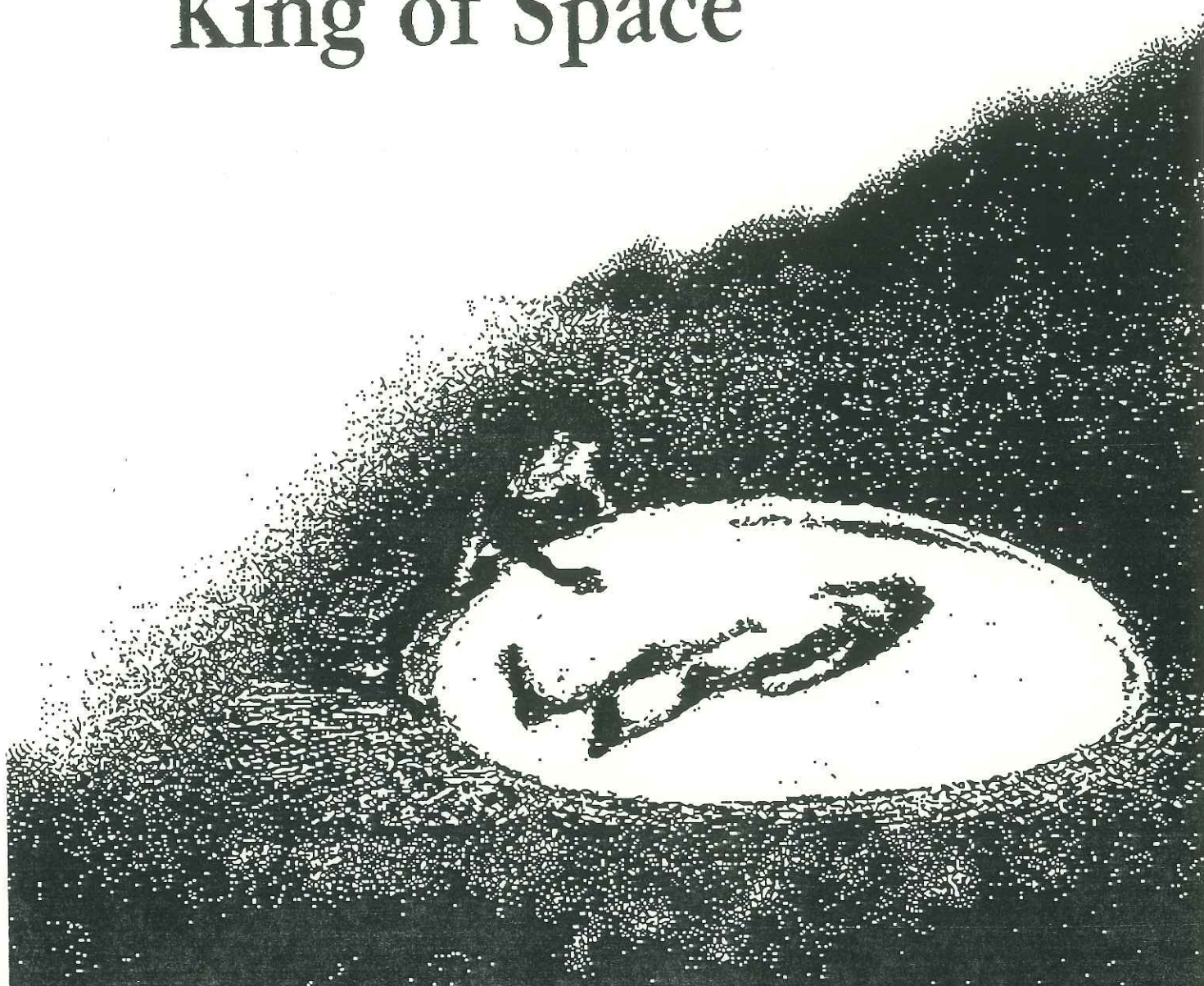


# King of Space



hypertext science fiction

by sarah smith . illustrated by matt mattingly

eastgate systems september 1990

information and orders 800-562-1638, 617-924-9044





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**A KING IN SPACE**

(c) 1988 Sarah Smith

The supply ship was a trap. The recycler was poisoned; the algae are <sup>dead</sup> dying. ~~Only one of the escaped prisoners is still~~ <sup>recycling</sup> ~~alive.~~ Tam Rosse breathes the foul air in gasps, every breath a knife twisting in his lungs.

Tam Rosse was the youngest and the strongest who fled Circe Prison. Now he is the only one, alone in a dying ship.

~~The dying ship~~ <sup>He</sup> is mocked by seeds drifting from broken supply bags: winged mutants whirl lazily across the viewport and obscure his sight.

Tam Rosse has seen too much death. Life is a temporary thing.

Go on to the next page.



The torture left nerve-burns on his wrists. His hands shake as he reads the nav charts. No inhabited asteroid within a halfmonth, not even a miner's claim. The air will last for ~~four~~ <sup>five days</sup> ~~more days~~ less than a ~~four days~~.

Trans-asteroid pilots call this the Nowhere. Twenty or thirty asteroids in the Belt are capable of supporting a small town; a couple of thousand that could support a refueling port. In 690 billion square miles.

~~The Nowhere will kill him.~~

Go on to the next page.

e wd 2 mk 1 place Me Ssm a refuge 4 frē men  
+ women.

2 or 3 refug no e Nwr. B e Nwr wt kill m.



Barely visible through his failing viewport, a shadow-shape slides across the stars.

It is a miracle. It's not on the nav charts. A huge wheel, a greatship from the time of giants, when men lived in the Asteroids as though they were Earth.

No beacon lights shine from it; no red warning lamps, no yellow haze of man-manufactured sun. A derelict. *2 goals pg.*

But in orbit around it, for who knows how long: a tiny moon, a white crescent. A lifeship (page 4).

---

Tam Rosse brings his ship into sychronized orbit with the lifeship . . . page 6.

Tam Rosse brings his ship into synchronized orbit with the greatship . . . page 28.



~~Goals~~

~~e and 2 mk 1 place in e solar a refuge 4  
free men + women,~~

e dreams Solu dreams:

2 wear e pur crown / a glship captain.

2 v Chol / sp a ship / <sup>rock-gray</sup> Ts

2 mk Ts derelict, Ts <sup>rock-gray</sup> livable, e seed /  
freedom in Asteroids.

+ / e takes Tes yg men's dreams,

+ gasps, + smiles at em,

e is a lile lile moon / oval and e glships.

NP

e ~~these~~ zooms e import mo e moon.

<graphic: LIFESHIP>



Lifeships are the means by which the Fertile Worlds spread their genes through 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.

This one is very young, a virgin girl, still with her moon-earring in her ear.

When the earring is removed, she can access her full powers.

Go back to page 3.

In the lifeship's core of ice, frozen in coldsleep, the girl lies. Over her dark skin are scattered stars, which shine unwaveringly. Seeds in tiny silver darts ray out from her hands, from her fingers, from her feet, from her navel and heart, from her mouth. Silver darts ray in a halo around her head.

When she is unfrozen, the tiny creatures that are her stars will begin testing the atmosphere, the light level. When conditions are favorable for life, her stars will begin to twinkle, as stars do on Earth.

Go on to the next page.



Tam Rosse brings his ship into sychronized orbit with the lifeship.

In the lifeship, he gasps and lets the air clear his lungs. The ship of the Fertile Worlds is smooth and white inside, brightly lit, like 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.

For four years, in Circe prison, he has not seen a woman.

---

Remove earring . . . Go to page 7 or 8.

Find coldsleep control . . . Go to page 10.

To initialize her powers, he knows what he must do. No time for delicacy. Tam Rosse reaches through the "ice" and rips the earring out of her ear.

(Graphic.)

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 bloodied ear.

Go on to page 27.



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

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 shoulderblades. He needs more hands than he has. 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.

Go on to the next page.

He sees a sliver of her eyeballs under her partly closed eyelids. He comes in a spasm of disgust, remembering the loveless penetrations of prison. For the first time he feels he will never escape from Circe, from what Circe has done to him.

He rips out her virgin's earring and throws it onto the floor, taking pleasure in the savage action. 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, 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. That's how it is, thinks Tam Rosse. We all get used.

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

Go to page 27.



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.

Slowly the girl sits up.

Choose either page 11 or page 19.

She looks around her, confused, still stunned from the coldsleep drugs. Standing over her is a man in red.

"Do you know who you are?" the man in red says.

You . . . The word is strange. It means her. She looks 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 Santa Claus in a red suit and an old-fashioned spacemask, arriving on Pall' for Great-days. "I'm four," she says triumphantly. "Are you <sup>St. Nicholson?"</sup> Santa ~~Claus?"~~

"Sure," he says. "You'll get your memory back soon."

Go on to the next page.



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

"Let's look in the ship," the man says. "Maybe you'll find it there."

She looks down at her body again. All over her body she is shaped like a grownup. She touches her strange new 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.

"I don't want to," she says. "Not yet."

Go on to the next page.

She is afraid of the way he looks at her, as if she is something to eat.

He goes in front of her, propelling himself down a snaky nasty 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.

He takes her by the arm and leads her down the corridor. In his other hand he holds some kind of dagger, like a dressup for Greatdays. 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 on the plate.

Go on to the next page.

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

"What did you do?"

"I just put my hand on the plate . . . " She can't explain it.

Go on to the next page.



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

Go on to the next page.

(This page is all black)

It might be worthwhile to put a button somewhere on this page, then make them grope for it.

Go on to the next page.

(Darkness, a candle flame)

Go on to the next page.



(Eyes behind a candle flame)

Go to page 32.

She sits up, shaking the water from her dusky skin, as unselfconscious as an otter. She seems very young, but her eyes are calm and ageless. She looks him up and down; she is seeing his jumpsuit, the red of Circe prison.

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

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

---

Tam Rosse gives her the seeds . . . go to page 20.

Tam Rosse doesn't give her the seeds . . . go to page 24.

He pours the seeds into her cupped hand.

"Help me," he says. "There's a deserted station outside. It's derelict. My ship's recycling algae are dead. I need live algae."

(Graphic)

"Of course," she says.

He takes her arm. Her flesh is as warm as a tropical sea, as warm as the Water Center of a greatship.

Go on to the next page.



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."

She runs her long fingers across the nerve scars on his wrist. Unexpectedly the deadened nerves tingle and flare back into life. It is painful; he cries out. She drops her hand, startled. Healer, gardener, priestess of the Fertile Worlds: but she looks flustered and young, like a teenaged girl dressed up for a masquerade on Pallas. (See page 23.)

"I didn't think," she said. "It's all been practice, before this."

"How do you come to your full powers?" he asks.

Go on to the next page.

She smiles. "You'll know that very soon," she says.

She looks deep into his eyes. He blushes. There is something about the Ceremony of the Priestesses . . . He has heard that on her first assignment, a priestess has her earring removed. The ceremony requires a young man.

The silver, sickle-shaped earring glitters in her ear.

He stammers, "Let's go look at the ship."

Go to page 29.

Pallas the Beautiful

Pallas asteroid, home base of the Wandering Eccentrics, is the center of civilization in trans-Terran SolSPACE. It is known for the richness of its architecture, the Palladian Library with its treasures of Earth and Venusian pre-Terran artifacts, and the beauty of its women.

Return to page 21.

Go to page 29.

Well, what the heck does he do next?

He remembers that there's a Ceremony that priestesses are supposed to go through . . . does she need the seeds for that?

Does she need him?

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

It's been a long time. But if he doesn't get the ship, it'll be a lot longer.

Go on to the next page.



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

"Of course," she says. She frowns. She opens her mouth, then closes it again.

He takes her arm. Her flesh is as warm as a tropical sea, as warm as the Water Center of a greatship. He wonders whether it was such a good idea to put her off.

She touches her single earring, silver and shaped like the moon. She says, "This is my first ship." She sighs. "It'll wait."

Why couldn't you have given her the seeds, you dolt . . .

"Uh, if you really need those seeds . . . "

"No," she says. "Let's go to the ship."

Go to page 29.

She awakens, but she does not know where she is. A pale man in a red suit stands over her. Strange winged seeds dapple his body.

She shrinks away; her silver-glittering seeds cover her body like wings.

After a minute the man shrugs and says words to her.

She does not understand him; but when he moves away, she follows him.

Go to page 29.

She looks up at him, her eyes ageless and unfathomable.

"You have done the Ceremony," she says.

He nods. *That is power too.*

"Now I have my powers," she murmurs.

"I need your help to get the ship going," he says. *She owes him the favor. The favor.*

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

"Oh, yes," she says, "I can do that."

~~Another man could say he's sorry, they should have met another way, they should have been introduced. Words for Pallas and the Fertile Worlds. He has been too long in prison. She wouldn't believe him. He wouldn't believe himself.~~

"Let's look at the ship," he says.

Go on to page 29.

2  
He propels himself down the pitted and murky port-corridor toward the greatship. He can see the white plume of air leaking from his suit. Maybe he should have gone to the lifeship first. His air may not last.

He has only a dagger, a prison weapon, made from the Circean mineral called heartsblood, chipped and edged in the long nights of waiting. 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.

Go to page 30.

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. The priestess needs no suit here. Like most important Terrans, 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 of waiting. 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.

Go on to the next page.



The outside of the ship is scarred from meteors and hard radiation.

(Could be a combination-lock puzzle here . . . If Aster is there the combination lock works. If she isn't the lock doesn't work. She doesn't even need to know what she's doing; she is set up to override most entry protection schemes.

(If Aster hasn't been rescued yet and the puzzle doesn't work at all, then King Brady must rescue TR. This constitutes a favor.)

If Aster is there, then go on to page 31.

If Aster isn't there, then go on to page 34.

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

Go to page 16.

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.

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

"I am King Brady."

32A

If Aster has no memories, go to page 35.

If Aster has her memory, go to page 71.

If Aster has had her earring removed, go to page 100.

If Aster is not here, go to page 156.

Choices

- Supplant K. Brady
- mk frs w K. Brady
- get Ship's Favor (Ship takes u r w/press 2 L)

Use Priestess.

for Ctral Ctr.

### 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.

(To get back to Tam Rosse's blunder with the priestess, go to page 78.)



(Haven't done this one yet)

[Here begins Lust vs Loyalty--]

He smells bad. She sniffs and backs into a corner. There is something wrong with him, something that makes her shudder. Her new grown-up body is repelled by him.

The man in red will take care of her.

"You got anything to trade?" The old man looks at the nice man in red. "I got a whole spacin' ship to trade."

She knows about trade. Trade means presents.

Go on to the next page.

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

"Sure, honey," the old man says. "But you have to ask me please."

"Will you give me a trade for a kiss?" she says solemnly, because the game is important. She doesn't want to kiss him, though.

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

There is something wrong with that, but she doesn't remember. The red man shakes her. She doesn't turn. Everyone has to trade alone. That's important.

Go on to the next page.

"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 and touches her lips to liquid.

Go on to the next page.

She drinks and drinks until the liquid is gone.

Go on to the next page.



And remembers . . .

Now she will never come to her powers.

She has chosen the wrong man.

The old man drinks the last dregs from the cup.

The old man chuckles. "Got a Priestess. Got her all to myself."

She does not dare to turn to look at the man in red. A young man, a fertile man, the man she needs. In a million miles of Nowhere, he is the only man who can make her whole. Her breasts and groin ache, and the silver earring weighs heavy in her ear.

How shall a Priestess come to her powers, except through a man?

But right or wrong, she has taken his food, and that is sacred in the Nowhere. A favor owes a favor in return.

If the old man only asks her to fix his ship, everything may still be well. But if he asks for her, then she is lost. Without her full powers she cannot fix his ship. And she cannot bear doing what he might ask of her.

Go on to the next page.

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

She takes his hand . . . go to page 43.

She turns and takes Tam Rosse's hand . . . go to page 44.

reluctant - she ch - 2 refuse a favor / deat, 2 refuse  
2 fix ~~am~~ dead ship / worse in deat, 4 she was 2 fix e  
(WRITE ME) ship, 6 / lik a Trobe m r.

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

"I have given you a favor. Give me this man for servant."

He must feel what she feels, it is so strong in her. Her body confuses her with its longing. She knows what she means to do. But she doesn't know what drives her, the need to have her powers or the hungry longing for him.

Give me a favor, the heat of her hand says to the young man.  
Or ask me for one. Don't make me ask.

Go on to the next page.



Mr. Zolt - "I must fix yr ship."  
"a wife shd do T. Tu," KB grins, "w'd e asl e ovr pt."

The Water Center (graphic)

Go on to the next page.

Even for a priestess without her full powers, there is work enough in the Water Center.

The stench chokes her and the man in red--Tam Rosse, he says his name is. The Water Center is a place of spherical shadows. The big transparent water-globes are choked with dying algae. The sunlights have dimmed, flickering, dying. The filters leak water onto the nutrient floor. She cannot see Tam Rosse without wanting to touch him. She sends Tam Rosse to look for new filters. The walls laugh.

Eyes follow them everywhere. Stationary cameras, skittering watchbots. A spyfly crawls over her ear, looking at the earring.

*(wife)* Of course. If the old man has survived in this ship, he has access to the controls. It's his ship. The ship protects the captain. (50)

*intend?* "Leave <sup>me</sup> us alone!" she shouts to the walls and ceiling. "Let us work!"

*meta-  
more  
obvious-  
she plants  
it  
onstage* She plants seeds in the nutrient floor, but nothing grows under her hands. Only the Ceremony plant, and why did she plant that seed?

She will be faithful to her word. She has got the man to fetch and carry, that is all.

Go on to the next page.

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

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

"A favor?" she says, and gives him the smallest of the unfurling green leaves. He <sup>knuckle +</sup> holds it in his hand, a <sup>tiny</sup> green thing in all this dead and rock-colored ship. ~~The plant weeps a tear of sap.~~ He looks up at her, and their eyes meet while they might count one.

~~Her eyes fill with tears and she looks away.~~

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

Go on to the next page.

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

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

"A favor?" she says again, and 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. The plant weeps three tears of sap. Tam Rosse looks at her, and their eyes meet while they might count three.

Her eyes fill with tears and she looks away.

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.*

Go on to the next page.

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

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

The Ceremony flowers have opened, red soft funnels of flower in a round whorl of leaves. Their scent is like a summer night in fields on the Fertile Worlds, or like a love-token from Pallas. ~~She closes her eyes.~~

The buzz she hears could be insects in those summer fields; but it is a spyfly. King Brady, who controls this ship, who should have her loyalty, can hear whatever she says.

The aerator motor pounds softly in her ears, her heart more loudly.

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

Nothing . . . go to page 51.

A favor . . . go to page 52.

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.

Captains and other essential staff are routinely spacehabbed.

WRITE ME



She snatches the spyfly out of the air. "Go tell your master I have betrayed him!" 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. "Favor for 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 she lies in his ~~strong~~ arms.

She runs her long fingers across his nerve-scars. He flexes his hand, smiling with surprise.

Go on to the next page.

"Does your hand hurt?" she asks; he shakes his head. "Then I have my full powers."

"Cured," he says. "Cured of four years of Circe. Of everything."

"What will Brady do to us?" she wonders.

"Worth it," he says sleepily.

Yes . . .

The silver earring has fallen out of her ear. She laughs and pokes it into the nutrient floor; it will grow now like any other seed. The soft flowers fall over them. The stars of her skin glow. She falls asleep in his arms.

Go on to the next page.

<Graph?: Darkness. Next page.>

She wakes up in the dark. Is it dark, or is she blind? She is not herself. She cannot feel her arms or body.

She can see stars.

(Puzzle: She cannot find her body--no gravity, no inertia.

To solve the puzzle she must make some distinction between her body, dark with stars, and space, which is dark and full of stars. But this is hard. She is as empty as space, she is all of space. It is intoxicating but disorienting, almost nauseating. It is a metaphor for being out of her body, freed from her body, universal; but this is less immortality than death.)

When the puzzle is solved, go to the next page.

3-4 buttons - all except one brings up text. The "body" button brings up the next stage of the puzzle. All are invisible.

Invisible button.

To be back in her body is like being in prison. Her skin is tight around her, she feels the room that every bone takes up.

She is in an area of the ship she has never seen. <Storage?>

(Puzzle. She goes through a maze. Whatever she does, her body gets heavier, huger, the corridors she travel through are tighter and smaller. The program chooses n cards in ascending order of tightness. After n cards, n being a number between five and eight and randomly generated each time the game is played, she goes to . . .

(Puzzle. She ends up in the Pain Place. Her body has become so large and heavy that she is racked with muscle cramps. She is close to the outside of the ship. Her stars fluoresce wildly; her skin burns from them. She cannot breathe. I would suggest this is a set of fifteen cards, three each at five levels. The program chooses one from each level, in ascending order of agony. The last order of agony is that her stars have become like maggots, like living things in her flesh, and she feels them eating at her.

(She blacks out.)

Go on to the next page.

stomach  
pain in  
stomach.

spread  
like a  
skin  
disease.  
puffy.

If she had eyes, she could see where she is. If she had a sense of smell, or a nose, she could smell the dingy urine stink of King Brady. If she had skin, she could feel him touching what is left of her. But her stars have eaten her all up, all but bones. She is bones in a forgotten storeroom, in a dead ship, and the ship's mad captain squats by them and picks up the long bone of her leg, and whispers, "Pretty. Pretty." He lays her bones out in order, the ribs arching, the delicate bones of her fingers falling into spiderlace. He knuckles himself in his withered groin and he lays himself beside her.

If she had a heart, it would revolt in her . . . page 57

If she had a heart, she could pity him . . . 58.

*Revise - "pretty wife" if he actually got her, she revolts from him.*

*If not, he says she did what the ship needed.*

"Pretty," he says. His space-scarred eyes look through her, the look of a man who has seen too much infinity alone.

"Pretty wife."

###

His space-scarred eyes look through her, the look of a man who has seen too much infinity alone.

He is what he is, ulcers between his bare toes from the dirt on them, but there is no flesh on her to infect from touching him, nothing to hurt her further in him. If she had tears to cry with, she might cry for him. If she had a heart to feel pity, she could feel pity for him.

~~Can dry bones heal--even the bones of a priestess?~~

Go on to the next page.



Graphic: Water

She is floating in something liquid, cradling, warm. She is a fish; she is a baby, floating in the womb of her giant mother. She opens her eyes. Her womb is full of sunlight. A koi swims past, gold-scaled and gold-finned; 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.

Perhaps she is a ghost, but she is one that feels.

She climbs out of the tank, the first land animal, weak and clumsy. She crawls out of the tank, collapses onto grass and vines.

The seeds have sprouted.

~~But she is old.~~

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touch - <She discovers her age ->

Her hair is streaked with grey. Her stars are faded and splotched. She is an old woman, fat-waisted, splay-footed, with wrinkled, sagging breasts. All her powers could bring her alive again, but they could not make her what she was.

Where the Ceremony plant stood, there is nothing, not even a hole in the nutrient.

"Tam Rosse?" she calls. But she does not expect an answer, or, perhaps, even want one. If her lover is still alive, the ship has been even more merciless to him than to her.

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She is an old woman surrounded by spring.  
from dry air, smell

She is a gardener still. Her <sup>skin</sup> face is wrinkled but her hands are clever. They shape the nutriment around the sprouts, balance the chemistry of the water-gardens. Algae drift in the smaller tanks, green life, a continual harvest, and nori ripples in the cold salt-water tank, the first hatchling seafish flashing through its leaves. Food and air grow under her hands: shrimp, kelp, plankton, soba; oranges, sunfood, breadfruit; ripe tomatoes with their stinging dust-smelling leaves; beans and clover, that keep the nitrogen in the soil.

Colors, blur  
She cultivates her body like a garden. She gets muscles from digging and hauling. She swims in the tanks, among the koi, in the brown waving leaves of the lakeplants. She is not young, but she is straight and strong.

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She plants her seeds and they come up as vines.

Graphic: A garden in early stages.

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touch -  
mud