

The City of Shifting Waters (Valerian) Study Guide

**The City of Shifting Waters (Valerian) by Christin
Pierre**

(c)2017 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The City of Shifting Waters (Valerian) Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Pages 1-10.....	5
Pages 11-20.....	7
Pages 21-30.....	10
Pages 31-40.....	13
Pages 41-48.....	16
Characters.....	19
Symbols and Symbolism.....	22
Settings.....	24
Themes and Motifs.....	25
Styles.....	28
Quotes.....	30



Plot Summary

Mezieres, J.C.; Christin, P.; Tranle, E. *Valerian and Laureline: The City of Shifting Waters*. Cinebook, Canterbury, Kent, 2010. Kindle AZW file.

Mezieres and Christin's *Valerian and Laureline: The City of Shifting Waters*, is the story of an agency charged with keeping the world safe. Set in a future time, the graphic novel follows the adventures of a hero named Valerian. Most people of this time in the metropolis city of Galaxy have plenty of leisure time. Valerian and his assistant, Laureline, spend most of their time traveling across space and time to fight villains who are not playing by the rules.

As this story picks up, Valerian and Laureline are enjoying a bit of time off, but are summoned to the Spatio-Temporal Agency headquarters. When they arrive, Valerian's boss informs them that the world's only political prisoner, Xombul, has escaped and managed to steal a ship that can travel through space and time. Valerian is horrified, knowing that it means potential disaster. For Laureline's benefit, the boss explains the history. The earth was struck by a series of cataclysmic events after a hydrogen bomb depot exploded in 1986. The resulting earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis brought about a virtual end to earth's civilization. The agency tracked Xombul to 1986 and Valerian is tasked with bringing him back to prison.

Valerian arrives in 1986 at the top of the Statue of Liberty, only to have the statue collapse before he can figure out a way down. The city is flooded and a group of gangsters picks up Valerian's unconscious body. He escapes and, realizing that the gangsters have nothing to do with Xombul, continues his search. He finds that some robots are operating from the United Nations building and elicits the gangsters' leader, Sun Tae, to help track them. They discover that Xombul is in charge of the robots, and they are forced to go to Xombul's headquarters, located in Yellowstone National Park.

They meet Xombul's only scientist, Mr. Schroeder. He is in Xombul's lab by force and helps them escape. Through a series of events, Valerian has Xombul in his custody, then loses him. By the time Valerian, Laureline, and Mr. Schroeder make their way back to the lab, Sun Rae is alone and announces that Xombul traveled to a space station, using a rocket ship that was supposed to be used by the president as an emergency escape to the satellite.

Valerian and Laureline find that Mr. Schroeder has been working on a time travel machine, though they know the first successful time travel does not happen for many years. They modify his machine and are able to travel to the space station. Valerian confronts Xombul but he boards a time travel machine of his own. That machine, however, is not configured correctly and it explodes. Valerian and Laureline return to earth with Mr. Schroeder and Sun Rae. Before they leave, they put the time machine back as they found it, knowing that humans had to follow their own path toward mastering time travel. As the story comes to a close, Valerian and Laureline are planning to take a short side trip before returning him. Dr. Schroeder is meeting with all

the great minds left on earth with ideas for their next projects, and Sun Rae is meeting with gangsters and thugs, planning his next moves as well.



Pages 1-10

Summary

The book opens with an idyllic scene beside a small waterfall and a beautiful stream. Valerian is reclining and Laureline is seated nearby, with a 3-D chessboard between them. A caption explains that the two live in Galaxity, which is a “metropolis of the future and capital of the Terran Galactic Empire” (2). The people have entered a time of leisure. Valerian and Laureline are members of the Spatio-Temporal Agency, which keeps the earth safe. Laureline is claiming that she has Valerian beat when they are summoned to the agency headquarters.

There, Valerian's boss tells them that Xombul, their only political prisoner, has escaped. The boss tells him that Xombul stole a time spaceship and went to New York, 1986. For Laureline's benefit, he explains that this was the year when a hydrogen bomb depot exploded near the North Pole, melting ice caps and flooding the world in addition to setting off a series of other disasters. He shows the agents maps and says Valerian is to travel there.

Valerian lands at the relay point in New York City in 1986, which happens to be in the torch of the Statue of Liberty. It is very wet inside and the city below is flooded. Before he can figure out how he is supposed to get off the statue, the statue crumbles and falls. Valerian's suit has a life vest built in, but he is unconscious when a gang of men pull him from the water. They travel through the flooded streets of the city. One man, wearing a captain's hat, who is apparently named Bud, orders a dark-skinned man named Alfonso to carry Valerian to an upstairs room and tie him up. It takes no time for Valerian to free himself of the ropes. He hides and listens as the men return and talk about his escape, but decides they have no connection to Xombul.

Valerian makes his way to the rooftop where he fights his way through growth, as if in a jungle. He encounters more men from the gang, and has to fight his way free again. As the sun sets, Valerian is glad he survived the day, but knows he is no closer to completing his mission. He climbs the stairs to the top of the Empire State Building, hoping for a better view of the city. He sees a light on in a window of the United Nations Building. Knowing there is no power anywhere in the city, he finds a boardroom filled with inflatable chairs and sets out to row his chair toward the light.

Analysis

Very typically, Valerian makes jokes about the danger he will face once he reaches New York in 1986. The planet is flooded, due to melting ice caps, and Valerian dismisses the danger, saying that he can swim. Some readers may find the wording, actions, and attitudes trite, but most who set out to read the novel for entertainment will accept this aspect of the story.



The second set of scenes of this story is set in New York City. Valerian and the gangsters are traveling through the city. The gangsters are looting and Valerian is searching for clues about Xombul. The scenes include stores and buildings that really exist in New York City, including Macy's, the Empire State Building, and the United Nations building. The author could have simply used generic buildings. The fact that he names them is an apparent attempt to lend more credibility to the novel.

When Sun Rae is introduced for the first time, he is playing a flute. The gangsters warn that no one is allowed to interrupt him. The flute is an obvious graphic and character-building tool, meant to make Sun Rae appear to be a sensitive person even though he is the leader of this gang of ruffians.

There are some things that are mentioned but never explained. As Valerian's boss orders Valerian to travel to 1986, they briefly discuss the fact that Galaxy's charter banned travel to that time, but that Xombul's presence there is enough to warrant breaking the ban. The situation is never again discussed or explained.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the Spatio-Temporal Agency. What are the first impressions of the agency and its role in the world?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Valerian? What details of his character have been revealed up to this point?

Discussion Question 3

Describe New York City in 1986. What caused the devastation?

Vocabulary

metropolis, raging, hydroponic, capacity, calculations, superintendent, temporal, cataclysm, archives, shrouded, flourishes, trussed, ransacking



Pages 11-20

Summary

Valerian reaches the building and manages to make his way inside. He finds that the light is inside a room designated as the “U.N. Scientific Library.” When he looks inside, he sees that robots are moving around the room, obviously with a goal in mind. When some of the robots get on the elevator, Valerian watches as it reaches the ground floor. He knows that floor is underwater and that he cannot go there, but he believes he has found a lead to Xombul.

Valerian gets back on his chair and begins paddling away but the gangsters arrive in a boat and shoot it. When the chair deflates and Valerian is swimming, the men pull him into the boat. They take Valerian back to their cargo ship, where they tell him they are gathering up loot under the direction of a man named Sun Rae. There is one cargo boat in the area that did not sink, and the men are loading it with gold and jewels. When they reach the ship, they force Valerian to help carry the loot they have gathered. Several days pass before Valerian gets a chance to escape. One man sees him and Valerian knocks him out then throws him into a dark room. Someone else fights with him in the room and Valerian decides that the person is small, but a good fighter. Eventually, Laureline reveals herself, saying that Valerian seems to be “off your game” (15).

Laureline has a raft and they travel through Central Park to an apartment she found in Greenwich Village. She explains that she was sent to find Valerian after he failed to check in or return for several days. She then serves up an “elegant” meal of canned food (16). They eat and talk about the situation, including that many people died and the survivors fight each other over even minor supplies.

Laureline mentions that many scientists have gathered at the University of Brasilia, and that they are worried that most scientific archives have been destroyed already. That prompts Valerian to remember the robots at the U.N. Scientific Archives. He points out that people with the greatest amount of knowledge will be in the best positions in this new civilization. Valerian decides they should ask Sun Rae for help finding out where the robots are going. He saw a man wearing a diving suit, so he knows Sun Rae has the equipment to be able to help.

Valerian and Laureline go to Sun Rae's ship. Valerian points out that no one will have anything to trade for Sun Rae's gold and jewels, and that the real ruler of this new world situation will have a wealth of knowledge instead. Sun Rae sees the logic and agrees to help Valerian with the understanding that Valerian will take custody of Xombul and Sun Rae can have anything else they find. Suited up in diving gear, Valerian, Laureline, Sun Rae and some of Sun Rae's men follow the robots through a submerged subway tunnel. When they emerge onto dry land, they have to split up to search for the robots. Sun Rae, Valerian, and Laureline soon find where the robots have gone. Then enter a room



with a huge monitor on the wall, and Valerian sees Xumbol's image as he talks to the robots.

Analysis

The group of gangsters who pull Valerian from the water and later return to capture him again are looting New York City. They are stealing all sorts of items for Sun Rae. In one scene, one of them has stolen a statue – apparently a statue that man feels is very valuable. The other gangsters order him to throw it overboard, saying they are only interested in cash, gold, and jewels. The world is literally destroyed and these men are trying to steal money. Valerian points out to Sun Rae that the endeavor is ridiculous because no one will have anything to trade for the money, or any use for it.

The author uses understatement that only works with the graphics involved. For example, Laureline says that she “left the plane I the suburbs” (16). In the graphics, the reader can see that the plane is crashed. A similar scene is seen when she explains how she borrowed the plane, and the graphic shows men shooting at her as she flies away. This literary device is different in the graphic novel than it would be without the graphics. The author is able to show the understatement through images rather than depending on just words to convey the message.

Laureline is supposed to be Valerian's sidekick, or assistant, but it is obvious she is capable in her own right. An example of this is seen in the scene in which Laureline and Valerian meet up with each other in 1986. Valerian does not know who Laureline is, and knows only that he is fighting against someone who is small, but a good fighter. She knows it is Valerian and reveals herself after a short fight, saying that he seems to be “off his game” (15), which indicates that she was holding her own against him. This is the typical sidekick attitude, which is one of the book's themes.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Laureline? What kind of character is she?

Discussion Question 2

How does Valerian get his first clue about Xombul? Why does he assume that Xombul is involved with the robots?

Discussion Question 3

Describe what the gangsters are doing in New York City. Why is this a pointless endeavor?



Vocabulary

pillaging, weirdos, archives, excursions, authorities, exile, heist, merciless, looters, oppressive, mooring, remnant, prestigious, tsunami, refuge, severed, irretrievably, symposium



Pages 21-30

Summary

Over the monitor, Xombul tells the robots another tsunami will hit New York City within the hour, and urges them to “blow up the place” before they leave the city (21). Then Xombul sees Valerian and orders the robots to capture him. A fight erupts but the robots can throw flames that would “disintegrate” the humans and Sun Rae's bullets do not harm the robots. Xombul orders the robots to capture Valerian's group alive, and they do. Xombul orders Valerian, Laureline, and Sun Rae to head west out of the city using Xombul's hovercraft. He warns that the robots will kill them if they go off course. Valerian wakes Sun Rae to have him pilot the hovercraft. The situation is serious as they manage to make it out of the city, but they survive just as the city comes crashing down behind them.

Outside the city, Valerian and Laureline see people on the roofs of destroyed houses. Some are yelling for help and are angry, but Valerian tells Laureline that they do not know where they are going and the hovercraft is now operating on autopilot. They reach the Rocky Mountains and the hovercraft becomes a helicopter. They cross the mountains in the midst of a storm.

On board the helicopter, Valerian says the landscape seems familiar. Sun Rae identifies it as Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. He points out a large herd of buffalo and a geyser as evidence that he is correct. The helicopter lands near the opening of a cave. Valerian, Laureline, and Sun Rae go into the cave, accompanied by some of the robots while others remain outside, unloading documents from the helicopter.

When the three humans reach the entrance of an elaborate laboratory, Xombul meets them. Xombul makes a comment about seeing Valerian last in a future time and place. Valerian pledges to get everyone who helped Xombul escape, but Xombul says none of his accomplices survived. Sun Rae asks Laureline what Xombul and Valerian are talking about, which prompts Xombul to end the conversation. Xombul invites them to meet his only scientist. He says all the others “ran like rabbits” when the disasters hit, but the one who is still working in the lab Xombul commandeered is “remarkable” (29).

Xombul takes Valerian to a workstation where a scientist, introduced as Mr. Schroeder, is at work. Mr. Schroeder snaps at Xombul, saying he does not have time for chatting. Xombul asks about Mr. Schroeder's current experiment, and the scientist drinks from the beaker, saying it is “synthetic whiskey” (30). Xombul laughs it off, saying Mr. Schroeder likes to joke around, but that he is brilliant. He points out the robots – which are programmed in tune with Xombul's brain – as evidence of Mr. Schroeder's ability.

Xombul says he plans to set himself up as the world leader. He offers Sun Rae a position as his military and Valerian a position as his “right hand” (30). Sun Rae

indicates interest but Valerian is offended at the offer. Xombul says he expected Valerian's reaction, and has a plan to ensure cooperation.

Analysis

There is some typical back-and-forth between various characters, specifically involving Valerian. When he and Xombul are talking for the first time immediately after the robots capture Valerian's group, Xombul asks who Sun Rae is. Valerian introduces him as his "associate," and says Sun Rae is the "uncontested master of New York City" and a "first class flute player," but Valerian adds that Sun Rae is those things "when he's not unconscious" (22). Later, Valerian apologizes for getting Sun Rae into the current situation, saying that it is bad for Sun Rae. Sun Rae counters, saying "you think so?" (23).

There is an interesting graphic element in the final frame of page 26. The frame covers the bottom half of the page, and shows a large, flooded plain with a few structures and trees sticking out above the water level. The sky is clouded over but there is an opening in the clouds and the sun is shining through. The message is apparently that the worst is over and the people of the world will begin to rebuild. A more immediate message is that Valerian's group is headed away from the devastation of the coastal area.

The graphics of the various laboratories are elaborate but undefined. There are long panels of monitors, buttons, and controls, but no indication of their function. This is acceptable to the story, which is merely showing the reader the expanse of the laboratories, but has no need to demonstrate specifics.

An example of the use of color is seen when Valerian and the others arrive at Xombul's laboratory in Yellowstone. When the characters are entering the opening of the cave, the artist depends heavily on red and orange, which indicates danger. The next frame shows Xombul as a silhouette in a blue passageway. The blue indicates light and the fact that Xombul is only seen as a silhouette is an attempt to make him seem threatening.

Several of the characters have interesting appearances meant to invoke specific feelings and ideas in the readers. For example, Xombul has a long face, pointed chin with a pointed goatee, bald head, and exaggerated smile. Some readers might immediately think of the stereotypical devil when they see his image. Mr. Schroeder has an uncanny resemblance to caricatures of comedian Jerry Lewis. That would make readers expect a bumbling character who might fall down stairs, rather than a brilliant scientist who would risk his life to escape from Xombul.

It seems trite to have Xombul try to coerce Valerian and Sun Rae to join him. It seems like the typical villain attitude, trying to turn them into villains with him.



Discussion Question 1

What is Xombul's goal in 1986? What offer does he make to Sun Rae and Valerian?

Discussion Question 2

Why might the author have chosen to set the story in New York City?

Discussion Question 3

How do Valerian, Laureline, and Sun Rae reach Xombul's laboratory?

Vocabulary

calculated, remnants, impervious, imbecile, disintegrate, impromptu, encounters, brute, uncontested, deviation, surveillance, savage, waterspout, fury, herculean, mockery, exerted, miraculously, havoc, imminent, vast, allies, predicament, compromising, collaboration, synthetic

Pages 31-40

Summary

The group, including Xombul, Mr. Schroeder, Valerian, Laureline, Sun Rae, and several robots – goes down some stairs to another part of the lab. This room has some equipment surrounded by the walls of the cave and stalagmites. Mr. Schroeder pretends to trip and uses the moment to hand something to Valerian. Mr. Schroeder says he will give Valerian a signal of when to throw the device, and that he wants to escape with Valerian. Xombul informs Valerian that Mr. Schroeder made a “molecular miniaturiser,” and shows him a buffalo that has been through the machine. Xombul now plans to shrink Laureline and carry her around in his pocket in order to keep Valerian in check. They place Laureline on a platform then Xombul and Mr. Schroeder work at some controls. Laureline shrinks.

Just before the process is finished, Mr. Schroeder yells out to Valerian, and he throws down the weapon which sends out a blast of sound that makes Xombul and the robots fall to the floor. Valerian picks up Laureline, who is angry. She says that the girl is always the one who gets into this kind of situation. She is so small, she can sit in Valerian's hand. Mr. Schroeder says they stopped the shrinking process before it was complete, which means Laureline will return to her normal size in time. Valerian says they have to leave immediately. Sun Rae announces that he is going to stay in Xombul's lab. He refuses to let Mr. Schroeder go with Valerian.

Valerian continues to walk, carrying the unconscious Xombul on one shoulder and the miniature Laureline on the other. Mr. Schroeder joins them, saying he got away from Sun Rae. They arrive at the entrance to the cave to discover there are robots there as well. Xombul wakes and struggles, making it difficult for Valerian to walk and for Laureline to hold on. Valerian knocks Xombul out but then robots see them and he has to run. Valerian is injured by the blast from a robot's gun, and drops Xombul.

Valerian and Mr. Schroeder continue to run, pursued by robots in an anti-gravity vehicle. The vehicle moves slowly, but relentlessly. Laureline regains her full size. They lose the vehicle and walk all night, finding an abandoned military base early the next morning.

Laureline, Valerian, and Mr. Schroeder find a jeep and make their way back into Yellowstone, discussing the possibility that Xombul has some sort of security measure that will detect their presence. When a plane is seen nearby, they run from the jeep, all armed with weapons from the military base. Valerian is hiding near the top of a rock, carrying a missile launcher. Laureline and Mr. Schroeder are hiding below the rock, and Laureline has a gun. Valerian hits the plane but Laureline and Mr. Schroeder see that something is dropping from the plane, even as the plane is going down. Mr. Schroeder yells for Laureline to shoot each of the bubbles falling, but she cannot get them all.

The bubbles are prison bubbles, invented by Mr. Schroeder. They simply envelop a person in a force field and keep them there. The bubbles can be steered by remote and the three soon begin to drive toward Xombul's base.

Analysis

The artist uses an interesting graphic novel technique just after Laureline shrinks. Valerian rushes to her and asks if she is alright. She is very small compared to him, and her speech bubble is filled with squiggled lines that represent words spoken in a very quiet voice. The fact that the reader cannot read the words is an indication that Valerian cannot hear them. When Valerian picks her up, he can hear her again, and that is when she shows how angry she is over the situation. Her anger is related to one of the book's themes, which is the role of the sidekick.

Color is an important part of this graphic novel. Different colors are used to convey different meanings. For example, the artist depends heavily on light blues to convey the idea of darkness approaching. There are more dark colors in the scenes in which Valerian is making his way through the jungle-like areas of the city. The reader will likely subconsciously make sense of these colors, even without actually analyzing them.

There are several mentions of Brasilia, where a symposium of scientists were gathered when the disasters began. Those scientists are apparently still in Brasilia when Valerian and Laureline capture Xombul. For some reason, Valerian announces his plan to go to Brasilia. He does not explain his reasoning and Laureline seems to accept it. This plan seems out of line, considering that they were originally supposed to be capturing Xombul and returning him to captivity in Galaxy. It is not explained.

The author and artist use a combination of devices to convey action and to move the story along. For example, the group is walking after briefly capturing Xombul. Above frame five, the words of a narrator appears, "after a few anxious minutes" (37). In that frame, Valerian is helping Laureline to her feet after she has regained her normal size and Mr. Schroeder says that the robots are no longer in sight. Above the next frame, the narrator continues the previous sentence with, "the group resumes its trek" (37). Taken together, the two narrator comments make a sentence that helps drive the action. This tactic is seen throughout the book.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Laureline small? What does she say to Valerian immediately following being shrunk? What does this say about her character?

Discussion Question 2

Colors are used frequently in the book to symbolize things. What are some colors that are used in everyday life to signify specific things? (Example, red means stop in a traffic



light, or hot on a water faucet.) What colors might a graphic artist use to invoke emotions or ideas?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how Valerian captures Xombul, then loses him again.

Vocabulary

molecular, accurately, consoles, vigilance, deafening, thrashing, gadget, wavelength, commission, annoyance, procedure, prey, curses, mesa, barren, contraption, scrounged, devastated, providential, salvaged, monitoring, provoke, seismic, foreboding



Pages 41-48

Summary

While Valerian, Laureline, and Mr. Schroeder are in the prison bubbles, a lava field erupts. The bubbles are uncomfortable but protect the three from the lava. They are “half conscious” and are “tossed around” inside the bubbles (41). They are clear of the lava before their bubbles open, setting the three free. Though Mr. Schroeder is certain they are only a half hour's walk from the lab, they walk for hours before reaching it to find that Sun Rae was in remote control of the prison bubbles, and that he moved them out of the lava field before releasing them.

Sun Rae then says that Xombul did return to the lab, but that he has escaped in a rocket. Dr. Schroeder explains that there was a rocket at the facility. In the event of a nuclear attack, the president was supposed to board the rocket and go to a space station. They have a view of the rocket and can watch what Xombul is doing, but they cannot figure out what he is working on. They discuss what to do next until Sun Rae lies down on a machine. Valerian and Laureline discover that it is a primitive time machine. Mr. Schroeder and some colleagues built it but were never able to make it work. With their advanced knowledge of time travel, they are able to make it work. They locate space suites and other supplies but Laureline hits Sun Rae and Mr. Schroeder, knocking both out for the trip. Valerian and Laureline discuss the situation, agreeing that they could not leave either of the men in the lab, but they also could not let them see “where we're going” (44).

The machine works, putting Valerian and Laureline on the space station where Xombul is frantically working on something. Valerian dons a space suit and goes through the space station hatch. He announces that he is taking Xombul back to Galaxy. Xombul is surprised. Valerian says they used one of “Mr. Schroeder's failures” to travel to the space station. Xombul announces that he has built a time machine of his own. Xombul goes on a rant, saying he was very close to being able to travel through time, changing anything he felt was bad and creating a better future for the world. Then Xombul rushes to his own machine and gets inside. Valerian warns him that the twentieth century technology could never work, but Xombul gets inside and prepares to take off. Suddenly, the machine erupts in a flash of light. Xombul and his machine are totally destroyed, and the pieces go drifting into space.

Valerian takes a moment to be angry, saying that he lost Xombul but his mission is complete. He then looks at the screens where Xombul was working and sees the same maps that his boss had shown him on Galaxy, just before Valerian set out on his mission. He knows that someone will eventually discover the images on the space satellite, and that they will wind up in his boss's possession and will be used as Valerian sets out on his mission.



Valerian returns to the space ship where Laureline is waiting and Sun Rae and Mr. Schroeder are still unconscious. They return to earth before the men wake. Valerian assures Mr. Schroeder that time travel is possible, but Laureline makes the changes to the time machine, putting it back as she and Valerian found it. Mr. Schroeder is upset, saying it could take years to figure out what he has done wrong, but Valerian says they do not have the right to change history by giving Mr. Schroeder the answers. As Valerian and Laureline prepare to leave, they see Mr. Schroeder and Sun Rae walking away, headed for Brasilia. They know both men are strong and capable, and will hold a place in the world's future.

The final three frames of the book serve as the conclusion. In one, Mr. Schroeder is addressing a group of scientists, saying he has some research projects they should begin. In the next, Sun Rae is addressing a group of men in a rough room, talking about the way to take control of the city. In the final frame, Laureline and Valerian are discussing the possibility of a “temporal side trip” before they return to Galaxy, knowing they will soon be assigned another mission once they reach home.

Analysis

Xombul is using documents his robots recovered to build his time machine. He travels to the space station to build it, believing he has everything he needs there, and he is angry when he learns there was a time machine available at his lab on earth. There seems to be a discrepancy in their conversation. Valerian warns Xombul not to trust the time machine he built, saying that the technology stolen from the twentieth century could not possibly be accurate. It seems that Xombul might have stolen some of that technology from Galaxy or from some future point in time when the technology was perfected. It is also noteworthy that Valerian has just done some modifications to a time machine built in the twentieth century, and successfully used that machine. It is also interesting that Valerian's boss said Xombul had stolen a “Spatio-Temporal ship,” and “is moving around history freely” (2). It is not clear why he needs to build another machine.

The story is meant to show a full circle with Valerian's discovery of the images he had seen at the beginning of his mission. His boss told him that those maps were found on a “primitive space station” (3). When Valerian sees those images on the space station just after Xombul's craft blows up, he recognizes that someone will find them on the space station some day, and they will wind up in his boss's possession. That idea was probably cutting edge in 1976, when the book was first published, but has become something of a cliché in the years since.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the maps Valerian finds on the space station?



Discussion Question 2

Describe Xombul's plan for his time machine. What happens when he uses the machine?

Discussion Question 3

Predict the future for Mr. Schroeder and Sun Rae.

Vocabulary

pacific, remotely, itinerary, volcanic, eruptions, intensity, orbital, refuge, observed, prototype, colleagues, mechanics, dabble, impossibility, ignition, vortex, instantaneously, opting, deemed, mercilessly, retrogrades



Characters

Valerian

Valerian is the novel's hero. He is a strong character, both physically and in terms of determination. He puts himself in danger repeatedly as he fights the villain, Xombul. He is knowledgeable about every situation that comes his way, fighting through any problem to achieve his goals. This is a graphic novel and Valerian is a very typical comic-book hero. He takes action against impossible odds, and is always ahead of his sidekick, Laureline, except in rare cases.

Valerian apparently has no desires, no personal life, and no dreams of being anything other than a Spatio-Temporal Agent. None of his personal thoughts are revealed, and he remains focused only on the tasks at hand.

As the story opens, Valerian is playing chess with Laureline, and she is apparently winning. When they are summoned to headquarters, Valerian immediately jumps up to go. This tells the reader that he is not accustomed to losing at anything, especially not at a game to his sidekick. When he arrives at headquarters, the boss is surprised at the quick response, which indicates that he is not often so prompt. That indicates another side to Valerian, with him sometimes operating out of the strict line of professional conduct.

Laureline

Laureline is a Spatio-Temporal Agent in her own right and is very capable, but she winds up playing the role of Valerian's sidekick. An important aspect of her character is seen when she winds up in the shrinking device. She complains that this kind of thing happens to her all the time, which indicates that she is sick of being the sidekick. However, she continues to play that role throughout the book.

Like Valerian, none of Laureline's hopes, thoughts, or personal life are presented in this book. She seems to have no life outside the Spatio-Temporal Agency. However, she talks about how much she likes the little apartment she finds in New York before she joins up with Valerian. That might indicate that she enjoys a normal lifestyle, with an apartment and time to do what she wants.

Although Laureline is completely capable of taking care of herself most of the time, there are instances in which she winds up depending on Valerian, as seen in the hours after she is shrunk and has to ride on his shoulder. She usually follows his lead, allowing him to make most of the decisions. She is also less knowledgeable than Valerian, as seen in the opening pages when their boss has to explain Xombul's identity to her.



Xombul

Xombul is a political prisoner in Galaxy until he manages to escape. When Valerian and Laureline chase him to New York City in 1986, he is trying to change history, which could bring an end to Galaxy. Xombul wants to control the world, and is looking for ways to gain power for himself throughout the book.

Sun Rae

Sun Rae is basically a gangster who has survived the catastrophes of 1986. He is the leader of the gang that is pillaging New York City. He is tough and capable, and he becomes involved with Valerian after learning that there might be more value to scientific documents than to the jewels and gold he has been stealing. Sun Rae actually saves Valerian, Laureline, and Mr. Shroeder after they are captured in the prison bubbles.

Mr. Schroeder

Mr. Shroeder is a scientist who bears a striking resemblance to Jerry Lewis. He is the only scientist in Xombul's control center when Valerian first meets him, and he helps Valerian and Laureline escape. He is a brilliant scientist who has worked on the time machine and invented items such as the prison bubbles and the shirking machine. He is excited to learn that time travel is possible, but he is disappointed when he learns that Laureline has reversed the modifications it took to make his machine work.

Valerian's Boss

Valerian's boss is a very short man who lives and works on Galaxy. He apparently trusts Valerian's abilities but knows that Valerian can sometimes fail to do things promptly, such as answer the call to return to headquarters. He appears only briefly in this book, but he is the one who explains the situation to Laureline and sends Valerian on his mission.

Alfonso

Alfonso is the gangster who carries Valerian up the ladder and ties him up after they pull him from the water. He is a dark-skinned man, perhaps of Mexican descent, and is seen in several of the scenes.

Bud

Bud is apparently the second in command of the gangster crew. He wears a captain's hat and seems to be the person giving the orders while the crew is working around the city, but he is obviously in awe of Sun Rae, the gang's leader.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Gangsters

The gangsters symbolize the lawlessness of the world after the disasters. These are a group of rowdy men who are looting New York City when Valerian arrives in 1986. They are violent and greedy, but are afraid of Sun Rae. They save Valerian after he falls into the water from the Statue of Liberty, but they make it clear that they plan to kill him. They are not overly bright or capable, and Valerian bests them at every turn.

1986

The original novel was written in 1976, and at that time, 1986 represented a time in the future. Valerian and Laureline are from the future and return back to 1986, where they find the earth in ruins and Xombul trying to take over.

Spatio-Temporal Agents Service

The Spatio-Temporal Agents Service is symbolic of law and order in Galaxity. It is an agency that oversees issues in other times and other places. Both Valerian and Laureline are members of this agency.

The Statue of Liberty

The Statue of Liberty is the symbol of freedom that stands in New York Harbor, and it is the location of the relay where Valerian lands when he reaches 1986.

The Hydrogen Bomb Depot

The hydrogen bomb depot located near the North Pole exploded, bringing about the disasters of 1986. The depot could have several symbolic meanings, including the author's perception that there are too many bombs in existence, which is setting the world up for disaster.

Time Travel

Time travel is symbolic of futuristic goals and events, and it is often seen as an accepted technology in futuristic novels. In this book, time travel is used by the villain Xombul as he tries to change history and take control of the world, as well as by Valerian and Laureline as they try to stop Xombul.



Sun Rae's Flute

Sun Rae flutes symbolizes his complexity as a character, specifically his sensitivity. The men say no one is allowed to interrupt him while he is playing, which is obviously a way to show that he is in control, but sensitive enough to be a musician.

The Robots

The robots are controlled by Xombul and are another symbol of the futuristic aspects of the novel. They are on the same mind pattern as Xombul so that he has control, but they can be destroyed, as seen in Dr. Shroeder's device.

Xombol's Command Center

Xombol's Command Center is where Xambul is operating when Valerian finds him, and it symbolizes the typical villain's workshop. The control center is located in a huge cave in Yellowstone National Park. The control center has a myriad of technology and a place for Dr. Schroeder's scientific experiments.

The Space Station

The space station is another symbol of the futuristic aspects of the novel. Xombul goes there in the hope of escaping from Valerian long enough to build a time travel machine that he plans to use to change history.



Settings

Galaxy

Galaxy is the metropolis city of the future and home of Valerian and Laureline. The majority of the action takes place in 1986, long before Galaxy is formed. What little is seen of the city indicates a paradise where people lead idyllic lives.

New York City

New York City is where Valerian and Laureline go in their quest to find Xombul. Valerian arrives to find the city in ruins after a series of disasters, but there are some recognizable landmarks, such as the Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, and United Nations building. The city completely falls when a tsunami strikes, just as Valerian, Laureline, and Sun Rae escape.

The United Nations Building

This is the building in New York City that is surviving up until the tsunami strikes as Valerian is leaving the city. The building is where Xombul's robots are working, which is how Valerian finds Xombul.

The Statue of Liberty

The Statue of Liberty is still standing when Valerian arrives in 1986, and is the location of the relay where Valerian lands when he reaches that time. He does not know why that location was chosen for the relay, but it could have been because the statue holds symbolic meaning to the people who built the relay. The statue collapses shortly after Valerian's arrival, perhaps because of his presence and weight or perhaps just coincidentally at that point in time.

Yellowstone National Park

Yellowstone National Park is where Xambul's control center is located. The area around the park is the setting for several scenes, including the scene in which Xombul drops prison bubbles to capture Valerian, Laureline, and Mr. Schroeder. Valerian, Laureline, and Sun Rae arrive via a futuristic helicopter, and they get their first view of the park from the air. They mention a geyser, which is probably Old Faithful.



Themes and Motifs

Good versus Evil

While a traditional theme of good versus evil exists in this graphic novel, a slight twist is added by including characters who are not as clear cut where they stand, or will stand in the future, on the side of good versus evil.

Valerian and Laureline are on the side of good. They work for the Spatio-Temporal Agency and their job is to travel the universe, fixing any situation that their agency officials assign. They have never traveled to 1986 before, and are actually banned from that time period by Galaxy's organizational charter. However, they feel that Xombul poses a sufficient threat to disobey that ban.

In many ways, Valerian is a stereotypical hero. He literally laughs off dangerous situations and successfully fights off several villains at once. He says that it does not matter if he winds up underwater when he arrives in 1986, because he can swim. He does wind up in some unfavorable situations, such as when the gangsters pull him from the water after the Statue of Liberty crashes into the ocean. The gangsters take him captive and tie him up, but he effortlessly escapes before much time elapses.

Sun Rae is the really questionable example of this theme. He is leader of the gangsters as the story opens, but he has his sensitive side, evidenced by the fact that he plays the flute. He saves Valerian, Laureline, and Mr. Schroeder when the three are in prison bubbles, but he seems ready to consider Xombul's offer to lead Xombul's army. He seems to be on Valerian's side by the time the book comes to a close, but the final frames show him meeting with some rough men with plans to gain power.

On the side of evil, Xombul is also the stereotypical villain. He uses robots as his minions and controls them with his mind. He is short and ugly, especially when compared with the handsome image of Valerian. He has evil plans but dies when he ignores Valerian's warnings that his time-machine technology cannot possibly be safe.

Mr. Schroeder is a good guy, but the final frames of the book show him meeting with other scientists and talking about research that should begin immediately. He is a brilliant scientist, but readers are left to wonder whether he will achieve a level of power that will eventually corrupt him.

The Role of the Sidekick

Laureline serves the purpose of sidekick in the graphic novel, fulfilling many of the common stereotypes of a sidekick, especially that of a female, as she is placed in danger and in need of her male companion's help.



Laureline is everything one would expect. She is beautiful and her image in some scenes is obviously meant to exude sex appeal. She is capable of handling herself on most fronts. In the opening scene, Laureline is winning at a game of 3-D chess against Valerian. When Valerian encounters her on Sun Rae's ship, Laureline fights against him for a few minutes before teasing him, saying he must be having an "off" day. She has found him with little effort and is able to steal a plane in order to reach him. She steps into her role to help him find Xombul, and they are successful, up to a point.

Her role becomes even more stereotypical when Xombul shrinks her in an effort to control Valerian. Xombul says that he will shrink Laureline and keep her in his pocket in order to ensure that Valerian does what Xombul says. Of course, that works out only to a point, but Laureline does wind up physically small and completely dependent on Valerian for a short time. That dependence is another trait commonly seen in sidekicks.

When Valerian is running away from Xombul's cave, carrying Xombul on one shoulder and Laureline on the other, Laureline berates him, saying that this sort of thing always happens to the girl of the team. This anger is yet another trait of the traditional sidekick. When she returns to her normal size, her clothes are torn, revealing more of her body than before. At that point, she complains that she looks like a scarecrow, though the graphic intent is to show more of her body than her suit would normally allow.

The Quest for Power

Set in a time where natural disasters have drastically changes the climate of the earth, the graphic novel shows that knowledge clearly has more value than money.

The story takes Valerian to Earth in 1986. A series of catastrophes have struck, beginning with an accidental detonation at a hydrogen bomb depot. That event lead to tsunamis and earthquakes, all prompting a worldwide devastation that changes every aspect of life.

When Valerian meets Sun Rae for the first time, Sun Rae is the leader of a group of gangsters who are looting the stores of New York City. He is gathering gold and jewels, which would normally make him a wealthy man. Valerian is the first to point out that these items are worthless in the new world. People will be fighting to survive and rebuild, and will have no use for money or precious stones. All the money in the world will not buy anything for Sun Rae. Valerian points out that the person who has knowledge will have all the power. Sun Rae sees the logic in this line of thinking, and he joins Valerian. When Valerian leaves Xombul's lab for the first time, Sun Rae stays behind. Valerian accepts that, having already agreed that Sun Rae could keep anything he finds along the way, including technology.

Xombul is on a similar quest for power, but has a different goal in mind. He plans to travel back in time, changing anything he wants and bringing the Earth to a "glorious" point. His quest for power would take him across time and his goal is to shape history to his favor.



In an interesting turn, Mr. Schroeder is another example of this theme. As the book comes to a close, he is meeting with a group of scientists and offering up research projects, probably based on information he received from Valerian and Laureline. He will likely set out on a similar quest for power, but will obey the common rules of humanity in his quest.



Styles

Point of View

The story is written in third person from an omniscient perspective, but with some additional factors. The author depends heavily on dialogue, meaning some of the story appears almost as first person. From the beginning, Valerian is a main character and he talks a great deal about what is happening and what he is seeing. When he arrives at the United Nations, following clues that he hopes will lead him to Xombul, he finds robots working in an archive room. He knows these robots do not belong in 1986, and that they are probably associated with Xombul. To himself, Valerian says, “Who are these weirdos busy pillaging the scientific archives?” (12). His words are pointless, except to offer information to the reader. In other scenes, other characters present information in similar ways.

While there is not a formal narrator, there is information presented in narrator form. Information appears at the top of some frames, giving the reader general information, such as the amount of time that has passed or setting details that cannot be presented through dialogue or graphics.

The graphic form means that the reader has a perspective of his own. As the reader examines frames, settings, and graphic details, he will naturally insert his own ideas and perceptions onto the characters and the story. Overall, the perspective is acceptable and traditional for a graphic novel.

Language and Meaning

The tone of the story is one of good triumphing over evil. The reader will fully expect the heroes – Valerian and Laureline – to win over the villainous Xombul. That does come to pass, though some modern-day readers may wonder if Xombul managed some miraculous escape.

The book was written in the mid-1970s, and has been translated to English. Most modern American readers will understand and accept the majority of the language. The author makes some effort at a futuristic dialogue. For example, when Valeria's boss tells him that Xombul has escaped, Valerian responds by saying, “By the great nebula!” This is an exclamation meant to be an expletive.

The book relies heavily on graphics and uses those to convey an array of information. For example, there are some scenes involving Valerian on the roofs of New York City buildings. These buildings are covered with vines and growth, and most of these scenes are filled with dark-colored plants. The darker shades are used to prompt sinister thoughts, making the reader fear what Valerian will find as he travels along the roofs. When night approaches, the scenes are set in shades of blue. The colors are meant to

convey the coming darkness. Scenes set in the dark of night depend on patches of black and shadows.

Structure

The story is presented as a graphic novel. As such, the author depends heavily on imagery to keep the action moving. The images are in color, which plays a role in the presentation. The book is divided between dialogue, narrative, and graphics, with dialogue and graphics playing the larger roles.

The book is divided into 48 pages with various frames on each page. The number of frames vary from one page to another, depending on the amount of detail and scope of the scenes being presented. In some cases, frames might cover roughly half the page. That is seen when Valerian, Laureline, and Sun Rae are escaping New York City, barely ahead of a tsunami. The top half of page 25 shows buildings beginning to crumble as the small hovercraft makes its way down flooded city streets.

The frames are not often divided evenly. On most pages, there are irregular shapes and patterns. The author also places narration above some frames as a means of presenting information. This includes passage of time and other details that are not readily presented through dialogue or graphics.



Quotes

But the Spatio-Temporal Agents Service – to which Valerian and Laureline belong – is in constant activity. The agents' mission is to patrol both history and the universe to safeguard earth and its empire.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph Frame 1)

Importance: This quote provides the reader with a look at the setting and the two main characters. It is noteworthy that the world has reached “the age of leisure” (2) but Valerian and some others are still chasing the bad guys.

Actually, no one knows exactly what happened in our past between 1986 and the 24th Century. It's a mysterious era: The dark ages of the earth. That was when traditional civilization was swept away by a cataclysm.”

-- Valerian's boss (Chapter 1 paragraph Frame 2)

Importance: Valerian's boss is telling Laureline about the earth's history as a way of explaining why Valerian has to catch Xombul. He goes on to tell about an explosion at a hydrogen bomb depot and the resulting disasters.

Who are those weirdos busy pillaging scientific archives? By Betelgeuses! They're robots!

-- Valerian (Chapter 1 paragraph Frames 1 & 2)

Importance: This is the first time Valerian has seen the robots, which are symbolic of the futuristic aspect of the book. This discovery will lead Valerian to Xombul's new headquarters in Yellowstone National Park.

If you want to be in charge, you'll succeed by knowing more than the others.

-- Valerian (Chapter 1 paragraph Frame 11)

Importance: Valerian is talking to Sun Rae, explaining that looting and finding treasure is not going to do him any good. Valerian goes on to say that Sun Rae can have any information they find, if he will help Valerian find Xombul. Sun Rae sees the wisdom and the two cooperate their efforts.

Miraculously, the craft manages to cross the Hudson River, leaving behind a wreck of twisted metal that sinks beneath the waves.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph Frame 4)

Importance: The image shows the total destruction of New York City in the background as Valerian, Laureline, and Sun Rae make it across the bridge to reach the outskirts of the city.

I propose that you become commander of my future troops. And you, Valerian, can be my right-hand man for this colossal endeavor.



-- Xombul (Chapter one paragraph Frame 7)

Importance: Xombul asks Sun Rae and Valerian to join him in his endeavor. He is trying to change history and save the world so that he can take over.