

Alien Collective II: The Link

A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,253

LEVELED BOOK • Z

Alien Collective II: The Link

Connections

Writing

Do you think the Collective has the right to intervene on Earth to stop it from destroying itself? Why or why not? Use details from the text to support your answer.

Science

Earth is the only planet in our solar system known to have life. Research the other planets and write a report about why they would not be habitable for human life.

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**Multi
level
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Focus Question

Who should Charlotte trust, Artie or the Resistance? Why do you think that?

Words to Know

Arbor Day	intergalactic
billion	nursery
breakthroughs	perspective
clinic	saplings
consumption	technology
habitable	transitions

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Level Z Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL Z

Fountas & Pinnell	U-V
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	50

Charlotte wasn't sure how long she had been in the room. It had no windows and only two doors. She found that she could get out of bed and walk around when Artie wasn't there. She couldn't open the door that led outside, though.

The other door led to a small bathroom with a shower. She slept often, and when she woke, food would be waiting on a small shelf in the corner. Sometimes she woke to find herself unable to move, which meant Artie was there for one of their chats.

I remember everything now, Charlotte thought, focusing on Artie. It was the first time she had tried to talk using the Collective Link. Her head still hurt, but the pain had gone down enough to think more clearly over the last few . . . days?

Do you now? Artie's voice appeared in her mind.

Where are you? Charlotte asked, walking around her room.

Not far. Would you like to come out of your room and chat?

Charlotte felt excited at the thought of getting out of the room. Maybe she could find a way to escape.

Something that sounded like a chuckle echoed in her mind.

When you leave your room, Artie said, *head down the hallway to your right. You'll find me in the observation room at the end.*

The door slid open as she drew near. She squinted in the bright sunlight from the wall of windows on the other side. Outside, she saw green hills dotted with trees and a small city rising up in the distance. She realized that she must be in the tower that the Resistance had attacked. If she could get out, she could make her way back to the compound in less than a day.

In the empty hallway, she turned to her left and moved quickly toward the doorway at the end.

As she came close, the large door slid open. A flash of blue light covered the opening. It tingled when she pressed her hand against it and was as solid as steel. She wouldn't be getting out that way.

She turned around and made her way past her room again and down the hallway. As she walked, she passed a few other small doors that didn't open. She wondered if the aliens were doing tests on other prisoners as well.

At the end of the hall, she came to another large door that opened. She reached out with her hand to feel for a shield, but it passed through easily.

The windows continued inside the room. To her left, she could still see the hills and grass. Artie was standing with his back to her, still wearing the same red robes. The alien didn't move when she entered. He was staring at the bright white room beyond the windows.

As Charlotte drew closer, she saw rows and rows of small black pots filled with dark, rich soil. Those at the bottom had tiny green shoots sticking up, and the plants grew larger in each higher row.

*What do you think of our little **nursery**?* Artie asked.

Charlotte didn't respond.



This area used to be covered with trees like these. They are native to this part of the country, but we made a few changes. The trees now grow faster, live longer, and remove more pollution from the air. Artie smiled proudly at Charlotte.

"I'm sure the next **Arbor Day** celebration will be a real blast, thanks to you," she said. For some reason, speaking out loud seemed like a form of protest.

With a grunt, Artie turned and walked to the right side of the room. The rolling hills stretched into the distance, but the grass ended at a line of burnt trees. The ground beyond the trees was scorched, and large craters dotted the hillside. The destruction ended abruptly in front of the building, where the blue shield must have stood.

Nearly fifty humans died in the Resistance attack on this tower, Artie said sadly. *Many others died or were injured in other places around the world.*

"How many were Resistance?" Charlotte asked.

What difference does it make? You're all humans, all members of the same species.

"The people working with you are traitors. While it's sad that they died, it was necessary for the cause of freedom."

You repeat your father's words well, Charlotte, but I wonder if you truly believe them.

"Of course I do," she said. "Remember, I've seen what you've done. Thousands upon thousands of worlds destroyed in so many ways. It's terrible, and you're not going to do that to Earth."

Artie flashed his awkward smile. *I think you need to search those experiences again to see what really happened.*

Charlotte again saw images of destroyed civilizations in her mind. The number of them made it difficult to focus. She tried again and again, but she couldn't find what she was looking for. Nothing showed that the Collective had actually caused any of the destruction she was seeing. That didn't prove anything, however.

*Planets with life are rare, but the universe is so big that it has vast numbers of them. This galaxy alone has more than one hundred **billion** planets similar to your own. It's only now, however, that your species is making contact with beings from another world. Artie's voice echoed in her brain. Why do you think that is?*

Charlotte found it a little hard to speak with so much destruction running through her mind again. At last she said, "Too far."

*That's a good starting point. Getting to space requires a certain level of **technology**, and traveling between stars is even more difficult. Still, with so many worlds out there, why didn't some of them contact Earth before the Collective?*

Charlotte shook her head and wiped tears from her cheeks. She was still upset from what she had just seen and felt. Artie gave her a disappointed look, as if he had expected more from her.

*It's really very simple: they destroy themselves. Coming up with new technologies isn't that hard. Learning to use them safely and responsibly is the real challenge. **Breakthroughs** in science are extremely dangerous. You've seen many examples of what can go wrong.*

Charlotte let go of the experiences, feeling the terrible destruction fade to the back of her mind. "You're saying we should all just hug Earth and each other?"

Artie let out a low growl that she realized was a laugh. *That does sound rather sappy, doesn't it? Really, though, your species just needs to stop being so selfish.*

"I've been kidnapped by alien tree huggers," Charlotte groaned.

We're trying to help your species as it **transitions** into an advanced **intergalactic** civilization.

"You didn't really ask if we wanted to transition."

*It was unavoidable. As you know, we've seen this happen many times. It always ends the same way. With your power sources, uncontrolled **consumption**, overpopulation, and complete disregard for the environment, you would have destroyed yourselves. We couldn't allow that.*

"How do you know?" Charlotte snapped.
"Maybe we could have *transitioned* on our own. Besides, who gave you the right to decide? We're free to destroy ourselves if we want."

*There's always a chance of natural transition, yes, but help from the Collective greatly increases the chance of success. You are free to destroy yourselves, except you'd take everything else with you. The loss of any **habitable** planet is a tragedy.*

"So the answer is to surrender, let you take over, and give up our freedom? Just accept that we are your slaves because otherwise there was an off chance we might have blown ourselves up? I'm not sure that's a fair trade."



As they watched, human workers left the tower and began to fan out into the field. Some carried bags of seeds that they scattered in front of them. Others had shovels and **saplings** ready to be planted.

*It's a matter of **perspective**,* Artie said.

"You won't win."

It's not about winning; it's about survival. You may come to see that soon, however. As much as I have enjoyed our talk, you need to return to your room to rest. Tomorrow we'll do the second procedure.



Pain. Darkness. A planet dying. Explosions. Where? People yelling. The Collective landing in ships. Something roaring. Another planet ending.

Charlotte felt herself being lifted off the bed and carried. She tried to fight, but every movement sent waves of pain through her body. There was a burning smell. She tried to open her eyes, but everything was moving and painful, so she closed them again. The Collective was there—all of them.

A moment later, darkness took her.

Charlotte woke to her dad's face looking down on her.

"Morning, sunshine," he said, breaking into a broad smile. Charlotte immediately hugged him.

"How long have I been gone?" she asked as she looked around. She was in one of the rooms at the **clinic** in the compound. The room had light green walls—strangely similar to her room in the Streed. The only real difference was the window along one wall.

"About ten days," he said. "We brought you here three days ago, but you've been out cold the whole time."

Charlotte's head hurt, but not nearly as bad as it had when she woke up in the alien Streed. She couldn't remember much of what happened after her talk with Artie in the observation room. She had returned to her bed and fallen asleep. Had they finished the procedure? The last time, it felt like an avalanche of information, but now she felt almost completely normal.

"Are you feeling okay?" her dad asked.

Charlotte nodded. "Just a bit of a headache, but I'm fine. Hungry."

Her dad laughed. "Of course you are. I'll see if I can get you some food. I'll let the doctors know you're awake," he said and left the room.

Charlotte lay back down and rubbed her temples. Her mind felt clear, as though nothing had ever happened. She examined her thoughts and her memories. Nothing felt jumbled, out of place, or twisted, but would she really know if it were?

Cautiously, she thought about one of the civilizations that had been destroyed: the planet with the violet-tinged ocean. Suddenly the entire Collective's experience rushed into her mind as if she had opened a computer file. The images and information were crisp, clear, and self-contained.

She tried another planet, with the same result, then another. Soon, she was scrolling through them faster than she could have imagined. This time, though, emotions were also there:



pain, fear, anger, and terrible sadness. The amount of information being dumped into her brain made her a bit woozy, so she stopped. Her mind was back to normal again.

She was still thinking about what she had seen when her father returned with something to eat. She quickly forgot about anything else.

"You must be starving," her dad said as she tore into the sandwich and soup. Charlotte just grunted and took another bite.

When she finished, she handed her empty plate and bowl to her dad, suddenly sleepy.

Just then, the door opened and a doctor came in, looking at a chart. "How are you feeling today, Charlotte?" she asked with a fake smile.

"Better," Charlotte replied. "Happy to be home."

The doctor nodded and began her examination, shining lights in Charlotte's eyes and listening to her chest. She poked and prodded without saying a word. When she finished, the doctor said, "I know you're tired, Charlotte. Before you go back to sleep, though, I need you to tell me what happened in the Streed. Did they do anything to you?"

Charlotte looked at her dad and opened her mouth to reply, but stopped. What would they do if she told them the truth? She was now linked to the entire Collective. That could mean they had access to her as well. Would they think she had been brainwashed or turned into a spy for the aliens?

"I don't remember," she lied. "I'm sorry, but I'm really tired. Maybe something will come back to me later."

The doctor was about to speak when her dad said, "Okay, get some sleep. We'll talk later."

The doctor flashed her dad a look, but they both left. Then she heard the door being locked from the outside.

Though she was tired and her head hurt, Charlotte stayed awake. The locked door meant they didn't trust her, but could she blame them? Would she have trusted someone who spent an entire week in an alien Streed? Probably not.

She checked the windows, but they were sealed shut. Could she break the glass without them noticing?

Why was she thinking of escaping? She was safe in the compound, but this room felt more like a prison. Maybe it was just some animal instinct to flee when trapped.

She wasn't going anywhere, so she decided to try and sleep. As she lay in bed, her mind wandered. She found herself thinking about the information she had picked up from the link. She knew that the Collective had not been involved in the destruction of any of the civilizations. Time after time, they had watched what was happening from a distance without stepping in. She didn't know whether that was worse.

The Collective had felt incredibly sad, helpless, and frustrated watching those events unfold. Locked in her room in the Resistance compound, it was a feeling she understood all too well.

Glossary

Arbor Day (<i>n.</i>)	an informal holiday dedicated to planting and caring for trees (p. 6)
billion (<i>n.</i>)	the number represented by the numeral 1,000,000,000 (p. 7)
breakthroughs (<i>n.</i>)	important events or advances in knowledge that move something such as technology, science, or medicine forward (p. 8)
clinic (<i>n.</i>)	a place, often part of a hospital, where patients receive medical care (p. 11)
consumption (<i>n.</i>)	the act of getting and using resources or goods, sometimes to the point of depletion or destruction (p. 9)
habitable (<i>adj.</i>)	capable of supporting life (p. 9)
intergalactic (<i>adj.</i>)	relating to or happening between two or more galaxies (p. 9)
nursery (<i>n.</i>)	a place where young plants are grown to be sold or transplanted elsewhere (p. 5)
perspective (<i>n.</i>)	a person's mental outlook or point of view (p. 10)
saplings (<i>n.</i>)	young trees with slender trunks (p. 10)
technology (<i>n.</i>)	the use of scientific knowledge or tools to make or do something (p. 8)
transitions (<i>v.</i>)	changes from one state, location, or condition to another (p. 9)