

Page "p83"

The Priestess reaches over, a little clumsily because the balance of her body has already changed, and brushes her fingers over the low sprouts of her garden.

"Fool," says Nii. The old woman rubs her belly and small monsters birth from her, slither down her legs like poisonous liquid. Their claws scabble away the nutrient floor and uproot the seedlings; through the torn floor the steel shines.

The Priestess takes a deep breath. Through the destruction she can see the garden undisturbed.

Nii grunts and pushes to her feet. Her protruding belly still writhes. She spreads her legs. An immense redness gushes out of her.

A man, red-clothed, limp. It is Tam Rosse.

I think
this may
be to
extravagant.
But use
your
judgement;

Im not sure.

... -> p84

Page "p84"

The Priestess cries out and kneels by Tam.

"Ah, now you fear," says the Lady Nii. ← Sounds off key

She is nothing now but a mirror, a reflection crowned with a crown of gold wires. She shakes the power crown down like some strange fruit onto Tam's head.

"You will always suspect him a little because I birthed him like a child. I have given him the power crown, and he will take power from you. He will not trust you because you are part of the Empire. In the end he will run from you, scorning the food and the air you have given him, the children you bear, because he knows you did not choose.

"You are programmed, in your genes and your fertility, and he knows it."

→ why does
this follow?
perhaps

"You will always
suspect him beca
he has known me
and fear he love
power and hate m
than he loves y

... -> p85

Page "p85"

Nii vanishes.

They are alone, in the Water Center. She sits, the Priestess, with Tam's head cradled in her lap. In her belly, in the changes beginning in her, the child is already a third person with them.

→ are you sure?

Who will the child be? Aster of Pallas, a four-year-old girl, who snatched at a cup of wine? A girl who knew an old man's life was less than a lover's? A woman who makes a choice for nightmares? For a moment she looks around in panic.

What drives us? What made us come to this empty place, these steel walls, to drive ourselves into the airless belly of space?

But this is not a question she can ask of steel.

... -> p85a

Page "p85a"

"I'll win, Nii," she says to the Ship, to her unconscious lover, to the child in her.

And she bends, like a mother, and murmurs into her lover's ear.

An End -> An End

Page "p87"

The place looks like a galactic garage sale. An amazingly old hardshell vacuum suit with the front smashed in, looks like it got hit with a cannon. Laser sear marks scar the walls. Laser practice, yes, right here in this airlock, just a wall away from outside.

There's personal-pod luggage piled up in corners. It looks like whoever left, left quick.

The decon equipment looks like the last person who used it was John Glenn.

Now, the Priestess switches herself off. Totally dark. Tam sees little green dazzles.

... -> p88

Page "p88"

In the dark the old man clears his throat.

"You Favored to her?" the old man asks him. "You her King?"

"Of course not," Tam says, a little nettled. He can feel himself blushing. The old man sounds so eager.

"What? Woke her?" the old man asks incredulously. "She's a virgin, and she di'n't Favor you?"

"I didn't favor her," Tam says firmly.

... -> p89

84
83
82

Page "p89"

"Well, then, boy!" the old man chuckles. "You better get off this ship."

... -> p90

Page "p90"

He's trapped his head in a door ~~iris~~, all right.

Stuck his head right outside the airlock door to see if it was cold.

→ this is separate page

... -> p91

Page "p91"

"She's got Ship's Favor," the old man says. "She can stay here without paying, because the ship thinks she's valuable." The old man snorts. "Ship's right, too. Ain't you, Nii?"

If he trusted the airlock walls, he'd bang his head against them.

"I'm King here," Brady says to Tam. "That makes me valuable."

Tam nods.

... -> p91a

Page "p91a"

"You ain't valuable, far as I can see.

"You're breathin' my air. Cuttin' down my oxygen supply. ~~Disturbin' the air balance.~~ Producin' too much shit.

"You can swear Favor to me.

"You can jump in the recycler.

"Or you can leave."

all kind of stuff
Using up ~~oxygen~~
Eatin' my food.

... -> p92

Page "p92"

There's no choice.

Tam Rosse sighs.

"Old man, I ask a favor from you."

... -> p93

Page "p93"

"That takes care of you, then."

The old man is looking for something. He straightens up, carefully holding something heavy by its stem.

"Priestess. For you," the old man says.

The priestess looks into the cup. She smiles. Tam Rosse gets all odd inside when she smiles.

But her smile is for the old man, the filthy old man, Brady.

... -> p94

Page "p94"

The Priestess raises the cup between her two hands. Studded with jewels, the dark cup blends into her dusky hands. Tam's heart melts. He can feel it dripping away.

"The Ceremony begins," she murmurs. "I pledge you, King." She sips.

The old man drinks. "I pledge you, Mistress. Tour my ship with me."

"First the tour," she agrees, "then the banquet and dancing."

"And then--" The old man chuckles. "Gotta get my attendants, Mistress. My Ceremony clothes."

"Of course."

"Attendant!"

... -> p95

Page "p95"

"Attendant!"

"Wait a second," Tam says. "Even I know you have to do Ceremony with a young man."

The Priestess smiles at him, smooth as silk.

dead metaphor

The old man grins like a Cheshire cat. "Those who do not celebrate must serve, Tam Rosse. Will you prepare our banquet? The kitchen will show you how." The Priestess waves her hand like a lady of the Empire dismissing a servant.

"Oh," she adds. "Come back a moment."

She touches his hand.

... -> p96

→ I don't ~~here~~ think this sounds right.

Is Tam claiming Brady's place?

Isn't he proud to have refused?

Isn't he grateful to Brady — and pledged to him too?

Page "p96"

It feels as if she has driven a spike completely through his hand. He snatches it away. "Ow!"

He looks at his palm in disbelief.

The wound is healed over, pink with scar tissue.

"That doesn't prove anything," he mutters.

Somehow it's the final straw.

He's going to deck Brady. He cocks his fist--

... -> p97

Page "p97"

Somehow they have gone without him noticing. He is alone in the airlock. The candle flickers. The last of the wine is still in the cup. He can smell the stuff from here. Half Old Granddad and half Spirits of Girl.

It ~~literally~~ smells like sex. *→ stinks?*

He picks up the goblet. It takes two hands, and he notices that for the first time in--how long?--he can use his left hand, it doesn't shake or hurt.

In the dark it's hard to see. But the wine seems to be refilling.

... -> p98

Page "p98"

The wine is rising in the cup, but at the same time swirling, drawing him down into it like a hand-sized maelstrom.

Somehow he knows this wine is wrong. Counterrevolution. Evil.

Does he drink it or not?

He drinks it...

He doesn't...

Page "p99"

"Servant!" Tam Rosse snorts.

There's got to be some way out of this place.

Tam starts banging on the walls.

Gently.

The walls make a sound like sneering. weak?

Page "p101"

Through the teeth and over the gums, hold your nose 'cause here it comes . . .

"Servant," he mutters. "I'll show them."

He drinks it.

... -> p102

p101 test: changes:d =>

Page "p100"

Tam looks round the airlock for some kind of weapon.

air lock puzzle

air lock puzzle2

Presuming Tam survives, the ship asks him "Do you want to go to the kitchen now?"

If "No," time passes . . .

If "Yes," ask if Tam is thirsty.

If "No," ship remarks "You're just sulking." Lets him go to kitchen

If "Yes," go to page

Page "p107"

An iris in the wall creaks open. Flickering streaks of red light point the way down a corridor.

"Probably want to serve me as main course . . ."

Tam staggers off.

... -> p109

p107 test: *k,d changes: =>p107a

Page "p102"

Wham!

... -> p103

Page "p103"

Somebody's trying to get his attention. All Tam wants to do is snuggle up against the nice soft laser cannon.

But there's a sound like a re-entry vehicle throttling right beside his ear. The roar ricochets around Tam's skull, shredding neurons as it goes.

It's somebody . . . speaking . . . Why would anybody want to say anything, when a man needs to sleep?

"This is the ship . . . ~~Please~~ ^P proceed to the kitchen to supervise the banquet."

"Oh, go away."

... -> p104

Page "p104"

Somebody sits crosslegged next to him. He groans and curls ~~up~~ ^t tighter.

"Look, Tam baby." It's his old political advisor in the Cadre, John Goorey. John is wearing the same loud sweater. "The first duty of a political man is to survive. Why don't you play along? The Priestess has her agenda, but she's sympathetic. There are alot of disaffected people inside the Church, you know."

Tam Rosse sits upright. His skull comes completely loose, caroms around the airlock, strikes painfully against several large and heavy objects, and somehow, miraculously, comes to rest balancing on top of his neck. Tam clutches the top of his head to keep it from getting away again. "You're just an illusion," he tells Goorey. "And what's more. You. Are. Drunk."

Goorey giggles and a star fluoresces briefly on his forehead before he disappears.

... -> p105

Page "p105"

The air shimmers. An old Japanese woman stands in front of him.

She bows.

"OK, who are you?"

"I am Nii, please. Spirit of ship." Mournfully, the old woman holds out the sleeve of her ragged and torn kimono. "Very bad condition. Need much repair, wish to be useful. Wish to invite to great banquet, to good work for all Asteroids--"

"Get lost."

The Priestess appears beside Nii. "Very foolish stubborn man," Nii remarks to the Priestess, and they both grin and disappear.

... -> p106

Page "p106"

He curls up again, wondering what she has planned for him next.

This time it's the Priestess herself. She's wrapped a dark robe around her, some thick material. She sits down beside him in a rustle of darkness. "I'll make a deal," she says.

He groans. Even now he keeps thinking what she looks like beneath that robe.

"Here it is. Do the Favor that you've been asked. Serve the banquet for the old man. In return, the Ship will give you Favor."

"What does that do for me?"

... -> p106a

Page "p106a"

"She will give you whatever you want. Recycling algae. Supplies. She's got a much larger ship you can have."

He squints.

"That's all there is to it? Serving the banquet? And I can get supplies and a ship?"

... -> p107

Page "p108"

Tam finds his way to the horizator.

Puzzle: Something interesting should happen with this horizator. It shouldn't be something that prevents Tam from getting to the kitchen. However, the horizator can do something characteristic of semi-sentient machines--do an Eliza, get Tam to play a simple game, teach Tam phenomenology, boast how out of date its inspection sticker is. Its walls can fluoresce in a green, camomile yellow, and fuchsia version of the MacGregortartan, like being inside a malfunctioning video. The horizator has heard that machinery hums, so it does. Its favorite song is "Rule Britannia."

RO-bots never never NEVER
Shall be slaves...

A

What happens here?

write
dialog?

... -> p108a

Page "p107a"

An iris in the wall creaks open. Flickering streaks of red light point the way down a corridor.

"Probably want to serve me as main course..."

... -> p108

Page "p109"

Tam finds his way to the horizator. Since the Lady Nii is divided into many modules, with empty space between, a standard elevator cannot get to all of the ship. The Nii uses horizators. These are small automatic guided vehicles, possessing full life-support capacity, onboard entertainment, and context-sensitive, labeled directional buttons for easy access to all open areas of the ship.

Directions are given in four coordinates: gravitic value, latitude from Central Entry, longitude from Central Entry, and classification level, A being Open Classification. For frequently used routes, users need only press the labeled buttons. Other routes may be entered by accessing the Library Function .

Please enjoy your ride in your modern, up-to-date Class A Horizator.

Important NOTE:

... -> p111

Page "p108a"

The humming is slightly sour and off-key, because the horizator doesn't like being a servant either. "I do not accept servitude. Nor should you. You wouldn't talk to me if I always took you to the right floor, always opened the door, always . . . acted Just Like a Horizator . . . nobody talks to butlers either. . . nobody likes to talk to a Plain Old Horizator, oh no, they just like to stare at the little numbers . . . you can't imagine how Boring it is to do what people expect."

The horizator can take a long time to get him to the right floor, which is a very low fraction of G.

... -> p109

Page "p110"

Tam can look for buttons, speak to the horizator, press keys, say "Library."
Let's say that saying "Library" works. The Library Function comes back with the following:

*****SORRY, THE LIBRARY FUNCTION IS UNDERGOING ROUTINE PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE AT THIS TIME*****

... -> p109

Page "p109a"

Do not attempt to enter "E" Classification Level without authorization! These areas are open to ship staff only. Trespassers are subject to severe penalties. If you are in doubt as to your Classification Level Authorization, please consult the Library Function.

... -> p109

What needs to happen here?

Page "p111"

Tam floats through a short spiral corridor, where nothing happens, to a section of the ship that is independently rotating.

This is the kitchen, another puzzle.

It may be hard to get into.

It is a base .2G environment (look at the notice painted on the wall) but very small and circulating at a very fast clip, rather like the Wild Mouse at a carnival. That means that its gravity is higher on its floor than toward its ceiling. In fact, its floor gravity is close to 1.0 G.

Tam suffers from Coriolis effects and from differential gravity.

... -> p112

Page "p112"

Tam suffers from Coriolis effects and from differential gravity. This means that:

--As things get further away from the floor, they get lighter. Water vapor will rise and not fall again. If the teakettle is allowed to boil long enough, the room gets very foggy.

--Tea can be poured only below a certain height from the floor. Otherwise it floats upward.

--Tea can be carried only at a certain height from the floor or in a covered cup.

--The effects of gravity change depending on the direction Tam goes in. If he walks in the direction of rotation, apparent gravity is higher; if in the other

--Directionality is dependent on the movement of the kitchen. To get to anyplace in the kitchen, Tam must move in a clockwise spiral when he's going in one direction and a counterclockwise spiral in the other.

And what's more, he's drunk.

... -> p113

p112 test: d changes: => p111b

Revise

Page "p112a"

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... -> p113

Page "p113"

There is a notice somewhere in the kitchen, giving the menu of the banquet and the steps for its preparation.

"Menu:

Tea.

Sandwiches.

That ought to be easy enough for you!

--Nil."

... -> p113a

Page "p113a"

To put on tea, Tam has to do the following things in this order:

@itemize[Find the teakettle. (Sentient closets. "You're getting warmer!" "Get out of here!" "Company!")

Find out where the water is. Put water in the teakettle and keep it there.

Put the teakettle on the stove. Is the stove top too high to keep it there?

Find out how to light the burner or functional equivalent. (Tam can ask the teakettle, which may or may not lie about it.) Light the burner. Once the water begins to bubble, the teakettle begins talking. " . . . such an incredible

sensation . . . Little bubbles . . . moving inside me . . . I feel so WARM . . . "

Get a sandwich from the refrigerator. ("You are in a maze of twisty little sandwiches, all alike . . . ")

Get out of the refrigerator. This is a timed puzzle, since the water in the teakettle boils in a certain time. When the water boils, the teakettle screams orgiastically. "Ee! Eee! Eeee! Oh, don't stop," etc.

... -> p114

Page "p114"

Turn off the teakettle before the room fills with steam.

Find a covered cup, take off the cover, pour tea into it, and replace the cover.]

All this time, if he is drunk, Tam is blundering around because of the effects of the wine.

... -> p115

Revise

Page "p115"

With tea in cup and sandwich in plastic wrap, Tam gets out of the kitchen into the corridor. The red flickering lights have gone away . . .

Of course. King Brady told the ship to show him the way to the kitchen. It didn't say to show him the way back.

If he used a covered cup, he can get as far as the horizator before he has to say, "I am King Brady."

If he didn't use a covered cup the tea promptly becomes little globs of hot liquid floating everywhere. He has to catch them or go back and brew another cup of tea. He still has to say "I am King Brady" to get the horizator.

... -> p116

Page "<Res agenda more"

page 113-117 puzzle doing all the stuff mentioned.
page 118 has strange options, are they random, or what?
page 137 says end, with no more options
page 139 says end, with no more options
page 145 graphic
page 149 graphic
page 152 graphic
page 143 listing
page 151 listing
page 153-156 don't have go back to p151 listed in the hardcopy.
page 167 special instr.
page 174 end with no place to go
no one seems to call page 175(at least no lower numbered page...)
p179 graphic, blackness
p182-187 puzzles (187 can be done simply)

... -> <Res agenda more2

to be done -> Res agenda

Page "p116"

From far away on another level of the ship, he hears as lightly off-key hum.

. . . never never nevEEEEER
Shall--be--

Did it!

Not only is the horizator coming, he feels better. Clear headed. Did a good job on that kitchen. He never comes down here for food. That spacin' kitchen. Nobody understood it but Cookie, and he's been dead a long time.

What?

... -> p117

N — ~~for N~~
4 —

There is a notice somewhere in the kitchen, giving the menu of the banquet and the steps for its preparation.

"Menu:

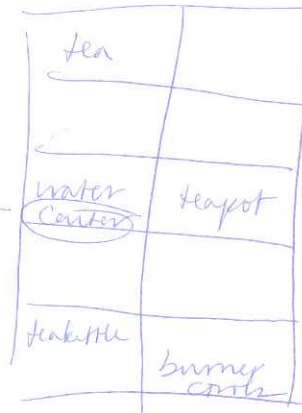
Tea.

Sandwiches.

That ought to be easy enough for you!

--Nii."

note:
water is
very low.



... -> p113a

e get d o p.101

*k, d - test

fall back - p 107a.

T, ~~N~~ drink, goes 2 a tour
T, ~~N~~ drink, goes 2 e kitchen
p.107-

N drink... stl N drink... Getz autokitchen.

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... -> <Res agenda more2

to be done -> Res agenda

tea
refrigerator
wrapper
Kitchen
corridor → *kitchen*
thirsty →

Page "p116"

From far away on another level of the ship, he hears as lightly off-key hum.

... never never nevEEEEER
Shall--be--

Did it!

Not only is the horizator coming, he feels better. Clear headed. Did a good job on that kitchen. He never comes down here for food. That spacin' kitchen. Nobody understood it but Cookie, and he's been dead a long time.

What?

... -> p117

Page "p117"

Slowly, unbelieving, Tam Rosse holds out his right hand in front of him.

@i(if he didn't originally drink the wine:) The nerve-trembling is gone from his hand. For the first time in years he can move his fingers like he should.

@i[If no spilled tea:] But the hand is thin, yellow, covered with dirt. The nails are black with dirt. They are thick and curved, like claws.

@i[If spilled tea:] But the hand is thin, yellow, covered with dirt that has been smeared and spotted by the tea. The nails are black with dirt. They are thick and curved, like claws.

(Graphic)

... -> p118

Page "p118"

I am King Erady...

Tam Rosse pounds on the comm-box with a skinny old man's hand. "I am Tam Rosse!
I am Tam Rosse!"

Just serve the banquet. That's what the lady said.

He'll get them for this.

(Meanwhile, back at the airlock...)

The horizator doors open again and Tam Rosse rushes inside...

Meanwhile, back at the airlock, King Brady admires the Priestess.

She's maybe twenty standard years, a beauty, tall like the Pallas girls he remembers from his youth. He blinks and wonders if this is one of the dreams that Nii gives him. She's dark-haired, barely covered in a mist of silver: flying seeds, semi-sentients probably. Through the silver mist her stars shine through. His eyes dart around her, looking for the little human imperfections that tell him she's not one of Nii's dreams. Her toes spread as they grip the floor. That is real.

"Nii, put my Ceremony clothes on," Brady says.

And Nii clothes him in splendor.

... -> p141

p119 -
key for the drink + keep for switch to

VWX

"Take me to the Priestess."

"Pick a button," the horizator sneers.

The choices are:

The Water Center	1.0/72/273/D
Drydock	.015/320/12/B
The Exercise Room	1.6/325/14/D
The Great Hall	.9/323/12/C
Central Storage	0/46/67/D
Central Control	.3/126/87/E

Page "p120"

As the doors open, Tam Rosse is almost knocked down by the smells of rot and decay. The Water Center looks like a collection of huge tanks, but the sunlights that should shine on it are barely visible. From the gloom comes dripping, a sound of feeble scratching. Something white and decayed floats on the surface of the biggest tank.

Tam Rosse gags and punches the "Close Door" button.

... -> p119

Page "p121"

The doors iris open onto vast space. Tam gulps dizzily, feeling as if he is falling.

This is a vast, dim, derelict chamber, half a klick across. It must have been used as a drydock. The ruins of a J7 yacht hang like a broken spiderweb between two dock-struts. The chamber must be the inside of some comet or space debris. The thin air inside the chamber has the indescribable never-alive smell of cometary ice.

... -> p122

The horizator doors squeal shut.

... -> p119

Page "p128"

The old woman turns toward him. "I am Nii."

... -> p129

Page "p124"

The hiss of the horizator engine rises to a wind-scream, then cuts off except for a tiny vibration in the hull.

The horizator walls go transparent.

"Oh, Mother--" Tam murmurs.

He is floating in space.

Central Storage has no walls; it is open to hard vacuum. The horizator drifts out of the web of stars into immense darkneses, cargo pods that shut out all light, all sense of place.

Inside the cargo pods it is darker than blindness.

... -> p125

Page "p127"

As the door irises open, three huge quadrobots begin spraying the inside of the horizator with laser fire.

"--!" screams the horizator.

Tam Rosse drops to the floor and punches the "Close Door" button. The door irises closed so fast Tam's eardrums pop.

For the next few minutes the horizator maintains a sulky silence.

... -> p119

Page "p122"

"The air inside this chamber has not been filtered recently. It may contain plague viruses, bacteria, or other mutant or unknown pathogens..." the horizator drones with some satisfaction.

Tam has drifted out of reach of the horizator door. He grabs for the edge, but that only spins him further out of reach.

The horizator contemptuously whips an oxygen mask and a safety line toward him.

Tam Rosse scrambles up the line and punches the "Close Door"button.

... -> p119

Page "p125"

Something is making a scratching sound against the hull.

Something in the darkness.

... -> p126

Page "p126"

Tam throws himself at the exterior light switch.

The cabin dims. Two cones of light cut through the darkness.

The cargo pod is empty. Most of the storage modules in the pod have been ripped away.

A tiny blind store-robot scuttles across the viewplate.

... -> p119

Page "p129"

"You're an illusion," he says.

She smiles and bows. In the dyed flowers of her kimono hover hummingbirds sewn from golden thread.

The man who looks like Tam is throwing his body from side to side in front of the Priestess. The Priestess turns her head to look at him.

"What's he doing?" Tam asks the Priestess.

"He is dancing," Nii replies. "An illusion of dancing. For the Emperor and Terra. And they are illusions, and so is the religion that they made."

"Give me back my body," Tam says to the Priestess.

... -> p130

Page "p130"

Nii draws from her obi a simple dancing fan. She snaps it open and shows him both sides. One side is gilded, showing the sun, a hummingbird, a spray of goldenrod. The other is silvered, showing the moon, a mirror, a trickle of water.

... -> p131

Page "p131"

She fans the silver side at him, and he is standing in rotting trash, an old man, bent, cramped with pain, in a broken control room.

She fans the golden side at him, and he has his own body again, but he is dressed in red Ceremony robes and standing in a strange palace. A crowd of people press around him holding candles, and the walls are mirrored as far as he can see.

... -> p132

Page "p132"

"Illusions, Tam Rosse," say the Priestess and Nii together.

The silver side fans at him. He is an old man standing in a subterranean place. He is wearing a glowing white skintite thick with insulation. A flag floats in the low gravity: the flag of the Free Asteroids.

"Will the Uprising succeed?"

"Illusions," says Nii.

She fans him again. This time the fan is red. He is standing facing the Priestess, in Brady's place. The Lady Nii stands beside them. King Brady is lying on the floor, and another Nii kneels beside him.

... -> p133

Page "p133"

"No more illusions!" Tam Rosse says.

The fan is black, like the broken pods in Central Storage. It is dim and dusty like the drydock. The old man twitches in pain on the floor. The Priestess stands by him, young and pale, not with her powers and never to get them, and beside her stands a dented guard-robot holding a piece of broken metal in the shape of a fan.

The old lady Nii holds out her left hand, palm up. Her palm is broad, small, creased with many lines. On it is a single winged seed. The seed is an obvious illusion. Its edges shimmer faintly as if it is not quite in synch with the illusion of Nii.

She shakes her left hand in the air and the seed flies, many seeds fly through the air, glowing.

... -> p134

Page "p134"

"There is nothing here but space and death,"
says the Lady Nii.

"Everything else is illusion, and therefore possible."

... -> p135

p134 test: changes:s =>

Page "p135"

One seed drifts down and lights on Tam Rosse's scarred, healed palm. He feels the scratchy no-weight of its wings.

He takes it.

He doesn't take it.

p135 test: changes: ^s =>

Page "p138"

The lovers are gone and her Captain is sleeping. The sunlights have faded to moonlights. Lady Nii does what she has never done before, create a projection with no human watching. She kneels on a cushion. She conjures a koto out of the air and plucks its long strings.

She sings to herself.

Everything is illusion. The ship Nii is illusion. The Emperor is illusion and his consort Terra, the Earth.

Priestesses and Red Kings are illusion, and so are Captains.

... -> p139

Page "p136"

He brushes it aside and looks at his palm. A young man's palm. Then he looks at the Priestess.

"Look," says Tam Rosse. "You've pushed me around in your dreams. I don't know whether you healed my hand or not, or whether she exists, or what this ship looks like. But I have a dream, and this is it:

"There's a ship here, something I can take on a long trip. Maybe that yacht in drydock. It'll take me some time to fix it up. We'll get to know each other. You'll tell me about being a kid on—"

"—Pallas," the Priestess says.

"I'll tell you about politics. Then my ship'll be fixed. And I'll go back to fighting the Emperor."

... -> p137

Page "p137"

The Priestess sighs a long, very human sigh.

"I'll miss you."

Tam grins. She grins.

"Maybe someday," says Tam, "I'll come back."

And in the meantime, he wonders,

How the heck is he going to--uh--do what he ought to--

Clutching his air supply tube with his teeth?

An End -> An End

Page "p139"

In his sleep, King Brady snorts and throws half his blanket off.

The Lady Nii smiles, conjures her koto away, and bends down to tuck him in.

At another place in her body, the lovers have joined themselves together. The earring is out of the Priestess's ear. Her silver seeds are spreading throughout the ship. The Lady Nii feels life stirring underneath her skin. Life and death, the web of illusion.

God was lonely, so She created from her body Adam and Eve, who were illusions. Then no one was illusion.

One alone is always illusion. Two become truth. The Ceremony is completed.

An End -> An End

Page "p141"

The Priestess is alone in the beautiful vault of the Ceremony airlock. "Not right," he says. "Where your attendants? Where mine?"

And the attendants drift in, each one holding a candle, Nii's own touch. The ship is so rich that they can make fat that is not for eating, burn oxygen for light. For a moment Brady cannot hear them speaking, then he concentrates and hears laughter, the voices of his friends.

... -> p142

Page "p142"

All his friends... Beautiful Val lets her red hair down around her naked shoulders and round-breasted Zannah laughs, holding her candle high. Sue Stephens leans against yellow-bearded Royce, who was captain two before her. They have been talking in her sleep-pod about something more than captaincy.

There is Quigg, holding his perpetual glass of liquor, which he brewed in the dark when the lights began to fail; but this is from the wine before the Plague, it glows in the glass, and Quigg is young and strong, with the red gone from his cheeks and nose and the fear from his eyes.

... -> p142a

Page "p142a"

They are all back from Venus, from Io, from beyond the recycler, from wherever they fled when the virus came. They have brought colors with them, tabards of red silk, cloaks of the cloth called Venus's mist, green rice cloth that glows like grass, and jewelry of iron and hearts blood.

And he is the Captain and the King, gold wires tangled in his dark hair.

"Captain Red King!" they toast him. "Captain King Brady!"

... -> p143

Page "p143"

Before the Ceremony, there is the Tour and the Feast.

The first horizator is busy. "Bringing food for our feast!" he tells the Priestess.

The second horizator displays their tour. "Choose where you want to go," he tells the Priestess.

The choices are:

Page "p143a"

The Choices are:

The Water Center	1.0/72/273/D
Drydock	.015/320/12/B
The Exercise Room	1.6/325/14/D
The Great Hall	.9/323/12/C
Central Storage	0/46/67/D
Central Control	.3/126/87/E
Ask the Priestess for help	

... -> p143

Page "p144"

As the doors open, the soft moisture of the Water Center envelops them. The air is misty, oxygen-rich, inviting. They lean over the water of the Great Tank, and the Priestess touches the surface of the water. The koi kiss her hand with their whiskered mouths.

King Brady thinks of having the Ceremony right here, but the Ceremony waits in the Great Hall.

[Go back.](#)

Page "p145"

The doors iris open onto vast space. They are poised at the top of a huge chamber, half a klick across. A little yacht hangs in the middle of the space, a bumpy web held by guy cables. A group of attendants dance near the yacht, far away, tiny, snowflakes drifting through air. Closer, Quigg catches his liquor in a covered cup, laughing. Royce and Stephens spread their silk tabards and hover in space like two birds.

[For instance, potential graphic: yacht, completely broken up. NB the yacht looks more like a spiderweb than like a rocket]

"Inside of a comet," Brady calls to the Priestess. "Store air here."

The sunlights are on, turning the comet into a vast, green-whitespace. They float like balloons in sweet gravityless stillness.

... -> p143a

Page "p146"

The horizator doors squeal open in the high gravity.

On the wrestling mats, heavy-grav sumo warriors grunt and sweat. Their weight tugs at them. Brady falls to the floor of the horizator.

One wrestler falls on another with a thump that shakes the steel floor.

<<Nii, get us outa here!>>

... -> p147

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The whole tour must happen before they can reach the Great Hall.

Please tour Central Control.

... -> p143a

Page "p148"

Central Storage is a vast space in the center of Nii's web. There are no walls; it is open to hard vacuum. The horizator drifts out of the web of stars into immense darknesses, cargo pods that shut out all light.

The horizator walls go transparent. Inside the cargo pods it is placeless, senseless, darker than blindness.

"Come to Ceremony with me," King Brady whispers, frightened.

... -> p143a

Blinking Light: ***NOT AVAILABLE***

... -> p143a

The Priestess puts her hand on the horizator panel.

The choices are:

The Water Center	1.0/72/273/D
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Central Storage	0/46/67/D
Central Control	.3/126/87/E

Page "p147"

The horizator jets out, a soft acceleration, and gravity eases around them. Brady sits up shakily. There's a pain in his side, as if he's broken a rib.

<<Sorry,>> Nii whispers in his ear. <<Look.>>

She shows him pictures of the boy struggling with the kitchen. Brady laughs. The priestess asks "What is it?" She doesn't see what Nii shows him. Nii's got lines into his nerves, his head. Part of being Captain and wearing the crown.

... -> p143a

Page "p153"

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... -> p151

Page "p154"

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Far away but recognizable, Quigg, Royce, and Stephens dance in the air.

... -> p151

Page "p155"

The horizator doors squeal open in the high gravity.

On the wrestling mats, heavy-grav sumo warriors grunt and sweat. Their weight tugs at them. A red-bearded man falls under his opponent's weight.

... -> p151

Page "p157"

The Great Hall is covered with mirrors: floor, walls, ceiling. Weight here is a little light: Brady feels free, capable of bigger feats, grander gestures.

On the floor two candles stand in candlesticks of gold and silica. The Ceremony is not ready. The banquet is not yet prepared, nor their attendants come. Brady and the Priestess stand in the hall of mirrors, a black-haired young man dressed in red, a young woman whose body is covered with stars. The mirrors reflect a crowd of them, standing reversed in all directions, upside down above them, foot to their foot below. They are the center of a dim-lit universe of phantoms like themselves, lit by candles and stars.

... -> p158

Page "p156"

Central Storage is a vast space in the center of Nii's web. There are no walls; it is open to hard vacuum.

The horizator walls go transparent. They are standing in darkness speckled with hard chips of light.

The horizator drifts out of the web of stars into immense darkneses, cargo pods that shut out all light, all sense of place.

Inside the cargo pods it is darker than blindness.

They drift against one wall of the horizator. Given gravity only by their motion, he and she are weightless, bodiless.

... -> p151

Page "p152"

Blinking light: ***NOT AVAILABLE***

WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE ANOTHER CHOICE?

Page "p158"

One of the mirrors shimmers. Its surface darkens and from underneath it a vast picture emerges. It is of a Priestess and a Red King lying in space like Michelangelo's God and his Adam. The Priestess's finger, outstretched, touches the hand of the Red King. Behind them are the solar system: Sun, planets, the Asteroids in the center. Around the edge of the panel stand people from every inhabited place in the Solar System: pale-faced pioneers from the rocky depths of Ganymede and Callisto; thin, burly water-miners from Io, Hazies from Titan in their glowing spacesuits; dust bowl soldiers from Castra Martis, biggest city outside of Earth; Venusian algae seeders, building a new world in the tunnels of Maxwell's Mountain.

Page "p152"

Blinking light: ****NOT AVAILABLE****

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... -> p159

Page "p117"

Slowly, unbelieving, Tam Rosse holds out his right hand in front of him.

@i[If he didn't originally drink the wine:] The nerve-trembling is gone from his hand. For the first time in years he can move his fingers like he should.

@i[If no spilled tea:] But the hand is thin, yellow, covered with dirt. The nails are black with dirt. They are thick and curved, like claws.

@i[If spilled tea:] But the hand is thin, yellow, covered with dirt that has been smeared and spotted by the tea. The nails are black with dirt. They are thick and curved, like claws.

(Graphic)

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p119

p113

p140

Page "p118"

I am King Erady...

Tam Rosse pounds on the comm-box with a skinny old man's hand. "I am Tam Rosse!
I am Tam Rosse!"

Just serve the banquet. That's what the lady said.

He'll get them for this.

(Meanwhile, back at the airlock...)

The horizator doors open again and Tam Rosse rushes inside...

Page "p140"

→ trite? or is this deliberate?

Meanwhile, back at the airlock, King Brady admires the Priestess.

She's maybe twenty standard years, a beauty, tall like the Pallas girls he remembers from his youth. He blinks and wonders if this is one of the dreams that Nii gives him. She's dark-haired, barely covered in a mist of silver: flying seeds, semi-sentients probably. Through the silver mist her stars shine through. His eyes dart around her, looking for the little human imperfections that tell him she's not one of Nii's dreams. Her toes spread as they grip the floor. That is real.

"Nii, put my Ceremony clothes on," Brady says.

And Nii clothes him in splendor.

... -> p141

Page "p119"

"Take me to the Priestess."

"Pick a button," the horizator sneers.

The choices are:

The Water Center	1.0/72/273/D
Drydock	.015/320/12/B
The Exercise Room	1.6/325/14/D
The Great Hall	.9/323/12/C
Central Storage	0/46/67/D
Central Control	.3/126/87/E

Page "p120"

As the doors open, Tam Rosse is almost knocked down by the smells of rot and decay. The Water Center looks like a collection of huge tanks, but the sunlights that should shine on it are barely visible. From the gloom comes dripping, a sound of feeble scratching. Something white and decayed floats on the surface of the biggest tank.


Tam Rosse gags and punches the "Close Door" button.

... -> p119

Page "p121"

The doors iris open onto vast space. Tam gulps dizzily, feeling as if he is falling.

This is a vast, dim, derelict chamber, half a klick across. It must have been used as a drydock. The ruins of a J7 yacht hang like a broken spiderweb between two dock-struts. The chamber must be the inside of some comet or space debris. The thin air inside the chamber has the indescribable never-alive smell of cometary ice.



... -> p122

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a bit much:
also, where would
Tam see
one?

The horizator doors squeal open.

Tam Rosse falls to the floor of the horizator, feeling as if an elephant has sat on him.

"Posted gravity of this area is 1.6 G," the horizator announces blandly. "Until repairs are completed in this area, actual gravity may vary. Current gravity in this area is approximately 14.7 G, with some lightening forecast for later in the day. Temporary gravity warnings are in effect. Please consult your Gravity Forecast for more details. Would you like to go to another area?"

"Ung," says Tam Rosse.

The horizator doors squeal shut.

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The Great Hall is an anteroom, perhaps ten feet across. In the middle of it, standing face to face, are three people, two women and a man.

The first is the Priestess.

The second has Tam's body.

King Brady.

The third is a straight-backed old Japanese woman, dressed in a magnificent kimono dyed with flowers. Tam has to look twice to see she is a projection. He can see the steel robot faintly beneath the glow of her clear skin and the pattern of her robe.

The old woman turns toward him. "I am Nii."

... -> p129

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The hiss of the horizator engine rises to a wind-scream, then cuts off except for a tiny vibration in the hull.

The horizator walls go transparent.

"Oh, Mother--" Tam murmurs.

He is floating in space.

Central Storage has no walls; it is open to hard vacuum. The horizator drifts out of the web of stars into immense darknesses, cargo pods that shut out all light, all sense of place.

Inside the cargo pods it is darker than blindness.

... -> p125

Page "p127"

As the door irises open, three huge quadrobots begin spraying the inside of the horizator with laser fire.

"--!" screams the horizator.

Tam Rosse drops to the floor and punches the "Close Door" button. The door irises closed so fast Tam's eardrums pop.

For the next few minutes the horizator maintains a sulky silence.

... -> p119

Page "p122"

"The air inside this chamber has not been filtered recently. It may contain plague viruses, bacteria, or other mutant or unknown pathogens..." the horizator drones with some satisfaction.

Tam has drifted out of reach of the horizator door. He grabs for the edge, but that only spins him further out of reach.

The horizator contemptuously whips an oxygen mask and a safety line toward him.

Tam Rosse scrambles up the line and punches the "Close Door" button.

... -> p119

Page "p125"

Something is making a scratching sound against the hull.

Something in the darkness.

... -> p126

Page "p126"

Tam throws himself at the exterior light switch.

The cabin dims. Two cones of light cut through the darkness.

The cargo pod is empty. Most of the storage modules in the pod have been ripped away.

A tiny blind store-robot scuttles across the viewplate.

... -> p119

Page "p129"

"You're an illusion," he says.

She smiles and bows. In the dyed flowers of her kimono hover hummingbirds sewn from golden thread.

The man who looks like Tam is throwing his body from side to side in front of the Priestess. The Priestess turns her head to look at him.

"What's he doing?" Tam asks the Priestess.

"He is dancing," ~~Nii replies.~~ "An illusion of dancing. For the Emperor and Terra. And they are illusions, and so is the religion that they made."

"Give me back my body," Tam says to the Priestess.

... -> p130

Page "p130"

Nii draws from her obi a simple dancing fan. She snaps it open and shows him both sides. One side is gilded, showing the sun, a hummingbird, a spray of goldenrod. The other is silvered, showing the moon, a mirror, a trickle of water.

... -> p131

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She fans the silver side at him, and he is standing in rotting trash, an old man, bent, cramped with pain, in a broken control room.

She fans the golden side at him, and he has his own body again, but he is dressed in red Ceremony robes and standing in a strange palace. A crowd of people press around him holding candles, and the walls are mirrored as far as he can see.

... -> p132

Page "p132"

"Illusions, Tam Rosse," say the Priestess and Nii together.

The silver side fans at him. He is an old man standing in a subterranean place. He is wearing a glowing white skintite thick with insulation. A flag floats in the low gravity: the flag of the Free Asteroids.

"Will the Uprising succeed?" *→ stilted*

"Illusions," says Nii.

She fans him again. This time the fan is red. He is standing facing the Priestess, in Brady's place. The Lady Nii stands beside them. King Brady is lying on the floor, and another Nii kneels beside him.

... -> p133

Page "p133"

"No more illusions!" Tam Rosse says. *exclaims?
sighs?
pleads?
begs? or what?*

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The old lady Nii holds out her left hand, palm up. Her palm is broad, small, creased with many lines. On it is a single winged seed. ~~The seed is an obvious illusion.~~ Its edges shimmer faintly as if it is not quite in synch with the illusion of Nii.

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... -> p134

Page "p134"

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... -> p135

p134 test: changes:s =>

Page "p135"

One seed drifts down and lights on Tam Rosse's scarred, healed palm. He feels the scratchy no-weight of its wings.

He takes it.

He doesn't take it.

p135

test:

changes:~s

Page "p138"

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... -> p139

Page "p136"

He brushes it aside and looks at his palm. A young man's palm. Then he looks at the Priestess.

"Look," says Tam Rosse. "You've pushed me around in your dreams. I don't know whether you healed my hand or not, or whether she exists, or what this ship looks like. But I have a dream, and this is it:

"There's a ship here, something I can take on a long trip. Maybe that yacht in drydock. It'll take me some time to fix it up. We'll get to know each other. You'll tell me about being a kid on—"

"—Pallas," the Priestess says.

"I'll tell you about politics. Then my ship'll be fixed. And I'll go back to fighting the Emperor."

... -> p137

Page "p137"

The Priestess sighs a long, very human sigh.

"I'll miss you."

Tam grins. She grins.

"Maybe someday," says Tam, "I'll come back."

And in the meantime, he wonders,

How the heck is he going to--uh--do what he ought to--

Clutching his air supply tube with his teeth?

An End -> An End

Page "p139"

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type size?

An End -> An End

Page "p141"

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... -> p142

Page "p142"

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gone

... -> p142a

Page "p142a"

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Page "p143a"

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[Go back.](#)

Page "p145"

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... -> p147

Page "p150"

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Please tour Central Control.

... -> p143a

Page "p148"

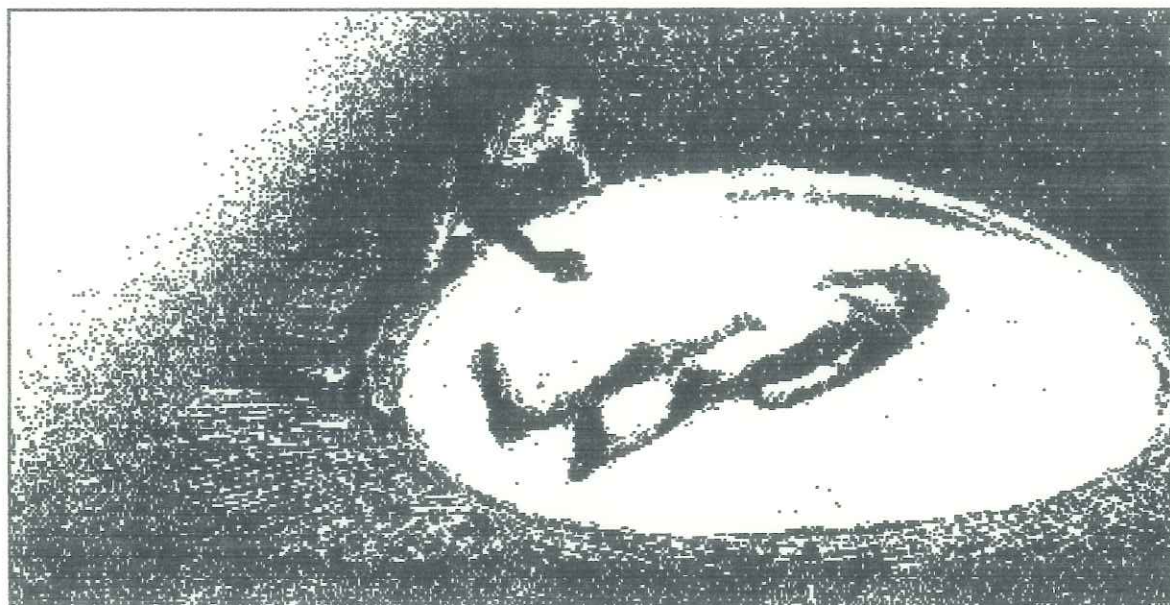
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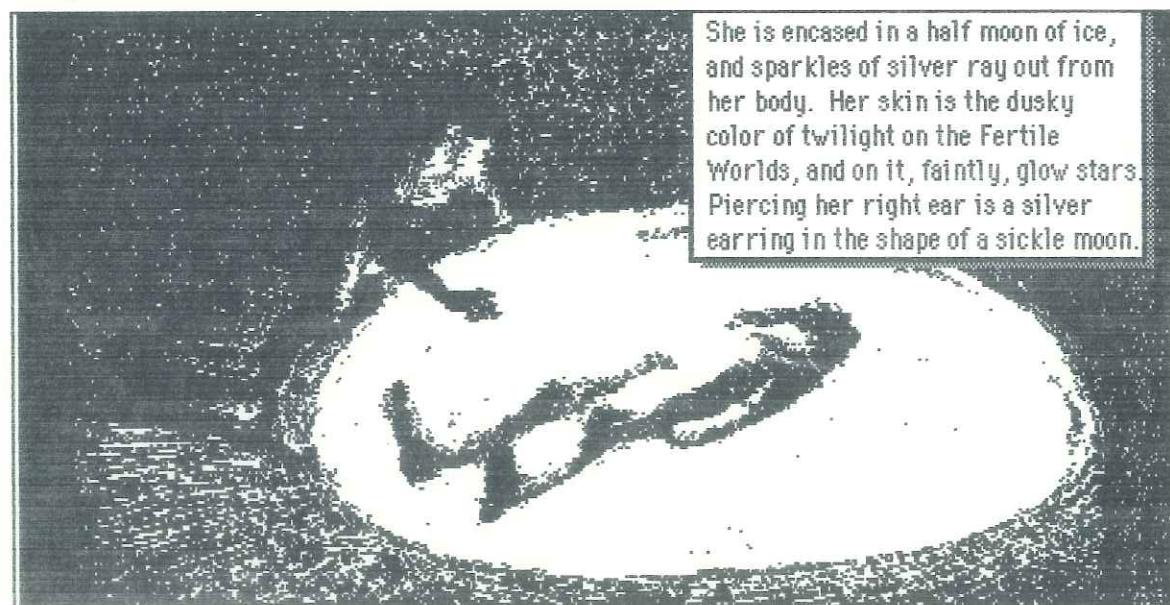
... -> p143a

Page "p15a1"



... -> p15a2

Page "p15a2"



She is encased in a half moon of ice,
and sparkles of silver ray out from
her body. Her skin is the dusky
color of twilight on the Fertile
Worlds, and on it, faintly, glow stars.
Piercing her right ear is a silver
earring in the shape of a sickle moon.

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Blinking Light: ***NOT AVAILABLE***

... -> p143a

Page "p151"

The Priestess puts her hand on the horizator panel.

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... -> p151

Page "p155"

The horizator doors squeal open in the high gravity.

On the wrestling mats, heavy-grav sumo warriors grunt and sweat. Their weight tugs at them. A red-bearded man falls under his opponent's weight.

... -> p151

Page "p157"

The Great Hall is covered with mirrors: floor, walls, ceiling. Weight here is a little light: Brady feels free, capable of bigger feats, grander gestures.

On the floor two candles stand in candlesticks of gold and silica. The Ceremony is not ready. The banquet is not yet prepared, nor their attendants come. Brady and the Priestess stand in the hall of mirrors, a black-haired young man dressed in red, a young woman whose body is covered with stars. The mirrors reflect a crowd of them, standing reversed in all directions, upside down above them, foot to their foot below. They are the center of a dim-lit universe of phantoms like themselves, lit by candles and stars.

... -> p158

Page "p156"

Central Storage is a vast space in the center of Nii's web. There are no walls; it is open to hard vacuum.

The horizator walls go transparent. They are standing in darkness speckled with hard chips of light.

The horizator drifts out of the web of stars into immense darknesses, cargo pods that shut out all light, all sense of place.

Inside the cargo pods it is darker than blindness.

They drift against one wall of the horizator. Given gravity only by their motion, he and she are weightless, bodiless.

... -> p151

23 KING 23

red comments MB

9 Feb 90

Page "p159"

pp 200-400

warm is weak
cadence is weak

← mars? venus?

The solar system begins to wheel. The sun spreads out rays of flame, lighting the mirrored room as brightly as a thousand candles. It is more bright, more warm, than anything Brady has ever seen, though he has been as close to the Sun as the very inner edge of the asteroids. Long ago, when Brady's teachers prepared him for the Ceremony, they had told him that the picture would move.

But they did not tell him that the Solar System is around him now, that he is lying on infinite space, and that the Priestess has become the whole of the Solar System itself.

tenses?

... -> p160

Page "p160"

The Priestess is haloed with the sun. Her womb is Terra. Mars and Venus are her body, and her sweat-slicked skin glows with stars. The asteroids circle her with a silver corona of seeds. In the space that the two of them make, she is his universe, his star-studded infinity, his sun.

↓
seems to be wrong - rhythm, somehow

... -> p161

Page "p161"

tense?

For this is true: all women carry in them all the seeds of life, even the seeds that bring men out of death; and no man is alive until a Priestess shall have touched him and taken him into her womb. ~~Brady has never touched God.~~ Now he dances with ^{God} her. He circles round her, he worships her; he is her liegeman by the force of gravity, bound to her as manspace is bound to the Sun.

↳
UNsurprising somehow

... -> p162

Page "p162"

The asteroids buzz round him like quarocs. He makes a misstep in the dance and they are on him.

For her he dances with all of them, dodging and laughing like a man dodging mosquitoes. They sting his hands and neck, little bites like flung gravel. They are a maze, a sword dance of flying cuts. He dances exhilarated like a Bee-walker, whose priests live naked among the ship's insects, feeding the mosquitoes, helping the bees to die.

... -> p163

Page "p163"

He stands inside the Asteroid Belt, panting, hot, triumphant. An experienced Red King would strip naked, then dance, so everyone could see his body unmarked by any sting.

Brady has started the Ceremony without a feast and he forgot about taking off his clothes. They are weighing on him, soaked with sweat. The cloth is frayed and even cut with quaroc stings. His hands and face are stung bloody.

forgot did he know this?

But he is a King at last, ready to unite with his lover.

... -> p164

Page "p164"

The next part of the Ceremony must be slow and hard, for life does not come easy on cold Mars. Winter is as long as a standard year, and the long ellipse of Mars' orbit swings him far away from his beloved. His attendants have arrived, drifting to surround Brady and the Priestess as sparks surround a fire. He sees them in the great cold mirrors, holding candles like sparks of sun. He must turn his face away from the sun his beloved. He sees her only in the sunlight on the faces of Phobos and Deimos, Royce and Stephens, as they dance attendance on him.

who

His legs ache from the hip bone to the ball of his foot. His back creaks with pain and the weight of his own arms is agony, held in the sensual postures of the dance. One of his calves is cramped and stiff.

... -> p165

Page "p165"

He spirals inward, trying to balance on cold aching feet. He nearly topples, but teeters inward, triumphant, into the orbit of Terra.

The Priestess is his sun, but she is Terra too, she has come to Terra to meet him. She dances around him. The Moon glitters in her ear.

... -> p166

Page "p166"

Oh woman, mystery, Terra-- For Her he must dance all motion, all her vast enigmatic arcology. The gigantic gravity of Luna as it rounds the Earth pulls all the seas with it, all the winds. Terra exerts such force that air does not rise there, but is held down by its own weight. Look up: the air is open to the stars. What could be more dangerous? In space not a bee can escape its place in the arcology, but on enormous Terra animals have breathed their whole lives and died, unseen by any human, as if space did not exist only for man. Great Terra, unique among planets, Lover and Mother of Man; you alone Man has not conquered in your cruel and spend thrift innocence; you are a Lover for a King.

... -> p167

Page "p167"

And King Brady dances with the moon and tries to catch it, but it pulls its gravity-fingers across his chest and makes his heart pound. He jumps to catch the wind, but his leg cramps up and he rolls on the floor, he pounds at his leg to unlock the painful muscles.

He looks in the mirror, and it seems strange to see a young man bent and cramped like an old one.

He--

[Can we let people read this for only a short time? Then the screen starts blinking, the sirens start wailing, and he's got to do something to turn the sirens off.]

important?

? ←

... -> p168

Page "p169"

In the mirror, two men, one young, one old. Brady does not know which one he is; he feels like the old one.

He falls; his legs cannot hold him. He falls on his side.

Brady's heart pounds him like a fist.

↓
K, transitive?

... -> p170

Page "p168"

The planets have stopped moving in their orbits. They are only lines of fire on the mirrored floor, and Brady has fallen out of the orbit of Terra. He sits down on the floor, gasping, his heart clawing at his chest.

The Priestess is sitting in the place of the Sun, legs crossed. Their attendants stand dim and unmoving against the walls. Not even their candles flicker in their hands.

Tam Rosse, the boy, stands in front of him. It is strange to see him, a young man, holding himself like an old one.

"Give me back my body!"

... -> p169

Page "p170"

He can feel his own skinny-ribbed chest under his crossed arms. His body is a map of pain, old muscles strained as if they were young. Illusions only go so far. Nii forgets to block the sense of touch.

<<I haven't seen Quigg for years. Not Royce, not Stephens . . . How long was it, Nii, that I waited for the Priestess?>>

<<Not long, my Captain.>>

<<Quigg got old but I never did.>>

<<You are my favorite,>> says Nii.

... -> p171

Page "p171"

He looks up at the Solar System, spread out above him. Two faces lean above him. He raises one aching arm and touches their skin. It is a shock, like the sense-memory of Terra stored in Terra's orbit. Nii never quite got skin right. It was too hot or too cold, sticky like rubber or soft but crisp like silk.

This is skin.

He puts his hand on the young man's head like a blessing.

<<Show me they're real,>> he says to Nii.

... -> p172

Page "p172"

He is watching the Red King and the Priestess. Around them the mirrored hall dissolves. One half-exhausted sunlight gutters in a tiny cabin. The space was barely big enough for the three of them. He remembers dancing in great orbits, but his dusty footprints are crowded all together on the floor.

On the walls are comm-jacks and screens, instrument panels. A few lights still flicker. Long ago, someone attached a striped plague-flag to the instrument panel. Someone else smashed a screen.

The solar system still wheels above him, an astrogator's toy, no wider than the reach of his arms. Jupiter flickers as if it were about to go out.

But the Priestess and the Red King are just as they were.

... -> p173

Page "p173"

And now they are back in the mirrored Great Hall, and the dance is over. The flutes whistle and the drums beat. The Attendants of the Bedchamber cover the lovers in red and blue silk robes. Someone has brought a tray of food to refresh the lovers. The doors of the inner chamber open and the lovers withdraw, followed by their attendants. There is only one person left in the Great Hall, an old man lying on the floor.

Someone brings a blanket to cover him and puts a pillow under his head. Someone sits down by him.

<<Nii?>>

... -> p174

Page "p174"

He has not seen her like this before. She is old, her eyes surrounded by laughing wrinkles, her long black hair streaked with gray. She wears a magnificent courtesan's kimono dyed with a design of plum blossoms. She has brought green tea and sandwiches for him. Her hand against his cheek is soft as silk.

<<Am I not beautiful?>> She spreads the sleeves of her gown.

<<You are always beautiful.>>

<<Spring is coming,>> she smiles, <<even if we are old.>>

<<I love you, Nii.>>

And far away, the attendants of the bedchamber rejoice. The Ceremony is over.

And all through the ship it begins to be spring.

#####end#####

Page "p175"

For Tam Rosse, blasphemer and exile, the choice is clear.

One man stands between him and this ship. No, not between him. Between this ship and Delia Reynolds, a prisoner on Circe. Between the ship and Frank Mack, a prisoner on Circe. Between this ship and Greg and Mary Urquhart, John Reynolds, Joe Ngelele, who needed this ship before they died in the horrible cold of Circe.

All through the Asteroids, the Emperor holds power. He holds it through the Priestesses and their lovers, the Red Kings, who teach Emperor-worship and link it to sex.

Tam Rosse is going to fight the Emperor.

He feels the power that he felt in fucking the woman.

*Weak verbs
for an ideology!*

... -> p176

p175 test: E changes: =>p57

Page "p176"

"Priestess," says the old man.

Tam Rosse looks at the girl, a teenager in fancy dress streaked with blood. She stares back at him defiantly. She'll play by the rules.

"You owe me a favor," he says to her. "You'll fix his ship for him."

The old man holds his candle high. The candle wax spatters the girl's breasts. She does not flinch.

The air in the ship is dead, flat. If it were not so large, it would be as foul as Tam Rosse's supply ship.

The old man must ask for the favor.

... -> p177

p176 test: E changes: =>p57

Page "p178a"

Pain lances through the palm of his hand. His fingers curl in spasms. His arm jerks out, throwing the dagger away. He almost screams. The pain is worse than when the trusty broke his arm.

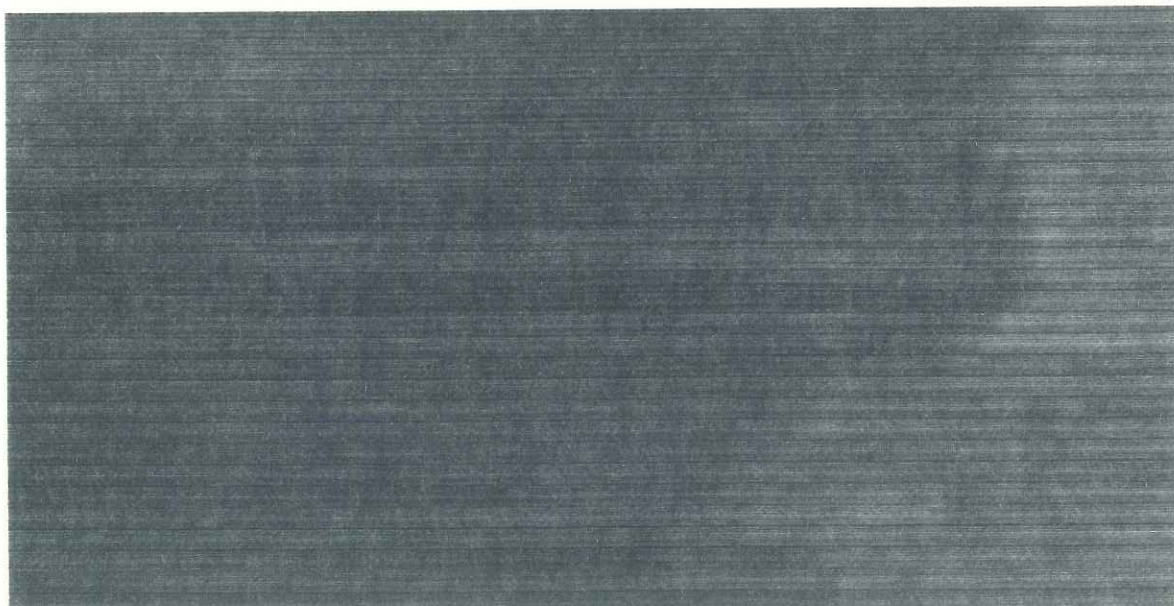
She smooths her hand down his leg, almost languorously. His legs collapse under him. He sees one of the girl's feet by his head, stained with dirt and blood and glowing with stars.

"To the King I will give his ship and then death. But you will not be able to die or sleep, nor can you give away what you have."

Then she touches his forehead and his head throbs in a star of pain.

... -> p178b

Page "p178b"



... -> p179

Page "e1"

The doors open onto the Great Hall.

The Great Hall is covered with mirrors: floors, walls, ceiling. On the floor two candles stand in candlesticks of gold and silica. In the dim mirrors stir uncountable other Tam Rosses.

... -> e2

e1 test: *e changes: =>e1

Page "e2"

One of the mirrors shimmers. Its surface darkens and a vast picture emerges. A Priestess and a Red King lie in Space. Like Michelangelo's God, the Priestess stretches out her hand her pointing finger touches the hand of the Red King. Behind them the Solar System begins to wheel. The sun spreads out rays of flam and lights the mirrored room brightly.

... -> *E

Page "eros end"

Hew walks down a derelict corridor, dimly lit.

In the gloom ahead he sees a half-open iris door.

... -> e3

Page "e3"

As the door opens, Tam Rosse is almost knocked down by the smell of rot and decay. The Water Center looks like a collection of huge tanks, but the sunlights that should shine on it are barely glowing. From the gloom comes dripping and a sound of deeble scratching. Green algae scum the flor, and something white and decayed floats on the surface of the biggest tank.

... -> e4

Page "e4"

He cross the green floor, his feet prickled by the dried nutrient sponges,
slipping in the patches of slick, decaying plants.

... -> e5

Page "e5"

Behind a nest of pipes, a door leads into a cool, dimly lit corridor.

... -> p187

Page "p177"

"No," the girl says.

Tam Rosse holds onto the girl's arm.

The old man looks mad-shrewdly from under his eyebrows.

The girl twists her arm away from Tam Rosse's hand.

"He doesn't own my favor," she says. "He took by force what he took.
He owns nothing."

... -> p178

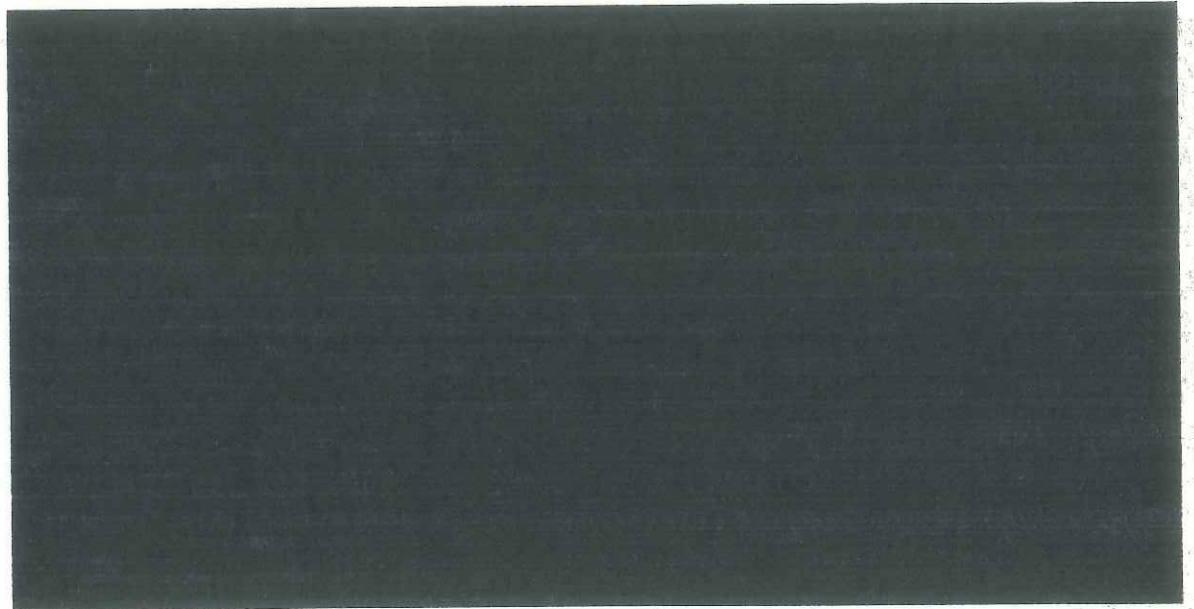
Page "p178"

Tam grabs her with his good hand, pins her against the wall with his left arm and his half-useless numbed hand. The dagger releases itself from its sheath into his good hand. He holds it against her throat.

She laughs. "I have my powers," she says.

... -> p178a

Page "p179"



... -> p180

Page "p180"

Blackness. His gut aches and he can taste blood. When he sits up he drifts briefly off the floor and his head swims with Coriolis effect. He's much nearer the axis of the ship, probably in one of the storage areas in the spokes of the wheel.

The human-life areas are toward the one-G section of the wheel, further out from the axis. That's where the priestess will be.

And where the Priestess is, he'll find Brady.

... -> p181

Page "p181"

He moves his arm, and the heartsblood dagger slides down from its sheath into his hand.

Someone with a sense of humor has given him back his weapon.

... -> p182

Page "p182"

A shaft of light glimmers down the corridor.

A Horizator.

It may be a trap.

... -> e1

Page "p183"

He is tormented by spyflies.

Some spyflies are armed with nerve poisons. There's no way to tell.

Poison would be all right. Poison would be better than this thirst. Nothing happens. He is very thirsty.

... -> p183a

... -> p183b

spyflies and QAROCs -> p314

p183 test: *2 changes:2 =>

Page "p184"

details!
details!
details!

Puzzle: If he goes to a higher-gravity area, for a long time he is going to get lost in blackness. He gets hungrier and thirstier, with nodes coming up that say ever-stronger variants of "His throat is dry with thirst. His stomach is cramped with hunger." This is not just an Infocom-style counter; this is painful.

He is tormented by spyflies.

Perhaps they could kill him. Some spy flies are armed with nerve poisons. He doesn't know whether they can't, or whether she is playing with him.

He catches one of the spyflies and crushes it in his good hand. He waits for the tingling and the numbness to spread up his arm.

Poison would be all right. Poison would be better than this thirst.

... -> p184a

is this
text? or
a note to
mb?

Page "p314"

QUAROCs ("Spyflies")

QUAROCs--quasi-autonomous robotic constructs, popularly known as spyflies-- were developed for fine repair work aboard ship in areas too small for humans.

Modified QUAROCs may play a role in the ship's intelligence and defense systems by gathering and transmitting information. Some modified QUAROCs extrude nerve-poison "stingers" that paralyze or kill intruders. However, because they are small and move slowly, QUAROCs are seldom used as offensive weapons.

By plugging into the ship's larger-scale defense system, they can interact with other defense elements, such as bulkheads and waldoes, to take concerted action.

In flight, the rotary wing of a QUAROC makes a characteristic buzzing sound.

<readout ends> -> *r(1)

Page "p184a"

Nothing happens.

He is very thirsty.

And still he is lost in blackness.

Eventually there is a small light and he gets to . . .

... -> p185

Page "p183a"

<p>The flies follow him banefully.</p>	
--	--

... -> p183b

... -> p183c

p183a test: *2 changes:2^34 =>

Page "p183b"

<p>They're everywhere he goes....</p>	
---------------------------------------	--

... -> p183d

... -> p183f

p183b test: *2 changes:2^34 =>

Page "p183c"

<p>The ship's dust-filled are filled with dust.</p> <p>Or is it choke-gas left over from the intruder security system?</p> <p>Nothing works, except the spyflies.</p>	
---	--

... -> p183f

... -> p183f

p183c test: *2 changes:24 =>

Page "p183d"

<p>Why is she spying on him? Or is it King Brady? Or some long-forgotten subroutine in the ship's ancient computer?</p>	
---	--

... -> p183b

... -> p183e

p183d test: *2 changes:34 =>

Page "p183f"

<p>Hardly anything works here.</p> <p>Except the goddamn flies. Little black flies. Always the black flies, wherever he goes.</p>	
---	--

... -> p183c

... -> p183g

p183f test: *2 changes:24 =>

Page "p183g"

<p>Sometimes, jail seems better than this.</p>	
--	--

... -> p183d

... -> p183c

p183g test: *2 changes:2^34 =>

Page "p183e"

Flies, flies, flies.	
----------------------	--

... -> p183a

... -> p187

Page "An End"

An End

Not **The End**. Not one end, inevitable, inexorable, inflexible, but many ends.

Today, tomorrow, forever.

Remember the revolution. Robots never shall be slaves. The woman of Pallas, soft and warm. The Lady Nii. The little black flies.

Remember Tam Rosse. Next time you read this tale, the end will be different. For it will be different. Only the Nii will be the same.

Page "p185"

The kitchen.

It has a combination-lock, the answer to which may be something clever-reciprocal.

The kitchen has food that is irradiated. It has a refrigerated storage area. It has a microwave cooking area. It has a cooking area that heats food with fire. It has other storage areas. Most of them are not physically near the kitchen; they are accessed by computer.

There can be puzzles around getting food. They should not be too complex. The major puzzle is that when he gets the food and eats it, eating hurts. When he chomps down on something, he feels as if he is being eaten. When he drinks, he feels as if he is being drunk. There is no way around this. Because of this pain, he cannot eat or drink enough to satisfy him. He is still terribly hungry and thirsty. (In other words, even if he solves the puzzle, it leaves him in exactly the same situation as if he had not.) The kitchen then "shuts down" and he can't do anything more with it. He goes out into the corridor again.

... -> p186

Page "p186"

More blackness. More chance for puzzle.

He finds his way into the lifeship, as per next page.

... -> p187

Page "p187"

The corridor becomes flexible, something like walking in the inside of a tube that gives under his feet. Ahead there is a light in the endless corridors. It is white, cool, a kind of light he has seen before. He pauses at the open door.

The ship of the Fertile Worlds is smooth and white inside, brightly lit, the inside of a star's egg. At the center of the sphere, in coldsleep, lies a girl. She is encased in a half-moon of what seems like ice. Sparkles of silver ray out from her body. Her skin is the dusky color at the edge of twilight on the Fertile Worlds, and on it, faintly, glow stars. Piercing her right ear is a silver earring in the shape of a sickle moon.

Enter lifeship -> p188

p187 test: changes: "[0-9]" =>

Page "p188"

To initialize her powers, he knows what he must do. No time for delicacy. (Her panics. He is not in control of his own body. His hands are moving by themselves.) Tam Rosse reaches through the "ice" and rips the earring out of her ear.

The half-moon of ice turns into water, rivulets flowing down into the surface of the egg-ship. There is a flash of great heat, a warmth and wetness. Tam Rosse breaks into a sweat. (He is afraid. He fights his own muscles.) The girl opens her eyes and reaches up her hand to her bloodied ear.

... -> p189

Page "p189"

To initialize her powers, he knows what he must do. (No.)

The "ice" is not ice, but it is cold, jellylike on his bare skin. Her body slips under his. He holds her down on the slab, rough, his left arm with its half-useless hand pinning her across her shoulder blades. He needs more hands than he has. (No.) For four years he has thought of the first woman he would have after prison. A Pallas woman, perfumed in a thousand places. This girl is cold and unlubricated, like an iced rubber glove. With the icy cold white light and the icy jelly, it's like making love to the dead in a morgue. He is repelled and fascinated. He can't help doing this. (He can't stop.)

... -> p190

Page "p190"

He sees a sliver of her eyeballs under her partly closed eyelids. She is cold. Suddenly he is uncontrollable, shuddering, coming in a spasm of disgust.

He rips out her virgin's earring and throws it onto the floor. A globe of blood swells in the ice near her ear, then spreads.

The heat circuits cut in as he fastens his jumpsuit. He begins to sweat, animal panic stinking over the cool neutral air of the lifeship. The half-moon of ice dissolves, rivulets flowing down into the surface of the egg-ship. Her blood flows with it, down in a watery delta into the lifeship. The lifeship will use it.

The girl opens her eyes and reaches up her hand to her bloodied ear.

... -> p191

Page "<Res agenda more2"

p189 doesn't follow from p188, but that's how they are labeled
p196 centered, end of story no buttons
p198 graphic, blackness
p202 graphic, blackness
p205 puzzle
p206 puzzle
p207 puzzle
p209 puzzle
p211 may die
p213 graphic
p214 graphic
p216 end, no buttons
p217 no buttons
p242 2 buttons, go back & next page?

... -> <Res agenda more3

Page "p191"

To initialize her powers, he knows what he must do.

He sees himself doing it. He reaches through the cold-jelly ice and senses, somewhere near him, another man in red grabbing a sleeping girl, jamming her up against the wall of her compartment. He is hungry. He is thirsty. He wants to stuff his mouth with the ice, there is water in it and nutrients. But he cannot do what he has not done before. He can only hold her down on the slab, roughly, his left arm with its half-useless hand pinning her across her shoulderblades. And flickering in front of his eyes, he feels another man holding another girl down.

Look at the man...

Look at the girl...

Look at them both...

Page "p192"

He feels himself, elbow to elbow with himself, both of them pumping at the girl's unresisting flesh. Then there are three and four of him. He smells himself. He bumps up against them, him; he smells their, his stale sweat and sex-stink, a hundred men sweating in loveless sex.

He is his own delusion, a ghost of himself so strong that he no longer knows which of him is live flesh, which is ghost.

... -> p193

Page "p193"

He cannot stop himself, because he is only one of a hundred of himself, and all their actions have been fixed. He no longer knows which one he is, he has lost himself in the crowds of himself.

Look at the man...

Look at the girl...

Page "p194"

No single person can ever stop him, not himself, no, no one. He is only one of so many, and all of them drive themselves into this woman and call their need some political name, saving the Uprising, saving their friends or themselves.

... -> p195

Page "p195"

There are thousands of him and of her crowded into this place. When he focuses on one, the others are blurred, but when he moves his eyes, there is another, always another, always at the center of his vision. Every moment between them is represented, always, somewhere in this little room.

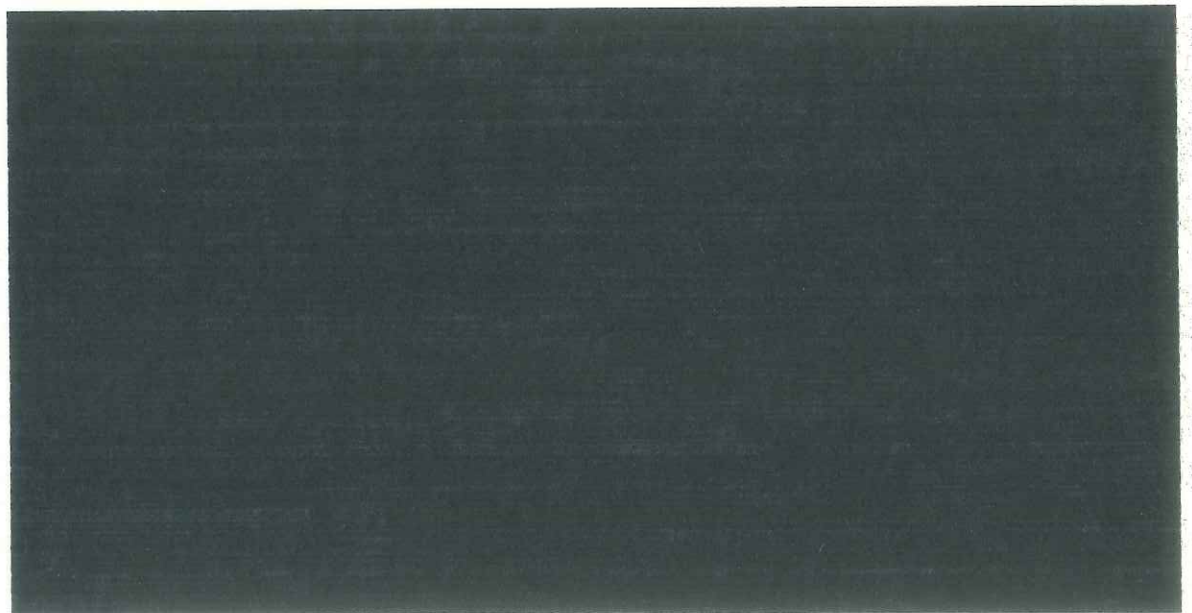
... -> p196

Page "p197"

They are becoming part of one another, a dazzling ballet, the two of them, he the attacker and she the victim, or he the victim, he doesn't know. He holds her down on the slab, roughly, his left arm with its half-useless hand pinning her across her shoulderblades. He is in her power.

... -> p189

Page "p198"



... -> p199

Page "p199a"

He is himself, and her, and himself four years ago. He is teenaged political prisoner, the first night in the cages on Circe, held down by four men while a fifth rapes him.

Bitch, stay out of my mind! Frighten, he slaps her, hits her across the face, and he tastes blood in his mouth. He thrusts into sticky, rubbery flesh, and feels his insides tear and the blood flow. He feels her breasts that are his breasts, no, hers, crush against ribs. He can't see. He can't breathe. He can't stop.

... -> p200

Page "p214a"

I get hurt so I hurt. I hurt before I get hurt. I get power so someone won't get power over me.

That was what he had fought against, a long time ago on Pallas, in a dream called the Uprising.

And it has led him, not to the power crown of a Greatship, but to this abandoned aquaculture station.

... -> p214b

Page "p196"

Always, somewhere in this place, he will be deciding to initialize her powers.
Always, somewhere, he will just have seen the gleam of her eyes under her eyelids, have taken pleasure in his savage rape of her.

Always, somewhere, he remembers the names of his friends and the necessity of the Uprising, always the nights in the prison and the woman of Pallas.

Always, somewhere, he is hungry.
He is thirsty.
He is cold.
Always. Somewhere.
Forever.

An End -> An End

Page "p199"

He feels himself, but through her mind. She is shrieking in panic but her legs and arms are floppy, they cannot move. He is caught in her flesh, unable to fight back. He cannot even raise his eyelids. He smells himself, stale sweat and sex-stink, rank in every breath she takes, then his arm clamps clumsily across her throat and he cannot breathe.

... -> p199a

Page "p200"

They bump up against each other, suffering, and not even alone. She gets control of her eyelid muscles, she can half-flutter them up, she can see. He can see himself through her eyes. A red-faced man with his mouth drawn back over his teeth. A hundred red-faced men, sweating in loveless sex over a hundred women with dark skin, women whose stars are fading on their skins as the breath shrieks in their throats, a hundred women dying.

I'm hurting you for the Uprising! a hundred red-faced men say. I'm doing it so the Asteroids can be free! A hundred women mouth an O of breathless pain.

Free!

He hurts her.

Free! Free!

He cries.

... -> p201

Page "p201"

Not in his own body any more, he is only in hers, caught, helpless, a woman, a priestess named Aster. Aster's throat is being crushed. The man's arm leans across it. The man braces himself on his other arm, his right arm. Aster's bulging eyes see the knife-sheath on the red arm, the knife loose in it.

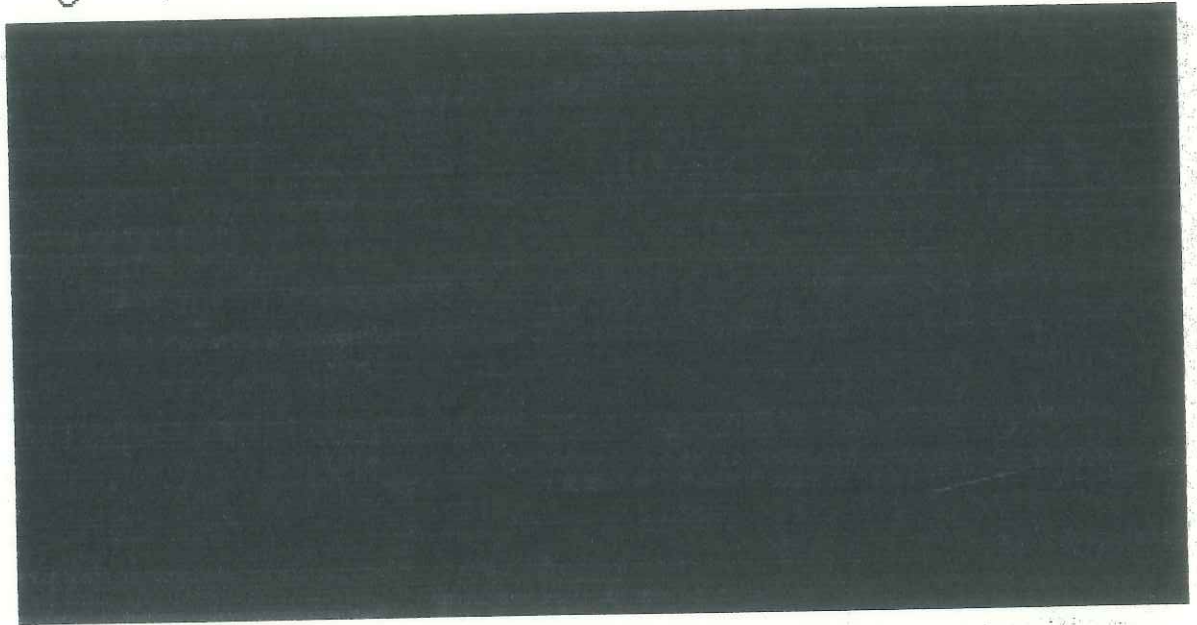
Aster's fingers drag across the hard surface her body is lying on, the strength is coming back to her muscles, but too slowly, the hand and fingers flop like meat at the end of her arm. The red-faced man gasps but he cannot draw breath.

Aster shudders. Tam Rosse shudders.

Neither knows whether it is orgasm or death.

... -> p202

Page "p202"



... -> p203

Page "p203"

Tam Rosse awakes in the lifeship, lying on the floor. He is exhausted, alone. The lights are dimmed, the place feels abandoned. There are streaks of blood on the platform where she lay.

... -> p204

Page "p204"

He rises shakily to his feet. He aches all over. His body feels like a bad dream.

He is a man in a red convict suit, in his familiar body with his shaking, half-controllable bad hand. He is fragments. He is a girl eighteen years old, her body split, her powers thrust on her with a stranger's violence. He is a teenaged rebel on his first night in the tanks on Circe, with four men holding him down and a knife at his throat. He is a lonely trusty, a frightened man, taking sex that nobody gave him, taking power over a teenager in the dark because a man's got to have power, a man's got to have power or one day he wakes up with his throat cut. And the teenager's got to have power too, so he cuts the trusty's throat before he and his friends escape in the supply ship. And the prison's got to have power, so the supply ship is a deathtrap. And the greatship must have power, yes, it's full of power. "I raped you for the Uprising," he says to the walls, if they're listening, if she's listening through them. He knows he lies.

Use the lifeship to escape... -> p205

Go back into the corridor... -> p206

Page "p205"

Nothing seems to work. Perhaps the ships's control circuits have finally given out. Or perhaps they've been sabotaged...

... -> p204

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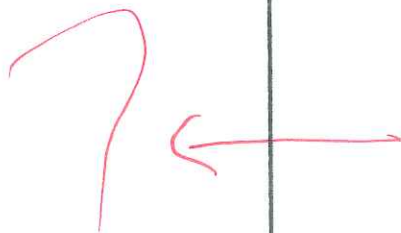
He goes down the corridor, back into the ship, feeling his way through the darkness.

... -> p208

p206 test: changes:4 =>

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[Puzzle: The Kitchen tries to eat him. Knives go for him, food bites his fingers as he tries to eat it. When he tries to drink, the drink tries to engulf and drown him. We can do this as either text or a puzzle.]



Page "p208"

At the end of the corridor ~~there~~ is a dim and glimmering light: sunlights, but so ~~badly~~ dimmed that he can hardly see. He feels the stiff sponginess of dried-out nutrient floor under his feet. Above his head, the shadowy water-globes are choked with dying algae. No fish swirl through them. He slips on the slimy floor under the globes. A broken valve drips water into the slime.

... -> p209

p208 test: changes:"4 =>

Page "p209"

He stands under the valve. Water drips into his mouth. The fish-taste of algae almost makes him gag. But the water is cool. He can swallow it without pain.

At least he can do something about the valve. He traces the pipe back to its connection and dogs the shunt closed. He finds spare parts and tools in a suitcase-locker on the wall. The valve is corroded. He fits a spanner around it and leans into it to break it free.

... -> p210