

Ambassador of the Shadows (Valerian) Study Guide

**Ambassador of the Shadows (Valerian) by Pierre
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Plot Summary

Mezieres, J.C.; Christin, P.; Tranle, E. *Valerian and Laureline: Ambassador of the Shadows*; Cinebook, Canterbury, Kent, 2013. Kindle AZW file.

Valerian and Laureline are traveling to Point Central, a conglomerate of cultures. Each culture has built its own cell onto the whole so that Point Central resembles a man-made planet. Valerian and Laureline are agents of the Spatio-Temporal Agency. As they arrive at Point Central, Earth's Ambassador contacts them, insisting that they meet with him immediately. Laureline's first reaction is that he is rude and demanding. Valerian and Laureline meet with the Ambassador, but Laureline is rude in return.

Earth's Ambassador says he does not like Valerian and Laureline because of their poor reputations with regard to authority. However, he needs them because of their deep understanding of alien cultures. He assigns Valerian to be his personal bodyguard and instructs Laureline to take care of the Grumpy Transmuter, which is a small animal that can make more of anything it eats. Grumpy is an incredibly valuable possession. Grudgingly, Laureline takes on the responsibility. It is clear the Ambassador has some additional information that he does not share with Valerian and Laureline.

The three travel to another room where the Ambassador is to give his speech. Before any of the formalities can begin, they are attacked. The Ambassador is kidnapped. Valerian is able to grab onto the attackers' spaceship, leaving Laureline alone. She soon begins to make contacts and discover information that sends her ever closer to Valerian and Earth's Ambassador. Laureline continues to utilize the Grumpy Transmuter to pay for information, including a map of Point Central. Grumpy is soon exhausted. Laureline begins to worry about him, knowing he needs an influx of energy to recover. Using the map, Laureline makes her way through several cells, meeting various races along the way. With each, she learns something new that puts her closer to her ultimate goal.

Meanwhile, Valerian and Earth's Ambassador have not been harmed, but they are living in the cell of the race that founded Point Central. Members of that race have forgotten their names and the name of their home planet. Now, they are referred to as the Shadows. They have discovered that Earth's Ambassador plans to take over control of Point Central. The Shadows are no longer willing to be actively involved in Point Central's government, they are also not willing to stand by while Earth takes over control. Toward that end, they re-educate Earth's Ambassador so that he is ready to give a speech calling for peace rather than taking control, as he had planned.

Before the Ambassador can give his speech, the race of aliens that maintains the passageways of Point Central arrive, arresting a member of another species and effectively bringing a halt to the Ambassador's speech. The Ambassador is angry, saying he had been prepared to give a speech about peace, but the Point Central council has decided that Earth should be banished from Point Central for a century. The council has also decreed that Earth's cell on Point Central will be destroyed.



Earth has a fleet of spaceships waiting nearby, planning to enforce the Ambassador's plan to take control of the Point Central government. However, Laureline calls on the fleet of spaceships to transport Earth's people off Point Central. As they set out to leave Point Central, Valerian prepares to use an auxiliary engine to make their spaceship go faster, but Laureline announces that she is already using that engine to power the Grumpy Transmuter.



Pages 1-10

Summary

Ambassador of the Shadows opens with four panels that focus on the history of the universe, including the tendency of every sentient being to explore the vast space. The next series of panels talks about the possible first encounters, questioning whether those resulted in violent conflicts or immediate connections. The narrator ends the second page by saying that no one remembers what those first encounters were like, but there was a time when “the first cell of what would become Point Central was erected” (4). Soon, other cultures began adding their own cells. Some of these cultures brought “a whole chunk of their world” as they connected to the existing cells of Point Central (5). Eventually, everyone in the universe knew about Point Central. It is an example of “immense artificial construction” that continues to grow (6).

Many cultures have built onto the original cell. They are diverse in nature and live “separated by impregnable walls” (7). There are some who are highly radioactive, others known for their mathematical or theological knowledge, and others that are craftsmen. There is no official government in charge of Point Central. The various cultures and planets have ambassadors who take turn “presiding over the council” (7).

On page 8, the spaceship from Earth piloted by Spatio-Temporal Agents Valerian and Laureline appears near Point Central. Valerian communicates with Earth's Ambassador, saying they will soon be landing. The Ambassador demands that they come directly to his cabin. Valerian begins to say something but the Ambassador cuts him off. Laureline is immediately angry, saying the Ambassador is rude. When they arrive in the Ambassador's cabin, she stands at attention and shouts, “Sir, yes sir!” (8). Valerian urges her to be calmer. The Ambassador's first words are that he knows of Laureline's and Valerian's reputations, indicating that he is not surprised nor is he upset at Laureline's lack of respect.

The Ambassador says he selected Valerian and Laureline for this mission because of their experience with alien races. He says the Earth people are about to have their first chance to lead the council meeting, and that he plans to “bring some order to it” (8). Valerian and Laureline are surprised, having heard nothing about this kind of plan up to this point. The Ambassador says they did not “need to know” about it sooner (9). He says the two agents are only present to provide protection.

Laureline begins to stomp out of the room, but smiles when the Ambassador yells at her. He goes on to say that the Earth should be in control on Point Central, and that he is going to oversee creation of a new organization. While he says it will be the “cornerstone” of Point Central, Valerian interrupts, saying it will actually be the “police” of Point Central (9). The Ambassador insists that people want an organization of this kind, even if they do not put that thought into words. The Ambassador goes on to say he has some allies in this step, but expects some opposition.



The Ambassador then says Valerian is to remain by his side at all times. Laureline is to guard the Grumpy Transmuter, a small creature from Bluxte that is the “secret source of funds” (10). He is an especially important asset because Point Central does not have a single recognized currency. The Ambassador gives a brief explanation of Grumpy, saying he can be overused to the point of death and that Laureline has to protect him.

Valerian and Laureline prepare to dock and Valerian stands up for the Ambassador, saying he is probably a good person. Just then, the Ambassador issues another command for Valerian and Laureline to walk exactly five steps behind the Ambassador.

Analysis

The first panel in the novel is completely black as the narrator discusses the possible origins of the universe. In that frame, the narrator suggests there was nothing at first. In the next frames, the narrator suggests how life came to the current point. These frames depend heavily on graphics to make the narrator's words clear. For example, the narrator says some worlds might have been dead for many years. That frame shows the skeleton of some unidentified creature on a mountain with a sun in the distance.

The artist also plays an important role in the way the reader sees the establishment of Point Central. The narrator gives the basic information, but does not include any descriptions. The artist gives the descriptions in graphic form, showing Point Central as a single port. Then, as additional ports are added at seemingly random places, Point Central becomes an immense conglomerate of ports and cells, none set with the intention of fitting in with their neighbors. All are specific to those cultures, bringing their own images to the total. Page 6 is a single-page panel showing the huge Point Central. In that image, the artist depicts all the cells in similar colors, which shows a cohesive quality that was not present in the previous images. That creates a new tone, indicating a collective sense that the narrator does not convey.

The author uses sarcasm as one of the literary tools seen in the novel. The first example of this is seen when the Ambassador demands that Laureline and Valerian come directly to his cabin. Laureline's response is that this is the first time the Ambassador has bothered to talk to them and that he is “certainly polite about it” (8). The statement is obviously sarcastic, especially when taken with her body language in that panel. She is literally marching away from Valerian. This is also an example of the combination of graphic images and dialogue to present a larger picture of the events.

There is an important first look at the characteristics of Laureline and Valerian seen in their arrival at the Ambassador's cabin. Laureline is angry because she sees the Ambassador's demands as rude. She snaps to attention and makes a sarcastic greeting. This gives the reader some idea of Laureline's nature. Valerian tries to diffuse the situation, which makes it seem that he is the peacemaker of the pair. He urges Laureline to calm down. These reactions are not completely typical of their natures, as seen in the previous novels of the series.



Discussion Question 1

What is Point Central?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Laureline's response to the Ambassador. Does it seem a reasonable response?

Discussion Question 3

What are the plans the Ambassador reveals?

Vocabulary

quests, spontaneous, fraternization, artificial, sprouting, mosaic, diversity, showcasing, reconstituted, impregnable, exude, theological, presiding, incoherent



Pages 11-20

Summary

On Pages 11 and 12, Valerian and Laureline dock their spaceship, disembark wearing spacesuits, and follow the Ambassador through a doorway. The Ambassador greets someone, then Laureline and Valerian remove his space helmet. The Ambassador begins his speech but a loud noise interrupts. The Ambassador and the others turn toward the sound to find a large hole in the wall.

In the opening panel of Page 13, creatures fire weapons toward those gathered, and strike the Ambassador first. Valerian yells for Laureline to put her helmet back on. The creatures continue to fire. Valerian is on the ground, hurt but all right. He has only a brief moment to wonder about Laureline before he realizes the creatures are carrying the unconscious Ambassador away. On Page 14, Valerian has mixed feelings. The Ambassador ordered Valerian to remain at his side at all times, but Valerian is worried about Laureline. He makes it outside just in time to see a spaceship taking off. He jumps in that direction and manages to grab on. A voice says the action was a “silly” move (14). The spaceship shoots across the sky.

Back in the room where the attack occurred, Laureline manages to remove herself from some substance that has covered them all. She then removes her space helmet, showing that she did have it on in time for the attack. A man rushes up and points out the direction the group went. He reveals that the creatures kidnapped the Ambassador and that Valerian went along. The man rushes through a door, and there is an immediate explosion. He returns, saying the doorway was “booby-trapped” (15). Laureline checks on the Grumpy Transmuter and finds he is unhurt, but still grouchy.

The man, who introduces himself as the under-chief of protocol, Colonel Diol. Laureline realizes the attackers fired cocoon-launchers from Xoxos. Those cocoons are not deadly, but the victims undergo 50 hours of “tetany” with no way to shorten the time. Diol directs Laureline to the radar screens where she plans to look for the attackers' spaceship. He rushes to another door and finds another booby-trap. Laureline finds the attackers are using anti-radar cloaks, meaning she cannot see where they went.

Just then, a buzz indicates someone is at the hatch and wants to come in. Diol says no one on Point Central visits anyone else in person, and they all communicate using a bank of monitors. The creature at the hatch is nothing like those that attacked, and Laureline lets them inside. There are three of them and they introduce themselves at the Shingouz. They say they do not know who kidnapped the Ambassador, but promise that they have information that Laureline can use. They want 1,000 Ebebe pearls as payment for the information. The Grumpy Transmuter eats a pearl and produces 1,000 from that one, which Laureline uses as payment.



They tell Laureline that she should visit the Kamuniks. For an additional 500 pearls, they provide Laureline with a map of Point Central. They point out where she will find the Kamuniks. She is angry that the map has a large vacant spot, but they say there is no complete map of Point Central. Diol argues that they should contact Earth, but Laureline insists that they look for the Ambassador and Valerian.

They leave the cell, which has Diol concerned. Laureline asks what the purpose of the corridor is if no one ever uses it. Diol says the Zools are a race without a planet, and they maintain and use the corridors.

Analysis

Page 11 contains five panels and no words. This is another example of the importance of the graphics in this novel. Their ship lands on a specific spot of Point Central. Valerian and Laureline are shown walking a few steps behind the Ambassador, as instructed. In the final panel, The Ambassador reaches a lit doorway with Valerian and Laureline still a few steps behind him. There are multiple moons and stars in the background. Page 12 picks up the action, this time with only a couple of words in the eighth panel. The images are full-color with various focal points. The final panel of the page is mostly red with the images of the people shown in red with black outlines. The red color shows that something dangerous has happened, though the event is not explained until the following page.

When they first meet, the Ambassador orders Valerian to remain by his side every moment over the coming events. When the Ambassador is kidnapped and Laureline is possibly injured, Valerian is faced with a choice. He curses, but follows the Ambassador's instructions and remains with him, even though he does not know whether Laureline is alive or in need of help. This shows that he is dedicated to his duty as an agent, even though the reader will later see a strong connection between Valerian and Laureline.

The Shingouz are the first of several aliens introduced during this novel. The creatures look like anteaters, but they have wings. They do not seem to use the wings, but walk about on two feet with a long tail that resembles a kangaroo. The creatures are strange in appearance, and their main role is to provide information.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Diol? What kind of character does he seem to be?

Discussion Question 2

What is the purpose of the first two pages of this section that have almost no words? Are the images effective without words?



Discussion Question 3

What is Valerian's conflict when the Ambassador is kidnapped? What does he decide? What does his decision say about his character?

Vocabulary

protocol, colonel, cocoon, lethal, asphyxiation, tampering, anarchy, mercenaries, stingy, allies, discreetly, millennia



Pages 21-30

Summary

Diol continues to talk about the Zools. He says they are mute, honest, and keep all the communications in working order. They encounter a rough spot, and Diol wants to return to their own cell to use the monitors to talk to the Kamuniks. Laureline refuses, saying it should be a conversation in person. Diol continues to follow.

A member of the Kamuniks greets them, and Laureline notices that they seem to be involved in some Medieval exhibition. They seat her atop a high platform. She is impatient, but thinks that it is best to accommodate their wishes. A group of Kamuniks rush toward her, knocking her to the ground. One of them grabs her and carries her by the leg, upside-down, before depositing her in front of a man who speaks for the group. He says he has information he will sell to her for “a hundred go-bersek pellets” (24). The Grumpy Transmuter bites Laureline when she orders it to make the pellets, but she scolds it and Grumpy Transmuter begins.

While Grumpy is working, the leader of the Kamuniks says a group of Bagulins, known as mercenaries, had been seen together at the Suffuss cell, which Diol says is where rough people gather. Diol says it is too far. Laureline takes a vehicle. When they get near, they see creatures in the corridors. Diol says this area is not like other areas of Point Central.

Diol refuses to accompany Laureline. She goes inside where an alien greets her, offers her a drink, and says they can fill her desires. She soon finds herself in a garden with three handsome, scantily clad men. One of the men sweeps her off her feet and kisses her. She allows it briefly. Then, she pulls her weapon and makes him stop. He points out that they are in a “neutral zone,” but she says she is just here for information (27). With that, the man disappears as the Suffuss takes on its true form.

Laureline asks the Suffuss to help her get into the room of the Bagulins, She wants to listen to their conversations. Initially, the Suffuss refuses to help her. The Grumpy Transmuter begins to manufacture some “aphrodisiac TXL sweets” (28). As the pile of sweets grows, the Suffuss agrees to help. After Laureline puts the Grumpy Transmuter away, the Suffuss warns that she might be surprised by what is about to happen. Then, the Suffuss surrounds Laureline so that his body completely covers hers. Laureline looks like a Bagulin female.

In the room where the Bagulins are drinking and celebrating, several are interested in Laureline, thinking she is a Bagulin female. Their storyteller continues his tale. The storyteller is an old man who says their “queen is satisfied,” though there is a “superfluous” person who was kidnapped. Laureline knows that person was Valerian. She asks the storyteller to reveal the person's fate. The storyteller says the queen decided he should live. As the story goes on, Laureline learns that Valerian and the



Ambassadors have been placed in pods and dropped into a “sweet-smelling lake” (30). Laureline also learns that the Groobos are involved.

Analysis

The Kamuniks look almost like Centaurs. They are very large and have the heads and torsos of men on the bodies of horses. They are dressed in elaborate costumes that resemble Viking armor, including helmets with horns. The leader, who does not identify himself, does say that his people identify with the people of Earth because they are all warriors. The use of the word “warriors” is an indication that he knows about Earth's history, and that he approves (24). It is also an indication that the people of Earth continue to fight wars despite the fact that the novel is set in the distant future.

More of Diol's character is revealed in this section. The reader has already seen him running around, panicked, after the Ambassador was kidnapped. When Laureline mentions the Suffuss, Diol immediately begins to act self-righteous. He knows about it, though it is basically a house of ill repute. However, he tries to act as if he does not know about it. He is torn, because he does not want to be associated with knowing about it, but he wants to show that he knows everything. It is impossible for him to do both.

The Suffuss is the next race of beings introduced as Laureline continues her quest to find the Ambassador and Valerian. They are able to take on any form, which is how and why they have become so popular. They literally have a brothel and bar, where they fulfill desires of anyone who comes in. When Laureline puts a stop to the human-looking Suffuss that is kissing her, he reverts to his normal form. At that point, the reader sees that he is a blob-like creature that looks sort of like an oversized, irregular doughnut.

The Grumpy Transmuter is usually very grouchy. At one point, he literally bites Laureline's finger when she tries to make him do something. However, that abruptly changes after he makes the aphrodisiac sweets for the Suffuss. When he is finished with the task, Laureline says she has to put her “affectionate little friend” back in his carrying case. The Case is very small and Laureline seems to be carrying it on her waist or somewhere on her body. It seems possible that what he makes affects the Grumpy Transmuter, and that making the aphrodisiac sweets might have made him affectionate.

The Bagulins are tall creatures with a vaguely human form. They have oversized feet and the long fingers look very much like claws. The skin seems to be scaly, like a lizard. The head is elongated with oversized eyes. After the Suffuss has surrounded Laureline so that she looks like a Bagulin, the look on her face is complete surprise. Her stance as she walks is also meant to be humorous. Her rear sticks out and she seems to be swaying from side-to-side as she walks.

The Suffuss and Laureline communicate with each other while Laureline is inside the Suffuss, masquerading as a Bagulin. The words of the Suffuss are presented in double-walled thought bubbles. It hints that only Laureline can hear the words. Laureline's



words are presented in traditional thought bubbles, meaning she might be speaking aloud in her normal voice. What becomes interesting is that the words of all the other Bagulins are also spoken in double-walled speech bubbles. This could mean that they are communicating telepathically or that they are using some other language that only they can understand.

There is a series of panels that convey the message of the storyteller who is relating the success of the mission. The Storyteller talks about a “superfluous” man who was with the Ambassador (30). In that panel, the reader can see someone carrying Valerian. Laureline immediately knows the man is Valerian, but it is not clear whether she knows this because she can see the images the storyteller sees, or if she has just figured it out.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the steps Laureline has taken to get her to this point.

Discussion Question 2

Describe the Suffuss. What is their unique ability?

Discussion Question 3

Who are the Bagulins? How does Laureline infiltrate their party?

Vocabulary

breathable, atmosphere, mute, negotiate, berserk, aphrodisiac, ritual, celebrations, peculiar, officiate, magnanimity



Pages 31-38

Summary

Outside the room, Laureline and the Suffuss part ways. She asks for information about the Groobos. The Suffuss hesitates, and Laureline bribes him with more aphrodisiac sweets from the Grumpy Transmuter. The Suffuss says the Groobos are large and live in the water. He knows little about them. Laureline finds Diol on her way out with a beautiful woman seated on his lap. Laureline forces him to leave with her. Diol says it is too dangerous to go to the Groobos' area of Point Central.

At one point, they pass a monitor. One of the Shingouz catches Laureline's attention. The Grumpy Transmuter makes more pearls for payment, and the Shingouz tells Laureline about the Groobos. They are a "psychic entity" that communicates through a jellyfish known as a zuur (33). The Shingouz says Laureline can learn about the Groobos if she catches a zuur, and that she can gain access to the Groobos' cell by using a submarine.

Laureline and Diol catch a zuur and Laureline puts it on her head. She soon sees Valerian, apparently asleep in a pod of some sort, but then the zuur explodes. Diol asks if Laureline is alright. She angrily says she is not, and jumps ashore, saying she is never going to reach Valerian at this rate. She says they have been working for hours with nothing to show for it. Diol complains he is hungry just as a man arrives in a small boat, offering to sell them "canal shellfish" (36).

The man says he gambled away his spaceship and has only one "blutok" left (37). Laureline takes that blutok and has the Grumpy Transmuter make more. The man gives them his shellfish and says he can take them to the Gnarf-Dreamers, a race that can put anyone into another person's mind. The man says he can take Laureline and Diol to the Gnarf-Dreamers.

Analysis

There is very limited narrative and dialogue as Laureline finds the zuur, which does closely resemble a jellyfish. The author depends heavily on graphics to drive the action during that scene, which happens several times over the course of this novel. The nomad who is fishing in the canal tells Laureline that the zuur is a "pedunculated jellyfish" (33). Some readers may initially believe the word "pedunculated" is specific to the futuristic novel because the word is not commonly used in modern language. However, it refers to the fact that the jellyfish is attached to another creature. In this case, the jellyfish is living atop of a huge fish, but it is not fully attached so that Laureline is able to detach it and carry it to the surface. All that action is seen in the graphics but is not explained through narrative or dialogue. This is yet another instance in which the reader has to depend on the graphics as well as the words.



Laureline struggles with the zuur when she gets it to the surface. She yells for help, but Diol says the creature looks disgusting. He refuses to touch it. Over the four panels that show Laureline taking the creature out of the water, putting it on her head, then beginning to see visions, the reader must decide whether she is forcing the zuur to get on her head or if she is fighting against it. The images hint that she is fighting against it, but it seems more likely that she is struggling to get it onto her head. There is another humorous scene in which the zuur has exploded, leaving Laureline sopping wet and holding a tentacle. She looks dejected as Diol asks if she is all right. She screams at him, and the expression on her face is meant to make the reader see the humor in the action.

Discussion Question 1

What is the zuur? What does Laureline get from it?

Discussion Question 2

Describe how writers and artists of graphic novels work together to help the reader fully understand what is happening.

Discussion Question 3

Where is Diol as Laureline leaves the Suffuss cell? What does this say about Diol?

Vocabulary

project (verb), expelled, canal, visions, morons, armored, gesture, function, telepathy, unique



Pages 39-48

Summary

Laureline and Diol reach the Gnarf-Dreamers' cell. The Grumpy Transmuter is very tired. Laureline leaves it to make more blutoks as she gets into a machine that is supposed to allow her to see what is happening to Valerian. The Gnarf-Dreamers tell her to concentrate in order to begin the process and that she will be happy with the outcome.

Laureline is soon seeing everything from Valerian's perspective. He is in the pod. He has "microequipment" that he uses to escape (39). He helps the Ambassador from his pod as well. They are aboard a ship that looks more like a multi-winged animal. The Ambassador says he is supposed to be giving a speech soon, and that there are 10,000 spaceships waiting for the Ambassador to give the word for them to "surround Point Central" (39). Their conversation is interrupted by a voice that says Valerian and the Ambassador are going to "pass into the Shadows' world," but assures them they will be safe (39).

The spaceship moves through space, then arrives on land. A voice welcomes them to "the world without a name" (40). Valerian and the Ambassador see a very tall man and woman approaching. The Ambassador shouts that he cannot be treated in this manner. Valerian says they have a time issue, and is about to talk about the ships waiting to surround Point Central. The man interrupts, dismissing the idea of time. He says life has been the same for his people for millennia, then goes on to say that they were the race that first settled Point Central. Years earlier, they were prone to fighting and participated in government, then began to see "the illusion it still represented" and pulled away from the outside (41). They continued to watch, but secluded themselves. They lost their identify and are now known only as Shadows. The man explains to the Ambassador that they will not allow Earth to take over Point Central. The Shadows are able to manipulate matter. He says a black hole will be used to swallow up each of the spaceships threatening Point Central. While the Shadows do not want to rule, they will not allow the Earth to bully their way into control of Point Central. They announce that some children are going to the "House of Wisdom," and urges them to listen (42). The Ambassador is angry, saying this is "brain washing" (42).

Laureline wakes, and the Gnarf-Dreamer seems surprised that the dream was interrupted. Diol says he is tired, and it is obvious that the Grumpy Transmuter is also tired. Laureline calls for the map they purchased from the Shingouz. She points out the empty space at the center of Point Central, saying that is where they are going. On the way, Laureline sees groups of Zools. Diol says that is unusual, but they do not know what is happening. When Laureline reaches the correct place, she finds that the cell seems to be in ruins. She has to clear debris in order to get to the doorway. They walk through a beautiful land and find Valerian and the Ambassador at the House of Wisdom Laureline had seen in her dream.



Laureline rushes to Valerian, and they kiss. Diol makes it clear that he knows the Ambassador's plan, but the Ambassador indicates that his feelings have changed. Diol says he has to check on the banquet. Valerian says he is hungry and follows. A Shingouz gets Laureline's attention, saying he has more information. She says the Grumpy Transmuter is too exhausted to provide payment. The Shingouz says the Zools are planning to "clean up Point Central" (46). He says the Ambassador's plans for a forced federation prompted the Zools to take action now. Just then the Zools arrive and silently arrest the Shingouz. The Ambassador returns, saying he was not allowed to give his speech, even though he planned to talk of peace. Instead, the Earth's representatives have been banished from Point Central for the next century.

Valerian and Diol return. Valerian is confused, having missed out on much of the action. Laureline says she will take care of the situation. She calls for the fleet of Earth's spaceships to transfer Earthlings from Point Central.

The final page of the novel is a large panel with several framed insets. Laureline and Valerian are back aboard their spaceship. Valerian suggests that Laureline switch on an auxiliary engine so they can go faster. She says it is not possible for now because she has rerouted the power to revitalize the Grumpy Transmuter. He is inside a machine, looking as if he is recovering through the influx of power.

Analysis

The Gnarf-Dreamers look very much like humans, except that they have a band across their eyes. These resemble swimming goggles but seem to be slatted. The reader can see only their noses and mouths, because their suits cover their necks, chins, and the sides of their faces. The reader may not be certain whether the Gnarf-Dreams are meant to look sinister or if their smiles are meant to be reassuring. As it turns out, Laureline has nothing to fear from them.

Valerian has no idea about Earth's fleet that is near Point Central. The spaceships are waiting for the Ambassador's call, and are then going to surround Point Central. That is obviously a power move, aimed at forcing their way into control.

There is an interesting set of graphics as Laureline goes into and comes out of the dream machine. Going in, she is imagining Valerian's name, which is surrounded by irregular, red blobs. The blobs that are nearer Laureline are smaller and they become larger as they get farther away. That could be symbolic of Laureline moving into the dream that will show her where Valerian is. At the end of the dream, the floor of the House of Wisdom seems to dissolve into puddles. Those puddles flow from the final frame of the dream to the next panel, where Laureline is waking up. That seems to symbolize the dream dissolving as Laureline regains consciousness.

Point Central has been operating for an unknown period of time with rotating government and no one holding ultimate authority over the entire man-made conglomerate of cells. There are several things happening at once as this novel takes



place. Earth is planning to demand a federation to take control, with Earth at the helm of that organization. Meanwhile, the Shadows continue to watch the events, even though they remain uninvolved. While they do not want to rule, they will not allow Earth to take control either. At the same time, the Zools are putting a stop to the profiteers and corruption, which is why they arrest the Shingouz. That group of creatures has done nothing but offer to sell information that would naturally keep the people in upheaval. The Shingouz that is arrested assures Laureline that his services will be needed, which is why he will be alright.

Ultimately, the Ambassador changes his statement from one of a forced federation government to one of peace, but he is not allowed to give that statement. The reader does not see what happens to interrupt his speech, but it is assumed that the Zool are responsible, as that takes place at the same time as the Zool arrest the Shingouz.

The final frame of the novel shows Laureline looking through a window into a machine. The Grumpy Transmuter is inside. The scene is made up of pinks and the Grumpy Transmuter is also pink. There are lines and clouds meant to make the reader imagine the amount of power flowing into the Grumpy Transmuter. His eyes are wide and his tongue is hanging out, as if he is in ecstasy.

Discussion Question 1

Who are the Gnarf-Dreamers? How do they help Laureline?

Discussion Question 2

Who are the Shadows? Why are they involved in the politics of Point Central at this point?

Discussion Question 3

What happens when the Ambassador tries to give his speech?

Vocabulary

depreciation, obsolescence, branding, niche, impose, dominance, abandoned, integrity, profiteers, shady, paternalistic, repatriation



Characters

Laureline

Laureline is an agent of the Spatio-Temporal Agency and Valerian's partner. She is outspoken and determined. She is rude toward the Earth's Ambassador when she learns why she and Valerian are present at Point Central. She disapproves of the fact that she and Valerian are expected to act as bodyguards. She believes that this assignment is beneath her and Valerian's skills. However, when Earth's Ambassador is kidnapped and Valerian winds up in the hands of the kidnapers as well, Laureline becomes determined to save Valerian. In the process, she saves the Ambassador, too.

Laureline is willing to do whatever is required in order to save Valerian. She shows her abilities and her resourcefulness as she travels among various cultures, seeking out information. She is able to gather a great deal of data and interprets what she learns in order to reach Valerian.

She is pictured as a beautiful, sexy, young woman. She has a close relationship with Valerian, as seen in their kiss when they reunite. She is also compassionate, as seen in her interaction with the Grumpy Transmuter.

Valerian

Valerian is Laureline's partner and the senior agent of their team. He and Laureline have a close working relationship and a closer personal relationship, seen by the kiss they share when they are reunited. However, Valerian chooses to follow his duty to Earth's Ambassador when he must choose whether to follow the Ambassador or check on Laureline. Valerian's daring puts him in danger, but he accepts that as part of his role as a Spatio-Temporal agent.

Valerian is pictured as tall, dark haired, and handsome. Though he is capable of failures and often has to depend on Laureline, he is also a dedicated and respected agent, as seen by the fact that Earth's Ambassador chooses him as a body guard. The Ambassador makes it clear that he does not personally like Valerian or Laureline. However, he respects their abilities.

Earth's Ambassador

The man who is Earth's Ambassador at Point Central is demanding and bossy to the point of being rude. He is apparently following orders as he plans to take control of Point Central. His attitude strikes Laureline the wrong way from the beginning, but he does not care. He notes that he does not like Valerian and Laureline personally because of their disrespect for authority – including his own. But, he does respect their abilities and skills, which is why he calls on them. At the beginning, he is planning to take control of



Point Central. He changes that stance after the Shadows re-educate him. By the time he is exiled from Point Central, he is calling himself the Ambassador of the Shadows.

Colonel Diol

Colonel Diol is the under-chief of protocol. Laureline's nickname for him is Colonel Protocol. He was supposed to be welcoming the Ambassador to the banquet. Laureline spends a great deal of time with him as she tries to find Valerian and Earth's Ambassador. Colonel Diol is not very brave or smart about the search. He mainly stays with Laureline as she works through the maze of Point Central.

The Shadows

The Shadows are the race of beings that initially settled Point Central. Over time, they have forgotten their names and the name of their race, which is why they are called Shadows. Though they are no longer actively participating in the daily happenings there, they continue to monitor the events and become involved when it is apparent that Earth is planning to take over control of Point Central.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Grumpy Transmuter

The Grumpy Transmuter is a creature from Bluxe that is able to manufacture more of any specific small item, such as pearls. Known as Grumpy, it represents Laureline's compassionate side, as seen in her concern for the creature after its reserves have been spent. It also symbolizes the power of currency because it is able to produce items that Laureline uses to buy information in her quest to find Valerian.

Earth's Spaceship Fleet

The fleet of spaceships is symbolic of the Ambassador's willingness to force the people of Point Central to accept a federation to govern Point Central, with Earth at the helm of this organization.

Point Central's Council

The council is a symbol of a self-governing plan that has been working for centuries. The Earth wants to change the governing plan. The races of Point Central take turns leading the council, but Earth's leaders want total control. Securing control is the driving force behind the Shadows' action.

The Zools

These are a group of aliens who do most of the maintenance work on Point Central. They are symbolic of the public watchdogs who have the right to protect their way of life. As the novel comes to a close, they embark on a mission to clean up the profiteers and corrupt people on Point Central, arresting some and banishing Earth from Point Central for the next 100 years.

The Monitors

Most of the communication on Point Central is done through monitors, and these are symbolic of the separation that naturally exists between people of different races. Colonel Diol cannot imagine leaving Earth's cell to have face-to-face conversations with other races.



Settings

Point Central

Point Central is the elaborate man-made planet that consists of many cultures, each attaching its own living space to the original nucleus set in place by the Ambassador of the Shadows. Valerian and Laureline end up here when the Ambassador of Earth calls on them for assistance. They learn after their arrival that the Ambassador is planning to take over control of Point Central.

The Suffuss Cell

The Suffuss cell is a place that resembles a bar and brothel. This is where Laureline meets up with the Bagulins to get another clue about where the Ambassador was taken. The Suffuss are a race that can take on any form.

The House of Wisdom

The House of Wisdom is located in the Shadows' cell. It is where Valerian and the Ambassador are re-educated. The House of Wisdom is a small building that resembles a grass hut. It seems to be symbolic of the enlightenment that makes a race willing to put aside the quest for power and war in favor of a peaceful co-existence.



Themes and Motifs

The Desire for Power

A desire for power is a universal theme seen in some form in most situations. The twist in this novel is that it is the humans – among all the diverse races of people on Point Central – who make a push to take ultimate control of a government that is working. Valerian and Laureline are agents from the Spatio-Temporal Agency, and they arrive at Point Central at the behest of Earth's Ambassador. They do not really know what their mission entails, but they soon realize that Earth's officials are making a power play in the hope of taking over complete control of Point Central.

Point Central is the ultimate man-made planet. It is home to thousands of different races of people from thousands of different planets. No one really remembers who established Point Central, and there is no hierarchy in the governing council. The various members take turns taking the lead. Up until now, that method has been working. Though the Ambassador never reveals specific motivations, the officials from Earth have decided that they should take control of Point Central.

An important aspect of this theme is seen in the fact that the Point Central council is a working government, but the Earth officials seem to believe they can force the council to hand over power simply because there is no centralized, established power among the council members. The officials bring in a fleet of spaceships as a show of force, apparently planning to bully their way into a powerful role.

A related aspect of this theme is seen in the way several people want things in return for information. The fact that Laureline has the Grumpy Transmuter places her in an enviable position. The ready influx of items that could be used as currency gives her power that she would not have otherwise.

Diversity

Point Central is a man-made conglomerate of cells, each housing a specific species of people. The conglomerate shows a hugely diverse population. This diversity is an important part of the overall culture of Point Central, but there is a limited amount of fraternization between the various cultures that seems counter to the overall construction of Point Central.

Laureline encounters several species during her search to find Valerian and the Ambassador. She first meets the Shingouz, who are small creatures that have a trunk similar to that of an anteater. These creatures offer to sell information and provide Laureline with a map of Point Central. She follows their information, encountering new species and gathering additional pieces of information along the way. The fact that they are limited in their contact could mean the diversity remains more pronounced than if the species were mixing.

The Suffuss cell is another interesting place. The spot is more diverse than most other areas of Point Central. They cater to the desires of other species, and they are able to take on any form, which means that other species are often there.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is presented from varying perspectives, depending on what is happening at a given time. The novel opens with a limited, omniscient perspective presented by the narrator. In those opening pages, the narrator gives a possible explanation for the beginning of the universe, including the first contacts between sentient beings. While the majority of the novel is focused on the actions of Laureline and Valerian, these opening pages provide an overview of how Point Central was created, including the fact that every sentient being throughout time has tried to find other forms of life.

After those first pages, the novel becomes focused entirely on Laureline and Valerian. In those scenes, the perspective is limited to what one or the other of those characters knows, with the majority of the focus placed on Laureline. When Valerian goes with Earth's Ambassador, hoping to save his life, the reader remains with Valerian until he leaves. After that, the focus reverts to Laureline and the reader knows only what Laureline knows. For example, the reader does not know where Valerian is until Laureline discovers where his whereabouts. This perspective is appropriate to the story and allows the author to present the surprise conclusion.

Language and Meaning

The novel has been translated from French, and some of the English words are not spelled or used exactly as American-speaking readers would expect. The first example of that is seen on the second panel of the novel when the narrator mentions “the footprints left by civilisations” (3). Most readers will instinctively understand the alternative spelling of the word “civilizations” and other words of this kind.

The novel is divided between dialogue, narrative, and graphics, with graphics carrying the heavier weight. The words used for the narratives and dialogues are necessary to fully explain some sections of the novel. For example, the reader learns the identities of the various characters and the traits of some of the cultures that live in the cells of Point Central mainly through dialogue, though some of the identifications are presented through narrative. However, the narrative and dialogue are very basic to the level of information. The graphics provide more description to make the reader further understand the events of the novel. That makes the graphics an important part of the novel's language.

Though many of the characters are aliens who would not speak English, the dialogue is all presented in English. The novel includes a few curse words and is obviously aimed at a mature audience.

Structure

As a graphic novel, the story is presented in the traditional manner of a comic book. However, the artist seldom uses the traditional six- or eight-panel layouts seen in many comic books. Instead, the panels are wider, taller, and placed in alternative directions. For example, the first page of graphics includes three panels. The top panel is very short, taking up just a sliver that stretches all the way across the page. The next three panels are each slightly taller than the one above, and each stretches across the page. The reader reads downward, and the increasing size makes it natural to assume that each panel has more detail than the one above.

On Page 12, the artist uses two rectangular panels at the top of the page. The second row of panels includes a large, tall panel showing a scene from a distance with three smaller panels stacked beside it, each showing a closeup of some of the characters seen at a distance in the previous panel. That means the reader reads from left to right, then from top to bottom. When the artist depends on alternative placement that does not have a natural flow (left to right or top to bottom), arrows direct the reader in the correct formation.

The graphics are presented in full color with elaborate details. Colors are used to help set tone, as seen in the reds used during the explosion when Earth's Ambassador is kidnapped.



Quotes

The only certainty is that one day, at the center of the most traveled paths of space, the first cell of what would become Point Central was erected.”

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph Frame four)

Importance: The narrator has been suggesting how the universe might have been established, including the innate need to explore and settle new places. The narrator says there is no way to know whether the first encounters between beings were friendly or warlike, but that somehow, the first cell of Point Central was formed.

We're still going to have a lot to do before the actual council meeting if we want to put the odds in our favor. Your role will be to follow me everywhere I go and not leave my side at any cost.”

-- Ambassador (chapter 1 paragraph Frame one)

Importance: The Ambassador's words are a hint that there is more to the coming meeting than normal, which is why he feels the need for a bodyguard. His words come back to Valerian when the Ambassador is kidnapped, which prompts him to follow the Ambassador despite his worry about Laureline.

Leaving the Cell! Oh my goodness!!!

-- Colonel Diol (chapter 1 paragraph Frame five)

Importance: Diol explains several times that the people on Point Central seldom leave their cells, but they communicate through a centralized system that uses monitors. The one exception seems to be the Suffuss cell, which serves as something like a brothel and bar.

Besides, we can take any shape we want. That's the secret of our success.”

-- The Suffuss (chapter 1 paragraph Frame 10)

Importance: Laureline has just forced the Suffuss to drop his masquerade as a handsome human from Earth, explaining that she is not interested in the illusions but is looking for information. This quote explains that the Suffuss can change its shape, which is how it gets Laureline into the Bagulins's party.

We're aware of the rot that has set in on Point Central and elsewhere in the boundless sky. But until now, no power has imposed its law. Such a thing we will never allow to happen.”

-- The Shadow Leader (chapter 1 paragraph Frame five)

Importance: The Shadow leader is talking to Valerian and the Ambassador, and the Shadow's explanation gives information about the race and why they are no longer actively involved in the government of Point Central. It also explains why they have chosen now to step in and become active.



But we're expelled! A hundred years of banishment from Point Central for Earth!"
-- Ambassador (chapter 1 paragraph Frame four)

Importance: The Ambassador has just announced the council's decision, which was taken because Earth planned to take over the government of Point Central with a show of force.