

The Creature and the Queen

A Reading A-Z Level W Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,767

Connections

Writing and Art

If you could manipulate the sands and construct something like the humans do in this world, what would you create? Why? Draw a picture and write about it.

Science

Research octopi and compare them to the cephaloids in the text using a Venn diagram. Using your research, write a paragraph that explains why Uncle Jasper calls them *cephaloids*.

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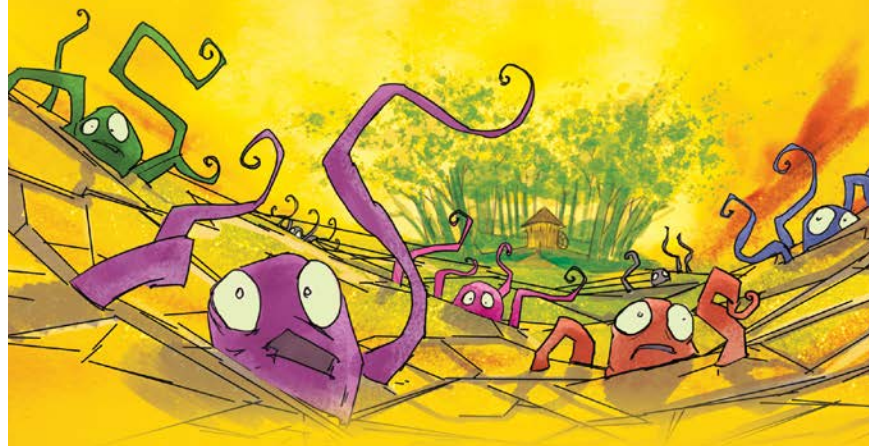
THE CREATURE AND THE QUEEN



Written by Rus Buyok • Illustrated by Thomas Boatwright

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Focus Question

Who is the Queen, and how has she affected this world?

Words to Know

abscond	empathetic
begrudge	frolicked
commenced	impudence
domicile	plight
eloquent	reconnaissance
embellishment	succumb

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Correlation

LEVEL W

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Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



I let the octopus creature inside, and now it's sitting on the table in the little house in the desert, giving me the once-over. It doesn't look impressed.

"Who might you be?" it asks.

"I'm Qynn, and that's Odie," I say. Outside, Odie lifts his head and wags his tail at the sound of his name. "Who and what might you be?"

"You couldn't pronounce my name with your inadequate, human tongue. Jasper refers to us as *cephaloids* for our resemblance to certain creatures from your world, though I'm not sure if we should take offense. We're the natural residents of this realm. You can call me Seth, I suppose."

"Is Jasper also a human?"

"Very much so, though I don't **begrudge** him that. He's a decent enough fellow, allowing me to secret myself away in his **domicile** on occasion," Seth shakes slightly, and shimmering sand dusts the table. As he speaks, the sand swirls and forms itself into a small candle that lights itself. "His influence seems to have fewer . . . negative consequences than the others of your species."



I want to ask what just happened, but Seth raises a tentacle to shush me.

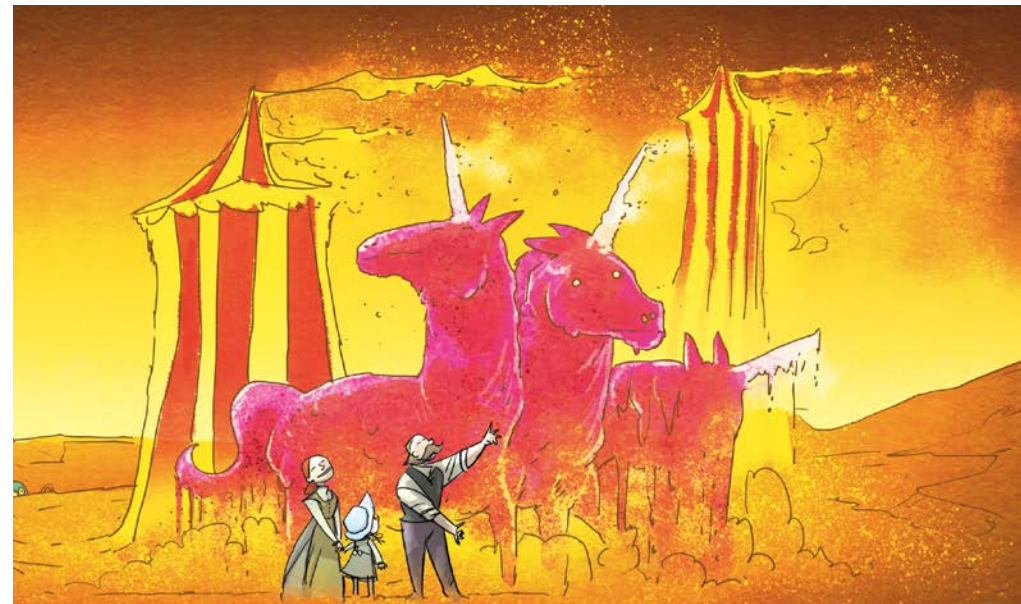
"You humans have been interfering with our world for longer than any of us can recall," the creature huffs. "It used to be endearing, even pleasurable, to watch you manipulate the sands to construct your deepest desires and then be on your way. Now it's starting to grow tiresome—and dangerous."

"What?" is all I can say.

Seth sighs and shakes his bulbous head in an adorably human expression of exasperation. "Bring that mongrel in, latch the door, and have a seat—you need some education."

I do as he asks, sitting cross-legged on the bed with Odie curled up beside me.

"A long time ago, the great sands spread in all directions, far beyond what your eyes could comprehend. We cephaloids **frolicked** through the sands innocently and happily, only willing the sand to construct those things we needed for survival and comfort—food, shelter, perhaps a bit of **embellishment** here and there—simple things, never permanent. They existed while they were required, and then we returned them to the sands."



"One day, humans began to appear. You were curiosities at first, wandering through doorways of light into the great sands. Your will, desire, and most importantly, imagination were much stronger than ours. Humans discovered that these things, which are so essential to your consciousness, could manipulate the sands, and they quickly constructed great palaces, bizarre creatures, alien landscapes, and incredible technology that we couldn't even fathom. Humans fascinated us, and I recall spending countless days in deep discussion about what they were formulating and why. The humans would stay for a short time, and then leave the way they'd come. The great sands returned to their natural state."

Seth clears his throat and looks at the floor. "Then, she arrived. Sometimes she came with small humans in tow, and they constructed their things and left. This time, however, she appeared alone and built a small home for herself. Still, we thought little of it, as she seemed harmless enough. The longer she remained, the more her presence influenced the sands. They became solid ground around the house, and then trees and other foliage began to emerge—massive leafy things that blocked out our sun."



"Each day, the solid ground spread farther and farther away from the house. Some of us, myself included, began to grow understandably concerned. Others thought a small island of solidity in the vastness of the great sands didn't pose a threat. Eventually, we agreed that one of us should at least attempt a conversation with the woman and ask if she would kindly stop expanding her solid land or return to your world. Being the most **eloquent** and level-headed among us, I was elected to speak with her."



"Since none of us had ever attempted to converse with a human before, the occasion caused quite a commotion. A large population of cephaloids gathered in the sands around the solid area to see and hear what could be seen and heard. I hauled myself onto the solid ground and maneuvered my way to the house."



"Before I could make any sign of greeting, a small human flung the door open, lifted me quite rudely into the air, and hauled me through the domicile. More youngsters were littered about the place. She must have created them from the sands as well. The one carrying me placed me atop a large table and **commenced** impolitely giggling. The woman shushed the youngsters. She seemed genuinely surprised when I spoke, explaining to her the effects of her influence on the great sands—our home."

"At first, she seemed **empathetic** to our **plight**, until I mentioned that she might consider returning to where she came from. Her expression became very grim, let me tell you, and she picked me up and flung me out of the house."

"'This is our home now,' she screamed, 'and no one will take it from us!' She stomped her foot on the floor, and the reverberation was greater than anything I'd heard before. The ground shuddered and rumbled, and the sands surrounding the house became solid for a great distance instantaneously. I aided as many of my kind as I could, but many more were trapped within the solid ground."



"Since then, the solidity has been increasing with each passing hour. If cephaloids like myself don't keep moving, we risk being swallowed up—and that doesn't end well . . ."

Seth trails off, and while I'm not sure, given his anatomy, it looks like he's blinking away tears.

"What do you mean?" I ask, fearing the answer.

"You said you had been attacked by some horrible tentacle creature—that's what we become. There's something malicious, something awful in this woman's influence. When we are caught, it begins to flow into us—distorting and twisting us until we become those terrifying things."

Suddenly, I feel a little sorry for the creature that had chased me through the woods. Seth looks miserable—telling that story has obviously taken a toll on him. My instinct is to comfort him, but I'm not exactly sure how.

"I can think of no worse fate than to become a vicious beast at the beck and call of that woman. I hear she's even started calling herself a queen. The gall! The **impudence!**"

"What does she do with the creatures? Doesn't she see the damage she's caused? Why doesn't she just leave? Why is she doing any of this?" The questions rattle off my tongue as quickly as I can think them up. Each one hits Seth like a punch to the gut, and he flinches.

"I . . . I spend my days fleeing through what's left of the great sands, running from those creatures and hoping that when I rest, I won't awaken trapped or captured," he says. "I can't comprehend why any of this is happening."

The front door latch clicks open and the door creaks inward. A tall human figure stands in the shadows. I instinctively reach out to protect Odie, who begins to growl.

"I think I might have an idea," the figure says as he steps into the light of the small candle. He rubs his hand through his red hair, shaking out shimmering specks of sand. His face is aged more than I remember, but I recognize him immediately.

"Uncle Jasper!" I scream as I leap off the bed and wrap my arms around him. Odie barks happily behind us.

"Qynn, is that you?" He kneels down and we hug again. "What are you doing here?"

The story pours out of me, and I tell him about everything that happened to Sarah, Jake, and me in our world, and how I ended up here.





He's quiet for a long time before Seth grimaces and says, "Where did you **abscond** to? You've been missing for days—I was almost worried."

"Your concern is almost overwhelming, Seth," Uncle Jasper says. "For your information, I was doing some **reconnaissance** on why the solidity has begun to spread again at such an alarming rate. I managed to come relatively close to her palace without the creatures discovering me, thanks to a series of distractions by a girl, a young boy, and a cat."

"What did they look like?" I ask.

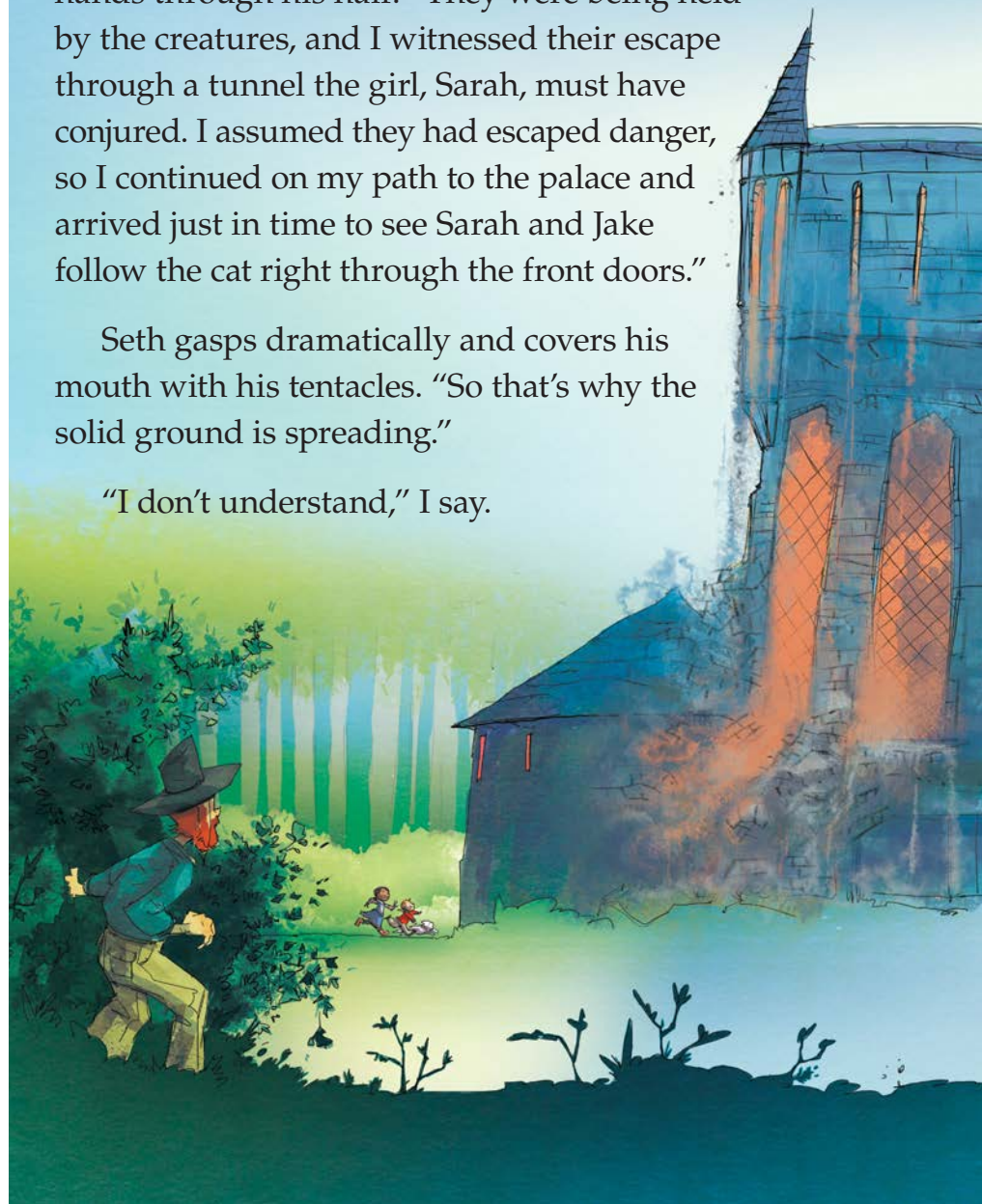
"She had dark hair and was wearing some sort of costume; the boy had blond hair and was dressed as a cowboy. The cat was, well, a cat—a white one."

"That sounds like Sarah and Jake!" I exclaim as ecstatic tears burn my eyes. "I'm so happy they're alive and safe."

Uncle Jasper's face drops, and he begins to pace around the small room, repeatedly rubbing his hands through his hair. "They were being held by the creatures, and I witnessed their escape through a tunnel the girl, Sarah, must have conjured. I assumed they had escaped danger, so I continued on my path to the palace and arrived just in time to see Sarah and Jake follow the cat right through the front doors."

Seth gasps dramatically and covers his mouth with his tentacles. "So that's why the solid ground is spreading."

"I don't understand," I say.



“The Queen is quite old, and over time, the effort of sustaining this solid world has taxed her will and imagination to the point where she can’t maintain her creations on her own anymore. She uses another, feeding on his or her will and imagination, twisting it to her own desires and capturing the other person into a world of illusion. The Queen used me for some time, and when I managed to escape, she captured another, Anna, and has been using her ever since . . .” His voice trails off, and the anguish is evident on his face.

“For a long time, the solidity was static. When the solidity started spreading again, I had to find out why. I believe the Queen was reaching out to lure in someone whose imagination and will was more powerful than Anna’s—and who has more imagination and will than children?”

“Sarah and Jake,” I whisper, and Uncle Jasper nods.

“We don’t have long now. We have to rescue them before they **succumb** to the Queen’s illusions completely and are lost to us, like Anna.”

Anna. That name flickers in my mind, tickling some memory I can’t quite grasp. Then, the realization slams into me: “Anna is Sarah’s mom,” I say.



Glossary

abscond (<i>v.</i>)	to escape or run away in secret; to steal something and escape or run away (p. 13)
begrudge (<i>v.</i>)	to believe someone does not deserve or has not earned something (p. 4)
commenced (<i>v.</i>)	began or started (p. 9)
domicile (<i>n.</i>)	a home or a place where someone lives (p. 4)
eloquent (<i>adj.</i>)	simple, powerful, and elegant in speech or writing (p. 8)
embellishment (<i>n.</i>)	a special detail or decoration that increases the appeal or attractiveness of something (p. 5)
empathetic (<i>adj.</i>)	having or showing the ability to understand another person’s feelings and experiences (p. 9)
frolicked (<i>v.</i>)	played with great excitement, enjoyment, or energy (p. 5)
impudence (<i>n.</i>)	the state or quality of being rude or not showing respect (p. 11)
plight (<i>n.</i>)	an unfortunate or terrible situation (p. 9)
reconnaissance (<i>n.</i>)	the act of exploring and gaining information (p. 13)
succumb (<i>v.</i>)	to give in to or no longer resist something (p. 15)