

Strata Study Guide

Strata by Terry Pratchett

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Plot Summary

Strata is a science fiction novel by writer Terry Pratchett. Strata is the story of Kin Arad, a woman who is thousands of years old and who works for the Company building planets with strata machines. The strata machines are creations of an advanced society who died out many generations ago but have been utilized by the Company in order to perpetuate the human race. Kin learns of a flat world discovered by a survivor of a mission years ago to send pilots flying into the outermost regions of space. None of these pilots were expected to survive, but this one apparently has and stumbled onto a world possibly fashioned by the creators of the strata machine. Strata follows Kin and two companions as she lands on and explores this strange, flat world. Strata is a science fiction novel that explores universal questions in a way that leaves the reader guessing to the very end.

Kin Arad has just completed building a new planet. Several irregularities have been discovered, and Kin is forced to discipline those responsible even though she can recall doing similar things in her own past. After this meeting, Kin is alone in her office when a strange man, Jago Jalo, suddenly appears. This man claims to have in his possession several artifacts from a flat world. Kin has lunch with this man and learns he is the survivor of the Terminus mission, a mission that sent three pilots into the furthest reaches of space without expecting them to return. This man has returned and claims he found a flat world created by the Great Spindle Kings, the same race of creatures who are credited with creating the strata machines that make it possible for Kin and the Company to make new planets.

Kin is curious enough to agree to wait for a message from this man to tell her how to find this flat world. When the message comes, Kin is surprised to find herself ordered to visit Kung, a strange planet that is perpetually under rain clouds. In the lounge above Kung while waiting for a shuttle to the surface, Kin meets Marco Farfarer, a Kung who was born and raised on Earth. At the same time, Kin is also given a raven in a cage that is meant for Jago Jalo. Kin and Marco go to the surface and make their way to a ship for which Jago arranged. On board the ship, Kin and Marco meet Silver, a Shand, who is also to join them on their mission to the flat planet. As the three companions get to know one another, Jago arrives and is attacked by the raven. Somehow the raven has managed to burn its way out of the cage. Jago has a heart attack and dies. The three companions move him into a medical tube for treatment when they return home.

Marco decides they should go on with the mission before anyone has a chance to voice their own opinion, so he pilots the ship into space. Kin and Silver argue, but there is nothing they can do. On the flight to the flat planet, Silver reads Kin's book about the Great Spindle Kings as Kin and Marco get to know one another and Silver. When they arrive at the flat planet, they move around it to see how it works, coming to the realization that it must take many machines to keep the planet working. When they go through a hole in the planet's atmosphere, they are hit by a ship attempting to sail over the waterfall at the edge of the planet. This collision causes a great amount of damage to the ship, leaving it unable to fly back home.



Marco puts the ship into autopilot and directs everyone to put on their space suits. Silver insists on taking the dumbwaiter with them in order to make herself food. If Silver does not eat a proper diet, she becomes insane with hunger. They fly down to the planet surface using propulsion belts on the space suits. Once there, they camp on a small island. The next morning, a ship comes toward them but is caught in the current of the waterfall. Kin saves them and the ship's captain agrees to take them to civilization. On the way, they are attacked by fire breathing dragons but manage to escape. Once among civilized people, they begin to learn about these people and discover a great number of similarities between their history and the history of the original Earth.

Silver, Marco, and Kin decide to use their suits to travel to the heart of the planet where they hope they will find the Builders. On the way, Kin is arrested by a group of religious people who believe her to be a water spirit. During her captivity, Kin meets a flying demon whom she later realizes is a robot who flies using a technology even the Company had trouble reproducing. Later, Kin and her companions meet a man with a flying carpet. This man takes them captive for crimes he believes Jago committed against him. Kin is able to use a flying statue and a magic sword to escape with her companions.

Finally Kin and her companions reach the hub of the flat planet. They are transported inside where Kin makes her way to the main control room. There are no longer any humans living inside the control rooms, but Kin learns the builders bring a single human there every few years to work as a Disc Master to help them run the planet. However, the planet has gotten so old that the builders now need help replacing the machinery. Kin agrees to build them a new planet if they will help her and her friends return to their home planet. They agree, and Kin and her companions fly away from the flat planet.



Pages 1-27

Pages 1-27 Summary

Kin Arad lives in a world where death can be put off for thousands of years thanks to genetic surgeries and treatments offered by the group referred to only as the Company. Kin is a writer who wrote a book about the history of the strata machine and the people believed to have created it. Kin also works for the Company, overseeing the creation of new planets.

Kin Arad is in her office talking with a couple of employees who thought it would be funny to leave their mark on the new planet. Kin warns them to be more cautious about their rebellions or face losing their jobs and their livelihood. Afterward, a man appears in Kin's office. This man has the ability to appear and disappear at will. The man, Jago Jalo, tells Kin he has discovered a planet that could only have been created by the Spindle Kings, the civilization credited with creating the strata machine humans use to create new planets. Jago knows that Kin is an expert on the Spindle Kings based on a book she wrote on the subject. Jago wants Kin to come see this flat planet he discovered, the same place where he got the technology that allows him to disappear and reappear at will. Over lunch, Jago shows Kin a money purse that appears to create money somehow. Kin takes one of the bills to have it tested and find out if Jago is trustworthy before agreeing to investigate his flat planet.

The creation of the new planet is complete. Kin welcomes the new colonists and wishes them luck before leaving the planet surface. On the line, Kin runs into Joel, one of her many ex-husbands. Joel has decided to be a watcher, someone who watches over the new colonists and their developing civilization. It is a job that requires the watcher to sleep for several generations and is not considered an ideal job. Joel has chosen this job because the money Kin gave the Company from Jago has proven to be a good forgery. If these Day bills can be forged, it could mean the end of immortality for many older Company employees. The people would remain young looking but would eventually become senile. It is a dark fate that worries many. Kin says her goodbyes to Joel and goes to her own ship, where she discovers Jago has arranged for the ship to take her to Kung, where she will meet up with a ship that will take her to the flat planet. Kin hesitates at first, unsure she wants to see this flat planet without sharing what she knows with the Company, but curiosity wins out and Kin decides to go to Kung.

Pages 1-27 Analysis

In these first pages the reader is introduced to Kin Arad. Kin lives in a world where growing old no longer happens. Kin has undergone treatments that allow her to continue to live as a young woman even though she is thousands of years old. The Company that Kin works for, the same Company that creates planets and controls currency, pays its employees in days rather than money. These day bills allow a person



to have treatments offered by the Company that allows a person to live a certain number more days than nature might allow. Kin has had these treatments and has collected many more day bills that she will use later when her treatments begin to wear out. Kin is a strong, independent woman who runs whole crews of people as they create planets. Not only this, but Kin has written a book that has brought her fame and makes her something of an expert on strata machines and the Spindle Kings.

The strata machine is a machine that creates worlds. These machines are thought to be the product of a group of telepathic people known as the Great Spindle Kings. These people were loners who preferred not to spend time with their own kind because their telepathic abilities caused them to be able to hear the thoughts of another nearby. The Spindle Kings would fly around in space and find planets they could change, adjusting the atmosphere and the vegetation, sometimes saving whole planets of creatures. Kin has written a book about these people and their creation which allowed for the survival of the human race.

Kin is approached by a man who knows about her knowledge of the Spindle Kings and wants her help with a planet he found full of advanced technology that he believes was created by the Spindle Kings. This is the main conflict of the plot, taking Kin to this strange world and allowing her to react to its existence and survive its residents.



Pages 27-51

Pages 27-51 Summary

Kin Arad arrives at Kung, but has to wait in a lounge for the shuttle to the planet surface. While waiting, Kin is recognized by the bartender who requests that Kin give him a voice imprint on his tape translation of *Continuous Creation*, the book Kin wrote. Kin attempts to move away and enjoy a silent drink, but she is joined by a Kung named Marco Farfarer. Marco has also been approached by Jago Jalo and is on Kung from his home on Earth to join the expedition. As Kin and Marco get to know one another, they are given a raven in a cage by the bartender who says that someone left it there as a gift for Jago. Finally the shuttle arrives. Marco and Kin take the shuttle to the planet surface and then a boat to the location of the ship Jago has arranged for their expedition. Once on board the odd-shaped ship, they meet the third person approached by Jago, a female Shand with a six syllable name, but who goes by the nickname "Silver." Silver is a linguist who has agreed to go on this expedition because of the historical ramifications of the flat planet's existence. Marco is not thrilled to meet Silver because of her frightening appearance, but Kin is immediately drawn by Silver's pleasant demeanor.

Jago joins them on the ship and is shocked to discover Silver and Marco are not human. Before Jago can force them from the ship, he is attacked by the raven who somehow burned its way out of the cage. Jago has a fatal heart attack and dies. Due to the advances in medicine, Kin and the others are able to place Jago in a medical sphere where he will be kept viable until they can return him to an advanced planet and begin revitalization treatments. As Kin and Silver are dealing with Jago, Marco uses film Jago had on him to pilot the ship toward the flat planet. Kin is upset because she had decided to back out of the expedition but now realizes she has no choice but to continue. The trip is long and gives everyone time to think about what has happened and what might happen. Kin thinks about the differences in the species on the ship and attempts to keep past biases out of her thinking. Kin also explores the weapons hold, shocked at the variety and overwhelming number of weapons on board ship. Silver reads Kin's book and learns the theories on how the Spindle Kings and the Wheelers before them supposedly created the strata machine to play with planets in the universe as they flew through space to avoid the overcrowding and overwhelming number of thinking creatures on their home planet. Marco pilots the ship, carefully following Jago's film until the ship drops into real space among stars that look strangely familiar but are pointed in the wrong direction. It appears they have arrived at their destination.

Pages 27-51 Analysis

The other two main characters are introduced in these pages. Marco is a Kung, a member of an alien species who often fight before speaking, but who was born and raised on Earth. Marco's parents were missionaries on Earth. Before Marco's birth, his mother underwent surgery to change her fetus into a warrior as was tradition on Kung.



However, Marco's parents could not return to Kung before his birth; therefore, Marco is something of an oddity. Marco's parents gave Marco to adoptive parents and he was raised in Hawaii. Marco likes to think his childhood makes him an honorary human and that he is nothing like his Kung counterparts despite his thin appearance and two extra arms. However, when Marco sees Silver for the first time, his reaction is definitely Kung as he lowers himself into a defensive position and begins to growl at her. This suggests to the reader that Marco is more Kung than he believes.

Silver is a highly-educated, quiet female who only appears ferocious and huge. Silver appears threatening to Marco, but Kin quickly establishes that she is a kind person who is only interested in the historic significance of a flat planet. The reader sees in Silver an intelligent, quiet person, almost like a college professor, leaving the reader curious how this expedition will affect Silver. Jago also makes another appearance in these pages. Jago is shocked to find that Marco and Silver are aliens and wants them to leave his ship. This shows the reader how out of touch Jago is and underlines Kin's impressions of him. Jago is then attacked by a raven that was intended as a gift, causing the reader to wonder where the raven came from and how it was able to get out of its cage so easily. The reader suspects this will not be the last time the raven will be heard from and wonders what impact it will have on the other characters in the story.



Pages 51-76

Pages 51-76 Summary

Marco pilots the ship around the flat planet so they can examine it more closely. Kin begins wondering aloud how the planet works, especially questioning the waterfall that rushes off the edge of the planet. Kin theorizes that there is a large machine at work on the planet that controls the movement of the water as well as returning the water to the sea in some way. They see a hole in the planet's atmosphere and Marco pilots the ship through. As they pass over the waterfall, they feel an impact. Kin goes outside and finds the remnants of a ship and cloth with human tissue on it. It appears that a ship attempted to sail over the waterfall at the same time their ship entered the atmosphere and hit them. This makes Kin wonder why a person would want to sail over the edge and she begins to theorize that the humans who inhabit this planet suspect it is flat. The damage to the ship is catastrophic, leaving it unable to make the return trip to their home galaxy. Marco decides they should abandon ship. Kin, Silver, and Marco put on space suits, using another suit to transport the dumbwaiter. The dumbwaiter can manufacture almost anything and Silver insists on taking it to provide her with Shand proteins, a food she must have that cannot be found anywhere but her home planet. If Silver is forced to go without her food, she will become insane and kill anyone around her.

They land on a small island and spend the night. The following morning, Kin sees a small ship coming toward them. However, the ship is caught in the current of the waterfall and begins heading toward the edge of the planet. Kin uses her space suit's propulsion belt to fly over the boat and tie a line around it that Silver is able to use to pull the boat to shore. Once there, the occupants of the boat speak to Silver and tell her a few things about their civilization, including their belief in a Christian God. They also discover that the history of this flat planet is remarkably similar to the history of original Earth, with a few modifications. The sailors also agree to take the three explorers to their home land. On the trip, Marco shows the men how the dumbwaiter works, programming it to make beer. Also on the trip, the group is attacked by three fire breathing dragons. Silver, Marco, and Kin manage to kill them all, bringing one on board the boat to investigate. Kin looks closely at the dragon and discovers that it essentially a robot that utilizes very advanced technology.

Pages 51-76 Analysis

The expedition has arrived at the flat planet and are amazed to see that Jago's claims are true. Kin, the engineer, immediately begins attempting to figure out how this planet is possible. Before they can land, however, they are hit by a boat attempting to sail the waterfall at the planet's edge. This accident disables the ship and leaves the three explorers without a way to return home. The accident represents the main conflict of the story, as the main characters will now spend the rest of the book attempting to find a



way off the planet. Also of note here is Silver's insistence on bringing along the dumbwaiter. This creates food for the Shand, food she cannot find anywhere else but her home planet. The fear is that Silver will go insane if she does not have food and will kill those around her. This suggests that there will be a point when Silver will go hungry, leaving the reader concerned not only for Silver, but her companions as well. Before they can discuss their options, however, they come face to face with a group of the planet's occupants.

Silver is a linguist, so she is able to speak to these people and learn about them. They appear to be the Earth's equivalent of Viking warriors. They even appear to believe in a Christian religion and to have a man among them with a name similar to a famous Earth Viking. These comparisons do not go unnoticed by Kin, who was born and raised on the original Earth. These people agree to take the explorers across the ocean to their home land. On the way, they are attacked by dragons. Again Kin takes a look at these creatures and quickly realizes that they are robots who utilize advanced technology, convincing her that the Builders created these dragons for some unknown reason. The reader suspects the reason for these creatures will be revealed as the plot continues. Finally, when the explorers escaped their ship, the raven came along. This leaves the reader convinced the raven will serve some purpose as the plot continues to develop, but the reader does not know what that purpose is at this point.



Pages 76-105

Pages 76-105 Summary

The boat arrives at the sailors' home. The explorers are greeted by the captain's father who tells Silver more about their traditions and beliefs. Everyone is taken to a great hall where they bed down for the night. Kin has trouble sleeping, so she goes outside to sit with Silver. Kin and Silver talk about the civilization, agreeing that they should give them timber for their help. They also discuss Marco's plan to make their way to the center of the flat planet where they will most likely find the control room for the planet, the Builders, and possibly a way home. They also discuss the way the planet works, the machinery that most likely runs it, and the fact that the sailors told Silver that sometimes the stars flicker out. They believe the planet's machinery is getting old and beginning to fail. As they talk, a brawl breaks out in the great hall. Kin goes inside to discover that Marco has allowed the sailors to use the dumbwaiter to make beer and that they have gotten terribly drunk, causing the fight. Kin helps break up the fight and uses a healing potion from the dumbwaiter to heal some of the injured. The next morning they give the people timber and continue on their way.

As they fly over the ocean using their space suit's flight belts, they see a strange animal in the water that is dead and strange water flow suggesting again that the machine running the planet is beginning to fail. Silver and Kin discuss Marco, and Silver suggests that Marco is not as human as he likes to think he is. Silver and Kin land on an island and Kin begins to bathe. Unfortunately, the island is a large turtle that wakes as Kin lies vulnerable in the water. Marco and Silver save her and help her put her suit back on. Finally they find a piece of land where it appears safe to land. Again Kin sets about to bathe, luxuriating in the cool water. As she swims, Kin is set upon by a group of men. They take her into custody and ride her into town on a horse. In town, a discussion takes place. Silver tells Kin in her ear piece that the people are religious people who believe Kin to be a water spirit. Kin is to be executed, but one of the priests pleads for her life. Instead, Kin is placed in a cell.

Pages 76-105 Analysis

A goal has been decided upon. The explorers have decided to make their way to the center of the flat planet with the hopes they will find the control room and the Builders hidden here. They want to find the Builders for two reasons, one to discover how and why the flat planet was made, and second, to find a means of transportation home. They stay with the sailors for that night. Marco makes a mistake by allowing the sailors to use the dumbwaiter to make beer. The primitive men become very drunk and fall into a brawl that results in several deaths and injuries. Kin does what she can to help those who have lost limbs, but she can do nothing for those who have lost their lives. Kin's actions show the reader that she has a great deal of sympathy while at the same time it makes Marco appear soft and immature.



The explorers begins their trek to the center of the planet, using their space suit's belts to fly. Kin makes a mistake and attempts to bathe off the side of a turtle, nearly resulting in her death. Later she makes a similar mistake and is arrested by a group of religious people from a nearby town after refusing to allow Marco to investigate the area for security. Marco, in this instance, has become the more mature, more in charge individual, leaving Kin vulnerable to attack. Kin is jailed, leaving the reader anxious to see how Marco and Silver might rescue her.



Pages 105-123

Pages 105-123 Summary

In the cell beside Kin, the religious people place a winged demon. This demon reads minds and speaks through telepathy. The demon knows who Kin is. The demon tells Kin it was knocked out of the sky when a spaceship crashed on it. Kin knows this must be their ship, which they witnessed falling out of autopilot to crash many miles away. Kin insists that Marco save the demon when he comes to save her. Marco is not so trusting, however, and insists on making the demon a prisoner until they can decide what to do with it. As Marco rescues them, he kills several of the guards, using what Kin and Silver decide is excessive force. After their rescue, Kin observes the demon and speaks to Silver about it, finally deciding it is not an organic creature, but a robot similar to the dragons. This demon appears fuzzy about the edges, suggesting that the Builders of this planet have discovered how to use a form of teleportation that even the Company has not yet perfected. Marco dislikes the demon and threatens to kill it, but Kin and Silver let it go after learning all they believe they can from it.

Silver notices a small raven has been following them for many miles, keeping up with them despite their speed. Kin wonders if it is the same raven from the ship and why it might be following them. Silver and Kin come to the conclusion that it is some sort of spy. It is beginning to look as though the Company is behind this strange planet. Kin denies this, however, because the temporary nature of the planet goes against the Company's main object, to preserve the human species at all cost. They continue their journey, coming across a strange religious temple. Inside, Marco manages to trick the raven and catch it momentarily, proving that it is following them. Later, they come across the wreckage of their ship and are forced to fly through the smoke. When they come to the center of the wreck, they discover the ship has opened a hole in the ground that reveals an underground tunnel of sorts. They investigate and discover that the tunnel is part of the machinery of the planet. There is a water pipe, now destroyed, that must fill a nearby lake or pond. Kin suspects it will soon become dry. At the other side of the hole, there is a carving in the mountain, similar to Mount Rushmore. One of the faces in the mountain turned and spit lightning at the dumbwaiter, completely destroying it.

Pages 105-123 Analysis

Kin is rescued, but Marco uses so much force that it appears he is revealing more of his Kung warrior heritage than his calm, human façade. They take the demon with them and hold it captive because Marco is afraid of what it might do. However, Kin and Silver examine it carefully and come to realize it is only a machine and it is being transmitted, which explains how it can fly with such a large body and small wings. Kin believes it is part of some sort of defense mechanism created by the Builders, making her even more curious about the origins of this strange, flat planet. To add to Kin's beliefs about the nature of the planet, they come across the wreckage of their ship and discover it has

caused a hole in the ground that reveals some of the workings of the planet, including a water system that fills the lakes and oceans.

Kin is an engineer and she is quickly putting together a group of theories on how the flat planet works. It seems the planet relies heavily on machinery. This implies that some advanced group has created this planet. Only the Company could be capable of such a thing. However, Kin is insistent that the Company is not behind this planet because it is clearly a temporary solution, therefore going against the directive of the company to protect and perpetuate the human race at all costs. This planet will eventually stop working and all its people will die. However, there seems to be no other explanation, leaving Kin searching for some other truth, showing the reader her depth of loyalty and intelligence. The dumbwaiter has been destroyed, resolving an idea foreshadowed when the reader learned it was the only thing standing between Silver and homicidal rage. Now the reader feels a sense of urgency as the clock begins counting down on Silver's sanity and the possible deaths of Kin and Marco.



Pages 123-152

Pages 123-152 Summary

Kin and her companions head out again, mulling on what has happened and what they have learned. Kin insists that they stay calm until they reach the hub, hoping there they will find the means necessary to help Silver. At the same time, Kin wrestles with the idea that the Company could possibly be behind this planet's existence. They arrive in a desert where they meet a man riding a flying carpet. The man wants to trade for their flying belts. Kin and her companions agree to negotiate and it is agreed they will go to the man's home. They ride on the carpet and discover it has some sort of protective shield around it to keep its occupants from falling off. Once at the man's home, they are shown a marble table that can reproduce almost anything a person desires. However, it cannot reproduce Shand proteins, so both Kin and Marco refuse to take food from it. The man shows them a lamp and rubs it to reveal the djinnee inside. This man acts as negotiator; however, Kin and her companions soon learn that the man does not want to negotiate but wants revenge for some things Jago stole from him. Marco and Silver are imprisoned in a zoo while Kin is taken to another part of the home.

Kin manages to escape her captors and hides in some sort of storage room. Here Kin grabs a sword and sits on a horse statue that comes to life and flies her to the zoo. Kin rescues Marco and Silver, setting them free, before returning to the room where the negotiations took place to take her own revenge. Kin has with her the sword she took from the storage room. This sword proves to be a magic sword that battles almost on its own. Kin is badly injured in the fight and tells the djinnee to get her a doctor. After a slight miscommunication, the djinnee gets a doctor the djinnee once was married to many years before. Marco and Silver join Kin and they steal the magic carpet, forcing the djinnee to make it work for them. They fly for a short time and come to a Dome that the djinnee tells them is forbidden for anyone to come near. This is the hub for which they have been searching. Before they can find a way to enter the Dome, Silver loses her fight against insanity and begins attacking Marco. Marco attempts to kill her but misses. Before Marco can make another attempt, the magic carpet disappears. A moment later, Kin and her flying statue also disappear.

Pages 123-152 Analysis

The explorers begin to despair, unsure what their next move should be. It is only a matter of time before Silver will become insane with hunger and place everyone's lives in danger. At the same time Marco vows to kill Silver, he also vows to go without food until Silver can eat again. This shows the more human side of Marco to the reader, suggesting he is not all Kung instinct. At the same time, Kin is struggling with her beliefs in the Company and the possibility that they are behind this planet. If this is true, everything Kin has believed in for thousands of years may be based on deception. This is difficult for Kin to accept, showing once again Kin's depth of loyalty.



The explorers come across a man who resembles Earth's Ali Baba. This man has a flying carpet and wants to take possession of the explorers flying belts. However, it turns out this man is not only a collector, but a man looking for revenge because Jago stole some of his possessions. This causes the man to imprison the explorers. Kin shows her bravery as she helps break them out of prison. Kin then goes a step further and fights the man, killing him but leaving herself badly injured. They move on, finally reaching their target, the hub of the planet. However, as foreshadowed in earlier pages, Silver goes crazy with hunger. Marco attempts to kill her, but Silver proves to be too much for the warrior. Before anything else can happen, they all disappear. Now the reader is left wondering where they have gone, why they have gone, and what will happen to poor Silver.



Pages 152-183

Pages 152-183 Summary

Kin wakes to find herself in a strange room. Kin asks to be set free and is transported to a corridor. Kin damages a wall circuit and waits for a repair robot to come. Kin then damages the repair robot and waits for a larger robot to come. Eventually the large, tank-like machine arrives with Marco riding on its top. They discuss their situation and look for Silver. Silver wakes and begins attacking Marco. Kin stops Marco from killing Silver and knocks them both unconscious. Kin is then attacked by a robot made to look like death. Kin defeats it too. Marco and Silver disappear and then Kin again is transported into a strange room. This time Kin is in what looks like a control room. In the main chair is the body of a dead human. The computer asks for Kin's help. At the same time, Marco wakes to the sound of Kin's voice. Kin instructs Marco to cut a piece of Silver's arm to help solve her insanity problem and to use the tissue to replicate the proteins. This appears to work. Kin then instructs Marco and Silver to follow a robot through the winding corridors.

Kin has agreed to put a helmet on that the computer has asked her to wear in exchange for the computer creating a ship for her and her friends to leave the planet. The computer explains to her how the planet was created and why it needs a human to help run the planet. The Builders designed the planet in such a way that human input would be necessary; therefore, they often bring humans in and entice them into sitting in the command chair. The helmet helps make these people capable of complex thought, aiding in their work. Kin is now the Disc Master and can do anything she likes to the planet. Kin directs Marco and Silver on a two day walk to the master control room where they find a large scale map of the planet and its machinery. There is also a ship. Kin directs Silver and Marco onto the ship where she begins to explain the purpose of the planet as they are transported out of the hub and into the atmosphere by a very large bird. The bird takes them to the opening in the atmosphere and flings them into outer space. The computer tells Kin that the flat planet was created because creation is in everyone's nature. Now the planet is dying and the computer wants Kin to help. Kin agrees to come back and build a new planet for the population of the Disc. It is for this reason that the computer has helped Kin and her friends leave.

Pages 152-183 Analysis

Kin and her friends find themselves inside the hub that controls the planet, the place they have sought since landing on the planet. Kin is taken to the control room where she agrees to build a new planet for the people of this world in exchange for the computer providing a ship to take herself and her friends home. The computer agrees. Kin also wants to know why the planet was created. The computer tells her it was created because it is human nature to create. This suggests to the reader that the planet on which Kin and her friends have been for the majority of the novel is the



reader's Earth and that it was created simply to exist. This seems to be the answer everyone seeks about the meaning of life and the universe.

Silver is rescued when Kin arranges to make Shand protein for her. At the same time, Marco is relieved of his need to kill her, revealing to the reader a brief moment of relief on Marco's part, once again revealing his more human side. Silver and Marco follow along as Kin takes them to the ship and flies them home. They are Kin's sounding board and listen as she explains the knowledge she has gained that seems to have changed her perspective on life and her personality in a small way. Kin has had an epiphany that many people seek throughout their lives and is now at peace with who she is and the meaning of her own life. It is almost a religious experience for Kin, but Silver and Marco are left somewhat confused. However, the main themes of the novel are perpetuated here, including the desire to preserve humankind and to play God. Kin has become something of a representative of God, almost as though she has had a religious experience, and the ending suggests she will carry on in this role for as long as she lives.



Characters

Kin Arad

Kin Arad is an independent woman who is thousands of years old, surviving thanks to surgeries and day credits offered to her through the Company. Kin has worked her way up the ranks of the planet builders employed by the Company and has become the leader of several planet creations, overseeing the workers who use a strata machine to create new worlds for humans to populate as they see fit. It is Kin's job to be sure no one leaves any marks on the planet that alerts future generations to the fact that the planet is manmade and not a natural world.

Kin Arad was born and raised on the original Earth and can remember a time before the strata machine in which robots far outnumbered humans. It was feared that humans would soon become extinct; therefore, the strata machine was found and used to create new earths where humans could feel free to reproduce at any rate they saw fit. Kin has since lived a long life in which she has been married multiple times and created many planets. Kin, however, does not have children because it is no longer necessary for her to reproduce because she can live as long as she desires.

Kin is a history buff and she has written a book about creation of planets that focuses on the Spindle Kings, the accepted source of the strata machine. In order to write this book, Kin had to make her own paper because paper and books no longer existed in that time. Kin's book was widely popular and created a new boom of books. This book also has led to Jago Jalo seeking out Kin to tell her of the flat earth he discovered. Kin rushes to see this flat world in hopes of discovering proof of the Spindle Kings but instead discovers truths she never really thought possible.

Jago Jalo

Jago Jalo is a pilot from the Terminus project. The Terminus project was a mission to send several space probes out into space with pilots who knew they would not be returning to Earth. One of these probes was discovered many years later and the pilot requested that The Company keep the project funded in hopes that someday the two other pilots would be found alive somewhere. Jago Jalo found himself transported to the deepest, darkest parts of the universe where he stumbled onto a flat Earth. Jago crash landed on this flat Earth and began to explore.

Jago found many civilized cultures on this flat Earth, including a collector of rare and unusual artifacts. Jago stole from this collector several items, including a money purse that was never empty. Jago then went to the hub of this planet and tricked the computers into allowing him to take one of their ships. Jago intended to exploit this flat planet by taking its technology and claiming it to be his own. To do this, Jago tells three creatures about his discovery, including Kin Arad, and attempts to return to the planet.



However, Jago suffers a fatal coronary, leaving him unable to participate in the return mission.

Silver

Silver is a Shand, a creature that is quite large and resembles something like a rhino or a triceratops, complete with tusks. Silver is female and is well educated and trained as a linguist; therefore, she knows many languages. Silver is very gentle despite her fearsome appearance. However, Shand are capable of viciousness, especially when they are forced to go without Shand protein for long periods of time. Due to this fact, Silver is frightened of traveling on the flat planet without dragging a dumbwaiter along with her to create the proteins she must have.

Silver and Kin become friends almost immediately. Silver is gentle and kind, giving Kin someone she can trust in a bad situation as well as a friend in whom Kin can confide. When the dumbwaiter becomes damaged beyond repair, Kin is unhappy with the situation that could cause the untimely death of her good friend. When the time comes, despite a promise to kill Silver, Kin resists and is happy when she is able to supply her good friend with Shand protein to stave off the madness that begins to overtake her.

Marco Farfarer

Marco Farfarer is a Kung who was born and raised on Earth. Marco is a tall, thin creature with four arms. Marco was born to be a warrior, but because his parents were not on his home planet, he was shunned and sent to live with an adoptive family in Hawaii. As a result, Marco thinks of himself as an earthling and not a Kung. However, as the mission begins and Marco finds himself reacting to stressful situations with the aggression of a Kung, he is forced to admit that he is more Kung than Earthling.

Marco is a pilot and flies the strange donut-shaped ship Jago has provided to go to the flat planet. Marco enters the planet's atmosphere and the space ship is promptly hit by a boat attempting to sail over the waterfall that falls off the edge of the planet. The space ship is badly damaged and Marco is forced to lead his two companions on a trek across this strange planet to the hub of the planet where they suspect the Builders reside. Marco is hot headed and often causes as much trouble as he solves, but he manages to keep Silver and Kin safe until they find the means to get off the strange, flat planet.

The Raven

While waiting to be transported to the surface of Kung, Kin is given a raven in a cage to give to Jago Jalo. The raven seems harmless at first; however, when Kin and her companions are on the ship Jago has arranged, the raven somehow burns its way out of the cage and attacks Jago. This attack causes Jago to have a fatal heart attack. Later, the raven transports itself down to the flat planet and follows Kin and her companions as they make their way to the hub of the planet. This raven is clearly some



sort of robot sent to spy on Kin and her companions, but they are never completely sure where the raven has come from or to whom it is to report.

The Company

The Company is the organization that owns and operates the strata machines. The Company has one directive and that is to preserve the human race at all costs. The Company has grown to such a scale that it controls almost everything about human life, including how long it will last. The Company pays its employees in days, offering the employees extra time to live. The Company also offers the procedures in which a person is given this longer time to live. The Company is almost like God, dictating how long a person might live. Kin is very loyal to the Company, defending it throughout the novel even when it appears that the Company is responsible for the flat planet they have come to explore.

The Builders and The Computers

Upon discovering the flat planet, Kin and her companions are aware that someone or something had to have created the planet. The planet is run by machines, with machines that control everything from the movement of the planets, the water flow in the oceans, and the rise and setting of the sun. However, these machines are thousands of years old and are beginning to break down. Kin and her companions search for the Builders who created the planet in the hopes they have a ship they can use to return to their own planets. However, when they reach the hub they discover that the Builders are no longer on the planet and most likely never resided there.

Kin discovers in the hub that computers run the entire planet with the help of robots. However, in order to do this, the computers need a Master, someone who can help them make decisions and offer a moral point of view. The computers want Kin to be their Master, asking her to wear a helmet especially designed to give a human the skills and intelligence needed to guide these computers. At first Kin refuses, but eventually she dons the helmet and learns about the creation of the flat world. In exchange for building herself and her friends a ship to leave the flat planet, Kin agrees to build a new planet to replace the dying Disc.

The Disc Master

The Disc Master is a person who wears a special helmet and guides the computers in the day-to-day business of running the flat planet. There have been many Masters over the years, normally people who have wandered too close to the hub and been transported inside by the computers. These people will usually run the planet until their deaths, leaving the computer in need of a new human to help them. When Kin and her companions are transported into the hub, Kin is chosen as the new Disc Master. Kin refuses, however, but promises to build a new planet for the people on the dying Disc.



The Great Spindle Kings and The Wheelers

The Great Spindle Kings are believed to be a civilization of people who are telepathic. These people needed a great deal of space so they were not overwhelmed with the number of thoughts and emotions they could read in the minds of other people on their planet. As a result, they build great, large ships and roam space. As a way of passing the time, these creatures create new planets and manipulate the people living on them, using the strata machine that would later be discovered by humans on Earth. It is believed that eventually this race of people died out because they became overwhelmed with each other's thoughts and could not stand to continue living in such a way. The Wheelers are believed to be a similar race of people to the Spindle Kings who existed before the Spindle Kings.

Winged Demon

Kin Arad is bathing in a river when a group of religious people come across her and believe she is some sort of water spirit. Kin is arrested and taken to a nearby town where she is caged while the people decide what to do about her. A winged demon is held in the cell next to Kin. The demon can read minds and knows who Kin is. When Kin's companions come to rescue Kin, she requests that they also save the winged demon. The demon is not set free immediately, however, but kept tied up as Kin and her friends try to decide what to do about it. Kin thinks there is something odd about the demon because it can fly but the body appears too heavy for flight. Then Kin notices that the demon is fuzzy around the edges. Finally Kin realizes the demon is a creature created by the Disc Builders to frighten the people and keep them from realizing their planet is a machine.



Objects/Places

The Dumbwaiter

Kin Arad and her companions take the dumbwaiter, a machine that makes food, drinks, and materials from molecules it gathers from water and other matter, with them when they crash land on the Disc. The dumbwaiter is the only source of food for Silver, who could potentially become murderous if she goes without Shand protein. The dumbwaiter is destroyed, adding urgency to Kin and her companions' mission.

The Never Empty Money Purse

Jago Jalo brings a purse from the Disc that manufactures money, causing the money purse to always have money inside of it.

Flying Horse Statue

Kin finds a horse statue that comes to life when she sits on it and takes her out of the room where she has gone to hide from her Arab captors.

Magic Sword

Kin finds a sword that magically fights on its own, swinging out and attacking the owner's foes without much input from the owner.

Flying Carpet

In a desert, Kin, Marco, and Silver come across a man who flies on a flying carpet. This man imprisons Marco and Silver out of revenge for Jago Jalo stealing from him.

Djinnee Lamp

Kin and her companions meet a djinnee named Azrifel while being held captive by a group of Arabs. Kin takes the djinnee's lamp and forces Azrifel to help her and her friends escape.

Continuous Creation

Continuous Creation is a book Kin Arad wrote about the strata machines and the Spindle Kings. When Kin wrote this book, she had to make her own paper and publish it



herself. The book became famous and began a return to the old fashioned way of publishing books.

Cage

Kin is held in a cage after being taken captive by a group of religious people while bathing in the river. These religious people believe Kin is some sort of water spirit and plan to execute her.

Space Suits

When Kin and her companions crash on the Disc, they wear space suits that include a propulsion belt system that they use to fly across the continents on the Disc to find the location of the Builders.

Strata Machines

Strata machines are machines discovered in a time when humans were dying out. These machines can create whole planets, allowing the human race to be able to start again on multiple planets, ensuring the race's survival.

The Dome

The Dome is a place in the center of the Disc where Kin and her companions believe the Builders have their headquarters. When they reach this Dome, Kin and her companions are transported into its vast labyrinth. Here, Kin learns the truth about the Disc.

The Disc

The Disc is a flat Earth that was created by an unknown civilization as an experiment in creation. Kin Arad and her companions are led here by Jago Jalo, an explorer who stole unique creations from this world with the intention of making himself rich.

Themes

Preserving the Human Race

When Kin Arad was a young girl, the population of Earth was quickly becoming unbalanced, with robots representing the majority rather than the minority. Many were frightened that humans would cease to exist; therefore, when the strata machine was discovered, many saw it as a way to preserve the human race. This machine could create planets like Earth where colonies of people could go and start new. These planets could be created with all the natural resources required to sustain human life as well as suns and stars to fill the new planets skies. This was an exciting discovery that quickly turned into a lucrative business for The Company.

Kin came to work for The Company as a planet builder. Kin would help create the mountains and valleys, as well as the wildlife that would be the basis of the new planet. Kin enjoyed her work and quickly moved up the ranks, soon becoming a project manager. Kin now oversees the designers and the workers who create these planets, watching carefully for any mistakes, or intentional oddities that might clue the new settlers into the fact that this planet is manmade, not natural. Kin is also a great fan of history, having written a book about creationism in her time, as well as a strong supporter of The Company.

The Company has only one directive, to preserve all human life. As part of the Company, Kin strongly believes that all the created planets should appear to be natural; therefore, she is shocked when she learns of a planet that is flat. Kin travels to this planet, in part to discover its origins, and in part to prove that this flat planet was not created by The Company. Kin believes this planet goes against The Company's directive and could not have been formed by them. In the end, however, Kin learns that the Disc has the same purpose and directive as The Company; they simply went about it in a different way.

Discrimination between Alien Species

When human beings began traveling in space, they quickly found other planets whose occupants were unfamiliar and different from humans. Some of these occupants have human features, but different cultures and traditions, while others look nothing like humans but more closely resemble animals. The differences in culture, appearance, and traditions of these alien species caused a great deal of fear and misunderstandings. As a result, discrimination began to appear.

Kin finds herself traveling with two aliens, one a man raised on Earth but of a planet where the people fight before all else, and two, a woman who is a creature that closely resembles a hippo or triceratops. This woman, a Shand, is of a culture who needs to eat Shand protein daily or the Shand could become violent, attacking, killing, and eating



anyone in her company. This fear drives the Shand to insist that the dumbwaiter, a machine that can create Shand protein from molecules it extracts from multiple sources, travel to the planet with them. Kin likes her companions well enough, but Kin is also old enough to remember the prejudices of early encounters with these creatures and finds herself often thinking these discriminatory thoughts when she first meets her companions. Kin constantly reminds herself not to think in such a way in order to prevent discord on the expedition.

At the same time, Kin and her companions find themselves on the Disc, a flat world that is inhabited by humans who seem to be living a life parallel to the one that exists on Earth. These people are of a time early in Earth's creation, but many events that have taken place on Earth, such as the rise of Reme, have also happened on this planet, only with a few variations, such as the name of Reme being changed to Rome. As a result of this primitive group of people, Kin and her companions cannot help reacting with some discrimination, unable to look down upon these people who have not developed as fully as themselves.

Playing God

The Company from the original Earth makes their money by creating new Earths for human being to populate. This began as an attempt to give humans the opportunity to reproduce in such a way as to guarantee the perpetuation of the species. However, as with any large company's success, The Company began expanding and moving into other aspects of human life. This includes discovering the ability to extend human life.

The Company controls commerce in this new modern world, including printing and controlling the money system. The Company has created a monetary system in which people earn days rather than dollars. These translate into extra days a person can live. In the world in which this novel takes place, life is more important than anything else and it is for what everyone works. The Company, with its technology, can offer extended life to its people, including repairing heart disease and giving people operations in which their lives are extended by thousands of years. In this way, The Company has become God on Earth, making playing God a theme of this novel.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is third person. The novel is told through the eyes of the main character, Kin Arad. The author remains with Kin Arad throughout the novel, never moving from her point of view even when the narration moves from Kin's viewpoint. This causes some confusion for the reader as the action often takes place outside of the narration, leaving the reader confused and catching up in a way that sometimes interrupts the flow of the plot.

The point of view of this novel keeps the main character as the focal point of the novel. The entire novel follows Kin Arad, the narrator, and her adventures as she attempts to find the builders of a flat world called the Disc. Only once does the narrator change from Kin, and this is during a point in the plot where Kin is in an unknown place; therefore, the narration moves to her two companions on the mission. Until this point, the narration remains with Kin even when she is outside of the plot, such as times when actions take place outside of Kin's knowledge and all she can do is react to the aftermath. This is confusing to the reader, making this choice of narration inconsistent and an interruption to the smooth flow of the plot.

Setting

The novel begins on a new planet that Kin Arad and her team from The Company have just completed creating. The planet is much like Earth, but there are a few inconsistencies in its creation that cause Kin to have to speak to a few of the workmen in order to repair the situation. While on this planet, Kin meets a man who claims to have found a flat Earth that was more than likely constructed by the Great Spindle Kings, a civilization given credit for the strata machines that are used to create new planets. Kin rushes off to see this flat world with two other characters who have also been informed of this flat world by the same character who informed Kin. This Disc where Kin and her companions soon find themselves shipwrecked is also like Earth, including the people and the lives they are living, except for the few obvious differences caused by the flat nature of the world.

The setting of this novel follows closely with the plot. The first world on which Kin is seen is much like Earth, a world with mountains, wildlife, and valleys much like Earth must have been before human beings. This world would appear primitive, but it is a world created for the purpose of giving human beings a place to live and to reproduce without concern to overcrowding. The flat world explores the idea of human beings or civilized aliens creating worlds in order to give a lesser group of living beings a place to grow and to create history. The setting of the novel follows the idea of this ability to create worlds and to start anew with civilization. The setting in this novel works well with the plot, following closely the ideas created within the plot.

Language and Meaning

The overall novel is written in simple English; however, there are many different languages spoken by the various characters who populate the novel. Silver, the Shand, speaks her own language which includes nearly impossible to pronounce words that are enhanced by the Shand's tusks. Marco has his own language as well, but he was raised on Earth and speaks English. The people on the Disc speak a variety of languages including Latin. Silver is a linguist who speaks many languages, including the allspeak that most creatures learn in order to communicate with other species.

The language of the novel is simple and easy to follow. There are some words in the novel that are clearly a work of fiction and are meant to be the language of aliens. These words are often either explained within the dialogue or easy to understand based on the way in which the word is used. There are also foreign languages that might be familiar to the reader used in this novel, but these languages are not really spoken in the novel, but translated into allspeak by the Shand. Despite the use of multiple strange languages, the novel is easy to read and simple for the youngest reader to follow.

Structure

The novel is not divided into sections, but is written in one long narrative broken up only by the occasional extra line break between paragraphs. This format gives the plot a sense of urgency that is emphasized by Kin Arad's narration regarding the flat world she and her companions wish to see as well as their need to reach the hub of the world in order to find some sort of transportation off the Disc. The novel is told both in exposition and dialogue, including some internal dialogue of both Kin Arad and her companion, Silver.

The novel contains one main plot. This plot follows Kin's discovery of a flat world and her desire to see this flat world. Kin travels to this world and finds herself stranded there because of an impact with a small boat as the boat attempted to sail over a waterfall at the edge of the flat world. Kin realizes she must find some other mode of transportation off the world, so she travels with her friends to the heart of the flat world to speak with the Builders of this world. Kin's discovery upon reaching this hub answers her questions of this world's origin and the origin of the strata machine that has made her long life and career possible. There are no subplots in this novel, leaving the main plot sufficient space to come to its conclusion.



Quotes

"No brochure would have shown the nightmare bulk of the pontoon-mounted strata machine, the small model for islands and atolls under fifteen kilometers. As Kin watched, another metre of beach spilled out of the big back hopper." Pg. 1

"Twenty-one decades lie on her shoulders like temporal dandruff. She carries them lightly. Why not? People were never meant to grow old. Memory surgery helped." Pg. 6

"It was better to send a man into space than a machine. In the complete unknown, a man could still evaluate and decide. Machines were fine for routine, but they flipped when presented with the unforeseen.

It was cheap to send a machine because it did not breathe and it sent its information back alone.

Whereas a man breathed, all the time. This was expensive.

But it was very cheap to send a man if you did not arrange to bring him back." Pg. 11

"The colonists were watching her silently. No gene surgery, no treatment, no Company store—yet they had volunteered. Not one in ten of them would see a century." Pg. 18

"Gene surgery merely stopped you dying. You could go on living without the additional treatments that Days would buy, but you would grow old. Immortal, but senile." Pg. 22

"Kin lay in her bunk, thinking. She thought of how attitudes to aliens got stereotyped. Kung were paranoid, blood-thirsty and superstitious. Shandi were calm, blood-thirsty and sometimes ate people. Shandi and kung thought humans were blood-thirsty, foolhardy and proud. Everyone thought Ehfts were funny, and no one knew what Ehfts thought about anyone." Pg. 45

"Kin was used to violent death. Oldsters died that way—freefall diving without a backpack on, deliberately wandering near when they released the cloned elephants on a new world, banjaxing the safeties and stepping into the hopper of a strata machine—but then ambulance crews took over. There had never been anything to see, except in the strata machine case. And that was only a strange pattern in a freshly-laid coal measure." Pg. 57

"There was a gasp in King's ear. Marco may have switched off his transmitter, but kung were paranoid. He'd never switch off his receiver. Kin looked up at the distant dot in the air. Silver mouthed the words: ignore him." Pg. 89

"The great human face, kingly and cold, twisted. The mouth opened, and the pit echoed to a great sad sigh. And a lightning bolt struck out of the smoking sky and melted the dumbwaiter so thoroughly that droplets of hot metal spilled towards the bright obversical sky." Pg. 123



"The screen in front of the chair blurred, then produced a word. It hung in front of Kin, glowing pitifully. HELP." Pg. 158

"Then she remembered. It came as a shock, but that dwindled as She took control over the body. How could She have forgotten. Then She remembered about that, too. Unless One forgot, how could One learn?" Pgs. 177-178

"Kin watched the stars she knew were only seventy thousand years old, marginally older than their cousins hanging from the Vault of Heaven. Stars were just lights in the sky, but bigger skies demanded bigger stars." Pg. 183

Topics for Discussion

What is unique about the world on which Kin Arad appears in the opening pages of the novel? What discussion does Kin have with two of her workers on this world? What is unusual about this discussion? How does this discussion reveal to the reader the unique aspect of Kin's job? What does this scene say about Kin's personality, her long life, and her aspirations in life?

Who is Jago Jalo? Why has Jalo come to Kin Arad? What work has Kin done that leads this man to believe she might be interested in what he has to show her? What is significant about Kin's work? What is unique about this work? What is unusual about the way in which Kin went about this work? What does Jalo have that causes Kin to become interested in his story? Where does Jalo claim to have found this item?

Why does Kin go to Kung? Who is she hoping to meet on Kung? What is unique about Kung? Who does Kin meet on Kung? Where do they go? Why? What happens when Jalo joins Kin and her new companions? How does this come about? What does Kin decide to do about the situation? How does Marco overrule her? Why?

What is the Terminus project? What was its purpose? How is Jalo related to this project? What does this project have to do with Kin's current mission? What kind of a person is Jalo? What does Kin think of Jalo at first? What does Kin come to think of Jalo as the book progresses? Why does Kin's opinion change?

What is the Disc? Who built the Disc? Who are the Spindle Kings? Who are the Wheelers? What is the strata machine? How are these civilizations connected to the strata machine? For what does Kin believe they used the strata machine? What does Kin learn about these civilizations when she finds the hub of the Disc? What do the computers there tell Kin?

How does the history of the people on the Disc compare to the history on Kin's Earth? What are the differences? What are the similarities? How do these histories compare to history in the reader's reality? What do these differences and similarities imply about the creation of the reader's earth?

Why is Kin made the Disc Master? What does the Disc Master do? Why does Kin not remain on the disc to run the computers? Why do the computers need a master? What does Kin promise the computers she will do for the failing Disc? Why does Kin promise to do this? What is the intended result of Kin's promise? What is the implied result?