

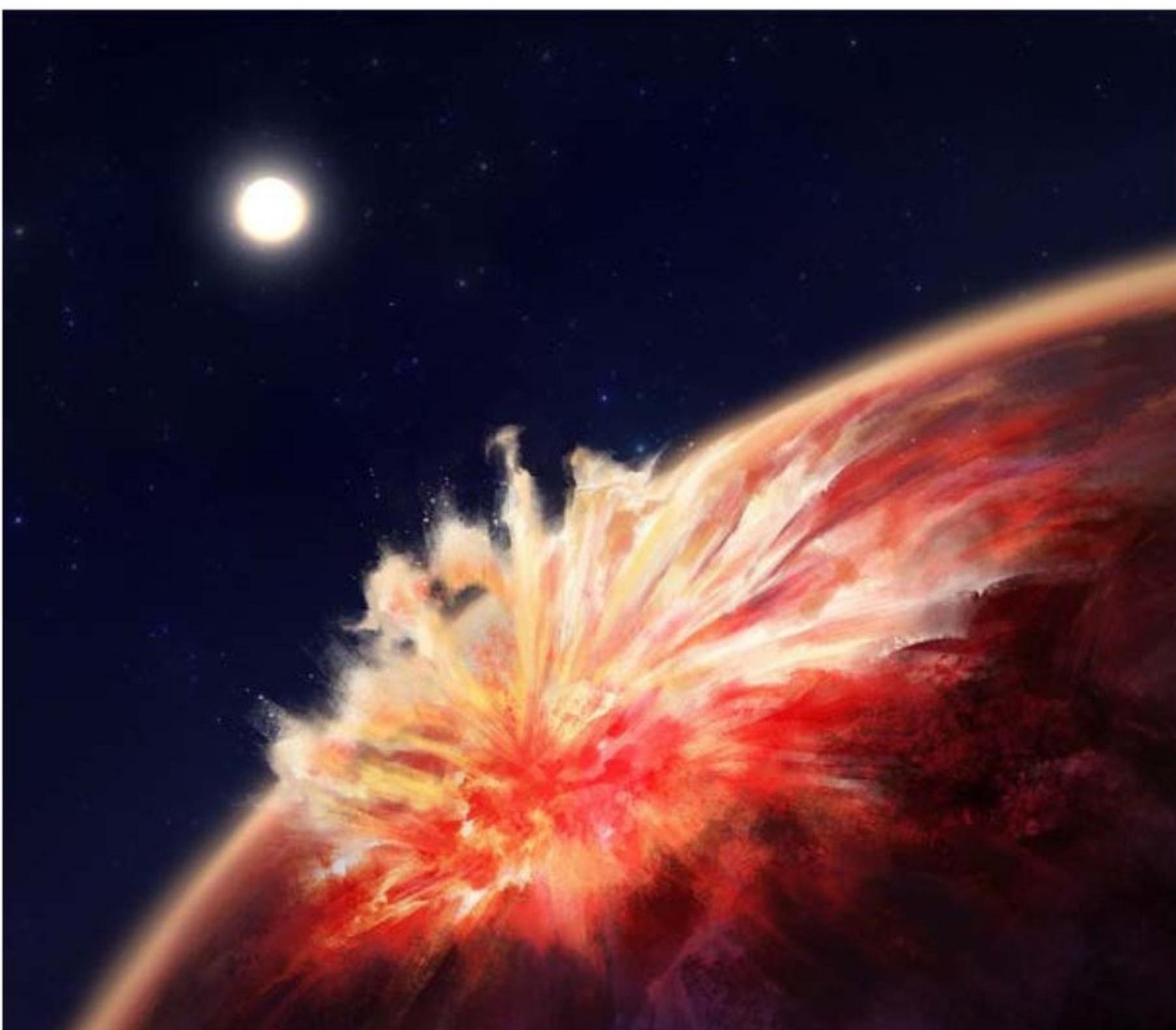
LEVELED BOOK • Z<sup>1</sup>

# Alien Collective I: Resistance

MULTI  
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Z•Z<sup>1</sup>•Z<sup>2</sup>

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  
reptilian  
submit  
traumatic

Alien Collective I: Resistance  
Level Z1 Leveled Book  
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### Correlation

LEVEL Z1	
Fountas & Pinnell	W-X
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	60

Destruction. Annihilation. Pain. Sorrow. The images flooded Charlotte's brain: a lush green planet filled with amazing creatures destroyed when an experiment set its entire atmosphere on fire.

Images of another world, one with advanced civilizations living beneath violet seas. The ocean was their home, their livelihood, and ultimately, their power source. Huge factories grown from organisms that resembled coral released clouds of seemingly harmless gases. The gases became the main food source for a class of **microorganism** few had studied. By the time the inhabitants discovered 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 destruction played out again and again in Charlotte's mind like a horrifying movie.

How were the aliens doing this to her? The pain was horrible 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 effort involved many Resistance **cells** around the world attacking the sinister structures at the same time.

This was the first time the Resistance was attempting a military effort of this scale. 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. Her father would be in Mr. Morrison's basement, a bomb shelter built in the 1950s. He'd be 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 a goal. One day, she would be in the online 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 meeting point behind the Mr. Tire shop's dumpster. Sam was nowhere to be seen.

Moments later, however, he came tearing around the corner, skidding into the darkness behind the dumpster.

"Took you long enough," Charlotte whispered.

"I had to wait until Mom was glued to her TV shows," Sam grumbled.

"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 backup force is going out the north gate. If we stay with the backup force, I don't think anyone will notice us."

Sam's dad was a leader in the Resistance's 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. Her head throbbed, as if her brain were trying to burst out of her skull.

She was on a bed in a stark, clean room. 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 painful. *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.

*"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 uses, the creature said. Species from all over the galaxy are part of the Collective. It would be impossible 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 a moment to sort it out. Painfully, she realized 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.



*In simple terms, I send my intended meaning to you over the link, and the link translates my message into something you'll understand. For most humans 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 want 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. 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. It had been her turn to take it home and care for it over one 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 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. *Artie is a fine name*, his voice said in her mind. *It's good that you were able to remember 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, mixed 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, the Resistance 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 shadowed the backup force at a safe distance. They wanted to see the attack with their own eyes, but neither of them had a weapon.

Charlotte and Sam stayed silent as they walked, careful not to draw anyone's attention. 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?

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 destroy the world.

Soon afterward, 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 energy sources 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. The governments also required people to do “Reconstruction Work”—planting trees, cleaning up landfills, and performing other tasks. The aliens said the work would “return the Earth to a balanced and healthy **ecosystem**.”

Charlotte’s dad, once a marketer 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 energy. Then, they began using sterilization to reduce the human population to a more manageable size. Re-education was a way to make people accept the aliens’ eventual rule.

According to Charlotte's dad, the aliens were "playing the long game." In time, 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. 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 control.

Sam suddenly stopped and crouched down, waving 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. Being awake meant an intense headache. 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. The way his scaled lips turned up made his face look more menacing than kind.  
*No, we are not torturing you. The pain you're suffering 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 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 labels. 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 real attack began. Bullets and rocket-propelled grenades struck the shields in dazzling blue light. As the main force focused its fire on the south side of the tower, a small team of five from the backup force flanked the north side. Though they all carried weapons, they didn't fire. Instead, they snuck up to the tower. 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

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

# Alien Collective I: Resistance

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book

Word Count: 2,208

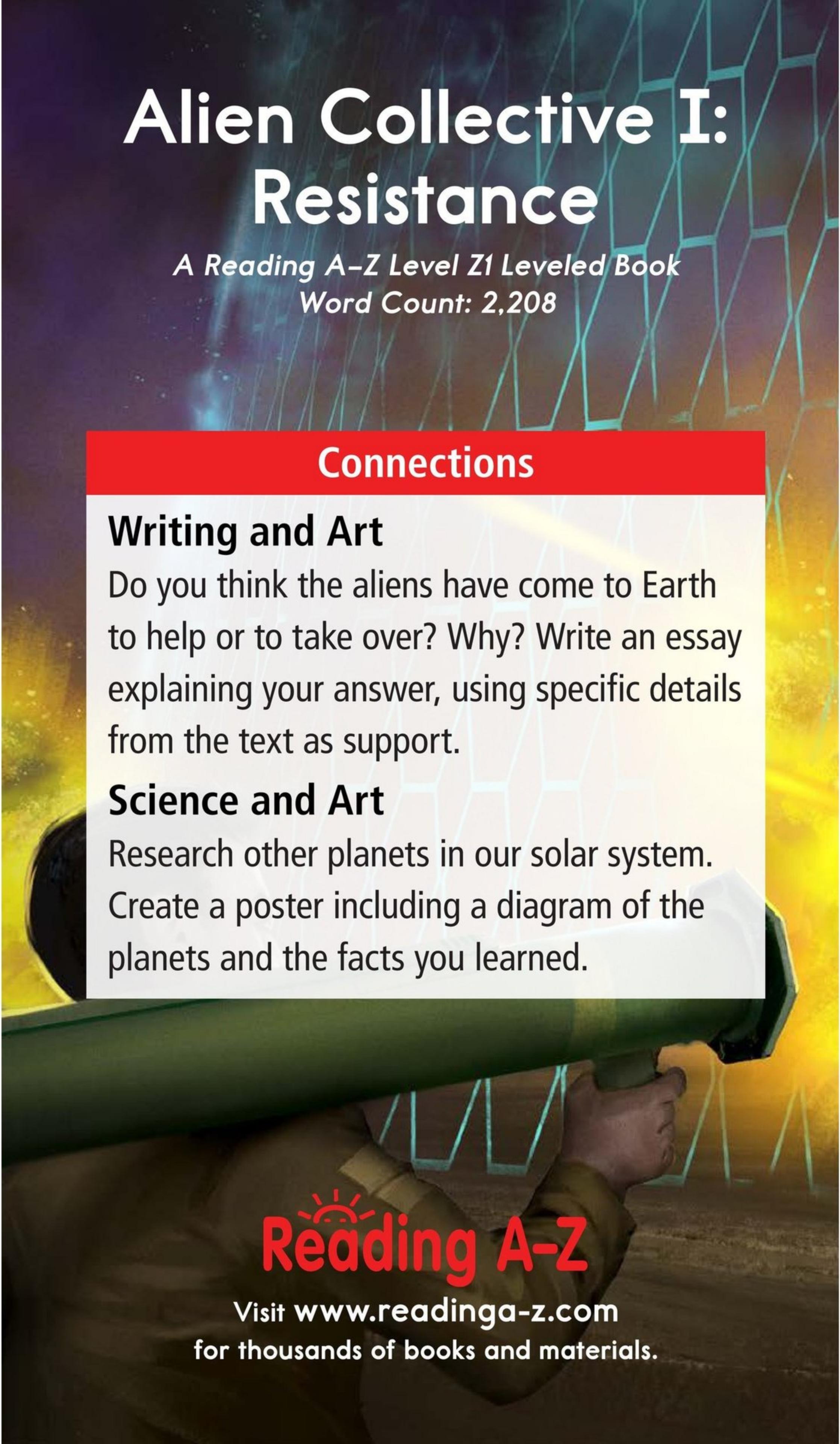
## Connections

### 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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