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Saga of the Ancients:

The Fallen

By Corey Jones

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Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen

Preface

Before you delve into the world of the Ancients I would like to give a special thanks to the people who made this book possible. Tony Wong the graphics artist and Kimberly Landenberg the editor; whose combined work has helped, bring this fantastic story to life.

I would also like to thank my friends and family who have supported my ideas and encouraged me to continue on in the past.

Prelude:

Times Past

"Haste now! Our refuge is near!" Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen a tan-skinned man yelled. He slammed the end of a large oak walking stick on the ground.

"Our way is lost, Gurni," another man shouted back. He pointed at the tan man and then to himself. "You know that! I know that!" His pointed finger fell on the final companion. "Curan knows that!" He could not hide Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen the deep frustration in his

voice. "Even with a map we could never find our way out of here! What a daft idea this was!"

"Cease this raving!" an angry voice shot back from Gurni. Yet his eyes grew wide, as if what the other man had said rang true. After a brief inward struggle played across Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen his features, his eyes narrowed once again in confidence. "You might be lost but not I! I know exactly where we are headed. Now hurry on!"

"Come... Let...go... I want...," the third man, Curan, said. He strained each word as if it might be his last. Curan had a wound on his side that was fairly deep and bleeding profusely. Despite Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen the Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen wound he motioned to continue, trying to hide his pain. "Home..."

"Very well. Let us go," the unnamed man acceded in a defeated tone. It was difficult to believe that they could save Curan; his wounds seemed far too Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen grave for such a victory. But, despite the apparent hold that death had on Curan, the unnamed Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen man still refused to give up. "We must get Curan home."

"As you will," the tan man growled as he walked over to where Curan was lying. "Get him up on his feet now and let us go!" Together the two men helped lift Curan up off the ground and put his arms over their shoulders. They took one step at a time, trying hard not to stumble; Curan could not take much more abuse at this point.

Fallen branches and pine cones littered the ground, making it that much more difficult to continue on with their injured Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen ally. Each step the men took left a lingering crunch behind them; it seemed to last unnaturally long after they had passed. Massive pine trees filled the forest; they seemed to go up to endless heights. The sky was not visible from the ground; only a hint of sunlight broke through the tops of the Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen trees. As time went on, the light began to dim and fade ever so slowly. Night would soon be upon the three men.

They continued to walk for some time, Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen trying as best they could to help Curan hobble over the rocks and tree roots. A slight breeze started to pick up, gently blowing through the trees, creating the illusion that they were not alone. Curan's face turned from pain to worry.

"Curan, something terrible is written on your face," the second man noted with a disheartened look on his own face.

"Th-th...the...wind...," Curan said, hardly able to push each word from his chest. His face seemed to lose more and more color with each passing moment. "It...brings...them." Finished with what little he could muster to say, his eyes were drawn upward, to the tops of the trees.

The unnamed man looked around frantically, trying to figure out what Curan meant to say. Curan was the only one of the three that truly knew this area and whatever dangers it held, so the unnamed man took his warnings to heart. He could not see anything in the tops of the trees,

where Curan's gaze was so adamantly fixed. They were far too high to see clearly, to pick out something, anything, especially when he did not even know what to look for.

All that he Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen could see was the dark shadows of the pine needles and the last of the sunlight disappearing behind them. The sun was close to setting now; the forest became darker by the minute. "I think we'd better stop here and set up camp, start a fire maybe?" the unnamed man suggested. It would be far too difficult to travel with Curan in the fading light.

Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen "What!" Gurni shook his head as he shouted. "We are too close for that; I know it! Keep moving!" Defiant and anxious, Gurni wanted nothing to do with the idea. He had no intention of stopping for a dead man.

"Curan looks worried. I think it would be good to let him rest now. We've been on the move for a long time," the unnamed man said with an exhausted voice as he slowed down his pace.

"No! Keep moving!" Gurni shouted again. "We must go through the night! Almost there... I swear it!"

The man's mouth opened to give a retort, but the two disputants were distracted by a pain-filled moan beside them, and before either could react they saw Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen Curan collapse to the ground.

Immediately the unnamed man went to his aid, remorseful that they had let him fall. Curan moaned as the man Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen rolled him over onto his back so that the wound did not rest in the dirt. It seemed to be getting worse: Curan lay quivering and sweating, his shirt was soaked with blood, and the wound had somehow gotten bigger. Perhaps all the walking had torn it open more. He did not even know how Curan had made it this far.

"We have to stop!" he yelled at Gurni, who continued on as if nothing Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen had happened. Or even as if it made his burden lighter.

Gurni spun around. "The lout is a deader anyway. Me and you, we can get to the stones! Move on! Let's go!" Even though Gurni pushed and ordered, the unnamed man's feelings were not mutual. As far as he was concerned, Curan was still alive, so he was going to do anything he could to keep him that way.

"Leave then! Go!" The unnamed man's jaw clenched tight. "I will not leave Curan!" He was shocked that Gurni would desert a wounded man like that, without a care.

"Stay here then, you stubborn bastard!" Gurni took off running. "See you in Elypsus!" His voice echoed as he disappeared into the forest.

"Pay him no heed, Curan. I will not leave you. His mind is that of a stubborn ass," Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen the unnamed man said, trying to reassure Curan—or himself. He knew

his chances of survival on his own would be bleak without Gurni's help. As far as he was concerned, they were completely lost. His specialty was not that of tracking and map reading; no, it was something completely different.

Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen Now it was just the two of them, and he would make sure that number did not change, despite the increased difficulties. For Curan's own sake, he must live. With rest and the warmth of a fire, it was possible.

"I will be fast, Curan. I need to find some tinder and dry wood." Not long after he had begun the search, he had gathered enough firewood from the immediate area to get at least a small fire started. He could look for more after that.

"Steady, Curan. The fire will soon be here to warm us up. Be nice if we had some mead, hm?" he tried to jest, but the concern in his voice ruined the joke.

The flint stone he carried was nearly used up, small and hard to manage. They had been traveling for quite a while now and what little supplies they brought with them were nearly used up or lost.

He slid the back end of his knife across it, spraying Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen sparks onto the tinder. He took his time and carefully blew on the growing embers until he could place them into the small twigs that he had set up. Starting a fire was something he had done many times before, and he grew the fire into a competent source of heat just before the sun had completely fallen from the sky. The deep darkness and cold followed soon after.

"Now," the unnamed man said, scooting over to Curan, "let us have a look at your wound." The light from the fire would make it much easier for him to see Curan's wound; maybe he could do something about it now. He only hoped it was not too bad, or too late, and wished that they could have stopped earlier, but there had been no way. They would have all been killed if they had stopped to tend the wound.

He tore Curan's shirt open to get a better look at what they were dealing with. The wound was broad; it looked as if a blade had cut clean through his side. His eyes widened as he tried to hold back the churning of his stomach. The mere sight of it was almost too much for him. How Curan was still alive was a mystery.

After he sat back and took a deep breath, he could only come up with one solution to the problem. "Curan..." His words faded. He didn't want to have to tell Curan what must be done, let alone do it. "We must use the hot iron." No response came from Curan. He was too weak to do much more than lie there.

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He pulled his knife out from its sheath and thrust the Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen blade into the fire. Thoughts of regret flooded his mind as the blade heated up. Curan was a kind man, even from the first day they had met him, and he Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen knew Curan would be doing the same thing for him if their positions were reversed. He wished that they had never convinced him to go on this journey. Nothing was worth the price this man

might soon pay, and he felt that the fault was entirely his and Gurni's.

Although, it was a curious reason Curan had given them, why he was willing to help them in their search. Curan had simply told them he would help because they had asked him to; he did not even expect any form of reward. Knowing this area as well as he did, it also seemed strange that he had not heard of the stories that brought the three of them down this path.

The handle of the knife began to grow hot, and the man with no name knew it was almost ready. When he pulled the blade out of the fire, it glowed red from the heat. "I must warn you, Curan, Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen this is going to hurt." He put a stick in Curan's mouth. "Bite hard, scream loud."

With a deep breath, the man focused all his attention on the task at hand. Curan's Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen attention, thankfully, was mostly gone; his eyelids blinked languidly, the eyes Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen behind them blurred with pain. The unnamed man held the knife fast in position with one hand while trying to hold the wounded area steady with the other. Slowly, fear for what he must inflict filling his eyes, he guided the red-hot blade closer towards Curan's side. Unseen by the unnamed man, Curan's fists clenched.

A scream echoed from within the forest. It Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen rung out like a thousand bells, but it was not the scream of Curan. It was the scream of another man, a scream of terror. Distracted from his task, the man looked around in the darkness of the night, peering through the trees. His ears perked Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen up, ready to hear the sound Saga of the Ancients: The Fallen again.

Soon enough it came, bouncing off the giant trees, closer than before. Without even another thought, he dropped the knife onto the ground and kicked dirt onto the fire. Who the man was and why he was screaming, he did not know. Either way, it was best to hide; Curan was in no shape for a fight or a chase.

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