

# STARCASTER

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## Exercise 4: Flow

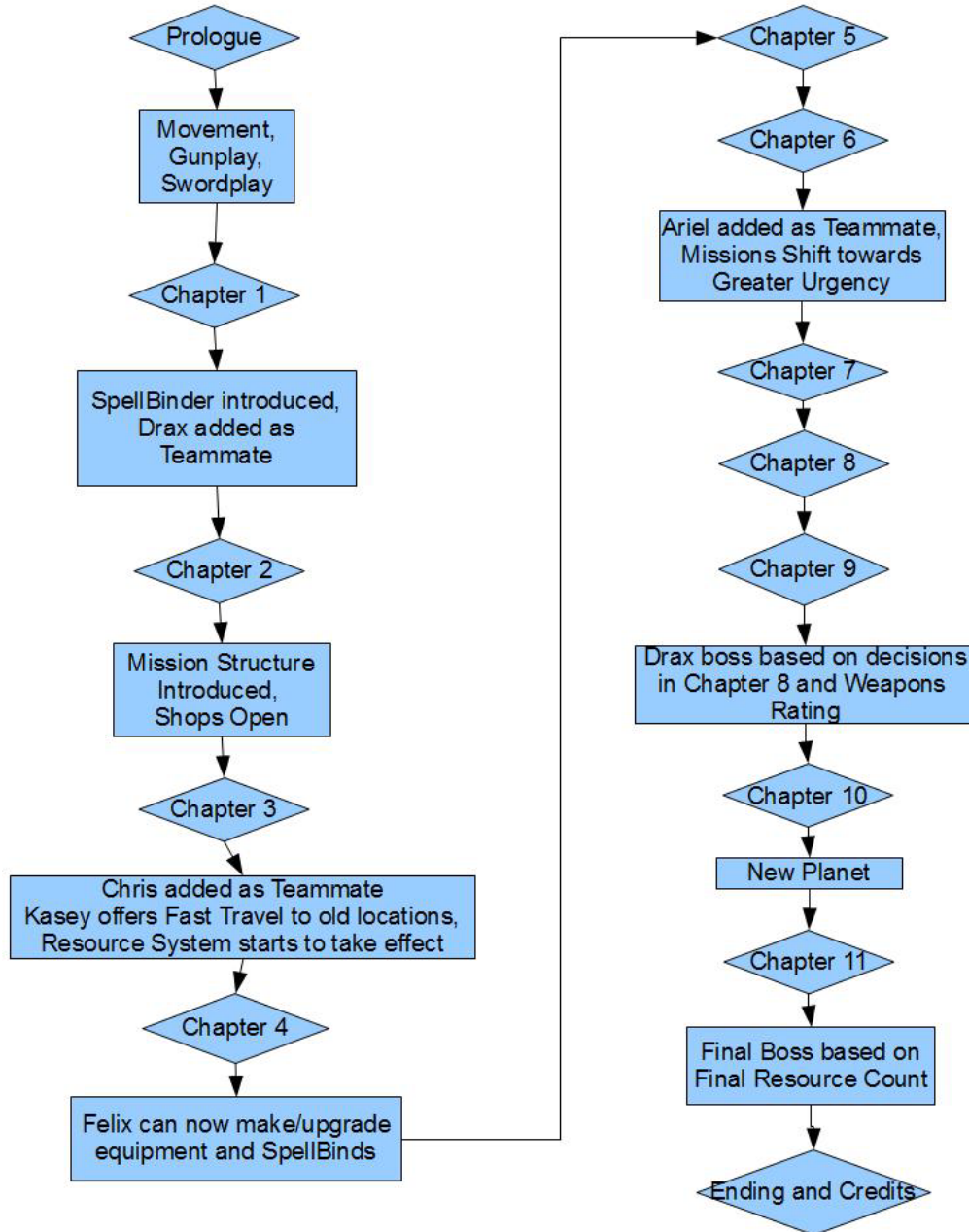
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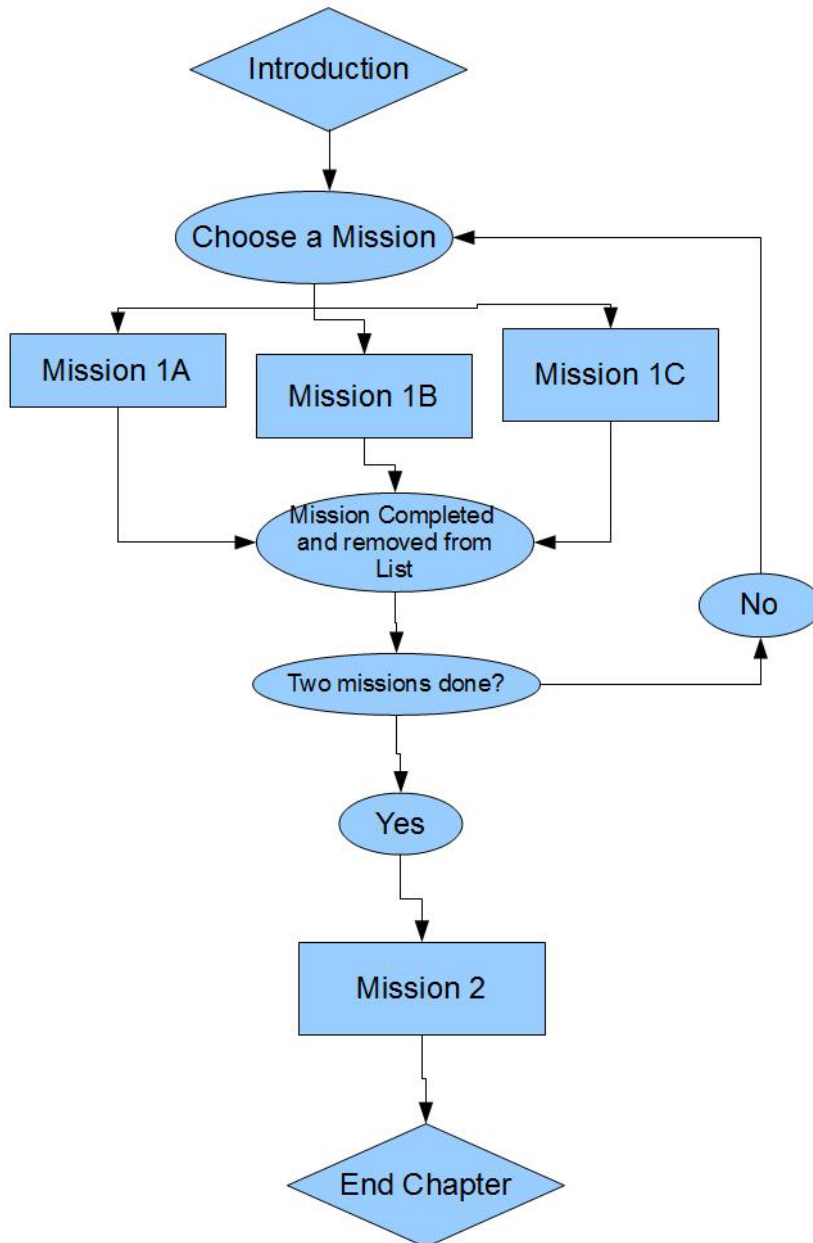
# Master Gameplay Flow

*StarCaster* is organized in "chapters;" whether they will be presented to the player as such in the final product remains to be seen, but each contains a number of missions to be done. The following diagram shows the chapter-by-chapter integration of gameplay features and shifts in mission structure.



## General Mission Structure

Many chapters in *StarCaster* feature a series of mini-missions that the player is able to do before moving on to a final, mandatory mission; generally the player is given the choice of doing two out of a possible three missions to do in preparation for the last run, although as the game progresses it narrows down to one of two at any given time in order to keep the game from dragging and properly capture a sense of urgency to those events.



## Reward System

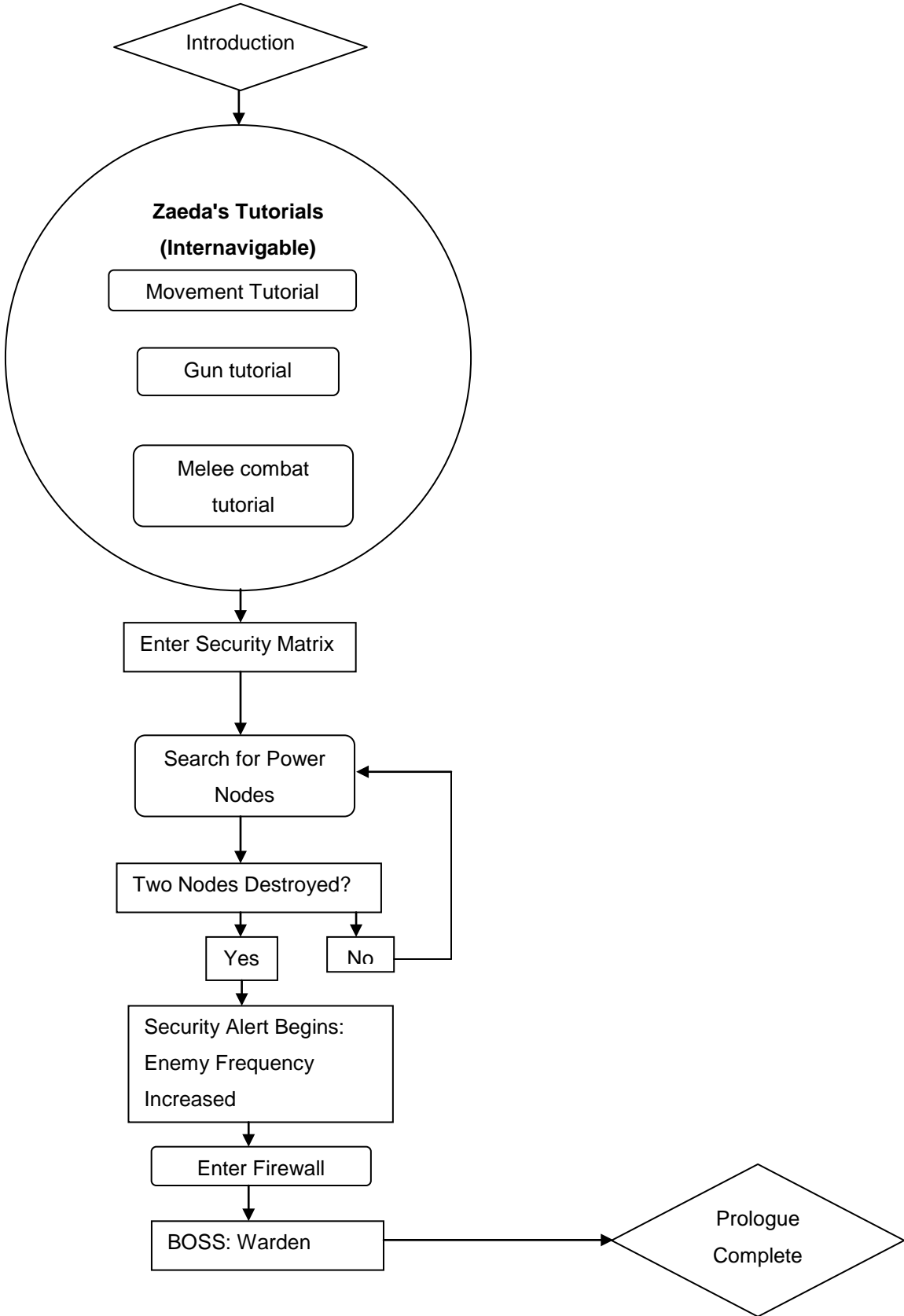
Each of these missions has some reward attached to it--called "Media," "Support," or "Weapons." Media equates to news coverage and the like, giving the player the most publicity, and ideally opening up relationships with more high-profile characters. Support equates to the player's relationship with the people of the city of Acheron; the higher the "Support" value gets, the more people who will join the Hades Resistance. Finally, Weapons relate to how much armament and supplies the Resistance manages to gather for itself; the higher this value is, the more equipment and guns Nick will be able to outfit himself with and the more Felix, the Resistance's engineer, will have to work with when building and modifying devices. Though the exact gameplay ramifications of these values have not yet been fully defined, it proves a valuable means for the player to differentiate the characterization they build for themselves as they choose missions.

## Notes and Future Alterations

At present the gameplay flow is very rough, not having taken the game's mechanics into full account or fully realized its narrative choice systems.

Additionally, the story flow requires some alteration as the Siren Project plot thread in particular is extremely loose, with the chapters devoted specifically to it having not been fully fleshed out and still trying to find their direction. At present all three chapters are aimed towards finding out what it is more than preventing Temran from getting their hands on it, which is what it *should* be about. Future iterations of the game's storyline should take this into account as it will help keep the direction of the story focused while also putting stronger emphasis on Ariel's character than is present at the moment.

# Prologue: The Digital Haze



## **Part 1 - Tutorial**

Nick is presently being held in a Temran Enterprises detention center, a GEN-jack forcibly installed in his head and hooked up to a piece of equipment that keeps him in a hazy, paralyzed state. As he struggles against the device, a female voice--the voice of the Siren, Zaeda--calls to him from deep within the digital haze, calling itself "a friend," and offering its help. Nick is instantly transported to an endless digital field; a simulation prepared by Zaeda, isolated from Temran's computer. Nick is irritated, stating that he "doesn't need a damn tutorial," but Zaeda insists that his nerves have become atrophied from being kept in stasis and he needs to work his brain out a bit in order to escape. The player is given the option to skip, but advised against it.

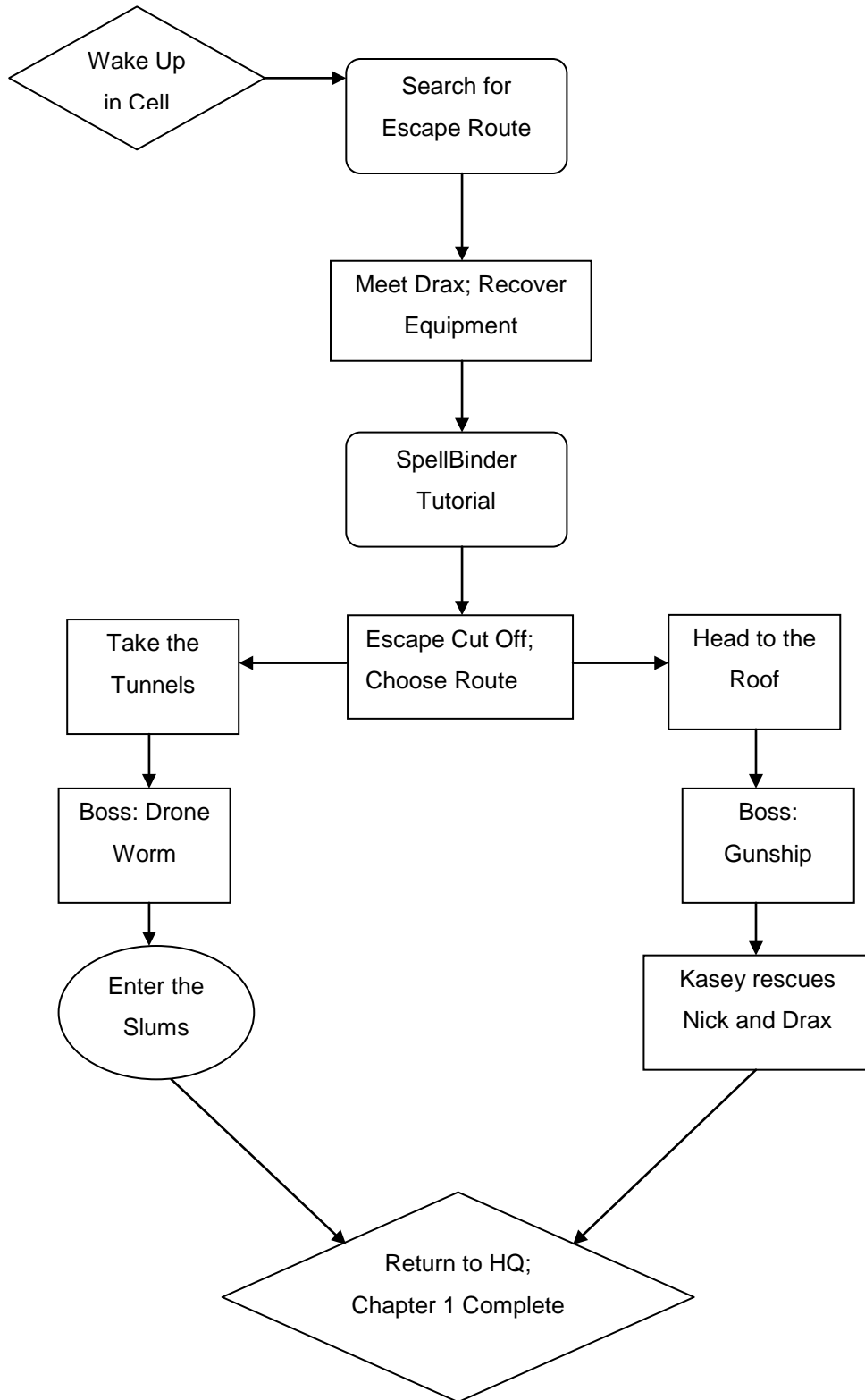
Zaeda walks the player through basic actions, preparing a series of simple blocks and objects to interact with and giving Nick a set of simulated weapons--a pistol and a sword--with which to practice. When all the basic tutorials are complete, Zaeda opens a portal back to Temran's computer matrix, saying that Nick has to take on the security program that's been holding him in place and bring it down from within--and that she can't help him in there.

## **Part 2 - The Security Matrix**

The security matrix offers a series of simple platforming challenges and fights against programs that take on simple, geometric shapes, similar to the ones that Zaeda used to train Nick, as well as larger, tank-like security programs that bar the path and don't resemble anything Zaeda was using.

The Security Matrix's master program, the Warden, is held behind a firewall that needs to be brought down. Three power supplies scattered around the level route energy to it, and two must be broken in order to bring it down. After that, the player must make their way back to the firewall and enter it to face the first boss: The Warden.

# Chapter 1 - Escape



## **Part 1 - Prison Break**

After destroying the Warden control program, Nick is released from his paralysis, awaking in his cell as its door unlocks. Things get tricky as he must now escape the prison unarmed--now facing *completely* foreign opponents, including Temran security guards and drones. Fortunately thanks to Nick's efforts much of the prison is malfunctioning, a mass prison break is in effect, and it seems as though someone else is trying to break *in*; specifically, Nick's partner, Drax, and the rest of the Hades resistance. In spite of Temran's extensive security measures, it proves little challenge, and Nick is able to meet up with Drax partway down the towering prison, where his force blade and pistol is returned to him alongside a new toy--his SpellBinder. Though it seems all is going smooth, the two ultimately find themselves cut off from the rest of the Resistance, which is forced to retreat when Temran reinforcements show up. The plan now fallen apart, it's up to Nick and Drax to improvise a way out, either escaping to tunnels into the Hades undercity or hijacking a ship to escape.

## **Part 2A - Trail through the Undercity**

Nick and Drax take to the undercity networks, losing Temran pursuit as they escape through the underground slums. The player is introduced to the poor way of life that many of the refugees on the planet Hades lead as they make their way back to the Resistance HQ in the residential district. They're interrupted along the way by the pursuit of a security drone worm; a huge, spindly string of security drones that can disconnect and attack.

## **Part 2B - Freedom's Flight**

Nick and Drax make their way to the top floor, but are quickly cut off by a Temran Enterprises gunship. After bringing it down they're rescued by Kasey, the Resistance's best and only pilot, who brings them back to HQ.

## Chapter 2: The Blue Stinger Strikes Back

### Open Areas: Residential District, HQ, Undercity

The player is greeted by the sight of the run-down Resistance HQ, the numbers of able-bodied fighters in its halls rather slim. Drax explains that while Nick was out many of their members quit, so it will be necessary for them to make a big comeback. Rumors of Nick's return are already spreading, giving the people of Hades some hope, but they need to give both them *and* Temran more than just rumors if they want to kick their resistance back into overdrive. The player may choose to do two of three missions at this junction.

### Mission 1A - Power to the People

**Location:** Spaceport

**Reward:** Support +2, Supplies +1

Nick and Drax head to a spaceport to conduct a raid on some Temran supply ships, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. They keep a few for themselves, of course.

### Mission 1B - All for One

**Location:** Commercial District

**Reward:** Supplies +2, Support +1

Nick and Drax break into a Temran Enterprises facility in the commercial district to steal some heavy ordinance and do some very public damage.

### Mission 1C - Media Blitz

**Location:** Commercial District

**Reward:** Support +1, Media +2

Nick and Drax break into a GEN broadcasting tower to hijack it and do a broadcast across the entire system, proclaiming Nick's return.

### Mission 2 - Damsel in Distress

**Location:** Forest of Acheron

Though the Resistance is gaining support back, Nick is growing increasingly concerned as he wonders about the voice he heard while he was inside the GEN. Then, the Resistance receives a distress signal from a ship en route to Hades and being pursued by Temran. The signal belongs to none other than Christina Temran, who's got a whole pile of refugees from the planet Artemis onboard with her, among them Ariel and Nodal. They crash in the forests outside the city, and Nick immediately rushes to investigate, though he has to do so on foot as Kasey can't take off with Temran anti-air in full alert the way it is right now.

In the forest, Nick discovers patrol drones on full alert. If they spot him they will alert Temran Security officers and reinforcements arrive shortly to deal with him.

Eventually Nick arrives at the downed ship, where Chris has her hands full fighting off a few guards. She and Nodal seem to have things under control, but Nodal quickly has his head blown off. As Nick goes to help they're soon besieged by an elite security officer, armed with a force blade much like Nick's. This officer proves no pushover, but together Nick and Chris are able to overcome him and his reinforcements. A few Resistance volunteers arrive in the forest to help them take the refugees back to the Resistance Base, where Nick and Drax have a few questions to ask Chris regarding their cargo. On the way Chris makes it a point of scooping up Nodal's head. Drax seems especially suspicious of them.

Chris reveals that the people onboard her ship were about to be detained by Temran--not on Hades, but somewhere else, somewhere *worse*, out of the Resistance's reach--and decided to take them herself and seek shelter with the legendary Blue Stinger, having heard of his capture and subsequent return. She has no idea what these particular peoples' significance is, but it's enough for her to know that Temran wants them. She hopes that Nodal's head will contain the answers, but in the meantime wants Nick and Drax's help keeping them safe.

## **Chapter 3 - The Siren Project**

Chris is able to get Nodal up and running again... in the body of a robotic housecat. Although he's irritated, he gladly supplies information regarding himself and the mysterious Neviel girl, Ariel, but not much. All they know is that she's an asset of the Cygna Corporation and that Nodal was her bodyguard. Her significance to either them or Temran Enterprises is totally unknown, and Nodal's memory is damaged, meaning he can't share more than that. Ariel herself is totally silent. Identifying that she's obviously someone important, Nick, Chris, and Drax all agree that it's something worth looking into.

### **Mission 1A - Unknown**

### **Mission 1B - Unknown**

### **Mission 1C - Unknown**

## **Mission 2 - Investigating the Tower**

**Locations: Undercity, Temran Tower**

Chris identifies Temran Tower as the place that's most likely to have access to Temran's information networks. Nick notes that the last time he went there he ended up on ice, but Chris has a plan, intending to use the undercity to gain entry and to stick to the hazardous, incomplete sections of the tower, where security mainly consists of drones. After scaling the tower Nick is able to access the network and get some information, pointing them to a researcher named Dr. Shana Alaris, who's credited as being the director of "The Siren Project." Shortly afterward Nick stumbles on Felix Morgendroth, another researcher, inside the tower; he's been brought in by Temran with the promise of freedom if he manages to find Ariel. Nick helps him escape, and Felix reveals Ariel's true nature as a cyborg, as well as the existence of her sister, Zaeda--the only other cyborg of her type that turned out viable. Designed to be particularly Ether-sensitive, they each were capable of operating a spectacularly powerful SpellBinder called "The StarCaster," which Temran is aiming to get their hands on.

## Chapter 4 - The Tightening Fist

With Chris having joined the Resistance and the Blue Stinger having stirred up no end of trouble, Temran is ready to take the offensive. They send Vulkair Schneider, the head of Temran Security, to deal with this "Blue Stinger" and his band. Meanwhile, Commander Alys Braden of the Imperial Knights is given orders to pursue him as well, sent by Prince Karim himself. She arrives first, stepping off her ship and taking the time to observe the ongoing conflict. Vulkair arrives shortly thereafter, ordering his troops and drones to scour the city looking for the Blue Stinger and any of his supporters and make an example of him.

The Resistance gets word of the impending invasion and Nick, Chris, and Drax scramble to get organized, muster up some resources, and prepare for the storm ahead. Drax strongly recommends getting their hands on as much ordinance as they can and brings up some connections he has with some shady people in the undercity. Chris urges Nick to help the refugees and repel Temran's attacks as much as possible, sweetening her overly altruistic claim by making the point that any ground they gain is ground they'll have to take back later. The player may now choose to complete any two of the following missions:

### **Mission 1A: Counterstrike**

**Reward:** +2 Support, +1 Media

**Location:** Residential District

Temran patrols have started scouring the residential district and harassing Acheron's citizens, taking many prisoner as they start to fight back. Nick and the crew must stop as many of them as possible.

### **Mission 1B: Sending a Message**

**Reward:** +1 Support, +2 Media

**Location:** Rock Island

For once Chris and Drax agree on something: the Hades Resistance needs to send Temran Enterprises a message--don't screw with us. By bombing their mining operation on Rock Island, they'll accomplish this while simultaneously limiting their resources.

### **Mission 1C: Mob Connections**

**Reward:** +2 Weapons, +1 Media

**Location:** Undercity, Elysium Wastes, Spaceport

The Hades Resistance realizes it can't be too picky about the kind of help it gets, so Nick heads for the undercity to see if he can't pick up on Drax's mob connections. The mob has a job for Nick to do--track down a particular shipment going through the Spaceport and steal the goods for them. Said "goods" are a small, mysterious package that a "special client" wants. It's evidently so valuable that they'll happily supply them with all the black market weaponry their hearts desire. Actually sneaking into the Spaceport

to steal it may or may not involve some detouring through the Elysium Wastes, as the polluted badlands sit right outside the Spaceport's walls.

## **Mission 2: Crash of the Titan**

Vulkair, having discovered the location of the Resistance's headquarters, calls in a Titan--one of Temran's largest weapons of war and terror--to strike at their very heart. The towering mech drops into the city's center from space and begins razing its way through the residential district. Now Nick and the gang must use their collective wits and resources to bring it down before it takes their headquarters.

## Chapter 5 - Siren's Call

Ariel's sleep lately has been disturbed by the voice of her "sister," Zaeda. She disappears in the middle of the night, leaving Nick, Chris, and Drax to wonder and worry.

### Mission 1A - Collateral Damage

**Rewards:** Support +2, Media +1

**Location:** Residential District

The Titan didn't exactly pick up after itself when Nick and the gang blew it up. Chris advises that they do something to help with the cleanup effort, noting to a very skeptical Drax that it'll help their image. Besides that, it'll give them the chance to look for Ariel, who may be out on the city streets somewhere. Destroyed buildings open up new paths to follow and new locations--but unfortunately, the destruction spread to the city walls, and some of the monsters from Tartarus are also getting inside. Nick must help the authorities clean up this mess and keep the monsters back.

### Mission 1B - Cyber Cowboy

**Rewards:** Weapons +2, Support +1

**Location:** Prison, Prison Network

Noticing that Nick has a VR Jack after his time in prison, Drax wonders if they can't use it to their advantage. Ariel is a worlds better hacker than he is, but even so, he proved resourceful enough to take down the master computer in the Prison. Maybe he could do even better. In this mission, Nick dives into the GEN to access Acheron Prison's grid once more, this time with dual goals: first, see if Temran has any information on Ariel's whereabouts; second, help break the security system and let out a few prisoners that Temran's gathered up since the breakout. Felix offers assistance by letting Nick simulate his SpellBinds in cyberspace. Throughout the mission, Nick finds himself going in-and-out of cyberspace as he navigates the prison's halls. Though he finds nothing on Ariel's whereabouts, he frequently hears the voice of Zaeda calling to him--this time accompanied by her ghostly image as she beckons for him to "find Dr. Alaris."

### Mission 1C - Unknown

### Mission 2 - The Blaknott Sleeps

**Location:** Forest of Junk, Blaknott

Temran Enterprises has been snooping around in the Forest of Junk, specifically around a crash site that appears to leave Nick rather disturbed--the Blaknott, one of the ships from Jareth's Rebellion. He and the others head out there to check it out, only to find Ariel wandering past Temran's patrols and inside the

Blaknott. Although she doesn't go far inside, she says that she feels as if the ship is talking to her, and that this is where Zaeda's voice led her.

## **Chapter 6 - Roar from the Depths of Hades**

Before the Hades Resistance can celebrate its victory, the ground beneath the city begins to tremble as Hades's faultlines begin to open. Felix proposes that it must be the Plate Control Center in the Tartarus Mountain Range. It turns out it currently isn't receiving power; someone has sabotaged it. Their options at present are to either re-route the city's power grid, which requires a visit to the now-on-full-alert Temran Tower as well as Ariel's assistance, or to retrieve an Ether Crystal from the mines on Rock Island. If they don't repair the plate center soon, Tartarus will erupt and Acheron will almost certainly be demolished by avalanches or covered in lava.

### **Mission 1A - The Mines**

**Reward:** +1 Weapons, +2 Support

**Location:** Rock Island

Nick heads to Rock Island to retrieve a suitable power cell from the mine's depths. Doing so forces the mine to shut down, forcing a hard climb out. Once removed, it must be taken to the plate center to replace its sabotaged power cell.

### **Mission 1B - The Tower**

**Reward:** +2 Media, +1 Support

**Location:** Temran Tower

Nick takes Ariel to Temran Tower to re-route the city's power grid to the mountains. Ariel is able to do so, but at great cost to herself as her own energy is drained greatly in the process. What's more, it didn't work--someone has blocked the power supply at the plate center, forcing them to go there.

### **Mission 2 - Through the Fire and Flames**

**Location:** Tartarus Mountain Range, Plate Control Center

Nick and company navigate through the Tartarus Mountain Range, now overcome by magma flows that threaten to flow into the city. The plate center itself is running on auxiliary power and overrun with monsters. Depending on which mission they chose previously, they must either reach the central computer core, whose security is on full alert, and let the city's power flow inside, or they must install a new power source at the energy core, which is currently serving as a nest for a humongous, dragon-like creature.

## Chapter 7 - Siren's Song

This chapter has yet to be defined in full, namely because too much has to happen here. The events that must occur between now and the next chapter:

As Temran's tactics get more desperate, Chris starts to feel reservations about the Hades Resistance, seeing it has having brought more damage on the city as opposed to having given its citizens peace. She relates to Nick that she wants to get away from all this, maybe start up a bar on some remote planet somewhere. Ariel, meanwhile, has grown depressed, wondering if the group really cares about her or if they just want to use her for her powers over machinery. Finally, Nick gets fed up with all the mystery surrounding the Siren Project and decides it's time to take real action, break down Temran's door and *take* the information they're looking for. They finally find Dr. Alaris, the creator of the Siren Project, but it turns out to be a trap. Chris is taken prisoner while Vulkair stays behind to duel Nick and Drax, distracting them. Vulkair is defeated, but manages to limp away alive. Dr. Alaris turns out to be Zaeda in disguise. Zaeda explains that Dr. Alaris has been dead for a long time and that she's taken it upon herself to complete her work in her stead. She says to Nick that she will be waiting for him at the StarCaster when he's done, and disappears--merely an illusion.

## Chapter 8 - Crashing Down

Temran has pulled out all the stops; determined to destroy the Resistance, Vulkair has authorized his security forces to drop the Hades control station from orbit onto the city of Acheron, demolishing it. What's more, he's planning to make it look like the Resistance was behind it, planting the captive Chris onboard. As Kasey's ship is still not space-capable, they must find a way to get up there and stop the satellite. Nick knows of a way to stop it, but not without killing Chris in the process; though nobody is sure how or why he knows this, he speaks of the Blaknott, a ship crashed down in the forests outside Acheron; the rebel ship that bombarded Hades five years ago. Felix identifies the shield facility, which needs to be powered up again, but it could potentially stop the colony from destroying the city. But that still wouldn't save Chris.

### Mission 1A - The Blaknott Stirs

**Reward:** +2 Support

**Location:** Forest of Junk, Blaknott

Nick goes to the Blaknott, finding it still intact despite the crash. The ship and the forest surrounding it is filled with Phantasms--bizarre mutant wildlife that seems to feed off the Blaknott's Etheric currents. The ship seems to live and breathe like a sleeping behemoth as they enter it, and they soon discover that Ariel can interface with it. Nick has many misgivings about activating it, but Drax sees no other way than to blow the colony out of the sky and stays there with Ariel to eagerly "watch the fireworks."

### Mission 1B - Acheron's Shield

**Reward:** +2 Media

**Location:** Undercity, Shield Facility

Nick and Felix head to the long-inactive Shield Facility at the center of Acheron to restore it to working order. Naturally, Temran has it swarming with drones so as to keep them from doing this. Additionally, though it protected the city from the Blaknott's blasts during the war, the facility sustained tremendous damage from feedback, making it a hazardous place to begin with. Still, they're able to restore the shield to enough power that it's hopefully able to ward off the impending colony drop, which shouldn't have as much force as the Blaknott's main gun did.

### Mission 2 - Serenity Now

**Location:** Elysium Wastes, Space Shuttle, Control Satellite

Although they have an effective deterrent set up for the space shuttle, Nick isn't interested in leaving Chris to die. Unfortunately there's not a whole lot of options. The control satellite is falling and Temran's security countermeasures have Etheric sensors that would detect any ship coming from miles away. The only way they could do it is if they had a cloak--which they don't... or if they used a non-Etheric ship.

Kasey recalls an old folk tale about a downed space shuttle from the old age of human colonization, back before they were using Ether as a crutch. He claims it's somewhere out over the Elysium Wastes. It's a long shot, but Nick is able to find it and piggyback it on Kasey's ship to help lift it off, and with Felix and Kasey's help they get the engines running and even manage to get it to pressurize and find a working space suit inside. With all that ready, Nick suits up and buckles in for the launch into space.

Thanks to the shuttle's primitive technology he's able to sneak in under the radar of the satellite's defenses and get onboard the colony--by crashing into it. As the colony falls it breaks apart, forcing Nick to go in-and-out of space as he rushes to find Chris--and afterward, get her onboard an escape pod. An explosion cuts them both off from each other as he hits the eject button. As she drops to the surface of Hades, Chris watches the colony burn up and, depending on which solution the player chose to deal with it, either crash into Acheron's shield or get blown to pieces by the Blaknott's cannon.

## Chapter 9 - Catastrophe

Nick is barely able to escape the crashing colony, realizing that this has all gone too far as he climbs out of an escape pod. He heads into a bar in Acheron's residential district, hearing on the news that Drax is ready to take the fight to the planet Theron, using Nick's image as a martyr to gain support. Nick dismisses it, seeing it as no longer being his business, when Alys Braden comes in to join him, offering to buy him a drink. She states that she was here to track down the Blue Stinger, to which Nick replies that she can consider her job finished since he's dead. She shakes her head as she watches the news, replying that he'll probably never die after the control station incident. Nick says that the excitement's gotten to be too much for him and that he's planning to head out to some other remote planet, maybe set up a bar. She knowingly smirks and makes a remark about wishing she could get away from the excitement herself, then recounts her own experiences as a hero during the war, saying it's brought her no end of trouble. Nick asks why she did it, to which she replies, "because I had to." He asks if she'd take it all back, to which she replies, "not for all the stars in the sky." Nick, steeled by this encounter and seeing what he has to do, immediately leaves. "Not gonna stick around for another drink, slick?" "Nah... I've got some things I have to do."

Nick goes to confront Drax at the Resistance HQ, but finds it abandoned--only Felix remains behind, injured. He says that Chris left, figuring him for dead, and that Drax has Ariel and is planning to do something with her. He tried to stop him, but Drax smacked him aside, claiming he was just getting in the way and that Nick would have wanted it this way. Nick tells him to get out of town; Felix agrees and explains Drax's whereabouts...

Depending on what the player has done so far, a multitude of things about Drax's station change.

**If the player awoke the Blacknott:** This is where Drax has taken Ariel. He's planning to lift it off, with the Resistance onboard and crewing it for him. Nick must go into its heart and face Drax there as he plans to use its cannon to destroy Temran Tower, claiming it will be a symbol of their new freedom. Nick will have none of it, though, claiming that the Blacknott was a mistake and that nobody should have its power--least of all a loose cannon like Drax. Their friendship crumbling, Nick duels Drax at the Blacknott's helm. Emerging victorious, Nick takes Ariel and leaves the Blacknott inert, Drax broken and defeated.

**If the player used the Shield instead:** Drax is at the wrecked Titan, forcing Ariel to hack into it and try to get it moving again. To his frustration it only partially works. To his greater frustration, Nick is still alive. Nick wonders how useful one big weapon is going to be against Temran, but Drax claims this is just the beginning and that they'll soon have much, much more. Recognizing that Drax is completely mad with power, Nick duels him at the Titan's feet. Emerging victorious, Nick takes Ariel and leaves the Titan inert, Drax broken and defeated.

**The player's Weapons Rating:** The higher this is, the more supplies that the Resistance has mustered for their fight with Temran. Although this means that the player has had more resources to play with and weapons to buy as the game has progressed, it also means that Drax has more resources *right now*, meaning he'll have scaled with the player's strength and have additional weapons at *his* disposal as well.

One way or another, Nick observes that for all the good that he tried to do for Acheron, it only ended up a smoldering husk. He may have saved it, but there is no way they could take Temran without losing everything that was worth fighting for. All he can do is protect the Galaxy's one *real* hope--Ariel and the StarCaster... which is still waiting somewhere on Artemis.

## Chapter 10 - Specters of Artemis

Nick and Ariel arrive on the planet Artemis, finding its chief city, Cypress, long abandoned and in ruin. Though the naive and impressionable Ariel is shaken, Nick seems considerably more disturbed looking upon it, seeing the shadows of the destruction he might've brought on Hades. They explore the ruins for some time, encountering many unfamiliar Phantasms--some of them formerly *human*--before discovering the StarCaster, which takes off into space as they climb onboard.

## Chapter 11 - Starfall

Nick and Ariel make their way through the surreal corridors of the StarCaster, suspecting Temran's interference but instead finding surreal illusions as Zaeda guides them to the core of the vessel. She explains her mission as a Siren is to pilot this vessel and use it to mend the Galaxy's wounds and cure its ailments--and that she sees Temran Enterprises and the Empire of Theron both as the greatest ailments of all, both in need of purging by fire. When Nick tries to argue with her she shows him images of the atrocities Temran has committed in the name of destroying him, and scolds him for building himself into the hero that she wanted him to be only to abandon his mission. Nick tells Ariel to shut the StarCaster down immediately.

Zaeda quickly destroys her as she starts hacking, leaving her a torso stump and retreating into the core. Ariel says as she lays dying that she's managed to break through its security, and that she hopes Nick can handle Zaeda on his own. He uses his jack to enter the StarCaster's local network himself, where Zaeda lays in wait for him. It's not Zaeda he has to face, though, but his doppelganger--the Blue Stinger, made real with the power of the StarCaster and the image that's been built up around him in the Galactic Media. Claiming that it will surpass him just as she surpassed Dr. Alaris and that she no longer has need of him, Zaeda sics the Blue Stinger on Nick.

The Blue Stinger changes strategies and appearance based on the player's performance throughout the game, based on final Support and Media ratings. More Support gives the Blue Stinger more defensive abilities while more Media gives it more offensive abilities.

Defeating the Blue Stinger causes a surge throughout the GEN, deleting all the information Zaeda pooled in order to build him. Nick then shuts down the StarCaster's systems, which spits him back out of the local network in turn. Zaeda questions Nick about his decision, surprised that he would erase himself and abandon his heroic image so readily. Nick affirms that he has no regrets and that the Galaxy needs peace more than it needs a hero, and then proceeds to duel Zaeda as the ship begins to collapse. The duel ends before he can definitively defeat her, leaving it open as to whether or not she's survived. Nick then escapes the StarCaster, scooping up the remains of Ariel as he leaves.

## Epilogue - Tomorrow's Edge

Nick arrives on Maernia and knocks on the door to Chris's bar. Shocked to see him still alive, she smacks him in the face before taking him in an embrace. The two go inside, ready to share that dream of owning a bar on a planet far from the reach of either the Empire's or Temran's law. Acheron, meanwhile, is now free of Temran's grip as they've claimed it as too great a risk to carry on trying to control and no longer have their satellite for processing purposes. Refugees are being taken elsewhere now, but the citizens and refugees of Hades now have enough peace to rebuild their lives as well as the considerable resources amassed by the Resistance prior to its crumbling. Drax moves on to other worlds, disappointed that the fight couldn't go farther.

**After the Credits:** Meanwhile, Cala Lancaster, Temran Enterprises' PR representative, appears on the planet Artemis, her boots crunching through the rubble as she makes her way to the wreckage of the StarCaster. She grins evilly as she finds Zaeda's unconscious body.