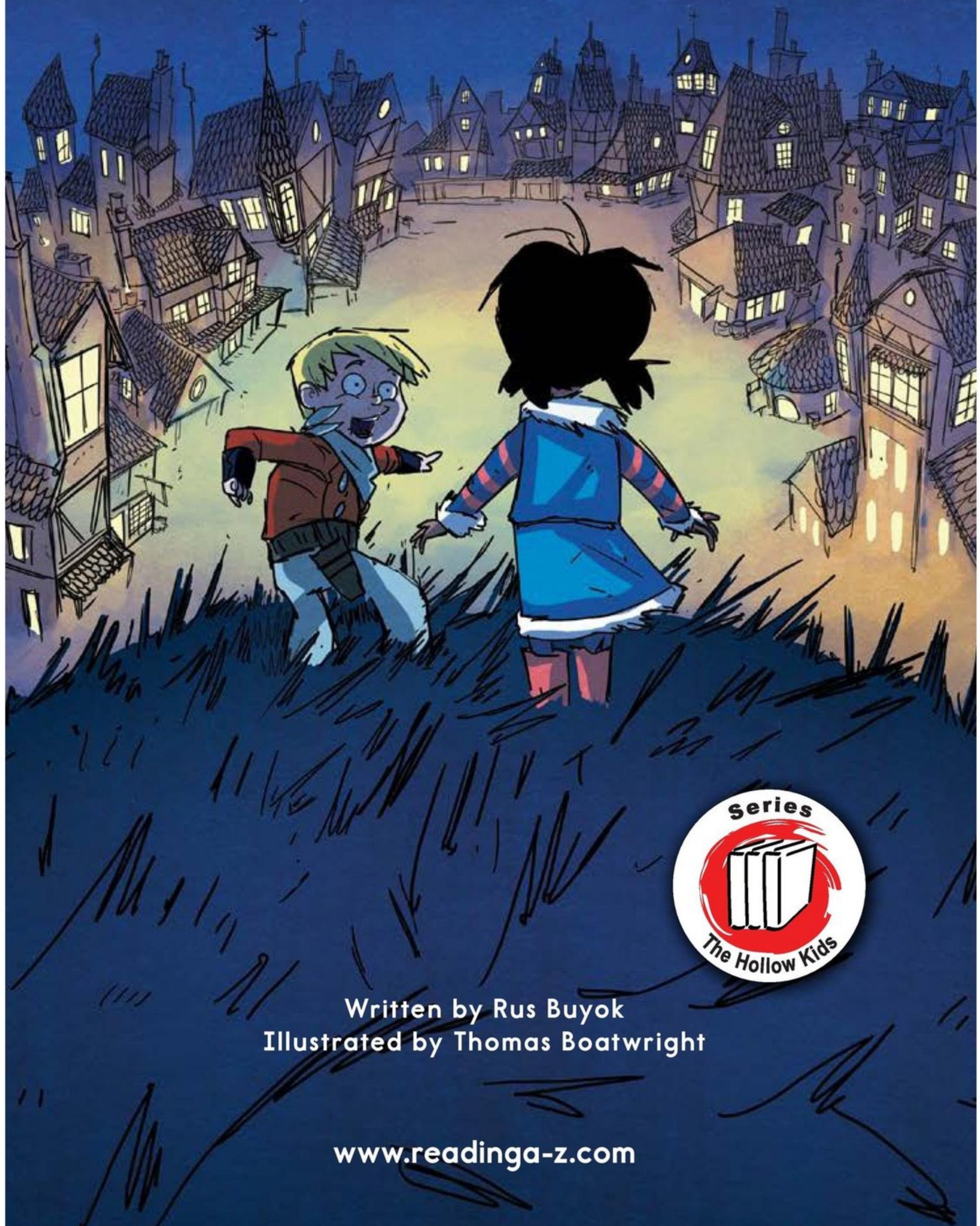


LEVELED BOOK • U

THE VILLAGE



Written by Rus Buyok
Illustrated by Thomas Boatwright

www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

Why do Sarah and Jake go to the village?

Words to Know

appendage
ascend
clammers
engulfed
hearth
illuminates

inexhaustible
menacing
persistent
quaint
scorching
viable

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Level U Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL U	
Fountas & Pinnell	Q
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



Sarah blinks and groans. Her head aches, and her back itches from the coarse grass beneath her. She remembers walking through the ornate door in the Cave of the Lost and falling, and a bright white light surrounding her. Qynn had been holding her hand, but they weren't strong enough. The wind had forced them apart.

The last thing she remembers is curling into a ball and covering her head with her hands before everything went dark.

A gust of chilly wind sends shivers down her spine as she stands up.

Tall grass that reaches her
waist waves in the breeze,
sounding like gentle ocean waves.

A full moon hovers peacefully
overhead. Far in the distance, over
what looks like miles of rolling hills, the
lights of a small village twinkle.

It's a nice night, Sarah thinks, but the thought
is quickly followed by another: *Where am I?*
She definitely isn't in the Hollow anymore, or
anywhere else she can recognize. She doesn't
panic. The environment of clean, crisp air
carrying the sound of the ocean of grass makes
panic all but impossible—but a lump of **persistent**
anxiety forms in the pit of her stomach nonetheless.





She scans her surroundings to see if she can locate Qynn or Jake, but she only finds more grass and the distant, inviting lights.

Then she hears a faint noise that could be someone calling out, but it's hard to tell over the sound of the grass shifting. The noise comes again, and she moves through the grass, toward where she thinks it's coming from. The lump of anxiety in her stomach grows, but Sarah presses on. It's definitely a voice calling out, but she can't distinguish what it's saying.

She continues to cautiously wade through the high grass toward the voice. Suddenly, she can make out what it's saying.

"Oooodieeee! Oooodieeee!"

It's Jake! She breaks into a run, calling out, "Jake, is that you? It's Sarah! Where are you?"



Jake's blond head pops up from the grass nearby like a jack-in-the-box, his eyes red and puffy as though he's been crying. "I can't find Odie!" he cries as he runs toward her. "He always comes when I call." He collides with Sarah, wrapping his skinny arms around her waist and wiping his wet face on her costume.

"It's okay," she says as she rubs his back. "He has to be around here somewhere." After a few moments, Jake starts to calm down.

"Have you seen your sister?" Sarah asks. Jake shakes his head and wipes his nose on his sleeve.

"What should we do? Where are we?" Jake is suddenly almost in tears again. Crying seems like a **viable** option to Sarah right now—if nothing else, it would feel good. She knows she can't, though. She has to watch out for Jake now—she has to get them home.





The lump in her stomach grows. She takes a deep breath and says, "I don't know where we are, but if Qynn and Odie are around, they're probably heading for that town over there. I think we should do that, too. What do you think?"

Jake takes a long look at the lights in the distance and sniffs. When he turns back, his characteristic smile has returned. "Yep, they would go there. Let's go!"

Jake bounds toward the lights like an excited puppy, and Sarah has to scramble to keep up. After a while, he slows to a walk, which Sarah is thankful for. They continue for what seems like hours through the tall grass, going up and down the gentle slopes of the hills. Each time they come to the top of a hill, the lights look a little closer, but the moon never seems to move. It's as if time is standing still in this peaceful place.



"Something's burning," Jake says after a while. The change has been so subtle that Sarah didn't notice, but now she catches the faint odor of smoke. "Maybe they have a campfire!"

"Maybe," Sarah replies and groans as they start to **ascend** another hill. Exhaustion is starting to settle into her legs and back—she had already abandoned her fairy wings. Jake seems **inexhaustible**, scampering up the hill with a broad grin. He reaches the top before Sarah and freezes.



"We're here!" he cries. Sarah **clammers** over the crest and looks down at a tiny village straight out of a fairy tale. Warm yellow light **illuminates** the small windows of the **quaint** homes surrounding a central, open area. Tall chimneys poke out from steeply sloped roofs, and tendrils of smoke disappear into the night sky.



Sarah can't help but be calmed by the sight. It seems like a quiet, happy place. She smiles, feeling the anxiety in her stomach lessen slightly.

"Take my hand," she instructs Jake as they start to walk down the hill toward a dirt path between two of the homes.

The smell of smoke is stronger now, but it comes with something else: the scent of cooking food. Sarah's stomach grumbles, and she realizes they haven't eaten in a long time.

As they pass between the houses, she peeks into a window. No one is inside, but a healthy fire burns in the **hearth** under a bubbling pot. A few wooden chairs surround the fire, a small table between them, and a bed with thick quilts sits in one corner. Something about the town and the homes strikes Sarah as familiar, but she can't quite place it.



She doesn't have time to dwell on the thought, as a fat white cat emerges from around the corner of a house and leaps into Sarah's arms.

"What are you doing here?" it asks. Sarah can't speak. She just stares at the creature in her arms, its bright yellow-green eyes staring right back.

"Awesome," Jake says, "a talking cat!"

"We need to go—NOW!" the cat snaps and smacks Sarah across the face with its white paw. "Move it."



"What's going—" A loud rumbling interrupts her, and the ground begins to shift. Sarah pulls Jake into the large open dirt area in the center of town. Wood creaks and cracks as the small houses collapse in on themselves, the healthy fires within igniting the walls and roofs. With a loud *whoosh*, the buildings are completely **engulfed** in flames that leap into the sky and quickly dissipate, while the fire catches the grass at the edge of town and spreads outward, **scorching** the fields beyond.



The rumbling stops for a moment, and Jake and Sarah watch the ring of fire spread further and further outward, engulfing everything in its path and burning faster than anything they'd seen before.

"Run!" the cat screams, but it's too late. The ground around them explodes with muffled booms and cracks. Sarah grabs Jake and shields him and the cat from the shower of soil, rocks, and ash.

When Sarah releases the two, she's completely unprepared for what she sees. Surrounding them is a **menacing** group of what look like octopi, though each has far more than eight tentacles. Some are the size of a fist, while others look as if they could lift a small house. Their bulging heads swell and contract as if they're breathing, and their tentacles squirm across the ground like snakes on the hunt. The suckers on each wriggly **appendage** have frightening rows of small, sharp teeth around the edges.

Jake stands frozen in awe, his mouth gaping in an amazed smile. Sarah holds the cat tighter and reaches for Jake's hand. The world around them is utterly silent.

"What do we do now?" she whispers, too frightened to speak normally.

"Whatever they want us to," the cat replies, sounding tense but defeated. "It's too late. We're trapped."



Glossary

appendage (<i>n.</i>)	an external body part that sticks out from the body, such as an arm or a leg (p. 14)
ascend (<i>v.</i>)	to move upward; to rise in position or rank (p. 10)
clammers (<i>v.</i>)	awkwardly crawls or climbs (p. 11)
engulfed (<i>v.</i>)	swept over and covered completely (p. 13)
hearth (<i>n.</i>)	the floor or area inside or in front of a fireplace (p. 12)
illuminates (<i>v.</i>)	lights up (p. 11)
inexhaustible (<i>adj.</i>)	unable to be tired or worn out (p. 10)
menacing (<i>adj.</i>)	threatening (p. 14)
persistent (<i>adj.</i>)	not ending or stopping; continuing longer than usual or expected (p. 4)
quaint (<i>adj.</i>)	old-fashioned (p. 11)
scorching (<i>v.</i>)	burning the surface of something (p. 13)
viable (<i>adj.</i>)	able to be done, used, or completed successfully (p. 7)

The Village

A Reading A-Z Level U Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,298

Connections

Writing and Art

Write and illustrate what you predict is going to happen next in this series.

Math

Sarah and Jake are surrounded by 6 creatures with 8 tentacles each, 7 creatures with 9 tentacles each, and 12 creatures with 12 tentacles each. How many tentacles do the creatures have in all? If all the creatures are watching them, how many eyes are on Sarah and Jake? Solve each problem in two different ways.

The logo for Reading A-Z features the word "Reading" in a red, sans-serif font. Above the letter "e", there is a small sun-like icon with rays. To the right of "Reading", the letters "A-Z" are written in a larger, bold, black font.

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