

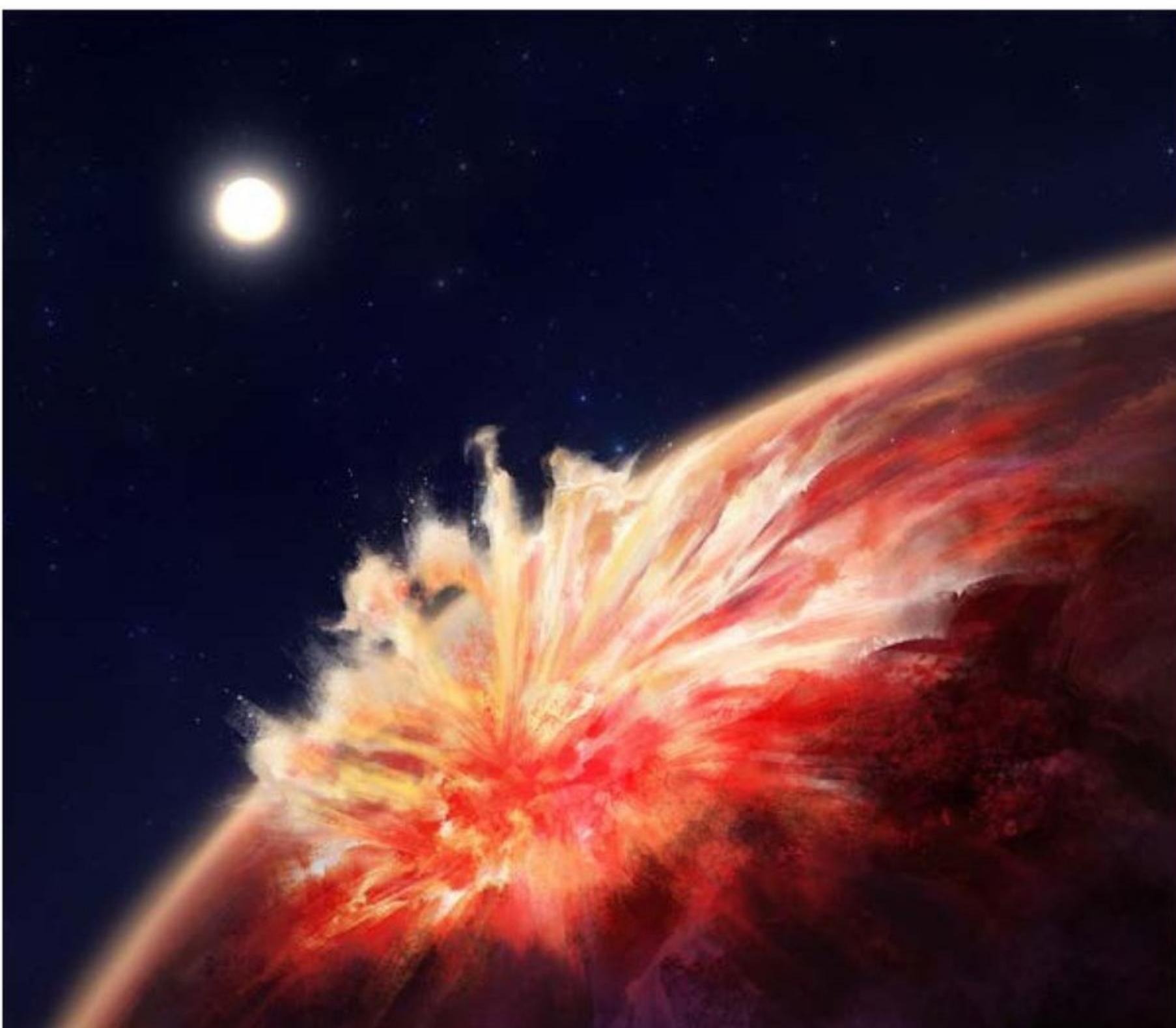
LEVELED BOOK • Z²

Alien Collective I: Resistance

MULTI
LEVEL
Z•Z¹•Z²

Written by Rus Buyok • Illustrated by Toma Feizo Gas

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Focus Question

What is the Alien Collective, and why is the Resistance fighting it?

Words to Know

annihilation
bioengineered
brainwash
cells
collaborating
colonization

ecosystem
invasion
microorganism
rhetoric
submit
traumatic

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Level Z2 Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL Z2	
Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+

Destruction. Annihilation. Pain. Sorrow. The images flooded Charlotte's brain: a once lush verdant planet filled with amazing, strange creatures transformed into a charred desert when one experiment set its entire atmosphere on fire.

Images of another world, this one covered with violet-tinged seas, at the bottom of which advanced, peaceful civilizations flourished. The sea was their home, their livelihood, and ultimately, their power source. Huge factories grown from organisms that resembled coral vented clouds of seemingly harmless gases that became an abundant food source for a class of **microorganism** few had studied. By the time the inhabitants realized that a complex food chain was turning the water toxic, it was too late.

A planet buried in trash. Another wiped out by **bioengineered** disease. Wars. Famine. Nearly infinite scenarios of obliteration played out again and again in Charlotte's mind like a horrifying movie.

How were the aliens doing this to her? The pain was excruciating and didn't seem to end.

To her, the aliens' message was clear: **submit** and change—or die.



Two days earlier, Charlotte was stuffing her pack with provisions for the raid on the *Streeds*, what the Resistance called the Sterilization and Re-education Centers. The coordinated effort involved Resistance **cells** around the world, all planning to attack the structures at the same time.

This was the first time the Resistance was attempting a military effort of this scale, and Charlotte wouldn't miss it for anything—even if her father refused to let her leave the compound.

"It's my responsibility to keep you safe," he had argued. "You're not going."

It took less than a minute to pry her bedroom window open and even less time to bypass the security system with a paper clip and some gum. Once outside, she crept low across the dark lawn, though she didn't really need to. Her father would be in Mr. Morrison's basement, a fallout shelter built in the 1950s, watching live video of the raid, looking for moments of heroism to use later.

Names would be made tonight, legends created, and Charlotte wasn't one to sit on the sidelines. Sure, she was only fifteen, but she had aspirations. One day, she would be in the videos her father made, using her heroism to convince people to fight the alien **invasion**.

She vaulted over the old, creaky gate before sprinting down the alley to the designated meeting point behind the Mr. Tire shop's dumpster. Sam was nowhere to be seen.

Moments later, however, he skidded into the darkness behind the dumpster.

"Took you long enough," Charlotte whispered.

"Tell me about it," Sam grumbled. "I had to wait until Mom was engrossed in her shows."

"I was starting to think maybe you'd chickened out." Charlotte gave Sam a playful push.

"We need to move or we'll miss everything," Sam urged. "The strike force is leaving through the east gate, but the auxiliary force is going out the north gate. If we stay with them, I don't think anyone will notice us."

Sam's dad was a muckety-muck high up in the Resistance who organized the home arsenals and vehicles that made up the military wing. He was in Mr. Morrison's basement, too, most likely issuing commands.

Charlotte nodded, and Sam bolted into the street, trying to keep to the shadows. Charlotte took a deep breath and followed him.



I'm sorry, Charlotte heard in her mind. It wasn't her voice, though, or one she recognized. She opened her eyes and blinked away the blurriness. Her head throbbed intensely, as if her brain were trying to burst out of her skull.

She was on a bed in a stark, clean room the color of fresh celery. A glowing ball near the ceiling provided a bright but pleasant light.

I know you're in a great deal of pain, but you can find comfort in knowing the first procedure was a success. The voice came again, but this time she could somehow tell it was coming from her right. Turning her head was excruciating. *You are now partially connected to the Collective Link.*

Standing just out of arm's reach from the bed was what she could only think of as a lizard person who observed her with its head slightly cocked, almost like a confused dog. It wore a long bright-red robe with small gold baubles dangling noiselessly from its sleeves.

"Lizard person" is somewhat accurate, the voice said, or even "lizard man," since I am male. Given your realm of experience, I can understand the comparison.

"What's happening?" Charlotte croaked. Her throat was painfully dry. "How are you talking in my head?"

The Collective Link has many useful applications, the creature explained. Species from all over the galaxy are part of the Collective, and it would be impossible, given the infinite variations of evolution, for all of us to communicate with sound. The original races developed the link as a way to translate meaning.

The explanation was dumped into Charlotte's mind like a high-speed download, and it took her a moment to sort it out. Painfully, she came to the realization that if she was talking with an alien, they must have captured her.

She tried to sit up, but her arms and legs were strapped to the bed somehow—she couldn't lift them more than a few inches. The pain in her head was so bad when she did move that she quickly gave up. The alien ignored her struggle and kept talking in her head. His tone was almost like someone talking to a small child.

The system is complex. In simple terms, I send my intended meaning to you over the link, and the link uses established language patterns and meaning structure in your mind to translate my message into something you'll understand. For most humans, because you are exceptionally verbal creatures, it comes through as words, but when you're fully connected, it could also come through as text, images, or even emotions.



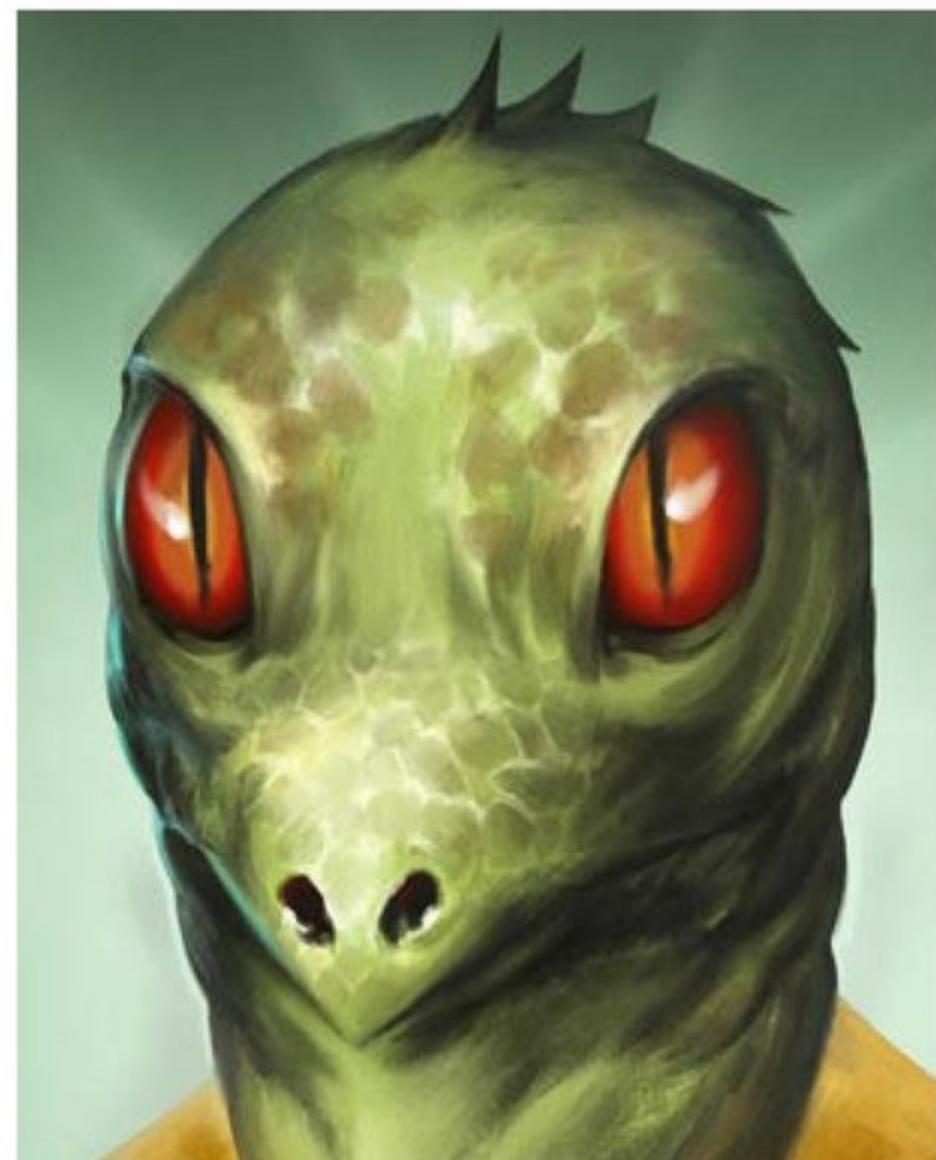
"So you can read my mind?" Charlotte asked.

Not really. I only receive messages you intend to send to me, or that are sent out to anyone who may be listening. It takes some time to get used to it.

How rude of me. I'm— Charlotte's mind was filled with a series of hisses, grunts, and gurgles. *The link doesn't do well with individual names, as the intent and meaning are always so personal. If you'd like, you can give me a name that will help you identify me, though doing so isn't necessary for the link to work. You simply need to think of me.*

The creature's face reminded her of Artie, the lizard her third-grade class had kept as a pet. When it was her turn to take it home and care for it over the weekend, she accidentally forgot about it in the backseat of her dad's SUV, and it froze to death. Her dad made her buy the class a new lizard with her allowance savings. The entire **traumatic** experience had ended any possibility of future pet ownership.

Charlotte looked up and saw an expression of shock on the reptilian face. She apparently had sent the entire memory over the link. Charlotte smiled. The creature composed himself. After a moment, she heard his voice in her mind again. *Artie is a fine name. It's good that you were able to recall that moment. The installation of the link is somewhat traumatic, and the mind has to rewire itself afterward.*



Charlotte tried to bring up other memories, but everything prior to a few minutes ago was a blur, muddled together with the horrible images of destruction and suffering. She tried to piece together what she could: her father, bits of life before the invasion, snippets of the Resistance's compound, gunshots. One overarching emotion colored them all—an intense hatred of these invaders, the Collective.

Don't worry, Artie said, the first procedure is always the worst. The second will be much easier. It will make sense in time.



Sneaking through the north gate was easier than they thought it would be. Charlotte and Sam simply put up the hoods on their sweatshirts and made sure to walk casually past the checkpoint. Anyone watching likely thought they were just another pair of fighters heading out. Once outside, they stayed a little off the road as they shadowed the auxiliary force at a safe distance. They wanted to see the attack with their own eyes, but they had to settle for being observers rather than participants since neither of them had a weapon.

Charlotte and Sam stayed silent as they walked, careful not to draw anyone's attention. Over the long, quiet trek Charlotte's mind wandered to the time before the aliens invaded. She had been a normal teenager, going to school, playing volleyball with friends, eating fast food. Part of her wished she had appreciated it more at the time, but how could she have known alien ships would appear in the sky on her fifteenth birthday, turning the world upside down?

The aliens had used their blue beams to disable all nuclear weapons, power, and other capabilities around the globe, plunging most areas into darkness. Her father said that was the first attack, a warning shot to show how easily they could annihilate the world.

Soon after, world governments began **collaborating** with the invaders, claiming they were forming a partnership that would make humans one of the great civilizations of the galaxy. The aliens provided free, abundant energy in the form of egg-shaped generators about the size of a small car that could somehow power an entire city without any fuel.

In exchange, governments began constructing the Sterilization and Re-education Centers in cities around the world, where all humans were expected to report and register. They also instituted mandatory “Reconstruction Work,” which required people to plant trees, clean up landfills, and perform other tasks the aliens said would “return the Earth to a balanced and healthy **ecosystem**.”

Charlotte’s dad, once a marketing consultant for large corporations, started working on campaigns to convince people that the aliens were really preparing the world for **colonization**. His materials claimed that there were sinister motives behind the aliens’ actions. First, they made humanity dependent upon free, abundant energy. Then they began “culling the herd” through sterilization, reducing the human population to a more manageable size. Re-education was intended to make people accept the aliens’ domination.

According to Charlotte's dad, the aliens were "playing the long game," and in a generation or two, they would be able to simply take over the planet with absolutely no opposition—so the human race needed to fight them while they still could.

That was the beginning of the Resistance. Eventually, her dad moved the family into a compound in the middle of nowhere, filled with hastily built houses powered by old, unreliable generators, where people could be free from alien oppression.

Sam, walking a little ahead, suddenly stopped and crouched down, motioning for her to stop as well. She halted, waiting for something to happen, and when nothing did, she crept carefully forward until she knelt beside him.

There, a ways beyond the edge of the trees, the Streed stood like a mirrored tower, reflecting the lights of the city behind it.

Suddenly, an explosion erupted against the shield on the south side of the tower, filling the night with bright blue light. The attack had begun.



Charlotte drifted in and out of sleep, miserable in both states. Being awake meant a headache more intense than the time she fell out of a shopping cart as a child and suffered a concussion. Sleep meant nightmares of planet after planet, civilization after civilization, being destroyed.

“This is some sort of torture, isn’t it?” she asked Artie when she saw him the next day.

Why do you think that? Artie replied.

“Because my dad—he’s important. I remember he’s important to the Resistance.”

Good, your memories are returning. What else do you remember?

Charlotte glared at him, projecting an image of a locked vault.

You’re making very good progress with the link. Artie smiled, an odd upturning of the scaled lips on either side of his snout that looked more menacing than kind. *No, we are not torturing you. The pain you’re suffering is unavoidable, unfortunately, but I assure you it will end soon. Your brain is processing the Collective’s experience—or at least part of it. It’s an incredible amount of information.*

"I understand what you're trying to do, but your threats won't get me to collaborate with you," Charlotte snapped.

There is a threat, but not in the way you're thinking. I assure you, we pose no danger to humans or Earth—in fact, the opposite is true. We're trying to save you from yourselves.

"I don't believe you. You're just trying to **brainwash** me into helping you and betraying my species like all the other collaborators. It won't work. I know what you really are—invaders, conquerors, colonizers."

I see you've remembered some of the Resistance's rhetoric. Your recovery is going well. We should be able to perform the second procedure soon.

Charlotte tried to jump out of bed, but her bonds held. She struggled with all her strength, and when they didn't give, she spit at her captor.

Artie simply nodded and left the room.





After the first explosion, the attack began in earnest as bullets and rocket-propelled grenades impacted the shields in dazzling blue light. The main force concentrated its fire on the south side of the tower, while a small team of five from the auxiliary force flanked the north side. Though they all carried weapons, they held their fire, instead sneaking up to the tower as if it were a slumbering beast. Then, one by one, with a flash of blue light, they passed through the shield and onto the grounds.

"We can get in there!" Charlotte gasped. Before Sam could reply, she sprinted across the open area, keeping close to the ground, heading toward the point where the soldiers had passed through the shield.

She reached the shield at a full run, expecting to pass through it as they had. Instead, she felt a flash of pain and a tingling sensation all over her body, as if she were sticking her tongue on a battery. Everything went dark.

Glossary

annihilation (<i>n.</i>)	the total destruction of something or someone (p. 3)
bioengineered (<i>adj.</i>)	modified using biological scientific methods that result in new versions of life forms (p. 3)
brainwash (<i>v.</i>)	to change a person's ideas or beliefs using force or persuasion (p. 14)
cells (<i>n.</i>)	small groups of people that work independently and often secretly within a network or organization (p. 4)
collaborating (<i>v.</i>)	assisting or cooperating with enemy forces in times of war (p. 11)
colonization (<i>n.</i>)	the act of taking control over a new territory for one's own use (p. 11)
ecosystem (<i>n.</i>)	a community of living things together with their habitat (p. 11)
invasion (<i>n.</i>)	the act of crossing a boundary aggressively to conquer, weaken, or injure (p. 4)
microorganism (<i>n.</i>)	a microscopic organism, such as a virus or single bacterial cell (p. 3)
rhetoric (<i>n.</i>)	persuasive speech or writing (p. 14)
submit (<i>v.</i>)	to give in to someone or something more powerful; to give in to a difficult situation (p. 3)
traumatic (<i>adj.</i>)	very damaging or disturbing, either mentally or physically (p. 8)

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A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book

Word Count: 2,380

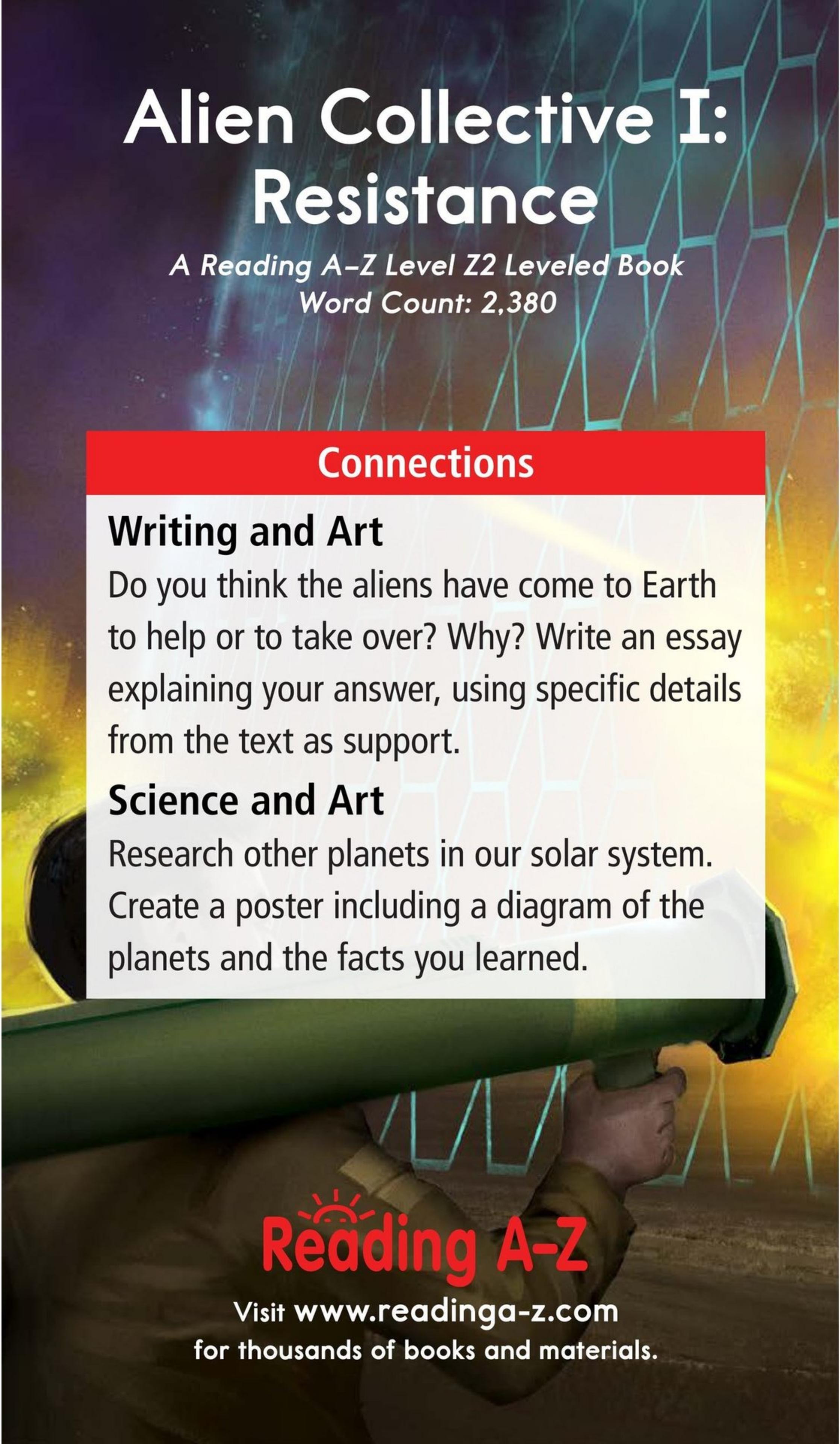
Connections

Writing and Art

Do you think the aliens have come to Earth to help or to take over? Why? Write an essay explaining your answer, using specific details from the text as support.

Science and Art

Research other planets in our solar system. Create a poster including a diagram of the planets and the facts you learned.



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