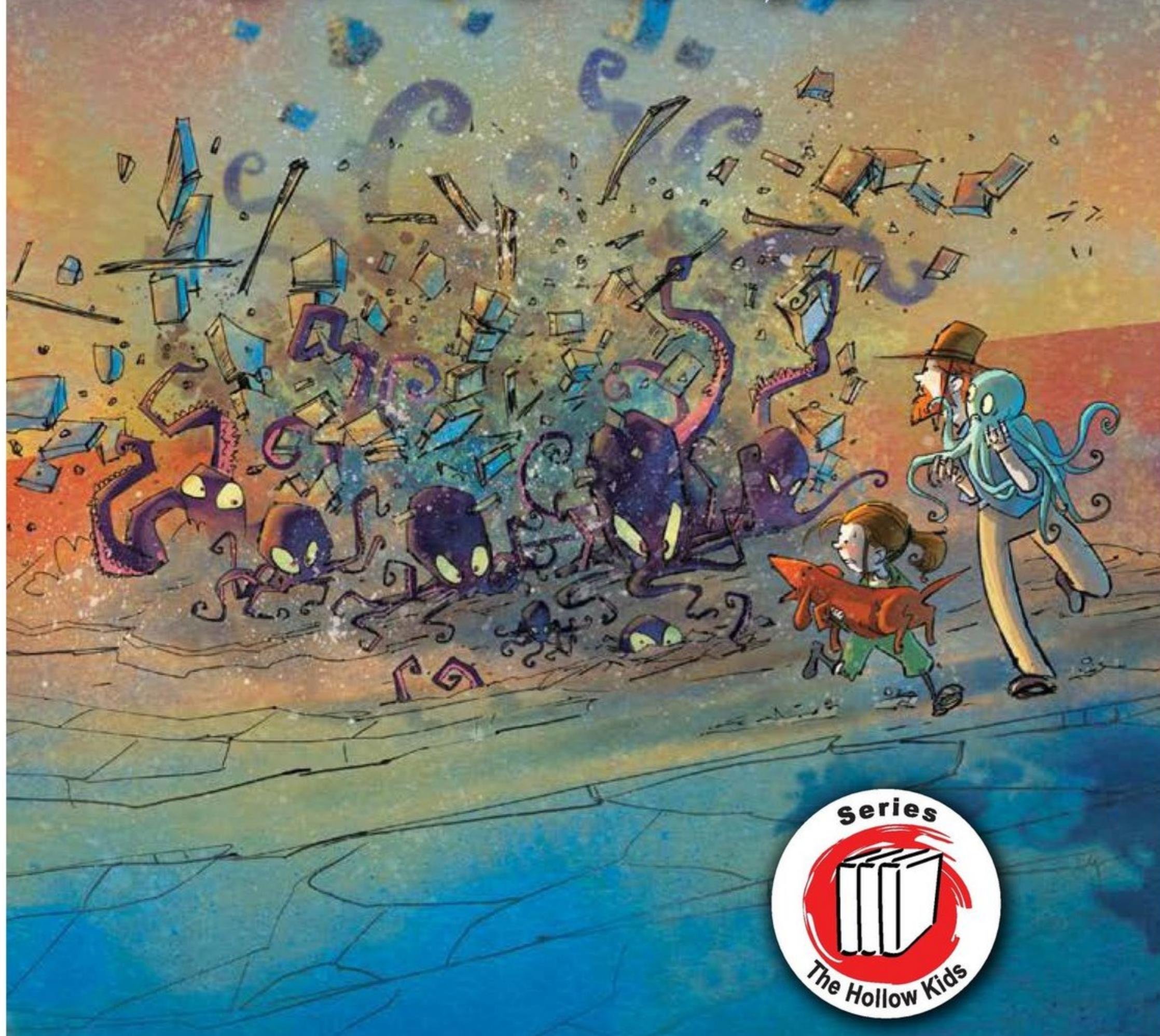


LEVELED Book • X

# THE QUEEN'S PROPOSAL



Written by Rus Buyok • Illustrated by Thomas Boatwright



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## Focus Question

What is the Queen's proposal, and why does it tempt Qynn?

## Words to Know

absentmindedly	hijacked
conjured	peripheral vision
contemplation	simulacra
discern	sullenly
emblazoned	transmogrification
frenetically	unbridled

The Queen's Proposal  
Level X Leveled Book  
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### Correlation

LEVEL X	
Fountas & Pinnell	S
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



“We have to do something!” I exclaim.

Uncle Jasper has just finished summarizing how the Queen, the same Queen who holds Sarah’s mom, once held him captive. Now, she has also lured Sarah and Jake into her palace.

“What are we going to do?” My voice sounds frantic as I pace the room. Uncle Jasper appears similarly concerned—he massages his temples, deep in **contemplation**.

Seth seems underwhelmed with the situation, allowing Odie to casually sniff one of his dangling tentacles.

“The sun should be rising soon, so we should rest while we can and approach the problem refreshed in the morning,” Uncle Jasper says. While the logical part of my brain knows he’s right, my heart almost shatters in that instant.

“We have to help them,” I plead.

“We will,” Uncle Jasper sighs, “but we can’t accomplish this alone—we’re going to need assistance.” He glances knowingly at Seth, who jolts to attention as if Uncle Jasper had just snapped him with a rubber band.

“I **discern** what you’re suggesting,” Seth grumbles, “and you can cease this instant. The remnants of my once-great civilization will not place one tentative tentacle on that woman’s solid land. We’re a noble race that values our existence.”

“Imagine how far the solidity will spread if she has the power of a child’s imagination and will behind her.”

“The desert is vast,” Seth retorts, staring at Uncle Jasper with intense determination that must stem from **unbridled** fear.

“What about all the cephaloids the Queen has already influenced and transformed into those horrific creatures?” Uncle Jasper asks.

“You have no guarantees that their **transmogrification** can be reversed,” Seth warns.

“No, but doing something is better than doing nothing—at least if you help us there’s hope, the possibility that you can return them to their natural state.”

Seth ponders this, **absentmindedly** swaying his tentacles back and forth under the table, an action Odie finds too tempting to resist. He gives one a curious, gentle nip, and Seth screeches like a frightened child.

The incredible tension filling the room breaks, and Uncle Jasper and I can’t help but laugh. It starts as a snicker, grows to a giggle, and ends with us holding our sides, wiping tears from our eyes.





"That repulsive mongrel bit me!" Seth screeches, holding his tentacle. We laugh harder. "Why do you consider this so hilarious?"

"Don't be like that," Uncle Jasper says. "Odie wants you to help us, too."

Less than amused, Seth retreats **sullenly**, crossing his tentacles in front of him. "Your cruelty knows no bounds," he mumbles.

"I'm sorry, but I'm exhausted," Uncle Jasper continues. "Let's rest for a few hours, and then we'll venture out to locate the rest of Seth's clan." He stretches out on the bed and is soon snoring loudly.

Despite his anger, Seth is soon slumbering, too.

Anxiety makes closing my eyes impossible; too much has happened, and I can hardly contain my desire to find Jake, Sarah, and Sarah's mom, Anna. I can visualize them clearly: Jake, ever optimistic and excited for life; Sarah, her timidity hiding great strength; and Anna, whom I have never met, but whose face is **emblazoned** in my memory. I wish they were here right now—all of them, safe and happy.



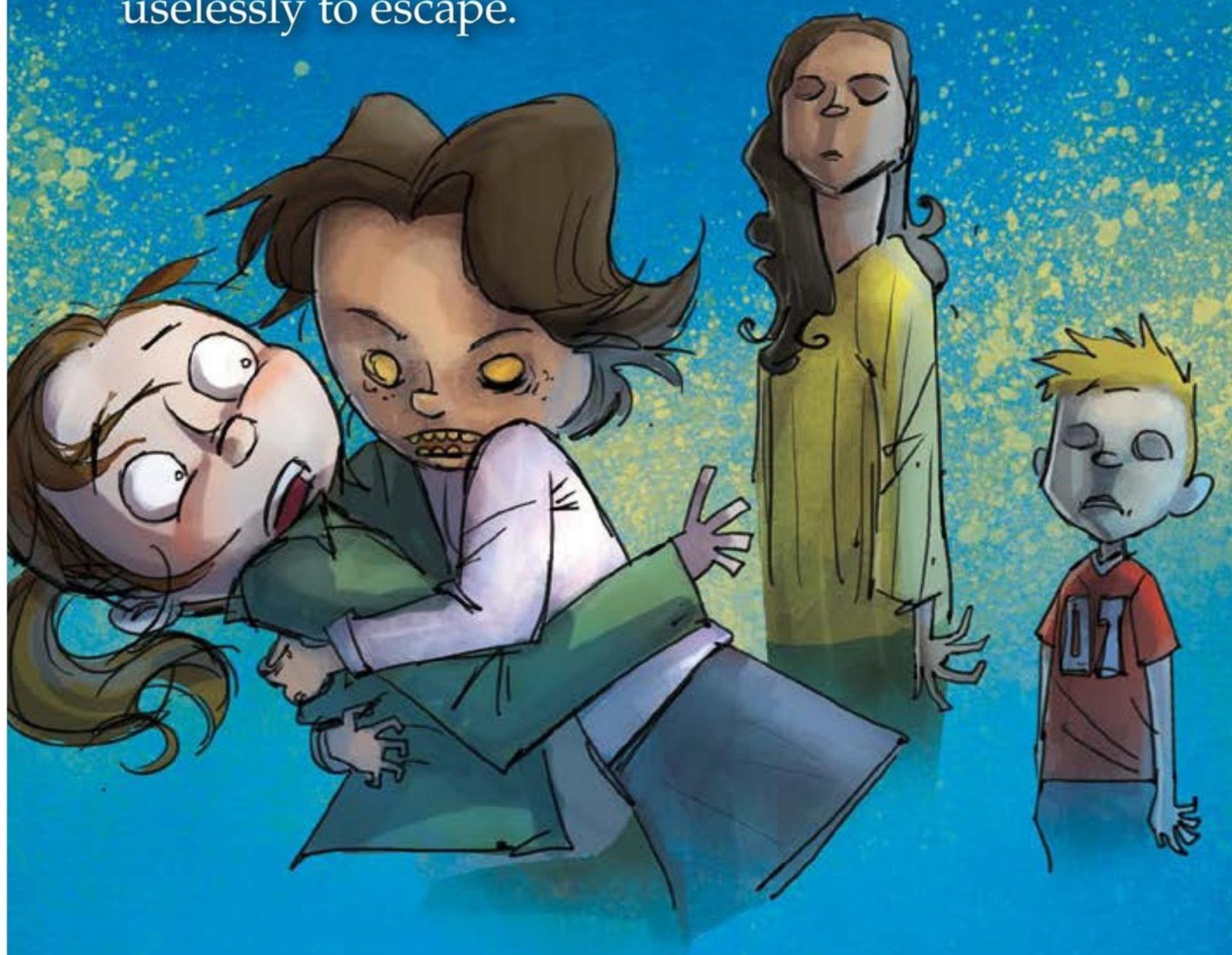
As my imagination meanders, the soft, sparkling sand begins to shift in my **peripheral vision**. I turn my head and freeze—there stand Jake, Sarah, and Anna, just as I imagined them. Jake smiles and waves, and it looks as if he's trying to speak. Sarah appears frightened. She hides behind her mother, who has the expression of pure love I remember from the picture of her in the hidden room.



I walk toward them, too overwhelmed to speak. My walk quickly becomes a dash toward Jake. Wrapping him in a big bear hug, I lift him off the ground and swing his small body around, ecstatically laughing. He's smiling, and his mouth is open as if he's laughing, but no sound emerges.

I place him back on the sand and turn to Sarah, who creeps from behind her mother and opens her arms for a hug. All three are still silent, and something about the entire situation feels wrong. I tentatively step toward Sarah, and a broad smile spreads across her face, her teeth gleaming almost menacingly as she moves forward, enclosing me in her arms.

At first the hug is gentle, but it quickly becomes tighter as she embraces me with a strength Sarah couldn't possess. I attempt to pull away, but she's pinning my arms to my sides. I struggle violently, twisting back and forth, trying uselessly to escape.



The Sarah that isn't Sarah leans forward and says in my ear, "You needn't be frightened, child. I simply want to bring you to your little brother and friend." Her voice isn't Sarah's, but that of an older woman. "They're here with me, safe and happy. I can make all your dreams come true, give you everything you ever wanted, take away all your pain, if you come to me and help me."

She pulls back, and her face is no longer Sarah's. It has morphed into a beautiful woman's, with brown hair pulled into a bun atop her head. She smiles the kindest smile I've ever seen, an expression that reminds me of my mother. As I look into her eyes, I feel safe and loved, as if everything she's saying could be true—I want it to be true.

"Qynn, no!" Uncle Jasper yells from the entrance to the house. He races over and begins frenetically tearing at the woman's arms, but she's too powerful. "Imagine them gone right now—all three of them, imagine them turning to sand again. Hurry!"



I picture the three of them dissolving, becoming three mounds of sand at our feet. My eyes closed, I focus on nothing except that image. Slowly, the woman's grasp slackens, and I open my eyes to see her face melting away as if made of wax. The final thing she whispers before disappearing completely into the glittering sand is, "Come to me."



Uncle Jasper examines me to make sure I'm all right. "She's growing so strong," he whispers.

Seth and Odie come traipsing out of the house now, still half asleep. "What the dickens is happening out here?" Seth asks.

"Qynn **conjured** up some **simulacra** of Jake, Sarah, and Anna from the sands, and the Queen **hijacked** her creations," Uncle Jasper explains.

"She was here?" Seth gasps. "We must evacuate immediately!"



"It wasn't really the Queen," I say, thinking of the woman's kind expression and voice, and of how genuine—and tempting—her proposal seemed. I have a hard time remembering why I was trying to escape her grasp. Uncle Jasper dashes back into the house and begins gathering supplies.

"It doesn't matter," Seth continues. "She was here, or part of her consciousness or will was here, which means she knows where *here* is, and her minions can't be far behind."

Just as Uncle Jasper bursts from the house, I hear a rumbling, like rocks grinding against each other, and the ground shifts beneath my feet. Odie barks as Uncle Jasper seizes Seth and throws him on his shoulder.

"Run!" Uncle Jasper screams, and I scoop up Odie, who was about to chomp down on a tentacle snaking from the sand.

My legs sting from exertion as we sprint toward solid ground. I glance behind in time to see the entire house crumbling and sinking into the soft sand as the creatures slither their way out in pursuit.



Soon we're on firm earth again, but the creatures follow close behind—eight or nine of them, tumbling over each other in a mass of terrifying clawed appendages.

"Seth, a little assistance," Uncle Jasper says, running ahead of me.

"What would you like me to do, irritate their eyes with the dust I can manipulate on this solid ground? Why don't you do something?"

"I've been trying, but nothing is responding! It's like the sand doesn't hear me." Uncle Jasper sounds truly terrified as he gasps for breath.  
"Qynn, I need you to imagine a wall, taller and longer than any you've ever seen, right behind us. Concentrate on it as hard as you can, but don't stop running."

I try to visualize a massive wall, and my mind is instantaneously drawn to the Great Wall of China. We learned about it in school weeks ago, but that seems like another lifetime. I remember being in awe of how far it spread, the thick stone walls snaking across the countryside, and how many different parts there were.

I imagine we're running away from the wall, but it's following, growing taller and thicker the farther we go. A grinding rumble similar to what I heard before fills my ears, but this time it's followed by an explosion. Dust, dirt clods, and stone shower down, and we try to shield our heads as we sprint.



Then, Uncle Jasper freezes, his chest heaving. I slow down as I pass him, and turn around to see an immense wall, just as I imagined it, blocking out the early morning sky. It stretches far off into the distance on either side. The creatures are nowhere to be seen.

"Did I do that?" I ask between breaths.

Uncle Jasper simply nods, his hands on his hips.

"My dear child," Seth says, the admiration clear in his voice, "in this world, you can do anything."



## Glossary

<b>absentmindedly</b> ( <i>adv.</i> )	in a forgetful or preoccupied manner (p. 5)
<b>conjured</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	created something or made something magically appear (p. 11)
<b>contemplation</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the act of thinking deeply (p. 3)
<b>discern</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to understand, observe, or detect something that is not obvious (p. 4)
<b>emblazoned</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	written or impressed on a surface so as to be clearly seen (p. 7)
<b>frenetically</b> ( <i>adv.</i> )	in a wild, excited, or confused manner; frantically (p. 10)
<b>hijacked</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	took control of something and used it for a different purpose or in a different way (p. 11)
<b>peripheral vision</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the sides or outer edges of one's vision. (p. 7)
<b>simulacra</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	images or representations of something or someone (p. 11)
<b>sullenly</b> ( <i>adv.</i> )	in a sad or resentful manner (p. 6)
<b>transmogrification</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the act of changing or altering something significantly, usually in a funny or hideous way (p. 5)
<b>unbridled</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	free or uncontrolled; unlimited (p. 4)

# The Queen's Proposal

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,584

## Connections

### Writing and Art

If you were Qynn, would you accept the Queen's proposal? Why or why not? Write a paragraph supporting your answer.

### Social Studies

Research the Great Wall of China. Write a paper about it, including its location, size, and purpose.

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