

# Problem

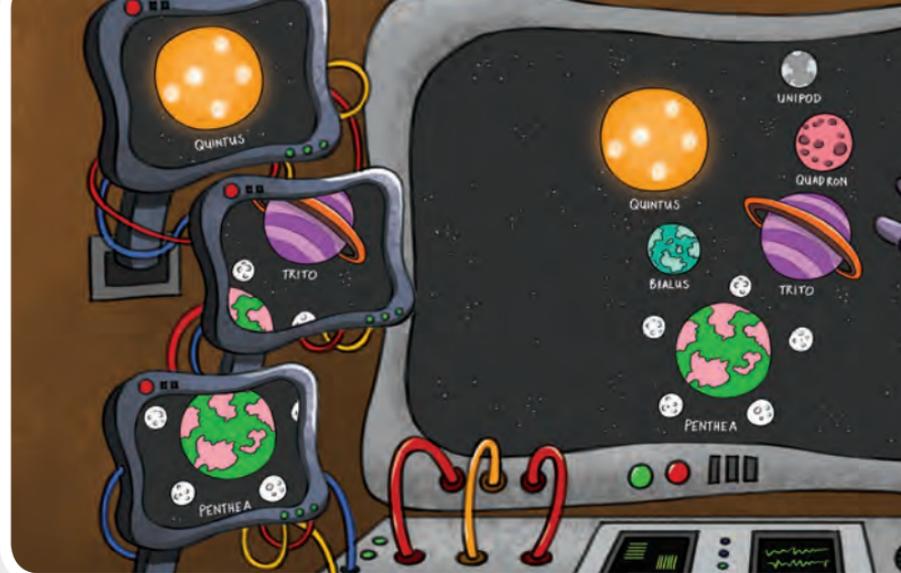


SEEKLER hated sitting still on the Implant couch. Information poured into her brain, but she wasn't allowed to know what it was.

"I'm sooooo bored," thought Seekler. Her brain was bulging with new facts, but her stomach was utterly hollow. She thought about fish, fruit, vegetable, cheese and bread.

At last, the info-sensor retracted. Seekler tried to rise from the couch, but three hands sat her back down again.

"The time has come, Seekler," said a booming voice.



It was Penboss, the head of the Penthea Institute. Penboss was old. His skin had faded and his remaining hair was wispy. Despite his age, he glided over energetically to face Seekler.

“Seekler, are you ready to serve Penthea?” he asked.

“Of course,” said Seekler.

“Then listen and learn.” Penboss glided to an info-deck. “Quintus is a yellow star, approximately 4.5 billion years old. Of its five planets, only Penthea can support life.”

“I know all that!” thought Seekler. “I’ve lived here all my life.”



“Pentheas has fish in the seas,” continued Penboss. “It has vegetable growing on the land, and fruit on the trees. Grain grows to make bread. The milkstems provide milk for cheese.”

Seekler wondered if it was possible to eat grain or milk, and concluded that it wasn't, because no one ever did.

“Pentheans have many children,” said Penboss. “I, myself, have fifty-five.”

“Excellent,” said Seekler obediently. “Hurry up,” she thought.

Penboss looked at her severely. “If you fail in your task, Seekler, you will have no children, ever. Pentheas has a problem.”