The Wandering Man

PROLOGUE

An old, bearded man made his slow staggering way down the dusty, tumbleweed edged road. The road was surrounded by a desert dotted with low, stout hills that were likewise dotted here and there with patches of scrub. All together, unremarkable in every way.

Suddenly, the old man turned, and looked around himself as if he thought he was being watched. He took long careful looks over the landscape, his gaze stopping here and there to stare suspiciously at oddly shaped boulders and large tumbleweeds. With one more nervous glance around, the old man stealthily slipped in between a pair of tumbleweeds and stepped behind the scraggly hills as quickly as possible. He wove around cacti and crinkled brownish-yellow bushes dead from the drought. After passing a particularly large trio of hills, the old man strode into a dusty clearing completely surrounded by hills. Parked directly in the middle of the clearing was an old rusty motor home, something that on the outside would appear as junk, but the old man knew better.

The man reached inside the knapsack which he wore around his shoulders, pulled out a battered silver key, and walked towards the motor home. When he reached the motor home, the old man slid the key into the lock, turned it, then stood back. He opened the door and stepped inside, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER 1

"He's an alien."some say, "No, no, no, he's a mutant escaped from a laboratory!" others argue. "You're all wrong,"someone shouts, "He's a warlock!" So many theories, Jake didn't know who was right and who wasn't. No one knows who or what the Wandering Man is. The adults all say he is just a rumor, ... a story. But I don't believe it and neither

do the other boys, that's why we held the meeting at recess. No one will notice us , they'll all be too caught up in whatever they're doing at the time to say anything, Jake thought. We started by reviewing the facts and making a pledge to each other. A couple dozen voices rang out saying the pledge, which they had made up themselves. "We pledge to look for and find the Wandering Man, to not hold secrets from each other, to search to the best of our abilities, and most of all, to not chicken out." The day seemed to drag by as slowly as mud dripping through an hourglass.

Finally, the school bell rang shrilly and the boys of the 6th grade poured out of the school, screaming as they ran, "Meet you at Jerome's house." Jake full of excitement sprinted the quarter mile to Jerome's house with the other boys, backpacks bouncing on their backs, and tennis shoes thudding on the sand of their secret short cut through the wash. A few minutes later the panting throng of boys arrived in Jerome's driveway, and headed inside to drop off backpacks and gather provisions, swapping rumors as they came. "I heard he'll teach you magic or how to talk to animals!" Mack exclaimed loudly.

"No, no, he'll let you make a wish!" Carl yelled.

"What are you thinking Carl?!" Jack shouted. "He's not a genie!" "But I've heard that he knows all kinds of secrets, and that he'll teach you one if you can find him." "After you leave his hiding spot he disappears and you will never find him again." Then Jack added a sentence that made the boys' spines chill. "If anyone ever tries to follow him, he will send an evil spirit to haunt you for the rest of your life!!" At this all the boys in the room fell eerily silent as if the Wandering Man was watching them already.

Suddenly, Nick broke the silence, making everyone jump. "Well, I guess we should get going, after all, he only comes to this region once every ten years." After a mumbled response from the now unnerved group of boys, they grabbed the knapsacks and filled them with snacks, and a couple bottles of water each. The boys walked out Jerome's front door and down, off towards the hills and tumbleweed dotted desert.

CHAPTER 2

When the boys reached the old dusty cowboy road, they stopped, took a sip of water, and discussed what to do next. They all knew that it would be less productive to all go in one group, because if they spread out, the boys could cover much more land than they could traveling as a group. After an enormous amount of arguing, the boys finally decided on searching in pairs, even though they would never admit it many, if not all of the boys were nervous about searching for the wandering man alone. Jake was paired with Jesse, his friend and the only person who was even close behind Jake in running races. He was glad about that because Jake definitely did not want to have to sacrifice his life and go back to save someone who fell behind. That would not be fun, or exciting.

As the two boys walked deeper into the desert, they came across more hills. Soon Jake and Jesse were breathing heavily as the plodded over the slopes. Up, down, up, down, it was the most boring routine he'd ever done in his whole life. Suddenly, music bit through the silence, both boys jumped and whirled around looking for the source of the noise. Then Jesse laughed. "It's just my cell phone" he said sounding relieved.

"Yeah, that's great, I thought it was the amazingly terrifying ring tone monster coming to eat us, soooo scary!!" Jake taunted.

"Oh yes, and you weren't startled at all." Jesse snapped. Jake shrugged indifferently.

After a hurried goodbye, Jesse hung up looking sad, as well as, angry. "What's up?" Jake asked.

"It's my Mom, she says I have to go home. Do you want me to call the guys and say that we've got to go?" Jesse questioned.

Jake was torn. He wanted to keep searching, but he was still slightly nervous about looking around. Racking up all his courage, Jake made his choice.

CHAPTER 3

Jake turned to Jesse still not quite sure about his decision, but determined to hold to it. "No thanks, I'm going to keep searching." Jake replied.

"Okay, tell me tomorrow at school what happened with your search , alright?" But Jake wasn't listening. He thought he had just seen a glint of light like the kind that is reflected off cars and other vehicles. What would a car be doing out here? How would a car get out here? These were the thoughts racing through Jake's head. "Hellooo??? Earth to Jake!" Jesse was calling to him and was waving his hand in front of Jake's face.

"Huh?" was all Jake was able to sputter as he gazed blankly at Jesse who was staring at him wordlessly.

"Dude, I asked you if you're sure you really want to keep looking?"

"Oh yeah, yeah, I'm going to stay out here," that was all Jake could babble before a quick ,"See you at school." Then he left, dashing up the next hill and out of sight leaving a very confused and dusty Jesse in his wake. Jesse shrugged, turned and walked off down the slope in the other direction.

CHAPTER 4

Jake stood huffing and puffing at the top of the tallest slope looking down on an old battered motor home parked smack in the middle of a small valley bordered by hills like the one he had just scrambled up. This must be the hiding spot of the Wandering Man. Then a small trickle of fear ran down his spine, and soon that trickle became a river, and the river became a torrent, and in no time at all, the whole of Niagra Falls was running down Jake's back. He did his best to push it aside as he strode less than confidently down the steep slope towards the run down motor home.

As Jake approached the motor home he could hear the soft strumming of a guitar and a minuscule amount of his fear slid away.

Music was always calming to him. Before he knew it, Jake was in front of the rickety old door of the motor home. He could see the individual pieces of paint chipping away from the metal surface of the door. Jake wondered whether he should be there or not. If he left right now he would be safe, but he would also be the chicken of the 6th grade for losing such an opportunity. Losing such an opportunity.....

Without knowing it was even happening, Jake knocked on the door, three timid barely audible raps against the hard metal surface. Silence. Wondering whether he should turn and run, he suddenly heard footsteps. They sounded hard with every thud they made on the inside of the motor home making Jake freeze in fear. The footsteps stopped at the door, it began to creak open slowly.

CHAPTER 5

Jake stood filled to the brim with terror as the door opened to reveal an old, ragged looking man. He was wearing a dusty pair of olive green pants, and a threadbare red and black striped shirt. First he glared angrily at Jake and then his face morphed into a twisted smile that was even more terrifying than his stare. "You're looking for the Wandering Man aren't you sonny?" The old man asked gruffly. All Jake could do was nod jerkily up and down, the rest of his body frozen in fear. "No need to worry son, I won't hurt you." He said soothingly. "Would you like to come in?" the Wandering Man asked Jake.

Jake gulped, then finally stuttered, "Yes, sir that would b-be n-nice, thank you, sir."

The Wandering Man let out a booming laugh, and was still chuckling as he said, "No need to be afraid son, just call me Carlos."

Jake smiled, relieved and spoke, "Yes sir, I mean Carlos, " Jake smiled, blushing. Jake then followed Carlos inside the motor home and down the short, narrow hall, into the kitchen/living room area. There, Carlos directed Jake to a small table with chairs where they sat down together. On the table lay many strange objects, a trio of colored glass marbles, two bright metal balls, a red marble apple and several blue, green and

red glass bottles lined up in a row. Spread about the whole room was every single instrument that Jake had ever heard of or seen, and also some that Jake never even knew existed.

Jake turned to the old man in amazement. "What are these things?" he asked in an awed voice.

The old man looked up from the shimmering crystal ball he was studying and smiled at Jake. "This is my personal library of magic."Carlos replied calmly.

"It's beautiful!" Jake spoke in an awestruck voice, as he stared at all of the wonders around him. Carlos brought him to the present with one simple phase that made his heart stand still with excitement.

"I can teach you anything you want to know about the magic of music," he indicated the instruments. "The magic of sounds," Carlos picked up the bottles and blew on them, a soft, low music sprang from them, and suddenly the music stopped as quickly as it had started. "Lastly, I can teach you the magic of movement," and waving his hands in the air, the marbles and balls spun into motion, spinning around each other in the air like miniature planets orbiting the sun. "Of course Jake, the choice is all yours." Carlos smiled.

CHAPTER 6

Jake wasn't even thinking about how Carlos could have possibly have known his name, he was still gaping, mouth open wide like a fish at the amazing feat that he had just preformed. "I think I would like to learn the last one you showed, it was just so amazing" Jake babbled. "Thank you so much for showing me this, gosh I didn't even know it was possible!!" He exclaimed.

In Jake's moment of silence, Carlos spoke, "Are you ready to begin, or would you like to sit and gawk all day?" He asked.

"Begin of course, Carlos." Jake replied happily.

"Good, now let's begin. Now concentrate on this marble, harder, don't lose concentration....."

The lessons went on like that. First Jake could only make a single

marble wobble back and forth across the table, but he got better. With the careful coaching of Carlos, Jake slowly improved. After three hours he was able to make all three marbles hover, and with in the next hour he could make the two metallic balls spin around each other.

Six hours after they had started, Carlos raised his hands into the air and smiled. "I have taught you all I can. We are finished here." Jake grinned excitedly. "But remember, be careful with your knowledge, do not show it to the wrong people. You have done well, thank you for being brave by coming here, most aren't. I only see them from afar." Carlos reminded Jake. "Goodbye, oh, and take these marbles, I can always make more." Carlos handed Jake the marbles.

"Thank you." Jake replied taking the marbles in his outstretched palms.

"Jake, one more thing, I would like you to have one of these," Carlos handed Jake one of the shimmery metal balls. "It will glow whenever I am here. Don't be afraid to visit." Carlos presented his last gift to Jake.
"It is now time for you to go." he handed Jake his knapsack and headed for the door.

Partway there, Jake stopped. "Wait, Carlos, I've been here for hours!" Jake exclaimed.

CHAPTER 7

Jake was amazed and upset with himself at the same time. How could he have lost track of time like that, he asked himself. This was terrible, his parents would be worried sick about him. Jake tried to explain this to Carlos, but he just smiled and pushed open the door with a flourish.

Jake stepped outside in amazement, it was still afternoon, in fact the same time as it was when he had knocked on Carlos' door. From behind him the soft voice of Carlos spoke, "the sands of time are strange and complicated things, but when they are mastered it is very useful indeed." Jake turned around to thank Carlos, but the door was already shut and no sounds echoed out from inside the old beaten up motor home. Jake's only apparent truth of the Wandering Man were the marbles in between Jake's fingers. Jake scrambled out of the valley as fast as he could

stealing one more hurried glance back towards the motor home. Then for a split second, Jake thought he saw a fraction of a wave from behind a grimy window. He had turned away again, headed down to the base of the hill. "Goodbye Carlos." Jake whispered as he sprinted away towards home.

The next day at recess, Jake was surrounded by his friends in the middle of the field. " I have something to show you, something amazing, you won't believe it until you see it!"