

The Empire of a Thousand Planets (Valerian) Study Guide

**The Empire of a Thousand Planets (Valerian) by Pierre
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Plot Summary

This guide refers to the following edition: Mezieres, J.C.; Christin, P.; Tranle, E. *Valerian and Laureline: The City of Shifting Waters*; Cinebook, Canterbury, Kent, 2011. Kindle AZW file.

Mezieres' and Christin's *Valerian and Laureline: The Empire of a Thousand Planets* takes readers on the next mission of Valerian and Laureline, two space travelers who work for Earth's Spatio-Temporal Agency. Valerian is the leader of the duo, but Laureline is also capable, intelligent, and determined. This novel opens as the two travelers are about to arrive at Sytre, the capital city of an extensive galaxy. As far as they know, they are the first Earth travelers to reach the galaxy, which has yet to create time/space jump technology.

Valerian and Laureline stop in a marketplace upon their arrival, and Valerian purchases Laureline a watch that captures her attention. A short time later, they get their first look at a member of the Enlighteneds, a group who has a great deal of power in the city. The Enlightened sees the watch and asks Laureline about it. When she says the watch is for tracking time, the Enlightened walks away and several of Syrte's people laugh. Later, Valerian and Laureline learn that the people of Syrte have an ingrained sense of time, and do not need a watch. They also learn that one of the Enlightened traded the watch at the marketplace years earlier.

They are briefly kidnapped and discover an abandoned power plant and scientific lab. Upon their return to the city, Valerian becomes convinced that there is something wrong with the galaxy's leader, Prince Ramal. He and Laureline manage to sneak into the palace where they have yet another encounter with the Enlighteneds and find that Prince Ramal seems interested only with the next social event.

A merchant named Elmir reveals that the Enlighteneds have forced an end to science and exploration, inserting themselves as rulers of the galaxy. Elmir has gathered a group of people willing to fight the Enlighteneds, and they ask Valerian and Laureline to lead them. The battle is short, thanks to the technology Valerian within his spaceship.

On an asteroid, Valerian finally has a face-to-face meeting with members of the Enlighteneds. He learns that they are from Earth, sent to find a habitable planet centuries earlier. They have become immortal, thanks to a substance mined on the asteroid. Their hatred of Earth – for putting them in this situation – has driven them for centuries. Now, realizing that Earth's technology is far superior and that their hope for revenge is futile, they all commit suicide.

Valerian, Laureline, and Elmir return to the capital where they discover that the people have begun a revolution. Valerian points out that the Enlighteneds would not have been able to take control of the galaxy unless there were underlying problems. Agreeing, Elmir sets out to join the fight, hoping to be part of the new government and telling Valerian they would be open to a trade agreement with Earth.



Pages 1-10

Summary

The book opens with a dedication of sorts, apparently addressed to the universe. The dedication asks the question, "How many billions upon billions of beings might call you home?" (3) On the next page, the reader learns about Syrte the Magnificent, which is the "capital of the Empire of a Thousand Planets." (4) A prince is the purported ruler of the kingdom, though he is never seen. There is an extensive market and an open space port for traders and travelers. Some people go to the city to seek out the Enlighteneds, a sect of people who have power over the people.

Valerian and Laureline near Syrte through a series of space and time ports. Valerian says the people of Syrte seem to be limited in their space travel, meaning they have not discovered the space and time jumps. Laureline agrees with the assessment, saying they need to pretend to be tourists in order to avoid raising suspicion about their visit. They have sent preliminary probes to Syrte and have learned the language through "hypno-teaching." (7) Laureline points out that they will be the first Earth people to visit Syrte, and that this is the first galaxy they have visited that Earth did not influence.

As soon as they reach the market, Laureline becomes interested in someone selling jewelry. One kind of jewelry is actually a small "critter" that attaches itself to the wearer's skin. (8) Laureline thinks the jewelry is pretty, but is not willing to have the "critter." However, in that stall, she finds an old watch. Valerian says he has seen similar pieces in the "pre-atomic museum" of their home city, Galaxity. He asks if Laureline likes the watch, and she kisses him as a way of thanking him for buying it for her. She points out that it functions correctly. Valerian puts it down to "mission expenses," and they move on. (9)

People are gathered in a crowd and Valerian asks someone what is happening. The person, who is not human in appearance, says one of the Enlighteneds is going to answer questions. One person asks if he will live long enough to see his business prosper. There is a moment of silence followed by a "slightly muffled" voice from the Enlightened, who says the person will die in 100 days, and that he should go home to get his "affairs in order." (9)

The Enlightened motions for Laureline, who is holding the watch. The Enlightened asks Laureline where she found the piece, and what purpose it serves. She says that it is used for "telling time," which makes everyone laugh and the Enlightened walks away without answering any more questions. (9) Several people comment on Laureline's statement. Laureline and Valerian realize they have made some sort of mistake, but do not know the nature of their mistake.

In the next frames, Valerian and Laureline are in a boat, headed back to the space port. Laureline is still talking about the incident with the watch. Valerian thinks they are being



followed, and orders their boatman into a canal. Another boat strikes theirs, and a fight breaks out. Outnumbered, Valerian and Laureline are knocked out and taken captive.

Analysis

The presentation of the Enlighteneds seems to include a level of foreshadowing. They have an evil presence, evidence by their bearing and costumes, which are metal and look something like a Medieval knight's armor. The people who live on Syrte are not human. Some resemble animals. Some walk upright. It is impossible to tell whether these people are male or female. In some cases, they resemble the stereotypical aliens, with strangely shaped heads and odd coloring.

The authors depend on graphics. The graphics, including colors, are used to convey tones, action, and events. On Page 9, one of the Enlighteneds addresses Laureline, asking where she got the watch. The question is written in typical type, but there is a large exclamation point at the bottom of the speech bubble, below the text but still inside the bubble. The placement indicates the Enlightened says the entire sentence in an excited manner, but that the exclamation is more important than the question itself.

The frames are not laid out in the typical order. For example, the first page of frames consists only of four graphics. The frames are stacked on the right side of the page, with the four frames covering about three-fourths of the page. The captions are to the right of the page. They describe Syrte as the reader gets the first look at this galaxy.

Discussion Question 1

Describe what is revealed about Syrte in the early pages of the book.

Discussion Question 2

How do Valerian and Laureline reach Syrte?

Discussion Question 3

What is Laureline's reaction when Valerian buys her the watch? What does this say about their relationship?

Vocabulary

infinite, expanse, hypnotic, oblivion, labyrinth, inscrutable, impregnable, galactic, propulsion, unimpeded, humanoid



Pages 11-20

Summary

Valerian and Laureline wake the next morning to find themselves on a ship. There is no wind on Syrte, so the ships have solar panels instead of sails. Soon after they wake, the ship gets underway. The guards are dog-like people, covered with hair and wearing loincloths. The guards release Laureline and Valerian. Valerian discovers that the guards are mute, meaning he cannot get information from them. From the ship's rail, Laureline sees they are approaching an "isolated temple." (11) From their earlier research, Valerian says the Enlighteneds live here and he refers to it as their "sanctuary." (11)

The guard makes a gesture and a huge door opens. Valerian and Laureline climb an extensive set of steps. At the top, Laureline predicts someone is going to talk about her watch again. Valerian believes the watch is the reason they are there. One of the Enlighteneds enters the room through another huge door. He says he knows they are from Earth because people of Syrte instinctively know the time, meaning they would not say that a watch is a device for telling the time. He says they are looking at Valerian's spaceship, but Valerian says the self-destruct feature will prevent that. The Enlightened then says he needs Valerian and Laureline alive for the moment, but pledges "vengeance" after that. Valerian makes it plain he does not understand, saying they are on a peaceful visit.

The Enlightened leaves through the door he used for entering. The door begins to slide down to close. Just before it reaches the floor, Valerian and Laureline rush through the opening. The guards are in the outer chamber. They want to chase Laureline and Valerian, but fear going into the inner chambers.

Valerian knows they cannot expect the guards to remain outside forever, so they set out toward a light in the distance. They discover the building houses an extensive power plant and scientific lab. The power plant is operational, but the science equipment is dusty and unused.

Valerian says they need to find a way out. They find an aircraft, and Valerian believes he can fly it. Then, the guards arrive. Valerian has trouble figuring out which button is the ignition. Laureline begins pushing buttons until she finds the correct one, just as the guards reach them. The guards "fire" at the ship, but miss. (16) Valerian flies erratically, which is a problem for Laureline who has not had time to fasten her seat belt. Valerian soon realizes there are two other ships chasing them. He cannot get away and the others continue to fly nearer.

Suddenly, there is a wall of clouds in front of them. Valerian hopes to lose his pursuers in the clouds, but they turn around abruptly, ending the pursuit. Valerian and Laureline soon realize why as the clouds begin dropping hail on them that breaks their ship apart.



Valerian and Laureline eject from the ship before it crashes. When they have safely landed, Valerian points out this storm as another example of the strange weather on Syrte. They are very cold in an area covered in ice. They begin to walk, trying to stay warm.

In a sudden change, the clouds vanish and colorful plants begin to fall from the sky. The temperature rises abruptly and the ice they are standing on cracks, dropping them into the water. They are dripping wet as they head toward solid ground. A large reptile rises out of the water beside them. Laureline identifies it as a marcyam but the animal falls to its death as Laureline and Valerian rush onto land.

Analysis

The Enlightened asks Laureline and Valerian if they are from Earth, but says he already knows the answer to that question. Valerian and Laureline each have a thought, but neither says it aloud. Valerian blames Laureline for creating the "mess" of a situation while Laureline blames Valerian for their failure to covertly visit Sytre. Their relationship and roles as hero and sidekick are one of the novel's themes.

The story is written from an omniscient perspective. This means the reader can see the scenes that are happening to Valerian from an extended viewpoint. For example, when the guards take Valerian and Laureline into the Enlighteneds' sanctuary, the reader sees the events unfold. When Valerian and Laureline escape through the automatic door into the Enlighteneds' inner chambers, the guards remain on the other side of that door. Valerian and Laureline cannot see the guards, but the reader sees their reactions.

The artist uses some nontraditional frame placement, such as the one seen on page 15. There are three frames that make up the top half of the page. There are two smaller frames on the right and one larger frame on the left. The reader has to read the three frames clockwise: The top left frame first, the larger frame on the right next, and the smaller frame on the left next. In some cases, the author uses small arrows to direct the reader in the correct direction. In other cases, like this one, there is no direction.

While the novel depends heavily on graphics and dialogue, there are some narrative frames that are also used to drive the action and explain events. On page 17, Laureline and Valerian are in the midst of the hail storm. The narrative describes "a veritable cathedral of ice" with "increasingly thick pillars." This description adds to the images in the scene.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the Enlighteneds' sanctuary. Predict what Valerian's discoveries mean.



Discussion Question 2

How do Valerian and Laureline escape from the guards at the Enlighteneds' sanctuary?

Discussion Question 3

What is the novel's perspective? Is it appropriate? Why?

Vocabulary

quay, sanctuary, obstinacy, vengeance, ominous, inexorably, breakneck, veritable, cathedral, phenomenon



Pages 21-30

Summary

Laureline and Valerian see marcyam hunters emerge from nearby trees. The hunters welcome Valerian and Laureline into their camp. One of the hunters explains that his group is going to the capital city for “the festival of the empire's ambassadors” where they expect to sell marcyam skins. Within days, they begin the trip and arrive back in Syrte. Valerian and Laureline stand on a boat as they approach the walls of the city.

Once on land, Valerian says he want to know who is running the kingdom – the prince or the Enlighteneds. They go to the market and buy new clothes and jewelry from a merchant later identified as Elmir. Laureline is thrilled with her appearance. Valerian says they will blend in with dignitaries in town for the festival, and he hopes to gain admittance to the capital building in that manner. He spots a group of visitors that he hopes will provide the cover they need. They follow the group up the extensive stairs, but the guards stop them and send them away.

Valerian guesses the guards have some method of spotting “authorized” visitors. He says the words aloud and Elmir, standing nearby, confirms that theory. Elmir says he tried to forge the necessary “decoder,” but was unsuccessful. (23) He also says that others have tried to buy clothes similar to what Valerian and Laureline are wearing in an effort to gain admittance to the palace. Elmir provides some other information as well. Merchants are not allowed in the palace. They take their wares to the walls, and the goods are “hoisted” over the walls. (24) He believes those inside do not want “prying eyes.” (24)

Elmir says he has a shipment of schamirs to deliver that evening, and offers to smuggle Valerian and Laureline in with the items. In return, he wants Valerian to provide him information about the Enlighteneds. Valerian silently considers that it might be a trap, but dismisses the idea and agrees. Elmir says the Enlighteneds are reportedly in a different wing from the prince. The schamirs resemble large clams. Elmir warns them not to completely cover themselves because the “hypnotic fumes would make you forget who you are.” (24) Valerian and Laureline hide, and they are later pulled up along with the schamirs.

Once inside the storeroom, Valerian remains hidden for a long time and fights the drugging effect. Once awake, he cannot find Laureline. He goes toward a light, hoping she went that way and realizing she might be hypnotized. He finds himself in a huge room filled with sounds and sights “unlike anything on earth.” (25) No one tries to stop him but someone offers him a drink and points out Prince Ramal's chamber. Valerian sees Laureline with the prince just as the lights go out in chamber. That is apparently a sign and the party breaks up.



Valerian takes advantage of the chaos to head for the Enlighteneds' wing. He follows light and sounds, and finds another power plant like the one he saw earlier. He does not, however, see any Enlighteneds. He sees light in a tower, and decides to go there. He finds them involved in some sort of ritual. With drinks in hand and their helmets off, they recite together, "So that we live, and the Earth dies." (28) Valerian makes a noise and they spot him. They put their helmets back on and soon capture him. They place Valerian in a machine that makes him talk.

The following morning, Valerian wakes, restrained in a large, see-through cube, with no memory of what he said, but knowing that he talked. He wonders about Laureline. People enter the room. Laureline is with Prince Ramal. She says Valerian is the prison she talked about earlier. Ramal orders Valerian released but the Enlighteneds object. Laureline asks if Ramal is truly the prince, and he again orders Valerian released. Laureline kisses him, then the two are marched out of the palace. Once outside, Valerian says they need to get away from the Enlighteneds, who "seem paralysed for the moment."

Analysis

Color is often used in graphic novels to convey a series of emotions and ideas, and this novel is no exception. The author tends to use shades of pink in scenes involving Syrte. Even though the author also uses dialogue and narrative to explain the location, the color pink draws the reader into the image, making it clear where the action is taking place. Blues are often used to convey darkness or dangerous situations. These blues range from light to dark, with different tones used to differentiate between people, settings, and inanimate objects.

There is a confusing scene when Prince Ramal sets Valerian free. Laureline asks for Valerian's freedom and Ramal grants it. Then the Enlighteneds object, saying Valerian is dangerous. Laureline counters, asking Ramal if he is the ruler, or if he is going to let his advisers dictate his action. Ramal is immediately frustrated. He says he has a festival to plan for that evening. This is another important piece of foreshadowing. He is the prince of this kingdom but is indifferent when his advisers tell him that Valerian is dangerous. He does not even ask how or why Valerian poses a danger. Instead, he is focused only on the upcoming festival. The confusing point happens when Valerian and Laureline walk out of the palace. The Enlighteneds would likely stop Valerian and Laureline as soon as Prince Ramal is out of sight, but they seem to be frozen in place. That is not explained. Nothing seemed to happen to cause that response, and Valerian predicts it will not last long. It seems possible that Prince Ramal is using schamirs to control the Enlighteneds, but the facts of that aspect are never revealed.

There are a number of hints that things are not right inside the palace. Few people are allowed inside. Elmir provides a shipment of schamirs, which have a hypnotic effect. The prince seems ineffective and distracted. The Enlighteneds chant about the death of Earth. All these hints are a subtle form of foreshadowing, and most are explained as the



novel comes to a close. However, not ever hint is actually tied into the conclusion. For example, the use of the schamirs is never explained.

There is an interesting graphic on page 29, showing the events that happen when the Enlighteneds are questioning Valerian. He is not conscious for the sequence, and does not know what he says. His words are not revealed to the reader, but the image of that scene is filled with pinks, teal, purple, and yellow. There is an image of a man's head and hands, upside-down from the top of the frame. His nose and eyes resemble the shape of a tree. A woman's image, holding her hands over her mouth, appears in the man's forehead. There are bubbles across the entire graphic, and several other figures. Few of the images in this frame are detailed, but are outlines and hints at what Valerian might have felt and said.

Discussion Question 1

What hints are given about the true situation inside the palace walls?

Discussion Question 2

Describe what Valerian sees inside the palace.

Discussion Question 3

How do Valerian and Laureline get inside the palace, and what do they hope to accomplish there?

Vocabulary

throng, bustle, essences, covert, infiltrate, interrogation, resisting, bowels, narrative, unison, ritual



Pages 31-39

Summary

Laureline tells Valerian that she had to break one of the schamirs in order to get free of their hiding place, and that she does not remember how she wound up in Prince Ramal's lodge. When the Enlighteneds told Prince Ramal about their prisoner, she knew it would be Valerian, and she easily influenced Ramal to release him.

Laureline and Valerian seek directions to Black Street, where they were to meet Elmir. They find themselves in a "seedy" part of the city. The people are husks of the beings they once were, with the appearance of little more than skeletons. Their eyes are empty but Valerian says the positive point is that someone here can take them to Elmir. Someone does and Valerian gives the person something for the service.

Valerian knocks on a door. A man arrives and Valerian asks to speak to Elmir. A few minutes later, Elmir arrives and introduces them to "the Grandmaster of the Merchant Guild." (32) Elmir says they gather in this part of the city because it is the only place the Enlighteneds will not go. He takes them to a secret meeting room and introduces them to a group of people.

Valerian relates what he and Laureline learned. Elmir and others then give Valerian more background. The Enlighteneds arrived in Syrte less than a century earlier. They have enforced bans on knowledge, closed universities, and pushed religion instead of science. One merchant says there is no one who is able to repair spaceships. Another says new pilots are not being trained well, so that the trade routes are being forgotten. They say the Enlighteneds' attitudes have prompted some traders to stop coming to Syrte.

Valerian points out that he has seen evidence of the Enlighteneds' power. Elmir agrees, saying they have advanced medial and psychological knowledge, when the people of Styre had little interest in before the Enlighteneds' arrival. Elmir says they know where the Enlighteneds' lair is located, and he asks Valerian and Laureline to lead the attack. Fighters from other planets have pledged support but Elmir is impressed with Valerian's ship. He pledges to protect Valerian and Laureline in return for their help. Valerian says he and Laureline could not evade the Enlighteneds on their own, leaving them little choice.

Elmir shows them to a room where they can stay until they are ready to attack. He asks if it is like their own home, and hints for a clue about where they are from. Laureline cautions him not to be overly curious. Three days later, Elmir says the Enlighteneds are serious in their search for Laureline and Valerian. He then says it is time for the attack.

A huge crowd of people surround Valerian, Laureline, and Elmir, accompanying to their ship. The guards cannot break through the crowd, so the three board without incident.



Page 35 is a full-page frame. Ships begin to take flight. They come from the various planets of the Empire, all fighting against the Enlighteneds because of the oppression they have suffered at the Enlighteneds' hands. The many ships gather and slowly stray from their trade routes to join Valerian.

Elmir explains that the Enlighteneds have a prison camp at Slohm, an abandoned asteroid. The prisoners “seem to be working to sustain” the masters, and that base is a rally point for all the Enlighteneds on the various planets of the Empire. Elmir plans to strike at that rally point. Elmir says the Enlighteneds will surely attack the convoy in space, but he knows that Valerian's ship has space/time jump capabilities, which will give them an advantage. Valerian asks how Elmir has that information. Elmir says there were researchers before the Enlighteneds put a stop to that. From the watch, he believes Valerian and Laureline are from the third planet of the Sol system, which Valerian verifies. He then says that an Enlightened traded the watch for some jewelry, but Laureline interrupts that thought, saying one of the other ships is being attacked.

Valerian takes the controls. He warns Elmir that the jumps will be dangerous, but Elmir says the future of his world depends on them, meaning he is willing to take the risk. Over the next few seconds, Valerian makes a series of jumps, and the Enlighteneds are soon defeated.

Valerian calls on the other ships to fly in close formation, and uses the stealth shields from his ship to hide their approach. The Enlighteneds do not seem to even notice their arrival.

Analysis

The Enlighteneds have created problems for the people of Sytre, chiefly through the interruption of their science and their commerce. Elmir says new pilots are not fully trained and there is no one qualified to work on technology, including space ships. The hampering of freedom is one of the novel's themes. Universally, a group of people will tend to fight back once their personal liberties are attacked, or their means of earning a living is hampered. This is exactly what happens on Sytre.

There is a piece of foreshadowing when Elmir tells Valerian that one of the Enlighteneds traded the watch for some jewelry. That hints that the Enlighteneds have some connection to Earth. They would naturally have followed that conversation through to its conclusion except for the attack, which begins just at that moment.

There are two full-page frames in this section of the book, both showing the spaceships and battle that happens in space. The artist depends on colors and images, but also uses narrative to explain the events.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the battle between Valerian and the Enlightened. Why does Valerian win the battle so easily?

Discussion Question 2

What is the new significance of the watch Laureline obtained from the market?

Discussion Question 3

Why are the members of the Merchant Guild and others willing to risk their lives to fight against the Enlighteneds?

Vocabulary

irradiated, slimy, cesspool, unresponsive, labyrinthine, squalor, goons, guild, contingent, procession, convoy, vectors, rendezvous, preemptive



Pages 40-47

Summary

Valerian notes that the mountains on the planet have features that resemble faces. Elmir says it is believed that they are Slohm's former inhabitants, and that they are being absorbed into the planet. The tears remind Valerian of something, but it is only later that he realizes this is what he'd seen the Enlighteneds drinking in the palace.

The attackers split into groups. Valerian warns they have to be fast and efficient, or the guards will kill the prisoners. Valerian waits until everyone is in place, then kills the first guard. The attackers hit with their force, then the prisoners take advantage of the situation, joining the attack. Soon, Valerian's forces are victorious and all the guards are dead.

There is a huge, dilapidated ship and Valerian expects the Enlighteneds to emerge, ready to fight. They do not. The prisoners say that no one has been brave enough to enter the ship. Then a voice speaks from the ship, saying that Valerian is to come on board alone. They guarantee he will not be hurt.

Valerian boards the ship and finds an abandoned hydroponics lab with plants growing out of control. There are skeletons of people and animals along his path to the cockpit. When he reaches the control room, he finds several of the Enlighteneds. They tell him they were from Earth. They were sent out on a mission to find another planet humans could inhabit after the massive atomic explosions that threatened Earth. Valerian knows the history of their mission. He says others were sent to try to find them, but never found evidence that they had survived. The man who identifies himself as captain says the greatest scientists of the time were on board. When they were exposed to radiation, they discovered that the "tears" from the asteroid's mountains were an antidote to "the ailments of space." (44) Those tears rendered the men immortal and 300 years passed before they captured a space ship, and were able to leave the asteroid.

They moved into positions of power across the Sytre Empire but hate Earth because it turned them into "monstrosities." They were unable to defeat Valerian and believe that is proof that they do not belong on the Earth of the present, eliminating their dreams of revenge. They are hated in Sytre as well. The captain says they are "homeless trash." (45) He gives Valerian a watch and says their ship will explode in five minutes. With so little time, Valerian rushes to the other, yelling for them to take cover.

A few days later, the conveyer is on the journey back to Sytre, with the former prisoners. Elmir predicts that everything will return to normal. The Enlighteneds around the galaxy are killing themselves as soon as they learn that the Enlighteneds on Slohm have died. Laureline has had conversations with someone in the capital, and she and Valerian say there is a revolt underway. Valerian points out that there had to be problems in order for the Enlighteneds to gain control. Elmir says he does not if the former dynasty is in



control, or some new dynasty. He asks Valerian to use the space/time jump to get them back to the capital quickly, despite the fact that means they will leave the others behind.

They arrive on the planet to find a battle in progress. Elmir says he has ideas about how to get into the palace. He suggests there might be a need for a “provisional government” once that happens, and he wants to be involved. He also says that he would be open to trade agreements with Earth, if he becomes part of the new government. As he walks away, Valerian and Laureline agree that it is time to go home.

Analysis

There is foreshadowing – mainly surrounding the watch – that makes the reader expect the Enlighteneds have ties to Earth. However, details are meant to be a surprising twist. The reader has to remember that the author penned these novels almost a half century ago, when these kinds of twists were still revolutionary.

The Enlighteneds have fallen into the trap of having no goals. They are immortal because of the elixir made from the “tears” on the asteroid, but they do not have any real goals to make their lives worthwhile. Their dreams of revenge on Earth have sustained them, but after Valerian defeats them in battle, they realize they cannot compete with the new technology. The idea of needing a reason to live is a minor theme in the novel.

There is a revolt in progress as soon as the Enlighteneds are out of control. That indicates that there were other problems outside the oppression of the Enlighteneds. That is seen when Prince Ramal is more interested in the next party than in figuring out what is the best course of action regarding Valerian. As the novel opened, the narrator explains that the family has been in power for as long as anyone can remember. Like all dynasties, he may simply have lost track of his role as caretaker of his kingdom, and become focused only on himself.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the battle between Valerian's forces and the Enlighteneds. What is the significance of Valerian's quick victory?

Discussion Question 2

What does Valerian discover about the Enlighteneds?

Discussion Question 3

What does Valerian say about the fact that there is a revolution underway in Syrte?

Vocabulary

permeate, fray, extraordinary, liberators, venture, hydroponics, imperial, cosmic, infiltrated, monstrosities, provisional



Characters

Valerian

Valerian is a space traveler who works for the Spatio-Temporal Agency as a peacekeeper across the galaxy. He is a strong character who is able to handle any situation, though he is not invincible.

He believes in right and wrong, and he always works on the side of good. He is intelligent and is able to figure things out when faced with new situations. For example, he discovers that the guards are mute when he and Laureline are first captured after their arrival on Syrte.

The relationship between Valerian and Laureline is never fully defined. However, there seems to be something more than a working relationship between them. Valerian is the stereotypical strong, handsome hero, while Laureline is the capable sidekick. Typically, Valerian sometimes makes glib or humorous comments, and he dismisses dangerous situations. As a hero, he is always willing to do whatever is necessary.

Valerian is not overly believable, but that is an acceptable limitation, considering he appears in a graphic novel.

Laureline

Laureline is an agent for the Spatio-Temporal Agency. She is an assistant to Valerian, who is the main character and hero of the novel. Laureline is depicted as a sexy, beautiful, young woman. She is capable of taking care of herself, but she is often dependent on Valerian for leadership and strength.

Laureline's weaker character is shown in the fact that Valerian is the one who pilots the airship they use to escape the Enlighteneds, but her strength is shown when she uses her time with Prince Ramal to ensure that Valerian is released.

Like many of the characters of the novel, Laureline is not really believable. However, as a character in this graphic novel, she does not need to be believable.

Elmir

Elmir is a merchant who operates at the marketplace at Syrte. He is interested in learning about the Enlighteneds who live within the palace walls. He helps Valerian and Laureline sneak into the palace in return for their promise of information. As it turns out, he is an important part of an effort to rid the galaxy of the Enlighteneds, but he is also willing to be part of the revolution trying to overthrow Prince Ramal's dynasty.



Prince Ramal

Prince Ramal is the leader of Syrte, though some people have begun to doubt that he is actually in charge by the time Laureline and Valerian arrive on the planet. He is a real person, and he really does seem to be in charge. However, he has apparently lost sight of his true purpose. He does not seem to care about the people or his duty. When faced with the question of what to do with Valerian, he is immediately bored and frustrated. He wants only to move on to the plans for his next party. As the novel comes to a close, a revolution is underway with people trying to overthrow Ramal's government.

The Captain of the Enlighteneds

This is the man who captained the ship that came from Earth. He was the leader of a group of scientists charged with finding a place for the people of Earth to live after an atomic explosion on Earth. They were knocked off course and their mission failed. He and the others found an antidote to the space illness and made themselves immortal in the process. He tells Valerian that he and the others found themselves without a purpose other than trying to wage revenge on Earth. He blows up the space ship, with all the Enlighteneds on board, prompting the others to commit suicide as well.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Enlighteneds

The Enlighteneds symbolize immortality, revenge, and oppression. They also symbolize Earth's hope for a future at a time when the planet was in crisis. They are a group of people in Syrte who wear helmets and are sought out for their healing abilities, but Valerian reveals that they are men from Earth who had set out on a mission in search of a habitable planet.

The Spatio-Temporal Agency

This is the agency that employs Laureline and Valerian, and it symbolizes order in the world's future. The agency is not described in any detail in this book. However, those who have read other installments of the series will have at least a working knowledge of the agency.

The Watch

The watch Valerian buys for Laureline is a symbol of their ethnicity as Earthlings, because the people of Syrte all have a natural sense of time and have no need for watches. That watch prompts the Enlightened to point out Laureline as an outsider.

The Tears of Slohm

These symbolize immortality for the Enlighteneds and the lost hope for the former inhabitants of Slohm. The Enlighteneds discover that the tears are an antidote to their space ailments and it provides immortality. Many people are imprisoned to mine the tears for the Enlightened on the asteroid Slohm. Elmir says the theory is that the mountains on the asteroid are its former inhabitants, and the tears are literally their tears.

Space/Time Jump Technology

This is a symbol of the technological advances that the people of Earth have made over the centuries. The people of Syrte, including the Enlighteneds, have not developed that technology. Realizing that they do not have the technological knowledge prompts the Enlighteneds to commit suicide.

The Abandoned Science Labs

These labs, which have not been used for years, represent the Enlighteneds' rule against science and the loss of drive for the people of Syrte.



Settings

Syrte

This is the capital of the solar system known as "The Empire of a Thousand Planets." It is first identified as "Syrte the Magnificent." The city is becoming run down, but it boasts a large marketplace and a space port where people come and go freely, including traders. The capital itself is home to the ruler, Prince Ramal. People can hear events that take place inside the capital building, but no one actually sees what is going on in there.

Slohm

Slohm is an asteroid where there are mountains that resemble people. Elmir recounts the belief that these mountains are the former inhabitants of Slohm, who are being absorbed into the asteroid. This is where the Earth crew crashed, setting in motion the events that lead to them becoming the Enlighteneds. The mountains have a substance that resemble tears, and this substance has made the Enlighteneds immortal. They have imprisoned people, forcing them to mine the substance. This is where the Enlighteneds tell Valerian about their history before blowing up their ship.

Earth

Though all the action of this book takes place in the Syrte galaxy, Valerian, Laureline, and the Enlighteneds are all from Earth. The Enlighteneds come from a time when Earth had suffered an accidental atomic explosion, putting the planet in jeopardy, while Valerian and Laureline are from a time far in the future when Earth has recovered and excelled.

The Palace

The palace is where Prince Ramal lives and rules, and where the Enlighteneds live. The palace has become a literal fortress and few people are allowed inside. That rule is so strict that deliveries are hoisted up over the wall so that merchants never go inside. Valerian finds the palace is home to an elaborate party, but the palace and much of the galaxy is falling into ruin from neglect.

The Marketplace

The marketplace is a part of Syrte, and where Valerian buys the watch for Laureline. The marketplace is an area of free trade, but the members of the Trader Guild point out that the Enlighteneds' rules have hampered the trade.



Themes and Motifs

Freedom

Under the Enlighteneds' rule, the people of Sytre have lost many of their freedoms. However, they show a hopeful and determined spirit as they fight to get those freedoms back. Elmir is Valerian's main source of information about the political climate of the galaxy, and he reveals that the Enlighteneds are forcing their religion on the people while forbidding scientific knowledge.

Valerian and Laureline discover an abandoned science lab when they are in the Enlighteneds' isolated sanctuary. They find similar signs within the palace walls. These show that Elmir is correct in his assessment. The members of the Merchant Guild say the Enlighteneds have even begun to negatively affect the trade routes, which is affecting trade. There are no longer people qualified to work on existing space ships or to build new ones. The sum of these restrictions have begun to harm the galaxy as a whole, and people individually.

The fact that so many people are willing to join the fight is an indication that the Enlighteneds have pushed the people of Sytre to the limit. They are no longer willing to stand by while their freedoms are taken.

The reader may expect a negative reaction when Elmir learns the people of Sytre are in the midst of a rebellion, but that is not the case. Valerian points out that there must have been bigger problems facing the people centuries earlier, and Elmir accepts the revolution as the next step toward creating a better life and regaining their freedoms.

The Role of the Hero and his Sidekick

Valerian and Laureline play stereotypical roles throughout the series, and the readers will come to expect that they fill those roles in an accepted manner. A major example of this theme is seen as Valerian and Laureline are almost immediately compromised, captured, then escape. That happens to Valerian twice in this book, but he (typically) calls on his resources to escape each time.

Both are extremely knowledgeable and capable. They are only captured when they are facing overwhelming odds, as seen when they are captured early in this novel. They depend on technology and understand how to use it, even when they are unfamiliar with the specific technology. This is seen when they escape from the Enlighteneds' remote sanctuary by using a plane. Valerian cannot even find the ignition, but once they get started, he is able to fly with no problem.

Also typically, they have a mutual attraction. When they first arrive on the planet, Valerian buys a watch that Laureline admires and she kisses him as a way of showing



her appreciation. They are often standing very near each other, further evidence of their relationship.

The Need for Goals

Humans need goals as a means of feeling accomplishment, and the removal of those goals is often devastating. There are two main examples of that in this book, with the Enlighteneds and the people of Syrte showing their need for goals as a means of fulfillment.

The Enlighteneds are the most obvious example of this theme. They arrived at Syrte centuries earlier, and they have spent those years dreaming about revenge against the people of Earth. In their minds, the people of Earth sent them on the original mission to find a planet they could inhabit because Earth was in crisis. The members of the crew were hurt and found that the “tears” from the mountains of Slohm provided natural antibodies for their ailment. As they consume this substance, they became immortal and lived for centuries. However, they became monstrous in appearance, and that heightened their desire for revenge.

The Enlighteneds reveal all this to Valerian, along with their new discovery – their technology is so far outdated that they have no hope of exacting their revenge against Earth. With that possibility removed, they find they no longer have anything to live for, and they commit suicide.

The people of Syrte are another example of this theme, though on a different scale. The Enlighteneds have removed their basic freedoms, including the study of science. Under the Enlighteneds' rule, the trading has also suffered. These and other restrictions have narrowed the people's ability to set out on scientific and exploration endeavors. The fact that these goals no longer exist has created a void in their lives.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is presented from an omniscient view, but it remains focused almost exclusively on Valerian. The reader follows Valerian's actions and adventures when he is separated from Laureline, as seen when they manage to gain entrance to the palace. One of the few lapses from that rule occurs when Valerian and Laureline dash through a door into the Enlighteneds' inner sanctuary. The guards do not immediately follow, though they apparently could choose to do so. The perspective changes for a single frame, focusing on the guards and explaining that they are frightened to go into that inner sanctuary. Valerian is a stereotypical hero, which makes the perspective appropriate to the novel.

Information about events that occur outside Valerian's perspective are explained through dialogue and narration. The book opens with the narrator giving some basic information about Sytre to bring the reader into Valerian's current mission. That is an example of the author's use of a narrator for information. An example of the use of dialogue is seen when Valerian asks Laureline about her first few hours in the palace. The two were separated for that time. Valerian does not know what Laureline did during that time, meaning the reader does not know. Laureline gives him a brief version of the events, which also presents the information to the reader.

Language and Meaning

The novel is presented in modern-day American English, though it has been translated from the original version in French. The author depends heavily on graphics for descriptions, but also uses descriptive words and phrases to drive the action. For example, Valerian and Laureline go to a "seedy" part of the city to meet Elmir after their night in the palace. The narrator describes the area as a "veritable cesspool." (31)

The reader with an average vocabulary will find few unfamiliar words, with the exception of the futuristic words and phrases. In some cases, the author uses imaginary terms and phrases to further the impression of a futuristic setting. For example, Valerian and Laureline are agents of the Spatio-Temporal Agency. The agency, obviously, does not exist and the term is made up by combining a derivation of the word "spacial" with temporal. There are other futuristic terms, many related to time and space travel. While the majority of these are not explained and have no real definition, most readers will be able to infer meanings and accept the terms for the fiction they represent.

Some aspects of the language is presented graphically. For example, Laureline and Valerian are surprised when they find Elmir in a rundown part of the city. Elmir introduces them to the "Grandmaster of the Merchant Guild." (32) A large question mark

appears next to Valerian and Laureline, indicating their confusion. They do not say anything, but the graphic element makes their confusion clear.

Structure

The novel is presented in graphic form. The pages consist of series of frames, each showing people, places, and events relevant to the story line. The number and placement of frames varies from one page to the next. There are some pages with only a single frame showing a large action or group of events. There are other pages with eight or more frames, each showing one step in the action.

The story has a narrator who gives pieces of relevant information. In some cases, this information is in the form of background, as seen in the opening pages when the author introduces the reader to Syrte. The narrator explains about the galaxy and gives basic information about the palace. The narrator also becomes an important part of the story when he explains why the guards do not immediately follow Valerian and Laureline into the inner sanctuary of the Enlighteneds. Neither Valerian nor Laureline are present to see the guards' hesitation, which the narrator explains.

The story falls in chronological order with gaps and historical information provided by dialogue or the narrator. For example, Valerian does not know what happened to Laureline in the hours just after their arrival inside the palace. Laureline fills him in on those details through conversation.



Quotes

Only the prince's favourites and ambassadors accredited by imperial authority ever enter the heavily guarded palace. The people, often gathered at the doorstep of the building, hear but the echoes of mysterious celebrations..."

-- Narrator (One paragraph Frame three)

Importance: This is an introductory page, explaining about Sytre and its people. This is also the first clue that things are not right inside the palace.

Yes ... Strange ... I've seen similar ones at the Pre-Atomic Museum of Galaxy.

-- Valerian (One paragraph Frame eight)

Importance: Laureline has just found the watch in the marketplace on Sytre. Valerian's words are a foreshadowing that the person who had that watch originally came from Earth. The comment is significant because he believes the people of Sytre have had no contact outside their galaxy.

The strange thing is that everything seems to be abandoned. Look at these devices ... No one's touched them for years ... Maybe even centuries."

-- Valerian (One paragraph Frame nine)

Importance: Valerian and Laureline have found one of the abandoned science labs. The Enlighteneds have forbidden study, including science, which has hampered the people's freedoms and their ability to have goals, two of the novel's themes.

So that we live, and that Earth dies."

-- The Enlighteneds (One paragraph Frame four)

Importance: Valerian is watching as they drink a liquid which is later identified as the tears from Slohm. Their chant makes no sense to Valerian at this point, but he later discovers that the liquid has made the Enlighteneds immortal. It has given them centuries to plan their revenge against Earth.

From every world where the yoke of the Enlighteneds has brought its lot of victims, broken a culture or smothered a trade, people take off to join the crusade."

-- Narrator (One paragraph Frame one)

Importance: This is a single-frame page with an array of spaceships gathering to join up with Valerian and Elmir in their fight against the Enlighteneds. The fact that so many are willing to join is a sign of their oppression, and it is also a sign of their desire for freedom.

Don't you understand? The Earth turned us into cosmic monstrosities. Beings sustained only by the thought of taking revenge against their mother planet."

-- The Enlighteneds (One paragraph Frame one)

Importance: The Enlighteneds are explaining their situation to Valerian, including their understanding that they will never be able to match Earth's technology to actually gain the revenge they seek. This eliminates their only goal in life, which is one of the novel's themes.