

Heroes of the Equinox (Valerian) Study Guide

Heroes of the Equinox (Valerian) by Pierre Christin

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Plot Summary

NOTE: Citations for this Study Guide are based on the following version of the book: Mezieres, J.C.; Christin, P.; Tranle, E. *Valerian and Laureline: Heroes of the Equinox*; Cinebook, Canterbury, Kent, 1978. Kindle AZW file.

In the graphic novel *Heroes of the Equinox*, Valerian and Laureline are agents with the Spatio-Temporal Agency, an Earth-based organization charged with an array of duties and missions. In this situation, Valerian has been chosen to represent Earth in a contest on the planet Simlane. Valerian and Laureline arrive to find a delegation waiting for them. The members of this delegation explain that the contestants will cross a body of water to arrive at Filene, the Island of Children. There, the contestants will climb a mountain before they face their final challenge.

The inhabitants of Simlane are barren, but every "hundred equinoxes," the Simlane heroes travel to Filene and a group of children arrive a short time later (8). The people of Simlane do not know what happens on Filene, only that a hero makes it successfully to the finish and a group of children who look like that hero arrives in Simlane a short time later. The successful hero never returns. This cycle, however, has passed without a hero successfully making it through the challenge. Now, the Simlane people are too old to possibly succeed.

Valerian and three other heroes have been invited to participate in the challenge. Irmgaal is a warrior from the planet Krahan. Ortzog is from the industrial planet Boornyof, and carries chains that represent an elimination of servitude. Blimflim is from Malamum, and he believes in peace and harmony. All three are much larger than Valerian and have strong opinions about what is right.

The other three heroes show their power, destroying parts of the already crumbling Simlane. Valerian does not have a true superpower, but he shows off his marksmanship. Valerian really does not know what his purpose is, or what is expected of him, but he believes that he should represent his home planet of Earth to the best of his ability. Toward that end, he sets out with the others. They take to the air to cross the water, with Valerian using his jetpack to navigate.

They reach the island of Filene and discover they have to cross grueling countryside. Valerian winds up falling and spends a lot of time wandering through a crevasse in the mountain. The other three arrive at their destination before Valerian. A man greets them and asks each what he envisions for the future generation of the Simlane people, if he is chosen as the father of the next generation. Each offers their hope that this generation will mimic the heroes' home planets. Irmgaal wants the next generation to be warriors, unafraid and anxious to become space explorers. Ortzog imagines a race of people who focus on increased productivity in industry and agriculture, and who form alliances with worthy people from other planets. Blimflim hopes the next generation will focus on meditation and inner peace.



Valerian arrives after the others have given their answers. When the man asks Valerian the question, he is still dazed from his time in the cave. He says that he would prefer that the next generation of people choose for themselves how to live.

The next morning, the man arrives and announces that the Great Mother has chosen Valerian as the man who will father her children. She explains that they will mate, and she will then give birth to many, already developed as children.

A whirlwind arrives and carries the other three heroes back to Simlane. Laureline becomes worried about Valerian and crosses the water, then scales the mountain, ending in the correct place in a very short amount of time. Just as she arrives, many children rush out of the huge palace. Laureline soon discovers Valerian and the other heroes who had successfully mated with the Great Mother. Each is fully intact, but is tiny. The Great Mother grants permission for Laureline to take Valerian away with her. Laureline carries him in a pouch around her neck but she is obviously furious that he went through with having sex with the Great Mother. Aboard their ship, Valerian suggests she could contact their doctors to see if anything can be done to return him to his natural size.



Pages 1-10

Summary

As the graphic novel opens, a hero later identified as Irmgaal is standing with the people of his planet. He is talking in their language and someone is answering. In the next frame another hero, later identified as Ortzog, is doing the same thing with the people of his planet. In the next frame, another hero, later identified as Blimflim, is seated in a meditation pose as he addresses his people, while other people from his planet speak. In the final panel of the first page of graphics, Valerian is speaking with officials of Earth. The Earth officials urge Valerian to remember that he is representing his entire planet. Valerian says he will not let them down. On the next page, four panels show each of the heroes in their spaceships.

The first panel of page five is a symbol that indicates Valerian and his partner, Laureline, have made a jump through space and time. In the next panels, the two from Earth talk. Laureline is disdainful. She says that Valerian is not there because of Earth's honor, but is supposed to “sell Galaxy's brand image” to other civilizations (5). Valerian says Laureline should be nice, and he reminds her that he volunteered.

Valerian and Laureline arrive at the spaceport of Simlane. They see several other spaceships. Laureline says the people of Simlane do not travel in space, and that it is not the right season for tourists to arrive. The presence of three other ships indicates that the other heroes are already here. A delegation greets Valerian and Laureline. They take him into the city, which Valerian calls “magnificent” (7). The members of the delegation correct him, saying that the buildings are falling to ruin and the marketplace is no longer an important place of commerce. One says that the only source of money now is tourism, and that they have nothing to show tourists now except the dilapidated buildings.

Valerian asks for details about this contest. The members point out that everyone in Simlane is barren, and that they are now old. Up to this point, local men have achieved the quest. Shortly after one succeeds, a group of children arrive as the next generation of inhabitants. They point out the island of Filene, otherwise known as the Island of Children, which is the goal for the contestants. The conversation is interrupted by locals, screaming derogatory remarks at Valerian. The delegates say the people shouting are not “capable of anything violent” (9). Valerian assures them he has no fear of those people, but he does not understand the situation. One of the delegates says the people shouting are former heroes who are upset that outsiders were invited to the contest.

Some people believe they should mount an expedition to find out what happens on Filene, but another says the “ancient texts” say “that would mean the death of Simlane” (9). One delegate points out that they are doomed without a next generation, meaning their survival is in the hands of Valerian and the other three heroes.

They arrive at the Grand Theatre, where the people get a look at the contestants. One delegate says all the heroes should give the people a look at their powers before they begin the quest.

Analysis

Heroes of the Equinox is presented as a stand-alone graphic novel, but the reader who has read other books about these characters will have a greater understanding of the characters, actions, and themes that appear in the series. For example, Valerian and Laureline have a close relationship. In some previous episodes of the series, they have hugged and kissed, indicating that there might be a romantic connection.

The first page of the novel shows the four heroes, each on their own planets and each speaking to their own people in their native languages. The first three conversations are shown in a series of images and lines. There are no real letters or punctuation, and the entire conversation is meant to show that the conversation is in a language that the reader would not understand. The second page of the novel shows the four spaceships headed for Simlane. In each frame of these first two pages, the reader gets a first look at the kind of people showing up for the contest. Irmgaal is a warrior and his planet and ship are shown in reds and brilliant yellows, and the people all have spears. Orzogh's planet is shown in dull greens and blues, indicating the industrial side of their planet. Blimfilm is mainly surrounded by greens, and his spaceship looks like a giant praying mantis, indicating his people's tendency to grow things. Valerian's scenes are more of a mixture of colors and the people are wearing spacesuits but are not carrying weapons. The people of Earth are more focused on exploration, which is explained more as Valerian and Laureline talk.

Valerian does not know what is expected of him, and he does not sound like a hero. For example, he stutters as the delegation greets him. His words include the sound “er” as he tries to think of something to say (6). This is an important part of Valerian's character. While the others are determined in their efforts, Valerian seems much more relaxed and lackadaisical in his stand.

The Grand Theatre is a symbol of what has changed for the people of Simlane. That theatre was once the place where the people of Simlane gathered for various events and celebrations. One of the delegates says that the people no longer feel like celebrating. That is an important look at how their lives have changed. They are no longer happy, but are consumed with worry over the future of their entire race.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Valerian, based on what has been revealed up to this point.



Discussion Question 2

What is the problem the people of Simlane face?

Discussion Question 3

Based on the early tone of the novel, what will most readers expect as the outcome of the novel?

Vocabulary

superb, committee, assembly, delighted, eloquent, polyglot, magnificent, meted, equinox, posterity



Pages 11-17

Summary

One of the delegates begins to introduce the heroes to the people gathered. He begins with Irmgaal from Krahan, “the planet of the great black warriors” (11). Irmgaal makes a display of pledging that he will be “merciless” (11). He uses his sword, named Zarkam, to strike a huge boulder-like object, smashing it to bits. The people in the crowd yell out that his actions are “lame” and “wasteful” (11). He marches off as rubble settles in the background. The delegate next introduces Ortzog from Boornyof, known for its industry. Ortzog gives a speech about democracy, freedom, and liberty, showing a set of chains that have been broken to represent an end of servitude. He promises to save Simlane's future, though he does not agree with their ideals. He then slashes a huge column with one of these chains, making it collapse.

The delegate introduces Blimflim, from Malamum. Two other delegates are on the sidelines. They see the destruction and wonder if they have made a mistake by having the heroes show off their prowess. Blimflim talks of peace and harmony. He promises that gentleness will be his weapon as he scatters seeds on the ground. They grow immediately into a huge vine that drags yet another part of the theater down. They next introduce Valerian. He does not know what is expected, and pulls out his gun, deciding he can show off his marksmanship. He shoots a tiny appendage from atop a wall, and it falls to the ground. On the sidelines, Laureline thinks that Valerian's performance was terrible but one of the delegates is pleased that Valerian was the least destructive of the four.

They go to the docks and one of the delegates points out that Filene, or the Island of Children, is past the clouds that cover the immediate view. He says the journey should take three days, and they will face different kinds of challenges each day. Laureline asks what happens next but one of the delegates says that no one knows the details. They only know that no hero who completed the quest ever came back, but that children who look like the hero later arrive from Filene.

There are boats prepared to take the four across the water to the island, but the heroes take off without the boats. Valerian uses a jet pack and the other three use their powers. The weather is merciless and some people left behind are skeptical. They reach the island the next morning. Valerian is tired but the others push on and he follows. Each chooses a path and sets out.

Analysis

The delegate introduces Irmgaal first, and says that he is from “the planet of the great black warriors” (11). Irmgaal has dark skin, but it seems more like a tan than black based on the illustrations. His armor tends toward black but his cloak is bright red. The



use of the word “black” may be more symbolic than descriptive. It could be that the warriors from Irmgaal's planet are simply known for their dark natures. He does not seem overly cruel during this novel, but he does seem violent.

The people of Simlene hate the fact that they are now dependent on outsiders to preserve their race and create the next generation of children. They yell insults and make it clear they are not happy with the situation. This is an example of one of the novel's themes: the role of outsiders. Another aspect of these heroes is seen in their blatant disregard for the Grand Theatre. When the delegate asks them to give a demonstration of their power, they each destroy huge parts of the building. They have no regard for the possessions of others, and are only interested in the opportunity to show off their power and strength.

There is a very descriptive scene on page 14 as the four heroes finish their introductions and head for the docks. Valerian is far behind the other three, and the reader may believe that the size difference is only because of the perspective, with Valerian seeming small because he is in the distance. However, in the next panel, Valerian pushes his way in between Irmgaal and Ortzog. He does not even reach their shoulders and he is very small compared to them. The idea of what a hero should be is one of the novel's themes, and this scene demonstrates that a hero may not be what the reader expects.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does Valerian look less impressive than the other heroes?

Discussion Question 2

What is the attitude of the people of Simlane regarding the presence of the heroes? Why do they have that attitude?

Discussion Question 3

What happens as the heroes show off their power? Do they seem indifferent to the building in their effort to impress the people?

Vocabulary

pathetic, imposter, tiresome, convincing, economical, menacing, summit, corresponding, turbulence



Pages 18-28

Summary

The four heroes set out with each facing different obstacles. Valerian is climbing a mountain but he soon falls into a crevasse. Irmgaal is in a land with lava and “choking mists” (19). He has to depend on his sword, Zorkam, to make a path. Orzog is in a land covered with snow and ice where he faces brutal cold. He uses his chains to break through walls of ice. Blimflim is in a prairie at first, but it soon becomes a desert where there is no water. He uses his power to grow seeds into oases. Meanwhile, Valerian's jet pack is unusable and he is trapped at the bottom of the cavern.

Most of the heroes get past the most difficult phases. Irmgaal has a meal, though his sword overcooks it. Orzog unbuttons his clothing, saying he needs to get a larger size next time. Blimflim reads a recipe and cooks. Meanwhile, Valerian takes periodic rests as he continues to struggle through the cavern while Laureline worries about him.

On the second day, Irmgaal, Orzog, and Blimflim face an array of challenges, including animals, and have to fight. Irmgaal and Orzog kill the animals they face. Blimflim makes a huge bird fly him out of the jungle. Valerian finds the cavern ahead of him filled with rats and shoots them.

Analysis

The artist uses alternative layouts throughout the novel, but there are several pages in the early part of the heroes' travel across Filene that are vastly different. Pages 18 through 22 are multi-page layouts with the panels running all the way across the pages. The reader has two options for reading these pages. The first is to follow the top panel all the way across the pages before reverting back to the second panel, which also goes all the way across. Each of the panels is split into sections, though they are not divided by gutters. The second option is to reach all four panels down page 18, then follow the same method through the other pages. In the first option, the reader would follow Valerian's trek. Irmgaal's journey is on the second level. Orzog's journey is on the third level, and Blimflim's journey is on the bottom. However, the artist uses the space that should be the gutter between pages 20 and 21 to show Valerian's fall into a deep crevasse. When he makes that fall, the reader follows his progress to the bottom of page 21. The other three characters continue to appear in order, but with Valerian at the bottom of the final page of this sequence.

The artist depends on colors and shapes to set tone and to make scenes clear. For example, Irmgaal and Orzog fight against huge animals, each in their own area. The two kill the animals and the artist shows those fights with huge splashes of red to depict the blood that flies when the heroes beat them. When Blimflim forces the bird to fly him out of the jungle, he whacks the bird on the head. At the end of the journey, Blimflim



leaves the bird behind and the artist depicts the bird's emotion with several hearts above his head, indicating that he likes Blimflim. The red splashes show blood and carnage but the red hearts show love. Readers will be familiar with the uses and meanings of the colors and shapes, which convey meanings without any words.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the journey up to this point. How has each contestant's journey differed?

Discussion Question 2

What are the different kinds of challenges the characters face?

Discussion Question 3

List some typical meanings and expectations of colors and shapes in the illustrations for this section. (For example, hearts are often used to symbolize love and blue can be used to symbolize night.)

Vocabulary

charming, bordered, artfully, gigantic, merciless, reckon, obstacles, withers, hardiest, encroaching, plateau, reigns



Pages 30-37

Summary

The first panel on page 30 is an ocean scene presented in blues and black to represent night. The narrative at the top of the panel says that another night passes. Laureline continues to worry and she suspects that Valerian is having problems. Irmgaal, Ortzog, and Blimflim emerge from the challenging terrain. Valerian continues to travel through the cavern. Irmgaal, Ortzog, and Blimflim climb up and over a cliff, and begin to fight against each other. Valerian continues to crawl through the cavern. A man interrupts the fight between the first three to arrive. He is an elderly gentleman who says that they should remember they are facing “things of the mind” as their final challenge (32). All three stop fighting and look at the man in confusion.

The heroes seem indignant that this man is questioning them. The man says that he is “an examiner of sorts” (33). The final challenge will be held in the Pavilion of Revealed Imagination. According to the Examiner, everything the men say will be projected as images that the Examiner can see for himself. He says the purpose is to “avoid injustices” while he forms an opinion about their answers (33). The Examiner says each man is to describe what they envision for the next generation, if they are chosen to be the father of that generation. The three men respond as expected, considering their natures and home planets.

Irmgaal says he envisions his children making major changes to this “decaying, decadent planet” (34). He says this new race will discover a new love of space exploration, and will then use this new civilization as an example to any location where it is needed. He predicts that the sacred flag will be displayed wherever they travel. Both Blimflim and Ortzog make derogatory comments in response to Irmgaal's comments. The Examiner says Irmgaal's comments are “interesting,” before calling on Ortzog (35).

Ortzog says his children will reorganize the entire production process, take specific steps with regard to tourism, and destroy all the luxury buildings to make way for agriculture. He expects changes in the political system, including “absolute egalitarianism” (36). He also predicts that an “absolute social order” will create “powerful intergalactic agreements with those regimes that prove themselves worthy of its protective friendship!” (36). The Examiner says Ortzog's answer is “amusing,” while Blimflim and Irmgaal make derogatory comments (36).

Blimflim is the next to speak. Blimflim says his children would return to a more humble way of life, abandoning the “dens of vice” in favor of a rural and agricultural lifestyle that focuses on meditation and silence “under the benevolent guidance of the enlightened ascetics who shall lead the people to sublimation” (37). When Blimflim finishes, the Examiner says he has nothing to say. Irmgaal and Ortzog make typically derogatory comments. Just then, the Examiner says he can see another candidate nearby.

Analysis

The artist sometimes arranges the four heroes atop each other so that the reader sees what each is doing at a specific moment in time. An example of that practice is seen on page 30. At the top of the page, Irmgaal is climbing up and over the edge of a cliff. Directly below that image, Orzog is climbing up and over a similar cliff. Below that, Blimflim is climbing up and over a similar cliff. Each of those panels is of similar size and shape. Valerian is at the bottom of the page. He is still trying to make his way through a cave. There is a clear contrast between what the characters are doing, and the artist continues to put Valerian in the worst possible situation in the worst possible placement on the page, showing that he is the least likely of the heroes. This is a deliberate buildup to the point where Valerian is chosen as the father of the next generation.

Pages 30 and 31 meld into one another. Page 30 is a series of four layered panels, and page 31 is a single panel. On page 30, each of the heroes is struggling to make their way to the final point. On page 31, the heroes converge and begin fighting, apparently each wanting to be the first to arrive. The reader may be tempted to glance at the fighting scenes on page 31 and dismiss them as insignificant. That is not the case. Looking closer, the reader will see that Valerian is missing from the action. He does not appear on that page at all.

The artist uses another set of symbols to show the reaction of Irmgaal, Orzog, and Blimflim as the man tells them to stop their physical battle to prepare for “things of the mind” (32). They all have the rough shape of a question mark, though they do not have any meaning in the English language. The artist's intention is clearly to ensure that the reader knows these people are confused, and he is successful in that.

The Examiner says the Pavilion of Revealed Imagination is designed to project the thoughts of each hero so that the Examiner can see exactly what they mean. That is an acceptable explanation, but it is also a vital tool for the artist to use as a way to show the scenes to the reader. The artist and authors could have chosen to use thought bubbles so that the reader could see what the speaker was thinking, but the projection seems to be more effective.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Irmgaal's answer to the question regarding the next generation. What is significant about his answer?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Orzog's answer to the question regarding the next generation. What is significant about his answer?



Discussion Question 3

Describe Blimflim's answer to the question regarding the next generation. What is significant about his answer?

Vocabulary

phase, claustrophobia, valiant, thus, opinion, injustices, revealed, envision, eagerly, decadent, beacon, instilling, crude, delineated, bureaucratic, intergalactic, humble, meditation, benevolent



Pages 38-48

Summary

Valerian emerges from a hole in the ground, sheltered by rocks. He is having trouble seeing in the sudden sunlight because he has been in the dark so long. Irmgaal, Ortzog, and Blimflim object, but the Examiner says he has the right to give his answer, just as they did. Irmgaal complains that allowing Valerian to participate is a show of favoritism, which he says is “the death of elitism” (38). Ortzog says the “complex social mechanics term” to describe this situation is “string pulling” (38). Irmgaal suggests they should “dope” Valerian with “forbidden liquors” (38). Valerian is still having trouble seeing.

Valerian says he has not had time to think about his answer, and that he does not have a clear path in mind. He then says that it is not his choice to make. He continues, saying that he would want them to “be happy in their own fashion” (39). The Examiner says Valerian's comment is “original,” while the other heroes make the typical derogatory comments. The Examiner invites them all to the palace. The three heroes walk beside the Examiner, leaving Valerian to bring up the rear.

The palace is huge and elaborate. He takes them into an elegant room where he says the men can remain until “she” makes a choice (40). Irmgaal, Ortzog, and Blimflim ask who “she” is (40). The Examiner says the one she chooses will be given that information and the others will be removed with no memory of having been on the island at all. Back on the mainland, Laureline continues to worry.

The next morning, the four heroes are gathered on a balcony just after the Examiner has made the announcement. Three of the four are very surprised that Valerian is the ultimate winner. The Examiner says there is nothing they can say to change things, and he points out a whirlwind that will take the other three back to the mainland. They are caught up and taken away.

The Examiner instructs Valerian on where to go, saying “the Great Mother of Filene awaits” (42). The Great Mother tells Valerian to come near, “so I can look at you properly before you impregnate me” (42). When they are standing face-to-face, the Great Mother says she is pleased with the appearance of the man she chose. She says Valerian was brave, though he showed it differently than the other three heroes. She says she chose him because he was willing to let the children choose their own future. She hopes the children “will be happy to live for themselves,” and will restore their planet (43). She is, however, happy to have Valerian's ideas play a role and says she hopes the children will fill their world with “colours as cheerful as your funny visions” (43).

The Great Mother says Valerian will “join past heroes of Simlane” after he impregnates her (43). She goes on to explain that they will have sex, then “fully formed young beings will spring from my womb” (43). Some of the past fathers have been good, and the



Great Mother says it is acceptable that Valerian is the first father from another planet. The final panel of page 43 shows the heads and shoulders of Valerian and the Great Mother, face-to-face. There are no clothes visible. Valerian thinks to himself that “it’s for a good cause” (43).

Back on the mainland, the other heroes wash up on the shore. Laureline decides she has waited long enough and she sets out in a boat to cross the water. When she reaches the planet, she chooses the easiest route, saying she does not need to impress anyone. She reaches the Great Mother’s palace early the next morning, just as hundreds of children rush down the steps of the palace. The Examiner asks why she is there. Laureline explains that she expected Valerian to be dead, but can tell by the children that is not the case. She insists on seeing him. The Examiner tries to prepare her for a surprise.

When Laureline reaches the place where Valerian and the other past heroes are, she is surprised to find they are all very small. The Examiner says that being the father of the next generation is “an exhausting task,” which explains why they are all tiny (47). Laureline picks Valerian up by his clothing. They are aboard the ships that cross the water with all the children on board. She carries Valerian in a pouch around her neck. She is obviously angry and Valerian points out that the Great Mother was “kind enough to let me go” (47). At Simlane, Valerian says that he did a good deed, and he says he knows Laureline is going to fix the situation for him. One of the old people of Simlane says they can now die knowing the next generation is in place. Aboard their spaceship, Valerian is still in the pouch which is now hanging on the wall of the ship. He asks Laureline if she is going to contact Galaxy’s medical services about his situation. She indicates that she does not believe there is any hurry.

Analysis

The Great Mother is depicted as a sexy woman. She has circular filigree covering her breasts, but very little is left to the reader’s imagination. She has curly hair in shades of red and yellow, and a large ornamental clasp in her hair. The overall effect is meant to make the reader realize that this is a sexually-charged setting.

There is a confusing image on page 42. The third panel is the reader’s first look at the Great Mother. The next panel seems to be part of a large, circular image with an upside-down man near the bottom. In truth, it is Valerian and his shadow, as seen from directly above him. Valerian is very small and the reader can see only the top of his head, his hands and shoulders, and the tip of one foot. The remainder of the image is his shadow, stretched out behind him. While the majority of the images are readily explained, readers may have to carefully consider this one. The artist may have done this on purpose, to ensure that the reader would look over that panel. The image of Valerian’s shadow is meant to convey the idea that he is larger than he has appeared throughout this novel. He is no longer in the shadow of the other three heroes, and he is now a strong man, chosen by the Great Mother to be the father of the next generation.



The Great Mother's speech bubbles are different from the other speech bubbles throughout the novel. Each speech bubble has a double frame, which probably indicates a strange voice or even another language that is somehow being translated into English for Valerian's benefit.

There is an important aspect of perspective seen as the Great Mother and Valerian look over the past heroes. The panel is large with the Great Mother and Valerian at the top, fading out so that the reader can see no clear delineation between the two of them and the former heroes who live in a village. The reader will naturally think that this is an artist's view of the scene, and that the Great Mother and Valerian are shown larger than life-sized while the village is shown on a very small scale. When Laureline shows up at the village, the reader may initially believe there is a similar situation. Laureline and the Examiner arrive and walk up to the village. Both Laureline and the Examiner are huge compared to the village and the people there, but it seems reasonable that she may be pictured so large as a way of exaggerating her anger over the situation. Then she reaches down and picks up Valerian. At that point, it becomes clear that Valerian and all the other heroes who impregnated the Great Mother are now tiny versions of themselves.

The novel ends with an open-ended scene in which Valerian is urging Laureline to contact the medical services from Galaxity so that they can reverse the situation, making him back to his original size. Laureline seems indifferent, saying he can think about what he has done. The reader will never know how the process is reversed, but Valerian is back to his normal size in the next novel of the series.

Discussion Question 1

What is Valerian's answer when the Examiner asks what he has in mind for the next generation? What is significant about his answer?

Discussion Question 2

What is Valerian's role in creating the next generation? What is the Great Mother's role?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the situation between Valerian and Laureline as they are leaving Simlane.

Vocabulary

eliminate, favoritism, elitism, complex, euphoric, superb, gorgeous, eternity



Characters

Valerian

Valerian is an agent with the Spatio-Temporal Agency, an Earth-based agency that basically provides an array of services around the galaxy. In this episode of the series, Valerian has volunteered to be one of four heroes to participate in a contest designed to help a planet survive.

Valerian is a strong, resourceful character who is not intimidated by the size and powers of the other heroes. He is depicted as a tall with dark hair, and is obviously supposed to be handsome.

Valerian is not without faults. For example, he falls while making his way through the caves inside the mountain. Without his jet pack, he is unable to get out of the hole, which means he is the last of the heroes to arrive at the Great Mother's palace.

An important part of Valerian's character is seen in his willingness to follow the quest to its conclusion. In previous novels of this series, he and Laureline have indicated a close relationship. They sometimes kiss when they have been separated for a period of time. The fact that he goes through with impregnating the Great Mother shows that he is either not serious about the relationship with Laureline, or that he is so dedicated to his mission that he is willing to do anything to complete it.

Laureline

Laureline is an agent with the Spatio-Temporal Agency. She is capable and resourceful, but is not always entirely respectful of authority. She speaks out her disdain for the mission as it begins.

In this novel, Laureline is relegated to waiting for Valerian to return. She chafes under the inactivity and her worry over Valerian. She soon decides that she cannot sit idly by, especially after hearing that the successful heroes do not return.

Laureline is able to make the trip to the Great Mother's palace much more quickly than Valerian and the other three heroes. She says she can do so because she does not have to impress anyone.

Laureline's anger is evident from the moment she sees all the children running from the palace. From how the children look, she is certain that Valerian is the biological father. She does rescue Valerian from the Great Mother, but he is so small that she can carry him in a small pouch. Once they are back on the spaceship, Laureline continues to show her anger. She does not offer any real help, and basically ignores Valerian when he asks for help.



Irmgaal

Irmgaal is from the planet Krahan. He is described as a "great warrior," and he sets out on every aspect of the trials with displays of force (11). Other than Valerian, all the heroes are large men, and Irmgaal is no exception. He has red eyes and wears armor and a cape.

Ortzog

Ortzog is from the planet Boornyof, which is an industrial planet. He is a large man, much taller than Valerian. He carries chains that he uses as tools, but he also uses the chains as a symbol of his hatred of servitude. His attitude makes him naturally a warlike man, though he is fighting specifically against servitude whereas Irmgaal is just a fighter.

Blimflim

Blimflim is from Malamum, and he is able to make things grow. Of the three alien heroes, he is obviously the least violent. He is able to make plants grow to create an oasis and food when he is traveling across a desert.

The Great Mother

The Great Mother is the being who gives birth to entire generations of children. She is presented as a beautiful woman who wants only what is best for the next generation. She appears only briefly, but seems to be reasonably benevolent, seen in her willingness to let Valerian leave after he has performed his duty.

The Examiner

This is a man who greets the heroes when they arrive at the Great Mother's palace, at the end of their physical quest and the beginning of their test of the minds. He is an elderly man who has black and white hair. He seems to be dressed royally, in a robe and jewelry.



Symbols and Symbolism

Ortzog's Chains

Ortzog carries two chains which are apparently one chain that has been broken in half as a symbol of independence, as opposed to servitude. Modern American readers might equate this symbol with the chains that were used during slavery, making the symbolism of the broken chains more evident.

The Children

The children are symbolic of the continuation of Simlane. They are an entire generation of children, birthed by the Great Mother. The children are vital to the successful continuation of the race, and the normal course of creating that generation has failed. The children are also symbolic of Valerian's sexual encounter with the Great Mother, which makes Laureline angry.

Space/Time Jump

The artist uses a graphic symbol to indicate each time the spaceship jumps through time and/or space. That symbol is a panel that seems to be filled with static. The spaceship is at the center with white rings at varying points around the ship.

An Equinox

The equinox is a period of time that is never defined, but is symbolic of the optimal time between generations for the people of Simlane.

Zarkam

Zarkam is the name of Irmgaal's sword, and it is symbolic of his warrior nature.



Settings

Simlane

This is where Valerian and the other heroes are participating in a competition. The name seems to apply to the planet, but it could refer only to the city where Valerian and the others begin their quest. The race is in trouble because the people have aged past their ability to complete the grueling trials. The city's buildings are falling into ruin because all the inhabitants are too old to be fully productive, and none are able to complete the quest. One of the guides who meets Valerian and Laureline upon their arrival gives a brief tour, including the Palace of Truth which is a court system, and the Dome of Exchange which is a marketplace. Everything they see is covered with vines and looks as if it need repairs.

Filene

This is also called the Island of Children, because this is the home of the Great Mother and where the replacement generation originates. The Island includes a series of obstacles that heroes must pass in order to reach the Great Mother. The palace and grounds where the Great Mother resides is in good condition, a stark contrast to the situation at Simlane, where the quest originates.

Earth

This is the planet from which Valerian and Laureline originate. Valerian and Laureline depart Earth in order to fulfill Valerian's mission on the planet Simlane.

Malamum

Malamum is the planet from which Blimflim originates. It is described as a peaceful planet and its inhabitants are focused on meditation and the environment.

Boornyof

Boornyof is the home planet of the character Ortzog, and is described in the graphic novel as an industrial planet.



Themes and Motifs

The Power of Outside Influences

Valerian, Blimflim, Ortzog, and Irmgaal were all invited to Simlane to participate in a contest because the leaders of Simlane realize that they need outside influences to bring their planet back to a positive point. However, other people of the population are furious that these men are inserting themselves into Simlane's culture. They yell out derogatory names to the four heroes, including calling them "imposters" (14).

What the general population is not willing to realize is that the planet is in a serious situation. The men of the planet are too old to carry through with rebuilding the planet's population, which means that the planet is in danger of dying off. Without a new influx of children, there will be no young people to carry on with the routine work that has to be done. The evidence of this problem is seen in the situation on the planet: buildings are decaying and the planet is in poor condition.

The most important aspect of this theme is seen as the four heroes are asked what influence they expect their children to have on the planet. Irmgaal imagines a warlike race that becomes a mighty force willing to travel through space to share their values. Ortzog says he believes his offspring will reorganize the planet's industrial endeavors. He sees no need for any building not directly related to industry and believes there should be a new focus on intensive farming. He ultimately wants to establish a program for cooperation with other powerful planets, but only those worthy of the alliance. Blimflim sees a complete return to an agronomic society where the people find peace in "frugality, meditation, silence" and "shedding worldly woes" (37). When Valerian is asked for his opinion on what the next generation should be, he indicates that they should have freedom to choose that path for themselves. When Valerian meets the Great Mother, she says that his answer was perfect.

The fact that Valerian is willing to let an entire generation choose its own path is a key element of his character. While he is the biological father of that new generation, he is ultimately happy to have a minimal impact on their choices.

The Role of a Hero

A hero is typically a person who has the ability to complete some difficult task or reach a goal against all odds. The heroes in this novel are strong, resourceful, and determined, but each has faults that make them more believable.

The leaders of Simlane consider Valerian, Blimflim, Ortzog, and Irmgaal as heroes. Each is also considered a hero by his home planet. Blimflim, Ortzog, and Irmgaal literally have superpowers or super strength. Each is ready to show off that strength or power for the people of Simlane before they set out for Filene. That can be attributed to self-confidence, but it can also be seen as a need to show off. They do not care that



they are wrecking the already-fragile building that belongs to the Simlane people. Valerian is a contrast in many ways. He does not know what to do when he is called on to show his power, and winds up shooting a small appendage on the wall.

Another example of this theme is seen in the size of the men. Irmgaal, Orzog, and Blimflim are all very large men. The first time the four are pictured together, it is obvious that Valerian is very small compared to the other three. That is yet another case in which Valerian does not look like the typical hero.

When they reach the coast of Filene, Valerian is ready to rest but the other three insist on immediately pushing on. Their insistence seems to be another sign of their need to show their strength. All three make it through the challenges of the countryside in about the same amount of time. However, Valerian falls into a crevasse and takes longer to reach the palace.

Another example of this theme is seen when the man asks the four what they believe the next generation of people should be. Blimflim, Orzog, and Irmgaal are each determined that the next generation will be exactly like them. Valerian shows true heroism by saying that he believes the next generation should be whatever they choose.

A final example of this theme is seen in Laureline's role in the story line. Laureline remains behind when Valerian and the others go to Filene. However, when it becomes apparent that Valerian will not be returning on his own, she sets out to save him. She is furious when she finds out that Valerian has had sex with the Great Mother, but she does what a true hero would do, taking Valerian with her as she leaves the planet.



Styles

Point of View

The graphic novel is presented from a limited perspective, but that perspective changes depending on the action taking place. The majority of the novels in this series focus on Laureline and Valerian, and the reader sees things from their perspective most of the time. That is true only to a point in this novel. Valerian and the other three heroes travel to Filene. They split up and each takes his own route to their final destinations. The perspective follows each for a few panels, so that the reader sees what is happening with each, but only for short periods of time in their quest.

An important part of the perspective is seen in the change between Valerian and Laureline near that end of the novel. The focus is on Valerian when he meets the Great Mother, but then reverts to Laureline while Valerian apparently has sex with the Great Mother. Laureline does not know what is happening to Valerian, and she sets out to save him. During that decision and the journey to Filene, the perspective changes to Laureline. The changing perspective is acceptable and appropriate to the novel.

Language and Meaning

The novel is presented in modern-day English, having been translated from the original French. There are some alternative spellings seen, such as the word “colour” instead of the traditional American spelling of color, and “honour” instead of honor (3 and 5). There are a few other alternative spellings, but most readers will understand without any explanation. In some cases, the spelling is so slightly different that readers may not even notice.

There are four heroes invited to participate in the contest on Simlane. During the opening panels, those heroes are seen on their home planets as they prepare to go to Simlane. Each of the four is depicted as they address their people. Valerian speaks English but the other three characters, and the people gathered with them, speak their own language. Their speech bubbles look like the traditional speech bubbles, but the language inside does not consist of recognizable characters. There are only a few lines and shapes inside each of the speech bubbles, and the reader is left to imagine that these men are talking to the people of their planets in the same manner as Valerian and the Earth officials. The Earth officials remind Valerian that he is representing the entire planet, and he pledges to do his best.

The majority of the novel is written in everyday language. The overall tone is one of hope and the reader will expect that Valerian will be successful, which turns out to be exactly what happens.

Structure

The novel is presented as a graphic novel. As such, the author and artist depend heavily on graphics. While the novel has many of the characteristics of a traditional comic book, the artist does not use traditional six- and eight-panel pages. Instead, the artist creates pages with varying numbers of panels, and different shapes and sizes. For example, there are five panels on page eight. The first is very short and stretches entirely across the page. The next is taller and still stretches across the page. The remaining three are tall and narrow, standing against each other across the bottom of the page.

This novel also has some double-page graphic layouts. For example, pages 18 and 19 are used as continuous layouts. There are wide panels that stretch entirely across both pages, broken up by insets and lines that show breaks between the panels, but without the traditional gutters seen in most layouts. Some readers may find the design confusing, but it gives the artist the opportunity to make different kinds of impacts from the panels.

The reader sees the story in roughly chronological order. The only exception to that is seen when the perspective changes between the various characters. For example, the reader sees highlights of Irmgaal's journey, and then sees highlights of the other characters' journeys, though all those happen simultaneously. This change from the typical chronological order is appropriate and acceptable.



Quotes

Every hundred equinoxes or so, a new generation is supposed to relieve the old one."
-- Old person from Simlane (chapter 1 paragraph Frame three)

Importance: This is the beginning of the explanation about why Valerian and the other heroes have been invited to Simlane. The remainder of the explanation appears in the coming frames.

All we know is that each time, children who looked like them arrived on great ships pushed by the final wave of the equinox ..."
-- Old man of Simlane (chapter 1 paragraph Frame seven)

Importance: This is the first hint that the man who wins the contest will actually be the biological father of the next generation of children on Simlane.

Fine, never mind that then..."
-- Valerian (chapter 1 paragraph Frame five)

Importance: Valerian and the other three heroes have just arrived at Filene. Valerian is exhausted and is ready to rest, but the others hit the ground running, ready for the next phase of the contest. The fact that Valerian just goes along with it is an important look at his character, and shows at least a small measure of humor.

Anyways, it's not up to me to define it. I hope those people will be happy in their own fashion on their planet ..."
-- Valerian (chapter 1 paragraph Frame three)

Importance: The other three characters gave definitive answers about what they would want for the next generation of children, if they were chosen to father that generation. Valerian's hope that they would choose for themselves captures the attention of the Great Mother, and she chooses him because of that answer. This is also one of the novel's themes.

Come closer, so I can look at you properly before you impregnate me."
-- The Great Mother (chapter 1 paragraph Frame four)

Importance: This is the first time it has been clearly stated that Valerian will literally be the biological father of the entire next generation of children on the planet. Readers who know Valerian might expect him to decline on the basis of his relationship with Laureline or on some other principle, but others might expect him to go through with it. He does go through with it and there are dozens of children by the time Laureline arrives.

I'm looking for someone ... Someone I was afraid might be dead ... But whom I now have every reason to believe is alive and well, looking at the fine job he's done!
-- Laureline (chapter 1 paragraph Frames four and five)



Importance: Laureline has just arrived at Filene and sees all the children running around. She has figured out by now that Valerian was expected to be the biological father of the planet's next generation of children, and she realizes he has done that when she sees all the children. Laureline and Valerian have had an emerging relationship in past novels of the series, and Laureline is furious to learn that Valerian actually impregnated the Great Mother.