

The Site

Carlos Valrand

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The Site is a mysterious science fiction novel in which investigators stumble on aliens and face deep ethical questions.

In Carlos Valrand's science fiction novel *The Site*, a woman's dreams of clandestine missions and alien forces may be rooted in reality.

Cicely, a mild-mannered teacher who leads a pleasant existence, has been seeing a therapist to help with her disturbing lucid dreams. In her sleep, she is either Charles or Vivian, one of two freelancing investigators who are pulled into dangerous, secretive assignments.

The therapist is sure there is trauma behind Cicely's dreams; he asks well-connected friends to help him with the case. But as Charles and Vivian begin to investigate a murder, Cicely becomes convinced that her dreams represent real events. In them, Charles and Vivian end up at the mercy of advanced extraterrestrial life forms; conspiracies and corruption impede them from finding the truth.

Cicely shares narrative duties with Charles and Vivian, her dream state counterparts. Charles and Vivian are her opposites, not only because their jobs are exhilarating. Cicely experiences their lives as if they were her own, and conveys the action and excitement of their endeavors to her therapist. She is under developed in comparison to the investigators, though; their stories soon subsume hers. Meanwhile, the therapist and his colleagues reveal information that Cicely and her counterpoints don't see, foreshadowing what's to come as they pore over case notes and old books.

A romance between Charles and Vivian increases in intensity over the course of the book. Their exchanges are flirty and open. Charles's love for Vivian is strengthened during their missions, and ends up pushing them both toward an underground alien structure. There, the story shifts again, focusing on their experiences with the humanoid species. Androids and space travel are introduced, the language around them technical and realistic. Alien history is also covered in their conversations; the approach to it is analytical, and is enhanced by a helpful glossary of terms.

As Charles and Vivian face planetary challenges, and Cicely grapples with understanding how her dreams connect her to their work, the story is suspenseful. All three struggle to trust those around them—and themselves. But the switches between perspectives, and the addition of travels into space, confuse the book's timeline. Still, the intricate alien histories are tied together in the end, which features an epic reveal and sets the story up for future developments. Nonetheless, human stubbornness, curiosity, and determination give the book its true momentum.

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DELIA STANLEY (April 16, 2021)

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