

LEVELED BOOK • Q

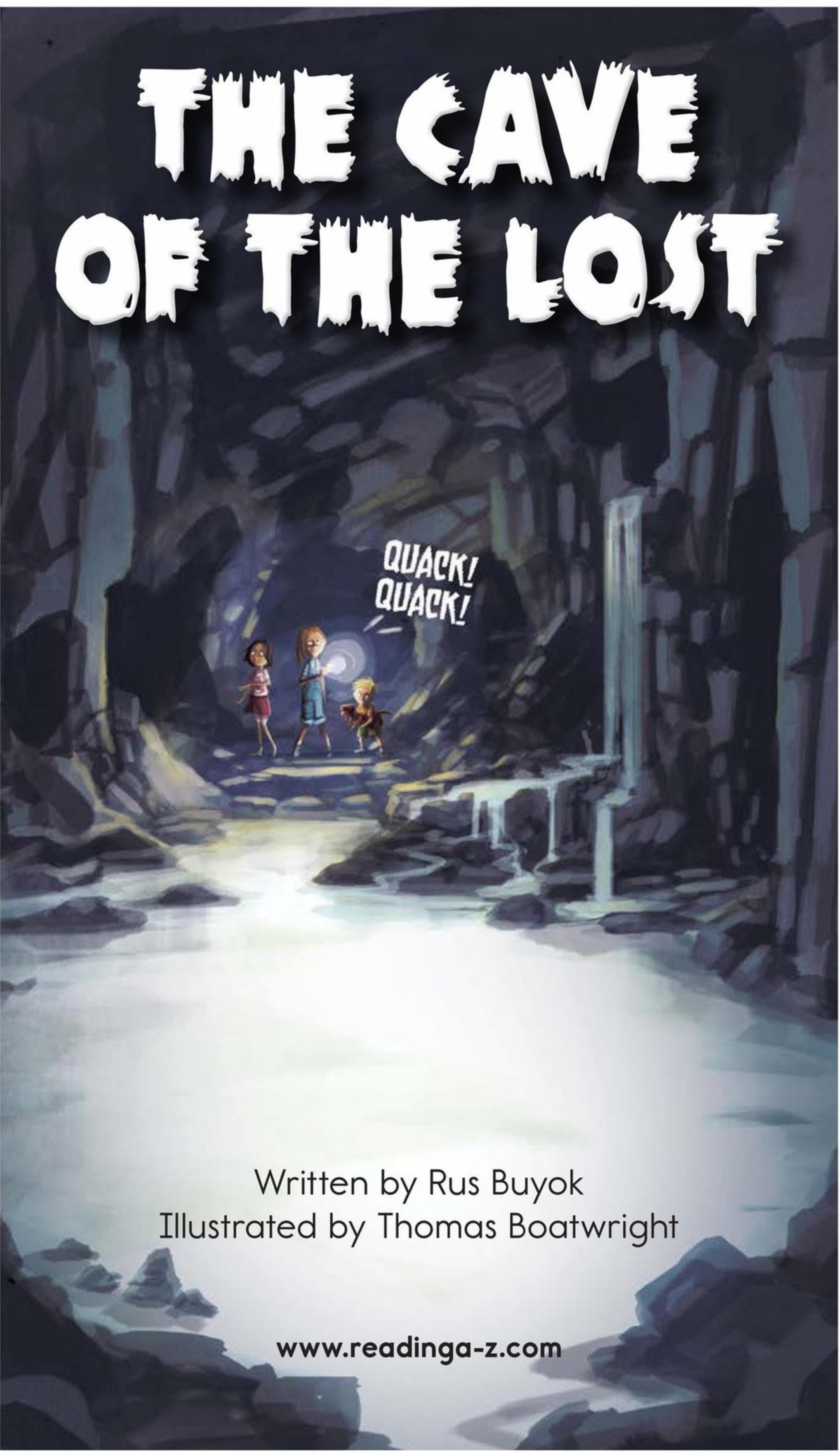
THE CAVE OF THE LOST



Written by Rus Buyok
Illustrated by Thomas Boatwright

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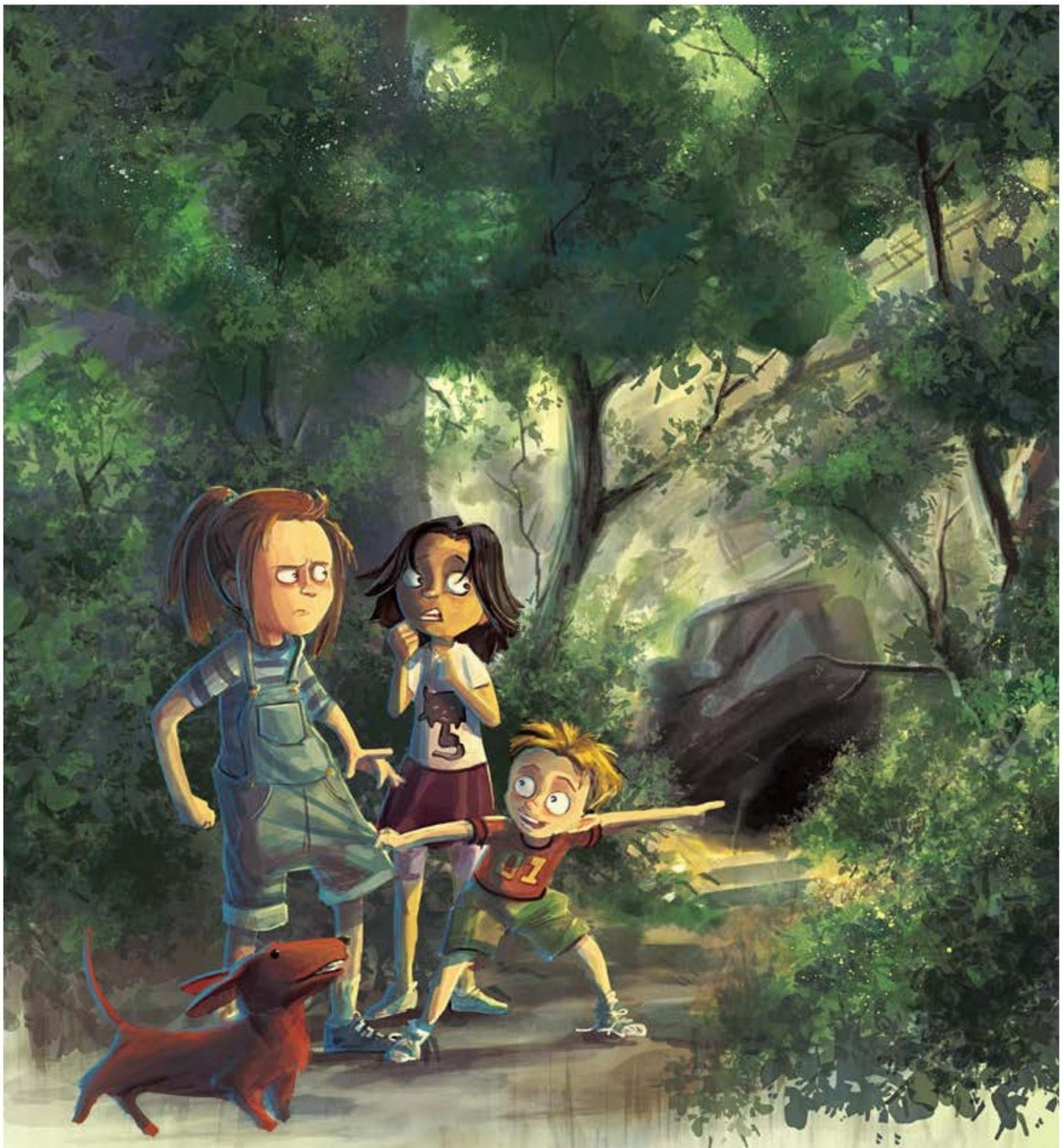
THE CAVE OF THE LOST



QUACK!
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My best friend Sarah, my little brother Jake, and I are standing before the entrance to a large cave. Odie, my brother's dog, barks into the darkness.

"Odie thinks someone is in there," Jake says.

"Is this where you saw the boy?" I ask Sarah. She stares up through the hole between the trees at the edge of the **gorge**.

"I think he was standing right here, waving," she replies. "We're not going in there, are we, Qynn?"



"You're the one who saw the mysterious boy waving at you. You're the one who had us leave the picnic and climb all the way down to the bottom of Finneas Gorge to help him. Now you don't want to go in?"

“That . . . that’s the . . . Cave of the Lost!”
she cries.

“What kind of ridiculous name is that?”
I ask. “I bet your aunt told you about it.”





“She did! Centuries ago, after Porter’s Mill was built, some people explored the cave, and they never came out. Others went to search for them and disappeared, too. Only one man ever made it out—but he couldn’t explain how.”

“He claimed he found others,” Sarah continues, “but they kept leading him in the wrong directions. Finally, after many days, he fell asleep in the cave and woke up in the Hollow, alone.”

“Your aunt tells a lot of stories,” I say.

“We still can’t wander around in there,” Sarah says. “The place is probably filled with massive spiders.”

“Hey, kid!” I yell into the cave. “Do you need help?”



My voice **echoes** for a moment, followed by silence. Then, something unexpected reaches my ears. It sounds almost like laughter.

“Let’s go in!” Jake exclaims.

A new sound emerges from the cave. “Someone is crying in there,” I say.



Seeing an opportunity, Jake charges into the darkness, but I seize his arm.

"Hold on, little man—we need light," I say.
"Do you have your keychain, Sarah?"

She tosses me her house keys with the Li'l Quacker keychain I gave her for her last birthday. When I squeeze it, the light in the duck's mouth comes on, and it quacks over and over.

"Jake, hang on to Odie—I don't want him running off," I say.

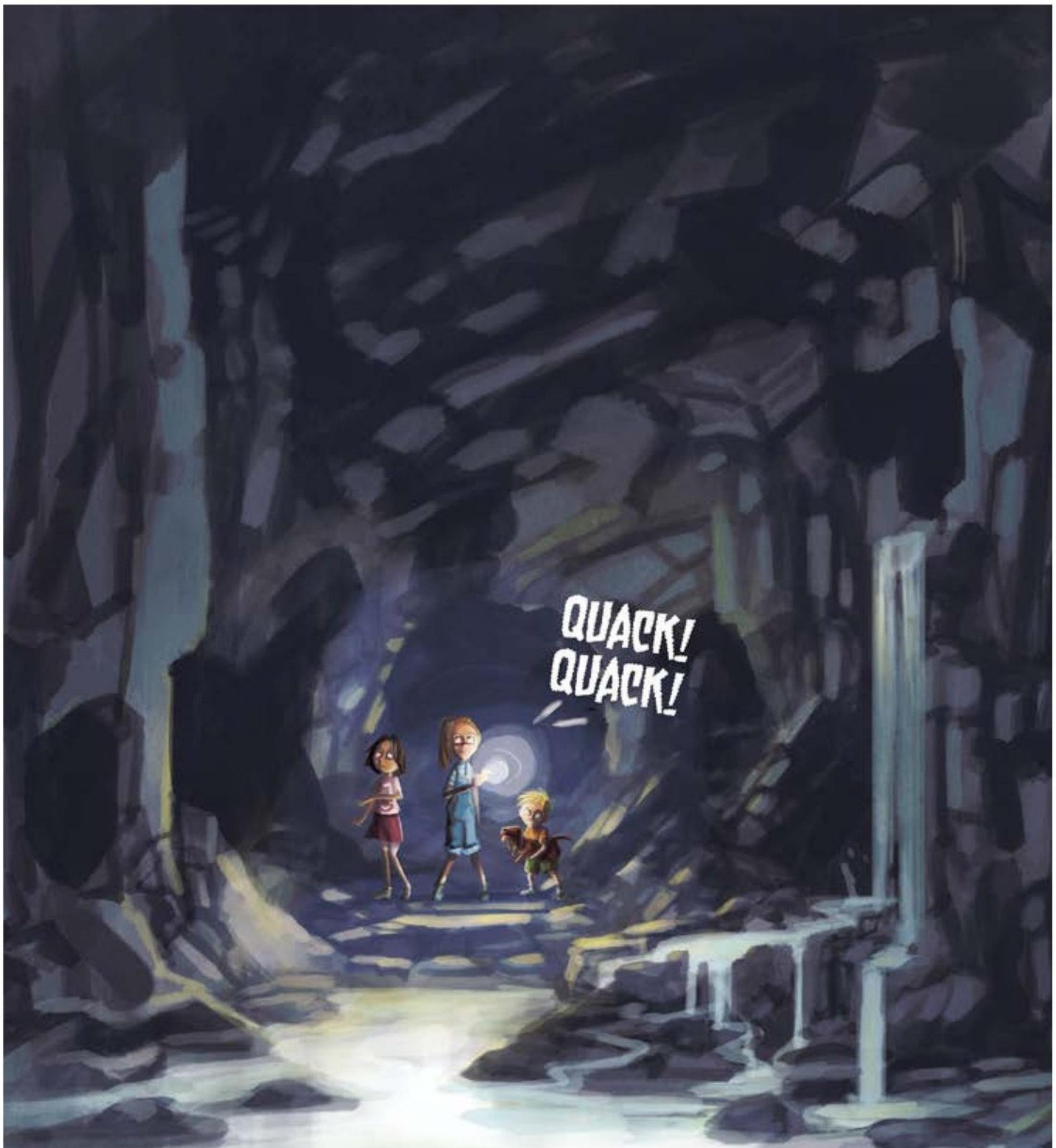
"Roger," he replies and picks up the dog.

I take a few steps inside, shining the light as the quacks echo around us. I hear Sarah reluctantly follow. A short distance inside, we reach the first **fork**. “Don’t freak out,” I say as I turn off the light.

The quacks fade, and intense darkness presses in on us. Sarah whimpers, but after a moment I hear the weeping again. It comes from the left **passage**, so I squeeze the Li’l Quacker and start moving again.

We **encounter** a few more forks, and I can see how someone could easily become lost down here. I memorize each turn as we **creep** closer to the sound.





Finally, the passage expands into a **chamber**. On the far wall, water trickles down the rock into a clear pool. Six other passages branch off in random directions.

I turn off the Quacker, and in the absolute darkness I only hear the running water.

Suddenly, a splash breaks the silence. I run over to the small pool, the keychain quacking again. The light glints off something in the sand at the bottom of the clear, undisturbed water.

The frigid water sends shivers through my body as I plunge my hand down. “It’s a key,” I say, holding it up to the light.

“A key to what?” Sarah asks as I put it in my pocket.



Laughter erupts all around us at once—children’s laughter. Sarah screams, and I drop the Quacker, tumbling us into blackness. I grope for it as the laughter continues to grow.

A small hand grasps mine and jerks me away. “Stop it, Jake—we need the light.”

Finally, I feel the keychain, and the light blossoms, filling the room. Sarah stands a few feet away from me, and Jake stands behind her, holding Odie.

"Jake, did you grab my hand?" I ask. The laughter is still there, getting louder.

"Let's get out of here!" Sarah yells as she **bolts** for one of the passages.



“This one,” I yell, realizing I’m pointing to the one I had been pulled toward.

I follow the turns I memorized as the laughter shadows us, echoing through the passage.

After the last turn, I expect to see the intense light of day. It’s only another fork, and I have no idea which way to go. I retrace the turns in my head, certain that I’ve followed them exactly. Has the cave changed?

“We’re lost, aren’t we?” Sarah asks. “I’m really scared.”

“Everything is going to be okay.” I turn off the light, hoping to hear the gurgling river. The laughter grows louder. It seems threatening, almost menacing, but then I hear the sound of someone running away to my right.

I turn on the light and look around for Jake. He stands between Sarah and me.

“Did you hear that?” I ask.

“The footsteps?” Sarah replies. “I thought that was you.”

I shake my head, and Sarah's eyes widen.

"We should follow them," I say.

"They could be trying to make us more lost."

"I don't think so," I say and start walking.

We come across more forks, and each time I stop to listen. The footsteps come again and again, leading us away from the laughter. Suddenly, we come to the mouth of the cave.





The light is painfully bright, but we run into it, laughing.

Sarah tugs at my shirt. “Qynn, look,” she says, pointing up through the small hole.

There, looking over the edge of the gorge, is the distant **figure** of a small boy. He is waving down to us.

“He looks very familiar, but I can’t explain why,” I say.

Glossary

bolts (<i>v.</i>)	suddenly or nervously moves or runs away (p. 12)
chamber (<i>n.</i>)	a room or other enclosed space, either natural or artificial (p. 10)
creep (<i>v.</i>)	to move slowly, often close to the ground, especially to avoid being noticed (p. 9)
echoes (<i>v.</i>)	repeats, as in a sound (p. 7)
encounter (<i>v.</i>)	an unexpected meeting, a conflict, or an experience (p. 9)
figure (<i>n.</i>)	a form or shape, especially a human shape (p. 15)
fork (<i>n.</i>)	a place where something such as a path, river, or road branches into two directions (p. 9)
gorge (<i>n.</i>)	a long, deep valley surrounded by higher land (p. 4)
passage (<i>n.</i>)	a route or channel along which a person or vehicle may pass (p. 9)

The Cave of the Lost
Level Q Leveled Book
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