



Valparthan Adventuress: Sequel to Valpartha: One Woman's Quest

Dale Shillito

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In the science fiction novel Valparthan Adventuress, women from different planets dream of empowerment, but struggle to attain it.

In Dale Shillito's science fiction novel *Valparthan Adventuress*, women scientists fight against social expectations.

Henri and Astrid are scientists from Earth who travel through space to teach the inhabitants of Earth-like planets about scientific processes. They're also married. As visitors to other worlds, they learn the cultures of the native people, many of which include strict gender roles—there are both matriarchal and patriarchal societies represented.

When Henri and a Valparthan student, Rospah, are imprisoned by one of the tribes, they are led to believe that Astrid is dead. While captured, they form a romantic bond that leads to pregnancy. Upon their release, they learn that Astrid is alive; love, jealousy, parenthood, and ambition lead them all in dark directions.

Prior to her internment, Rospah had wanted to follow in Astrid's footsteps. She and the scientist had involving conversations about geology and botany, and found that they were kindred because of their focuses on their careers, though both also felt pressured to have children, and had mixed feelings about motherhood. Throughout the novel, they discuss challenges around their ages, birth control, and sacrificing aspects of their careers. They have miscarriages; they deal with the physical and psychological symptoms of pregnancy.

But once Henri and Rospah are released, the three adults enter into a strange relationship defined by fickleness, jealousy, and toxic behavior. Astrid and Rospah become competitive with each other, while Henri proves to be sex driven and manipulative. These off-putting circumstances make up the bulk of the narrative, impeding interest in its progression.

Suggestions of feminism are present in the novel's promotion of birth control and discussions of gendered expectations, but this is undermined by the fact that sexism is rampant in the characters' attitudes and conversations. Descriptions of the book's women emphasize their bodies, attractiveness, sexuality, and child-bearing ability; their negotiations around sex undermine the novel's physical scenes. Further, Rospah's husband, Hanuk, is abusive and rapes her, but the novel orients itself to his point of view, seeming to excuse his behavior.

The novel is a sequel, and it includes a short introduction for context. Nonetheless, its story is obscure. Interplanetary cultural information is delivered via stilted conversations that are short on personality, while the new planets' mix of tribal life with advanced technology comes without sufficient explanation. The book's religious undertones come via visions related to sacred femininity, but the nature and meaning of these supernatural elements is underdeveloped, too. As the story jumps between planets and points of view, it becomes too disperse. Its ending is abrupt and disruptive.

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DELIA STANLEY (August 25, 2021)

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