

The Reality Bug Study Guide

The Reality Bug by D. J. MacHale

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Contents

[The Reality Bug Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....4](#)

[Chapter 1, Second Earth \(1, pp. 1-4\); Chapter 2, Second Earth \(2, pp. 5-17\); Chapter 3, Veelox \(1, pp. 18-23\); Chapter 4, Veelox \(2, pp. 24-28\).....5](#)

[Chapter 5, Veelox \(3, pp. 29-38\); Chapter 6, Veelox \(4, pp. 39-49\); Chapter 7, Second Earth \(3, pp. 50-59\); Chapter 8, Veelox \(5, pp. 60-65\).....8](#)

[Chapter 9, Veelox \(6, pp. 66-78\); Chapter 10, Second Earth \(4, pp. 79-87\); Chapter 11, Second Earth \(5, pp. 88-93\); Chapter 12, Veelox \(7, pp. 94-104\).....10](#)

[Chapter 13, Veelox \(8, pp. 105-111\); Chapter 14, Veelox \(9, pp. 112-118\); Chapter 15, Veelox \(10, pp. 119-132\); Chapter 16, Veelox \(11, pp. 133-143\).....12](#)

[Chapter 17, Veelox \(12, pp. 144-148\); Chapter 18, Veelox \(13, pp. 149-163\); Chapter 19, Veelox \(14, pp. 164-175\); Chapter 20, Second Earth \(6, pp. 176-186\).....14](#)

[Chapter 21, Second Earth \(7, pp. 187-198\); Chapter 22, Second Earth \(8, pp. 199-208\); Chapter 23, Veelox \(15, pp. 209-223\); Chapter 24, Veelox \(16, pp. 224-232\).....17](#)

[Chapter 25, Veelox \(17, pp. 233-243\); Chapter 26, Veelox \(18, pp. 244-254\); Chapter 27, Veelox \(19, pp. 255-264\); Chapter 28, Veelox \(20, pp. 265-273\).....20](#)

[Chapter 29, Veelox \(21, pp. 274-281\); Chapter 30, Veelox \(22, pp. 282-290\); Chapter 31, Veelox \(23, pp. 291-301\); Chapter 32, Veelox \(24, pp. 302-309\).....22](#)

[Chapter 33, Veelox \(25, pp. 310-323\); Chapter 34, Veelox \(26, pp. 324-336\); Chapter 35, Veelox \(27, pp. 337-347\); Chapter 36, Veelox \(28, pp. 348-363\); Chapter 37, Second Earth \(9, pp. 364-375\).....24](#)

[Characters.....27](#)

[Objects/Places.....30](#)

[Themes.....33](#)

[Style.....35](#)

[Quotes.....37](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....39](#)



Plot Summary

The Reality Bug is a young adult science fiction/fantasy story in a series of books about a fifteen-year-old boy named Bobby Pendragon and his friends. The story is set in a universe with multiple parallel worlds that can be accessed through gateways called flumes. Bobby must travel to the various worlds, known as territories, to do battle with the evil Saint Dane. Helping him are other people who can do this, called Travelers. All the Travelers have helpers, known as acolytes, on the various territories.

Bobby starts his adventures by going to the territory of Veelox, where he meets Aja Killian, a pretty and smart young woman slightly older than Bobby. He learns that the people of Veelox have become addicted to Lifelight, a computer-enabled virtual reality that gives the people very benign fantasies. Their physical bodies are kept within a high-tech pyramid in which they lay while the computer generates their fantasies from their actual memories. Meanwhile, the evil Saint Dane, the antagonist, has claimed that he has already conquered Veelox. Aja believes she has thwarted him.

While Bobby goes about helping Aja, his two friends on his home territory of Second Earth, Mark Dimond and Courtney Chetwynde, start high school. Both have a hard time of it, but Courtney suffers the most as her career in sports degrades to an intolerable level. Mark has decided that he wants to become an acolyte, and he hopes Courtney will do the same.

Back on Veelox, Aja installs the Reality Bug, a program enhancement designed to make the fantasies of those in the pyramid, called jumpers, too realistic to tolerate. The plan is that this will cause the people of Veelox to return to their normal lives, thereby defeating Saint Dane's evil plan. At first this seems to work, but then the Reality Bug becomes a monster that leaves the fantasy world and enters the real world. Bobby and Aja meet Dr. Zetlin, the inventor of Lifelight, and convince him to entirely shut down the pyramid, of which there are many scattered about Veelox. Shutting down this one turns off them all, and doing this destroys the Reality Bug.

Thinking that they had won, Bobby attends a general meeting in which the head Director of Lifelight declares that it will be back up and running. Zetlin had expressed hope that the people of Veelox would return to their normal lives in reality, but this announcement sends them back to the pyramids and their fantasy lives. In the end, Aja and Bobby are defeated by Saint Dane, who gloats about having attained his first victory over the Travelers. By the end of the story, Mark and Courtney have become acolytes, Bobby is having a horrible time with Saint Dane, Aja has admitted to her defeat, and the story will be continued in the next book of the series.



Chapter 1, Second Earth (1, pp. 1-4); Chapter 2, Second Earth (2, pp. 5-17); Chapter 3, Veelox (1, pp. 18-23); Chapter 4, Veelox (2, pp. 24-28)

Chapter 1, Second Earth (1, pp. 1-4); Chapter 2, Second Earth (2, pp. 5-17); Chapter 3, Veelox (1, pp. 18-23); Chapter 4, Veelox (2, pp. 24-28) Summary

In Chapter 1 Bobby Pendragon, Mark Dimond, Courtney Chetwynde, and Gunny Van Dyke watch as a ring that Bobby wears produces a holographic head of a girl, Aja Killian. Aja lives in a parallel world known as Veelox. Bobby and the others are in a fairly normal dimension known as Second Earth. Aja tells Bobby that her world is in grave danger from a demon called Saint Dane and wants him to travel to the dimension as quickly as possible. Bobby agrees. He and Gunny, a six-foot-three African American, take a limousine that had been waiting for them to the Bronx and an abandoned subway station. From there they can travel through a mysterious passageway called a flume to the Veelox world.

Bobby, Mark, and Courtney are all of the same age, 15. With Bobby headed off on his quest, Mark and Courtney, in Chapter 2, attend their first day of school at Davis Gregory High. Mark is Bobby's best friend, and Courtney is Bobby's girlfriend. Mark is the direct opposite of Bobby, not being popular at all and quite picked on. Bobby is popular and athletic, as is Courtney until she starts high school. She quickly discovers that she must start at the bottom again to compete with the older students. Mark had high hopes of a new beginning, but he is also picked on in high school. They both have miserable first days, and in the bus on their way home, Mark confides in Courtney about his desire to become an acolyte for the Travelers. Travelers are people who move among the many dimensions where the flume can take them. Their acolytes keep their possessions in order while the Travelers move about and fight the demon, Saint Dane. That night Mark's ring, similar to Bobby's, activates and delivers a mysterious object to him from another world. The object is about the size and weight of a credit card and has three buttons. An attached note from Bobby gives instructions on how to use the object, which when turned on beams a very realistic holograph of Bobby. The holograph talks and says that this is his journal number thirteen.

Chapter 3 starts the narrative from Bobby's journal. Bobby is an experienced Traveler, but one who has been prone to making serious mistakes that could send all the worlds into a path of destruction. This is what Saint Dane wants and what the Travelers must fight against. Bobby wants to again confront Saint Dane. After this background, the narrative moves to when Bobby and Gunny travel the flume to Veelox. The flume is



located at the abandoned subway station in the Bronx. Bobby leads the way through loose boards, across the tracks and to a doorway with a star on it. The flume is inside, but it looks like any ordinary tunnel. However, once Gunny hollers the name of his destination world; a light appears; harmonious music plays; the light gains strength, and the flume whisks him away inside a crystalline tunnel. Bobby does the same thing and arrives at Veelox, standing right behind Gunny. Saint Dane is there too.

In Chapter 4 Saint Dane claims that he has finished his evil work there and is about to leave for another world. Bobby and Gunny try to keep the demon from leaving but fail. They decide that Gunny will follow Saint Dane to the destination world, Eelong, while Bobby seeks out Aja Killian. Gunny enters the flume for Eelong, and shortly after his departure, the holograph of Aja's head appears. A door in the flume chamber opens for Bobby to enter Veelox.

Chapter 1, Second Earth (1, pp. 1-4); Chapter 2, Second Earth (2, pp. 5-17); Chapter 3, Veelox (1, pp. 18-23); Chapter 4, Veelox (2, pp. 24-28) Analysis

The fantasy world in which the protagonist, Bobby Pendragon, lives has multiple worlds and gateways between them called flumes. The only known flume in the Second Earth world is in the abandoned Bronx subway, but there may be more. Other dimensions have multiple flumes, and so Bobby and his friends cannot dismiss the possibility. It appears that Bobby's next adventure will take place in the Veelox world, and that his primary ally will be Aja Killian, a girl he has only briefly met before. The implication is that Bobby may have romantic experiences with this new girl, especially since his current girlfriend, Courtney, has been noticing cute boys during her first day in high school. Between the youthful slang used in the narrative and the plot setups, this novel is solidly in the young adult genre.

The science behind the fiction has to do with modern physics, in which various mathematical models predict that multiple dimensions and parallel earths may exist. Additionally, time may be stranger than most people think. The physics math shows that all things that have happened and could happen are all happening right now. Time is not linear as we normally think, but from a certain perspective, all of time past and present could possibly be seen. While this mathematically supported theory could lead to thinking that nothing at all matters, the author has chosen to use the concepts for creating the fantasy world of the story. This is a much more entertaining way to think about the nature of the universe and time.

Mark Dimond is an antihero with the desire to go on adventures with Bobby. For now he only dreams of helping out Travelers as one of their acolytes, who are staged on the various worlds. He is not heroic by nature, being an awkward boy with poor hygiene and a crippling shyness around girls. The author presents him as Bobby's best friend because Mark thinks outside the box, and Bobby finds that attractive. They also enjoy doing the same things, reading the same books, and even tried forming a band. They



were terrible musicians but had great fun making noise. Matching a hero who can make mistakes with an antihero friend who might find ways to save the day is a common literary combination. Mark is Bobby's sidekick, while Gunny is one of Bobby's mentors. Bobby's first mentor was his uncle Press. Press is mentioned but does not appear in this story.

The antagonist, Saint Dane, is a nonhuman who is tall and has long gray hair. His eyes are cold and blue, and his breath stinks of carrion. He is a demon, and as such, he makes for a single-dimensional evil character with no hope for redemption. The overall theme has to do with good versus evil, but that may be a backdrop story against which the adventures of the protagonist are cast. This book is the fourth in a series, and a note from the author at the beginning confirms that an overarching theme exists across the already published books and those that will be written in the future. An irony also exists that if the theory of time that the novel is based upon is true, then those future books have already been written somewhere, in some world, from a point of view that may be unattainable by human beings.



Chapter 5, Veelox (3, pp. 29-38); Chapter 6, Veelox (4, pp. 39-49); Chapter 7, Second Earth (3, pp. 50-59); Chapter 8, Veelox (5, pp. 60-65)

Chapter 5, Veelox (3, pp. 29-38); Chapter 6, Veelox (4, pp. 39-49); Chapter 7, Second Earth (3, pp. 50-59); Chapter 8, Veelox (5, pp. 60-65) Summary

In Chapter 5 Bobby's arrival in Veelox becomes very confusing when Aja directs him through an old subway tunnel to a manhole that opens to a city street. He notices that the city looks exactly like his home on Second Earth. Emerging from the manhole, he sees Aja, an attractive girl a bit older than Bobby, who wears a dark blue jumpsuit and a mysterious wide bracelet with many pushbuttons on it. She explains that Veelox has been saved from whatever Saint Dane had done, and when Bobby does not understand, she takes him to a big black pyramid.

In Chapter 6 Bobby is prepared to experience something within the pyramid. He is full of questions and asks some of them, but the responses he receives range from odd looks to outright sarcasm from the young man who is preparing him for the jump into Lifelight. Aja tries to cover for Bobby by telling the young man that Bobby has a habit of making bad jokes, which seems to convince the young man that Bobby is from the city and not another world, or as Travelers put it, territory. Aja then takes him to an empty room and has him lay down on a comfortable bed. She slides the bed into a tight chamber, and Bobby begins his experience with Lifelight, a very realistic virtual reality.

In Chapter 7 the story reverts back to Second Earth. Mark worries that Courtney will be angry with him for having watched a part of Bobby's holographic journal. Mark's second day in high school goes smoother than his first, mostly because he keeps to himself. A science teacher invites him to join the Sci-Clops, a prestigious high school science club. Mark accepts, and this event gives him an unfamiliar feeling of confidence. Courtney's second day turns out to be worse than her first. She is cut from the varsity soccer team and must play with the junior team or drop soccer altogether. Her coach tries to let her down easy by explaining that she needs to work on the fundamentals before competing with the older and more experienced players. She sits next to Mark on the bus after school, and he tells her about Bobby's holographic journal. Courtney forgives Mark for having viewed part of it without her, fully understanding that the uniqueness of the journal had fascinated him. They go to Courtney's house to view the rest in her basement where they will not be disturbed.



In Chapter 8 Bobby has entered the virtual world known as Lifelight. He wakes up in his old house, the one that had disappeared along with his family in a previous story, because his dog jumps on him and licks his ear. His little sister comes into the bedroom and tells him he has to hurry if he plans to play in the basketball game. In the kitchen he sees his mother cooking and his father pouring orange juice. Bobby wonders if all his strange adventures had been simply an elaborate dream. He leaves the kitchen and, having realized that this is the virtual world, presses a button on the bracelet that had been given to him before entering Lifelight. This summons Aja to come into his virtual reality. She comments that Bobby had adjusted to Lifelight more quickly than most, and that all that he experiences in this world comes from his own memories.

Chapter 5, Veelox (3, pp. 29-38); Chapter 6, Veelox (4, pp. 39-49); Chapter 7, Second Earth (3, pp. 50-59); Chapter 8, Veelox (5, pp. 60-65) Analysis

Chapters 5 and 6 are orientations to the territory of Veelox, where all seems to be the same as on Second Earth except that most of the people live their lives vicariously through virtual reality. Somehow this has foiled Saint Dane's attempt at destroying the territory, and for now Bobby must simply play along with Aja in order to find out exactly how that had worked. He experiences some anxiety while being prepared for an unknown experience in a strange place, but he does enter Lifelight by the end of Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 moves Mark's and Courtney's story forward. Mark gains confidence in himself after being invited to join Sci-Clops because the science teacher had been impressed by a robot he had built for a competition while in middle school. This new found confidence may play an important part in his desire to become an acolyte for the Travelers. Meanwhile, Courtney's self-confidence takes a serious blow when she is cut from the varsity team. Fortunately for her, Bobby's holographic journal takes her mind off this problem.

Just how Lifelight works is explained in Chapter 8. The virtual reality is so convincing that Bobby at first thought that actual reality had been a dream. What remains unexplained is how this virtual reality had saved Veelox from destruction. At this point it seems unlikely, since almost everyone on Veelox lives in a kind of dream state, while some of the others tend to their biological needs. This is an unpleasant duty assigned to pyramid workers wearing red jumpsuits and called vedders. Aja is a phader, a technician who makes sure that the pyramid is in working order, does upgrades periodically, and monitors the virtual reality experiences via video screens to make sure nothing bad happens. So far the population of Veelox seems to be in three classes: vedders, phaders, and Lifelight participants. All the phaders wear blue jumpsuits; the vedders wear red, and the participants in Lifelight wear green.



Chapter 9, Veelox (6, pp. 66-78); Chapter 10, Second Earth (4, pp. 79-87); Chapter 11, Second Earth (5, pp. 88-93); Chapter 12, Veelox (7, pp. 94-104)

Chapter 9, Veelox (6, pp. 66-78); Chapter 10, Second Earth (4, pp. 79-87); Chapter 11, Second Earth (5, pp. 88-93); Chapter 12, Veelox (7, pp. 94-104) Summary

In Chapter 9 Bobby heads deeper into his Lifelight experience. Aja shows him what button to press if he wants to change anything that the Lifelight computer is constructing. He thinks about a pizza, presses the button, and a delivery man for a pizzeria shows up at the door soon after. He then goes to a basketball game in which he plays for the Davis Gregory High Cardinals, the varsity team with which he had always wanted to play. He becomes the star of the game, and just as it goes into overtime, his time is up in Lifelight. Aja appears next to him on the bench, and even though he pleads for another twenty minutes of virtual reality, suddenly his consciousness is back with his body in the pitch black tube, on the bed upon which he had laid when Aja had pushed him into the tight chamber. An emergency happens after Bobby returns from his Lifelight jump. Another jumper had died without warning while in his virtual reality. Aja comments that this has been happening more frequently. This ends Bobby's thirteenth journal. Twelve more exist, and Mark takes care of them.

In Chapter 10 the story returns to Second Earth. Mark speculates on what might be going on in Veelox, and while Courtney becomes more annoyed with him due to her recent humiliation at soccer, Mark's ring acts strangely. It glows as if another of Bobby's journals is about to arrive, but this time only a character etched into the setting sends out light. This has never happened before. When the whole routine of light and music finishes, an envelope appears. Inside the envelope is an address for an apartment in Manhattan. Mark decides to go there by train on Saturday. Courtney at first expresses doubt, but at the last minute she decides to go with him. Mark feels that he and Courtney are again working together as a team.

In Chapter 11 Mark and Courtney meet Tom Dorney, an aging World War II veteran with an impatient and demanding attitude. The two high school students almost become disgusted with his behavior and leave when Mark's ring glows. Dorney notices, and they wait for Bobby's journal to appear. When it does, Dorney shows Mark and Courtney his journals from another Traveler and identifies himself as an acolyte.

In Chapter 12 Bobby tells in his fourteenth journal about his further adventures with Aja. She brings him home, but on the way they have a fight. Bobby thinks that everybody



should just leave the pyramid and go about their real lives. Aja tells him that this is impossible. Bobby realizes that he should keep his opinions to himself and apologizes. Still angry but satisfied, Aja invites him into her home. Bobby is greatly impressed with the mansion. He meets Evangeline, who calls herself Aja's aunt but is not a blood relative. She had met Aja as a little girl in the group home where Evangeline worked and still does. When Aja became of age, she and Evangeline decided to move in together. Evangeline offers Bobby dinner, but the offered food is entirely unappealing to Bobby. It consists of a thick multi-colored liquid used to feed the jumpers in the pyramid. He lets slip that he is from Second Earth, but Evangeline already knows. She is an acolyte.

Chapter 9, Veelox (6, pp. 66-78); Chapter 10, Second Earth (4, pp. 79-87); Chapter 11, Second Earth (5, pp. 88-93); Chapter 12, Veelox (7, pp. 94-104) Analysis

The Lifelight pyramid and jumping have mysterious associated dangers, as is brought out in the chapters on Veelox. Aja tells Bobby that she will explain, but so far she has not done that. This could be because Bobby interrupts her train of thought with silly theories about saving Veelox or because the dangers involve complex problems that may or may not be solvable. Another mystery involves what Saint Dane had done that somehow Aja thwarted. Bobby's doubt that she had actually done this is emphasized by his experiences both inside and outside the pyramid. He is frustrated because Aja seems to be holding back information due to her possible internal conflicts, having grown up parentless in a group home.

Mark displays his newly found self-confidence when going to New York and meeting the acolyte, Tom Dorney. Mark boldly expresses his impatience with the prickly old man and almost leaves with Courtney agreeing. This show of courage prompts the old man to reveal his secret of being a Traveler's acolyte. He will likely become Mark's mentor and possibly Courtney's if she finds that adventure more interesting than playing soccer for the junior varsity team. Mark is for certain on a growth path that will change his character, and since he likes to work with Courtney, and she seems to share the feeling, her character will probably take the growth path as well.



**Chapter 13, Veelox (8, pp. 105-111);
Chapter 14, Veelox (9, pp. 112-118);
Chapter 15, Veelox (10, pp. 119-132);
Chapter 16, Veelox (11, pp. 133-143)**

Chapter 13, Veelox (8, pp. 105-111); Chapter 14, Veelox (9, pp. 112-118); Chapter 15, Veelox (10, pp. 119-132); Chapter 16, Veelox (11, pp. 133-143) Summary

In Chapter 13 Bobby tries the only food available on Veelox, which is known as gloid. It has the consistency of yogurt and has three different flavors that can be eaten separately or blended together. Bobby hates the blue variety when not mixed with the others. He learns that Veelox has many pyramids in all the major cities. After dinner Evangeline displays a level of knowledge about the territories and Bobby's experiences that surprises him. He then has an argument with Aja about the pyramids and how the people need to break their addiction to virtual reality. Aja shows him a computer disk about the size of a quarter and counters that she has already solved the problem with an enhancement to the software that runs the pyramids. She calls it the Reality Bug.

In Chapter 14 Bobby and Aja go to the local pyramid, where she secretly installs the Reality Bug as Bobby looks on. She then arranges for the two of them to share a jump, with Bobby's mind being the source of the memories. He learns that all feeding and waste disposal for long-term jumps are handled through a technology that uses the jumper's skin to deliver nourishment and eliminate waste, which makes the whole process less messy. They then enter their tubes and start their shared jump.

In Chapter 15 Bobby finds himself in the overtime part of his fantasy basketball game and is pleased that he will be able to finish. Aja watches on from the crowd. Instead of winning, Bobby's team goes down in a humiliating defeat. After the game Aja explains that her Reality Bug program enhancement includes the fears of the jumper. Bobby had been afraid of losing, and so the virtual reality included that experience. The idea is that jumpers would go back to actual reality because it is no different than virtual reality. Aja then directs Bobby to push the reset button on his control bracelet, but instead of changing the virtual reality, a hologram of Saint Dane appears. He taunts Aja that he had changed her Reality Bug to produce uncontrollable nightmares that would thwart her plan to save Veelox. She and Bobby soon realize that they have no control over their jump.

In Chapter 16 monsters, known as quigs, from Bobby's memory try to corner Bobby and Aja. They must retrieve the control bracelet from the jump monitor who had somehow been brought into the jump, but their first attempts fail. Bobby remembers that the high



school has a public address system, and he knows how to produce feedback in it by pointing the microphone toward a speaker. He also knows that quigs hate the sound of dog whistles. In a last desperate attempt, he puts the plan into action, and to his immense relief, it works. They almost make their escape, but suddenly the loud screeching stops.

Chapter 13, Veelox (8, pp. 105-111); Chapter 14, Veelox (9, pp. 112-118); Chapter 15, Veelox (10, pp. 119-132); Chapter 16, Veelox (11, pp. 133-143) Analysis

The holograph of Saint Dane reveals how powerful an adversary he is to Aja, who had all along thought that she could outwit him. However, Saint Dane had always been in control of Aja's life, or so he claims. He could very easily be lying, since he is a demon with no moral values at all. If he is such a powerful villain, then neither Bobby nor Aja have a chance against him. However, his plans have been foiled in the past, so an assumption can be made that he is indeed lying and trying to throw his foes off balance. This is a common plot twist that introduces uncertainty about the hero winning the day. Without that uncertainty, the story would flatten and become unentertaining. Bobby emphasizes their dire predicament by shouting at Aja that Saint Dane is always steps ahead of everyone, which could have resulted in despair were they not dealing with monsters trying to kill and eat them.

The frantic actions that Bobby and Aja perform just to survive keep them from thinking very much about anything else. This carries the story into adventures layered onto adventures in a rapid-fire action sequence. The dangers must be horrible and nearly impossible to escape, and the vicious quigs fill that storytelling need. They are ugly creatures that resemble bears and behave like wild dogs. They are also cannibals that go crazy over the smell of their own blood, which may be a weakness that Bobby and Aja can exploit later in the story. Since Bobby is narrating the story after the fact, it is certain that at least he survives. If the point of view were to be omniscient third person, that is, telling the story from a separate voice rather than one of the character's, the uncertainty would likely be stronger. However, most stories do not kill off the hero midway through, or ever. An interesting phenomenon about stories is that even with this knowledge, readers still become caught up in the action and feel relief when the protagonist wins, oftentimes more from luck than skill, and especially if escaping one deadly scene leads right into a worse one.



**Chapter 17, Veelox (12, pp. 144-148);
Chapter 18, Veelox (13, pp 149-163);
Chapter 19, Veelox (14, pp. 164-175);
Chapter 20, Second Earth (6, pp. 176-186)**

**Chapter 17, Veelox (12, pp. 144-148); Chapter 18, Veelox (13, pp 149-163); Chapter 19, Veelox (14, pp. 164-175); Chapter 20, Second Earth (6, pp. 176-186)
Summary**

In Chapter 17 the quig that had been chasing Bobby and Aja before he had created the feedback in the PA system revives and fiercely comes for them. Bobby thinks quickly and pulls the school fire alarm switch, and that again disables the beast. Aja quickly takes the dead phader's control bracelet, and it works to bring them out of the jump. However, other alarms are sounding throughout the pyramid. Hundreds of jumpers are in trouble at once, and the situation is quickly becoming critical. Bobby notices the phader who had mysteriously appeared in the jump and was killed by a quig, sitting in his control chair. He is dead and has gashes in his neck, meaning that what had happened to his fantasy character in Lifelight also happened to his actual body. This was never supposed to happen. Hurrying past the scene, Bobby and Aja find the phaders and vedders in a panic. She quickly decides that the only thing that can be done is to suspend the system, since it had been designed never to be completely shut down.

In Chapter 18 Aja struggles to keep control as everyone not in Lifelight panics even more after the system suspension. She finally gets their attention by hitting a green button that makes a shrill, uncomfortable sound. After telling everyone that she would soon fix the system and bring it back online, she and Bobby go into a central control room that, unlike the general control area that has glass walls, is private. Here she breaks into tears and tells Bobby that she may not be able to fix the system because she is not the big hero that he is. She thinks everything had come easy for Bobby. He assures her that nothing of the sort ever happened because most of the time he was too scared to think straight. This encourages Aja to get to work and fix the code.

Aja's technique involves going down into the secure parts of the system that require pass codes. She knows all but one that protects the very heart of the system, and only Dr. Zetlin, the inventor of Lifelight, has that knowledge. The problem is that Zetlin is currently in a jump, implying that he cannot be reached for the pass code. Aja thinks



through the problem and comes up with a possible solution. Since Zetlin is jumping in a part of the system separate from the main grid, his virtual reality has not been suspended. It may still be a nightmarish experience, but there is still a chance that Bobby could join in the jump with Aja monitoring it. Bobby decides that he wants to jump with another Traveler in case things become very bad.

In Chapter 19 Bobby takes the flume to the territory of Zadaa to bring back his choice of Travelers, a beautiful woman with a dark complexion named Loor. He has a bit of trouble because the territory has two races, one with light complexions like his, and Loor's race of dark people. The two races are not getting along when he arrives, which hampers his search for her. A group of bullying dark warriors threatens to lower him headfirst into the sewer of the city where Loor lives. At the last moment she arrives and orders the men to leave Bobby alone. Loor is an imposing female warrior well known for her fighting abilities, so the male warriors grudgingly let Bobby go. After discussing the troubles in Veelox, Loor agrees to accompany Bobby even though she cannot understand anything about computers and virtual reality. Her world is primitive and has simple morals. The technology does not extend past controlling subterranean rivers in a world with a desert surface.

When Loor and Bobby arrive in Veelox, Aja greets them outside the manhole cover. She at first does not like Loor and laughs at her ignorance of technology. Aja then realizes that Loor is a strong woman and entirely appropriate for what is about to happen.

In Chapter 20 the story returns to Second Earth. Courtney and Mark finish viewing Bobby's fourteenth journal with Dorney, who surprises the students with his intimate knowledge of the territories and Travelers. Dorney tells them that he became an acolyte after finding out about the multiple space and time dimensions that actually make up reality, and he wanted to help the good guys fight against Saint Dane. He also reveals that his extensive knowledge had come from the use of the rings that pass materials between territories, and since he had managed to get the note to Mark through the rings, apparently within the same territory. Dorney then tells the students that they are not yet ready to become acolytes, but when the time comes, they will know it. Mark and Courtney leave with Dorney's disappointing judgment call.

On his way home from school, Mark's ring starts glowing. He notices that only one of the embossed characters glows, and expecting some sort of note, finds cover and takes the ring off. Nothing happens, so he starts back toward his home. He runs back to recover his forgotten backpack, and the character on the ring again glows. It seems to glow stronger the closer he moves toward an old abandoned mansion that, as rumor has it, could be haunted. He gathers his courage and moves closer to the house. The character on the ring glows ever brighter until, while looking through a window, he comes face-to-face with a quig. He then sees more quigs behind that one.



Chapter 17, Veelox (12, pp. 144-148); Chapter 18, Veelox (13, pp 149-163); Chapter 19, Veelox (14, pp. 164-175); Chapter 20, Second Earth (6, pp. 176-186) Analysis

Most heroic stories cast sidekicks and helpers for the central protagonist. Bobby has Courtney and Mark as sidekicks, with other Travelers serving as helpers, except more equal to the hero and sometimes superior. Bobby asserts that other Travelers have pulled him out of tight spots more than once. Introducing Loor as Bobby's helper for the next part of the story on Veelox gives additional intrigue on events to come. Bobby has feelings for the beautiful woman warrior, and he suspects that Aja might be a bit jealous of her. This opens a plotline for a possible love triangle, but not so strongly that one must develop. Aja and Loor could also become fast friends, with opposites attracting, and leaving Bobby without any girl other than Courtney, who is still noticing cute boys in her classes. Another unknown is how crazy the virtual world of a seventy-some-year-old genius inventor could be when it is mixed with his fears. Bobby selects Loor as his companion specifically because of her quick reflexes when confronted with unknown dangers.

Mark is disappointed that he failed to move quickly along the acolyte path, and Courtney's somewhat lukewarm desire to become an acolyte with him does not help. However, a greater problem exists. Somehow monsters from one territory have moved to Second Earth, and that is never supposed to happen, much as nightmares were not supposed to happen in Lifelight. Since Saint Dane had his fingers in the disaster on Veelox, he probably is responsible for this problem on Second Earth. These unexpected events make the lives of the story's characters more complicated, and that in turn creates a more interesting story. The events are sometimes referred to as plot twists, but they are actually obstacles that the hero must somehow overcome. The plot remains the same in that the hero keeps heading into ever worsening situations until reaching the climax of the story. A plot twist would redirect this progression elsewhere, and a possibility in this story is a side trip into romance that could very well have a humorous outcome, with the hero being unintentionally humiliated. The virtual realities in Lifelight simply change the settings to present ever worsening obstacles, although the changes do happen more abruptly than normal, and this is an advantage for a fiction that uses virtual reality as part of its scientific underpinning.

Bobby narrates the Veelox part of the story with funny commentary. This masks the horror of virtual reality gone bad, in which people are dying all over Veelox due to Aja having introduced the Reality Bug. His character injects a steady stream of humorous diversion, which is often necessary in horror stories for softening the fear. He also displays a noble characteristic by reminding Aja that she is not directly responsible, due to Saint Dane having been manipulating her all through her life. Most of what Bobby has accomplished does not seem heroic to him because of the many mistakes he has made, his sheer terror blocking out thought, and his good luck. He gives credit more to his helpers than himself, which is heroic in itself. Real heroes are modest people.



Chapter 21, Second Earth (7, pp. 187-198); Chapter 22, Second Earth (8, pp. 199-208); Chapter 23, Veelox (15, pp. 209-223); Chapter 24, Veelox (16, pp. 224-232)

Chapter 21, Second Earth (7, pp. 187-198); Chapter 22, Second Earth (8, pp. 199-208); Chapter 23, Veelox (15, pp. 209-223); Chapter 24, Veelox (16, pp. 224-232)

Summary

In Chapter 21 Mark runs away from the quigs just as they break through the window and chase him. He manages to jump and gain handholds on the concrete wall surrounding the property due to having adrenaline coursing through his system. Pleased with himself for having had a heroic adventure like Bobby's, he sees the ring still glowing. This means he has not found what he must, so he decides to enlist Courtney's help.

Meanwhile, Courtney has one of her worst days ever when the varsity soccer squad scrimmages with her junior squad. The varsity players contain her in double-teaming strategies, and right at the end when she is about to make a goal, one of the varsity players purposefully trips her. Courtney flares up at the girl, and a fight almost develops. The coach sides with the varsity player who committed a foul but saved a point. She then suspends Courtney for two weeks. Thoroughly beaten, Courtney heads home and comes across Mark. He sympathizes with her and tells her about the house and the quigs. She immediately perks up. They decide to call the police and register a complaint about vicious dogs around the old house. Two officers search the property and house, and they find no dogs. Mark and Courtney follow them, but they find nothing of importance that would correspond to the glowing ring.

In Chapter 22 Courtney and Mark return to the house and search the property again. While on the floor containing bedrooms that open into one another, the quigs show up again. The beasts run upstairs, and due to Courtney's quick thinking, she traps them in one of the bedrooms by luring the quigs into one room and running out another. Mark slams one door shut, and Courtney handles the other. Knowing that the strong quigs will only be delayed, they head down to the basement and root cellar. There the ring goes nuts, spinning wildly and sending out musical notes. This has never happened before. The quigs escape from the bedroom level and crash into the basement door. Soon they are through, but the ring starts making a high-pitched noise. This causes the beasts to



run away, whining in fear. An impressive show of light and sound happens behind the door to the root cellar; the ring shoots a laser beam at the door, and then all goes quiet. The ring had burned a star symbol onto the door, marking it as an entry way into a flume. Mark and Courtney feel that they have arrived as novice acolytes. In the aftermath of their adventure, the next journal from Bobby arrives via the ring.

In Chapter 23 Bobby and Loor go into Zetlin's virtual reality, with Aja monitoring. Oddly, they find themselves in a western United States setting consisting of a canyon that opens onto high meadows. In the background are the Rocky Mountains. Both Loor and Bobby are dressed in Old West clothes, and both are unarmed. A herd of cattle suddenly come around a bend in the canyon, stampeding straight for them. There is no place to take cover, so they run for it. The herd gains on them alarmingly fast. Loor spots a hanging vine, and with Bobby hanging onto her neck, she climbs up and away from the stampede. Once the herd passes, they meet the two cowboys who had pushed the herd into the canyon. Neither man is Zetlin, but they do lend their horses to Loor and Bobby, since they have two more at their camp. They also tell the two Travelers that Zetlin lives in the nearby town of Glenville.

Bobby and Loor ride into Glenville, but it seems deserted. Hearing piano music coming from the saloon, they investigate. Saint Dane, dressed up as a gunslinger, confronts them.

In Chapter 24 Saint Dane calls out a gang of desperados and tells the Travelers that they have ten minutes in which to save a man in a stone building atop a big rock dam. At the end of ten minutes, the dam will be dynamited. Bobby snatches one of Saint Dane's two six-shooters, after which the Travelers run for the blacksmith shop where they had left their horses. The desperados surround the horse barn and start shooting. Loor gathers the other horses in the barn together, opens the doors, and stampedes them out. She and Bobby follow on their horses. The surprise stops the shooting for a while, and the Travelers gallop at top speed toward the dam. Loor hangs back to handle the desperados while Bobby rides across the top of the dam to the rock building. Throwing the door open, he finds not Zetlin but Gunny tied to a chair. Undoing the knots, Bobby asks how this could have happened, and just as Gunny starts to answer, explosions begin destroying the dam.

Chapter 21, Second Earth (7, pp. 187-198); Chapter 22, Second Earth (8, pp. 199-208); Chapter 23, Veelox (15, pp. 209-223); Chapter 24, Veelox (16, pp. 224-232)

Analysis

The most important outcome of Mark and Courtney's adventure is that Courtney decides with conviction to become an acolyte. This is partly due to her continuing humiliation while playing soccer and partly from the sheer excitement of the adventure. Mark's self-confidence takes a leap when he escapes the quigs the first time, and with



Courtney's help, the second time. Their discovery of another flume caps their adventure with a mystery: What are they supposed to do now?

The story moves into an Old West setting when Bobby and Loo go looking for Zetlin in his virtual reality. The plot follows along clichéd lines with Saint Dane being the gunslinger outlaw, a frantic escape from his band of desperados, and a horse race to the dam. The big surprise is that the man in the stone building is not Zetlin but Gunny. Saint Dane had only claimed that a man was in the building, not that the man was Zetlin. This introduces a true plot twist that places an unexpected character into a setting where he does not belong. An implication is that this is a result of the Reality Bug messing with Lifelight, which brings the overall plot back into focus. Bobby must find Zetlin and get the security code out of him, and he must do this soon. Gunny's appearance in the story may be another obstacle, but he may also turn out to be a needed helper. Chapter 24 ends with another sort of cliffhanger, and this time it has to do with dynamite, a dam, and a whole lot of water.



**Chapter 25, Veelox (17, pp. 233-243);
Chapter 26, Veelox (18, pp. 244-254);
Chapter 27, Veelox (19, pp. 255-264);
Chapter 28, Veelox (20, pp. 265-273)**

**Chapter 25, Veelox (17, pp. 233-243); Chapter 26,
Veelox (18, pp. 244-254); Chapter 27, Veelox (19, pp.
255-264); Chapter 28, Veelox (20, pp. 265-273)**

Summary

In Chapter 25 Bobby must decide what to do while the dynamite goes off; the dam crumbles, and Gunny pleads for him to run away. Bobby decides to abort the jump and pushes the appropriate button on his control bracelet. He and Loor discover that Aja has left her monitoring station back at the pyramid. They look for her and learn from the vedder at the front desk that she had gone home. Riding the three-wheeled peddle transportation used in Veelox, they go to Evangeline's house only to find the two cowboys who had lent them their horses in the jump that they had just escaped. Saint Dane in his gunslinger outfit shows up with his desperados, and they all start shooting. When Loor and Bobby try running away, they discover that the house is on fire. Things turn from bad to worse until everything goes black.

In Chapter 26 Bobby finds himself in a suspended rain storm. Loor is nearby, and the two explore the statue-like people and raindrops that do not fall. Aja appears and explains that the first jump had not ended but, due to the Reality Bug, had shifted focus to Bobby's mind. The whole western theme had come from his memory of western stories he had either seen or read, not from Zetlin's memories. However, she assures them that they are in the right jump now. Working some codes that Zetlin had given Aja before his jump, she reanimates the rainstorm in progress. Bobby and Loor duck into the entry way of a building and ask a passing man where they can find Zetlin. He tells them that he is where he always is, in the Barbican. The Barbican turns out to be a strange black skyscraper with even stranger interiors. The building can also move from vertical to a horizontal position. As they look on, the building moves from horizontal to vertical, which allows access.

In Chapter 27 Loor and Bobby enter the strange building. The first floor is a jungle with dangerous carnivorous plants that attempt to entrap them. They barely escape up a circular staircase to the second floor, which is full of water that somehow does not fall out of the round hole in the floor for the staircase.

In Chapter 28 Bobby manages to swim to the surface with Loor, who cannot swim, hanging onto him and both holding their breaths. They then see strange crafts like



motorcycles racing in the air, plunging into the water, then racing in the air again. They climb up to the third floor and see a wintery landscape. Some snowboarders come by, and Bobby asks them if they can point the way to Zetlin. They challenge Bobby to a skating race in which out of six contestants, only four can finish, telling him that if he finishes, he will be directed to where he can find Zetlin. Bobby has played hockey before, so he has a better chance of finishing than Loor.

Chapter 25, Veelox (17, pp. 233-243); Chapter 26, Veelox (18, pp. 244-254); Chapter 27, Veelox (19, pp. 255-264); Chapter 28, Veelox (20, pp. 265-273) Analysis

Loor detects a romantic attraction between Bobby and Aja, but Bobby denies it. He instead keeps focused on surviving the many obstacles placed in his path due to the Reality Bug messing with jumps. This is a handy reason for all kinds of strange things going on that are limited only by the author's imagination. Even the laws of physics can be violated, such as the water that does not drain through the staircase hole in the floor and the motorcycles that can race in either water or air. Dr. Zetlin is the hero's immediate goal, but he is not very easy to find. Once found, he likely will not give up the needed security code easily, and the overall goal remains to thwart Saint Dane's evil plan.

Since jumps are purely out of the imagination and memory of the jumper, no further scientific basis beyond the nature of virtual reality is required. This keeps the novel within the realm of science fiction, but the heavy use of virtual reality also makes the story part of the fantasy genre, in which pretty-looking flowers on cacti plants can turn into vicious mouths hungry for hero meat. The primary problem is believable, since Lifelight had been designed to give only benign jumps, and software changes to operating systems and application programs are known to sometimes cause more problems than they fix. Aja had foreseen this problem and had tried to keep the Reality Bug from impacting the whole system, a technique in actual computer science known as creating a sandbox for testing. However, Saint Dane, the evil antagonist, seems to be always a few steps ahead of the Travelers. Defeating him is extremely difficult and can be accomplished only with a lot of luck and teamwork. This seeming invincibility of the antagonist adds to the suspense and tension leading up to the climax of the story.



**Chapter 29, Veelox (21, pp. 274-281);
Chapter 30, Veelox (22, pp. 282-290);
Chapter 31, Veelox (23, pp. 291-301);
Chapter 32, Veelox (24, pp. 302-309)**

**Chapter 29, Veelox (21, pp. 274-281); Chapter 30,
Veelox (22, pp. 282-290); Chapter 31, Veelox (23, pp.
291-301); Chapter 32, Veelox (24, pp. 302-309)**

Summary

In Chapter 29 Bobby competes with five other skaters. He quickly learns that they cheat, and although he can keep up with them, he had to do something different to gain an edge. In an ice canyon, he uses a sloping wall to move up a position. His advantage does not hold, and toward the end of the race it seems he has no chance to finish. Then Loor empties a basket full of large balls onto the course. This enables Bobby to finish in fourth place, which is good enough to gain the knowledge of how to find Zetlin. The winner of the race turns out to be the man.

In Chapter 30 Dr. Zetlin takes the two Travelers for a tour of his amazing building. Zetlin appears to be fifteen years old, has many physical gaming courts and the other things that a fifteen-year-old boy would desire. He also has many virtual friends about the same age. He explains that he would rather live out the rest of his days in Lifelight than in the real world. Bobby thinks to himself that the man must have had a terrible childhood, and so his ultimate fantasy is to relive it in the perfect virtual reality. When Bobby asks for the security code, Zetlin does not believe the story about a virus infecting Lifelight. Aja appears in the jump and assures Zetlin that this is indeed the truth.

In Chapter 31 Aja and Bobby try to convince Zetlin to give up the needed security code. With a little help from Loor they do, and the code turns out to be simply zero. Aja leaves the jump to fix Lifelight. She soon returns with the bad news that she cannot stop a massive rush of data into the grid even with access to the central part of the system. Suddenly a black mass of goo appears before them. It takes different forms and grows. Bobby says that this is the Reality Bug in a physical form as it turns into a quig and attacks.

In Chapter 32 the quig is temporarily stopped when Loor throws two knives into it. The goo reforms into an even bigger quig. She, Bobby, and Zetlin run for the elevator in the building, and while waiting for the car to reach them, they see the Reality Bug goo turn into a huge black snake. They all try to abort the jump, but none of their bracelet



controllers work. The monster coils and strikes after the elevator car arrives and while the three jumpers rush into it.

Chapter 29, Veelox (21, pp. 274-281); Chapter 30, Veelox (22, pp. 282-290); Chapter 31, Veelox (23, pp. 291-301); Chapter 32, Veelox (24, pp. 302-309) Analysis

The story moves closer to the climax by turning bad situations into impossible and frightening predicaments. First the inventor of Lifelight, Dr. Zetlin, refuses to believe that Lifelight has been corrupted. Then he agrees to give the needed security code, but Aja cannot gain control of the system. Finally the Reality Bug takes a physical shape in the virtual world and presents a deadly threat to all.

This brings the hero and his helpers to the brink of defeat. They cannot simply leave the virtual reality, and they have no control over it whatsoever. On top of this, they have a new deadly threat in the virtual materialization of the Reality Bug. They need to vanquish the threat and gain control over Lifelight, and accomplishing these two things will be the first part of the climax. The other part will be motivating the people of Veelox to quit Lifelight and go back to real life. Only then will Veelox be saved from destruction.



**Chapter 33, Veelox (25, pp. 310-323);
Chapter 34, Veelox (26, pp. 324-336);
Chapter 35, Veelox (27, pp. 337-347);
Chapter 36, Veelox (28, pp. 348-363);
Chapter 37, Second Earth (9, pp. 364-375)**

Chapter 33, Veelox (25, pp. 310-323); Chapter 34, Veelox (26, pp. 324-336); Chapter 35, Veelox (27, pp. 337-347); Chapter 36, Veelox (28, pp. 348-363); Chapter 37, Second Earth (9, pp. 364-375) Summary

In Chapter 33 Bobby, Loor, and Zetlin run into the elevator, and just as the door closes, the Reality Bug snake pierces it with two giant fangs. Venom shoots out of the fangs and hits Zetlin, but other than an ugly red mark, he is not hurt. They make it to the weight room, which is actually a weightless room, and put on special heel pads, called inertia jets, that allow them to navigate in zero gravity. The Reality Bug, now in the form of a snake with human-looking arms and hands, chases them through the weight room to the door leading down to an area of huge machinery that moved the Barbican from vertical to horizontal position and back again. The Reality Bug turns into a liquid and starts oozing underneath the door, so Zetlin brings the others to where the motorcycle-like crafts that can fly and run underwater are kept. After a little instruction, all three fly away on their own crafts. The Reality Bug turns into a bird and flies after them, and they run full throttle toward the opening to the glacier room, where Bobby had competed with Zetlin on skates. From there they fly through the water room and into the jungle room, which had been the entry level when the Barbican was vertical. Zetlin goes to a control panel and starts the process of moving the Barbican from horizontal to vertical, but something jams the machinery, and while the building is horizontal, they are trapped with the Reality Bug.

In Chapter 34 the Reality Bug shows up in the jungle room as a gigantic spider. Loor tries to fly her craft away from the spider, but it shoots out a filament and catches her. Zetlin frees her by flying his craft straight into the filament and severing it. They regroup on their crafts, and Zetlin says that it would be possible to reach the ground if they went back to the machine room and took the ladder through the supporting arch. Without too much more trouble, they arrive at the machine room, descend through a tube to the arch and then to street level. They run away from the Barbican and peer out of another building's entry to see the Reality Bug break its way out of the Barbican. The evil shape-



shifting mass has taken on the form of a hellish beast, and it strikes the ground with powerful fists in an attempt to break out of the Lifelight fantasy world into the actual world. Aja enters the fantasy and is entirely horrified over what she sees.

In Chapter 35 everybody leaves the Lifelight fantasy, including Zetlin. Bobby sees that Aja is back to normal in the Alpha Core room, and soon after Loor joins them. They open Zetlin's chamber. The real Zetlin, a very old man who has spent years in Lifelight, has a difficult time moving at first, but with the help of the others, his balance and strength slowly return. Aja believes that the Reality Bug has been destroyed when Zetlin left his fantasy, but then the monster attacks the ceiling of the room, punching a hole through it. Zetlin produces a red control card, inserts it into the Alpha Core and completely shuts down Lifelight. This action finally destroys the Reality Bug, but it also releases all the people of Veelox from their fantasies.

In Chapter 26 the people of Veelox return to real life because they have no choice. Lifelight has been shut down while the Directors of Lifelight and Zetlin determine what went wrong and how to proceed from here. Loor returns to Zadaa while Aja and Zetlin testify to the Directors about the Reality Bug. They make up a plausible story that hides the actual horror of the Reality Bug leaving the fantasy and entering the real world. The Directors call a meeting in the shutdown pyramid that is televised across Veelox. Zetlin explains to the crowd why Lifelight had been shut down and expresses hope that now everyone would get back to normal life. However, the Directors have decided to reactivate Lifelight now that all the problems have been solved. This brings Veelox back to the condition it was in when the story began, and thereby hands victory to Saint Dane. The head Director, Dr. Sever, then talks to Bobby in Saint Dane's voice and asks how it feels to have failed.

In Chapter 27 the story returns to Second Earth. Mark and Courtney had just finished watching Bobby's journal when another section begins. This part is from Aja, and she expresses her feelings of failure over losing Veelox to Saint Dane. This is his first victory over the Travelers. Courtney and Mark decide to go back to Tom Dorney and become full-fledged acolytes. Dorney accepts that they have now had enough experience to perform that role, and he explains how the ring works. Mark can accept journals and send messages to other acolytes by use of the ring. Excited about their new roles, Courtney and Mark gather clothing for arriving Travelers and put the garments neatly beside the flume that they had discovered in the old Sherwood house. Mark enters the flume and shouts the name Eelong. This brings Saint Dane through the flume. He cackles about his first victory and leaves a bag with instructions to give it to Bobby, who arrives directly after Saint Dane leaves. Mark scolds the two new acolytes for having done exactly what Saint Dane wanted. He looks at the contents of the bag left for him and sees that it is the severed hand of his close friend, Gunny.



Chapter 33, Veelox (25, pp. 310-323); Chapter 34, Veelox (26, pp. 324-336); Chapter 35, Veelox (27, pp. 337-347); Chapter 36, Veelox (28, pp. 348-363); Chapter 37, Second Earth (9, pp. 364-375) Analysis

The ending of this story is atypical for heroic novels. The hero is defeated and faces an even more powerful villain now that Saint Dane has won Veelox. However, Mark has won his acolyte position, and as the final sentence of the story predicts, he will now have his own great adventure. This will likely be the subject of the next book in the series.

This is a grand cliffhanger ending for a book that leaves the fans suddenly hungry for the next volume in the series. Many loose threads have been left, and the final resolution appears to be far away. Saint Dane somehow severed Gunny's hand, and Bobby is under tremendous pressure because the rules of the game changed decisively in Saint Dane's favor. The big question here is how can the relatively powerless Travelers, the good guys, defeat the very powerful bad guy? The ending is similar to a classic radio and television series that admonishes the audience to tune in next week to find out if such-and-so happens.

Another technique is used for the climax, that of tension-release heading into a greater tension-release, and so on. Just as everyone is feeling safe and relaxed, the problem that was supposed to have been solved returns as a much bigger problem. Most stories use a single iteration of the tension-release progression within the climax, and doing more than two is generally not effective. What this story does is two iterations and then introduces a final failing of the hero and all his helpers. To encourage future book sales, this kind of ending works the best for a series. Only readers who have a mild interest can resist signing up for the earliest released, and therefore the highest priced, copies of the next book. This can also result in long lines at brick/mortar bookstores.

Mark and Courtney will likely be teamed together in the next book. In this one, their partnership is solidified, with Courtney finally abandoning her sports career in favor of being an acolyte. Her character grows from a child wanting to be adored to an adult having an important job to do—a mission to save the world—except with the multiple territories, she must save several worlds. Mark's character has grown into a state of confidence that he had never possessed, other than when tinkering with science. His technical abilities will likely be put to great use while battling against Saint Dane, and Courtney's natural athleticism will probably be tested as she and Mark fight side-by-side against pure evil. Bobby's character also grows in this story. He comes to the realization that no one Traveler can ever beat Saint Dane. The only chance that good has for defeating evil is if the Travelers work together, the strength of one covering another's weakness, and the concept that the team is greater than the sum of its parts. Acolytes are important helpers for the Travelers, so they are also members of the team.



Characters

Travelers and Acolytes

Travelers have the ability to move to parallel worlds through gateways known as flumes. All the Travelers have a single foe, Saint Dane, and their singular mission is to keep the antagonist from destroying all the parallel worlds. This is not an easy task, and it is the central framework of the stories in this series of books. The Travelers are never sure just how much of what happens is the result of Saint Dane's work or some other natural process.

Acolytes are the helpers of the Travelers. Each acolyte has a special ring that allows communication among the several parallel worlds. Travelers send their journals to acolytes, and acolytes communicate among themselves as well. The acolytes are tasked with providing appropriate clothing at the mouths of flumes for Travelers so that they can blend in with the culture.

Bobby Pendragon

Bobby Pendragon is the protagonist in the story. He is the youngest and least experienced Traveler, and yet he has been credited with more than one success in the ongoing battle against Saint Dane, the demonic antagonist. In this story Bobby takes a flume to Veelox, one of several worlds to which he can go via the flumes. He finds an empty city because all of the people have either entered benign fantasies in the Lifelight pyramid or care for the participants, known as jumpers. Their fantasies are called jumps.

He meets Aja Killian, an attractive girl who monitors jumps and understands the Lifelight software better than all others, except for the inventor. Bobby helps her to encourage the people of Veelox to abandon the Lifelight fantasies in favor of living their actual lives. When the Reality Bug goes wild, Bobby agrees to enter the inventor's jump and obtain a code that is needed for opening up the core of the Lifelight software system. He encounters strange and deadly situations within an odd building of Dr. Zetlin's, the inventor of Lifelight, imagination. By the time that the Reality Bug is destroyed, Bobby has come to realize that Saint Dane will never be defeated without teamwork among the Travelers.

Aja Killian

Aja Killian, also a Traveler, is the primary helper for the protagonist in this story. She lives on Veelox and summons Bobby, via a holograph, to help her defeat Saint Dane. Once with Bobby, she finds him extremely dense and judgmental. Her greatest accomplishment is the Reality Bug, a software enhancement meant to mix benign with frightful fantasy experiences in Lifelight. However, Saint Dane has been manipulating



her throughout her life and has changed the Reality Bug into a monstrosity. Once she introduces the enhancement to the main Lifelight system, people on their jumps start dying. This had occasionally happened before for unknown reasons, but now the entire population of Veelox is at risk. Not knowing what else to do, she suspends the system. This means that all the fantasies also suspend, but at least no further deaths occur.

After trying unsuccessfully to extract the Reality Bug from the Lifelight system, Aja needs the core passcode from Dr. Zetlin. He has been jumping for years, so the only way in is through Lifelight. Fortunately, a core part of the system that she believes has not been infected by the bug runs Zetlin's jump. She asks Bobby to enter Zetlin's fantasy world and obtain the passcode while she monitors the jump. He agrees, and with another Traveler named Loor, the plan goes into action. After things go terribly wrong, Aja appears in Zetlin's jump to pull everyone out, including Zetlin. She and Zetlin tell the Directors what went wrong, and by the end of the story, she realizes that Saint Dane has won despite all her efforts.

Mark Dimond

Mark Dimond is Bobby's best friend and is directly opposite his heroic character. Shy around girls and lacking in self-confidence, Mark nevertheless receives Bobby's journals from the other parallel worlds. In this story, Mark grows from a pathetic boy rejected by most of his classmates to an acolyte, a highly trusted helper for the Travelers. He accomplishes this by showing courage in several frightful scenes that he usually shares with Courtney. They work together as a team, and she achieves the status of acolyte with him.

Courtney Chetwynde

Courtney Chetwynde is Bobby's girlfriend who also reads, or in this story, watches Bobby's holographic journals with Mark. She had been a sports star in middle school, and expecting to follow that path smoothly into high school, she soon meets with frustration. The high school players are far more experienced and make her look very bad in practice scrimmages. She finally decides that Mark's direction to become an acolyte is the better path for her.

Loor

Loor is a Traveler from the Zadaa territory. She is an accomplished warrior and a beautiful woman whom Bobby respects. She accompanies him into Zetlin's Lifelight fantasy and helps to fight against the Reality Bug in many key ways. Bobby would like to draw closer to her, but she does not share the feeling.



Dr. Zetlin

Dr. Zetlin is the inventor of Lifelight. He designed the fantasy machine to escape a reality that he had found entirely too harsh. Once he realizes that the Reality Bug is out of control, he joins in the fight against it. His ability to entirely shutdown Lifelight finally destroys the monster.

Saint Dane

Saint Dane is the primary antagonist. He is a demon who gains a tremendous advantage over the Travelers by the end of the story. Defeating Veelox is his first victory over the Travelers, and this changes the game in serious ways that will be revealed in future books.

Tom Dorney

Tom Dorney is an aging acolyte who contacts Mark, knowing that he has ambitions to become an acolyte. After Mark and Courtney prove their worth, he explains how the rings work to enable communication among Travelers and acolytes, no matter what world they are on.

Evangeline

Evangeline is Aja's surrogate aunt. She is also an acolyte who knows a great deal about Bobby and the other Travelers.

Gunny Van Dyke

Gunny Van Dyke is Bobby's friend and fellow Traveler. He appears at the beginning of the story, toward the end as part of a Lifelight fantasy, and his severed hand is delivered to Bobby by Saint Dane at the end, signifying the dire straits that Bobby is in.

Press Tilton

Press Tilton is Bobby's uncle and mentor in earlier stories. In this story he is referred to but never appears. He may be dead.

Dr. Kree Sever

Dr. Kree Sever owns the house in which Aja and Evangeline live. She shows up at the end of the story, but she is really Saint Dane in disguise.



Objects/Places

The Heavy Ring

The heavy ring belongs to Mark. It allows Bobby to deliver his journals from other territories and has other abilities important to communication among acolytes.

Journals

Every Traveler keeps journals and sends them to the appropriate acolyte. Bobby sends his journals to Mark, who shares them with Courtney.

Barbicon

The Barbicon is a fantasy creation of Dr. Zetlin. The building has the ability to move from vertical to horizontal positions and has strange environments within.

Gloid

Gloid is the only food available on Veelox. It has the consistency of yogurt and comes in three flavors.

Phader

Phaders are highly trained people who dress in blue jumpsuits and monitor the fantasies of Lifelight jumpers.

Vedder

Vedders are semi-skilled workers who dress in red jumpsuits and take care of the mundane tasks in the Lifelight pyramids.

Jumpers

Jumpers are the participants in Lifelight who dress in green jumpsuits and engage in their fantasy worlds for lengths of time ranging from minutes to years.



The Reality Bug

The Reality Bug is a software enhancement that Aja had developed. It goes entirely out of control and cannot be stopped until Dr. Zetlin comes out of his jump in Lifelight.

Alpha Core

The Alpha Core is where Dr. Zetlin's physical body lies while he enjoys his Lifelight jump. This is where he finally shuts down all of Lifelight and thereby destroys the Reality Bug.

Quig

A quig is a vicious bear-like animal that behaves like a wild dog, but worse. Quigs run in deadly packs.

Halla

Halla is the term used to encompass all of the parallel worlds.

Veelox

Veelox is the parallel world on which Aja lives.

Second Earth

Second Earth is Bobby's home parallel world and where Mark and Courtney live.

Zaada

Zaada is the territory where Loor normally lives a primitive life as a warrior.

First Earth

First Earth is like Second Earth and where Bobby had taken part in a previous adventure.

Flume

Flumes are gateways to other parallel worlds. A Traveler merely needs to shout the name of the destination world, and the flume almost instantly takes the Traveler there.



Bronx

The Bronx is where one flume is known to exist on Second Earth.

Stony Brook, Connecticut

Stony Brook, Connecticut is where Bobby had lived and where Mark and Courtney continue to live.

Davis Gregory High School

Davis Gregory High School is where Mark and Courtney begin their high school careers.

Territories

Parallel worlds are generically called territories.

Pyramid

The pyramid is where the people of Veelox go to jump into their Lifelight fantasy worlds.

Lifelight

Lifelight is a computer system that enables the fantasy worlds and was developed by Dr. Zetlin.

Rubic City

Rubic City is where Bobby and Aja meet on Veelox. This is also the location of the pyramid containing Dr. Zetlin.

Old Sherwood House

The old Sherwood house is where Mark and Courtney discover the second flume on Second Earth. The exact location is in the root cellar of the house.



Themes

The Struggle between Good and Evil

The overall theme of the book series is the struggle between good and evil. This is a very common theme in heroic novels, and the twist on this is that the good guys are not as powerful as the bad guy, Saint Dane. Saint Dane always seems to be two or more steps ahead of the Travelers, and the Travelers seem to muddle their way into victory more than plan and execute successful campaigns. Bobby tells Aja that he is usually running scared and cannot think, let alone cleverly plan his next moves. Even when there is enough time available, nothing comes out right. This way of pacing a story keeps reader interest because doubt always exists that the hero and his helpers will make it out alive. On the other hand, the roundness of the Saint Dane character suffers. He is absolutely pure evil with no redeeming qualities. Saint Dane is also not human and perhaps a spirit that can take human form. He does appear in a disguise toward the end of the novel, and this is likely not the result of cleverly applied makeup, body padding and choice of clothing. The question left hanging at the end of the story is whether the Travelers will now be defeated time after time until all the parallel worlds are destroyed.

Bobby realizes that he cannot be effective against Saint Dane without the help of other Travelers and the acolytes. This idea will likely be developed further in the next book of the series, but for now it suffices to know that here is a possibility for the Travelers to once again achieve the upper hand over Saint Dane. An additional positive is that Mark has become a self-confident acolyte, although his first action works against Bobby's current fight with Saint Dane. As with Bobby, Mark will make mistakes along the way and learn from them. Courtney will also be making mistakes and working with Mark, and this could give the Travelers an edge. Saint Dane works alone. He must depend upon only his wits to defeat the Travelers, and he seems capable of making mistakes. The villain needs to have faults that the hero can exploit, otherwise evil would win over good, and that is not an acceptable plot reversal unless done temporarily, as it is handled in this story.

Teenage Struggles

The story being young adult fiction, the main characters are young, fifteen years old and starting high school. Bobby is too busy with his Traveler duties to be going to school, but Mark and Courtney provide this point of view. The transition from middle school to high school is especially hard for Courtney. She at first appreciates all the new cute boys in her classes but soon realizes that she is not very competitive on the soccer field as she had been before. She suffers through humiliation after humiliation while struggling to compete with the older and more experienced teammates. Ultimately she is cut from the varsity team and told to work with the junior team, a crushing insult to her ego. Yet she eventually realizes that her ego had been based on fallacies due to her more rapid



physical development over her peers. Now she faces girls who had surpassed her development and had gained experience in highly competitive games. Not knowing where else to turn, she halfheartedly takes the acolyte path that Mark had chosen. After they fight the quigs together in the old Sherman house, she decides that soccer pales by comparison and joins him on his quest.

Mark's character suffers a little bit at the start of high school. He expects to be treated very differently in the new environment, since hardly anyone knows who he is. Then the same treatment comes down on him anyway, and he concludes that the world is completely unfair. However, his invitation into the science club changes everything. He has found something that he is very good at and has received recognition for his accomplishments. Others in the club treat him as an equal, not a weak boy to be tormented. He then does very courageous things at the old Sherman house while he and Courtney fight the quigs. They form a team of acolytes at the end of the story. Both have grown closer to adulthood faster than any of their high school classmates.

Attractions

The author hints at Bobby's attractions while the narrative is from his point of view. He likes kind adults and finds older women fascinating. He especially wants to move closer to Loor, a common attraction of a developing boy for an adult woman. Although Loor is fond of Bobby, she is far beyond being more than a comrade and friend. He could not possibly understand her depths until having reached adulthood and experienced similar affairs of the heart. Loor, either by her nature or by conscious design, does not encourage Bobby's affections and keeps him at arm's length.

Bobby's ego assumes that when a girl treats him well, she must like him in a romantic way. This confusion leads him to think that Aja is jealous of Loor, but in the end nothing could be more wrong. Aja feels contempt for anyone who does not understand technology at the same level as she does. She treats Loor exactly the same as when she first met Bobby, but he does not recognize that until much later. Aja is not jealous at all about anything other than her importance on Veelox. When she finally realizes that she had been being played by Saint Dane all along, her self-confidence is destroyed. Bobby's departure from Veelox has no impact on her whatsoever.

Bobby is quick to acknowledge his attractions and dislikes, at least in his journals. He tends to be less direct when speaking, although expressing disdain for Saint Dane seems to be an established habit. The artificial food, goid, on Veelox first disgusts him but then is not so bad when he tries it. However, one of the three flavors he finds even more terrible than when he had first looked upon the viscous gel. His dislike of this flavor becomes a running joke through part of the book.



Style

Point of View

This story uses two points of view, the single-person and the omniscient third-person. Bobby Pendragon provides his single-person narrative through the journals that he sends to Mark. Bobby tells his version of what happened while in Veelox, and this colors the events with his interpretations of them. When the story shifts to Second Earth, the omniscient third-person point of view kicks in. The reader can consider this voice to be that of the author's, looking down on his characters from a perch close by. He can give details of what Mark and Courtney are thinking and feeling as they go through their scenes. The author can also reveal actions taking place outside the perception of the characters, which in effect gives an all-knowing power to the viewpoint, and this is why it is described as being omniscient. Other advantages of a narrative done in third-person are the ability to shift among the characters to explain their interpretations of events and to give background information on anything of interest. An example of this is when the author gives the history of the old Sherwood house.

By using the first-person voice for Bobby, the reader comes to know the protagonist more intimately through his descriptions of himself and others. Rather than coldly explaining Bobby's reactions to Aja, the reader hears him talking about her within the mind's ear. Various impressions and conclusions about his character happen without ever being said outright by the author, which is a primary technique in the idea of showing rather than telling. It is generally preferable to show rather than tell while constructing a story, but sometimes there is no way around the necessity of informing the reader of important details. The author strikes a good balance of showing and telling through the use of two points of view.

Setting

The settings in this story shift dramatically through parallel world travel and via fantasies created by the jumpers in Lifelight. Bobby visits his old home in a fantasy and travels to Veelox in reality, a setting that is not much different from his home on Second Earth. The one big difference is the pyramid that houses the equipment and software that drive Lifelight. The setting is sterile and high-tech compared to the decaying Rubic City. Bobby finds himself in an Old West setting, in the territory of Zaada, back on Veelox and in his Connecticut setting on Second Earth. The most important setting for this story is within the fantasy of Dr. Zetlin, where the Reality Bug grows into an enormous threat and breaks out of the fantasy into real life.

Changing the settings often is a characteristic of adventure stories in the heroic novel mode. The hero must move from place to place, always facing unexpected dangers along the way. This story begins and ends at a flume, a setting that is unremarkable when not activated and stunningly beautiful when the Traveler enters and shouts the



name of the destination territory. A setting that has this magical quality usually needs a bit of explanation, but since this story is part of a series, the explanation is not given. The assumption seems to be that the reader is familiar with the first story in the series, where an explanation is probably given. However, the mystery of connections between parallel worlds could simply be an inexplicable phenomenon that most readers would accept, since this has been done repeatedly in earlier stories by many other published authors.

Language and Meaning

The author keeps the language fairly simple throughout the story because the intended audience has around an eighth-grade level of reading comprehension. As with most fantasy novels, many words and names of places are contrivances, for example the word gloid, which is the only food available on the Veelox world. Due to the intentional simplifying of the language, words are often repeated rather than using synonyms that the reader might not understand. A few advanced words are peppered throughout as a likely challenge to young readers.

The use of language to convey meaning is most obvious in descriptions of the odd settings in which the characters find themselves. The sensory impressions are mostly sight, smell, and sound. Tactile impressions are kept to a minimum, and the only strong taste impression comes when Bobby samples gloid for the first time. He hates the purple variety and tolerates the others.

Action scenes move ahead rapidly with focused descriptions. This technique results in what is called a page-turner, a story that is so engrossing as to cause the reader to keep on turning the pages to find out what happens next and possibly reading far past the allotted time. This author avoids taking tangential moves into somewhat related territory and keeps the narrative moving along a single thread.

Structure

The structure of the book is unusual. Rather than having numbered chapters with unique titles, each chapter is designated as either Second Earth or Veelox. The book has 37 chapters, 28 of which take place on Veelox, and the remaining 9 on Second Earth. Presumably, the other books in the series use the same structure. This Summary/Analysis paper has numbered the chapters in overall sequence and also the sequences of the Veelox and Second Earth chapters. Page number ranges have been included to help discern one chapter from another.

Each chapter tells the story up to the point of some important event, usually a cliffhanger in which somebody is in big trouble. The chapters build tension that is not released until later chapters, and the release is usually short-lived as even more tension builds.



Quotes

"Mark and Bobby liked the same things, and not always the normal things that other kids thought were cool."

Chapter 2, Second Earth (2, pp. 5-17), p. 6

"The rock walls cracked and groaned as if they were stretching out the kinks after a long sleep."

Chapter 3, Veelox (1, pp. 18-33), p. 21

"But there was one thing I was dead sure of: If I wanted to figure out what Saint Dane had been up to on Veelox, the answer would be inside this pyramid."

Chapter 5, Veelox (3, pp. 29-38), p. 38

"There was no way I could have slept for one night and dreamed up the whole adventure, because I wasn't the same guy anymore."

Chapter 8, Veelox (5, pp. 60-65), p. 64

"Mark and Courtney walked cautiously after the man, staying close to each other for support, ready to bolt at the first hint of danger."

Chapter 11, Second Earth (5, pp. 88-93), p. 89

"The Reality Bug was nothing more than a really advanced computer virus. And computer viruses were scary. You never knew where they'd turn up or what damage they'd do."

Chapter 15, Veelox (10, pp. 119-132), p. 125

"I scanned the monitors, searching for at least one gray-haired, wise scientist who would save the day. There weren't any."

Chapter 18, Veelox (13, pp. 149-163), p. 150

"The glowing symbol on his ring was telling him something, and he had the sick feeling that whatever it was, it was inside the Sherwood house."

Chapter 20, Second Earth (6, pp. 176-186), p. 183

"Did she know how to ride? The answer came when Loor jumped up on her horse like a pro, tugged the reins, and got her horse to spin in a circle one way, then the other."



Show-off."

Chapter 23, Veelox (15, pp. 209-233)

"If that wasn't bad enough, the entire downstairs hallway was full of horses. I'm serious. It was like being back in the blacksmith barn, times about a hundred because the animals were terrified by the fire that shot flames and smoke out of the rooms on either side of the hallway."

Chapter 25, Veelox (17, pp. 233-243), p. 239

"I felt bad for the guy. His life was a fantasy. . . . Worse than that, I was going to have to tell him that it wouldn't last."

Chapter 30, Veelox (22, pp. 282-290), p. 289

". . . we entered another space that I can best describe as being inside of a giant clock. It was a huge room full of gigantic, heavy gears. All around us and high above were massive, interlocking cogs and flywheels and I don't know what else."

Chapter 33, Veelox (25, pp. 310-323), p. 316

"The monster stood on its two hoofed feet, with its tail wrapped around one leg, and howled. It was a horrible, angry sound that made my blood freeze."

Chapter 34, Veelox (26, pp. 324-336), p. 334

"Both Mark and Courtney focused on Bobby. He was wearing rags. His feet were bare, his hair was a mess and he had a coating of dirt all over his body. He didn't smell so hot either."

Chapter 37, Second Earth (9, pp. 364-375), p. 374

Topics for Discussion

Describe the Reality Bug in its three phases: design, installation, and maturity.

Why does Aja behave the way she does?

What is the relationship between Travelers and acolytes?

Describe Saint Dane in his usual form.

How does Mark change from the beginning of the story to the end?

Bobby is told that he is the lead Traveler, so why does he doubt this?

Why did Dr. Zetlin invent Lifelight?

How did Saint Dane defeat the Travelers?