

On False Earths (Valerian) Study Guide

On False Earths (Valerian) by Pierre Christin

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Plot Summary

Mezieres, J.C.; Christin, P.; Tranle, E. *Valerian and Laureline: On the False Earths*; Cinebook, Canterbury, Kent, English translation 2014. Kindle AZW file.

As the novel opens, Valerian is in India when he announces that he has recovered some coordinates shortly before being shot during a battle. It is only later that the reader begins to realize that this is really a clone of Valerian. The original Valerian is safe aboard his spaceship. A short time later, another Valerian clone is in England. This time, he is killed soon after getting the coordinates.

Aboard Valerian's spaceship, a historian named Jadna is talking with Laureline. The two women prepare yet another clone and send it into the next situation. This time, the cloned Valerian is sent to America in the early 1900s. He is shot before he can accomplish anything. Back aboard the spaceship, Laureline and Jadna prepare the next clone. This one questions Laureline before she and Jadna send him out to find the next set of coordinates. He learns from the previous clone's mistake and does get the coordinates.

The coordinates take Jadna, Laureline, and Valerian nearer to the Egg Alien who has been creating these replicas of Earth. (Editor's Note: The alien is never named, but it is shaped like an egg. For the purpose of clarity in this study guide, he is referred to as the Egg Alien.) Upon their arrival, the alien creates a replica of World War I. Jadna sends all the remaining clones of Valerian into the battle while she makes contact with the alien.

The Egg Alien says that everything on his planet is boring and that he has his parents' blessing to go on this adventure. He reveals that he was the one who stole items of historical value from Earth's current civilization, known as Galaxity. The Spatio-Temporal Agency had approved Jadna's involvement in a mission to track down the alien, all because everyone was afraid that the alien presented a danger to Earth. Laureline insists the Egg Alien restore their spaceship so they can leave. Knowing that Jadna was only using the mission for her own historical knowledge, Laureline leaves her behind with the Egg Alien.

As Valerian recovers from being cloned multiple times, Laureline makes plans for a short vacation. As the novel comes to a close, she and Valerian are dressed in period clothing, enjoying refreshments on a patio with several other happy people.



Pages 1-10

Summary

The opening page of graphics has four panels. The first frame shows a line of military men on soldiers in the distance. The next two frames show the soldiers coming nearer. The final frame of the page shows a man saying that the “artillery is ready” (3). On the next page, one man soldier calls for the others to fight in the name of the “East India Trading Company” (4). In the remaining panels of the page, the men advance on a fort. The battle rages on the next page and the readers who know the characters will see a man who looks like Valerian. He is later identified as one of Valerian's clones created for this mission.

Valerian's clone runs away. One of the soldiers says this scene was “not in the programme,” as Valerian's clone climbs a wall (6). A soldier shoots Valerian's clone's hat off. He says the “game” and weapons are not perfect (6). As Valerian's clone runs past an old man seated on the ground, the man says that Valerian's clone is disrespecting the program. Valerian's clone believes he is supposed to enter a doorway, and he encounters a tiger. He shoots the animal with his weapon, leaving a pile of ashes. He continues to run, reminding himself that he has to be careful. He enters a corridor, reminding himself to pay attention. In the corridor, a heavysset man is working at what appears to be some sort of computer panel. The man says that there is an “external threat” that prompts the need for an immediate “programme modification” (8). Valerian's clone knows he can get rid of the man's guards without any real effort, but also knows he has to get rid of that man without hitting the panel. The man is continuing to try to change the program when Valerian's clone blows a hole in the wall and enters the room.

Valerian's clone strikes the man, then turns his attention to the panel. He calls to Laureline, asking if she is able to get the coordinates. Just then, a voice in the panel says that the program has been changed, and Valerian's clone knows that means he is in trouble. He asks Laureline if she has the data, saying he cannot remain any longer. Laureline answers, but another voice interrupts, saying they do not have time to waste. The voice says that everything else now is “irrelevant,” and Valerian's clone calls that a “heartless” attitude (9).

Valerian's clone says he has not yet been defeated, and he runs back to the wall of the fort. The soldiers are massed below the wall where Valerian's clone is standing, then they shoot into his body, striking him multiple times with their bullets.

Valerian's clone falls from the wall and hits a body of water that changes into space with stars and planets in the background. His body is limp as he falls. The final panel of page 10 shows a spaceship. A speech bubble with the sound, “aaah!” appears coming from the spaceship (10).



Analysis

The story seems to pick up in mid-scene. The author does not immediately explain how Valerian is being killed and what is actually happening. That literary tactic is a way of creating suspense. The reader will not learn the details, including that the Valerian who is killed is a clone of the original, for several scenes.

The mission is not explained until much later in the novel. Valerian's clones are visiting replicas of Earth that are being created by the Egg Alien. (Editor's Note: The alien responsible for creating all the alternative Earths is never named, but he has the general appearance of a large egg. For the sake of clarity in this study guide, he is called the Egg Alien.) Valerian's clones are finding coordinates from the computer panels in each of these Earths, and those coordinates are leading Valerian and Laureline ever nearer to the Egg Alien's current location.

There is not one single word on page five. This is one of many examples of how important the graphics are to the novel. The page has six panels of varying sizes. Each shows specific scenes from the battle that is raging around Valerian's clone. There are men fighting and dying, in a scene that mimics real battles that occurred in India. The historian will know a lot about some of the scenes depicted in the novel, but some readers will have to accept the scenes as presented and without any real information from the authors of this novel. At the end of the novel, Laureline goes on a tirade about the politics behind each of the scenes, and she refers to this one as "colonialism" (47).

This novel is one of a series of graphic novels featuring Valerian and Laureline. Each can be read as a stand-alone novel, but the reader without a working knowledge of the characters and their role in the Spation-Temporal Agency may be confused until Laureline offers up an explanation. This is a non-traditional means of opening a novel because it assumes that the reader will recognize Valerian and will be confused when Valerian is killed without understanding that this is Valerian's clone.

The second voice from the spaceship is Jadna, who is pushing the action of this mission. She makes a comment about being irrelevant, and Valerian's clone takes offense. What she is actually saying is that they will not be waiting for Valerian's clone to survive. Those details are explained in an upcoming scene.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the battle that occurs during this chapter.

Discussion Question 2

What is the man doing at the computer panel? Predict what this signifies.



Discussion Question 3

What might the term “programme modification” mean (8).

Vocabulary

artillery, programme, weaponry, actually, urgent, terminal, corridor, modification, external, acknowledged, data, coordinates, irrelevant, heartless



Pages 11-18

Summary

On board the spaceship, Spatio-Temporal Agent Laureline is at the helm with Jadna, a historian who is a large part of this mission. Laureline says she is not accustomed to something, but Jadna cuts her off with a comment about “sentimentalism” and “male supremacy” (11). Jadna instructs Laureline to get another Valerian clone ready for the next phase. Jadna says they are on track and making good time, and she warns Laureline against letting emotion get in the way of her job. Aloud, Laureline agrees, but she refers to Jadna as a “stupid cow” in her thoughts.

The next scene opens with a Valerian clone standing on an empty street in England. He is looking at his watch as people begin to appear, going about their evening. A coach arrives and a man who resembles Valerian disembarks. He tells the driver to return at their prearranged time. Valerian intercepts the man before he can enter his destination, a gentleman's club. The man mentions the program just as the Valerian clone pulls a knife from his cane and stabs the man. He takes the man's monocle, hoping it increases their resemblance. Valerian's clone enters where a servant greets him and seems surprised that he does not automatically reach for the newspaper. The man's confusion gives Valerian's clone a hint that he is not working exactly with the program.

Valerian's clone goes to the bar. He hesitates, then asks for a scotch. The bartender is confused. He says the program calls for gin, and he emits a buzzing sound. As Valerian's clone walks away, a man makes a comment and Valerian's clone responds, but the man's confusion makes it clear the clone has not said the correct line again. Valerian's clone knows he needs to search for the coordinates instead of trying to fit into the program.

He goes down a hallway and several men gathered around a table in another room. One of them says they can begin their “informal meeting” now that Sir Percy has arrived. Just then, the first servant enters, saying that Sir Percy is off the program. One of the men at the table says it is time for a “programme change,” and another emits a buzzing sound in the midst of his words (15). One man stands and goes to a computer panel, like the one seen in the India scene.

Valerian's clone becomes rude, saying he hopes the originals of these men were more capable than their copies. One man pulls a gun, but hesitates, feeling he needs confirmation of a program change. As soon as the voice from the computer panel approves a change, Valerian's clone steps near to retrieve the coordinates. He rushes out of the club and grabs a bicycle, but finds he cannot control it well. As men chase him, he rides down a street and off a cliff. In the next panel, Valerian's clone is still on the bicycle, but is now in open space with stars and planets in the background.



Aboard the spaceship, Laureline is seated at a control panel. She yells “aaah!” as Jadna says that Valerian's clones are “wasting valuable time” (18). Laureline is angry. She says Valerian was chosen because of his bravery. Jadna interrupts, saying she has work to do before their next scene. She says Laureline knows what she is supposed to do now. Laureline leaves the room.

Analysis

The author does not detail the exact place and time of the scene set in England. The man arrives in a horse-drawn carriage and the clothing – including top hats and dresses with flounces – would set the scene in the late 1800s.

Valerian's clone does not look exactly like Sir Percy, so Valerian takes Sir Percy's monocle, hoping that will make him look more like Sir Percy. The ruse works. That monocle is symbolic of Valerian's ingenuity because his clone has to think quickly enough to figure out that the monocle might help him fit into the program. It also points out that Jadna and Laureline are not able to control every aspect of the program or of Valerian's role in the mission.

The author has still not revealed everything that is happening, but the reader should be beginning to put some clues together. Though the reader does not yet know for certain that Valerian is a clone, the fact that he has already died makes it clear that something is going on with his character. While he is with the group of men, he says he hopes their originals were more skilled than they seem to be. Several of the characters emit a buzzing sound when they are faced with different circumstances. It is also significant that several characters mention the program and the need for a change. The details will be explained in coming scenes, but those clues should be leading the reader toward the correct conclusions.

The artist depends on colors to convey information, including tone. The scenes set in India included an array of colors, but the artist turned to shades of yellow and gold inside the corridor. When Valerian's clone intercepted the man at the computer panel, the backgrounds became a shade of red, tending more toward purple. The majority of the colors inside the club in England are shades of red. That color scheme changes to blue for the two panels in which Valerian's clone submits the new set of coordinates. The reason for colors varies from one scene to another, but most readers will unconsciously accept the artist's intention, such as sensing the danger when Valerian's clone is gathering the coordinates or knowing that it is dark outside when the artist uses blue backgrounds outside the club.

The final panel of page 17 is abrupt, and it holds another clue about what is happening. Valerian's clone is literally pedaling his bicycle down a street in one panel, and the street ends in the next so that Valerian's clone is falling into space. The first panel of page 18 shows Valerian's clone, still on a bicycle, in open space with stars and planets in the background.



The final panels of this scene show Jadna and Laureline on the spaceship. Jadna is saying that Valerian's clones are “wasting valuable time ... with pointless heroics.” The reader will later discover that Jadna believes the clones should just die as soon as they retrieve the coordinates. The clones are engineered for short lifespans, and Jadna obviously does not see them as human at all. Laureline, however, cares deeply for Valerian and seeing his clones die, one after the other, is taking an emotional toll on her.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the setting of this second set of scenes.

Discussion Question 2

What are the clues in this scene that hint that Valerian is in a computer program?

Make a list of characteristics the author has revealed about Laureline up to this point. Keep the list and add details as they are revealed.

Discussion Question 3

Make a list of characteristics the author has revealed about Laureline up to this point. Keep the list and add details as they are revealed.

Vocabulary

sentimentalism, historical, passe, supremacy, resemblance, remarkable, linger, decisive, imposter, galactic



Pages 18-29

Summary

The final panel of page 18 is the first panel in the next scene. Valerian's clone is on a street car, about to disembark. On the next page, Valerian's clone reveals that he is in Chinatown, San Francisco, in 1895. He lights a cigar and says the town is “nice” just as a biker on a motorcycle drives through (19). He calls that an anachronism, and goes on his way.

Aboard the spaceship, Jadna asks Laureline for an update on the progress of Valerian's clone. Laureline says he is nearing the “secret meeting” (19). Laureline and Jadna watch their screen and see Valerian's clone order men to raise their hands. He urges Laureline to hurry just as a voice says, “New action follows. Immediate destruction of external threat” (20). Jadna indicates they have the coordinates and tells Laureline to stop watching. Laureline says Valerian's clone has been hurt. Jadna instructs her to watch from satellite images if she really feels the need to know what is happening. Laureline watches as Valerian's clone rushes down a pier before the men chasing him shoot him in the back. He falls off the pier.

Jadna is relaxed about the death. She is clearly derisive of Valerian and is more interested in evaluating the scene that just occurred, including the man on the motorcycle, which she calls an “anachronism” (21). She says they are getting very close to the man they are chasing, and that he will not have time to fully create his next program. Jadna goes on at length about how wonderful the man's work is. She says they are headed to France next, and orders Laureline to “thaw out another one of your heroes” (22).

Valerian's clone lands on this version of Earth. He notices another anachronism just as a man steps out and shoots him. Valerian's clone tries to run but is shot down. He falls through a road, into space, as cars drive over the road.

Aboard the spaceship, Jadna says Valerian's clone's death was an amateurish mistake. She says the creator of these alternative Earths has figured out they are near. She tells Laureline to get another clone. They go to a room where there are dozens of pods. A few are open, indicating the Valerian clones inside have already gone. The rest contain clones ready for use. Jadna says they may catch up to the Egg Alien soon, and they will then have to decide what to do with all those clones.

Laureline wakes clone number 210. He believes he is the original and Laureline spends little time telling him the facts. Jadna orders the clone to another part of the ship to prepare for his mission. He is a little confused but Laureline assures him it will “be over soon” (26). AS the Valerian clone pilots a space shuttle toward the new Earth, he says that he has only two and a half hours to live, and wonders how many times he has died.



He pledges to avenge the death of the previous clone and to survive. Jadna interrupts, telling hi to put an end to speaking his thoughts aloud.

This time, he shoots the would-be assassin, then jumps into a car and sends Laureline the coordinates. The men in the car begin to call for a “programme modification,” and the entire car falls through the bridge and into space (28). Jadna says this leg of the mission was a success. They are not only a light year from the Egg Alien and Jadna is certain they will catch him. Jadna says the alien will not have time to create another world, and she seems disappointed. Laureline pilots the spaceship using the most recent coordinates. After the space-time jump, they find a huge conglomerate, and Jadna announces that they have caught up with the Egg Alien.

Analysis

The image of space continues to pop up at the end of each scene in which Valerian's clone is killed. In India and in Chinatown, the image faded from the life-like scene in which Valieran's clone was operating, to water, then to space. In the scene in England, the street abruptly ended, casting Valerian's clone immediately into space without that intervening part. The differences make the reader look more closely at what is actually happening. In the scenes in India and Chinatown, Valerian's clone passes through water before falling into space. That seems to indicate that he is dying of his injuries. In England, no one caught up with Valerian's clone and it seems that he might actually have been about to escape until he drove off into space. The reader will better understand the significance after the full story is revealed.

While the novel can be read as a stand-alone story, the reader who knows more about Laureline and Valerian will have a deeper understanding of some details in the novel. For example, Jadna calls Valerian a “chauvinist,” which is true though readers new to the series will have no examples of that characteristic (21). It is also clear that Laureline is invested in the fate of each of the clones, though Jadna is not. That is because Laureline and Valerian have a very close relationship. In other novels of the series, they often kiss and are devoted to each other. Though Laureline knows that these are clones – a fact that the reader should have guessed by now – it is still difficult for her to see the man she loves die, time after time.

This novel was originally written in 1977 and was only recently translated into English. Modern-day readers will not be surprised by the idea of anomalies cropping up in a computer-generated world, but the idea would have been ground breaking in the 1970s. The glitches, which the characters refer to as anachronisms, are never fully explained in this novel, but the tech-savvy readers of modern times will have no trouble figuring out the basic concept.

After Jadna orders Laureline to “thaw out” another Valerian clone, the artist inserts a graphic symbol that seems to be a frame filled with static. There is a spaceship at the center with white rings at various points around the ship. Readers of previous comics of



this series will recognize this is the symbol that the spaceship has performed a space/time jump.

The reader has some clues up to this point about Jadna's true motivations. She is excited about the various Earths the Egg Alien has created up to this point. She is a historian from the distant future, so it is natural that she is happy to see the live versions of the historical past she has studied. However, as they are about to catch up with the Egg Alien, Jadna says that she feels certain he was about to recreate a scene from World War I. She is disappointed that she will not get to witness that scene. The fact that she is indifferent to the deaths of the Valerian clones and that she is happy to watch the various battles indicates a selfishness and indifference to suffering. Even though the characters in these various Earth situations are clones, she has no problem seeing them die. She is actually impatient for the Valerian clones to die once she has the coordinates from each scene. The authors and artist have taken care to develop her character so the reader can form his own opinion about Jadna.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the scene in England.

Discussion Question 2

Make a list of the ways Valerian's clones have died up to this point. Add to the list as more deaths occur.

Discussion Question 3

What is an anachronism? What do they seem to indicate?

Vocabulary

anachronism, observe, impression, external, observation, chauvinist, quarry, methodical, decoding, linguistics, stymied, cunning



Pages 30-39

Summary

Page 30 is a full-page panel with a chaotic mix of buildings, cities, and countryside. On page 31, Laureline warns that they are in danger if they fly into the chaos but Jadna refuses to stop. She rants about the Egg Alien's genius for recreating Earth's historical periods. Laureline believes the Egg Alien has "lost it" (31). Jadna refuses to let Laureline stop until the spaceship runs into land and becomes stuck. Laureline hits her head and is knocked unconscious. Jadna looks through the window and sees troops amassed, as they would have been for a World War I battle. Just then, a bomb blows up right outside the window.

Jadna wakes all the remaining clones and Valerian. She says they will be her "Prussian troops," and that she plans to "rewrite history" (34). She quickly provides clothes and weapons for them. They are obviously confused. One asks another if they have met before. Jadna informs them that they have to kill anything they encounter outside the spaceship. She then sends them out. The first Valerian clone to top the hill is shot in the head and falls. The real Valerian is at the back of the group. He is very tired and decides he has to rest before he can join the battle.

Jadna is just about the address Laureline when the Egg Alien calls out to her. He says that she should join him, and that there is no reason to be afraid. Jadna dons a spacesuit, lamenting the fact that it does not look pretty, and flies to meet the Egg Alien. On the way, she encounters bombs and airplanes, all part of the ongoing battle. Page 38 consists of two panels. In the first, Jadna sees a tall, futuristic building or ship. In the second, she has entered the building.

The main part of the Egg Alien is egg-shaped. There is an appendage on the side that has a mechanical appearance. He does not touch the ground. He calls Jadna his "cruel huntress" (39).

The Egg Alien mentions the battle. Jadna says it is beautiful, which makes the Egg Alien say that he had expected that attitude from her. He says he was excited to learn that he was to face Jadna, the "famous pre-atomic historian" (39). He goes on to say that his home planet is boring. The inhabitants developed all their technology and their way of life in a short time, and now there is nothing new to do. There are no conflicts and no opportunity for creativity. His parents gave him their blessing to go on this adventure, and he indicates there are others on similar adventures in other parts of the universe. The Egg Alien admits that he had tried to "infiltrate Earth's timeline," but was quickly kicked out (39).



Analysis

The authors introduce the storyline in this novel in bits and pieces, which may leave some readers confused during specific scenes. By the time Jadna has a face-to-face meeting with the Egg Alien, the reader knows all the basic information. The Egg Alien stole pieces of information and historical artifacts from Earth. Jadna, a scientist, convinced the Spatio-Temporal Agency that the Egg Alien is a threat to Earth. She has cloned Valerian, using the clones to track the Egg Alien until they catch up with him. When they do catch him, Laureline learns that the Egg Alien is not a threat, and that Jadna has known that all along.

The artist uses a different kind of speech bubble to indicate the Egg Alien's words. The speech bubbles of all the other characters are traditionally shaped. The Egg Alien's speech bubbles have irregular edges with multiple walls around each bubble. There are different colors around the edges of the first few bubbles, ranging from blue to yellow to pink. The artist also depends on traditional font sizing to establish tone and volume. For example, the Egg Alien shouts for the "Earthling" when he first makes contact with Jadna (36). The word "Earthling" is in larger letters, with the middle letters even larger than those at the beginning and ending of the word.

The reader should keep in mind that the original version of this novel was published in the 1970s. Technology was much different then. The idea of cloning was something considered only science fiction and mainstream readers would have no opinion about the ethics of cloning. However, that question might arise in the minds of modern-day readers. Jadna has created a literal army of Valerian clones. These are fully-functioning men with Valerian's basic characteristics. She callously sends them into dangerous situations and wants them to hurry and die once they achieve their missions. As they catch up with the Egg Alien, Jadna looks around at the massive number of Valerian clones that remain, and she makes another callous remark about what they will do with all of them once the mission is over. When they set down in the middle of a battle, Jadna sends all the clones out to fight. The clones are programmed to die three hours after they are brought to consciousness, which is another decision some modern-day readers might find questionable.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Jadna's decision of what to do with the remaining Valerian clones. What does this say about her character?

Discussion Question 2

How did people of 1977 probably view clones? How have attitudes about clones changed over the intervening decades?



Discussion Question 3

What does the Egg Alien reveal about his motivations for creating all the alternative Earth settings?

Vocabulary

defense, layouts, foe, accessories, intensifying, peckish, exhilarating, atomic



Pages 40-48

Summary

Jadna tells the Egg Alien that the complexity of the human race makes them tend to guard their past carefully. She says that she has had a difficult time getting permission to conduct “field research,” though she is a respected historian. The Egg Alien shows Jadna to a huge room filled with books that cover topics such as “anatomy, biology, medicine, meteorology, agronomy, psychology, economy” (40). Next, he takes her to a room that is filled with items, including a chair that looks like throne, statues, art, a saddle, and a motorcycle.

The Egg Alien goes on to say he included factual information as he created his Earths, but that the opportunity to include his own imagination is equally so. For that aspect of the creation, the Egg Alien depended on creative people of Earth's past, such as poets, writers, and filmmakers. Jadna calls the Egg Alien her “dear friend,” and asks for a list of his favorites (41). He begins a list, but says he cannot possibly name them all. Jadna guesses that he drew from Hitchcock and Einstein, and he commends her on her perceptive outlook. Jadna asks how he then makes his ideas materialize. The Egg Alien says that it technical and boring, but he shows her a huge machine that he identifies as the “matter synthesiser” (41). He says the holograms are the most difficult.

He next shows Jadna the room where his androids are made. According to the Egg Alien, each robot has “a miniaturised electronic brain directly linked” to the Egg Alien (42). Like a movie, he has to limit the length of time a program can run because things become too complex. In each Earth, Egg Alien includes one android with greater freedom to make choices. That is the character who took steps to call for an altered program each time Valerian's clones interrupted. Egg Alien says the actions of Valerian's clone was how he first discovered he was being pursued. Jadna says that one of Egg Alien's Earths was discovered by accident, which prompted the mission to find the person responsible for its creation. She says the Spatio-Temporal Agency wanted to find and destroy the creator, but she convinced them that a show of force would have prompted him to hide. Jadna says that would have been “a terrible loss to the worlds of art and science” (42). Egg Alien calls Jadna a prisoner, but says his spaceship is out of commission until time passes to recharge. Egg Alien invites Jadna to look over the items he has, including models and storyboards. Jadna is excited at the opportunity.

Meanwhile, back at Laureline's spaceship, Laureline regains consciousness. She begins looking for Jadna and finds that all the Valerians are gone, including the clones and the real Valerian. Laureline goes outside and finds a huge stack of dead clones. One is still alive and he tells Laureline that he is also dying. From that, she knows she must have been unconscious for about three hours, the length of time the clones live once they are outside their pods.



Laureline continues to walk for a short time, and hears someone snoring. She finds Valerian is alive and well, but is still exhausted from the ordeal of having been the original for so many clones. Laureline hugs him and says she believes she now understands more of what is going on. Valerian says he is pleased, because he is still “a bit fuzzy” (45). They cross the planet and Valerian sees all his clones, dead on the battlefield. They continue until they reach the Egg Alien's structure. Inside, they find Jadna and the Egg Alien are still engaged in conversation, and Jadna admits she had forgotten about Laureline.

Laureline is furious. Jadna says that Laureline is “crassly common,” and she talks about the “incredible aesthetic gesture” of the Egg Alien's creations (46). Laureline says she now fully understands that the Egg Alien is not, and has never been, dangerous to Earth. She yells that she does not care about the 19th Century.

Laureline then points out that these reenactments are political pitfalls. She says the scene in India is an example of colonialism and cites the imperialism of England, while America's expansion into the California is capitalism. She then invites Jadna to look outside at the battlefield to see what World War I was really like. Laureline goes on to say that everyone knows the result of “that history of yours” (47). Laureline demands that the Egg Alien release their ship within the hour and says she is leaving Jadna behind, though she does say someone will give Jadna a ride when she grows tired of this situation. She is not sad to stay.

On the final page, Laureline is piloting the spaceship. She says she has a plan for some relaxation time. They make a space jump, and the final panel shows Valerian and Laureline in period clothing, enjoying a meal at an outdoor restaurant.

Analysis

Jadna reveals another important piece of information about herself and her motivations while she is talking to the Egg Alien. She says that she has had trouble getting permission to conduct field research. As a historian, she is intensely curious about human history, and she would naturally be excited at the opportunity to see these places and times in person. The reader should not realize that she never really thought the Egg Alien was a threat to Earth, and that she was only satisfying her personal desire to see the alternative Earths the Egg Alien was able to create.

Laureline witnesses a horrible scene on page 44 when she first leaves her spaceship. There is a trench that stretches off into the distance, and the trench is filled with bodies. Some are in terrible condition, indicating that they are really androids. The majority of the trench and the bodies are blue. The shade barely changes from one to the next, but all are outlined in dark black. Several of the bodies have splotches of pink, which seems to hint at blood. It is interesting that the artist chose not to use a stark red for the blood, as has been seen in some other scenes. Another interesting aspect of the scene is that Laureline is standing at the side of the trench, and she is also shown in blue. The



remainder of the scene is in yellow that ranges to a very pale pink. The color is very stark, and could be an indication of the darkness of death.

There is an interesting editorial note on one of the panels near the end of the novel when Laureline mentions Earth's history. She does not explain what she means when she talks about how the Earth ended, but that information was presented in a previous book of the series. The author makes a note of that connection as a footnote on the page. The footnote reads, "There's an excellent book on the subject: *The City of Shifting Waters*, same series!" (47). In "The City of Shifting Waters" of the Valerian and Laureline series, the heroes travel back in time to Earth. During the historical information presented in that novel, Valerian and Laureline discuss the fact that a hydrogen bomb depot explodes near the North Pole. The result is that icecaps melt, flooding the Earth. The casual reader may not remember that scene, or may not have information about that novel.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the Egg Alien's home civilization.

Discussion Question 2

What does the Egg Alien reveal about his motivations for creating these alternative Earths?

Discussion Question 3

Compare the Egg Alien and Jadna. How are they similar? How are they different?

Vocabulary

imbeciles, clever, lamentable, pastoral, ethnographic, indomitable, melee, crassly, aesthetically, nostalgia



Characters

Laureline

Laureline is an agent of the Spatio-Temporal Agency. She is a strong character who is willing to do her duty but is also willing to stand up against Jadna once she is certain that Jadna has been using the agents to further her own historical research.

Laureline is intelligent. She is able to talk about the political significance of all the places the alien being has created, and she is disdainful of the negative aspects of each. She is horrified by the casualties of the fighting, even though the casualties are clones and artificial beings created by the alien.

Laureline is presented as a beautiful, sexy woman, but she is also capable of manning the mission. She does what is necessary throughout the mission, giving in to Jadna until she is certain of the alien's objectives and that he does not pose any real danger to Earth. The reader sees her strength as she demands that the Egg Alien release her spaceship and as she decides that Jadna will remain with the alien. She is also compassionate, as seen in her attitude when the clones of Valerian are killed.

Valerian

Valerian is an agent of the Spatio-Temporal Agency. In this novel of the series, the real Valerian is mainly absent because he is being cloned dozens of times. For the sake of clarity, the Valerian clones are referred to only as Valerian clones, but they can be considered interchangeable with the original Valerian.

Valerian is depicted as strong, dark haired, and handsome. He has an angular face with a distinctive profile. He was chosen for this mission because he is strong and capable. His clones share all his strengths, but they also share his weaknesses. In this novel, the key weakness is his need to succeed. Each time a clone gets a set of coordinates, his part of the mission is complete. Jadna is ready for him to die so they can move on to the next stage of the mission. However, the Valerian clone is always searching for a way to survive.

As the novel comes to a close, Valerian has to spend hours recovering from the rigors of being used for the multitude of clones. Because he does not really know what is going on, he is happy to follow Laureline's lead. That willingness to let her take control is an important part of his character, especially since he was virtually unconscious for the majority of the mission while his clones took part in the action and Laureline was responsible for the logistics of the mission.



Jadna

Jadna is a historian who is involved in the mission to find out why someone is stealing historical artifacts from Earth. Jadna is bossy and demanding, and she seems to enjoy being in control while they are working to find the Egg Alien. Jadna has made the situation seem dangerous in her quest to find the Egg Alien, but she is actually just intrigued by the Egg Alien's abilities and information, and she wants to learn from him more than she wants to stop him. Jadna is really nothing more than a bully, and she quickly backs down when Laureline stands up to her.

The Egg Alien

(Editor's Note: The alien in this story is never named but he resembles an egg. For the purpose of clarity in this study guide, he is referred to as the Egg Alien.) This is the alien who steals historical items and documents from Earth, which prompts this mission. He is nothing more than a bored youngster who is looking for some excitement and who sets out on this quest with the blessings of his parents. As the novel comes to an end, it is clear that he is not a danger and is only recreating situations he has read about in an effort to avoid his boredom.

Sir Percy

Sir Percy is a character in the program set in England. He appears only briefly and is one of the few characters who has a name. Valerian's clone stabs him in order to take over his character within the program.



Symbols and Symbolism

A Program Change

This is what the Egg Alien's characters say each time a Valerian clone appears and creates problems with their program. It symbolizes the fact that Valerian is using the programs to track the Egg Alien while the Egg Alien is trying to avoid the tracking. It is also symbolic of the fact that the characters can only do what they are programmed to do. The Valerian clone's appearance often interrupts scenes because the characters cannot make decisions without a new program.

Space

Each time a Valerian clone dies, he falls off something or through something into space. In these cases, space symbolizes death for the Valerian clone.

Sir Percy's Monocle

This is a part of Sir Percy's ensemble that Valerian's clone takes in the hope that it makes him look more like Sir Percy. The items symbolizes the need for Valerian's clone to fit into the program and the fact that they are unable to control every aspect of the program.

The 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.

The External Threat

The external threat, which is really the Valerian clones, is symbolic of the fact that Jadna and Laureline are trying to locate the Egg Alien. The characters of the program have figured out that someone outside the program is present.

The World War I Battlefield

This is the final scene of the novel that is created by the Egg Alien. It symbolizes the brutality of war, as seen in the deaths of all the Valerian clones. It also symbolizes the insatiable curiosity of Jadna and the Egg Alien to witness historical events, even when those events are brutal and ugly.



Settings

The Spaceship

The spaceship of Valerian and Laureline is one of the main settings of the novel. It is seen repeatedly between the scenes on the various Earth settings and the space setting that serves as the meeting place for the Egg Alien and Jadna. The spaceship seems reasonably typical of futuristic spaceships. It is large and complex, with room for dozens of pods holding Valerian clones and for the equipment needed to program those clones.

India

India is the setting for the first battle of the novel. It is in India that the reader sees for the first time a Valerian clone get killed. There is not a lot of detail about this setting, which has a lot of sand and a fort of some sort.

England

England is the setting of the second time a Valerian clone is killed. The scene is set on a city street and inside a gentleman's club. There are elaborate decorations, including chandeliers and velvet curtains.

Chinatown, San Francisco

This is another of the Earth settings created by the Egg Alien. The setting shows a traditional western town of Earth in the late 1800s. It includes a saloon, horses, and people wearing period clothing. There are also some anachronisms in this setting, including a man on a motorcycle and a man playing a pinball machine.

The Egg Alien's Final Earth

The Egg Alien's Final Earth is where Jadna finally catches up with the Egg Alien and where dozens of the Valerian clones are killed in a battle that mimics a World War I battle. This is set in space, but it is filled with documents and items from Earth's history. The pieces include statues, books, and furniture such as a coat of arms, a marble statue, a saddle, and a chair that resembles a throne. This is where Laureline learns that the Egg Alien is not a threat and where she leaves Jadna.



Themes and Motifs

Ethical Questions about the Clones

Most modern-day readers will have heard – and perhaps participated – in ethical debates about clones and cloning. Some people consider clones to be human beings with all the rights and privileges of any other human, while others consider them to be nothing more than science experiments. The information and ideas about clones were much more rudimentary in the 1970s when this novel was originally written. To fully understand how this theme impacts the novel, the reader must be willing to look at the situation from both time frames.

Jadna clearly considers the clones as scientific tools to be used on her mission without regard for any ethical questions. She sends each to a new version of Earth, knowing they will likely be killed during the mission. Furthermore, each clone is generated with an automatic death time of three hours after animation. That means that none of the clones can actually survive, even if they live through their mission. That does not stop each from trying to survive for two reasons. First, they are copies of a strong, determined agent. The second reason is that there is the natural desire to live.

In an astounding act of indifference, Jadna mentions that they might have created too many clones and that they might have a lot left that will be destroyed at the end of the mission. The modern-day reader may find that attitude disturbing, depending on where he stands on the ethical questions related to clones.

Whether the reader considers the clones as human is not the entire issue related to this theme. Another point is that Laureline deeply cares for Valerian. In other episodes of this series, they often hug or kiss in open displays of affection. In this episode, Laureline is forced to watch helplessly as Valerian's clones are killed, one after another. That is bound to be disturbing, even though she can rationalize that each is a clone and that the original Valerian is safe in a cloning pod on the ship.

After Laureline sees all the Valerian clones dead on the World War I battlefield, she sits down and cries. She fears that the original Valerian might also be dead, but she is also appalled by the carnage.

Jadna's Motivations

Jadna is dishonest about her motivations from the beginning, but she not very good at keeping her real motivations hidden. Her actions, which are motivated only by her selfish desire to spend time with the Egg Alien, come at a great cost to other people. She shows her selfish nature by her indifference to everyone and everything else.

Jadna is steering the mission from the start. When someone accidentally discovers a false Earth created by the Egg Alien, some people fear the creator would be dangerous.



Jadna does not believe that, but she sets out on a mission and continues to lead Laureline to believe that they are in danger if they do not stop the creation of these false Earths. After they catch up with the Egg Alien, Jadna makes her true feelings known. When Laureline finds out, she is furious, pointing out that Jadna had selfishly led a mission when it was completely unnecessary. Laureline says she will leave Jadna to spend time with the Egg Alien, and Jadna is not even upset about it.

From Jadna's viewpoint, the mission provides an opportunity to learn more about Earth's history. As a historian, she feels she cannot pass up that opportunity. Readers who are passionate about a subject might be able to identify with that attitude, though the modern-day reader will have to also weigh the cost of killing all the Valerian clones to reach that goal.

Valerian and Laureline as Heroes

Valerian and Laureline are the undisputed heroes of the series, which includes more than a dozen novels. Their past heroics have put them in this situation and made them qualified to make judgments about the situation as they go along.

The most important aspect of this theme is seen in the fact that Valerian is selected to be the original for all the clones. He is skilled, intelligent, and capable. He is always determined to finish his mission. Theoretically, his clones will have the same skills and characteristics, which is why they are able to step into these strange situations and find the necessary data from each.

At one point, Jadna becomes angry that the Valerian clone is trying to survive after successfully finding the computer panel and the coordinates. When she voices that anger, Laureline points out that Valerian was chosen because of his skills and Jadna cannot pick and choose how he uses those skills now.

As the novel nears the end, Laureline becomes furious with Jadna for putting them through the mission when she always knew that the Egg Alien was not a real threat to Earth. Laureline uses her own authority as an agent of the Spatio-Temporal Agency and leaves Jadna with the Egg Alien.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is presented in third person from a limited perspective. However, unlike some novels, this perspective is not limited to a single character. The majority of the novel is seen from the perspectives of Laureline and the Valerian clones. For example, at one point the Valerian clone is being chased, and he falls. Laureline can no longer see what is happening from his perspective, so she picks up a satellite feed that shows her the scene from a larger view. In most cases, the reader sees and knows only what Laureline knows. This perspective allows the author to preserve the twist when Jadna finally meets the Egg Alien in person. Though Jadna has known all along that the Egg Alien is not dangerous, she has kept that information secret.

However, the perspective switches after Laureline is knocked unconscious. At that point, Jadna dons a spacesuit and goes to meet the Egg Alien in person. Laureline is not present and does not know what is happening, but the reader follows Jadna's progress for a period of time. That switch is necessary to set the stage for Laureline's tirade and to show the reader exactly what Jadna knew.

The limited perspective is appropriate and acceptable to the novel. The changing perspective is also appropriate because it gives the author options that would not otherwise be available.

Language and Meaning

The novel is set in a futuristic time and in a series of imaginary places. Some of the settings are historical times and places of Earth. The setting dictates that the language be somewhat futuristic as well. For example, Valerian talks about the anachronisms that exist in several of the settings. The word anachronism is a word seldom seen in modern-day American English, but some readers may recognize it. It refers to things that exist out of their normal time and place, and it is an appropriate reference in this novel. The word has a futuristic sound to it that will ring true with readers.

There are other words and terms that are not real, but they are used to further the story line and the characters. For example, Laureline and Valerian are agents of the Spatio-Temporal Agency. Obviously, that agency does not exist. The term is meant to make the reader think in futuristic terms.

Another point about the language is that the traditional English spellings are sometimes used instead of modern-day American spellings. For example, several of the characters mention the "programme," which is the English spelling for program (15). In another scene, Jadna is talking about the fact that they are getting near to the Egg Alien, and she asks Laureline if she "realises" how close they are (28). The use of the letter "s" instead of the American spelling that uses the letter "z" appears several times in the



novel and multiple times in the series. The average reader will have no trouble with these occasional spellings, and some readers may not even notice. Except in direct quotes, the American spelling is used in this study guide.

The overall tone is one of hope, and the reader will fully expect Valerian and Laureline to successfully complete the mission. Since Valerian is nude in one scene, the novel is aimed at mature readers. In the graphic, Valerian appears in a full frontal stance with no clothes. Though the details are not clear, some readers might still find this offensive.

Structure

The novel is presented in graphic form, like a comic book. Because of the presentation, the author depends heavily on imagery and color to set tones, describe characters and settings, and display action. In most ways, the novel is like traditional graphic novels. Characters are shown with specific details so that they remain recognizable from one scene to the next. That is especially important in this novel when Valerian's clones are being dropped into specific settings. The dialogue is presented in traditional speech bubbles, and the characters talk to drive action and further explain events. For example, Valerian's clones present monologues on several occasions in order to give the reader details about what is happening at specific moments in the scenes. Other characters present similar pieces of information, as needed for explanation.

The majority of panels are framed, but there are few pages with traditional layouts. While many traditional comic books have six- or eight-panel pages, this novel has varying numbers of panels in varying layouts and shapes. Page 28 has two panels, each the height of the page. The first is slightly wider than the second. Page 30 is a single panel that takes up the entire page. That panel is filled with imagery and the reader has to examine the various aspects of the scene to fully understand. Some other pages have wide panels that are stacked on top of each other so that the reader literally reads down the page. Other pages have arrangements that include tall, narrow panels butting against wider, short panels. In most cases, the artist uses arrows if the reading direction is not readily apparent.



Quotes

Hey, but ... this isn't in the prog ... programme!"
-- Unnamed Military Officer (chapter 1 paragraph Frame three)

Importance: This is the first clue that the characters are in a computer program.

Leave it, young lady. The rest is irrelevant."
-- Jadna (chapter 1 paragraph Frame six)

Importance: This is the first time the reader sees Jadna's attitude toward the Valerian clone, though the reader does not yet know Jadna's identity or that this is a clone. Her feeling that the clones are entirely expendable and that they are not due any respect or comfort is seen throughout the novel, and it is one of the themes.

Those galactic heroes! Always into action for action's sake. Your partner keeps wasting valuable time for us with his pointless heroics."
-- Jadna (chapter 1 paragraph Frame two)

Importance: This is another example of Jadna's attitude about the clones. She cannot understand why the Valerian clone would try to save himself, and she considers any action he takes after finding the coordinates as a waste of time. In the next frame, Laureline counters, saying Valerian was specifically chosen as the original for these clones because of his bravery.

The pleasure of meeting this marvelous creator will more than make up for my stymied curiosity."
-- Jadna (chapter 1 paragraph Frame two)

Importance: Jadna and Laureline are near the Egg Alien's current place, so Jadna is certain she will find him. Her comment is significant because it reveals her true motivations, which is one of the novel's themes. She is enjoying the time spent chasing the Egg Alien because she has been able to examine his versions of Earth. As a historian, she has looked forward to the historical reenactments.

Ah, trench warfare. You shall prove your bravery on the field of honour..."
-- Jadna (chapter 1 paragraph Frame three)

Importance: Jadna is talking to the huge group of Valerian clones as she is about to send them into the reenacted World War I battle just outside the spaceship. Her words are another example of the fact that she is enjoying this mission because it provides her with a chance to see history come to life.

Galaxy got worried after one of your false Earths was discovered by chance. After that, those imbeciles wanted to destroy you, plain and simple."
-- Jadna (chapter 1 paragraph Frame five)

Importance: Jadna is talking to the Egg Alien, explaining how and why she became involved in this mission. Their conversation provides a great deal of current and historic information for the reader. It also makes it clear that the Egg Alien was not a threat to Earth at all.