

The Land Without Stars (Valerian) Study Guide

The Land Without Stars (Valerian) by Pierre Christin

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Mezieres, J.C.; Christin, P.; Tranle, E. *Valerian and Laureline: The Land Without Stars*; Cinebook, Canterbury, Kent, 2012. Kindle AZW file.

Mezieres and Christin's *Valerian and Laureline: The Land Without Stars*, is one of a series of graphic novels about the adventures of Valerian and Laureline. Valerian is the typical space hero and Laureline is his sidekick. As agents of the Spatio-Temporal Agency, they go on a series of missions. In this installment of the series, they are visiting the Ukbar, which is a very small solar system at the very edge of the explored universe. During their visit to the four planets of this solar system, Valerian becomes drunk on the local forms of beer. Laureline is furious with him but he is shaken from his drunken stupor when they discover that a planet is hurtling toward the Ukbar system.

Valerian and Laureline travel to the planet, identified as Zahir, and discover they can drive through the planet's surface. Inside Zahir, they discover a sun, a moon, and an entire civilization with three distinct tribes of people. They soon meet Mutahar, a member of the Lemm people, who explains the basics of how the planet's civilization operates. The Lemm people gather an explosive mineral called Flogum and sell it to the people of the two powerful cities of Zahir – Valsennar and Malka. Those people use it to wage war on each other. Valerian and Laureline soon realize that the constant explosions of this war are the reason Zahir is no longer in a safe orbit but is hurtling through space and about to strike the planets of Ukbar. Valerian tries to explain that to Mutahar, but he refuses to believe it.

Mutahar says “only men may go to Malka and only women are allowed into Valsennar” (17). He cannot explain why, only that it is a rule and that Valerian and Laureline must obey it. Valerian agrees. They soon discover that the men of Malka are treated as lowly slaves. They are servants who feel they are unworthy of anything other than fighting the war waged by their leader, Queen Klopka, and the women in power. Almost the exact opposite is true in Valsennar. Emperor Alzafrar is in control and the men do not participate in the war at all. They watch from a distance and view it as entertainment.

Valerian catches the eye of Queen Klopka by attacking Emperor Alzafrar. Laureline catches the emperor's attention by shooting down the flying bug Valerian is riding during the attack. With the attention of the leaders, they reveal the truth about the universe and the impending doom of Zahir, all because of the war they have been waging.

Valerian comes up with a plan to set off a series of carefully timed and placed explosions, and he successfully puts Zahir into orbit with the other planets of Ukbar. As the three societies of the planet come together to stop their destruction, they become allies. That alliance stretches past the emergency and Laureline reveals a “veritable epidemic of marriages,” including Queen Klopka and Emperor Alzafrar (48).



Pages 1-10

Summary

The graphic novel opens with the narrator explaining that the small solar system of Ukbar is at the very edge of the explored universe. There are four planets and groups of Terran people have established colonies on each. Valerian and Laureline, agents of the Spatio-Temporal Agency of Galaxy, are still nearby, but they are the final connection the colonists have with home. They arrive at Ukbar I where Valerian is supposed to give the first of a series of speeches. He congratulates the colonists on their courage for undertaking this "Terran expansion" (4). The two attend a banquet in honor of the event. One of the colonists catches Valerian's attention. Valerian goes with the man, wondering if there is something wrong. The man takes Valerian to a brewery, showing him the "first alcohol distilled on Ukbar I" (5). It is made of algae. Valerian says it tastes good, and the man gives him another.

Later, Valerian and Laureline are on Ukbar II where Valerian gives the same speech again. This time, he stumbles at the ending. Some men take Valerian aside again, to another distillery. As they are traveling to Ukbar III, Laureline has to direct Valerian to correct his course by thousands of miles. This time, Valerian completely forgets the words and ends by saying, "yaaaa" (6). In the next frame, Valerian and the men of that planet are sampling more alcohol. By the time they leave, Valerian is so drunk that he falls boarding their spaceship. Laureline tries to take over control as they come in for a landing at Ukbar IV, but Valerian refuses, promising a landing that the people will remember.

Valerian hits something on the way down, but manages to land. This time, there is no one present to meet them. Laureline is now fully aware that Valerian is drunk, and calls him a "booze hound" (6). They see that there are people at the space observatory and go there. The people of Ukbar IV announce that there is a planet headed directly for them. It is later identified as Zahir. Valerian is so drunk that he says he wants to give his speech. Laureline is angry. She says these people have no way to leave, meaning they are all going to die if that planet strikes the Ukbar system. Valerian stands on a platform and makes a new speech, promising that he will protect them. Laureline's thoughts indicate she believes it is hopeless, but she goes with Valerian.

Valerian sleeps off the alcohol while Laureline does the calculations to conduct a space/time jump to Zahir. Laureline wakes him when they are approaching the planet. Valerian is confused for a moment but they both put on spacesuits and go to the surface. There, they discover "phosphorescent lakes" on an otherwise barren landscape (9). They decide to take the skiff to further explore the planet. They dive into the lake, through "abundant flora" and increasing light until they emerge into an opening where they see a sun and moon (10). They are confused.



Analysis

In the opening scenes, the reader gets a look at a stereotypical example of male bonding as the men of Ukbar I, Ukbar II, and Ukbar III take Valerian aside to sample their forms of alcohol. Laureline is not included in these meetings, which is significant because her exclusion is based solely on her gender. There are no women involved at all, making it clear that women are deemed different, if not inferior. That is one of the novel's overall themes, seen more specifically when Valerian and Laureline begin to explore the planet that is hurtling through space toward the Ukbar system.

Each time Valerian and Laureline make a space/time jump, the artist inserts a graphic to break up the actions prior to the jump from those following the jump. That frame is dark with a series of circles around a white silhouette of their spaceship. That image appears each time and the reader who is depending heavily on graphics will begin to recognize it as a symbol of that action.

The reader gets a look at the specific language used in the novel as Laureline and Valerian prepare to land on the rogue planet. Valerian has been sleeping off all the alcohol he consumed on the first three Ukbar planets and he is not completely aware when Laureline first wakes him. He says his brain feels like “a Flutmul jellyfish” (9). The statement is not explained and the reader is left to decide whether Flutmul refers to a kind of jellyfish or a planet where that kind of jellyfish is found. It really does not make any difference and is only an example of the author's effort to make the dialogue seem more futuristic.

The artist depends on punctuation to help convey emotions and ideas, and one of the earliest examples of this is seen on page 9 when Laureline and Valerian are outside their spaceship and are approaching the rogue planet. Valerian points out a light with an unidentified source. Laureline's response is merely an exclamation point. Naturally, she does not say anything, but the enlarged punctuation above her image indicates her reaction. A similar scene appears on page 10, when the two burst through one of the phosphorescent lakes and emerge into the middle of the planet. In that case, the author uses an exclamation point and a question mark, which seems to indicate excitement and confusion. In that case, the emotions are not assigned to a specific character, which likely means they are each feeling those two emotions.

The overall perspective remains focused on Valerian and Laureline throughout the novel, but there are some alterations in the direction which sometimes changes what the reader sees. For example, Valerian and Laureline are descending toward the planet on page 9 with Valerian facing the reader. That makes it easy for the reader to identify each of the figures. In the next frame, the reader sees only their backs. Both are wearing spacesuits, which makes it impossible to tell the two characters apart. Based on the fact that Valerian was higher in the first frame, the reader can assume which is Valerian. The conversation would not have a different meaning if the characters were reversed. This is one of several examples of changing perspectives that alter how the reader sees the action.



Discussion Question 1

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

Discussion Question 2

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

Discussion Question 3

What is Valerian's response when he knows there is a planet headed straight for the Ukbar planets? What does this say about his character?

Vocabulary

philosophy, expansion, revelers, distilled, invaluable, endeavor, imminent, destruction, evacuate, barges, dismantle, trajectory



Pages 11-19

Summary

The first frame of page 11 shows Valerian and Laureline in the skiff. They know they have arrived inside a “hollow planet” (11). They realize Zahir's core is also the planet's sun, and there is a moon orbiting it. They plan to land the skiff into a shaded area but see a house being carried by some sort of strange animals and know Zahir is inhabited. As they watch, they see one of the houses about to fall into a cavern. Laureline says they have to help and Valerian agrees, saying it will give the planet's inhabitants a positive image of the visitors. Valerian maneuvers the ship as the people pull on ropes, shouting in a strange language. Once the house is safe, Valerian says they will land. Laureline says the “automatic translators” have already picked up enough of the language to translate for them (12).

They talk to the first man they encounter, saying they are “friends from another world” (13). The man introduces himself as Mutahar. He is grateful for the help but is skeptical of their claim that they are from another planet. He explains that the animal pulling their house stepped on “flogum,” which is an explosive mineral. Mutahr is a member of the Lemm people, and they gather flogum which they then sell to the other two civilizations of Zahir. He explains that they travel the same routes, harvesting the flogum as it matures.

As Mutahar talks to Valerian and Laureline, a “powerful squall” blows up (14). Laureline goes back to the skiff, Mutahar says it is not weather, but is a war between Zahir's two cities – Malka and Valsennar. That war is why Mutahar's people sell flogum to the people of those cities. Mutahar says the people of Mulka and Valsennar depend on the Lemm people for flogum, which means they never attack the Lemm people. Valerian is angry, saying the Lemm people are involved in the war by providing the weapons. Mutahar dismisses that statement as true, but inconsequential. When Valerian says Zahir is “tumbling through space,” Mutahar refuses to believe or try to understand (16).

Valerian hears a nearby explosion and rushes to the skiff where Laureline accidentally caused the flogum to implode while trying to examine it. She has damaged the skiff but did look at the instruments during the battle. The explosions caused negative reactions, making Valerian realize the war is probably the reason the planet left its orbit. He decides that stopping the war is the first step toward making the people of Zahir realize the danger.

Toward that end, they ask Mutahar if they can accompany the Lemm people as they deliver the flogum to Malka and Valsennar. He agrees, but says only women can go to Valsennar and only men can go to Malka. Valerian asks why. Mutahar says that has always been the rule and the Lemm people are not curious enough to question it. Valerian and Laureline put on native clothing. This time, they carry weapons and radios. They repair the skiff before they leave, then put it in a secluded spot before they leave.



Valerian and Laureline join the two groups that are making deliveries. Mutahar bids them farewell. The groups are segregated by gender, meaning Laureline and Valerian are not traveling together. In their separate groups, they travel along a canyon and then cross a rock bridge before emerging into the light of the sun. The two groups then go different directions.

Analysis

The author makes a point of saying that Valerian and Laureline are “armed only with their miniaturised translators” when they talk to the first of the hollow planet's inhabitants (13). The use of the word “miniaturised” instead of “miniaturized” is due to the translation. European spelling and wording is used throughout the novel. Most readers will only nominally notice and will have no problems with the translations.

Laureline and Valerian have no weapons when they talk to the first person on the hollow planet. The author may expect this to heighten the readers' sense of danger. It is also a part of Valerian's and Laureline's characters.

The artist depends on blues during the scenes inside Zahir with the Lemm people. There are several shades of blue that are meant to convey the idea of darkness lit only by moonlight. These blues are interspersed with some faint pinks representing plant life. In an interesting choice, the majority of the Lemm people are dressed mainly in shades of blue and brown. Valerian's native clothing includes a yellow shirt and Laureline's includes a light purple shirt, but the artist tends to blend in those colors when the two are part of larger scenes. As a contrast, the artist depends on oranges, yellows, and reds when the scenes are set in the harsh light of Zahir's sun.

The author presents the idea that the people of Zahir do not know they are part of a larger system of planets and solar systems. That is believable if the reader assumes it is possible for the people of Zahir to live inside their planet. With no view of the sky, they could be limited in their understanding of a bigger universe.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the war on Zahir.

Discussion Question 2

What is the role of the Lemm people of Zahir?

Discussion Question 3

What has been revealed about Zahir up to this point?



Vocabulary

dialogue, lunar, interminable, accessories, convincing, offensive, discreet, hastily, lull, solar, otherwise



Pages 20-26

Summary

Valerian and the group of men arrive at Malka after another three days of travel. One of the men says Malka is one of two cities of Zahir, and that both are “beautiful” (20). The Lemm men are not allowed to enter the gates of Malka. Valerian thanks them for bringing him to this point, then goes off on his own. The city’s walls are “well guarded” and he sets out to find a way inside (21). He finds sewer tunnels. He swims and wades through them, eventually coming to some stairs.

Valerian emerges into the city and finds only men. They are doing all the work. In the images, they are feeding children, weaving on a loom, and washing clothes. Women arrive on horseback, raising dust and shouting for the men to line up. One woman cracks a whip and yells at them to hurry. One man tries to run away and a woman shoots him, though she says it was only “a warning shot” (23). One woman instructs the others to choose “the least ugly” of the men to fight in the upcoming battle (23). Valerian is among those chosen and realizes that puts him in a good position.

During the next day, Valerian and the other men learn to use the various weapons. The women drive them relentlessly and do not care if someone is wounded during the practice. They also punish anyone who is inept or unwilling.

That night, one man points out that most men die in battle. Valerian asks why they are fighting the people of Valsennar. One man says the men are in charge at Valsennar, and that life in that city is terrible. They say the women of Malka protect the civilization. One man says anyone who survives the fighting is then forced to attend a “procreation session,” which he says is more terrible than death (26). Valerian continues to ask questions, prompting the others to think he must have a head injury. Valerian tries to talk to one of the women, but is silenced. He goes to bed, realizing he does not have any other options.

Analysis

The people of Zahir look very much like humans, though the people of Lemm have light-colored eyes with no colored iris. The people of the two cities have human appearances, including normal eyes. The choice of the human form may have been intentional, since the planet itself is not ordinary.

The colors throughout the novel are muted. There are no brilliant colors in any of the places, but the artist chooses a larger variety of colors when Valerian reaches Malka. The artist focuses on different colors, but the same variety appears in the scenes at Valsennar. The use of more colors makes the reader imagine a different tone at these places.



Gender roles are an important part of the story line, and is one of the novel's themes. As Valerian begins to learn about the people of Malka, he makes a comment about “women's work” (22), which is one of the first examples of this theme.

The language throughout the novel is traditional American English, but the author uses some passages to emphasize the futuristic, space setting. In one instance, Valerian uses the words “by space” as an expletive (24).

The graphics on page 25 seem chaotic, which is the artist's way of making the reader understand the horrible events of the military training day. The page is a full-page panel but shows several scenes. Two are inset framed panels, but the other panels simply melt into each other, so the edges are indistinct. The artist depends on oranges and yellows, with some reddish tones. The one exception on the page is a bright red, indicating the blood pouring from one man's shoulder wound.

Discussion Question 1

What does Valerian discover about Malka?

Discussion Question 2

What is the focus of the people in Malka?

Discussion Question 3

What do the men of Malka think about themselves?

Vocabulary

pity, mingling, expedition, conscription, billet, unfortunate, venom, merciless



Pages 27-32

Summary

Laureline's group arrives at Valsennar. She thanks them for taking her to the city, then leaves them. She sees women working all around the city. One of them is carrying a load of baskets. Two others are working with hand tools. One is swinging a pick. She says that Valerian would approve of the situation.

A woman named Nadjika introduces herself and asks if Laureline is planning to enter the contest. Laureline is confused and the woman assumes that means she is. She begins making plans for preparing Laureline, and Laureline goes along with her. Nadjika says she is "too ugly" to win the contest (28). She says Laureline will go to the palace if she wins, and she asks Laureline to remember that Nadjika helped her. Laureline bathes and puts on the clothes Nadjika gives her. Then Nadjika leads her to the place where the contest will take place. Nadjika says Emperor Alzafrar is present and she urges Laureline forward.

The contest consists of cooking, weaving, and music, and Laureline is terrible at all of them. Emperor Alzafrar notices that Laureline is pretty, and defends her when someone criticizes her singing. After the contest, the emperor summons Laureline. She knows she performed poorly, and is surprised. Emperor Alzafrar announces that Laureline is the winner. He warns that he will have every woman beaten if anyone complains. He then tells Laureline to accompany him to the palace. He says they will be fighting against the women of Malka soon, but they have a few days to enjoy themselves until then.

Laureline notes that the palace is beautiful. Emperor Alzafrar says it is the "palace of resplendent virility" (31). He says the women of Malka frequently bomb the palace. He points out the military fleet, saying they have no choice but to defend themselves from the "obscurantist brutality" of the people of Malka. Laureline asks if all the warriors of Valsennar are women. Emperor Alzafrar says that only women are suited for the "dirty" business of war. He says the men enjoy watching the "colorful spectacle," but would never actually participate (32).

Analysis

The first image of Valsennar depends on pale blues and pinks with some splashes of orange. The image is a contrast to Malka, which leads the reader to realize the focus there is on fighting. Valsennar is different. The first images show fountains and paths, hinting that the people of Valsennar are less focused on war and fighting, and more focused on beauty. Despite that, they continue to be involved in the ongoing war. More about their attitude is revealed in the coming section as Laureline learns more about the culture.



Emperor Alzafrar uses the word “virago” to describe the women of Malka. Some readers may not be familiar with the word, which is synonymous with shrew. The fact that he uses an elaborate word is an indicate of his character, and is one aspect of the importance of language to convey meaning, tone, and actions.

Emporer Alzafrar is the exact opposite of Valerian. He is heavysset and lacking in the traits that would make human women like him. That image is on purpose, and the queen of Malka is very similar. Laureline considers him pretentious and immediately realizes the best way to gain his attention is to pretend to fit in with the people of his palace.

In many ways, Valsennar and Malka are exact opposites. The main contrasts are seen in the fact that Valsennar is ruled by men and Malka is ruled by women. In each, the other gender feels inferior and weak. The scenes in Valsennar show a focus on poetry and beauty while scenes in Malka are focused on military training. The use of contrast is a literary device seen in many novels and its use in this novel is meant to convey the ridiculous extremes of the two rulers.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Valsennar.

Discussion Question 2

Who is the ruler of Valsennar? Describe him.

Discussion Question 3

Compare the situation in Valsennar to that in Malka.

Vocabulary

journey, yokel, jousts, horrible, virago, resplendent, virility, gorgeous, obscurantist, brutality, lethal, soiree, pretentious, libations, fortified



Pages 33-48

Summary

Valerian and the other men continue their training, then load up the flogum and make final preparations for battle. One of the men tells Valerian that the queen will soon come by. Valerian asks if she is pretty. The man says she is beautiful. The men stand in awe as she arrives. She is heavysset with folds of skin below her chin. She is dressed in armor and Valerian is obviously not impressed with her beauty. The men chant, "Long live Klopka the Exquisite" (33).

The battle will take place in the air. The forces of Malka take off with their leader in the front of the formation. Emperor Alzafrar is in the rear of the military force from Valsennar. Some women on his ship serve drinks as he and the other men prepare to watch the battle. As the flogum explodes during the fighting, the sun repeatedly reacts. Valerian sees a flyer, which is the equivalent of a fighter plane but is a living creature. The flyer has no rider but has a load of flogum. Hoping to catch the eye of Queen Klopka, Valerian gets on the flyer and makes his way through the fighting to drop flogum on the palace. Queen Klopka and Emperor Alzafrar each see Valerian's action.

Valerian next flies near Emperor Alzafrar's ship. Emperor Alzafrar is upset that Valerian would bring the battle this close to him. Everyone tries to hide except Laureline. She finds a crossbow and shoots down the flyer, only then realizing that it is Valerian. As Valerian is going down, he sees that Laureline fired the bow. He is proud of her. On the way down, he spots a ship and is able to jump from his flyer to safety. On the ground, Valerian notes that the sun's activity is increasing. With the other survivors, he heads back toward Malka, hoping that he has captured the queen's attention so that she will listen to him.

That evening, Valerian is in the Palace of Supreme Femininity in Malka. With some time alone, he decides to use the radio to contact Laureline. She is in the Palace of Resplendent Virility. She knows she has captured Emperor Alzafrar's attention by saving his life, but is horrified that she almost killed Valerian in the process. She feels the need to know he is alright. They call each other on the radio at the same time. Valerian feels Emperor Alzafrar and Queen Klopka are so caught up in their war that they would never listen to reason. He proposes they kidnap the emperor and queen. Laureline agrees.

Laureline joins Emperor Alzafrar in Valsennar and Valerian joins Queen Klopka in Malka. Valerian uses a stunner to knock the queen unconscious. He then drags and carries her heavy body to one of her ships, then heads to the skiff. Laureline knocks the emperor out with a sleeping pill in his drink. She drags him to a flyer and heads for the skiff.

When they meet up, Valerian says he has taken new readings and that they have a matter of days to keep Zahir from striking the Ukbar system. Valerian says he plans to



take the emperor and queen out of their planet to see the stars, which will open the door to explain about the larger universe and the danger. While Valerian and Laureline are talking, Queen Klopka and Emperor Alzafrar begin fighting. He says she hit him first. She is angry because he was drinking flower alcohol. Valerian orders both onto the skiff. They continue to bicker as he takes off.

The skiff passes through one of the lakes and then through to the outside of the planet. Queen Klopka makes an outlandish explanation for the stars but Valerian explains what they really are, and that there are many other planets like Zahir. There is silence as the queen and emperor faint. Valerian and Laureline decide to use hypno-education to make the situation clear.

Afterward, the two still bicker but Valerian points out the danger. He demands their entire stockpile of flogum. For the first time in history, the people of Zahir all work together. While Laureline works to transport the flogum and arrange “automatic deployment” as Valerian instructed, Valerian goes through some “complex calculations” (47). Valerian then tells Laureline his plan to detonate flogum at specific spots around the planet using the space/time jump capabilities of their spaceship. Valerian is correct. After the procedure, Zahir falls into orbit with the other planets of Ukbar. Valerian says the colonists of Ukbar have made contact with the people of Zahir with “excellent” results (48). Laureline says the society of Zahir has changed dramatically, with many men and women getting married. Queen Klopka and Emperor Alzafrar are among those planning to wed.

Laureline then notices a strange odor. Valerian says he is trying out the alcohol from Zahir. He also says he is in favor of “matriarchy,” and is going to prove it by letting Laureline pilot the spaceship back to Galaxy (48).

Analysis

The author uses sarcasm to show Valerian's reaction when he sees the queen of Malka for the first time. That literary tool is not seen often in this novel and the others of this series, but it is more effective because of the look on Valerian's face in the accompanying panel. His mouth is slightly twisted into a smirk and his eyebrows are raised.

The relationship between Valerian and Laureline is morphing as the series progresses. It has always been apparent that Laureline is attracted to Valerian, but she makes her feelings known in this novel for the first time. As they are talking about their plan to kidnap Emperor Alzafrar and Queen Klopka, Laureline says she loves him. She seems to casually drop the comment, as if it is normal for them. Valerian does not respond. Other than Laureline's concern for Valerian and Valerian's pride in Laureline's abilities, there is no indication of their feelings toward each other.

The author uses a great deal of contrast during the final few scenes of the novel, usually centered around Valerian and Laureline. For example, the artist uses one panel to show



both Laureline and Valerian as they call each other at the same moment. Valerian is on the left side of the panel and they are facing each other. Each is in a circle within the rectangular panel to show that they are talking through the radio but are not physically in the same place. The use of contrasts is effective in showing the steps taken by the two characters as they work toward a common goal.

The final panel shows Valerian and Laureline as they prepare to leave the Ukbar solar system. Valerian is relaxed, leaning back in his seat, and is already drinking alcohol again. This is again showing that less-than-perfect side of his character, which is an important part of the novel. The reader who reads only a single novel of the series will not see the depth the author is creating over the course of the series, and this aspect of Valerian's character is part of that building process.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the battle. What does Valerian do during the battle? What does Laureline do?

Discussion Question 2

Describe three contrasts in the novel. What is the purpose of contrasts in literature?

Discussion Question 3

How do Valerian and Laureline get the people of Zahir to work together to save the planet?

Vocabulary

exquisite, majestically, imperial, prudently, inexorably, convulsing, turbulence, melee, docile, prodigious, intensive, scant, desperate, looming, matriarchy



Characters

Valerian

Valerian is a stereotypical hero, and an agent for the Spatio-Temporal Agency. He goes on various missions for the agency and winds up in an array of adventures. He is handsome, strong, and resourceful. In this novel of the series, he successfully pilots a large flying bug that is used by the native people of Zahir. He has an inherent sense of who is trustworthy. He is also a bit of a daredevil and scoffs at danger.

Unlike some heroes, he does have his flaws. He is often arrogant to the point that he puts himself and Laureline in unnecessary danger. As this novel begins, he drinks a great deal and winds up so inebriated that he cannot make good decisions. Despite these flaws, he is always successful in his endeavors. As the novel comes to a close, he comes up with a plan to set off a series of explosions, which successfully sets the planet into orbit in the Ukbar system.

Ultimately, Valerian is likable, if not believable. Most readers will expect him to be successful in every endeavor, and will not be disappointed.

Laureline

Laureline is also an agent of the Spatio-Temporal Agency but Valerian is apparently the leader of their team. Laureline is capable in her own right. She does not seem to be able to control Valerian, as seen when he becomes drunk during their visit to the four Ukbar planets and refuses to let her pilot the ship. She is portrayed as a beautiful woman who captures the eye of Emperor Alzafrar, and she catches his attention again when she shoots down the bug Valerian is flying during the attack. She is obviously attracted to Valerian, as seen in her reaction to almost killing him.

Laureline is likable, if not believable, but this is appropriate considering the genre and storyline. She is the more stable of the pair of agents, and seems more focused on their missions. She is not afraid of danger, but seems to be the more careful of the two. The fact that she defers to Valerian is a sign of her status as the junior member of their team.

Emperor Alzafrar

Emperor Alzafrar is the leader of Valsennar, one of three groups of people in the civilization of Zahir. He is pictured as effeminate and unwilling to dirty his hands by directly participating in the fighting though he is heavily involved in keeping the war going. Ultimately, he does listen to Valerian and Laureline, and puts his resources to work as he tries to save his planet.



Queen Kopka

Queen Klopka is the ruler of Malka, one of three groups of people in the civilization of Zahir. She is pictured as heavysset and brash with a personality that is the exact opposite of Emperor Alzafrar. She is always involved in the fighting and is a heavy-handed ruler. She is willing to put aside her hostility when she learns that her planet is in danger.

Mutahar

Mutahar is a member of the Lemm tribe of Zahir and is the first person Valerian meets upon his arrival inside Zahir. Mutahar does not believe Valerian's claim that their planet is one of many, and that they are in danger. He does, however, welcome Valerian into their group and allows Valerian and Laureline to travel with the Lemm people as they deliver the Flogum.

Nadjika

Nadjika is the woman who introduces herself to Laureline in Valsennar. She believes Laureline is going to participate in a contest, and offers to help her prepare. She does not appear again after sending Laureline to the contest.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Palace of Resplendent Virility

This is a symbol of male supremacy. The Palace of Resplendent Virility is the palace in Valsennar where Emperor Alzafrar lives.

The Palace of Supreme Femininity

This is a symbol of female superiority. The Palace of Supreme Femininity is the palace in Malka where Queen Klopka lives.

Flogum

Flogum is an explosive mineral that symbolizes the ongoing war between the people of Malka and the people of Valsennar.

Lemm

This is one of three groups of people on the planet, and is symbolic of ongoing war. The Lemm people mine flogum, which is the only real weapon in the ongoing war between the people of Malka and the people of Valsennar.

Stars

The stars are symbolic of the larger universe, which is hidden from the people of Zahir until Valerian and Laureline show them the truth.

The Dark Frame with a Silhouette of the Spaceship

This is a symbol of the space/time jump Valerian and Laureline execute. Unlike some of the symbols, this one only exists as a graphic symbol.

Settings

Ukbar

Ukbar is a small solar system that consists of four planets as the novel opens. Valerian and Laureline visit each of the four. At the first three, they congratulate them on their recent successful colonization. While they are at the final of the four planets, they learn about Zahir, which is the planet that is about to strike Ukbar. As the novel comes to an end, that planet falls into orbit, making the Ukbar system a system of five planets.

Valsennar

This is a city in Zahir controlled by Emperor Alazfrar where men are in power. The emperor is effeminate and their civilization is focused mainly on the more delicate side of life. He is involved in the ongoing war against Malka, but does not actively participate in the battles. The city itself is beautiful, but constantly suffers from the effects of the war.

Malka

Malka is the city in Zahir controlled by women and ruled by Queen Klopka. The men feel they are inferior and that their only purpose is to do whatever the women say. The city is large and elaborate.

Zahir

Zahir is the planet that is hurtling through space toward the Ukbar solar system as the novel opens. It is the “land without stars” mentioned in the title of the book. Because the people of Zahir live in the center of their planet, they have no stars. The core of the planet serves as a sun. The planet has two large cities and the people of these cities are at war with each other, which has put the planet in danger.



Themes and Motifs

Gender Roles

While traditional gender roles on Earth have changed over the decades, the people of this novel push the expectations to extremes. Some of those extremes resemble former times and places in human history.

When Valerian first arrives in Malka, he sees that the men are doing all the work. They are feeding children, working at the weaving loom, and doing laundry. Valerian wonders what qualifies as “women's work” in Malka (22). His comment indicates his sexist attitude about traditional gender roles but is also the first indication of societal norms in Malka.

When Laureline arrives in Valsennar, she notes that there are women working everywhere. She says that Valerian would approve of the situation. This is another indication of Valerian's attitudes related to traditional gender roles.

Another aspect of this theme is seen in the kind of work the men and women are doing. In Malka, men are performing the duties that one would normally expect women to do – caring for the children and weaving, for example. It seems reasonable that the men of Malka would also be working with tools and carrying things, but the artist does not show those actions, apparently as a means of demonstrating that men are doing all the work in Malka, including work traditionally performed by women. The same is true in Valsennar. In Valsennar, there is a woman carrying a heavy load on her back and two others are working with hand tools with one of them swinging a pick. While the women in Valsennar are apparently responsible for caring for children and doing laundry, the artist does not show those actions.

Valerian's Role as a Hero

Valerian is, in many ways, a typical hero, but he also has faults. His actions, attitudes, and skills are an important part of the novel and of the series as a whole. While his role is often that of the typical hero, he is also a source of humor, and his imperfections play an important part in the storyline.

As the story opens, Valerian and Laureline are traveling to the four planets of the Ukbar system. Valerian has been assigned the task of giving speeches at an event on each planet, congratulating the colonists on successfully beginning new lives. He drinks with the men on each planet so that he is very drunk by the time they reach the fourth of Ukbar's planets. He is oblivious to the danger, which is another of his traits. When Laureline yells at him, accusing him of ignoring the problem. He counters, saying that he is going to solve the problem. His calm, determined attitude is typical of his character.



Valerian's attitude toward Laureline is another aspect of his character. When she shoots him down, he is proud that she has the ability, and is certain that she learned those skills from him.

The Effects of War

The people of Zahir have been fighting each other as long as anyone can remember, and that war – like all wars – has brought devastation to the planet. The three groups of people on Zahir each have their own motivations for their participation. Each is indifferent to the suffering of others, and to the suffering of their own people.

The women of Malka constantly challenge the men of Valsennar. Their only motivation seems to be that the men are in control at Valsennar. Some of the other fighters in Malka tell Valerian that Valsennar is a horrible place, but they have no facts. Once the women of Malka issue the challenge, the men of Valsennar believe they have no choice but to respond with violence. Many people are killed during the battles and the cities are damaged. Despite that, the two factions continue to fight with no real goals in mind.

The people of Lemm are profiting from the war. They mine flogum – the explosive mineral that the people of Malka and Valsennar use as weapons. They sell the flogum for profit to the other two groups, making them the equivalent of modern-day arms dealers. The work is dangerous for them as well, as seen in the opening scene of the book when Valerian helps them pull one of their mobile houses back onto solid ground.

The biggest damage from the ongoing war is the destructive effect on the planet's core. The constant explosions have damaged the core to the point that the planet is hurtling through space. Not only are the people of Zahir in danger, but they are headed directly to the Ukbar system, and would have destroyed the four planets there if Valerian had not managed to put the planet into a safe orbit.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is presented in omniscient perspective but focuses entirely on the actions of Valerian and Laureline. The omniscient perspective is vital in this novel because the two agents are not together throughout the novel. The reader follows Valerian's actions, and later picks up on Laureline's actions. That allows the reader to know what is happening to each character, though they are not together. The perspective merges again when the two reunite during the battle between the people of Valsennar and the people of Malka.

One example of the omniscient perspective is seen when Valerian urges Laureline to leave Ukbar IV with him. She does not respond aloud, but has a thought that is conveyed through a thought bubble. The artist graphically makes it clear that she only thinks the words by putting the words inside a thought bubble instead of a speech bubble.

The omniscient perspective is limited to a degree. For example, Valerian comes up with an idea to set the planet back on course, but does not reveal that plan to anyone – including Laureline – until he is ready to implement it. That means the reader also does not know what the plan is until Valerian reveals it. The fact that the author hides some details, especially thoughts, is the only significant limitation to the omniscient perspective.

Language and Meaning

The novel is divided between dialogue, narrative, and graphic elements. These work together to make up the story line. The story is set in a futuristic time and imaginary place. As such, there are many words and phrases that exist purely for this novel. For example, Valerian says that his brain is “like a Flutmul jellyfish” (9) Most readers will know what a jellyfish is, but the word Flutmul could be a reference to a planet or a specific type of jellyfish. It is never explained. The reader is not intended to understand the majority of these terms. The terms that are important to the novel are explained through dialogue and narrative, such as the identities of the three groups that make up the civilization on the rogue planet.

Some of the words and phrases are slang English. At one point, Laureline thinks “what the heck” (8), which merely means that there is no ready alternative. In another frame, she says Valerian is “drunk as a skunk” (6). There are other phrases meant to look futuristic. For example, Laureline says the words, “By space” (6), which is obviously an expletive. The words are meant to convey an exclamation but the words themselves convey the futuristic setting.



The dialogue is presented in traditional graphic novel form though speech bubbles. These exist as circular bubbles with narrowed arms pointed to the character speaking. An interesting aspect of the use of speech bubbles is seen as the artist sometimes crosses the bubbles. For example, on page 7, Laureline goes on a rant, yelling at Valerian that the people of Ukbar have risked their lives to colonize this solar system, and are now about to be killed. Valerian responds with “Oh, is that all?” (7). Valerian is on the left side of the page, but Laureline's words appear on the left. Valerian's words appear above Laureline's head, meaning the speech bubble pointers cross in the middle of the panel. This is not typical placement and it is not seen often in the novel.

Structure

The graphic novel is presented in the typical form of a comic book. As such, the authors depend heavily on graphic elements to set tone and describe people, places, and events. The novel is divided between graphics, dialogue, and narrative. The narrator's voice appears as words above, beside, or inside the graphic frames.

The novel is presented in chronological order with historical information included as narrative and dialogue, each combined with graphics. This is especially true at the opening of the novel, when Valerian and Laureline are arriving on the first planet of Ukbar. The narrator explains their presence at Ukbar and the reason for their visit. The narrator also gives basic information about Valerian and Laureline. This novel is one of a series about Valerian and Laureline, which is why the narrator presents some basic information about the agents.

The number and sizes of panels vary on each page and few pages have the traditional, square, six or eight-frame layout. The first page opens with four long, narrow panels that cover the top half of the page. The fifth panel stretches across the entire page and there are two additional panels covering the bottom one-fourth of the page. Page five has 11 panels total, with two that are very small and one that is very narrow. Some have slanted sides, giving an impression of movement. The various configurations are meant to convey action, ideas, and tone.



Quotes

... And to all of you, in the name of Earth, in homage to your endeavour, and seeing in your courage the very model of the values that alone must shape the philosophy of Terran expansion, I wish you good luck!

-- Valerian (chapter 1 paragraph Frame five)

Importance: Valerian is giving his speech to the people Ukbar I, congratulating them on their successful efforts toward colonization. He gives the same speech at Ukbar II and Ukbar III, though he is slurring his words and completely forgets the speech after consuming a lot of alcohol.

Don't you understand that all these poor people came here only to die in a massive cataclysm? And now that the cargo ships have been dismantled, we can't even evacuate them!"

-- Laureline (chapter 1 paragraph Frame eight)

Importance: Valerian has acted as if he is indifferent to the fact that the planet Zahir is hurtling directly toward the Ukbar system, and will likely destroy all four planets in the Ukbar system. This statement is an example of Laureline's character. Valerian's response is an example of his character, when he says, "Oh, is that all?"

War has existed for as long as Zahir has! But the Lemm people are peaceful ... and we are needed by both sides ... so we are in very little danger."

-- Mutahar (chapter 1 paragraph Frame seven)

Importance: Mutahar is explaining the gusts of wind that he says is the result of a nearby battle between the people of Malka and the people of Valsennar. The effects of war is one of the novel's themes. The fact that Mutahar is indifferent to his people's role in the war is a significant part of that theme.

I wonder what exactly is women's work in this city."

-- Valerian (chapter 1 paragraph Frame four)

Importance: Valerian has just begun to see how the people of Malka live. He makes this comment after realizing that the men do all the work, such as caring for children, weaving at the loom, and doing laundry. Valerian apparently considers all these things as "women's work." The gender roles are one of the novel's themes.

Everywhere in the skies of the hollow planet, the battle rages. The flogum-armed flyers have gone into action as well, and around the increasingly unstable sun, convulsing with massive turbulence, Zahir's atmosphere is torn by terrifying eruptions."

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph Frames one and two)

Importance: This is another example of how the war is tearing Zahir apart. The effects of war is one of the novel's themes.



Everywhere, as if by a miracle, the looming danger erases the weight of the unmoving past. In Malka, in Valsennar, and among the Lemm people, the Zahirians, united for the first time, men and women working side by side, struggle to save their planet in distress.”

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph Frame three)

Importance: Valerian has shown Emperor Alzafrar and Queen Klopka that they are part of a bigger universe, and that they are in danger. That common cause unites the people and puts an end to the war that threw the planet out of orbit.