

MEMORANDUM

TO DAS, Steve C., Steve P.
Fr Sarah
CC Mark
Dt 5/18/89
Re: KING OF SPACE

This memo describes King of Space, the interactive computer fiction you have recently received.

- What KING OF SPACE Is
- How You Should Read What You Have
- Narrative Decisions
- Background of the World
- Characters
- Summary of the Action (with flowchart)
- Questions

1 What KING OF SPACE Is

This is a narrative written to be read and played on a Macintosh. I wrote the basic design and the text and described the puzzles. That's what you have here. The computer version of KING OF SPACE will combine narrative with puzzles, static and animated graphics, and original music.

The programmer and designer of the puzzles is Mark Bernstein, who's also the publisher (through Eastgate Systems) and who's a fairly well-known creator of hypertext systems. The music is by Michael Derzhinsky.

David asked "What's on the jewel box?" (Jewel box=computerese for the little box that the software arrives in.) Dunno. Usually Mark's software simply goes out in a generic box.

If I were doing it: Plain box, the slugline "Space is a woman", the title, and a mix of the flying seeds (pp.133-35) + stars. I wd say it's fortunate that I'm not the artist.



On the back, author's, programmers', musician's, artist's names. We don't know who's doing the graphics yet--any suggestions?

2 How You Should Read What You Have

When you read the manuscript, think of the pages as appearing on a computer screen. Sometimes the pages are only text; sometimes they include graphics. On the screen, often at the bottom, there are labeled buttons representing choices. Sometimes these buttons are hidden in the graphics. Sometimes the choice is a default, for which you simply press a button when you are through with the screen.

The equivalent of pressing the default button is "Go on to the next page." (Sometimes this doesn't appear at the ends of pages where it should. When in doubt, go on to the next page.) The equivalent of pressing another button is "Go to page ____."

You are allowed to go both forward and backward. You are allowed to look at other information (for instance, the map of the Nii) and then return to where you were before. Sometimes you have access to a simple database in which you can read information.

Sometimes you are asked to solve a puzzle. (The puzzles are described here. By solving the puzzle you can move in one or more directions.

Sometimes you can pick up objects. They may help you in later parts of the story.

There are lots of notes in square brackets ([]) addressed to Mark, the publisher. Ignore them.

3 Narrative Decisions

We are billing this as a computer game for adults. That determined the content. The theme is "All intelligent life is sacred, and the making and preservation of life is sacred." The metaphor is sex. One of the characters is literally a sex goddess and the central action in all five of the stories is a sexual encounter.

We're looking for our initial audience among Hypercard cognoscenti and the computer-based in-crowd. We are appealing particularly to artists. Most people don't have Macintoshes, and a high proportion of Mac users are artists, computer jocks, and/or SF freaks. The story is set up for the maximal number of graphic opportunities--I hope we'll have the caliber of artist to support it--and there are other appeals to the High Art crowd, like the original music.

The career goal in doing this is to get recognition for doing this sort of thing and to get the chance to do it again.

The five stories all start from a single initial scene, they all are set in the same world, and they all use the same four characters:

- Tam Rosse, a young man
- The Priestess (Aster of Pallas), a young woman
- Andrew (King) Brady, an old man
- The Lady Nii, a manifestation of the intelligence of the interplanetary cargo ship on which the stories take place)

The characters are allowed to manifest different aspects of their personalities from story to story. Within stories I hope they are consistent.

The goal of the exercise is to get people to read all five stories (rather than, say, as in an Infocom game, to leave the puzzle once they have solved it). For this reason the puzzles don't have the same value as in adventure games. Solving the puzzle is not the payoff. The puzzles are not always solvable.

The puzzles

- Have emotional value. Puzzles are used to make the user feel challenged, frustrated, happy.
- Are used for pacing. The degree of difficulty of the puzzle advances or retards the action.
- Have intellectual or simply fun value, like Tam Rosse's adventures in the kitchen.
- Are metaphorically linked to the narratives they're in. For instance, the only arcade game is part of the adventure story; the reciprocal puzzles are part of a story about reciprocation.
- Expand the background of the story.

In order to maintain the balance between puzzle and narrative, I've done several things I wouldn't in a story or in a more conventional computer game.

- There are comparatively few branches and comparatively many pages between branches. (See the flowchart.) *on p. 9*
- The writing is less complex than in a conventional story. The narrative voice is relatively flat, sentences are simple, and paragraphs are short. This is partially a function of screen size--you've got to say something in each screen.
- The writing is more melodramatic and graphic than I'd usually do. (Graphic? It's darn' near pornographic.) Again, this is a function of what I think the screen will accept. Lurid and melodramatic seems to work well and onscreen sex is a winner.

If we do it right, it is new, which should appeal to the people we're hunting.

4 Background of the World

Politics

KING OF SPACE is set in our solar system, which is partially colonized and is divided into three parts. The inner ring of planets--Mars, Venus and Earth, known as the Terrans--are all colonized. (Mercury is uninhabited.) The Terran solspace is also intensively occupied by space habitats. Some of these are owned by governments or corporations, some are ITCs (Independent Trading Corporations). The Terrans are governed "democratically"

under an emperor, who is a spiritual as well as a political leader. (See under "Religion.")

From Jupiter onward is the Io-Europa complex (the "Land of Ghosts"), supposedly under control of the Terrans, but actually in revolt. The Io-Europa complex does its own mining and manufacturing, but largely to serve its own needs; there is no trade between it and the Terrans. In the Rocks there are rumors that the Io-Europa Complex has let its genetic pool drift and that the IECs are no longer fully human.

Between the Terrans and the Land of Ghosts is the enormous solspace of the Asteroid Belt. 690 billion square miles in cross-section, "the Rocks" is very thinly populated.

It is also quarantined in order to stop the spread of a viral infection unleashed by a man named Harry Nicholsun, some fifty years ago. For the story behind that quarantine, see pages 306-310 of the manuscript.

The effect of the Nicholsun Plague is to induce a mindless loyalty to two classes of priests, the Priestesses and the Red Kings.

Religion

The religion practiced in the Belt is built around genetic community and fertility, real issues in a scattered group of small populations.

The Emperor is the spiritual leader of the Terran Empire. He incarnates the fertility of the race.

By impregnating Space (if you believe what you hear in the Scriptures), the Emperor created his Daughter, the Priestess. Priestesses are the higher of the two religious orders. Their job is to distribute genetic material and maintain environments (arcocultures) in the scattered locations where humans live in the Asteroids.

These women are taken into first orders as young as three or four years old. In the Mother-house on Pallas they are trained in arcoculture, genetic distribution, simple genetic engineering, ship maintenance, and the sexual arts. Their bodies are modified with nanocomputers and other genetic modifications, including space habituation (see page 300-302). They are prepared to understand and modify the programming of the ships they will work on. They are physically modified to look like Priestesses: beautiful women with dark skin that is scattered with luminescent stars.

They give off a pheromone that induces sexual attraction and devotion. This is their most important modification.

As virgins, they wear a sickle-shaped silver earring in one ear.

On her first assignment, a Priestess is ceremonially deflowered. This is the Ceremony, the central action of KING OF SPACE. She officially becomes a fertile woman and may become pregnant. Her sickle earring is removed, triggering hormonal changes, which trigger some of the nanocomputers. The Priestess "comes into her full powers." She has access to and can modify all the programming of the ship; she can make any change in the environment; and she can communicate with the ship.

From then on, the Priestess is principally a genetic and arcological engineer. She moves from ship to ship, maintaining the genetic pool and the arcological balance.

However, she also participates in every genetic distribution ceremony, having sex with many men. She is literally a sex goddess.¹

Individual Priestesses choose the members of the lower religious order, the Red Kings. Red Kings serve the Priestesses as bodyguards, gofers, and lovers. When a Priestess has sex with a man, she can decide to make him a Red King. He becomes permanently devoted to her; he also receives from her some neurogenetic modifications that make him faster, stronger, and partially space-habituated. It is considered the civilized thing to ask the man first, but frequently men have been made Red Kings against their will.

Red Kings are chosen for youth, strength, and handsomeness. Often they are young convicts or ex-convicts. They dress in red, which is also the convict color. Their duties include distributing genetic material, as the Priestess does, by having sex with as many women as possible.

Some men are trained by their ITCs to be Red Kings. They are presented to a Priestess as, as it were, a kind of welcoming gift when she arrives at the ITC. Brady was trained in this way but was never presented.

Priestesses may have more than one Red King at once; some have small armies of lovers. ~~The first Priestess and Red Kings are popularly associated with the Martian military society centered around Castro Mart.~~ High-ranking administrative Priestesses may continue to have Red Kings.

Trade, Economics, and Entertainment

The principal Terran export to the Rocks is genetic material, on which Terra has a monopoly. It is a religious duty to accept and

1. Part-time lesbianism is fairly common among Priestesses, but women who prefer to have sex only with women join the administrative part of the order. Priestesses who are beyond fertility also retire to administration. The highest-ranking Priestesses are old women.

use new genetic material in order to maintain the common gene pool.

Export is handled through the Priestesses. The priesthood is maintained (in style, on one of the largest asteroids) through the revenues from genetic updating.

The material on the Nicholsun uprising, pp. 306-310 of the manuscript, explains how genetic updates are done.

The second export from the Terrans to the Rocks is entertainment. Again, Terra itself is the exporter. The entertainment is in the form of "illusions," sensory hallucinations. Illusions are used not only as traditional entertainment but to change the appearance of persons, to make habitats appear larger and more beautiful than they are, and to provide companionship. The Lady Nii becomes Andrew Brady's lover in the form of an illusion.

(Illusions, of course, also socialize people to accept the Terran culture and Terran appearances as the norm.)

Trade in physical objects is less profitable than trade in entertainment, designs, and ideas, but there is considerable trade within the Terrans. The trade ships are known as "greatships", described on pp. 297-298. Their only fixed assets are a central computer and an orbit. Everything else is in modules that can be plugged in and out at will.

Trade used to be carried on in orbits that crossed between the Terrans and the Asteroids. These orbits have become valueless since the quarantine. The Lady Nii was in one of these orbits. She was abandoned, with the infected people aboard her, at the time of the Plague.

Andrew Brady is the only survivor of those people and the only inhabitant of the Nii.

5 Characters

There are four characters:

Tam Rosse

Point-of-view character for three out of the five story lines. He is twenty-three, an airvent repairman who is not sympathetic to official Terran religion. He got involved in the Uprising [sorry, Jon], a Belt-based movement for independence, and was imprisoned in the cold mines on Circe. He has recently escaped. He is young, handsome, tough, and a little sullen.

Aster Pallady (the Priestess)

A native of Pallas, she was taken into first orders at four. She is eighteen now and is on her first assignment. Responding to a distress signal set by people long dead, her ship has diverted itself to service the hulk-Greatship, the Lady Nii. She is anticipating the Ceremony, which will give her her full powers.

Andrew (King) Brady

As a young man in the service of the Lady Nii, he prepared to be a Red King. But when Nicholsun's Plague broke out and the Nii was found to be an infected area, Brady was left on the semi-abandoned ship with the rest of the plague-stricken. That was fifty years ago. He is the last survivor.

The Lady Nii

The intelligence of the Greatship. She appears in the bodies of cargo waldoes and guard robots and in illusory form as a Japanese woman, young or old. She also speaks mentally with the Priestess and King Brady, who are directly linked with her. She may appear in several guises at once. Sometimes she is devoted to the principles of Terran religion, sometimes she is bitterly critical of them. She took her name from a Japanese noblewoman in the Heike Monogatari who drowned herself, holding her infant Emperor, after the disastrous battle of Lake Biwa.

6 Summary of the Action and Flowchart

In most adventure games, the plot of the story is shaped like a river delta or a decision tree. Each decision creates two or more possible outcomes. KING OF SPACE is different.

KING OF SPACE is shaped like a five-tined fork. There are five stories, two of which are the same events from different points of view.

Once you get into one story, you're there until you finish with it. (Unless you get yourself killed or, in "Inattention and Stupidity", switch points of view.) The stories interweave narration, graphics, and puzzles.

The puzzles are what Steve Meretzky calls "string-shaped," tied down at beginning and end but mobile in the middle. So when you go through the story, you get a chunk of narrative, a puzzle, a

chunk of narrative, a puzzle, etc. But it's still the same five-tined fork.

Here the stories are labeled with titles ("Fight for a Woman", "Lust vs Loyalty"). The labels are only for convenience.

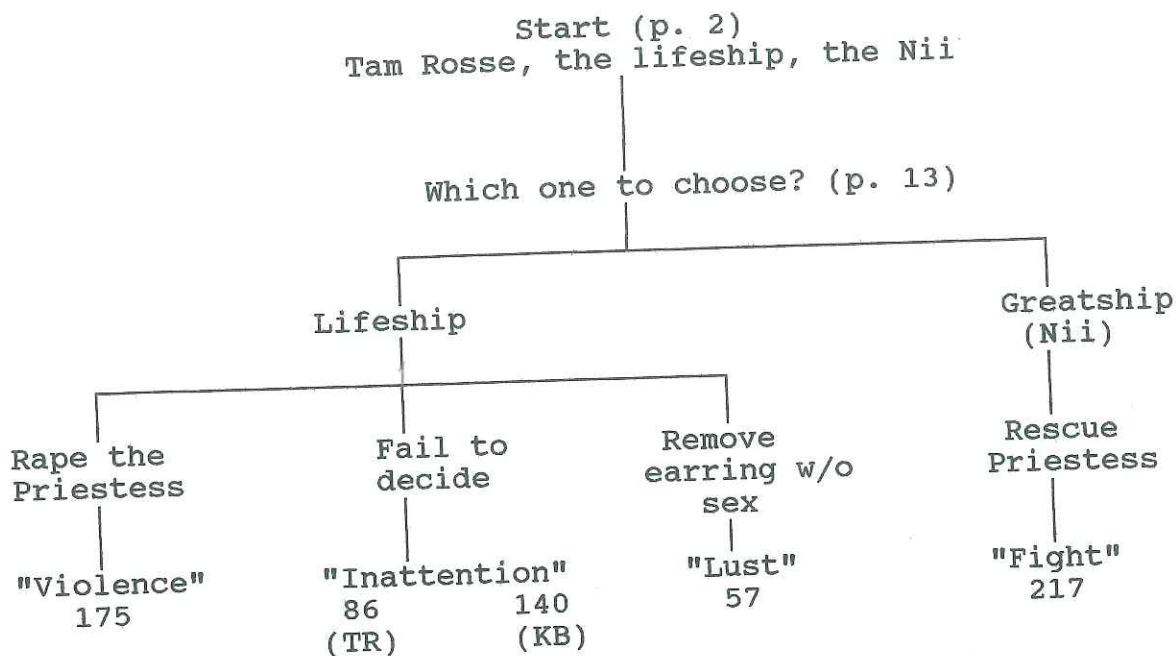


Figure 1: Flowchart

We start on page 2. Tam Rosse, a convict recently escaped from the prison-asteroid Circe, approaches the abandoned hulk of the greatship Lady Nii. Close to it he sees the personal lifeship of a Priestess.

On p. 13 Tam makes the first decision that chooses a story. If he goes into the greatship, he is immediately propelled into the story "Fight against the Empire." The text for this starts on p. 217.

In "Fight against the Empire", Brady tries to turn on the Priestess's powers by having her have sex with Tam. Instead, Tam and the Priestess attempt to escape. They have various adventures in which Tam Rosse may die. If he escapes, he is threatened with death, and the Priestess saves him by turning him into a Red King. In a climactic fight involving a huge cargo robot, laser guns, and the Nii herself, Tam defeats Brady. The Nii sacrifices Brady. Tam Rosse and the Priestess form an alliance.

If Tam goes into the lifeship, he is faced with several further decisions.

He can choose to fix the ship, but not to go through the Ceremony of sexual relations with her. He removes her earring without the Ceremony and causes her temporary loss of memory. During that amnesia she chooses Brady as her Ceremony partner instead of Tam Rosse. This begins the story "Lust vs. Loyalty". The major text for this starts on p. 57.

In "Lust vs. Loyalty" we are in the Priestess's mind. She is a woman named Aster, who must choose between her given word and her abilities and desires. She chooses Tam Rosse, but even choosing well has its price. King Brady dies, Tam Rosse disappears, and the Nii inflicts nightmares on Aster.

He can vacillate. He wants to have sex with her, he doesn't want it . . . Vacillation leads him to do important things wrong.

In "Inattention and Stupidity", which starts on p. 86, Tam Rosse neglects an important ceremony with both the Priestess and Brady. Through this he becomes their slave. They apparently intend to act out the Ceremony--inappropriately, since Brady is an old man. Tam Rosse is designated, as their servant, to prepare the banquet. He has great trouble preparing it, then getting back to them with it. He finally confronts the Priestess and compromises with her, as the Lady Nii comforts her old lover Brady.

We are also able to see the Ceremony through King Brady's eyes (starting p. 140). Mesmerized by the Lady Nii's illusions, Brady still believes himself a young man and the ship in good order. He takes the Priestess on a tour of the ship--virtually, of his memories of Nii--then dances for the Priestess as part of the Ceremony. Tam Rosse confronts him as he realizes his age. He is comforted by the Lady Nii while the young lovers finish the Ceremony.

Tam Rosse is full of rage at the Emperor and at the Priestess. He rapes her while she is still in coldsleep, in "Violence and Anger."

In "Violence and Anger", starting on p. 175, the Priestess takes her revenge on her rapist. The theme is reciprocity. She sends him into a maze that attacks him. Finding himself again at the lifeship, he is forced to relive the rape again and again, sometimes dying from it. Finally he is attacked by a machine in the Water Center. The attacks on him end only as he realizes what he has done to her.

An appendix to the narrative contains material that the Priestess and Tam may see during their exploration of the ship. Most of this material is taken from the Encyclopedia Galactica.

7 Questions

The basic questions are:

- Are we making the right decisions?
- Are we implementing them well?

I'd like to have you look first at the ideas behind the piece. Are the ideas about audience, etc., reasonable? Will we restrict our audience too much for what we want to do, or will we draw useful attention to ourselves?

What about the decision to write in biggish chunks of narrative interspersed with biggish chunks of puzzle? Do these fit together? Is the granularity too large?

Will the writing work on screen? (We won't really know this until we have it on disk, but in the meantime, I take opinions.)

Does the world work? Is it consistent?

Does the rubber science work?

Now the stories: Do they say things worth saying, and do they say them well? How can they do it better? Where are the weak spots, draggy parts? Where can it be shorter?

Page "cover"

23 KING 23

8 Feb 90

B 13
536

pages 1-100

red: comments by MB

King of Space

by

Sarah Smith

presented by

Eastgate Systems, Inc.

hypertext services since 1982

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A Hypergate™ hypertext document
betware

King of Space -> page one

cover

test:

changes: '[0-9]*[a-z]*[A-Z]24 =>

848 year

Page "page one"

King Of Space

The Asteroid Belt separates the Terrans from the Land of Ghosts.

Sunside lies the fertile Empire of Terra, from just inside Venus through Terra to Mars. The Emperor reigns here with his Children, the Priestess and the Red King. In this prime land are counted three worlds, one inhabited Moon, and hundreds of spaceborne Independent Trading Colonies.

Darkside lies the deathly Land of Ghosts—the Io-Europa Complex, rebels against the Empire.

Between them are the Lonely Rocks, the Asteroid Belt, shunned by Men and Ghosts.

good image, not
exploited elsewhere

why
capitals?

... -> p2

page one

test: *M(2)*0

changes: '[A-z]*[0-9] =>

Page "p2"

It is a place of unimaginable emptiness. In 690 billion square miles are only three major asteroids capable of supporting a Class A town: Pallas the whorehouse, Circe the prison, Ceres the bureaucracy from which the Terrans, behind their glass screens and their virus filters, ~~try to hold~~ a territory larger than all of the Empire.

weak verb
clutch at

The Independent Trading Colonies scratch out a living in Beltspace. Each ITC supports perhaps fifty to a hundred humans. But between the ITCs ~~and the~~ ~~Twenty-Three~~, there is emptiness, desertion, and silence.

Fifty years ago, it was different. But then the Incarnations came. The Incarnations of the Priestess and of the Red King...

And after them, the Plague...

... -> p3

p2 test: *M(2) changes: =>

Page "p3"

Tam Rosse dreams.

He is back on ITC 3502, waking on his fifth birthday. He is curled up in the sleeping pod he shares with his mother. His mother is a very important person, a watchman at the WaterCenter, and they hang their pod right by the big water tanks.

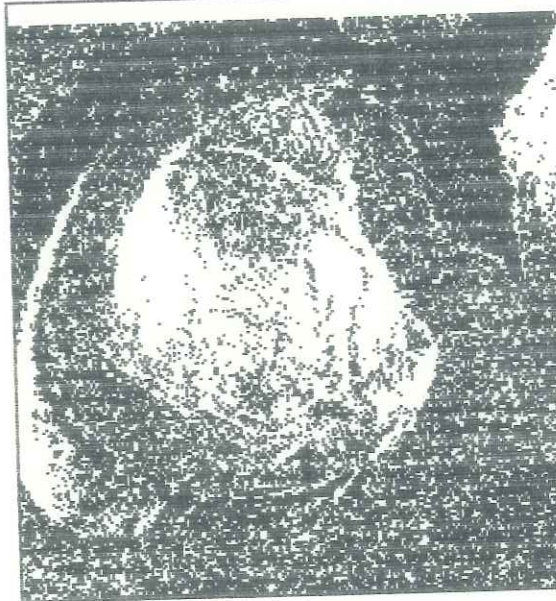
He cracks open the sleeping pod and sniffs the cool fresh air. The auxiliary lights are dim. The sunlights are still off. Lit by a tiny spotlight, the sacred puppet of the Rice Emperor dances in the wind from the air vents.

or "sun lights"

sunlights

... -> p4

p3 test: *M(1) changes: =>



Tam touches the edge of the sleeping pod and wriggles out the seam. The cool damp air raises goosebumps on his skin. He runs over the prickly-grassed nutrient floor and climbs up the ladder to the biggest tank.

He jumps in and begins swimming among the koi, in the cold early-morning water, and the big fish rub their bodies against his and kiss him, asking for food.

... -> p5

But as he rises to the surface of the water, the Rice Emperor reaches up to his puppet frame and breaks the strings that holds him. He strides across the air toward Tam, across the surface of the water. He stands on the water, glaring with rage, pointing at Tam.

"Blasphemer!"

He grabs Tam tight by the left hand and draws his fingernail across the complex gene-tattoo on Tam's palm that is Tam's name. The pain runs up Tam's arm and claws at Tam's chest as if it were an infection in his blood. The gene-tattoo bubbles and bursts.

... -> p6

[Handwritten signature]

This page confuses everyone who reads it. Why? Because it's a dream within a dream - a flashback of a hallucination.

I'd rewrite this

page to make the point some other way - perhaps when Tam resurfaces he sees some sudden ^{traumatic} altercation. ~~then~~ Imperial troops in red uniforms drag his mother off to the slave pens because

Page "p6"

With a wave of his arm the Emperor calls up his Children, the star-skinned Priestess and her lover the Red King.

"Kill this blasphemer!"

Shrieking with rage, they grasp Tam's arms and sink with him beneath the water. They open their mouths and scream at him wordlessly, the Priestess's high ululation, the Red King's deep bass groan.

Tam cannot get air— he must breathe—

*see "page 5"
comments*

... -> p7

p6 test: *A(1) changes: =>

Page "p7"

He wakes up sweating. Tam Rosse breathes the foul air in gasps, every breath a knife in his lungs.

The oxygen depletion alarm is wailing.

He cannot remember for a moment which auxiliary oxygen tanks are still unused. He flicks switches.

One tank left.

... -> p8

p7 test: *A(2) changes: =>

Page "airlock puzzle"

[Puzzle: Several things to open in the airlock. Something should contain a large iron bar.]

Page "airlock puzzle2"

[Puzzle: Several doors. Prompt, "Choose door to hit." When the person chooses a door, the prompt changes to "Are you sure?" Two of the doors contain nasty surprises, at least one of which is space. The third isn't openable. "You can't go that way," sneers the ship. "It's the way you want to go."]

Page "Res agenda"

page 7

[Minor puzzle: he has to pick the right switch on the board. Can we have the wail of the alarm?] [The board should say "Seeker on" and there should be a radar-like thing showing a big blip and a small one ahead.]

page 8 [Still the sound of the second alarm: very deep, slow bleep.]

page 49 Combination lock puzzle links page 49 to page 50 if Aster is present, or page 54 if Aster is absent.

page 74 water center puzzle, plus descriptions...

page 76 program local computer, fix documentation about it.. []

page 85a just ends with #####, with no following page

page 98 wine refilling graphic

page 100 2 puzzles, weird links to futz

page 102 needs picture of wham!

page 108 puzzle, doc; infinite loop 108-110; Horizotor too much like marvin

page 111 puzzle (a & b, too for drunkenness)

... -> <Res agenda more

ignore
this

Page "p8"

His eyes are blurred as he tries to read the nav charts.

When they tortured him in Circe prison, the torture left nerve-burns on his wrists. He is only twenty-three, but his hands shake as he keys in chart coordinates. The wound on his palm makes his left hand nearly useless.

There is no inhabited asteroid within a halfmonth, not even a miner's claim. The air will last for less than a fiveday.

He picks up the mask and breathes pure oxygen for a moment. His head clears but his lungs still ache.

K

→ that bad?
Doesnt seem to
cripple him THAT
much...

... -> p9

Page "p9"

The viewport clears.

Barely visible through it, a shadow-shape slides across the stars.

He has never seen anything like it. It is the size of a Class A town, a huge irregular globe of a thousand pieces, webbed with keep-me lines, studded with the detritus of a thousand System journeys. It revolves about itself in a vast complexity of orbits. At its edges he can see the stars through the ship, but in its center the environments revolve around each other so thickly that it looks like a single vast object.

And it is dark.

No beacon lights shine from it: no red warning lamps, no yellow haze of sunlights.

... -> p10

p9 test: *A(4)*p(1) changes: =>

Page "p10"

"Identify," he tells the Seeker board.

The Seeker identifies it as the **Lady Nii**, greatship-class cargo vessel of the Hermes-Eccentric fleet. It blinks:

*****LADY NII, ABANDONED 869*****
*****MAY BE CONTAMINATED BY PLAGUE*****

additional information is available regarding:

GREATSHIP

HERMES-ECCENTRIC FLEET

NICHOLSUN'S PLAGUE

... -> p11

Copy Vessel Map -> map

Page "p16"

The Priestess. But there is no Red King with her. The warm bass tones of the Scriptures echo inside Tam's head.

*The Emperor mated with Terra, and their Daughter was Space.
Space is a virgin whose skin is dark and whose body is covered with
stars. The moon hangs in her ear. In her womb are all the seeds of life,
and they are represented as a silver halo around her womb.*

The halo of silver seeds around her extends through all the ice. The genetic code of algae is in there. Tam Rosse shakes his head. On Venus, criminals kill to get algae. Algae make oxygen; you can eat algae. Where are the algae in all this silver?

He doesn't know. But she would.

... -> p17

Page "p17"

Where is her Red King?

The ship is small, one coldsleep couch.

*Because she was lonely for a lover, she made a man out of Mars-dust,
and by concourse with her in the Ceremony he gained life. He is the Red
King, the trickster, but he is also her true love, mated to Space for life.*

Mated to Space for life...

... -> p18

Nicholsun's Plague

~~An extremely~~ dangerous virus that swept through the ~~area of the~~ Asteroids in SY 869. Victims fell prey to delusions, believing that their female ministry, the Priestesses, were wholly good while the representatives of Imperial authority were completely evil.

In the chaos that ensued, many loyal servants of the Empire lost their lives. Fortunately, the Priestesses themselves were not prey to this delusion and their loyalty to the Empire helped to restore order.

Outbreaks of Nicholsun's Plague in more recent years, and the fear of the virus moving into the general gene pool, have made necessary a strict quarantine of the Asteroids. It is hoped that, like other plagues, Nicholsun's Plague will eventually abate or turn benign.

<readout ends> -> *r(1)

10
20
20

→ treatment?

Even after fifty years she will still have enough oxygen.

And maybe more.

Oxygen, algae, anything...

Enough to live on. Enough to make a place with, in these dead asteroids. By the Emperor and his Mother, he is not dead after all...

A little white moon orbits the greatship.

... -> p12

Page "p12"

He zooms the viewport in on the moon.

It has waited in orbit around this dead greatness, for who knows how long: a tiny moon, a white crescent. A **lifeship**!

He laughs, almost silly.

A present from the Emperor-worshippers. Lifeships are full of genetic material. The little white moon can restock an entire planet.

Not to mention a **Greatship**.

... -> p13

Page "p293"

Lifeships

Lifeships are the means by which the Fertile Worlds ensure genetic **consistency** throughout Terran Space. These small, moon-shaped, heavily shielded ships carry genetic material--a selection of base ecologies, suited to any habitat in which Terrans can live.

There is ~~only~~ one pilot. For religious reasons, she is always a woman.

Usually there is a second crew member. For religious reasons, he is always a man.

do you mean diversity?

NO

Lifeships have

<readout ends> -> *r(1)

Page "p13"

But there will be a crew.

A Priestess and her Red King.

The greatest servants of the Empire in the Asteroids.

A Priestess with her powers controls life and death in the Rocks. The Red King is her lover, her helper, her bodyguard. A condemned criminal, a violent man, he is linked to her by bonds as strong as life.

A

*lapsed
parallelism*

Tam Rosse brings his ship into synchronized orbit with the lifeship

Tam Rosse brings his ship into synchronized orbit with the greatship

Nicholson's Plague -> p316
Priestesses -> p301

Page "p15"

Never mind. He's a condemned criminal himself. Tam Rosse brings his ship into synchronized orbit with the lifeship.

At the door of the lifeship he looks around warily, drawing his heartsblood knife from its sheath. The ship of the Fertile Worlds is smooth and white inside, brightly lit, the inside of a star's egg. It smells strange, cool and intoxicating.

He gasps and lets the air clear his lungs.

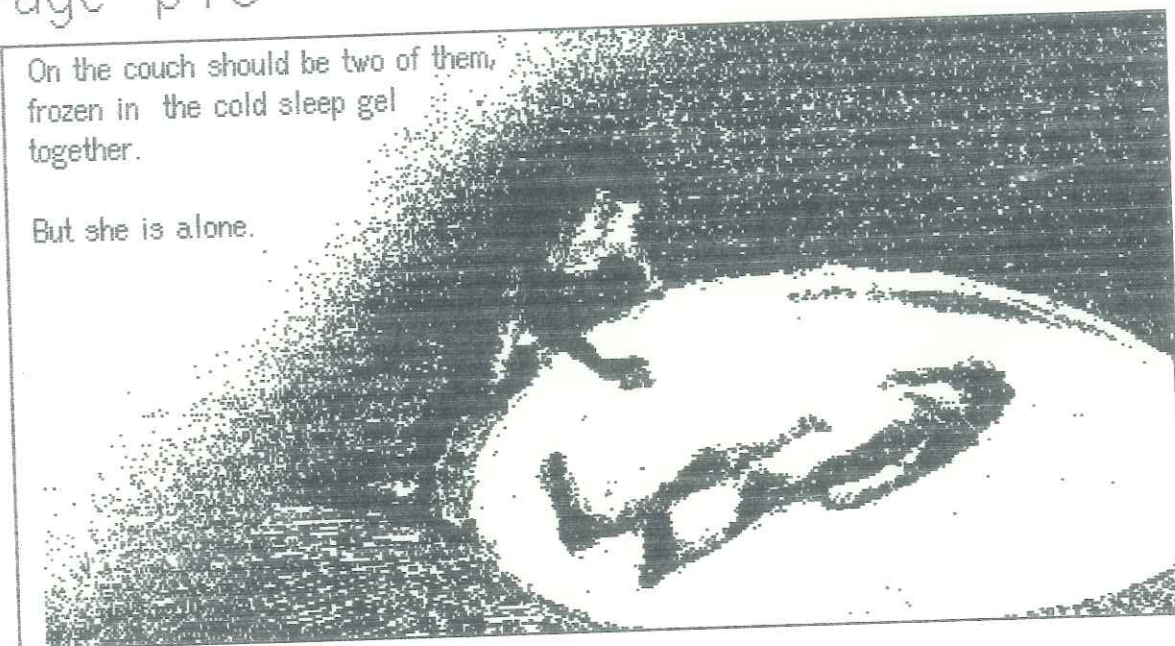
At the center of the sphere, in coldsleep, lies a girl.

... -> p15a1 *hope...*

Page "p18"

On the couch should be two of them,
frozen in the cold sleep gel
together.

But she is alone.



... -> p19

Page "p19"

And he looks more closely at her, and in her ear he sees a silver earring, shaped
like the sickle moon.

She is wearing the Virgin's Moon.

The Scriptures speak the truth for once. The Red King is not made until the
Priestess makes him. And the Priestess is sent out on her maiden voyage to find a
Red King.

After she finds him and mates with him, she gets her powers.

And whoever the poor bastard was, he becomes her Red King. Her bodyguard.
Mated to her — for life.

... -> p20

Scriptures -> p317

Page "p21"

"Just enough power to run the ship, lady," he murmurs. "Not enough to run me."

There is no mystery about Priestesses. They're eco-engineers. Removing the earring kicks in their programming. The rest is smoke and mirrors.

Tam Rosse reaches through the "ice" and tries to slip the earring out of her ear.

It won't move.

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

Her eyes are utterly blank.

... -> p28

p21 test: changes:LE =>

Page "p26"

On one wall of the eggship there is a control to bring her out of sleep. Tam Rosse finds the control to waken her. The half-moon of ice melts slowly, rivulets flowing down into the surface of the egg-ship.

The rich air becomes even richer, intoxicating, like the air of spring. It's too much for him, coming from Circe prison, and he steps back and licks his lips nervously. He knows it's a trick, scents of grass and vegetables mingling with the smell of woman-sex, but it makes him want to roll with her in that grass, he can smell the crushed scent of it underneath their bodies.

... -> p27

p26 test: changes:l =>

Page "p22"

He's heard in prison that the earring is the key.

There is no mystery about Priestesses. They're arco-engineers. They're zapped full of nanocomputers that do all the work while they play Sex Goddess of the Universe. Removing the earring kicks in their programming. The rest is smoke and mirrors.

And bodies.

"Fuck the Emperor," he mutters.

... -> p23

p22 test: changes: =>

Page "p28"

It has been such a long dreaming. She looks around her, confused, still stunned from the cold sleep drugs. Standing over her is a man in red.

"—you?" the man in red says.

You... The word is strange. It means her. She looks tentatively down at her arms, at her naked breasts. Her skin is dark and across it are freckled little stars. Funny. They mean something. So does his red suit. She thinks of a party—something— St. Nicholsun's Days on Pallas. "I'm four," she says triumphantly. "Are you Saint Nicholsun?"

He looks her up and down. She can feel his look like a hand on her skin. Rough. Bruising. He turns away. "You've lost your memory. It happens sometimes in coldsleep," he says.

... -> p29

p28 test: changes: ^M =>

mildly K. I have trouble with point of view here: this IP slips back toward TAM's POV.

Page "p23"

→ Not a great 1st sentence

~~He touches his red prison suit and it opens down to his groin.~~ 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. For four year 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~~ ^{dry?} 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.

... -> p24

p23 test: changes: =>

Page "p24"

He rides his brutality, he pushes against it like G-force. He feels power like the prison trustees on Circe must have felt toward him.

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

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.

Does he feel
contempt? Disgust?
Annoyance at the
waste of time?

... -> p25

p24 test: changes:ER =>

Page "p25"

The ship's heat circuits cut in as he fastens his jumpsuit. He begins to sweat, smelling his bodystink 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.

... -> p45

Page "p27"

He wants to worship her, to protect her. He wants to give her his whole loyalty. The feeling is as strong as a smell inside his head.

Wow.

What's happening?

Slowly the girl sits up. He tries not to look at the stars glowing on her bare skin.

... -> p36

Page "p30"

He goes in front of her, propelling himself down a snaky corridor. It is dark and she is afraid. She makes him wait for her, and looks for her suit, but he tells her she doesn't need one. "Not you. You're spacehabbed."

"What does that mean?"

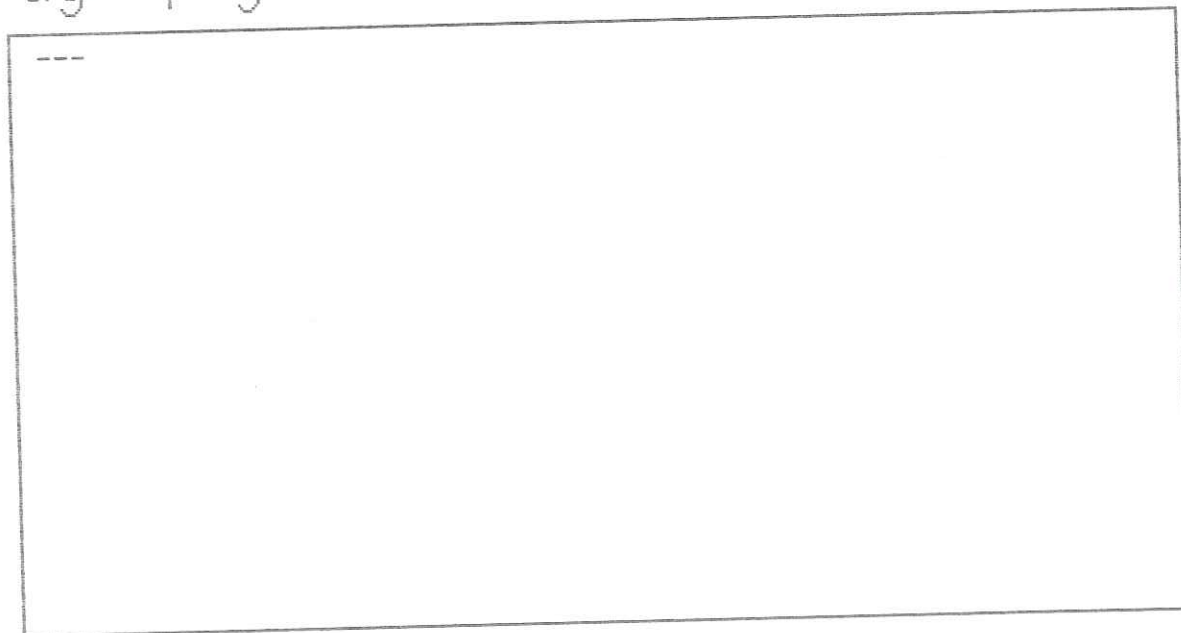
"It means you're important," he says roughly. "Almost as good as a Terran."

He takes her by the arm and leads her down the corridor. In his other hand he holds some kind of dagger, like a dress up for St. Nicholas's. He gestures to the lock.

There are frost-flowers around the massive old doors. She remembers not to touch frosted metal, to put her hand only on the touchplate.

... -> *c

Page "page A"



Page "p36"

She sits up, shaking the drops of jelly from her dusky skin. She looks him up and down; she is seeing his jumpsuit, the red of Circe prison.

"Uh, I won't hurt you," he stammers.

She laughs. "No," she says. "You won't."

He can no more hurt her than turn his dagger against himself. The stars glow on her glowing skin, he smells the fragrance of her body, fresh from the coldsleep, and he is overwhelmed by helpless tenderness, a violent sweet loyalty. He wants to fall down in front of her, worship her body inch by inch, protect her, love her, live for her until he dies.

Whoa. Reset. These are NOT HIS FEELINGS.

Can we be ^{a little} less

elastic? For example →

Voices in his mind
compose roles to
her, tell him how
he wants to ~~be~~ need
before her, worship
her body --- etc

... -> p37

p36 test: changes:M =>

Page "p29"

"I know who I am," she says. "I'm Aster."

"I'm supposed to go to a party," she says. "It's called the Ceremony."

She looks down at her body again. All over her body she is shaped like a grownup. She frowns. She touches her strange round breasts. They bob and tug as she gets up, and there is some kind of ID stud in her ear, something that hurts and tingles. They have something to do with the party. She is afraid of the party, somehow.

"Let's look in the ship," the man says.

... -> p30

Page "p31"

Her fingers work by themselves, and through the metal of the ship they feel a vibration.

The lock-picture makes a pattern and the door unlocks for her.

It's a nice feeling, like a tickling, like a koi kissing her hand.

She feels the ship somehow. She almost smells it.

... -> p32

Page "p32"

The leaves of the airlock creak open like an old waterwheel.

... -> p33

Page "Keys" *Babbage - 969-8193*

Keys

- A: Aster's point of view (p32 / p32a)
- B: Aster accompanies Tam (p15, p20)
- E: Aster has lost her earring
- I: Inattention and Stupidity (p26)
- L: Lust vs. Loyalty (p21)
- M: Aster has memories (p36)
- R: Aster has been raped (p48)
- S: Tam has given Aster the seeds (p38)
- d: Tam is drunk in I&S (p101)
- m: Tam has a map (p map)
- s: seeds flyings
- t: Tam spilled tea in puzzle p113-115 (not yet entered)

more keys -> keys 2

c1 -> e1 -> end and

Keys test: changes: 34 =>

Page "p32a"

The leaves of the airlock iris force themselves slowly open, as if they are doing something unnatural, moving against the flow of time.

p33 -> p33

*break
here*

Page "p33"

"I'm scared", she tells the man in red. She reaches out to hold his hand.

... -> p34

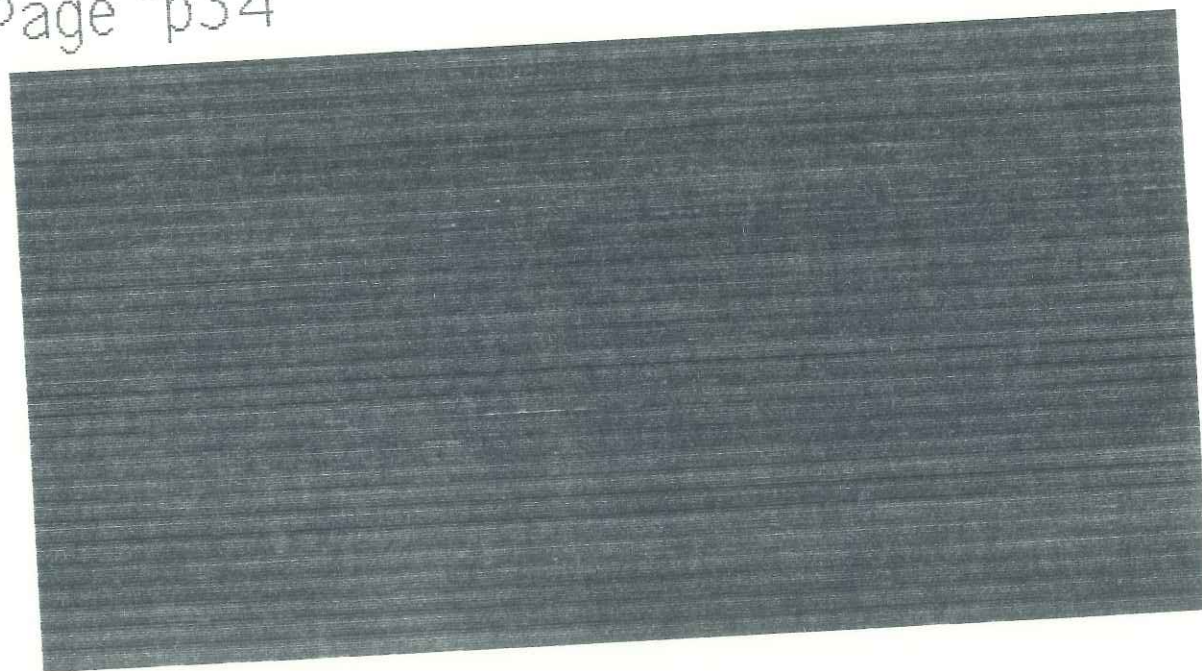
p33

test: A

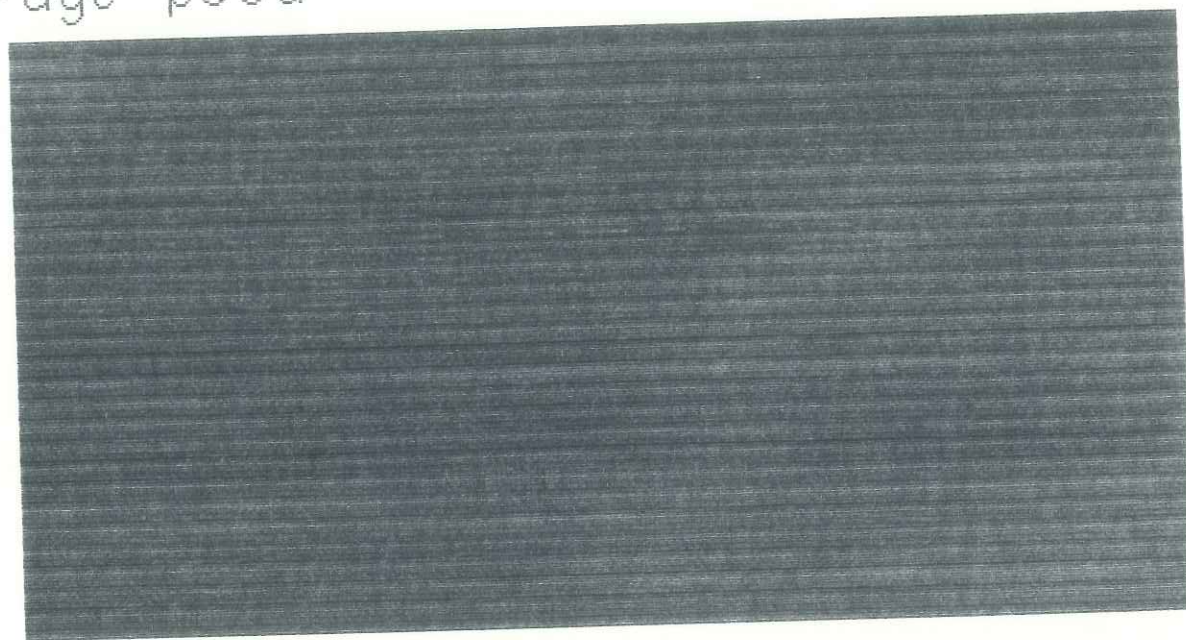
changes:

=>p33a

Page "p34"

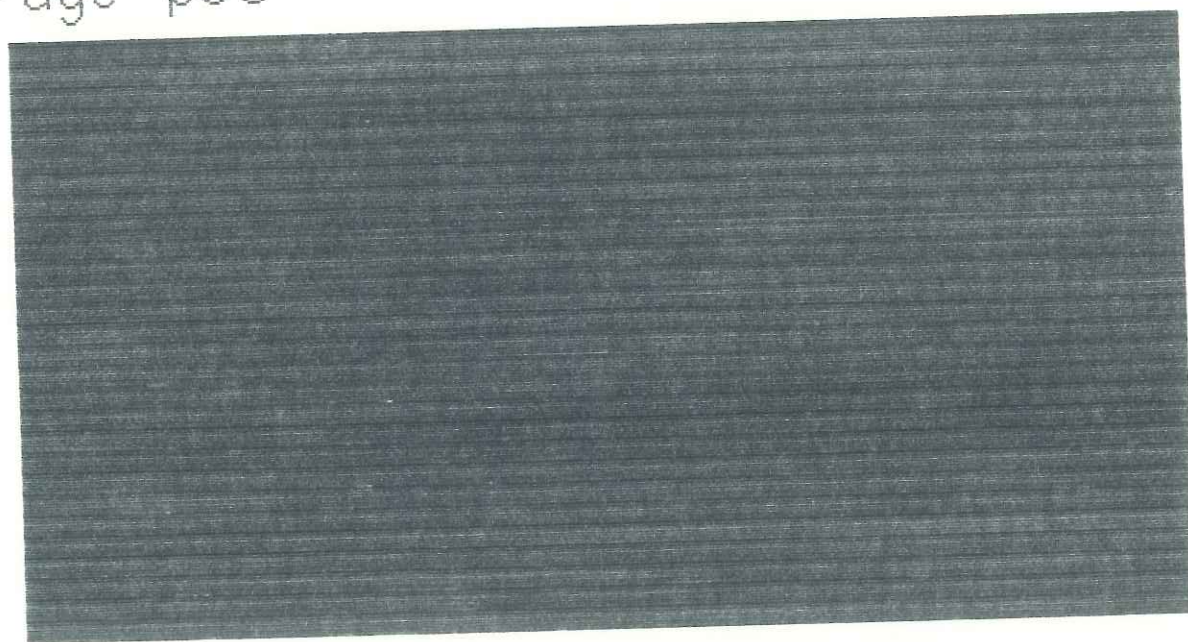


Page "p33a"



... -> p34

Page "p35"



Page "p51"

have the Olympics survived?
Do they run marathons on Circe?

Inside the airlock waits an old, old man.

~~He would set records in the Olympic dirtiness competition.~~ Lice crawl in his matted gray hair (lice! Who let loose the genes for those?). He looks past them as if he is trying to see beyond their shoulders all the way to Terra.

And then he focuses on the Priestess.

Speak of dirty old men...

Doesn't work

... -> p52

p51

test: l

changes:

=>p51a

Page "p37"

She picks five seeds from the shoulder of his suit. "These will grow here. Give them to me."

Tam Rosse gives her the seeds

Tam Rosse doesn't give her the seeds

p37

test:

changes:s

=>

Page "p38"

He does not want to touch her. The woman is a black hole. A gravity well. He can feel himself falling into her.

He shrugs her hand away and brushes the seeds toward her, half giving them, half pushing her away.

"Ah," he says. "There's a deserted station outside. It's derelict. My ship's oxygen producing algae are dead. I need live algae."

"I'll see what I can do," she says.

... -> p39

p38 test: changes:5 =>

Page "p43"

She has the look of somebody who's not thinking about five sunseeds on his shoulder.

He doesn't believe in her religion. The Emperor is a Terran. The Emperor takes some dumb girl kid or some thirteen-year-old stud. Tells them they're incarnations, Daughters of the Emperor, Red Kings. Teaches them to worship Terra and the Emperor. Sends them out with a shipful of hallucinogens and sex manuals to spread the worship of Terra.

Politics as pornography. People act as if their brains were between their legs.

... -> p44

p43 test: changes:3 =>

Page "p39"

She touches a small moon-shaped earring in her right ear.

"I don't have my full powers yet," she says, "but I can do this much."

Surprising him, she runs her long fingers across the nerve scars on his wrist. Deadened nerves tingle and flare back into life.

"Ouch!"

He looks in amazement at ^{his} this palm. It's healed. The scar is pink.

... -> p40

p39

test:

changes:"s

=>

Page "p40"

She smiles and looks into his eyes.

"I can give you much more than that," she says, "if you'll do just a little thing for me."

He says yes

He says no

Page "p42"

It's as if she's done something, turned up the power on his feelings. He wants her, he can't help himself.

He can't stand it.

"Yes!" he babbles. "You want me? Sure! I'm a blasphemer! I don't even believe in you! Hate your guts! The Emperor your father too—"

He clenches his teeth on the mouthpiece of his air supply tube. ~~Wow.~~ Rubber. Foul horrible ozone laden, tank-smelling air. Close your eyes and think of the Uprising.

He propels himself down the corridor, away from her and the girl-laden air. But he ~~keeps~~ looking ^s over his shoulder to make sure she is following.

... -> p48

Page "p41"

If you don't breathe, they can't get you. That's what it said in the Uprising database.

He holds his breath hard. Pressing at the edge of his nostrils are sensations no one has ever described. Pink sensations, tickling feelings, wonderful wonderful wonderful—

"No!" he gasps and clutches his air supply tube with his teeth. Foul air never tasted so politically correct.

She looks up at him, eyes wide, then smiles slowly. He almost drowns in the wonder of her smile.

"There's plenty of time," she murmurs.

... -> p48

This makes more sense as soldier gossip — "That's what Corporal Laugel said that night at Ypres, the night the shelling was so heavy, the night Samuels got his hand blown in No-man's land."

Page "p48"

He goes first, propelling himself down the pitted and murky port corridor toward the greatship. He can see the white plume of air leaking from his suit. He slaps a seal-patch over it.

The priestess needs no suit here. She is spacehabbed.

He has only a dagger, a prison weapon, made from the Circean mineral called heartsblood, chipped and edged in the long nights in the mines. The thongs that wrap the handle are a man's skin.

Around the lock there are only the fossilized pale marks of water impurities; it has been so long since the lock was opened that no ice crystals blur its metal leaves.

... -> p49

p48 test: R changes: =>p48a

Page "p44"

But, still...

Her eyes are beautiful. He looks down, away from them. ~~Mistake~~. Her body is gorgeous.

"Um," he says. "There's a station outside. It's dead--derelict. My ship's oxygen production algae are dead. I need algae for both ships. . . . This is really important. Can we talk about the, uh, seeds later?"

"Of course," she says. She frowns. She opens her mouth, then closes it again. She touches her single earring, silver and shaped like the moon. She sighs.

"It'll wait."

... -> p48

Page "p45"

She looks up at him, her eyes ageless and unfathomable. "You did the Ceremony," she says.

He nods. He has power over her. He feels it in what his body has done to hers.

"Now I have my powers," she murmurs.

"I did you a **Favor**. I woke you up. Now I need your help to get the ship going," he says.

She sits up, looks him deep in the eyes. The blood is still flowing down her arm. She pinches the lobe between two fingers and the blood stops.

"Oh, yes," she says, "I can heal the **Lady Nii**."

... -> p48

Page "p294"

Trades and Favors

Trades and favors are the most serious social ceremonies in trans-Terran space. "Favors" involve only items necessary to life: food, water, air, fuel, military support, genetic codes, and essential information. Trades involve anything else, from artifacts to games software.

No one is required to trade. Anyone is required to do a favor, to the best of their ability.

It is considered bad taste on both sides to trade nonessential items for essential items.

Anyone who asks a favor--a granting of any essential item--is required to do a favor back, even at the cost of his life.

<readout ends> -> *r(1)

Climbing into his skintite, he dogs the hatches open into a pitted and murky port-corridor. As he propels himself toward the greatship, he can see a white plume of air leaking from his suit. He slaps a sealant patch over it.

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Around the lock there are only the fossilized pale marks of water impurities; it has been so long since the lock was opened that no ice crystals blur its metal leaves.

... -> p49

Circe -> p303

Circe Prison

The famous "Cold Mines" of Circe Prison contain many of the most dangerous political prisoners of the Solar System.

none

<readout ends> -> *r(1)

Space Habituation

"Hardening" of essential human staff against common space dangers (vacuum, radiation, noxious environments). Space habituation does not give full or lasting protection against any dangers and is no substitute for a good skintite spacesuit-- though far too many space staff seem to believe otherwise.

Full hardening requires surgery. However, the Ceremony of the Priestesses produces a similar effect on newly created Red Kings (the "Little Hardening"). This effect is the source of a well-known anecdote about the Nicholsun Uprising, the "Incident of the 47 Kings."

*is this actually
used in the story?
If not, it seems
mildly implausible*

<readout ends> -> *r(1)

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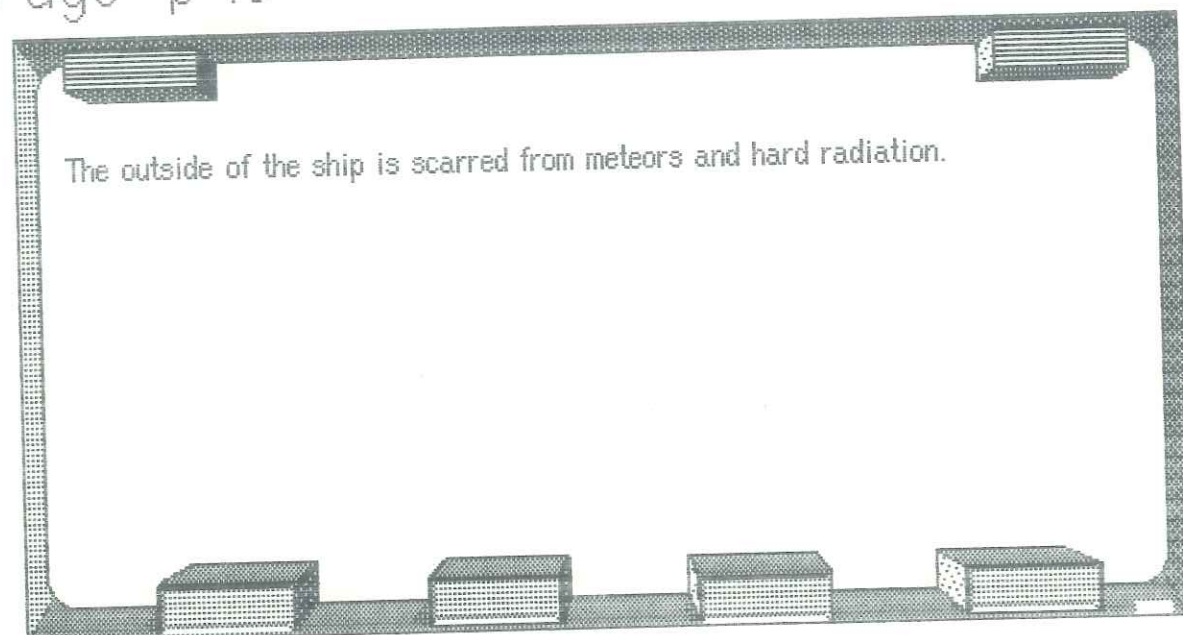
The priestess needs no suit here. She is spacehabbed.

Around the lock is a little delta of old water impurities.

Great. Atmosphere leaks.

... -> p49

Page "p49"



... -> *c

Page "p50"

The Priestess diddles with the lock, caressing it with long fingers. The pictures on the lock change. Tam looks, looks again, blinks, and feels himself blushing.

"Stop that!" he mutters to her.

Think of the Uprising.

He feels an uncomfortable pressure on his skintite, between his legs.

Think of the...

No.

The leaves of the airlock iris slowly open, creaking like a frog prince in a foul mood.

... -> p33

Page "p54"

Tam slips the knife into its external sheath and keeps working on the lock. But his right hand is clumsy with cold, his left is useless.

The warmth is draining out of Tam's body. The skintite's heat circuits aren't cutting in.

He's beginning to shake with cold. He remembers the cold, the endless cold, of the Circe mines.

Go back to the lifeship

Yell at the comm box

Page "p50a"

Her fingers work by themselves, and through the metal of the ship Tam feels a vibration.

The leaves of the airlock iris force themselves slowly open, as if they are doing something unnatural, moving against the flow of time.

... -> p33

Page "p51a"

Inside the airlock waits an old, old man. Funny little animals crawl at the edge of his hair and he is all yellow, like a candle. He smells nasty, dirty. But he is a captain, because he has a wire crown on his head.

"I am king," he says. His jumpsuit is red too and Aster wonders whether everyone is St. Nicholsun today. He stares at Aster and scratches somewhere that he shouldn't.

"Who . . . ?" she murmurs.

"I am King Brady."

A real king.

... -> p52

p51a test: "R changes: =>p51b

Page "p52"

"I am king," he says. His jumpsuit, stiff with dirt, hangs on his body. He scratches at his withered crotch. He plucks at the Imperial name-patch and looks at it curiously as though it is the instructions for a machine he does not use.

"I am King Brady."

... -> p176

Page "p51b"

Inside the airlock waits a man.

Lice crawl in his matted gray hair; his body smells; he is spider-thin, a man who has spent his life in low gravity. His yellow skin is smeared with dirt. Old power wires are tangled into his hair, wires plaited into a rough circle like a crown.

He stares like a man who has seen too much infinity alone.

... -> p52

Page "p57"

The king smells bad. There is something wrong with him, something that makes her shudder. Her new grown-up body is repelled by him. cut?

She holds the other man's hand. The other man in red will take care of her. She is afraid of him too, but she wants to be near him.

"Priestess?" the old man says. He looks at her strangely.

"No," she says. "Aster."

"You folks tradin'?"

Trade? She looks more closely at the dirty old man.

... -> p58

Page "p86"

"Priestess," says the old man, awed.

The priestess does something to the stars on her body. For a moment she glows like a sunlight. The old man blinks and smiles all over his dirty face.

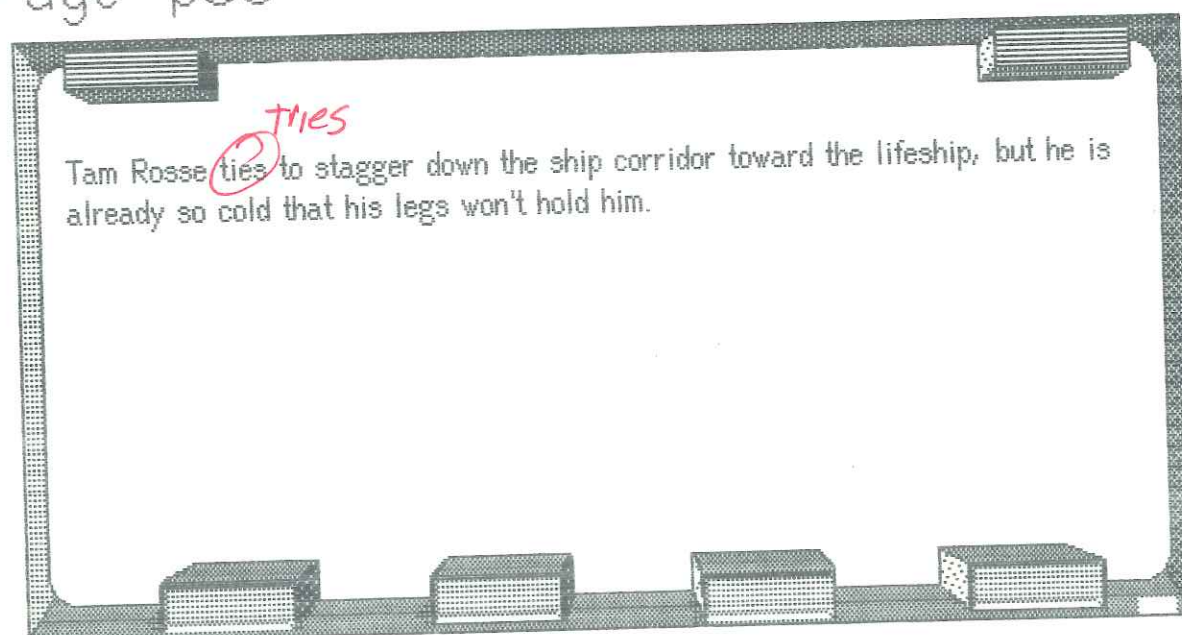
"My Priestess," he coos.

In the glare, Tam Rosse blinks and looks around the place where they're standing. Maybe one time it was a standard airlock/decontamination room. Not big--freight goes into ~~the~~ ship on the lower-G levels, not up here at 1.0--but after the supply ship and the lifeship, it looks like you could fit Saturn into it, rings and all.

... -> p87

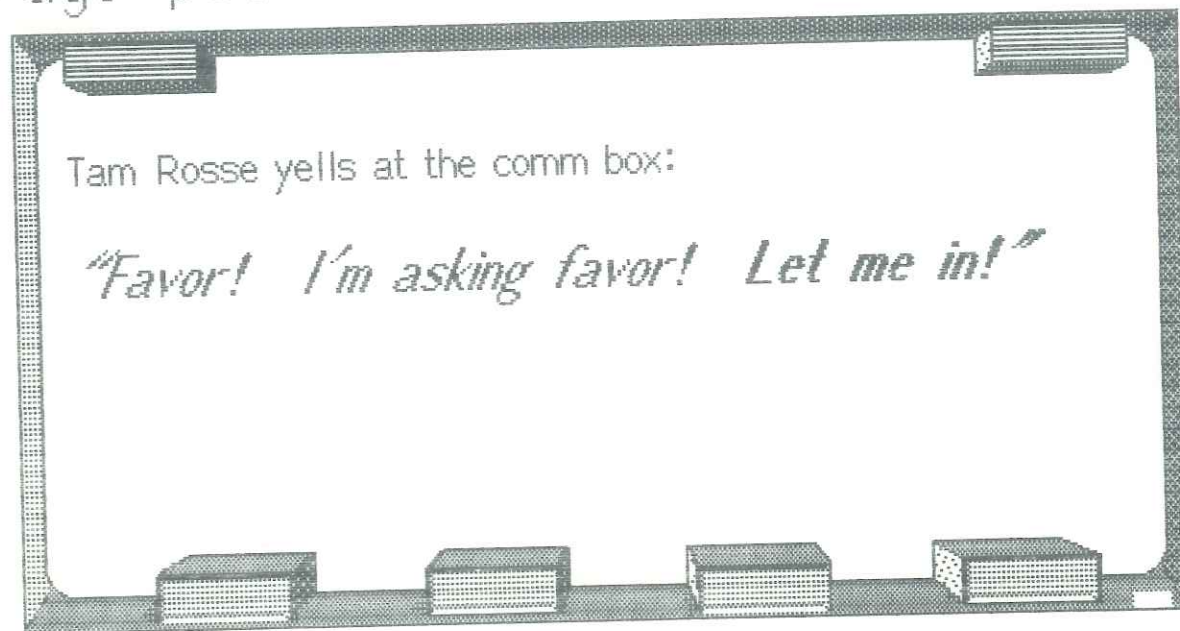
p86 test: M^E^R changes:l =>p175

Page "p55"



... -> p54

Page "p56"



... -> p217

Favor -> p294

Page "p217"

The leaves of the airlock-iris force themselves slowly open, as if they are doing something unnatural, moving against the flow of time.--

... -> p218

Page "p50a"

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... -> p33

p50a test: B changes: =>p54

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p57 test: ^M changes: =>p86

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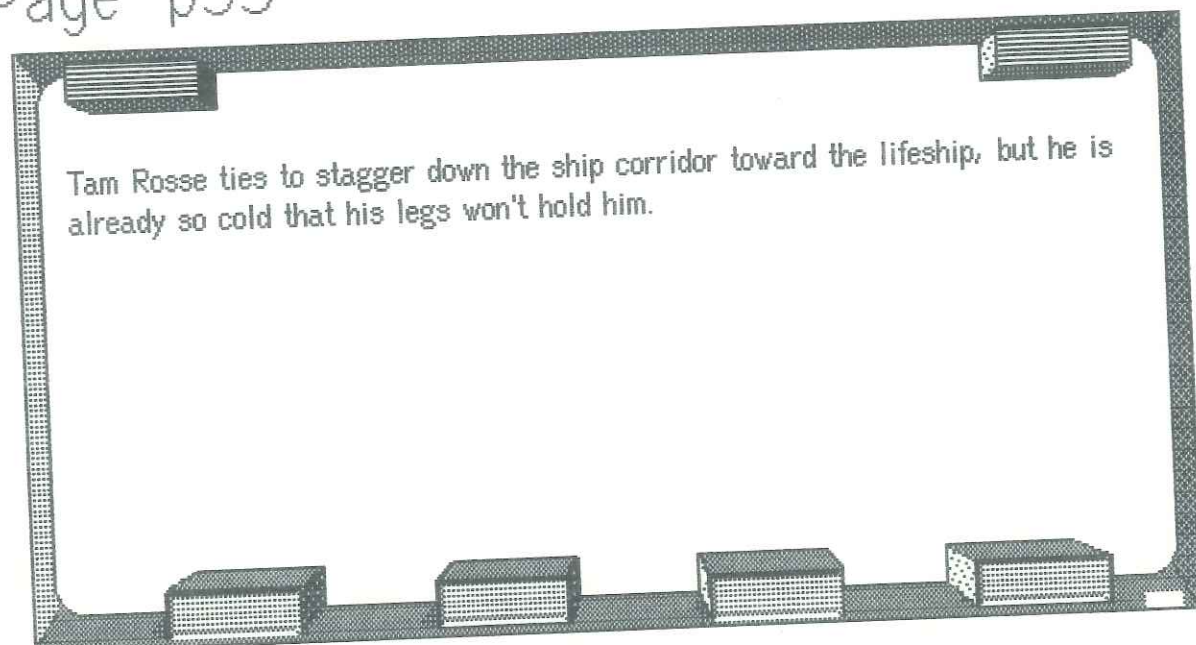
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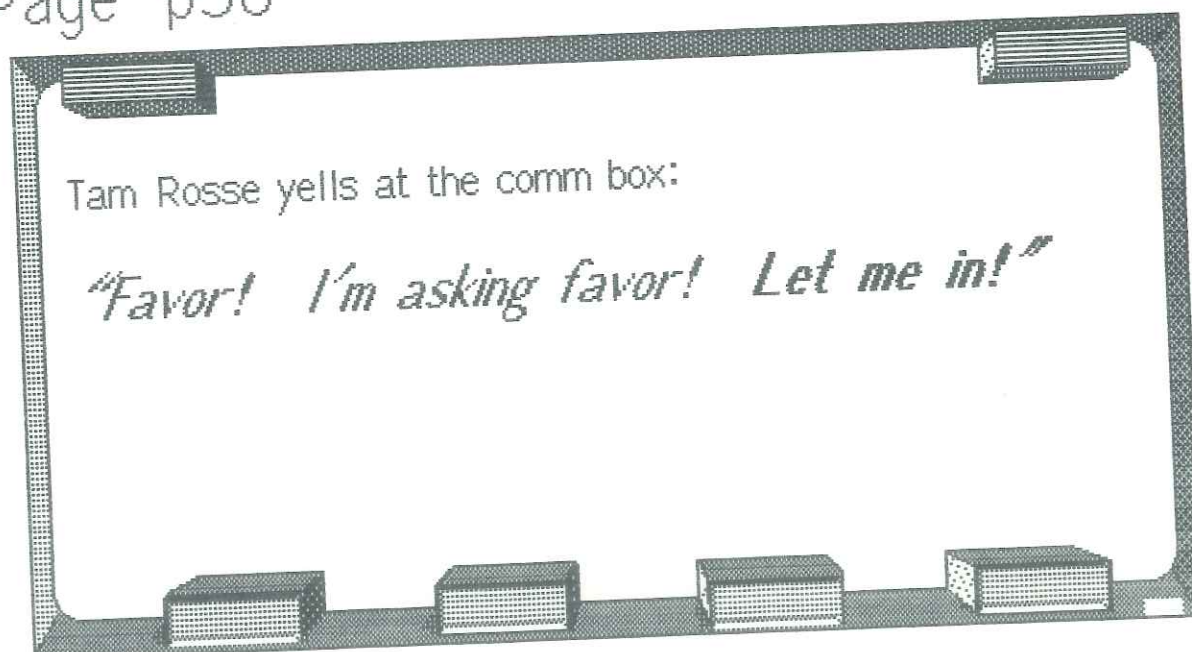
p86 test: changes: =>

Page "p55"



... -> p54

Page "p56"



... -> p217

Favor -> p294

Page "p217"

The leaves of the airlock-iris force themselves slowly open, as if they are doing something unnatural, moving against the flow of time.--

... -> p218

Page "p58"

She knows about trade. Trade means presents.

"Will you give me a present?" she asks the old man. When the trading ships come in, a little girl on Pall' can get a present just by asking.

The old man laughs strangely.

"Honey, I'll do you a favor."

... -> p59

Page "p59"

"You can't do that!" the other man says.

"You shut up. I got some wine," the old man says. "Honey, you ever tasted wine?"

No, she has never tasted wine. How could she at four years old? The old man sets the strange candle down. The quavering light speckles the top of a dust-covered storecube and glimmers on something more wonderful than she has ever seen.

The metal of the cup has a sheen, all over, like her own skin. The cup is heavy, covered with crystals that spark like the stars on her own skin. She picks it up, delighted.

The other man tries to knock it away from her! She cries out indignantly and drinks it all down.

... -> p60

Page "p60"

It's strange, it's choking. She coughs. It has the taste of incense in it.

Incense . . . the smell of bodies together, a crowd...

Barefooted on the swirl-patterned steel of the Palladion, a crowd of girls, Priestess-virgins, practicing for the Ceremony, tasting the wine. Taste of grapes and fermentation, cumin, nutmeg, cannabis, the sting of the alcohol against the roof of the mouth. . .

She remembers.

... -> p61

Page "p58"

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... -> p61

Page "p61"

The cup loosens from her hand and drops.

And the old man, snatching it from her, drinks the last dregs of the cup.

"No!" she cries.

... -> p62

Page "p62"

The old man holds out his hand. His nails are black ridged claws. Between his fingers are seams of dirt. "Take your King's hand," he says.

Him, her King? It is a blasphemy.

"You tricked me, Brady," she says.

The young man protests. "She didn't remember. You forced a Favor on her."

"No force, boy."

She turns to look at the man in red. The young man, the fertile man. She can hardly bear to look at him without touching him. The hormones that the silver stud pumps into her body tell her what she must do.

... -> p62a

Why can't Brady be a Red King? Yes, the younger, more fertile candidate would be more efficient, but what about Brady makes it vital to Aster's purpose that he not be the King?

Page "p62a"

How can a priestess make fertility, until her own body is a seed?

"You cannot be my King," she gasps to the old man.

Her breasts and groin ache and the silver earring weighs heavy in her ear.

"But I am."

→ why not? This is a non sequitur to non-believers, no.

... -> p63

Page "p63"

She turns and takes the young man's hand. She holds it tight, not daring to look at the man whose hand she holds, feeling only his tight strength.

How can her word be important?

"I have given you a favor. I will fix your ship. Give me this man for servant."

Her body confuses her with its longing.

The old man looks at her shrewdly.

He'll serve you in the day," he says. "But in the night, I."

... -> p64

Page "p64"

Picture¹.

As she stands in the Water Center, she feels the agony of the ship.

She has only half her powers. The ship needs more knowledge than she has, and the silver earring hangs heavy in her ear.

The Water Center is a place of spherical shadows. The big transparent water-globes are choked with dying algae. The stench repels her. The sunlights have dimmed, flickering, dying. The filters leak water onto the nutrient floor.

... -> p64a

Page "p64a"

She sends Tam Rosse to look for new filters.

Servant. Her servant.

Eyes follow them everywhere. Stationary cameras, skittering watch bots. A spyfly crawls over her ear, looking at the earring. They are like flies on the bodies of the dead.

... -> p65

Page "p65"

At night she goes to Brady.

She closes her eyes and endures. But at the end she is as she was before and the earring will not drop from her ear.

In the dark, she plants seeds in the nutrient floor, but nothing grows under her hands. Only the Ceremony plant. The seed she can plant but never use.

... -> p66

Page "p66"

The first day-period the Ceremony plant is as high as her belly.

"Give me a favor from that plant," Tam Rosse says.

She gives him the smallest of the unfurling green leaves. He kneels and holds it in his hand, a green thing in all this dead and rock-colored ship. He looks at her and their eyes meet while they might count one.

What good is her word on this dying ship?

They clean the old filters. They find in them the skeletons of koi. She re-balances the chemistry of the hydroponics garden.

That night Brady comes to her, but again he cannot take the earring from her ear.

... -> p67

Page "p67"

The next day-period the Ceremony plant is as high as her heart.

"Give me a favor from that plant," Tam Rosse says again.

She gives him a branch with a spray of green leaves. He holds it in his hand, and they smell the scent of its life in the dead and decay-smelling ship. Tam Rosse looks at her, and their eyes meet while they might count three.

What good is her word when it was tricked from her?

... -> p67a

Page "p67a"

They clean dead algae from the tanks. Tam Rosse fixes valves and reams out a pipe. They start the aerator in the big open tank. The water runs clear but dead.

They look at it together and do not look at each other. They say nothing.

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... -> p68

Page "p68"

On the third day-period the Ceremony plant is as high as her silver earring.

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The Ceremony flowers have opened, red soft funnels of flower in around whorl of leaves. Their scent is like a summer night in infieldson the Fertile Worlds, or like a lover's-token from Pallas.

The buzz she hears could be insects in those summer fields; but it is a spyfly. Does the ship control them, or does King Brady? Which of them can hear whatever she says?

... -> p68a

Ship's Favor

Ships are programmed to protect their essential staff against any contingency from breach of the lifewall to mutiny.

Spyflies, watchbots, and other intelligence mechanisms monitor suspicious passengers.

The intelligence of the ship is programmed to take defensive or punitive action against those who harm the ship or its staff.

Among the common defense weapons available to a ship are lasers, waldoes, subships, poisoned QUAROCs, and psymones.

For further protection, Captains and other essential staff are routinely spacehabbed.

<readout ends> -> *r(1)

She snatches the spyfly out of the air. "Go tell your master I broke my word!" she whispers to it and crushes it.

And there is no buzz in the air, no summer fields, only the scent of Ceremony flowers, and of him. "I give you all my favor," she murmurs into his ear. The red Ceremony blossoms fall on them as they lie under the tree. The red is the color of his discarded jumpsuit, and she laughs, drunk with joy, as they lie together.

She draws her fingers across his palm and his wound heals.

He looses the silver earring from her earlobe.

She is the ship and the ship is living. The ship is a speck in her belly and she is lying with her lover in the belly of the ship.

... -> p70

Page "p68a"

The aerator motors in the Water Center pound like hearts. She is the heart of the ship, and it beats, it beats.

"A favor?" she asks, and gives Tam Rosse . . .

... -> p69

Page "p70"

When she wakes up it is snowing in the ship.

The plants are growing underneath the snow. The snow dazzles at the edges; it is illusion.

But it is a cruel illusion, a strong one. Ice forms on the water-tanks. The koi struggle as the water freezes. The great tanks strain and crack, and a cold wind screams as the doors iris open.

"The Captain is dead."

... -> p71

Page "p71"

The Priestess finds herself standing in a hall made all of ice. The wind keens through the ship as if the very steel of the ship is crying.

"Oh my lover! The Captain is dead."

A red-clothed man lies dead on a bier. He is pale all over, blue with cold.

Oh my lover!

But it is King Brady.

... -> p72

Page "p72"

A woman stands over him, an old Japanese woman. Her hair whirls around her, ice-crystals and snow. Her kimono is broken mirrors, the sign of unfaithfulness.

"I am the Lady Nii," says the Ship.

"Your King is dead," says the Lady Nii, raising her wrinkled face. "My Captain-lover of many years waited for you, Priestess. When you came you would not have him. You took another lover. My Captain, my lover died of a broken heart."

... -> p73

Page "p73"

The Ship passes her wrinkled palm across the dead man's hair. She lifts the power crown from his dead forehead.

"I feel your sorrow like my own," the Priestess says. "I am linked to you now. I carry life, like you."

The old woman recoils.

She passes her fan across the Priestess's stomach, and her fan is made of broken mirrors. "Your lover has left you a child, and you want to make gardens in my belly. Your child will never nurse from me or wear the power crown. Your lover is the dung in your gardens, and your child shall die, and you will starve while your gardens crumble to dust."

... -> p73a

Page "p73a"

"Live," says the Priestess.

The old woman puts the power crown on her own wild hair. "I am steel. Why do I need gardens? I will support human life no more."

... -> p74

Page "p61"

The cup loosens from her hand and drops.

And the old man, snatching it from her, drinks the last dregs of the cup.

"No!" she cries.

... -> p62

Page "p62"

The old man holds out his hand. His nails are black ridged claws. Between his fingers are seams of dirt. "Take your King's hand," he says.

Him, her King? It is a blasphemy.

"You tricked me, Brady," she says.

The young man protests. "She didn't remember. You forced a Favor on her."

"No force, boy."

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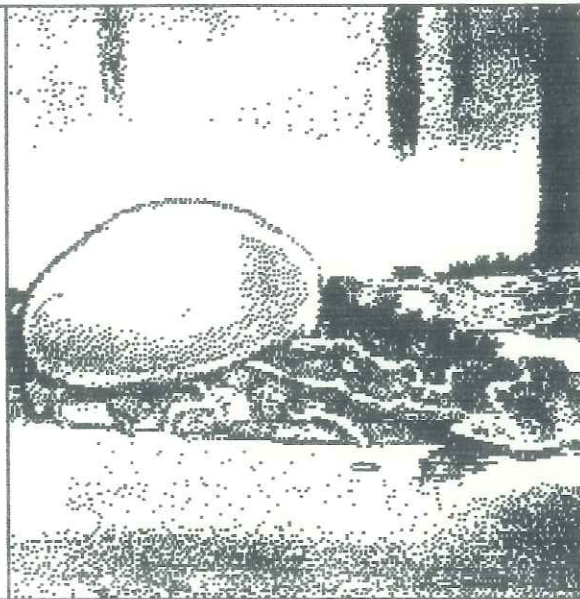
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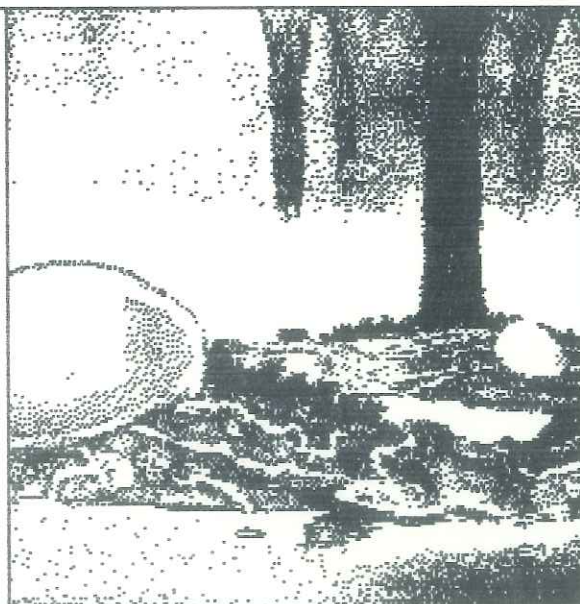
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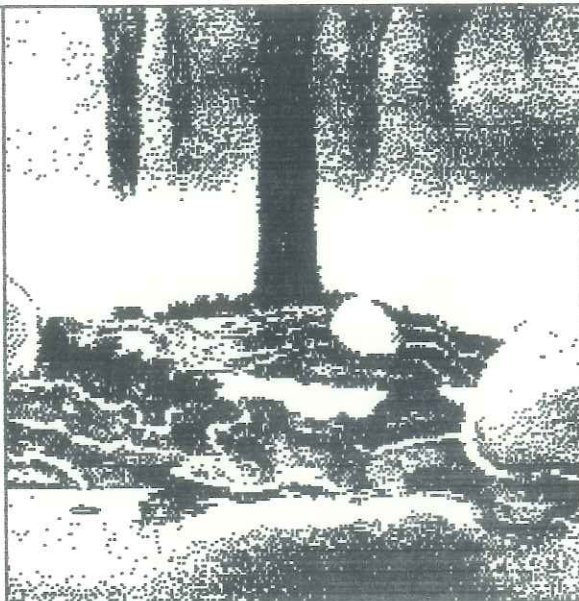
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p68 test: changes:3 =>

Page "p313"

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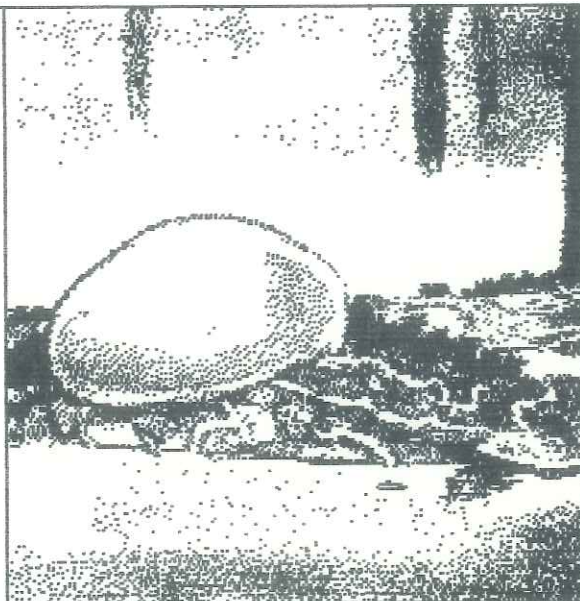
... -> p69

Page "p70"

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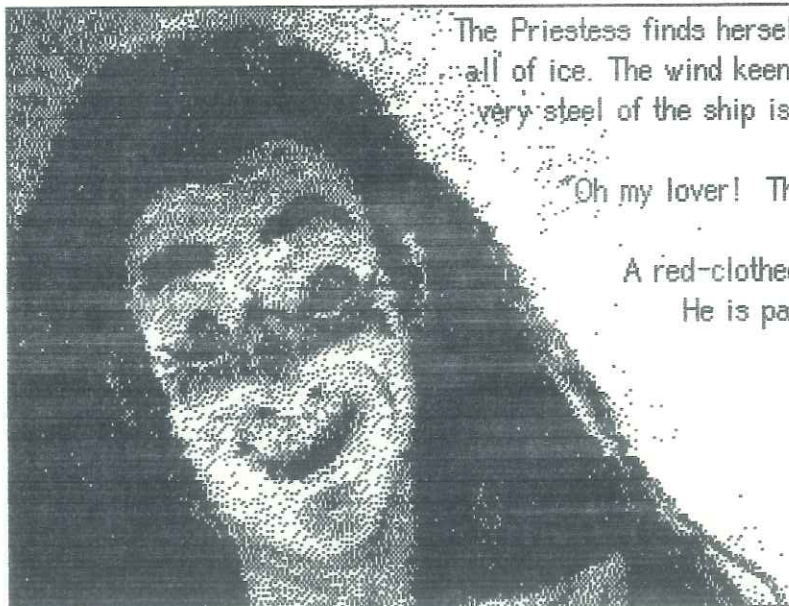
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... -> p73a

23 King 23

pp. 100-200

Page "p73a"

9 Feb 90

??

- Need to
look at
this

"Live," says the Priestess.

The old woman puts the power crown on her own wild hair. "I am steel. Why do I need gardens? I will support human life no more."

... -> p74

Page "p74"

Nii may fight her, but she and the ship will live.

She barricades herself in the Water Center, cutting the physical links to the rest of the Nii. She cuts off the aqueducts to the rest of the ship. Cutting off the Nii's supplied power, she will depend on the Water Center's own generators.

This section
might be expanded!

Is this a battle
between Aster & Nii?

Is Aster a refugee
and/or an equal?

Is she trying to
cure Nii? Just
to survive? Is

... -> p74a

Nii trying to kill Aster for revenge? Or just from mild annoyance?

Page "<<Test 2>>"

This is a test

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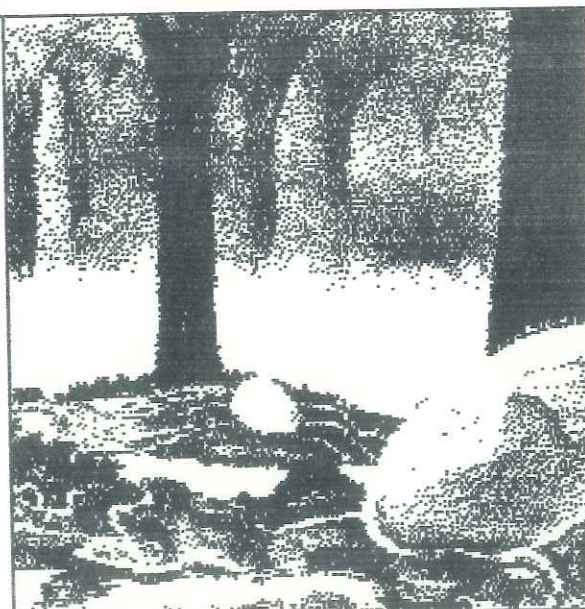


<<Test>> -> p11a

Page "p74a"

Nii does not speak to her, not even
through illusions.

The ship's grief is like a steel wall.



... -> p74b

Page "p74b"

She programs the local computer to rotate the sunlights. Her hands shape the nutriment around the sprouts, balance the chemistry of the water gardens. In the smaller tanks, algae drift. Nori ripple their wide leaves in the cold salt water.

... -> p74c

Page "p74c"

Food and air grown under her hands. Shimp, kelp, plankton, oranges, sunfood, breadfruit. Ripe tomatoes with their dust-smelling leaves. Beans and green clover, that keep the nitrogen in the soil and give her air to breath.

The Priestess's child pushes upward in her womb. She is her child's ship, swelling like the ground before the seedling breaks it open.

The hatchling koi swim in the tanks.

... -> p75

Page "water center"

Is this a vital puzzle
what should
happen here

The Priestess must cut off the physical links between the Water Center and the rest of the *Nii*. The Water Center is linked to the *Nii* by aqueducts and by power sources.

If she doesn't cut off the aqueducts, *Nii* starts draining water from the Water Center.

If she doesn't take the power offline and onto the Water Center's own power source, the power fails.

She must physically block the entrances to the Water Center, including the ones small enough for *quaracs* to get through. Otherwise robots start attacking her crops.

Every time something like this is going to happen, the Priestess gets a message first, because she's linked to the *Nii*.

Page "p75"

Sometimes she cannot tell herself from the ship.

Tam has put seeds in both their wombs, and the ship is breeding fish, her womb is full of food, air, flowers.

... -> p77

Page "program computer"

[Puzzle: She must take the computer offline from the central computer. If she doesn't, the central computer tries to flood the Water Center.

She must program the local computer to rotate the sunlights, which had been run by the central computer. If she doesn't do that, the sunlights burn the crops.

I want this puzzle to be full of details but easy to solve. Nothing should go definitively wrong.]

Is this a vital puzzle?

*What should
happen here?*

Page "p77"

One day, as the Priestess swims in the tank, she feels a wave that starts in her belly. It is pain and excitement at once. She rides it, panting. There are handles at the side of the tank. She grasps them and floats in the water, bracing herself against the waves.

One by one she rides them and they course through her body, pulling at her like the moon. She is opening herself like a ripe fruit. The waves come closer and closer together, more quickly, higher, immense. She is enormous, fragile, as tenuous as Mars' atmosphere, stretching over the living planet of her baby.

And the locks on the doors slip away from her, the links she has severed slither toward each other and reform.

And Death comes walking toward her across the waves.

Page "p78"

Death is a belly full of nightmares, a belly that bulges and twists under gray skin. Death's belly writhes waves in the tank that slap painfully against the Priestess's straining swollen womb. The koi rise to the surface and kiss Death's feet, and shudder and float on the surface. Brown water pumps out of Death's womb into the irrigation system, and the brownness spreads into the plants and turns them sickly and yellow. Their leaves droop.

"Healer," says Death, "did you forget me?"

... -> p79

Page "p79"

The waves come from outside her now, faster, faster, she can't breathe, they won't stop long enough for her to breathe. Death grabs her in muscular arms, holds her against Death's taut belly, womb to womb. Death's heavy-laboring belly tightens, tightens, and the Priestess screams but the tightness spreads over her belly too, she is choking, drowning, splitting apart. The water draws back from her, roaring, and the final wave of pain comes, hangs over her head, she can look up, her whole body convulses with the pain and the fear of it, and then the wave hits, all at once, and tumbles her to darkness.

... -> p80

Page "p80"

She is floating in something liquid, cradling, warm. She opens her eyes. A tiny koi swims past, gold-scaled and gold-finned, blurry in the water; it swivels around on itself and returns to kiss at her skin. She is in the Water Center, floating in the big open tank. The sunlights are working.

She is dreaming all this. Or she has dreamed everything that happened.

She crawls out of the tank. She is the first land animal that ever was, weak and clumsy. Exhausted, she sits on the nutrient floor, feeling her body, running water-wrinkled hands over breasts and belly. Her breasts are painful but not much swollen yet. Her nipples are still a virgin's soft cones. Behind her groin-bone she can barely feel the hard ball of her womb, rising like a baby's fist.

Months yet before she bears her child.

... -> p81

Page "p81"

But still Nii, the Lady Nii, stands above her, wearing her kimono of broken glass. Nii slaps her naked lump-swollen belly, where nightmares crawl under the skin. The old woman squats down, rubbing at her back as if she is about to birth her nightmares. She squints at the Priestess.

"Fertility," she says, "is your excuse for everything. You humans spread like a virus out of your planet. You infected your own moon, Venus, Mars. You came out here to the Asteroids, where you can barely live.

"To reproduce yourselves here, you humans had to carry your genes around with you, outside your bodies. You had to trade genes and calculate which to combine with which, to keep your colonies going. Your gene pool got infected, so you humans cut it away, like a sore away from your bodies. And you left all your infected here to die. You have no morality. You have only this sickness of life."

K (stilted)

... -> p81a

Page "p81a"

"You have no morality. You have only this sickness of life, life, life everywhere.

"You killed my Captain-lover from grief because he was not fertile, and took another man only because he was.

"You created me to be your servant. You infect me. ~~I have lived with you so long~~ I am leprosed by you."

... -> p82

Page "p82"

"Priestess, you are not steel; ^{oy} you will die. I know your fears. Every night your guard will be down, I will come into your mind as you read mine, I will paint pictures on your nerves. Last night's was a kiss."

The Priestess can look through Nii's body if she concentrates. "I will not believe you."

"I will tell you ^{weak} ~~about~~ breast cancer and wombs that dry up. I will ~~tell~~ you about children that die and children that hate. I will say that your lover does not love you, does not want to serve your body; that he will take a ship one day and go to fight in a bigger war. You will believe me more every day. I will make you smell shit from the disease that kills you. Your tongue will taste the sourness of your dying. Fertile Priestess, ~~every~~ ^{the} flower that grows under your hands will be a fear."

"Give me more to fear" -> p83