Pellinore sighed and cleared the chess board for the fifteenth time. He was hot, he was uncomfortable, and he had just lost fifteen games straight to Charles, his butler. Pellinore suddenly looked up from the table.

“What, again?”

“Afraid so, m’lord.”

“Say, where’s Fenton?”

“I believe the boy is outside, m’lord, playing with your dog, Barney.”

“I believe the boy is outside, m’lord, playing with your dog, Barney.”

“What? With Barney?”

“Yes, m’lord.”

“I've got to see this.”

Pellinore was quite fond of Fenton. He had met the boy a few months ago while on the hunt for his hereditary quarry, the Questing Beast. Other heirs received money or estates; Pellinore received a Beast. He was not one to complain, however, at least not out loud, and he faithfully spent all the vacation time he could grasp chasing the elusive animal throughout England. In fact, that was exactly what he was doing the day he came across Fenton. The two had grown together through one misadventure after another and quickly became the best of friends.

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Pellinore, still wearing his slippers, which were large, fluffy ones with rabbit ears (and didn’t suit him at all), shuffled out the door. He stood on his porch and found, to his delight, that Fenton was indeed playing with the enthusiastic, yet not overly bright, Barney. The game was fetch, and Barney was taking to it wholeheartedly. The source of Pellinore’s amusement was that whenever something was thrown to Barney, he would always eagerly return with something totally different. Fenton stared at Barney's latest find.

“No, no,” he said desperately. “I threw a stick. This is . . . some sort of metal twisty thing. Fetch the stick, OK?”

Barney nodded understandingly, then barked in a sort of universal dogspeak meaning, “Yeah, whatever. Just throw the darn thing.”

Fenton hurled the corkscrew into the bushes, and Barney charged after it. For a while, nothing came out of the bush except some muttering and cursing. Then Barney burst free again, this time with a gnarled staff in his mouth. Pursuing him was a disheveled, irate wizard.

By Matthew Roessing

This story represents chapter two of an ongoing work by Matthew Roessing, “The Questing Beast.” Part one, also called “The Questing Beast,” appears in the book Eighth Grade, part of the American Teen Writer Series.
“Merlyn!” shouted Pellinore. The ragtag wizard stopped his pursuit and swiveled around.

“Pellinore! Haven’t seen you in ages! You better get your dog away from my staff. There’s no telling what may happen!”

Barney had retreated to the far end of the garden with Merlyn’s staff, which he began to gnaw on. There was a flash of light; then Barney’s coat traveled through every color of the spectrum until it came to rest on deep purple, and stayed there. Merlyn quickly retrieved his staff.

It is an interesting phenomenon that humans, when completely shocked, tend to state the obvious. Pellinore was no exception.

“Hey—it turned my dog purple!”

“Don’t worry,” sighed Merlyn. “The color fades in a few hours. In fact, that’s one of my problems.”

“He’s purple! I’ve got a purple dog!” Pellinore gibbered.

Seeing that Pellinore had not yet recovered from his shock, Merlyn talked to the nearest person handy, who happened to be Fenton.

“My magic’s fading, you see, and it’s quite embarrassing.”

In the background a bugle sounded.

“What was that?” cried Fenton.

“Dramatic accompaniment?” suggested Pellinore.

“No, m’lord,” said Charles, coming out of the house with a small trumpet. “Dinner!”

In a fortress far into the Alger Forest, Nylrem sat back comfortably and felt the power course through him. These foolish humans, he sneered. They think they’re so powerful. And here he was, a mere reflection, with power enough to suck the energy out of all of them. This was nothing like before! For centuries he had been trapped, forced to imitate that incompetent Merlyn. Then one day, he had found a way out of his captivity. Soon he would absorb all of Merlyn’s power and become the most powerful wizard ever! Deep in his castle, Nylrem threw back his head and laughed.

Far away in Pellinore’s garden, Merlyn had an overwhelming urge to do the same.

The three sat around Pellinore’s huge table, most of which was laden with food. The monarch was at the head of the table, stuffing himself with—well, with stuffing. Between gulps, he managed to choke out, “Merlyn, by the way, weren’t you saying something?”

—Zac Weiner, Seventh grade, St. Paul’s Episcopal School, Oakland, California

Sunflower

I stand in the sea of the many swaying to the beat of the earth singing to the drum of the rain staring at the face of the sun.

I am part of a chorus of yellow heads on green stalks, a chorus of thousands directed by my conceiver, the sun.

When our conductor steps down we rest our weary heads; but while he stands, the healthy sing and the sick are nourished by our song.
“Oh yes, Pellinore. I was saying that I believe the culprit is—”

“Could someone pass the peas?” Pellinore interrupted. He received them and helped himself to most of the bowl.

“As I was saying,” continued Merlyn, “the culprit is—”

“And the gravy, too,” requested Pellinore. “It’s right by your elbow.”

“As I was saying,” said Merlyn, handing over the gravy, “the culprit is Nylrem.”

He was expecting a big response. He received nothing but the sounds of determined mastication.

“Who?” put in Fenton, who believed something was expected of him.

“Nylrem,” repeated Merlyn. “It’s kind of confusing to explain. He sort of eats my magic.”

A voice floated down from the head of the table.

“Speaking of eating, could someone pass the bread?”

After dinner, the three retired to the study, where Merlyn began his story, interrupted only by occasional reports from Pellinore’s digestive system.

“Nylrem is a reflection,” Merlyn began. “My reflection. Everyone has one, but most people never realize that a reflection is a living being. I’m afraid mine has upped and run away!”

Pellinore and Fenton nodded sagely, despite the fact that they had no clue what Merlyn was talking about.

“Look here,” said Merlyn as he strode before the full-length mirror in the corner of the study. Instead of

![A mirror isn’t a world. It’s a piece of glass backed by mercury. You can’t go inside it—the only problem being that King Pellinore was inside the mirror.](image)

a reflection, there was nothing. Just a blank space where a second Merlyn should have been. Pellinore walked over and stood next to him. Now a mirror Pellinore shared the surface with the blank area. Pellinore began to realize how serious the situation was.

“Wow!” he observed.

“Right now, Nylrem is sucking my magic. I only hope we can stop him before he gets too powerful.”

“What can we do?” queried Fenton, who felt it was time he contributed to the conversation.

“I have a plan,” said Merlyn, as he stepped, one foot at a time, into the mirror. It parted like water. Pellinore shrugged and took a step forward, following Merlyn; Fenton, feeling totally confused, brought up the rear.

Out in the yard, Barney looked up at the sky. Dark clouds were gathering. These were not thunderclouds, Barney noted, but thick, red-green clouds of magic. He saw the terrible forms spiraling down to earth near Alger Forest. You can’t leave stuff like this up to the humans, he thought. By the time they noticed, it would be too late. Sometimes a dog has to stand on his own four feet. This in mind, he took off for Merlyn’s house.

Pellinore peered into the silvery, glittering world. This can’t be right, he thought. A mirror isn’t a world. It’s a piece of glass backed by mercury. You can’t go inside it! Which is a perfectly normal school of thought, and quite true—the only problem being that Pellinore was inside the mirror, whether he liked it or not. Fenton was thinking pretty much the same thing, but Merlyn’s mind was already too occupied to worry about unimportant details like the laws of physics. He was a man with a mission.

Exactly what that mission was he wasn’t quite sure, but he figured that something would turn up. And sure enough, it did, in the form of a small, bespectacled man sitting at a large desk. In front of him were a notebook and a time clock.

Pellinore walked up to the table and prepared to speak, but the little man seized the initiative.

“Ah, it’s you, Eronillep. You’re late today.” The man took a timecard from his desk and prepared to punch it into the clock.

“Uh . . . I believe there’s been a slight misunderstanding. My name’s Pellinore,” said Pellinore.

“Very funny, Eronillep. This is a joke, right?”

“I’m afraid not, and my name’s Pellinore.”

The little man smiled weakly, then appeared to have reached a decision. “In that case,” he said, “catch!” He threw the clock at Pellinore.

Pellinore reached out and caught it. With his right hand.

“Oh no!” moaned the little man. “What are you doing here?”

Merlyn pushed his way up to the desk.
“You’re not Nylrem, are you?” asked the little man hopefully.

“No.”

“Didn’t think so. Nylrem’s been missing for the last few days. Now I see what’s happened.”

Merlyn told him how Nylrem had been stealing his magic. “I have sensed that Nylrem is somewhere in the Alger Forest, but it’s a long way by foot.”

“That’s not a problem,” said the little man. “This place is a conduit between mirrors. Let’s see,” he said, shuffling through his notebook. “The nearest entrance is right outside the Alger Forest. That’s the most I can do. Just go through that doorway there.” He then returned to his desk, muttering about how much paperwork this was going to cause him. The group shuffled toward the door. It was then that the little man caught sight of Fenton.

“How are you?” he pleaded, waving a card.

“Sorry.”

The man let out a whimper and began scribbling furiously.

Barney burst through the bushes for the second time in this story. However, this was not the neatly trimmed foliage of Pellinore’s house. This was the twisted, gnarled shrubbery of Merlyn’s cottage. Barney ran up to the porch, glanced around quickly, then stood on his hind legs and knocked. There was a barking from within, which Barney echoed, and the door to the musty house swung open.

The silvery glass of the mirror parted and a large man squeezed through, a man wearing pink bunny slippers, chewing a chicken leg, and calling, “Hello? Anybody home?”

Pellinore chucked his denuded chicken leg as Merlyn helped Fenton out of the mirror.

“Where are we, anyway?” Pellinore asked.

Merlyn took a look outside, seeing only a cottage backed by very tall trees. “It seems that we’re right outside the Alger Forest.”

Pellinore looked outside as well. “Yep, looks like you’re right.”

There was a pause.

“Yes,” remarked Fenton, who was feeling left out.

There was a longer pause, interrupted by an embarrassed silence.

“Yeah,” supplied Pellinore.
or, which proceeded to smash the cottage into fire-wood. Missed! He could feel the power, all right, and he could use it, but control was difficult. He was like a child, playing with paper boats all his life, who had suddenly been given a battleship. But once he learned how to sail... Merlyn and his friends had better watch out!

Pellinore stood and dusted himself off. Fenton rose tentatively as Merlyn crawled out of a ditch.

“Well, that was a close shave,” remarked Pellinore cheerfully. “A sort of rare event. You don’t usually have gigantic rocks rolling at you from nowhere.” He looked suspiciously at the other two. “Well, at least I don’t.”

“That was no accident,” declared Merlyn. “That was Nylrem, using his new power. It’s a good thing he’s not used to it or we would have been squashed flat. We’d better hurry.”

“Um... how?” asked Pellinore, looking at the dense growth of the Alger Forest. “I don’t see a path!”

“How about this one?” called Fenton. He was standing by a neat, well-defined trail that snaked through the woods. On the road was a sign: THIS WAY TO THE CASTLE OF THE EVIL REFLECTION NYLREM.

Below these words was a large red arrow pointing into the forest.

“Do you think it’s a trap?” asked Pellinore.

“Probably,” replied Merlyn, “but what choice do we have?”

Pellinore shrugged and followed him into the woods, leaving Fenton to tag along behind.

Nylrem watched their progress with pleasure. When they were far away, he was not able to affect them, but the closer they came, the more power he had. In the meantime, he could work on refining this newfound power. Selecting a pointy hat from his hat rack, he thrust his hand into it and pulled out a frog.

This is going to take some work, Nylrem reflected.

Harry concentrated. “Mirror. Reflect... reflection. Reflection? Reflection!”

Barney panted as he contemplated his next sentence. Harry sighed and sat in a chair.

They had been traveling for a while in the forest, and Pellinore was growing bored.

“So, Merlyn,” he said, “what is this plan you have?”

“Well, actually I was hoping something would occur to me as we walked along.”

“And?”

“Nothing yet.”

They walked on in silence.

“Well, you better think fast,” said Pellinore, “because I believe that this is our destination.”

And, sure enough, the path was intersected by a lean, tall castle about twenty paces distant, its drawbridge protruding like a tongue. A gigantic billboard proclaimed: THE CASTLE OF THE EVIL REFLECTION NYLREM.

The parapet was draped with a banner that stated, in bright pink letters: WELCOME, MERLYN, PELLINORE, AND FETON!

In smaller letters underneath, it said: FREE FOOD.

“Free food!” exclaimed Pellinore. “Maybe this Nylrem guy isn’t so bad after all!”

Fenton didn’t share his enthusiasm. “Hey, what gives? He spelled my name wrong!”

Only Merlyn seemed puzzled. “I’m getting a bad feeling about this.”

Nylrem watched from his tower. Maybe he had overdone it a little. Oh well, they were here, and that was all that mattered. It would take them some time to get inside, so there was time for more practice. He reached into the hat again and pulled out a squirrel.

No, wrong color... shorter tail... the ears must be longer! He groped in the hat and this time a rabbit popped out. Ah... that was more like it. Nylrem, as all diabolical villains are bound to do at least once in a story, threw back his head and cackled.

“What was that for?” asked Pellinore.

“What?” said Merlyn.

“The way you laughed just now,” explained Fenton. “It sounded... scary.”

“I really don’t know what came over me,” said Merlyn.

Pellinore looked up at the smooth stone of the castle. “Well,” he said, “we could try a siege.”

Merlyn glared at him. “I don’t think so. What we need now is a brilliant master plan. A stroke of genius.”

“Actually,” Fenton contributed, “I have a plan.”

“Yes, what we need is a stroke of genius,” agreed Pellinore. “However, we are a little bit short of gen-
ius at the moment, if you haven’t noticed.”

“Yes, it’s a shame,” interrupted Merlyn. “If only we could think of something.”

“Excuse me!”

Merlyn and Pellinore turned to Fenton.

“Yes?” they said simultaneously, then glared suspiciously at each other.

“I was just saying,” said Fenton, “that I have a plan.”

“Well, spit it out, then,” said Pellinore impatiently. Fenton told them.

“That’s it?” asked Pellinore incredulously.

“That,” said Merlyn, “is very stupid.”

“Well, just hold on a minute, Merlyn,” argued Pellinore. “It just might work. After all, he’d never expect it.”

Nylrem rolled up his sleeves and prepared to unleash a blast of energy that would destroy that meddling Merlyn and his blundering friends forever when he heard a knock at the door. He listened, in case he had heard wrong. Another tentative knock. No, that wasn’t right! Castle storming was an art. You couldn’t just knock at the door! That was . . . wrong! Again the knock. Mostly out of shock, Nylrem walked down the winding tower staircase.

“Coming!” he shouted, surprised at himself. He reached the main floor, walked to the door, and opened it. “Yes?”

Nylrem looked at Pellinore, standing there badly disguised in a false beard made from leaves. What did the fool think he was doing? Nylrem could have blasted him on the spot, but curiosity won out.

“Package for you, sir.”

Nylrem stared at Pellinore, open-mouthed. Was he serious? Did he really think that—Nylrem got because Merlyn had snuck up from behind and whacked him on the back of the head with his staff. The last sound Nylrem heard as he sank into unconsciousness was Merlyn’s amazed voice saying, “Well, what do you know? It worked!”

Nylrem grunted as he hauled Nylrem’s inert body onto his shoulder. Then the party of four stepped into the full-length mirror in Nylrem’s tower. The silvery glass parted—for the last time.

Barney awoke and glanced suspiciously at the mirror on the floor which suddenly sprouted bunny slippers. He cocked his head in confusion until the rest of Pellinore tumbled out. Barney barked happily. Merlyn looked around his house.

“This place sure is a mess,” he said, observing the various objects strewn about the room. “What have you two been up to? Having a little sleepover, ay?” said Pellinore, patting Barney’s head. “Where were you guys when we needed you? Why didn’t you come and rescue us?”

Barney winked at no one in particular, then rolled over so Pellinore could scratch his stomach. Harry merely grunted. ★

The Beowulf Syndrome

On the greatness of the world’s beach
A billion specks of sand under darkened sky
Are made into lives of men
By my hands, with time out of reach
And we build cities, wars, and streets
Roads that circle and run
Only to turn on themselves
Biting their own tails, forgettable feats
A castle of sand, damp and unkissed
We crawl importantly, here and there
The waves out of sight
Like unseen fetters on the wrist
Those white-bellied waves chase to meet
Racing to our castle and vacuum words, devouring
In roiling patterns of gray matter
Leaving smooth expanses in their retreat
We have renounced the covenant once more
The sands as flat as Heorot’s shadows
Crabs sidling in men’s vanishing footprints
Now there lives not even the richest of our poor.

—Cynthia Cheung,
Twelfth grade, Bartlesville High School,
Bartlesville, Oklahoma