the sword you sent me, and ... it's a nice sword ... but there's a man here saying that he has better swords, and that I should trade my sword in. Ahhh, what should I do?"

Gently the King replied, "Nathaniel, the sword you are holding was forged in the Kingdom Beyond the Woods. It has a strength you will never find in any other sword. Many warriors risked their lives to bring this sword to you. It, like you Nathaniel, is absolutely priceless."

Strengthened by the King's words, Nathaniel turned to the man selling the swords. "This sword is just the right sword for me. And I wouldn't trade it for a thousand of your swords."

"Suit yourself," the man grunted in reply. "But when that sword fails, don't come crying to me."

"Don't worry," Nathaniel said as he turned and continued down the path. "It won't fail."







As Nathaniel journeyed through the woods, he learned to use his radio and sword constantly. But these were not the only tools that were given to him by the King. Nathaniel also received a full suit of armor to protect him from any

dangers that might be lurking in the woods.

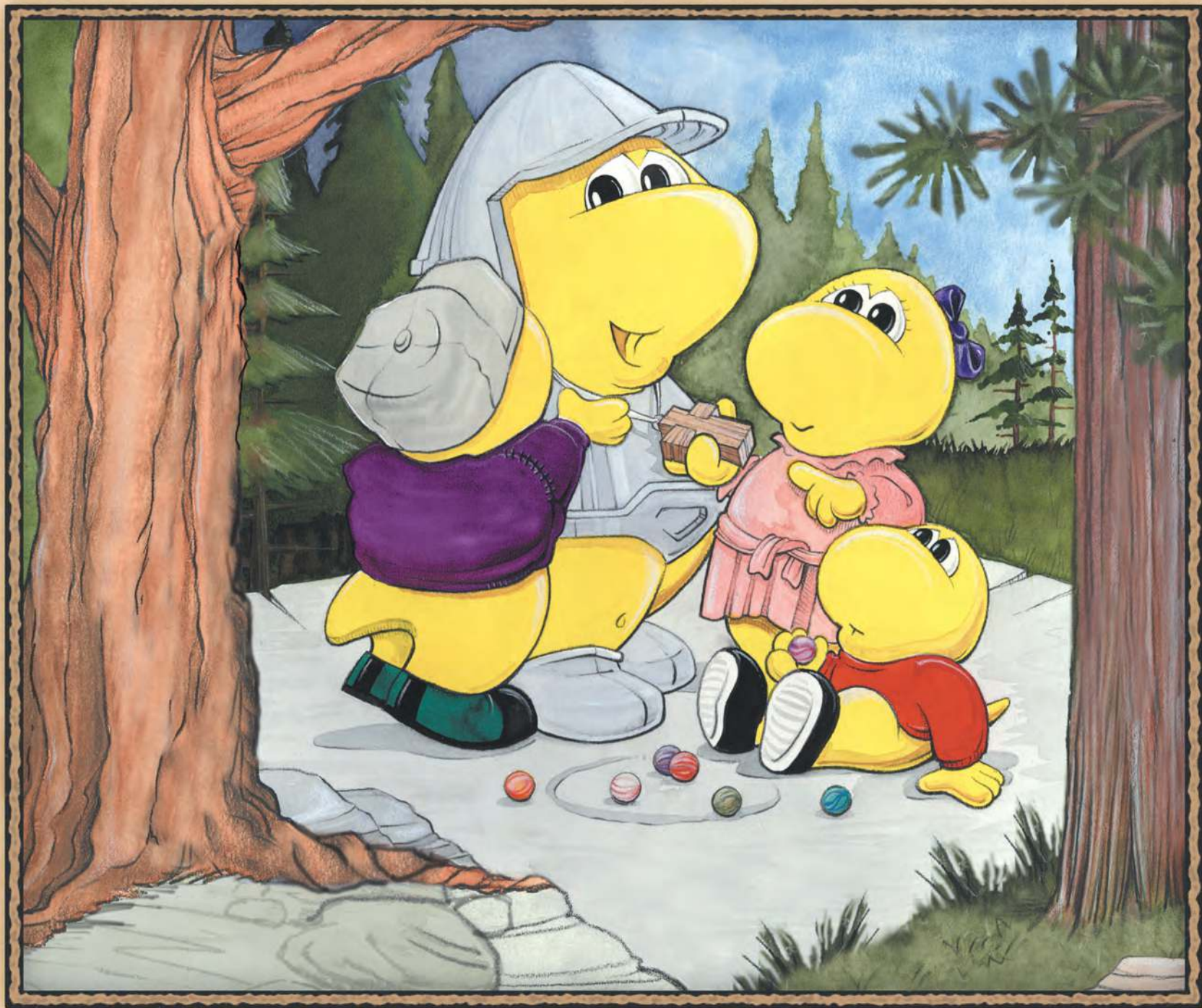
One day, several months after he had started his journey, Nathaniel noticed a group of children playing marbles by a big oak tree. Eager for some fellow travelers, Nathaniel asked, "Are you traveling to the Kingdom Beyond the Woods?"

The children stopped their game and stared. Finally, a little girl spoke up. "What Kingdom?"

Nathaniel was shocked. "You mean you don't know about the Kingdom Beyond the Woods?"

But the children simply shook their heads. So Nathaniel told them all about the King and the Kingdom Beyond the Woods.





Then he told them everything that had happened to him on his journey, from the first moment he stepped into the woods. The children listened carefully, asking him questions about every detail.

"But we've never heard any of this before," the girl said. "If it's really true, why aren't you in the King's Kingdom right now?"

"Because the King told me to tell other people about his Kingdom," Nathaniel answered. "Someday I'll get to go there, but right now I'm supposed to help other people find the way."

By this time, the children were crowded around Nathaniel. "Do you have any extra passes we could have? We want to meet the King and live in his Kingdom."

Nathaniel smiled, "Everyone who asks for a pass can have one."

The children eagerly took the passes from Nathaniel.

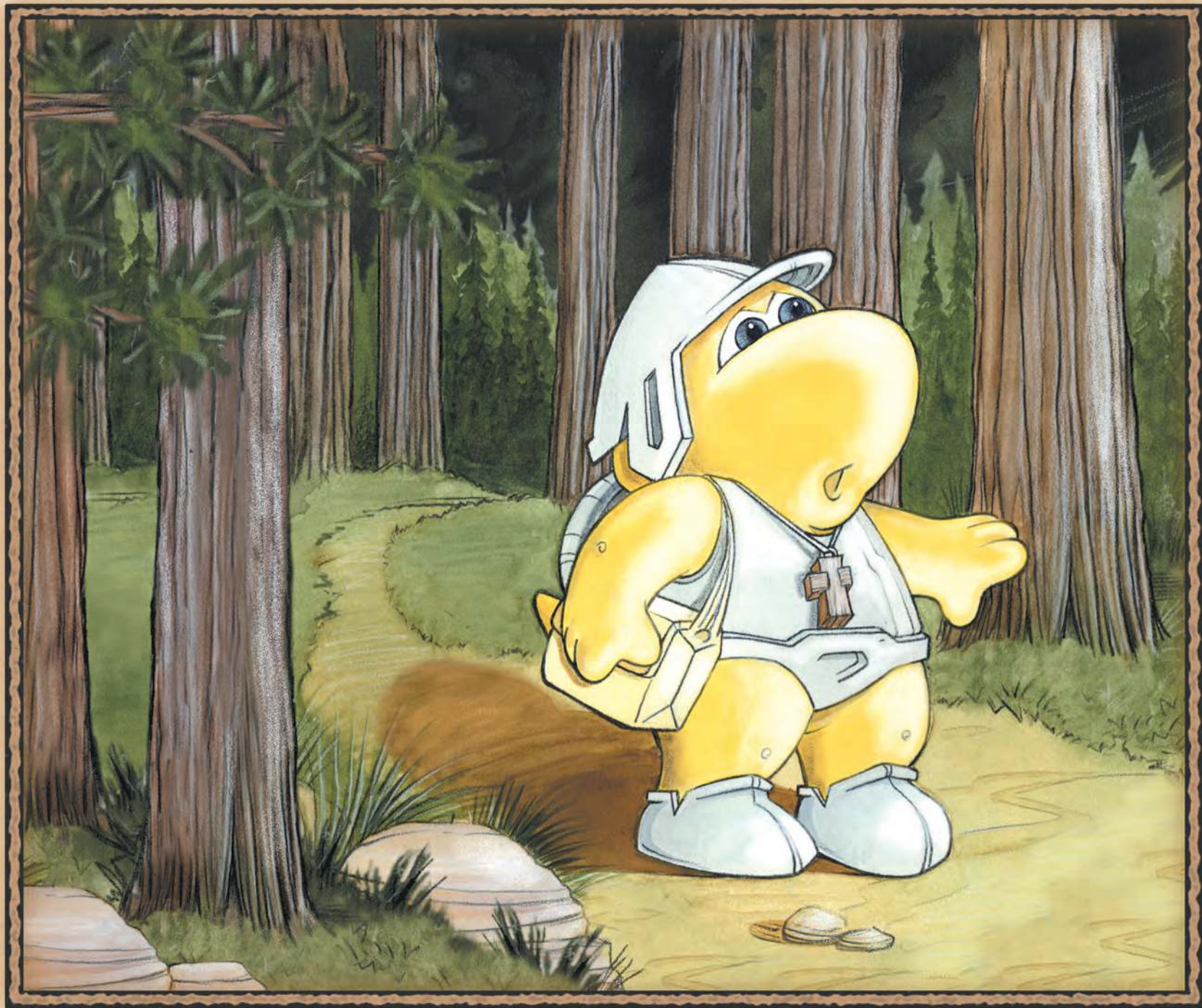
As Nathaniel continued his journey, he told many other people about the King and his Kingdom. Many times the people believed what Nathaniel was telling them and gladly took a pass into the Kingdom Beyond the Woods, but other times they just laughed at him.

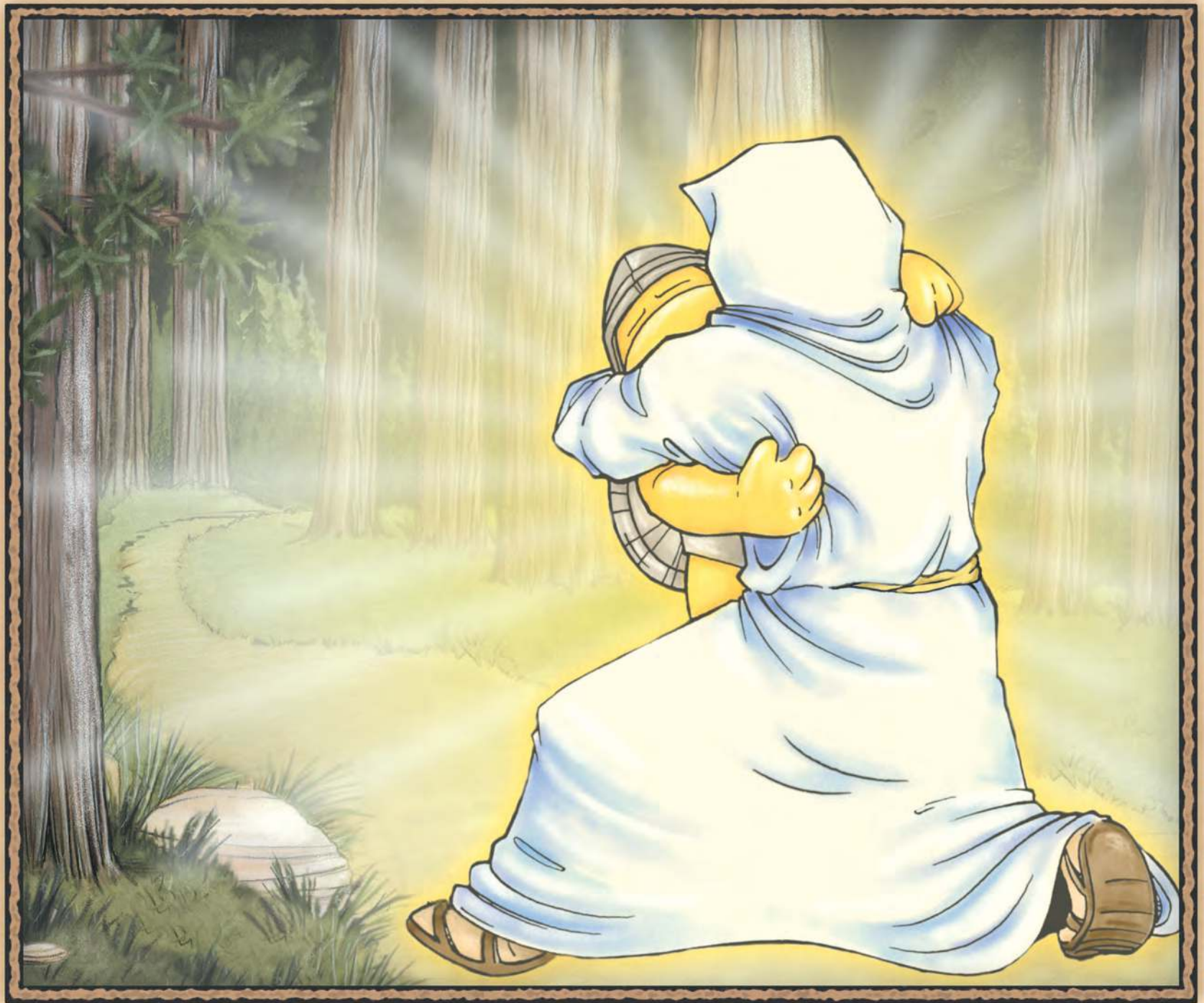




One day, as he was walking through the woods looking for people to talk with, Nathaniel rounded a bend and came face to face with the most beautiful person he had ever seen. The person was wearing a robe that reached down to his feet. He had a golden sash around his chest, and his eyes shined like a blazing fire. In his heart, Nathaniel instantly knew that it was the King.

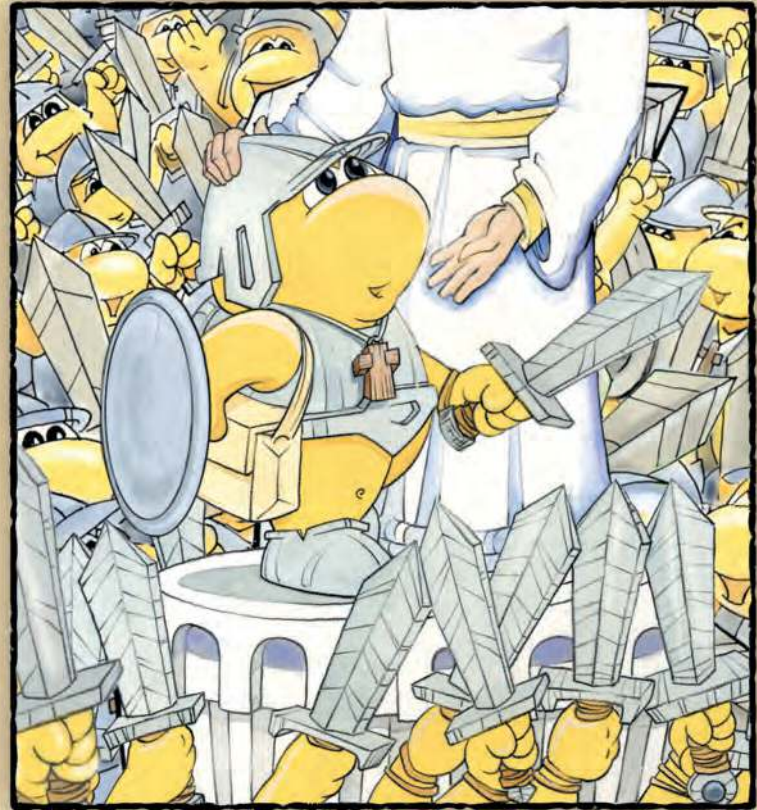
"Nathaniel," the King said in a loving voice, "I've come to bring you home."

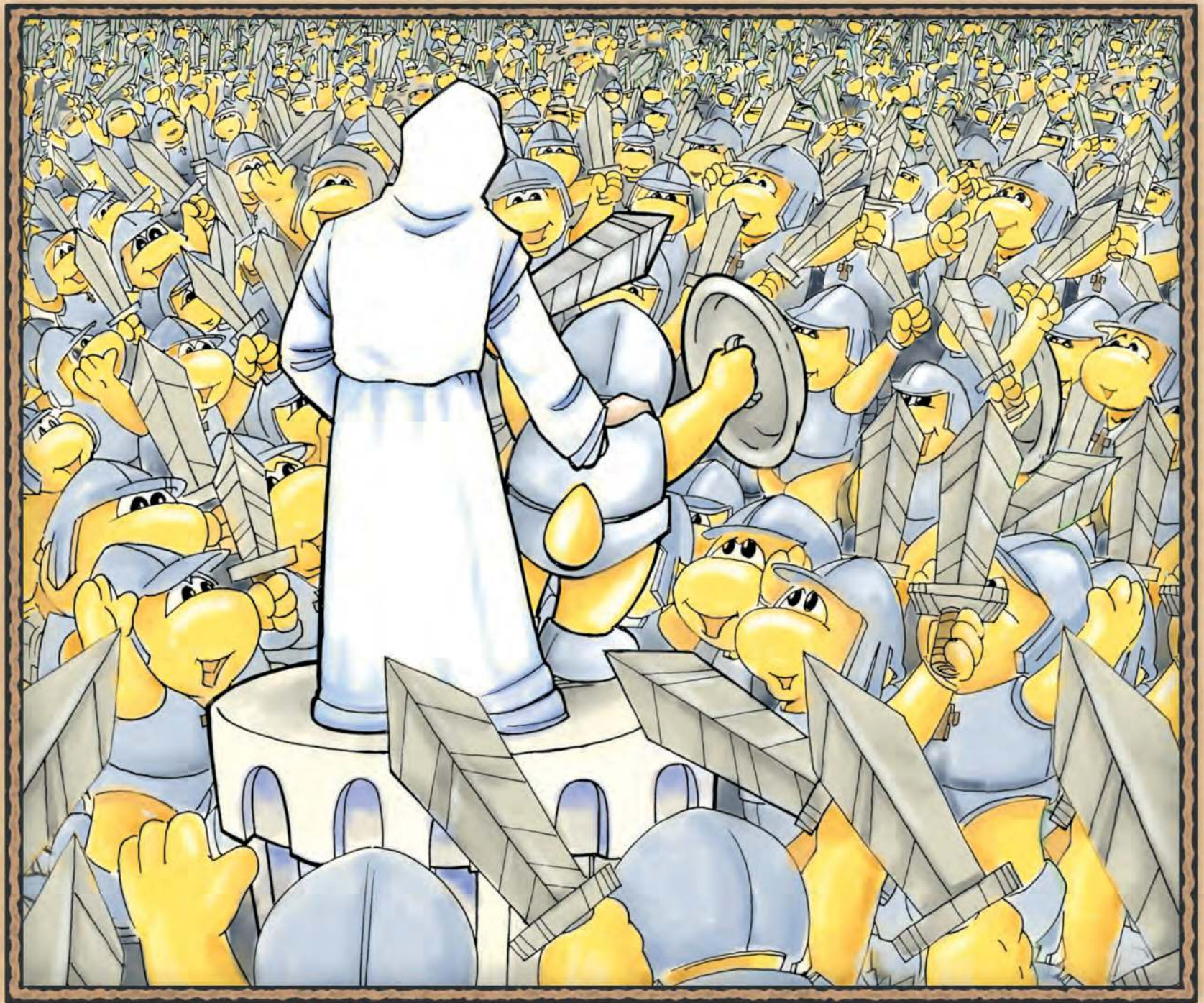


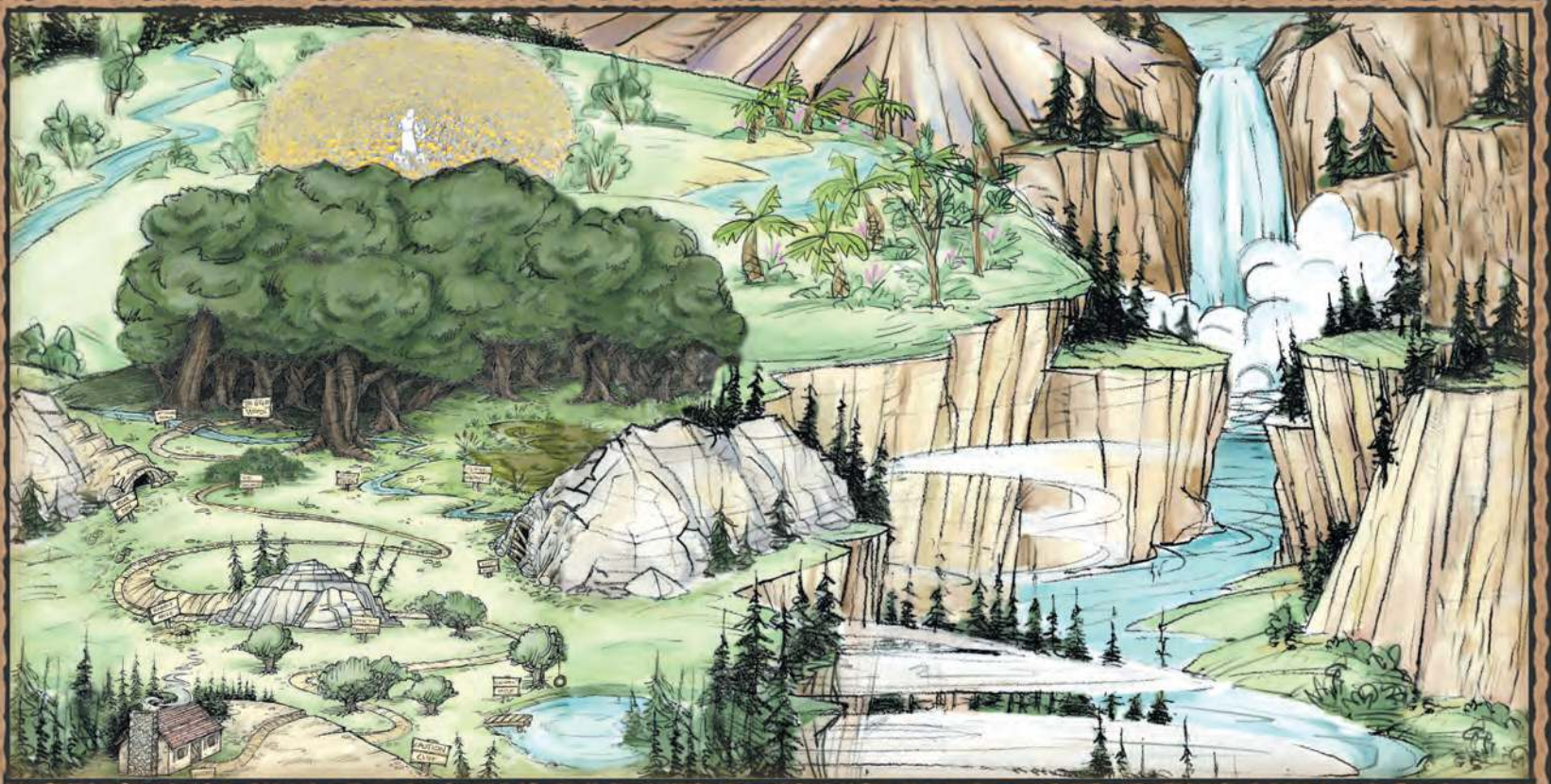


The King reached out his hand and pulled Nathaniel toward him, wrapping him up in a tender hug. "You've been a faithful servant of mine for many, many years, and you've done everything I asked you to do. Your work in the woods is complete. It's time for you to come live in my Kingdom. But before I show you all around your new home, I have to take you somewhere first."

The King smiled and led Nathaniel onto a magnificent platform. The instant they stepped on the platform, a great crowd of people broke into the loudest ovation Nathaniel had ever heard.





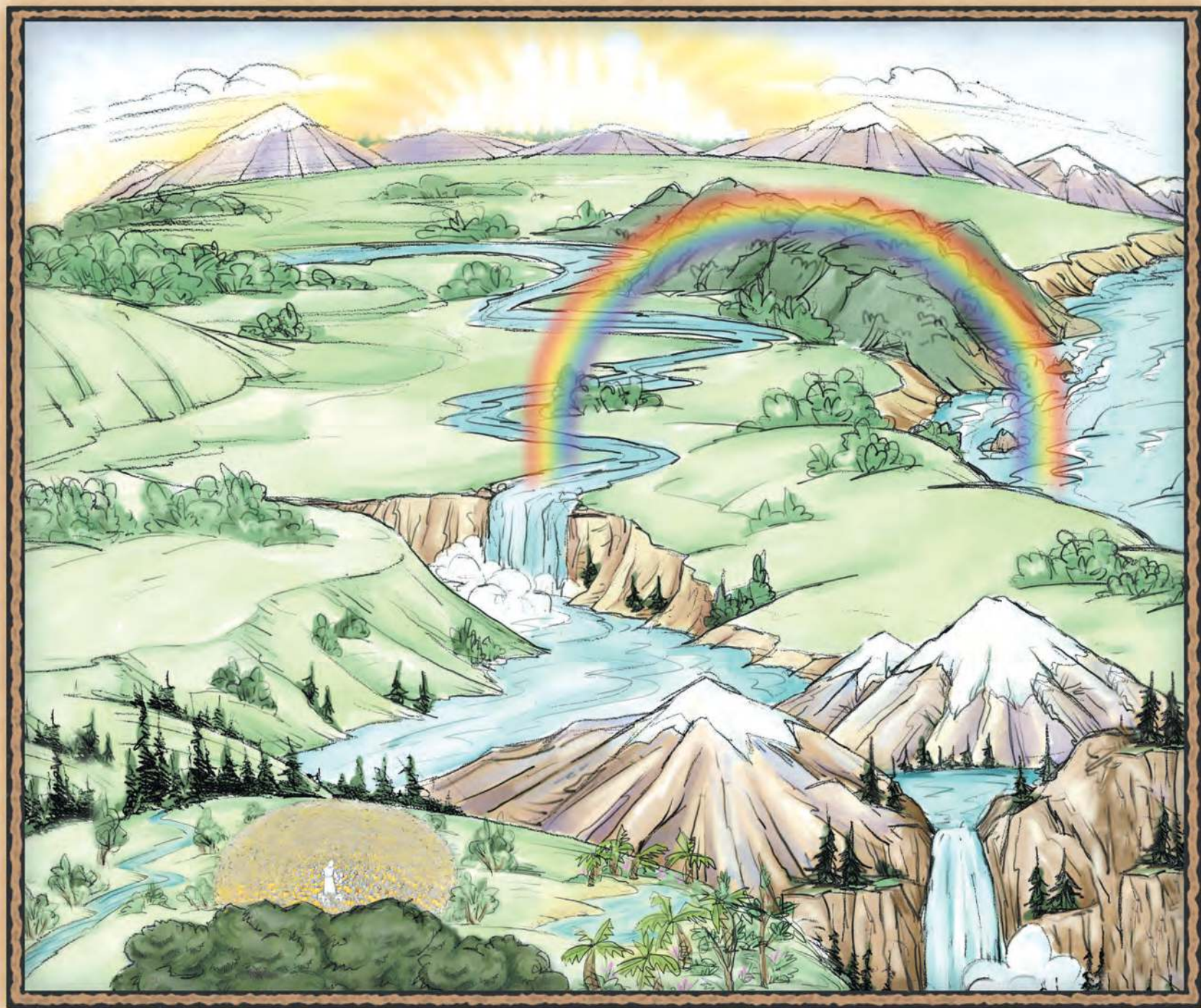


“Sir,” Nathaniel shouted into the King's ear, “what are they cheering for?”

“They're cheering for you, Nathaniel.”

“But why would they cheer for me?”

“Because I told them about all the great things you've done for my Kingdom. Welcome to your new home Nathaniel. I'm glad you're here.”



A decorative border featuring a repeating pattern of oak leaves and acorns, rendered in a light tan color against a dark grey background. The border is framed by a thin, dark line. Four larger, stylized oak leaves are positioned at the corners of the border, pointing outwards.

*Just the
Beginning*



EXPLANATION

Nathaniel's Journey is a parable. A parable is a short story that tells a truth about God. When Jesus talked with his followers he often spoke in parables. Like the parables Jesus told in the Bible, Nathaniel's Journey teaches us about God. This is the meaning of Nathaniel's Journey:

Nathaniel is just like every other person in the world. He is like you. He is like me. Nathaniel had a deep desire to reach the Kingdom Beyond the Woods and to meet the King. All people have a deep desire to meet God. But in the same way that Nathaniel didn't know how to find the King, most people don't know how or where to find God.



When Nathaniel started his journey into the deep woods, he met a man who said that the King wouldn't want to meet Nathaniel. The man said that the King wanted warriors, not nobodies like Nathaniel. Many people think that they are not special enough for God. But what they don't know is that God made them. And God doesn't make mistakes. In fact, when God made you, He used the most perfect pattern there was. Himself.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

After Nathaniel left the large man, he started walking through the woods, trying to find his way to the Kingdom Beyond the Woods. The way was very dark, and it was hard to walk. While he was walking, he bumped into a man who was looking for a pass into the Kingdom Beyond the Woods. This news surprised Nathaniel. He didn't know you need a pass. But it was the law of the land.



God has a law too. His law says that no one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven without a relationship with Jesus. Jesus said,

“**I** am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6



All Nathaniel had to do to receive his pass into the Kingdom Beyond the Woods was to ask for it. That's the same way we enter into a relationship with Jesus, by asking him to come into our hearts.

... if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

Once we've asked Jesus into our hearts, we receive another gift – the Holy Spirit. In some ways, the Holy Spirit is like Nathaniel's flashlight. He leads us and shows us where we need to go and what we need to do. Before Nathaniel received his flashlight, he could barely see anything at all. He had to walk with his arms straight out in front of him so he wouldn't bump into anything. But when Nathaniel received his flashlight, he knew exactly where to go. This is what the Holy Spirit does for us when we know Jesus - He shows us the way.



"... when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth." John 16:13

One day a creature in a tree told Nathaniel to turn off his flashlight. But when Nathaniel shined his light on the creature, it flew away. It was scared of the light. The devil is like that creature. He is God's enemy. The devil wants us to leave the path of God. He wants us to stop listening to the Holy Spirit. But



he can't do anything to us if we're listening to God and following the direction of the Holy Spirit. If we stand up to the devil in the name of Jesus, he has to leave.

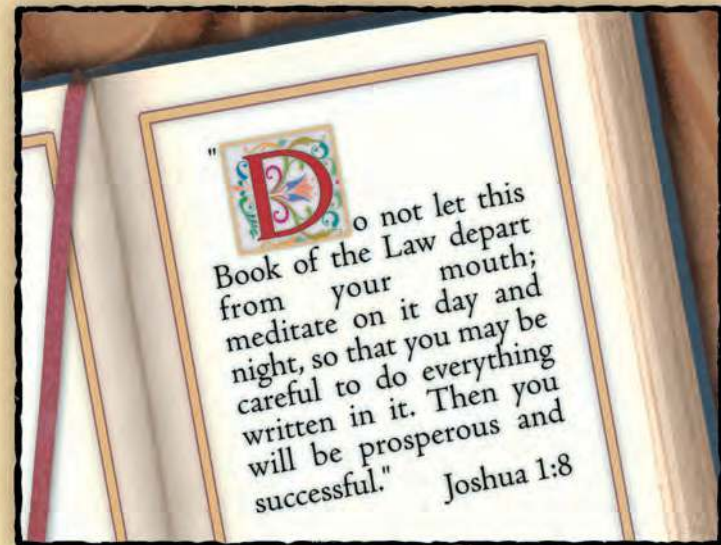
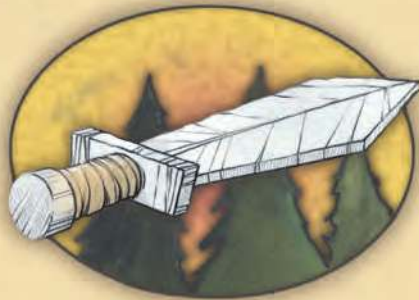
Submit yourselves, then, to God.
Resist the devil, and he will
flee from you. James 4:7

Even though the woods were filled with many narrow paths and scary creatures, Nathaniel didn't need to be afraid. He had his flashlight to guide him. He also had a sword. We have a sword too. It's called the Bible. The Bible is full of God's own words. And every single word in the Bible is true.



And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. Psalm 12:6

If you take time to study the Bible and do what it says, God promises that you will be successful in everything you do.





Nathaniel also received a radio to talk with the King. This radio didn't have an on or off switch. It was always turned on. Nathaniel could talk with the King anytime he wanted to, day or night. We can talk with God anytime we want to just by praying. And everyone who knows God will want to pray throughout the day and night, because that is how God gets his work done. Prayer is very powerful. But when we pray, we need to believe that God is going to answer our prayer. The Bible calls that faith. Jesus said that when we pray in faith, we will receive what we ask for.



If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." Matthew 21:22

After Nathaniel accepted his pass into the Kingdom Beyond the Woods, the King didn't let him into the Kingdom right away. He wanted Nathaniel to tell other travelers about the Kingdom Beyond the Woods and how they could receive a pass to get there. God is just like the King. He wants us to tell other people the good news about Jesus so they can receive eternal life. The last thing Jesus told His followers before He went to heaven was to tell everyone about Him.



Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19,20

God loves everyone. He doesn't want anyone to miss out on the good things He has planned. That's why it's important that we tell everyone about the good news of Jesus. We need to tell them that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for their sins, that He rose from the dead, and that He is up in heaven right now. And we need to tell them that all they need to do to receive God's gift of eternal life is to accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

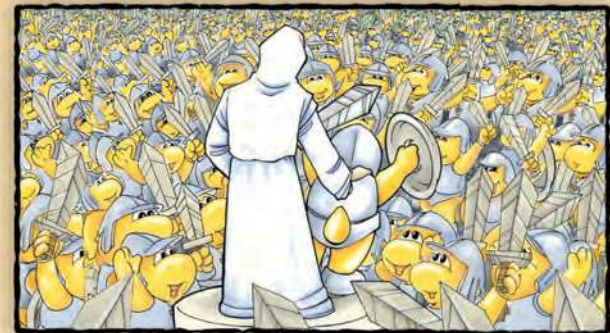


... if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

One day, Nathaniel finally met the King face to face. The King said that Nathaniel's job was finished. And he welcomed him into the Kingdom Beyond the Woods.

In the same way, the Bible promises that everyone who knows Jesus as their Savior and Lord will someday leave this world to live with Him forever. Seeking to please God with all your heart earns you rewards not only here on earth, but also in heaven.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6



God has planned so many good things for His children. But if you haven't accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you won't receive any of them. All of God's blessings are reserved for people who personally know Jesus. If you haven't met Him yet, take the time right now and ask Him into your heart as your Savior and Lord. There is nothing more important than knowing Jesus. He is the only way we can receive eternal life.

Here is a prayer you can pray to accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

Dear God, I believe that Jesus died on the cross for me, and I believe that He rose from the dead and is in heaven with You. I accept Your gift of eternal life and I thank You for it. I give my whole life to You, and promise to serve You forever. Amen.





ISBN 1-930914-01-6



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