

Chapter 1

Having your nose in a book may be a great way to spend your spare time unless you do it to the exclusion of everything else. You get up, grab your book, and read until night comes when you're forced to put it down for sleep. Oh sure, you have the occasional interruptions in the pattern like eating and school, but that I suppose must be tolerated. James Reese, a young man in his senior year of high school, does just that. Unless there is something of dire importance demanding his attention, he will be found lying on his bed, deep within his current favorite book. He sees nothing wrong with spending every possible, available moment reading. Reading to him is grand adventure, new ideas and it sure keeps him out of trouble. His main interest is fantasy adventure books, though he does dabble in sci-fi occasionally. He has kept every book he has ever read since he was around twelve. His book collection, now pushing over five hundred titles, is the one thing he takes the most pride in.

An obtrusive knock at the door brings him back from the middle of a particularly exciting battle. "James, breakfast is almost ready," he hears his grandmother's voice through the door. "Put your book down and get ready, or you're going to be late for school."

Finding a good place to stop, he carefully inserts the bookmark and places it gingerly on his nightstand. He's read it before, many of the books lining his walls have been read several times over the years, and most are still in very good condition. Some think that he cares more for his books than for anything else. There are times when he thinks they may be right. His friends always kid him about rereading the same book over and over, but he asks them if they ever saw the same movie twice or ever went to the same place for a vacation. Having made his point they leave him alone.

He picks up some clothes from off the floor that don't seem too dirty and gets dressed. After slipping on his shoes, he grabs his backpack which he's rarely seen without. Slinging it over his shoulder, he opens the door.

Coming out of his room, the aroma of eggs, bacon and biscuits fill the house. His grandmother is in the kitchen where she's just finishing cooking breakfast. "Have a seat at the table, James," she says from the kitchen. "It'll be ready in a few minutes." His grandparents have raised him for the past five years, ever since his parents were killed by a drunk driver.

At the table, his grandfather is reading the morning paper. So intent is he on an article that he doesn't notice him right away. James has some trepidation about disturbing his grandfather. For the last few months his grandfather has been encouraging him to get a job and has been directing his attention to the latest ads in the paper that he feels James might be interested in. It's his senior year in high school and it's almost over. He knows he needs to make some decisions about his future but has never been that great trying new things. Some call him antisocial but he thinks of himself as just nonsocial. He doesn't hate being around others, he just prefers time to himself, with his books.

Setting his backpack on the floor by the legs of his chair, he joins his grandfather at the table. Having noticed him, his grandfather leans toward James and shows him an article in the paper.

Local Teen Missing

Seth Randle, a teen from Haveston, was reported missing when he failed to return home Wednesday evening. The police have issued an Amber Alert and teams of volunteers have been combing the local area but so far have been unsuccessful. He was last seen on Wednesday leaving Haveston High School, where he is currently enrolled as a senior. If you have any information please call 911...

"Isn't he one of your classmates James?" his grandfather asks.

"Yes he is," James replies, "but I don't know him very well. He's on the football team and is well liked by everyone. Hope he's okay."

Just then, his grandmother emerges from the kitchen with breakfast. James grabs a biscuit and helps himself to a big portion of his grandmother's jam. It won 2nd place at the county fair last year, old Widow Jones took 1st place. His grandmother always says that Widow Jones puts too much sweetener in her jams and that is why she wins every year.

"James," she reminds, "let's say grace first."

Looking at his grandmother, he sees that look in her eye. He puts down the biscuit he was about to eat and bows his head for prayer. His grandfather prays, "Dear Lord, please bless this food to our good, watch over us and guide us. And **please** help James find a job! In Jesus' name. Amen."

“Leave the boy alone John,” his wife chides him as she places her napkin in her lap. “He’ll find one when the good Lord is ready.” Turning her attention to James, she adds, “Just find one that you are interested in. There is nothing worse than spending your life at a job that is dull and lifeless. One should come along when the time is right that will be just right for you. Now hurry and eat or you’re going to be late for school again.”

Stuffing his mouth full of eggs and bacon, he mumbles, “I’d better eat on the run.” He tucks several biscuits in a napkin to eat on the way. “Thanks for another award winning breakfast,” he says to his grandmother before giving her a peck on the cheek as he heads for the back door.

“Don’t forget your lunch, it’s sitting on the table by the door.” she reminds him.

“Got it!” he hollers back to her as he stuffs it in his backpack. Opening the back door, he leaves the house and heads for the garage. Pulling his bike out of the garage, he hops on and quickly makes his way down the road to school. Haveston High isn’t much more than a mile away and only takes him a few minutes to get there.

As he arrives at school he notices several police cars, both marked and unmarked, in and around the parking lot. Pulling into the bike rack, he grabs his chain and starts securing his bike. His best and only friend Dave soon rides up and parks his bike in the slot next to him.

“James, did you hear that Seth is missing?” Dave asks as he secures his bike.

“Yeah, I saw it in the paper this morning,” James replies. “Wonder what happened to him?”

“Don’t know. Let’s go and see what’s going on,” he says as his lock clicks into place. Grabbing his backpack, he spies a nearby policeman and heads that way with James following right behind.

Approaching the officer Dave asks, “What’s going on?”

The officer turns to them and says, “We’re interviewing students about Seth Randle. His mother says he’s been missing since Wednesday evening. Would you boys know anything about it?”

“No,” replies James, shaking his head. “We barely know him.”

“That’s right,” Dave adds.

The officer hands each of them a card and says, “If you see or hear anything that might help us in locating him, please call.”

“Sure,” says Dave.

“If we hear anything we’ll be sure to let you know,” James adds.

Heading to class, they both can’t help but wonder what’s happened to Seth.

The rest of the day, all anyone could talk of was Seth. They had an assembly before lunch where they were told the facts surrounding his

disappearance. Evidently, he had been heading downtown after school and that was the last time anyone had any contact with him. They were given the standard lesson on strangers and what to do in emergencies, the basic “Don’t talk to strangers” lecture they’ve had for years.

At lunch James and Dave sit in their regular spot in the lunch room. They both brought their own lunch today but Dave was not very enthusiastic about his.

Reaching into his lunch sack, he pulls out a poorly wrapped sandwich. “How about a trade,” he asks James with longing in his voice. “My mystery meat sandwich for whatever your grandmother made for you?”

James pulls out a six inch homemade hoagie and smiles, “Not on your life, bud. My stomach isn’t that strong. Besides, after all these years of your mom’s infamous cooking, you should be use to it by now.”

Taking a bite, Dave replies, “I suppose so. No use in subjecting another living thing to this stuff.”

Hearing a sigh from his friend, Dave looks over to see James holding a small piece of paper he had just pulled out of his lunch sack.

“What’s the matter?” asks his friend.

“I thought I had gotten off easy this morning,” James explains. “You know how my grandfather always mentions jobs he thinks I would like?” When he gets a nod from Dave, he continues. “Well, instead of pressuring me about it this morning, he slips one in with my lunch.” He reads the ad as he continues eating his lunch.

“This one is at least interesting, if a little odd,” he says after several bites.

“What do you mean?” asks Dave curiously.

Handing him the ad, James says, “Here, read it.”

Wiping his hands on his pants, he takes the ad:

Magic! Real Magic! Ever wanted to learn?

We require someone with intelligence and a disciplined mind. Those well versed in fantasy novels and role playing games a plus. May need to travel. Only those of good character need apply. No appointment necessary. For preliminary interview, drop by at:

**1616 Commercial Ave
Room 2334
Haveston, CA**

“That is different, I’ll give you that,” affirms Dave as he hands the ad back to James.

Putting the ad in his wallet, James asks, “What do you think?”

Pausing for a moment to think while he finishes the mouthful of food he’s working on, he replies, “Well, it is right down your alley. You have read more books than I could even hope to get through, and we play D&D every once in a while. Maybe you should look into it. You’ve always said you would like to travel and see the castles of England, maybe this will be your chance. It sounds like some traveling magician or something like that.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Maybe I’ll go down tomorrow and see what it’s about. If nothing else, it should please my grandfather and maybe get him off my back for a while.” Taking a bite out of his hoagie, James ponders the ad, thinking it was definitely worth looking into.

Pointing off to the right Dave says, “There’s Alyssa. You should go invite her to the dance next week. I know you have a thing for her.”

Smiling, James says, “I haven’t quite worked up the nerve yet. I’ve tried twice, but my mouth gets all dry and I can’t find the words. I’m afraid I’ll look like an idiot.”

“You need to get out of that room of yours more. Stop spending so much time in there alone with your books and start to live in reality a little more. She’s nice and I believe still available.”

“I know,” he sighs. “Maybe I’ll ask her on Monday.”

“If you ask her at all.” Dave’s attempts to bring him out of his room have met with very little success, but he keeps trying.

After they finish eating, they leave the lunch room and head over to the chess room where they spend the rest of their lunch break playing one role playing game or another. James is usually the one running the game since he enjoys making the campaigns more than Dave does. Back in his bedroom he has a whole collection of campaigns that have never been played. He simply likes designing them almost more than playing them.

Dave on the other hand prefers to be the character, or characters, like what he’s doing in this one. He’s playing a thief and a mage who are currently trying to find the third ring of Xanak, the god of fire.

James sets up his godwall and removes the dice and papers from his backpack. He always keeps meticulous notes during his campaigns. Dave gets his papers, dice, and the player’s rulebook ready as well. Once everything is ready, they begin.

“Your mage and thief had infiltrated the Red Rogue’s Lair,” he began giving a brief recap of where they left off the day before. “You had just found a flight of stairs and were beginning to descend.”

“On to fame and fortune!” Dave exclaims with a grin. “Thief is checking for traps as they go down the steps.”

James nods. “No traps were found. Upon reaching the bottom step, you discover a long hallway stretching far into the darkness ahead. A sound can be heard coming from out of the dark, and it seems to be coming toward you...”

The rest of the day goes along pretty much as usual. Classes, including the dreaded PE class that James is about ready to flunk. He simply is not much into sports or anything else exertive. His gym teacher tells him that he needs to show more enthusiasm for the physical side of life, but his teacher’s arguments do nothing to sway him in that direction. It’s not that James is fat or anything, he actually looks quite fit. He just doesn’t go for that sort of stuff.

After school at the bike rack, Dave informs him that he plans on accompanying him down to the interview. For moral support, as he puts it.

“You don’t have to come with me you know,” James tells his friend.

“I know. But you stand a better chance of following through if I do,” Dave replies.

“Are you afraid I am going to chicken out or something like that?” he asks.

“As a matter of fact, yes, yes I am!” he replies with a smile.

“I plan on catching the 512 at 9:00 a.m. If you want to go with me, meet me at the bus stop.”

“I’ll be there,” insists Dave.

“Okay, see ya tomorrow!” With that, James hops on his bike and heads for home.

At dinner, he tells his grandparents about his decision to go to the interview tomorrow.

“Now, remember, James,” his grandfather says. “When you are at an interview you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you. Never settle for conditions that you are not going to like. Be assertive.”

“I will,” responds James. “I don’t plan on making any decisions on the spot. I plan on finding out what the job is and how much it pays. It sounds interesting though.”

Showing concern on her face, his grandmother says “Be careful while you’re there. The last place anyone saw poor Seth was heading into town. Watch yourself.”

“Please don’t worry about me, I’m almost eighteen. Plus Dave plans on coming down with me. I’m sure that between the two of us, we’ll be able to handle any situation.” Knowing that it is love that prompted his grandmother’s concern, he comes over and gives her a reassuring hug.

A little after dinner, James is again in his room reading. There’s a knock on his bedroom door.

“Yes?” he says without removing his eyes from the pages of the book.

“James,” his grandfather’s voice comes through the door, “You should come and see this.”

“Now what?” he says to himself. Slipping his bookmark within the pages, he gets up off the bed.

Out in the living room, he finds his grandparents raptly watching the news. “There is another missing person,” his grandmother informs him. “This time a girl”

The news reporter goes on to say that this is the second person who has come up missing in the past week. There are no leads, no connection between them. They come from different cities in the same area. They both just up and disappeared without a trace. The report continues on with interviews of different family members of the two missing people.

“This is getting serious.” his grandfather says. “You be extra careful tomorrow when you’re downtown.”

“I will,” James assures him. He continues watching the report on the missing teens until the reporters begin repeating themselves. Then he returns to his room where he lays back down on his bed and picks up his book.

He found it difficult to concentrate on what he was reading. After realizing he read the same paragraph three times he decides that it’s a lost cause and put his book down on the nightstand. Thoughts and worries about the interview tomorrow make him far too nervous to be able to concentrate on reading. The ad continues running through his mind, ‘well versed in fantasy novels and role playing games’, ‘may need to travel’. It all sounds exciting. *Maybe Dave is right. It could be a traveling magician.*

Different theories and thoughts continue running through his head until he finally gets up and undresses for bed. Crawling in under the covers, he reaches over and sets the alarm clock for seven thirty before switching off his reading lamp. He lies there in the dark, enjoying the cool night air as it drifts in through the window over his bed and wafts over him. Eventually, he’s able to fall asleep.

It seems like he no sooner fell asleep when his alarm goes off. Hitting the off button, he rolls over onto his back and tries unsuccessfully to keep his eyes open. He is just way too comfortable and almost doesn’t have the energy to pull the covers off and get this day going. His sense of responsibility eventually overcomes his laziness and drags himself out of bed. Also, Dave would never let him hear the end of it if he left him waiting at the bus stop.

After a quick shower, he put on some of his better clothes. Not his church clothes to be sure, but ones good enough to look nice. Once he’s dressed, he takes his backpack and empties all of his role playing paraphernalia onto his bed. *I’ll clean this up when I get back.* He puts a clean handkerchief in his

backpack along with the book he's currently reading. Pausing a moment, he decides to take the two candy bars lying in the pile on his bed and places them inside as well. Shouldering his ever present backpack, he opens the door to his room and goes out to see about breakfast.

Sausage, eggs and biscuits, are already on the table. His grandparents had been nice enough to wait for him before eating. "My, don't you look nice," his grandmother says.

"Thanks," he tells her as he comes to the table. "I better eat on the run, or I might miss my bus." He throws together two sausage, egg, and biscuit sandwiches. Wrapping them in a napkin, he heads toward the back door. His grandmother's "Good luck James!" follows him out the door.

Eating, he hurries down the road to the bus stop where he'll catch the 512. When he arrives, he finds Dave is already there, waiting.

"Good morning James," Dave says when he sees him approaching. He'd always been a cheerful morning person, which usually irritated James.

"Good morning yourself," replies James somewhat moodily as he finishes his last bite of breakfast. He definitely was not a morning person.

Keeping an eye out for the bus, Dave says to James, "I hear they have a new laser tag area at the arcade. Wanna try it out after your interview? The loser pays for lunch."

"You're on, I can almost taste the burgers now," boasts James as he keeps a lookout for their bus. When he sees it turn the corner he announces, "Here comes the 512." Picking up his backpack he prepares to board the bus. The 512 pulls up and they have to wait a moment as an elderly woman leaves the bus, then they get on. Showing the driver their bus passes, they then move to the back of the bus and take their seats. The 512 will take them most of the way before they'll need to make a transfer to the 33 for the last leg to Commercial Avenue.

"Nervous?" inquires his friend after they sat down and the bus begins to move.

"A little," admits James. "I'm glad you decided to come along, it's partly the reason I am even here. When I woke up this morning, all I wanted to do was lay there. But knowing you were going to be at the bus stop waiting for me helped to get me out of bed."

"I thought so, that's why I'm here," Dave grins. He's glad that he could help his friend.

"You know," Dave begins after a few minutes, "you didn't have to go and kill my thief off that way."

"What do you mean?" asks James. "Is it my fault the guy had an IQ of a turnip? He never should've rushed in like that. He was greedy."

"Maybe," admits Dave. "But I've been playing him for over a month now. He was all the way to level five."

“Oh well, that’s life.”

As they get closer, James begins turning quieter as he starts thinking about the upcoming interview. Dave tries a couple of times to get him interested in further conversation but his mind really isn’t on it. Finally, he gives up and they ride the rest of the way in silence.

When the Park and Ride is announced where they’ll be getting off to transfer to the 33, James grabs his backpack and readies to disembark from the bus. When the bus pulls in, they get off and go over to the water fountain for a drink. Dave looks at his watch and says, “We’ve got about five minutes before the 33 shows up.”

The 33 does a loop through downtown and passes right down Commercial Ave. Going over to Berth 4 where it will stop, they stand in line behind several other passengers. Dave nudges James when he sees a pretty girl wearing practically nothing, but James is too preoccupied with what lies ahead of him to pay much attention. The mere thought of the interview is making his stomach do flip-flops.

Finally, the 33 shows up and pulls into Berth 4. They show the bus driver their passes and get on, going all the way to the back. They have to wait a few more minutes before it’s time for the bus to leave. When it does, it isn’t long before they see a tall building displaying 1616 Commercial. James hits the cord and the bus pulls over to the next bus stop and comes to a halt. They get off and make their way back toward the building. The butterflies are beginning to congregate in James’ middle.

Passing through the front door, they make their way over to the elevators and press the ‘up’ button. While they are waiting for the elevator to arrive, Dave notices James looking at the building’s list of businesses. When he moves over to join him, James glances at him and says, “There’s no listing for 2334.”

Dave just shrugs and says, “Maybe they just moved in and haven’t had time to get the sign adjusted.”

“You’re probably right,” replies James. “Or maybe they just don’t want to advertise who they are. That way if they’re well known and rich, the applicants won’t know to ask for more pay.”

“You and your conspiracy theories,” Dave says, shaking his head. “You always think someone is playing an angle or something.”

Shrugging, James just smiles.

Ding!

The elevator door opens and they get in along with several others. James presses the button for the 23rd floor. It takes a few minutes to get there as they stop at several different floors to allow various people on and off. By the time they reach the 23rd floor, they’re the only ones left. Another **Ding!** and the

door opens onto floor 23. Stepping out, they turn down the hallway to their right and come to the door marked 2334.

Once at the door James turns to Dave and asks, "Should I knock or what?"

"Naw, just go on in." he says.

Getting up his courage, James opens the door and enters with Dave right behind. The room is empty except for several chairs and two end tables, each with a neat pile of magazines and a few books upon them. Across the room from where they entered stood a closed door marked 'Private' in bold letters.

"I guess we should sit down and wait," suggests James.

"How are they going to know that we are here?" wonders Dave as he enters and closes the door behind them.

"There's probably an alarm on the door. Someone will most likely be out in a minute," reasons James.

Looking through the material on the nearest table, James doesn't find anything of interest so he moves to the other table by the door marked Private. Lying on top of the other reading material, sits a small brown book with a weird design inscribed in gold leaf on the cover. Intrigued, he picks it up and is startled when he receives a static shock. Reflexively, his hand lets go of the book and it falls to the floor. The book lands on its edge and a piece of paper slips out. Bending over to pick it up, he notices writing on the paper.

"Welcome and thank you for coming. Glad you found the book. If you could read the first page and then walk through the door marked Private, we can begin the interview. If you brought anything with you, please feel free to bring it along."

He picks the book up, bringing it and the letter over to show Dave. As Dave begins reading the letter, James says, "That's a dumb way to start an interview. What if I had never found the piece of paper? I could've been sitting out here for a long time!" he exclaims.

Finishing the letter, Dave looks up at him and shrugs, "You're right, this guy must be some kind of an eccentric or something. In the ad, he mentioned role playing games. Maybe in his mind this is some kind of test."

Nodding in agreement, James sits down in one of the chairs and opens the book to the first page.

Underlying Principles of Magic

The practice of magic is very simple and basic. Magic is the process by which the individual taps into the reservoir of strength or power inside himself and manifests it into changes of the world around him. Every individual has a different amount of power available

allotted to them. Some have very little, just enough to do simple spells while others have vast amounts that can be used to literally bring down mountains.

Looking up from the book, James turns to his friend and says, "Unless I am mistaken, this book is going to explain the workings of a magic system. Not Houdini type but Gandalf type. It is talking about using the power within you to manipulate things in the world."

"Weird. This guy must be a real character," Dave jokes.

"Yeah, but character or not, a job's a job." Turning back to the book, he finishes the first page quickly as it's not too long. Closing the book, he climbs to his feet and looks at Dave. His friend could see the nervousness in his eyes. "Wish me luck."

"Luck!" replies Dave, giving his friend a thumb's up.

Slinging his backpack over his shoulder, he carries the book and walks over to the door marked Private. Pausing only momentarily to calm his nerves by taking a deep, soothing breath, he opens the door. Stepping through to the other side, he suddenly finds himself in the middle of a small meadow that's entirely surrounded by a forest of trees. A small stream cuts through the middle of the meadow.

He stands there momentarily in dumbfounded shock as his brain tries to make sense of what he's seeing. Turning around to ask Dave if he's hallucinating or something, he receives another shock when he discovers the doorway is no longer there.

Did I just cross over into the Twilight Zone?

Unable to believe what his own eyes are telling him, he rubs them and then looks around the clearing again as he works to make sense of it. Trees swaying in the gentle breeze, the sound of birds singing in their branches, and the soft trickling melody of the stream as it makes its way across the meadow to disappear in the trees on the far side give this place a surreal feel. Especially since there's no way it could've been on the other side of that door.

Movement out of the corner of his eye causes him to glance across the stream to a fallen log lying near the edge of the forest. What he sees there almost convinces him he's lost his mind. Sitting atop the log is a strange little creature, about four and a half feet in height with skin that's a dark greenish color. Wearing a blue vest and a crazy felt hat, it looks out of place in such a surreal place as this. There seems to be intelligence behind those yellow eyes and they're looking right at James.

I'm having a hallucination.

Not knowing what else to do, he walks through the short grass of the meadow toward the creature. He pauses at the stream uncertainly when he sees the creature hop off the log and get to its feet. When no hostile action is

forthcoming, he carefully jumps across the stream and walks the few remaining feet until he's standing before the creature. "Hello," James says.

To his utter astonishment the creature says "Hello" right back at him.

"You can talk?" exclaims James in shock.

"Of course I can talk. Any intelligent creature can talk. But not many have anything worthwhile to say," it replies.

Before James can get his next question out the creature says, "'Where am I?' Was that to be your next question? You're not where you started out, boy. My master has set me here to get you started and that is all I intend to do. I am not here to hold your hand or wet nurse you, do you understand?" The creature gives him an intent look as he waits for a response.

Nodding his head, James gives a weak, "I think so."

"Good. Now listen up and listen well, for I am here to tell you some things and I will only tell you once."

"First of all, magic works here. Read the book you have in your hand. It will help you get a handle on it. Your survival may well depend on it."

"Secondly, you can't go home, at least not right now. Don't try. We won't try to stop you, but take it on faith that the way is simply not open to you."

"Lastly, you need to get your sorry butt to the village of Trendle."

With that, the creature jumps into the air and with a faint popping noise, disappears.

James ol' boy, he thinks to himself. You're screwed!

Chapter Two

Trying to come to grips with the enormity of the situation, he glances around. There has to be some rational explanation! The forest surrounding the meadow looks like any forest that might exist back on Earth. Pine trees, birds singing in the distance, insects buzzing here and there, normality. Nothing strange, except for the little detail that there is no way he could have arrived here by stepping through that door.

The ad said ‘traveling’. Well, I have traveled. The ad also said that being well read in fantasy novels and experience with role playing games would be a bonus. Thinking of the little creature just encountered, he can see the logic in that as well. Such a background might enable a person to more willingly accept these odd occurrences.

Okay, let’s take this one step at a time. What actually happened to you? You were on the 23rd floor of an office building, stepped through a door and then you’re in the middle of this meadow talking with an odd looking little creature. Have you lost your mind?

After taking a quick mental check, he feels relatively sane. No odd thoughts or urges running through his mind. No hallucinations, unless this meadow and that creature are one.

Bending over, he reaches down and runs his fingers across the grass. *Feels normal.* Standing up, he again looks around. He just can’t think of this place as not being real. *So, if this is real, then what just happened?* A breeze blows through the meadow, ruffling his hair. Closing his eyes, he takes a deep breath and holds it for a second before exhaling slowly. Opening them again, he found the meadow still there. He didn’t really expect that to change things, but it’s what everyone does who gets into these sorts of situations.

I’m not in the Twilight Zone. I don’t see Rod Sterling over to the side talking to the viewers. At this point, he’ would hardly be surprised if he did. *Then if this place is not a hallucination, then it’s real!*

Pulling out the book he brought with him from the waiting room, James takes a much more interested look at it than he did before. There is an odd

design on the cover, and not very many pages. *Think, James, think. What now? You were brought here for some reason. For your benefit? Probably not, it never is.* James reflects on various books he had read over the last several years. Some have this sort of thing in it, and the main character rarely has a fun time of it.

Opening the book, he rereads the first couple of paragraphs. *For the sake of argument, let's suppose this is in fact, a true guidebook on magic. And let's further suppose that since I was brought here and told to bring it with me, then it stands to reason that I should be able to make it work. For why else would they have bothered?* A couple of the sentences stand out:

“Rhyme and meter are the most effective forms of spell construction.”

“Maintain a visualization in your mind of the effect you wish to produce.”

Sounds easy enough. He decides to give it a try and see if he can in fact work the magic as the little creature had told him works here. *Let's see, keep it simple.* Spying a small stick lying on the ground near him, an idea begins to form. In his mind he creates a visualization of the stick rising off the ground and hovering there. *Now for the words...*

***“Little stick that I have found,
Float three feet off the ground.”***

With the utterance of the first word, James begins to feel pressure building deep within himself, like water behind a dam. He raises his hand as he says the words and points to the stick on the ground. Each word uttered causes the pressure inside him to build, wanting to be released. As the last word is spoken, the dam breaks and the power surges out of him. He can almost see the magic flowing from him to the stick, though it's probably just his imagination.

The stick on the ground begins slowly rising into the air. It gets about a foot off the ground before he becomes so excited that his concentration breaks and the stick falls back to the ground with a thump.

I DID IT!!!! James ol' boy, you are one amazing wizard! Cavorting around with jubilation, he goes over and examines the stick which, just a moment before, had been floating in the air. He reaches out and touches it hesitantly. Seeming normal, he picks it up and examines it closely, but doesn't see anything out of the ordinary. Feeling a little cocky, he thinks for a second and then tosses the stick into the air yelling,

***“Stick who once on the ground did lie,
Stay your course there in the sky!”***

This time he tries to maintain his visualization without breaking it. With the utterance of the last word, the power once again surges out of him. The stick comes to a sudden stop where it hangs motionless six feet above the ground. James walks over to it, all the while maintaining his concentration so as to not disrupt the spell.

He walks around the stick as it hangs in the air, running his hand over and under it as a magician might do to prove there were no wires holding it in place. Encountering nothing, he reaches out and touches it with a finger. It moves a fraction, but otherwise maintains its position. Placing his hand under the stick, he stops concentrating on the spell and it drops into his hand.

Quite pleased with himself, he smiles at his success. He feels a little tired from the magic, so walks over to the log where the creature had been sitting and rests himself. *I could get to like this*, James thinks to himself. Then sadness comes over him when he thinks of how his grandparents are going to feel when he doesn't come home. *I may never make it home. Oh my God! What about Dave? He saw me go through the door. How will he take it? I guess the best he can, that's all any of us can do.*

Reaching into his backpack he pulls out one of the candy bars he had brought with him and munches it while he contemplates what he should do next. *Eat it slow James, you'll not be getting another one of these for a long time. What am I going to do for food? Shelter? Toilet Paper??* The thought of using leaves doesn't bother him half as much as it used to before that one camping trip with his dad, oh so long ago. He smiles wistfully at the memory.

Realizing that sitting there is not going to get him anywhere he looks around the clearing and tries to determine the best way to go. By the position of the sun in the sky, it's a little after midday. Which kind of surprises him as it had only been mid morning when he and Dave had taken the bus downtown. *Maybe time works differently here?*

One of the things that little creature had said was 'to get your sorry butt to the village of Trendle', wherever that may be. Around the clearing, all he can see are the tops of trees. The forest itself looks unforgiving, lacking even the most rudimentary type of path. He'll have to forge his way through when he leaves.

Trendle. *It would've been more helpful if he would have at least told me which way to go!* Sighing, he pulls a quarter out of his pocket, **Heads-** North or South, **Tails-** East or West. Flipping the coin in the air he lets chance be his guide. He grabs the quarter on its descent, flips it on the back of his hand and looks, **Tails.** East or west then. Taking the coin one more time he tosses it up

into the air. ***Heads- East Tails-West.*** This time he allows the quarter to fall to the ground and come to rest. ***Tails. West it is then.***

Determining where West lies by the position of the sun, he shoulders his backpack and gets up off the log. A touch of excitement mingles with his fear and apprehension. Sure he had no clue where he was or even if he would ever find his way home. But beneath such a beautiful blue sky on a warm summer day, things didn't seem so bad. He had worked magic hadn't he?

On his way across the meadow to the forest's edge, he spies a good sturdy branch lying on the ground which would be ideal as a walking stick. Tearing off the smaller twigs and branches, he soon holds a stout walking stick. Turning back to the forest, he pauses upon reaching the edge. His excitement dims as he stands there about to enter an unknown world. What lies beyond these trees? What secrets may be hidden within? Beneficial ones? Or those less so? Taking a deep breath, he pushes a tangle of undergrowth out of the way and enters the forest.

Using the walking stick to aid in clearing a path, he manages to forge through the underbrush lining the edge of the clearing, only to find more beyond. James had always liked being in the woods, even one as overgrown as this. Time spent in the outdoors had always brought him a peace that he could never find in the city or around other people. His dad used to take him camping in forests similar to this one when he was little. Good times.

It doesn't take him long before he realizes this forest is nothing like the tame camping areas where his dad had taken him. For one thing, this one has no paths. The bushes and trees were all grown in together, at times forcing him to push his way through the tangled undergrowth, often with painful results. Walking over the uneven ground soon has his feet and ankles aching as well. Bleeding from a myriad of scratches and scrapes, his feet beginning to protest in earnest, it wasn't soon before all he wanted to do was go home.

An hour into the forest, a growl from his stomach reminds him he hasn't eaten for awhile. He reaches into his backpack and pulls out his last remaining candy bar. But not wanting to use up the last of his food, he sighs and puts it back much to the loud protest of his stomach.

As he continues making his way through the forest, the sun overhead gradually makes its descent to the horizon. The shadows begin to grow long. In the deepening gloom, James starts to get jumpy, hearing and seeing things that at first make his imagination run wild, but which turn out to be something quite innocent. ***Better find someplace to hole up for the night.***

But there was no place. All about him was nothing but trees and more trees. He finally locates a large one with accessible low branches and climbs up into the upper branches as far from the forest floor as he can. Finding a crook between a large limb and the trunk, he settles down into it and tries to get comfortable.

The forest descends into a place of haunting shadows and mysterious noises as the night gradually deepens into darkness. Hungry, scared and exhausted, he clings to the tree. His body hurts from hundreds of scratches received from pushing through the obstinate bushes that had been blocking his way all afternoon. The throbbing from his poor feet and ankles lends another level to his misery. Shifting around as best he can, he simply can't find any position that is comfortable. It's not too long before his butt begins hurting and going numb, forcing him to continue moving about in a fruitless attempt to alleviate his discomfort.

As he sits there in the tree scared and alone, the light gradually fades away, leaving him alone in darkness. The canopy of leaves above prevents even the smallest glimmer of starlight from coming through. He sits there in the dark, listening to the sounds of the forest, and rests his head against the bole of the tree. *I want to go home!* He despondently thinks to himself as tears of loneliness and fear roll down his cheek. Somehow, though long in coming, he does manage to fall asleep.

Howrrrrrrrr!

Startled awake, teeth chattering from the cold, he quickly realizes he wasn't just having a bad dream after all. From his perch high in the tree, he hears off in the distance the howls of a wolf pack on the hunt. He listens as they call to each other, every howl sending a shiver of fear through him. Face pressed tight to the bole of the tree, he silently prays that he will remain undetected.

The darkness of the night is alleviated somewhat by the faint light of the moon that is somehow filtering its way through the thick canopy of leaves above. Rays of moonlight pierce the canopy of leaves giving the forest an aura of ghostly light. Sitting there, eyes darting to and fro, James remains as quiet as he can while listening to the hunting pack.

For ten minutes the wolves call to each other when suddenly, their cries alter, becoming more intense as they begin crashing through the underbrush. Several shadows pass beneath his hiding spot as they race toward the latest call.

"Oh my God! Help Me!"

A cry of terror from off in the distance cuts through the night. Scared, immobile, James hugs the tree all the tighter. Looking off into the darkness where the scream originated, he catches a brief glimpse of the man as he runs through a patch of moonlight. A second after he passes out of the light, several wolves race through the light in pursuit.

Tears stream down his cheeks as he hears the man cry out for help again. A second later, a fearful bloodcurdling scream tears through the night before being abruptly silenced. He sits there crying as he listens to the wolves.

Saddened by the death of that man, ashamed of his own cowardice, tears stream down his face.

There was nothing I could do, James tells himself. *Had I gone to help, I would have been torn to shreds as well.* Getting little comfort from his own selfish reasoning, James presses his face against the bole of the tree and tries to think of home as he attempts to shut out the sound of the wolves. Sometime later, he hears the wolves begin howling as they race off through the forest. As the woods again become quiet, he tries to stop his imagination from replaying the scene of the man being torn apart by the wolves. Somehow, he manages to calm himself and finally goes back to sleep.

The morning sun shining through the trees wakes a very tired, cold and sore James. Remembering the events of the night before he knows that to stay in the forest will mean his death. *I gotta get out of here*, he thinks to himself. *No more pussyfooting around, I have to cover ground before night comes!*

Making sure the forest floor holds no menacing predators, he climbs down out of the tree. He then takes care of his morning business, realizing that plant leaves are not a good substitute, and starts to worry about food. Gazing around, he finds a bush bearing little pink berries. Wondering if they might be poisonous, he goes over and pulls one off the bush. Holding the berry between his fingers, he contemplates for a moment his chances of survival if it is in fact poisonous. Figuring one won't kill him even if it were, he puts it in his mouth and bites into it. Tart and firm. Not very ripe but not entirely unpleasant to the taste either. Chewing it slowly, he waits to see if he's going to react. When nothing odd happens, he swallows it.

Picking several more of the riper ones to take with him, he wraps them in a leaf before putting them in his backpack. If he doesn't get sick in an hour or two then he'll eat the rest of them.

Remembering the man the wolves killed during the night, he wonders if there may be something that the man might have had with him that may be of use. The death scream had come from the northwest so James grabs his spear and begins heading in that direction. It doesn't take him long to find the body, or rather what's left of it. If he'd had a full stomach he would have lost it right there. The scene was ghastly, bits of bones and flesh were strewn around. Strings of intestine lie strung in all directions. The clothing the man had been wearing was shredded and soaked with blood.

Horror grips James when he eyes settle on what's left of the poor guy's jacket. The letters *H-A-V-E-S...* are still discernable across what is left of the back of the jacket. It looked an awful lot like a letterman's jacket from his high school. Using the end of his walking stick he turns the torso over and sure enough, the name Randle is stitched across the front. *So Seth wound up here just like I did, no wonder no one could find him.*

Dropping to his knees beside the body, James begins sobbing. "Sorry Seth," he cries. "There was nothing I could do. I hope you can understand that." James is filled with guilt and humiliation at his weakness last night, wishing that he had had the courage to do something to help poor Seth. He knows logically there was nothing he could've done. Had he known it was Seth, would it have made any difference? Ashamedly, he realizes it wouldn't. Coward!

"Though there was nothing I could do for you last night," he says, "there is something I can do for you now." With that, James grabs a rock and begins to scrape out a hole, a grave for his former classmate. It takes him some time, the ground is firm but he manages to get it large enough. He then sets about gathering the pieces of Seth that are scattered about, and lays them in the grave. When the last piece of Seth is laid to rest, James fills it in with dirt and makes a cairn of stones. Tying two sticks together with some vines for a makeshift cross, he hammers it into the ground with his stone at the head of the cairn.

Bowing his head, he says a few parting words before picking up his backpack and walking stick. Taking a deep breath in an attempt to settle his shaking nerves, he sets out once more westward. Hopefully he'll come across this Trendle before the wolves return. The woods no longer bring him peace as they had yesterday. Wariness and dread fill him today.

As he continues making his way through the forest he comes to the conclusion that he is going to need to be able to defend himself. It's unlikely that he will make it out of the forest before night comes again, and he may not be able to make it through unmolested. Thinking about his walking stick he comes up with an idea. Formulating the words he says:

***As straight and true as a spear can be,
Filled with the strength of an old oak tree.
Make it sharp, to penetrate steel,
And perfectly balanced for user to feel.***

With the last word, James again feels the surge of power and watches as his walking stick slowly changes, becoming exactly like what he is visualizing in his mind. Its surface begins to smooth, one end rounds off while the other comes to a very fine point. When the spell runs its course, where the walking stick once stood, now a dark brown spear stands in its place.

Testing the tip with his finger he pricks it and blood wells out. *Sharp, I hardly even gave it any pressure.* Feeling somewhat better for having a weapon, he picks up his backpack and once again sets off toward the west.

After forcing his way through the undergrowth for awhile, he comes upon another small clearing with relief. He pauses at the edge of the clearing and

watches numerous rabbits hopping around and eating the grass. His stomach is still grumbling and the memory of a rabbit his father had once caught and cooked on one of their camping trips makes it even worse. Even though he finished all the berries, it just wasn't enough. He's *Hungry!*

Knowing that he has no skill with a spear, he comes up with a spell that may help his aim. Holding up his spear and getting ready to throw, he says quietly:

***Spear of mine please strike true,
Strike the rabbit and go right through.***

As he speaks the last syllable, he draws his arm back and throws his spear at the nearest rabbit. When the spear leaves his hand he again feels the surge of power as he watches the spear fly unerringly through the air. Impaling the rabbit, the spear embeds itself in the ground. The other rabbits flee to the shelter of the nearby bushes.

Yeah Baby! Excited, James runs over to the rabbit, watching as it kicks in its death throes. Pulling his spear from the ground with the rabbit dangling limp upon it, he looks at it uncertainly. *Now what? Never skinned a rabbit before, or any animal for that matter. Only saw my dad do it once.* All he has on him that is sharp is the spear which will be of little use in skinning a rabbit. Looking around he spies a pile of stones. Laying the spear with the rabbit down, he walks over and picks up a hand-sized stone and smashes it against a larger one. With a crack the smaller stone splits in two. One of the halves has a sharp edge, well sort of, but it should work.

Very carefully he takes the sharp rock and slices off the head and feet. Feeling slightly nauseated at the blood going everywhere, James again takes the rock, and using the sharp edge, slowly peels the skin off. The rock is not the best tool for the job but he eventually gets it all off.

Looking at his blood soaked hands and the raw meat he holds, his thoughts turn to Seth and a shudder runs through him, his gorge rising. *Steady boy, don't let the past rattle you. You did the best for him that you could.*

Laying the carcass on a layer of leaves James uses dirt to rid his hands of as much of the blood as he can before gathering kindling for a fire. Then after clearing a place on the ground, he carefully stacks the wood together. Placing bits of dried moss under the stacked wood he says:

***Moss I placed under the wood
Ignite so I can cook my food***

With that the moss begins to smoke and James watches as it bursts into flame, the fire rising upward to lick the wood. He kneels down and blows

gently on the flickering flame, coaxing it higher until the larger pieces have caught and the pile of wood is burning well. Satisfied that the fire will continue on its own, he creates a makeshift spit with a couple sticks and begins roasting the rabbit.

Once it's set and the fat begins dripping into the fire, he sits back and relaxes. The position of the sun in the sky tells him it's a little past noon, still several hours before night will come again to the forest. Every once in a while, the far off cry of a wolf can be heard echoing through the trees. A tremor of fear courses through him every time he hears it. He definitely doesn't want to spend another night in the trees, but what choice does he have?

The wolves are remarkably like the ones you would expect to find in a forest back home. In fact, all the animals he has seen so far have been very similar to the ones you would come across in an Earth forest. If it wasn't for the little creature and the fact that he can do magic, he would say he was back home on a camp out.

He and his dad used to go camping every once in a while. It was one of the few good memories he has of his parents. They would go up around Yosemite and backpack, do the nature thing. His dad would catch fish and they would have a fish fry. When they returned home they would tell his mom about all the fish they had caught, both real and imagined. She would then say how good he is and how proud of her little man she was.

What would his dad say if he could see him now? He's starting a bit rough but he has food and a weapon, as well as his health; he's managing.

"You're doing fine son," his dad would say.

"I wish you were here with me, Dad. I don't remember all that you tried to teach me. I sure miss you," James replies.

"You're alive James, be happy. You're in a bad situation but you're making the best of it. I taught you self reliance and I'm mighty proud of you." His father stands there with a smile, the smile he always wore when James did something he especially liked.

With a tear in his eye James walks over to his father and gives him a hug. His father returns the hug warmly.

Crash!

Startled out of his daydream, James finds the spit that had once held his lunch, burning in the fire and his dinner running away in the mouth of what looks like a small dog. *Stupid daydreaming fool!* Lurching to his feet, he races after the dog. Running under bushes and around trees, the dog quickly outpaces him and is gone, along with his lunch.

"Crap!" James yells loudly.

Returning back to his fire, James picks up the spear and looks around the clearing for more rabbits or an acceptable substitute. Nothing! His yell and the

chasing of the dog must have scared everything away. *No use sitting around here!* Using his foot, he puts the fire out by sweeping dirt over it. Grabbing his backpack he stalks off westward with recriminations running through his head and fierce growling in his belly.

No more than half an hour goes by before he has found, killed and begun roasting another small animal. Not sure exactly what it is, or was, it kind of looks like a squirrel but the size of a small cat. This time he keeps his wits about him and remains alert for any scavengers who might happen by for a meal.

The aroma of roasting meat makes his stomach cramp. Impatient for the meat to be done, he removes it from the fire when it has cooked 'enough'. Taking it over to a nearby tree, he sits down with his back against it and proceeds to eat.

As he bites into the roasted meat, the juices run down his chin. *Never has anything tasted so good. Of course, I've never been this hungry before in my life. Wonder what grandma would do with this if she was here?* Thinking of his grandmother's cooking brings back the feeling of homesickness.

Before he even realizes it, he's stripped the meat from the carcass. Still a little hungry, but feeling better with something in his stomach more substantial than berries, he tosses the bones into the bushes before cleaning off his hands and face in a nearby stream.

Now clean and refreshed, he picks up his backpack and sets out once more in search of Trendle. The nearby stream seems to be flowing in the general direction he had been going so decides to follow it. He stands less of a chance of being turned around if he uses it as a guide. Also, it might eventually lead to civilization. Streams lead to rivers, rivers to lakes and ponds. And where there is water, there are usually people.

If it wasn't for the thought that he might die at any time, he would be enjoying himself. Growing along the streambed are more of the berry bushes he had come across earlier, each bearing numerous berries. Picking the ripest ones he can find, he eats his fill, though his stomach grumbles about too many immature berries. He picks more and puts them in his pack for later. Between the animal and the berries, he now feels quite full.

About an hour before nightfall, the land begins to slope downward and he comes to a drop. The little stream he's following flows over the drop where it cascades down as a small waterfall. James looks over the edge and discovers a small pond thirty feet below. There is a clear area to the right of the pond that would make an ideal spot for a camp. It has the wall of the drop flanked by the pond on one side and a large fallen tree on the other, so will provide him some shelter through the night.

He tosses his spear down to the clearing before working his way down the side of the drop. Once at the bottom, he sets his pack down against the back

drop and then starts gathering wood for the camp fire. After sufficient wood has been gathered, he picks up his spear from where it landed and sets out in search of game. It doesn't take him long before he bags another rabbit. Taking it back to camp, he takes out his skinning stone and preps it for the fire.

He sets the readied carcass on some leaves while he gets the fire going. Using the same spell he used before, he soon has the fire going well and then puts the rabbit upon the spit. Sitting there with the waterfall sprinkling into the pond twenty feet away, he listens to the fat from the rabbit snap and crackle as it drips into the fire while it cooks. He feels kind of good. He's getting the hang of this world, magic hasn't been too difficult, at least not the simple spells he's been attempting.

Turning the rabbit occasionally for an even cook, he sits back and just enjoys the peacefulness. The aroma coming off the meat is wonderful. He gets up and walks over to the pond where he washes his hands and face, doing his best to clean up before he eats. The pond is a sparkling blue, fresh and clean. After allowing the water to clear after his cleaning, he takes a good long drink. It's so pure and crisp that he doesn't think there could be anything like it back on Earth.

Night is falling fast now and the rabbit is almost done. James opens his backpack and takes out some of the berries and lays them on a leaf near the backdrop and then goes over to the fire. Taking the rabbit off the spit he settles down against the backdrop and begins to eat it with a gusto only starvation can give you. Between bites of the rabbit, he pops several berries into his mouth. This time he takes his time, savoring each bite, but still finishes it quickly.

Before it grows too dark, he takes the carcass of the rabbit a dozen yards away from the campsite and tosses it off into the forest. He didn't want it close to where he will be sleeping as it might draw animals to his camp in the night. On the way back he gathers more wood for the fire, having no wish to freeze through another night. Keeping a fire going all night will bring him comfort and hopefully safety from wild animals as well.

Stoking up the fire, he settles down to sleep. Lying on his back and wishing for a blanket, he stares up at the trees above. Sleeping near the fire provides him with a sense of security that he lacked the night before. The soft sounds of the little waterfall and the fire crackling and popping gradually lulls him to sleep.

He awakes shivering several times during the night and puts more wood on the fire to keep warm. The coming of the dawn finds him frozen and that his fire has completely gone out. He's chilled to the bone, teeth chattering and breath misting in the morning air. Needing to get warm, he goes over to the remnants of his fire and stirs the coals, finding a few embers still aglow within

the ashes. Putting small twigs and moss on them he encourages a flame and then after adding some of the bigger pieces, soon has a good fire going again.

While he's warming himself by the fire, he looks up through a break in the canopy above at the clouds rolling in. *Great, rain. That's all I need.* He eats the remainder of the berries while he enjoys the warmth of the fire. Once finished with the berries, he puts out the fire and then gathers his things before setting off once more. He leaves the pond and waterfall behind to follow the stream as it makes its way through the trees.

Throughout the morning as he follows the stream, James continues to come across the bushes with the berries. It doesn't take him long to acquire a sufficient quantity to last him for a while. As the day progresses further breaks in the canopy reveals the clouds have continued to roll in and soon, thunder begins to be heard off in the distance. Around midday, he comes across another stream that joins the one he's following. The stream swells with the added water and becomes much wider and deeper.

When the grumbling of his stomach tells him it is lunchtime, he stops and makes a quick camp. After getting a fire going he grabs his spear and wades out into the stream, this time looking for a fish to fry. Using a variation on his hunting spell, James soon has a large fish wriggling impaled upon the end of his spear. Pleased with himself, he brings it back to camp, and in no time has it roasting over the fire.

The forest continuously grows darker and darker as the thunder becomes louder. *Unless I want to walk in a downpour I better find myself some shelter soon.* When the fish is ready James eats it quickly, making sure to leave some for later. He wraps what's left of the fish in a large leaf before putting it in his backpack. Kicking dirt on the fire, he puts it out before setting a quick pace downstream looking for shelter to wait out the storm.

He comes to an area where the trees begin thinning out somewhat and makes out a ridgeline off through the trees to the south, a little over a hundred yards away. He sees what looks like an opening which may be a cave at the base of the ridge.

As he moves toward the promise of shelter, it begins to sprinkle. Hurrying quickly, he rushes through three trees on his way to the cave, hoping to beat the rain. Just as he enters the clearing before the cave, there's a thunderous crack of lightning and the rain begins pouring in earnest. Feeling relief at finding shelter, he rushes into the opening before the rain has a chance to soak him. Turning about, he looks out of the cave and watches the rain come down in what his grandma always called a gully washer.

The cave is dark but with the intermittent flashes of lightning, he can see that it extends some distance further back in the hill. The foreboding gloom of the cave seems to be shrinking in on him. His imagination begins causing him to start at shadows and soon realizes he'll want a fire before too much longer.

The thought of sitting all night in a dark, cold cave is not something he wants to contemplate.

Looking outside at the rain, he realizes that it's pointless to go outside and collect firewood, since it would all be soaked and unusable. *Maybe a spell to make a glowing orb?* It wouldn't give off any heat, but at least the darkness will no longer terrify him. Working out the spell doesn't take very long as it's becoming easier to do. Concentrating he says:

***Glowing orb to dispel the night
Bright as a hundred watt light
From you no heat need I feel
Go and travel as I will.***

With the last word he stretches out his hand and a glowing orb, cool and firm to the touch, forms on his hand. He smiles in satisfaction and places the orb on a nearby stone. Unlike the other spells, after the initial surge of power, he continues to feel a very slight draining of power. *Guess the orb needs a continual source of power, like a light bulb, in order to keep working*, he reasons.

Looking around the cave, he notices many bones lying scattered across the cave floor. *Must be the cave of a predator, or used to be.* Not feeling secure until he makes sure that he is definitely alone in the cave, he picks up the orb and carries it with him as he moves deeper into the cave. The cave as it turns out doesn't extend too much further and he quickly reaches the far end. This area of the cave contains the most bones, and from the looks of it, nothing has been back here for a while.

Feeling better, he goes back to the front of the cave and concentrates on the orb, dimming its light so it's not quite so bright. Reaching into his backpack, he takes out the fish that was left over from lunch and sits down by the entrance of the cave. Pulling out the book he took with him from the waiting room, he reads more of it as he eats. A lot of what it says makes sense. It isn't a text book about magic just an overview to get you started.

By the time he's done eating it's completely dark outside. Yawning, he realizes just how tired he is. Putting the book back in his backpack, he gets ready to sleep.

One of the things mentioned in the book is that it takes a mage's concentration to keep a spell active. It occurs to him that when he falls asleep, the orb might go out. Not wanting to remain in complete darkness all night he tries to come up with a spell that will enable the orb to continue glowing all night, even while he's asleep. Coming up with the words he concentrates on his desired effect and then casts his spell:

***Glowing orb,
Soothing light,
Maintain thyself,
'Till morning's light.***

With the final word, he again feels the surge of power, but this time it feels as if he's being sucked dry. Unable to stop it, he feels a tremendous amount of power being drawn out of him, the effect of which leaves him weak. Gasping as his knees buckle, dropping him to the floor, he's relieved as the spell finally runs its course. Lying there on the cave floor, with barely the strength to keep his heart beating, he comes to the realization that there may be a limit to what he can do with magic.

He can see the orb on the rock next to him, still shining, unchanged. The constant, minute draining of power he had felt earlier is now gone, and the orb no longer requires his concentration to keep from disappearing. Happy that he managed the spell but not about its effects on him, he realizes he's going to have to be more careful in what he attempts before it kills him.

Crawling over to his backpack, he rests his head on it and passes out.

Awakening in the middle of the night, it takes some time before he becomes aware as to what awakened him. When his eyes finally focus, dread overcomes him as he realizes that he is no longer alone in the cave. A wolf has entered and is standing not three feet away, sniffing the glowing orb. Visions of Seth run through James' mind. Rather, the pieces of Seth that he had laid in the grave run through his mind. Hoping to scare the wolf away James concentrates and says very softly:

***Orb of soft soothing light
Flash to brilliance bright.***

With that the orb flashes momentarily into a brilliantly, blinding light. At the same time, James sits up and lets out a savage, primal scream as he waves his arms wildly. The wolf jumps two feet off the ground, turns and races out of the cave with a yelp. That spell, so soon after weakening himself earlier, leaves him light headed and dizzy.

Using his spear to steady himself, he manages to get to his feet and looks out into the night. There in the rain he finds a dozen pair of glowing eyes staring back at him. Using what little strength he has left, he holds his spear aloft and yells at the wolves, but they just continue staring at him.

Now what James? he asks himself as he leans upon the spear for support. *You're in a pickle for sure.* Still feeling drained from the earlier spell, he

doesn't feel like he can afford to do much magic. *Can't make myself any weaker or I won't be able to defend myself should that become necessary.* Thinking for a second, he reaches down for a small stone and as he prepares to throw it, says,

***Little stone, little stone
With speed of a bullet
Hit that wolf's hide
And go right through it.***

With the last word he throws the stone at a pair of the eyes and there's a crack in the air as it shoots toward the wolf. A loud thud along with the sound of snapping bones tells the tale and a pair of glowing eyes goes out as the wolf falls over dead. The rest of the pack begins yelping and howling as they turn and race off into the night.

With dots dancing in front of his eyes, James sits down abruptly and rests his head on his knees, panting. *Too much*, he says to himself, *no way can I do any more.* If the wolves come back tonight he's a dead man for he has nothing left within him. He tries to stay awake but he's just too exhausted. Trusting to fate, he lies down on the floor and quickly passes out. Some time near morning the rain stops and when the first rays of the sun's light enters the cave, the glowing orb vanishes.

A rustling near his head startles him awake and he sits up quickly, fearful that the wolves had returned. He discovers instead, one of the small dogs similar to the one that had made off with his dinner earlier. The dog is looking straight at James, still and not moving. James says, "Boo!" loudly which frightens the dog, causing it to run out of the cave.

His head feels like it's about to crack open and he's shaking a little but he gets to his feet and shoulders his backpack.

Using his spear for support, he steps to the mouth of the cave, looking around for any sign that the wolves are still in the area. It's with much relief that he looks out and finds the clearing before the cave, clear of any wolves. He does however see the wolf he killed last night and the hole in its chest where the stone had struck. To his utter shock, the back half of the wolf had been blown away by the force of the stone. He feels sorry for the wolf even though he knows the wolf, if given a chance, would've had him for a late night snack. Keeping eyes open for any of its friends, he makes his way back down toward the stream and continues to follow it westward once more.

The stream has swollen greatly through the night; the water now rushing pell-mell over the rocks in its bed. He finds more of the berry bushes and picks several handfuls, stashing most of the berries in his backpack, though

keeping out a handful to munch on while he walks. His strength slowly begins to return and it's not long before the headache and shaking goes away.

He continues making his way along the streambed all morning. Shortly before noon he comes to a sudden stop and a shiver goes down his spine. For within the forest on his side of the stream, one of the wolves from the night before stands motionless amidst the trees, watching him. He reaches down and picks up some stones, placing them in his pocket, just in case. Looking back over toward where the wolf was standing, he readies a stone to throw, but the wolf is gone.

For the next several hours, he continues catching glimpses of the wolves amidst the trees, pacing him along his side of the stream. Actually, it's getting to be a rather large stream. Several tributaries have contributed their out flow and now the stream spans twenty feet across, becoming more of a river.

James comes up to another large tributary that crosses his path on its way to join the river. Across the tributary sits a grassy knoll and staring at him from atop it stands a large, lone wolf. Reaching into his pocket for a stone he takes one and cocks his arm back to throw. Just before he launches the stone, the wolf lets out with a spine chilling howl. Several answering howls come from all around him and breaks his concentration, ruining the spell just as he throws the stone. Without the power of the spell behind it, the stone flies wide, landing in a bush several feet wide of the mark.

Wolves burst out from behind the bushes and trees racing toward him growling and snarling. He makes for the river as the wolves close fast. Using his spear as best he can, he swings at the wolves, trying to keep them from catching him before gaining the water. When he reaches the water's edge, he turns to face the oncoming wolves as he slowly backs further out into the water. Swinging the spear in desperation to keep the wolves from getting close, he manages to keep them at bay for the moment. The coldness of the water takes his breath away as he continues backing further into the river.

The cold in his legs and the terror of the wolf pack keep him from being able to formulate any spells. The wolves rush him as he enters the water and he lays about himself with his spear, using it like a quarterstaff. Beginning to pant hard, he connects several times and even manages to stab a few but they are beginning to wear him down. He still has not fully recovered from the night before.

With his footing becoming treacherous as his legs slowly lose feeling due to the coldness of the water, he slips on a loose stone under the water and almost falls. Having to thrust his spear into the riverbed to remain upright he's unable to keep the wolves away.

Seeing its chance, one wolf rushes in and nips him on the leg, tearing a three inch long gash. Blood flows freely from the wound, and James is sure this will soon be his end. He regains his balance and is able to use his spear

once again to defend himself as he strikes out at the wolf which bit him, driving it back. But his swings are becoming ever increasingly slower and less powerful, his arms losing the endurance to continue wielding the heavy spear.

A large wolf jumps at him and James strikes with the spear, piercing the wolf's chest. Though dead, the wolf's momentum carries him forward, knocking James over and pinning him under its dead weight. Frantic, he tries to push the wolf off him but it's too heavy, and he is just too weak. He looks up as three wolves move in to finish it. Barely able to keep his head above water, he takes his spear and tries to beat them back but his efforts have minimal effect, only managing to slow their approach.

Thwock!

An arrow flies from the opposite bank and pierces the side of the wolf closest to him, causing it to fall over dead into the water. Looking over his shoulder, James stares with disbelief at a man standing there wielding a bow. The man lets fly another arrow, grazing the side of another wolf that was closing in on James, causing it to yelp and leap back to the shore.

"Come on. Move! Stay there and you're going to die," the stranger yells at James. With renewed strength at the prospect of surviving this ordeal, he manages to get the wolf off him and staggers toward the other shore. Having to use his spear as a crutch due to the wound in his leg, he at last reaches the shore near the man.

Letting fly another arrow, the man puts an arm under James' shoulder and helps him to walk away from the river. James looks at his benefactor and says "Thanks" before collapsing into unconsciousness.