

QUEEN OF DEMONSTRATIONS

FOUR CHOOSE-YOUR-OWN-ADVENTURE
STORIES WITH LOW AMORTIZED SPACE USAGE

by

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Preface

o.1 Inspiration for the structure

In theoretical computer science, a *branching program* is something like a choose-your-own-adventure book: there's a number of states, and at each state you query a bit of the input to determine what new state to transition to. You start at a designated start state, and the result of the computation is determined by which of a number of possible end states you result in.

More recently, there's been interest in the notion of *amortized* branching programs (also known as *catalytic* branching programs, for reasons I won't explain). In an amortized branching program, there are *several* different start states, each with their own designated end states. Starting at each start state and following the transitions, you reach one of its corresponding end states. The catch is that these paths are allowed to *share internal states*: some internal state may be reachable from two separate start states, and so used in two totally different contexts by two different computations. With this kind of re-use, one can take several computations which would individually each require many states, and compute them "all at once" with fewer states on average.

This book isn't exactly an amortized branching program, but it's an exploration of what such space-saving techniques might look like when applied to a literal choose-your-own-adventure. Here, we tell several stories at once, "re-using" some pages between different narratives. The result takes more pages than a single one of the 4 stories would, but less than 4 times as many — ignoring beginnings and endings, the stories have x , y , z , and w pages respectively, but for all of them combined we only need C pages.

0.2 How to read this book

There are 4 stories contained in this book:

- ♠ To start an adventure story, [Go to Beginning 1.](#)
- ♥ To start a messy romance, [Go to Beginning 2.](#)
- ♣ To start trying to make it as a DJ, [Go to Beginning 3.](#)
- ♦ To start a crime thriller, [Go to Beginning 4.](#)

As you follow a given story, there will be options to choose from at the bottom. Consider only the options marked with the symbol corresponding to the story you're reading. (The other options will likely not make sense in your context, and should be ignored.) When you've reached a state with no options, this is the end of a storyline — you can start over and try a different path, or explore from a different start state.

o.3 A note on pronouncing the title

Pronouncing the title of this book is an activity best enjoyed with 3 friends. If you'd like, you can pick a nice chord and sing the 4 overlapping words on different notes. Morally speaking, one ought to take a page from Shostakovich's book and sing Diamonds, Spades, Clubs, and Hearts on D, S, C, and H (that is, D, Eb, C, B). However, this sounds pretty gross as a chord, so if you'd rather stick to a nice C major, I'll look the other way.

If you don't have 3 friends, just do your best. I forgive you.

Beginning 1: ♠ Spades ♠

YOU ARE A HIGH-PROFILE POLITICAL PRISONER, ever since your involvement in a plot to assassinate the king. You have been held for the past 10 years in “The Ace”, a remote detention center in Siberia. However, through years of careful planning and amassing what little resources you can, you and your fellow inmate Jack are now ready to attempt an escape today. Your plan is as follows: pay off your local gang leader to start a riot as a distraction; escape west with a pair of makeshift harnesses (to climb the nearly-impassable cliff face), and a sturdy shovel (to get past the barbed-wire fence beyond, which stretches for miles around the compound’s perimeter). It’s risky, but you have the materials you need, and it’s worth it for the shot at freedom.

Or at least, that’s what you thought. As of last night, the tradeoff seems less clear. You’ve just learned that the king himself will be paying a visit today to inspect the facilities — if, instead of making your escape, you decided to stick around, perhaps you could finally enact your original regicidal mission. (Now with the added bonus of revenge on the one who sent you to rot here.)

- ♠ Meet with the gang leader; ask if it’s possible to start a riot. **Go to page 31.**
- ♠ Abandon the escape plans; arrange to assassinate the king. **Go to page 8.**

Beginning 2: ♥ Hearts ♥

YOU AND JACK HAVE BEEN LONG-DISTANCE for the past 18 months. He's lovely, but lately you've been finding it harder and harder to be invested in the relationship.

Perhaps because of this (or, although you'd rather not admit this to yourself, perhaps vice versa?) you've started getting closer to someone else — the manager of the bar where you work (The Ace), who you affectionately refer to as “the king”.

Everything between the two of you is perfectly above board — or at least, that's what you've been telling yourself. It's been getting harder and harder to believe as you've found yourself lying to Jack about time spent with the king, and seen the king's face replace Jack's in your mind's eye when you're drifting off to sleep. Surely you've been doing nothing wrong, right? And yet, just now as you see Jack's text message “hey queenie, can you talk?”, and hear his incoming call begin to ring, you are filled with a mixture of guilt and dread — what does he know?

♥ Take the call. [Go to page 6.](#)

♥ Ignore him. [Go to Ending 1.](#)

Beginning 3: ♣ Clubs ♣

YOU ARE AN ASPIRING MUSICIAN, with a rather eclectic taste. Your lifelong dream has been to establish yourself as house DJ for “The Ace”, the most popping nightclub in New Mexico. It’s a deeply coveted role: the holder (regardless of gender) is given the title “the king”, and is appointed until death or retirement. Currently, the denizens of Santa Fe nightlife are all abuzz, because the latter condition is coming into effect: the present king has announced he’s stepping down, and will name a successor within the month.

This drama has been far from your mind, though — you don’t have the requisite connections to *enter* The Ace, let alone perform even a single song there. You’ll take whatever gigs you can get: right now, you and your ride-or-die Jack are at a talent agency auditioning for some campy 80’s tribute band. You’re trying desperately to stay on pitch — you’re a much better DJ than a vocalist — when J-dog abruptly stops the performance. Apologizing briefly, he gestures urgently towards someone passing outside your door.

“I know that face!” he whispers to you. “She’s a big-shot music agent with connections to The Ace. You’ve gotta go talk to her!”

- ♣ Ditch the audition; follow her down the hallway. **Go to page 1.**
- ♣ Ignore Jack; finish the audition. **Go to Ending 2.**

Beginning 4: ♦ Diamonds ♦

YOU ARE IN SERIOUS DEBT to local crime lord “the king”, as a result of an out-of-control poker addiction. The king has made it very clear to you that, should you care about your health and safety, you’ll need to pay that money back *very soon* — but the sum is far larger than you could ever imagine obtaining through normal means.

Fortunately, today is not a normal day. You’ve been tipped off that a courier is scheduled to transport famous Ace Diamond from the bank to a higher-security facility. The Ace is prized not only for its size, but also due to a long history of folk legends about supposed supernatural powers — the stories are hazy, but all describe some sort of destructive magical energy. You don’t believe any of that nonsense, but you sure do believe the ridiculously high price tag that nonsense has bestowed upon the gem. If you can intercept it before it’s placed in the automated vault system, you’ve arranged to fence it with Jack, a Viennese socialite whose deep pockets are whispered to have been involved in a number of recent high-profile thefts.

You’re lurking at the bank when you see the courier walk in.

- ♦ Touch your earpiece and whisper, “Jack, the target is in sight. What are my next actions?” [Go to page 10.](#)
- ♦ Get cold feet and go turn yourself in to the police. [Go to page 9.](#)

Page 1:

You gradually approach the agent from behind, walking just slightly faster than she is. You try to appear as casual and nonchallant as possible, but your heart is pounding. “This is it,” Jack whispers to you, “your one chance at The Ace”. You’ve got to play this cool.

In your head, you fret about your cover: many years back, there’d been another particular band you’d owed tribute to — and you’d totally killed. It was Under Pressure once, many years ago, though, and it never got big in the public eye — so you doubt this agent would recognize your face.

Just as you’ve almost caught up to her, your thoughts are interrupted, as...

♦ ...Jack speaks to you over the earpiece. [Go to page 35.](#)

♣ ...she turns around to talk to you. [Go to page 2.](#)

Page 2:

“Wait a minute...you look familiar.”

“Oh no -” you reply, nervously “I’m sure you’re thinking of someone else.”

“No, it’s *definitely* you. ‘Killer Queen’, right? Of course, everyone talks about you — your work is underground, but to those of us who work here it’s incredibly important. But why are you skulking around the hallways here? You should be dealing with The Ace!”

You feel your face flush. You don’t know how to respond.

- ♣♦ Bluster and invent some lies about your work with The Ace. Go to page 37.
- ♣ Admit that you have no connections to The Ace; ask if she could get you in to perform. Go to page 3.
- ♦ Make a break for it; try to hide in the janitor’s closet. Go to page 32.
- ♦ Hurl The Ace to the ground. Go to page 36.

Page 3:

“Yes, I think I can set something up. You’ll only get a single shot, though — the king isn’t an easy man to manipulate. And remember, The Ace is incredibly valuable — whatever track you take, make absolutely sure you don’t do anything to damage its appearance.”

You readily assent, although you’re somewhat doubtful such an opportunity can really be arranged for you on short notice. But whatever strings are pulled behind the scenes, they work like clockwork, and soon you’ve got both the king and The Ace within your sights. You remember what you were told: “you’ll only get a single shot”. You’ve got to make this next play carefully.

- ♣ Ask J-dog his advice — “what should I choose for the one song I get to play?” [Go to page 10.](#)
- ♣ Just play your favourite song (“When You Sleep”) [Go to page 14.](#)
- ♦ Fire at the king. [Go to Ending 3.](#)
- ♦ Fire at The Ace. [Go to Ending 4.](#)

Page 4:

As soon as you get the opportunity, you grab the king suddenly and pull him close to you, your hands laced around his neck. People all around you turn to look, surprised at the intensity of the gesture, but you aren't even aware of their existence. You feel your heart beating incredibly fast, your breath heavy.

You whisper in his ear:

- ♠ “Remember me? I tried to kill you once, and you locked me away. How about instead you fight me like a man?” [Go to page 5.](#)
- ♠ “Remember me? I tried to kill you once, and you locked me away. I could finish the job now. But I won't.” [Go to Ending 15.](#)
- ♥ “I love you.” [Go to Ending 5.](#)
- ♥ “We can't keep doing this.” [Go to Ending 6.](#)

Page 5:

“I’d love to,” the king whispers.

Then, moments later, he’s on the floor, twirling dramatically. He’s far more graceful than you could have imagined. You feel suddenly out of your league, spinning and scratching randomly. The king just laughs softly, “why so tense? Isn’t this what you wanted? Break a leg, kid!”

Egged onwards, you keep thrashing, carefully matching beats, but eventually the intensity begins to fade, and you slow down.

- ♠ [The king overpowers you and pins you to the ground.] **Go to Ending 7.**
- ♣ [The king comes over to congratulate you after the song ends.] **Go to Ending 8.**
- ♥ [You press close together for a slow dance.] **Go to page 4.**

Page 6:

As soon as you pick Jack up, you feel an almost unbearable heaviness. You try for a while to proceed normally, but even simple things feel invested with substantial weight now, and you're struggling to get a grip.

Eventually, a terrible impulse takes a hold of you. You could simply cut Jack off right now without warning, and move on without him. It would be the easiest thing in the world. Losing him would be devastating — but freedom hasn't felt this intoxicatingly close in a long time, and you feel you might be willing to do whatever it takes to taste it.

You picture Jack falling hard for you. Could you really be so cruel as to abandon him now? And in such a callous, unceremonious way?

♥♠ Cut the tie. [Go to page 7.](#)

♥ Stay on the call. [Go to page 9.](#)

♠ Grit your teeth and keep climbing. [Go to Ending 9.](#)

Page 7:

You decide it's time to drop him. Your fingers move in a deft swiping motion, and in an instant you've severed the connection.

You try not to imagine Jack at the other end of the broken line. You know he must be totally crushed. Instead, you ignore the tiny voice of guilt threatening to take control of your mind, and start trying to work your way up to normalcy.

You feel a great burden lifted. You'd grown so used to being coupled together that this new feeling of being untethered is strange — but welcome. You'll move on quickly.

- ♥ Get in contact with the king. [Go to page 8.](#)
- ♥ Keep to yourself and process things alone. [Go to Ending 10.](#)
- ♠ Climb over the cliff and keep running west. [Go to page 26.](#)

Page 8:

It's been too long since you last saw the king — you smile to yourself as you imagine meeting him again. After all, you've already sacrificed so much now for the king. It would be a shame of you not to finish what you started.

The only question that remains is: what's the best way to do it? It could be nice to hold him, up close and personal. It might also be nice to give him an unexpected surprise out of the blue.

- ♥ Call him up and invite him dancing [Go to page 5.](#)
- ♥ Head over to The Ace to surprise him on his shift [Go to page 27.](#)
- ♠ Rig up explosives to trigger when he walks by [Go to page 19.](#)
- ♠ Jump out and throttle him when he walks by [Go to page 4.](#)

Page 9:

A moment later, you're in what you know is an interrogation. Your interlocutor speaks in a gentle tone, and seems to be beating around the bush, but you don't drop your guard. Eventually, he comes right out with what he wants to say:

“My impression is that your relationship with the king is...complicated. Why don't you tell me exactly what you and that *colleague* of yours have been up to? Please don't hold anything back — if you're worried about Jack's wellbeing, trust me that he'll suffer much less if you tell the whole truth now than if I learn it in the future.”

- ♥ Tell Jack “I don't know what rumors you've heard, but the king is nobody. Just a work acquaintance. I promise.” [Go to page 16.](#)
- ♥ Admit that you've been closer to the king than you'd been letting on. [Go to page 10.](#)
- ♦ Offer the cops information about the king in exchange for protections. [Go to Ending 11.](#)
- ♠ Sell out Jack; try to frame him as the mastermind of the anti-royalist faction. [Go to Ending 12.](#)
- ♦♠ Clam up; deny any wrongdoing by the party in question. [Go to page 34.](#)

Page 10:

Jack speaks to you intensely, his voice hushed.

“Ok, this is a serious jam. I’m not going to tell you which of the options to go with, but remember that you only get one choice.”

Which kind of track are you taking?

♣♦ “Let’s show them a bit of metal.” [Go to page 11.](#)

♠♣♦ “We’ll get to the rock — but let’s keep it soft.” [Go to page 12.](#)

♠♣ “I’ll take the rap.” [Go to page 13.](#)

♥♣ [All you can do is shoegaze] [Go to page 14.](#)

Page II:

You decide to show these people something hardcore. You pull out the metal piece you'd been keeping in your pocket for this moment. "Everybody hit the floor!" you bellow, and the room goes crazy. After a moment you shout "let's get The Ace moving!", and the crowd is quite willing to give you what you want.

Listening to the screams and breakdowns around you, you feel powerful. But moments later, the door bursts open behind you. You wheel around, and the king is there with his underlings, smiling greedily at you.

"Wh- what are you doing here?" you ask.

"I heard you playing my kind of music" he says, a glint in his eye. "I thought I'd come dance."

- ♣ Invite him to dance on the stage in front of you. **Go to page 5.**
- ♦ Take the diamond and try to run **Go to page 33.**
- ♦ Shoot at the king **Go to page 22.**

Page 12:

You can hear the smile in Jack's voice. "Ok, it's time to get this rock! Go gentle — but not *too gentle*. Subtlety is the name of the game."

"*Creep*", you whisper to yourself. You start out at a slower-than-usual tempo, and gradually increase to a familiar pace, working your way through a chorus of twisted, tree-like figures until you reach exactly the spot you're looking for.

♣♦ [You suddenly hear the words you're waiting for] Go to page 18.

♠ [You make it to the base of the cliff] Go to page 17.

Page 13:

Jack is surprised at the suggestion.

“Are... are you sure? I mean if you want you can go with the standard beat making its way through this area now. If you do, though, you’ll be totally at the current king’s mercy. After all the creative hijinx we orchestrated getting to this point, I don’t expect that taking the easy way out now will earn you any favours with him. ”

♣ “Trust me bro — this isn’t just any beat. I’ve got a track that goes HARD — nobody can resist dancing to it.” [Go to page 19.](#)

♠ “Yes, I’m turning myself in. Realistically, we’re not making it out of this together, and I don’t want to leave you. Maybe if I take all the responsibility for plotting the escape they’ll go easy on you.”
[Go to page 9.](#)

♣♠ “Hmm — let me think this over, actually.” [Go to page 10.](#)

Page 14:

The room seems to fill with syrup. You feel acutely that you have made bad decisions, and you wish you could take it all back — but despite the muddle that’s filling your head, you look through the haze into Jack’s trusting eyes. You know that, no matter what has happened, you owe it to him to see this through.

“my bloody valentine — *why?*” Jack mutters to himself, in a tone of voice that seems far from complementary, but betrays more confusion than anything else. He’d had such high hopes for the two of you — this is a let down he wasn’t expecting.

- ♣ “I know it’s not what the club will want to hear — but this is *my* favourite music. That’s what really matters. I don’t need to prove anything to anyone.” **Go to Ending 13.**
- ♣ Switch to a different shoegaze song. **Go to page 15.**
- ♥ Try to walk things back; invent excuses; talk your way out. **Go to page 20.**
- ♥ Admit that you’ve caught feelings for the king. **Go to page 23.**

Page 15:

You haven't gone more than a couple more seconds before the fuzz is all around you. You should have listened to Jack, but now it's too late — you don't see any way to get through this chorus.

As everything goes into overdrive, you just let it happen — your hopes of appeasing the king are over.

- ♣ Give up on becoming the king; just enjoy your favourite music.
Go to Ending 13.
- ♦ [You are arrested by the police.] Go to page 9.

Page 16:

Jack smiles, giving an audible sigh of relief.

“Of course — please forgive me for my concern; this is just very important to me. I’m glad we’ve got this rock solid between us.”

He kneels down and pulls out a box. When he opens it, you see some of the most beautiful jewelry you’ve ever laid eyes on. Whatever your opinions about Jack’s methods, you have to admit that this little ring of his is top-caliber at what it does.

“In fact, maybe this is presumptuous, but I’m ready to seal the deal now. None of the diamonds in the world can measure to the gem I’m looking at now — but I’ll offer you some just the same. Why don’t you just leave The Ace, and come with me?”

♥ “Um... gosh I wasn’t expecting this now. I don’t think I’m ready.”

Go to [Ending 16](#).

♥ “Yes, Jack, I’ll marry you!” [Go to page 17](#).

♦ “It’s a deal.” [Place The Ace into the box, and accompany Jack to the next room to get your payment.] [Go to page 30](#).

♦ “Give me the money first, and then I’ll hand it over”. [Go to Ending 17](#).

Page 17:

You prepare to tie the knot. Jack seems very excited — for your part, you have a lot more misgivings. Can you really keep supporting 2 different people? Surely at some point something's going to have to give. But that's so unthinkable an idea to you at this point that you try to force it out of your mind, and instead focus on the mechanical things that need to be done.

♥ Go through with the wedding. [Go to Ending 14.](#)

♠ Pull Jack up the cliff. [Go to page 6.](#)

Page 18:

Eventually, your radio head piece announces “*She’s running out the door!*”

That’s your cue. As soon as you hear these words in your ear, you loop around, fading out the door with very little delay. It’s time to get the drop on this.

- ♦ Tail the courier out the door **Go to page 1.**
- ♣ Mix a truly inspired EDM version of Radiohead’s *Creep* **Go to page 23.**

Page 19:

You set up the trap masterfully. You'd got the material from your cousin (coincidentally also at The Ace now) a few months ago — you weren't sure then exactly how you were going to use it, but now you know. This is going to go off with a bang.

Except it...doesn't?

“What gives?” Jack asks, as confused as you are by the lack of response. And then, a moment later, “...are we tripping?”

It might be that what you need to do to make this work is to get in there and insert some lines manually.

- ♠ “No way — if I trip the explosives manually, I'll be blown to pieces. We just have to accept defeat.” [Go to Ending 18.](#)
- ♣♣ “Alright, if this isn't going to work automatically, I guess it's time for me to throw down fire myself.” [Go to page 36.](#)
- ♣ “There's no way *me* adding vocals is gonna help this. If the king doesn't appreciate this music, that's fine. *I* do, so I'll just dance.” [Go to page 20.](#)

Page 20:

It's hard. Much harder than you'd expected. You feel a tremor shoot up from your arm and quickly spread through your whole body, until you're shaking uncontrollably.

As you try to work it, you find yourself thinking about bars and the people who control them. On one side of the bars is serious, unrewarding labour — you want to be on the other side, mingling freely with other young people.

You don't care about letting Jack down. You don't care about the king. All you care about is dancing free.

- ♣ Tell Jack you don't want to be a DJ. [Go to Ending 13.](#)
- ♠ Give up and try to climb the fence. Go to page ??.
- ♠♥ Keep digging yourself into a hole. [Go to page 21.](#)
- ♥ Hang up on Jack. [Go to page 7.](#)

Page 21:

There's so much dirt below the surface here, but all you can feel is ice, the chill penetrating deep. You're acutely conscious of how you sound, every point ringing out hollowly. As you try to proceed, you find that some desperate, breathless thing in the back of your mind is constantly reminding you of the king.

Why are you doing this? As you proceed, you're painfully aware that you will never get Jack back, and yet that you're not going to make it out today. You go faster and faster. All you can see are Jack's eyes, betrayed yet still full of tenderness.

- ♥ As gently as you can, tell Jack things are over between you. [Go to Ending 21.](#)
- ♥ Break down and ask Jack for forgiveness; vow to never talk to the king again [Go to page 25.](#)
- ♠ Scrabble vainly at the ground with your shovel until the guards find you [Go to Ending 20.](#)

Page 22:

In an instant, the air is full of gunfire. You stumble in confusion, trying to run for cover. The king's men seem to be everywhere, although they're only partially focused on you — you've left the Ace behind you, and they're mostly staying back to try to secure it. Eventually, you manage to make it through the chaos to somewhere out-of-sight of the king's men. You try to catch your breath.

- ♠ [You glance over your shoulder to see if Jack is okay.] **Go to page 23.**
- ♦ Make a break for it. **Go to Ending 22.**
- ♦ Ask Jack if he can manipulate things remotely to trick the king into moving into your line of fire. **Go to page 3.**

Page 23:

You glance over at Jack — he's totally floored.

“*Damn*, this hits hard,” he says, and you can tell he's been struck deeply. He stands and sways, repetitively, back and forth in the same motion, for what feels a very long time. You look at him inquisitively — isn't it time for another step?

“I know maybe you'll tell me it's time to move on, but I still feel like there's fire in my chest — we've made it this far together, now I want to settle into this groove forever. Just let me stay.”

You're currently moving through the track quickly, so you have to make a decision: you can either just continue onwards, or you can loop back. What's your next line going to be?

♥ “I don't care if it hurts!” [Go to page 24.](#)

♠ “I don't care if it hurts!” [Go to page 25.](#)

♣ “I don't care if it hurts!” [Go to page 35.](#)

♥ “Whatever makes you happy, whatever you want” [Go to page 25.](#)

♠ “Whatever makes you happy, whatever you want” [Go to page 24.](#)

♣ “Whatever makes you happy, whatever you want” [Go to page 35.](#)

Page 24:

Something quietly snaps within you — you remember once caring deeply about Jack, but now he’s just another abstract figure to you. An abstract figure who’s holding you back.

“I’ve considered your offer — I won’t say no to the opportunity to ditch you,” you continue, adding insult to injury. “See you never!”

Part of you is appalled at the casual cruelty of your words — but another part of you is secretly delighted, and you feel your lips involuntarily curling into a broad smirk as you prepare to leave Jack behind. He just stares, slack-jawed, eyes beginning to fill with tears, and you spitefully curse his bleeding heart.

- ♠ Run west, abandoning him by the side of the trail to be discovered by the guards. [Go to page 33.](#)
- ♥ Hang up on him. [Go to page 7.](#)

Page 25:

You look into Jack's eyes, and you can feel his suffering. It takes everything in you not to weep.

“Oh Jack, I'm so so so sorry. I never wanted to have to see you like this. All I want is for you to be happy. I know it won't be easy for you to make it through this with me — you've been wounded pretty badly. But if you're still willing to keep trying, then I don't care how difficult it is, or how long you take to get there — I'm not leaving you.”

“...what about the king?” Jack asks, apprehensively.

“The king can go to hell,” you respond. “I'm never going back to The Ace again — we'll put all of that in the past.”

“Do you really think you can make it? Your living is important.”

“We'll make it through somehow, Jack: ...”

♠ “...I'll either haul you up the cliff, or else I'll turn myself in and take the blame for the escape. Either way, I won't let them touch you.” **Go to page 10.**

♥ “...I'll find other work — The Ace isn't the only bar in town. I don't want anything to get between us.” **Go to Ending 23.**

Page 26:

Breathless, you've made it face-to-face with exactly what you were looking for: the base of the fence. This last step is the only thing standing between you and the freedom you so desperately want.

Looking at the metal structure in front of you, you find yourself taken aback by its sheer size — what sort of sick purpose leads someone to build something of this scale, out here in the middle of nowhere? Of course, you basically know the answer, you suppose. And in any case, the important thing for you is not the “*why* does this exist” — it's just “*how* can I be rid of The Ace and free of the king as soon as possible”.

- ♠ Plant your shovel into the dirt and try to dig under the fence [Go to page 20.](#)
- ♦ Head to Jack's office; tell him “I've got the Ace”. [Go to page 16.](#)
- ♦ Instead, snoop around Jack's secret base to try to figure out what exactly he's up to out here. [Go to page 27.](#)

Page 27:

As you're sneaking in, you run into an employee doing some custodial work. He's wearing the official uniform, and going about his duties very earnestly. As you approach, he turns to look at you — he seems taken aback to see you.

“What are you doing here?”, he asks.

♦♥ “I work here.” [Go to page 28.](#)

♦ “I'm looking for Jack — I have The Ace.” [Go to page 16.](#)

♦ [Run away; try to hide in a closet] [Go to page 32.](#)

Page 28:

He looks into your eyes for a moment. “Ah yes... I guess you do.” He looks away. “You’re new here, right?”

You nod.

“Well, since you’re here now, I suppose there’s some stuff about this place someone really oughta tell you. The Ace has some pretty serious secrets. Follow me, okay? But remember, if you don’t like what you hear, don’t shoot the messenger.”

He motions for you to follow him down a hallway. Morbidly curious, you step after him, hanging on his every word.

- ♦ Ask him if Jack is planning to use The Ace for evil. [Go to page 31.](#)
- ♥ Follow him in silence. [Go to page 29.](#)

Page 29:

He leads you down to the back of the building. This is an unfamiliar passage — you’ve never been here before. You pause outside a wooden door, but do not enter. On the other side, you hear violent motion, the king’s voice, and another voice softly moaning.

Your companion looks at you. “You see, you’re not the only one. The king is a busy man.”

You’re appalled. You hadn’t been ready for this. Nothing could have made you ready for this. The sound is more than your mind can take — there is now nothing anyone could give you for you to be willing to take this other person’s place with the king. How could he be so awful?

♠ [Despair] [Go to Ending 24.](#)

♥ [Despair] [Go to page 30.](#)

Page 30:

Moments later, you're face-to-face with the king's underling. You feel like someone who's tried to step on a stair that wasn't there.

"I don't get it — how could he have betrayed me?" you ask the underling "I thought we had something together."

"Oh, you're far from the first to fall for his grand Romantic nonsense. He never really intended to follow through on those plans you talked about — it was all just talk. He's just using you for whatever he can, same as anybody else. Same as I suspect you would, if given half the chance," he says, giving you a piercing look. "You played the game, and you lost, sweetie. Live by the sword, die by the sword."

- ♥ You accept that you've been cheated on. [Go to Ending 25.](#)
- ♠ You're brought in for questioning about your and Jack's anti-Royalist sentiments. [Go to page 9.](#)
- ♦ You promise that you'll find the money another way. [Go to Ending 26.](#)

Page 31:

“Yes, I reckon so. The Ace holds great power, you see. Our boss understands this more than anyone else. This facility was constructed with the sole purpose of containing that power; he hopes to use it to destroy his enemies for good.

But the thing is, the secret that nobody talks about, is that The Ace is extremely unstable. All of that violent energy pent up in a tiny little space — a little bit of pressure in the right place could release it all. It could tear this place to shreds in an instant.

Of course, what The Ace can do depends on how you use it. If you’re able to handle The Ace intelligently, you can use its power and maintain control indefinitely. If all you want is to create some momentary pyrotechnics, all it’ll take is some crude force — but you’ll dissipate all the energy pretty wastefully.”

- ♦ “Pyrotechnics like *this*?” [You hurl The Ace to the ground.] [Go to page 36.](#)
- ♦ “Yikes, ok. Well I’m glad the two of us don’t have to worry about such things — for us this is just another job.” [Go to page 2.](#)
- ♠ Pay him to start a riot as a distraction at 3 PM. [Go to page 35.](#)
- ♠ Agree to join his movement to take control of The Ace “intelligently”; pool your resources together. [Go to page 30.](#)

Page 32:

You hasten away, find the door you're looking for, and bolt yourself in. As soon as you do, you realize this was a wise decision. Sitting there in a cramped position, in the dark, smelling the pungent odors around you, it's not exactly the most comfortable of hiding place. But as the world on the other side of the door descends into chaos, you're very glad to have *some* form of hiding place, and especially one that nobody's especially likely to check.

You hear sirens blaring, a multitude of voices shouting, boots thumping heavily in every direction, and occasional gunshots. This is a pretty serious response. Eventually, although the noises haven't stopped, they sound more subdued, and you suspect the majority of people are at a distance from your current location.

- ◆ Keep hiding in the closet [Go to Ending 27.](#)
- ◆ Make a break for it [Go to Ending 28.](#)
- ♠ Keep hiding in the latrine [Go to Ending 29.](#)
- ♠ Make a break for it [Go to page 22.](#)

Page 33:

You just run. Hard. For a while there's nothing on your mind except the imperative to push your body as hard as you possibly can. You can feel the Ace at your back as you sprint through dark networks of winding paths.

You can't say for sure when the king's men stop following you, but eventually you manage to lose them. You find your way to the base you and Jack had planned to reach. Wordlessly, you go up.

- ♠♦ Find the fence. [Go to page 26.](#)
- ♦ Talk to one of Jack's minions at the secret base to see if you can get more information about him. [Go to page 27.](#)

Page 34:

“She won’t sing? That’s a pity.”

He has a barely-contained expression of excited anticipation on his lips. As you watch, you realize with a sense of dread that this was the response he was hoping for.

“I guess I’ll just have to take matters into my own hands” he says, pulling out an unfamiliar-looking metal instrument. Covered in valves and gears and wires, you can’t begin to imagine what it’s used for — but you fear that, against your will, you’ll find out soon enough. “It’s time to jazz things up.”

- ♠ [The guard leads you to the king’s torture chamber] [Go to page 29.](#)
- ♦ [The police officer questions you with an experimental lie detector] [Go to Ending 31.](#)
- ♣ [Jack solos over your music with his homemade EDM saxophone] [Go to Ending 30.](#)

Page 35:

Although you're terribly anxious, things seem to be proceeding well. As time keeps ticking, you can't tell whether the thumping you're hearing is from outside your head, or just your own heart. But then, at 2:56, Jack announces loudly to you "You need to scat."

You're pretty taken aback. Really? *Scat*? Now? It seems like a totally bizarre suggestion. Here you are, finally reaching the most pivotal moment of the operation, and with zero explanation Jack is telling you to change plans and start scatting. Maybe he's got some master plan; maybe he knows something you don't — or maybe he's just dumb?

- ♦ Take Jack's advice: run away. [Go to Ending 22.](#)
- ♠ Take Jack's advice: follow him to the latrine. [Go to page 32.](#)
- ♣ Take Jack's advice: improvise some jazz vocals. [Go to page 36.](#)
- ♦ Ignore Jack's advice: keep tailing the courier. [Go to page 15.](#)
- ♠ Ignore Jack's advice: stay in the central clearing. [Go to Ending 32.](#)
- ♣ Ignore Jack's advice: play the song normally. [Go to page 34.](#)

Page 36:

You bomb. Once the noise you've made is over — something like an inhuman screech, sending a wave of shock through everyone and everything around you — and the dust has settled, all that remains is a terrible silence.

You're dead. But at least you went out with a bang, I suppose?

- ♣ Sheepishly apologize for your bad vocals; never show your face in The Ace again. [Go to Ending 35.](#)
- ♠ And you took the king down with you. [Go to Ending 34.](#)
- ♦ And you took Jack down with you. [Go to Ending 33.](#)

Page 37:

bluster?!

Page 38:

Page 39:

Page 40:

Page 41:

Page 42:

Page 43:

Page 44:

Page 45:

Page 46:

Page 47:

Page 48:

Page 49:

Page 50:

Page 51:

Page 52:

Ending 1: Ducking ❤️

You sit there watching your phone ring until it goes to voicemail. Ducking this call was an easy decision, but it wasn't in any way a *principled* decision: you haven't resolved anything, you're just ignoring the problem. You know that, at some point in the future, Jack will call again, and you'll have to explain not only the situation with the king, but also why you've been ignoring his calls. But that's a later problem. For now you close your eyes, and try to take a nap.

Ending 2: Straight ♣

You decide to play it straight — you're not gonna run out in the middle of your audition. That would be very bad form. Besides, you have no reason to think that agent would even give you the time of day. You're just a nobody. You ignore any thought of The Ace, and try to finish the audition as best you can.

When it's over, you're told, "Jack, your drumming is on-point — love the aggression. But Queen, your performance left much to be desired. Your singing is weak, and let's not even talk about your stage presence. It seemed like your head really wasn't in the game."

They claim they'll let you know if they have a spot for you, but from this feedback you're pretty confident they won't. Ah well — you'll find other gigs.

Ending 3: Hit me

You pull the trigger — in an instant, the crime kingpin worth hundreds of millions of dollars has crumpled to the ground.

“It’s hit me!” he cries, and his grunts all crowd around him, unsure what to do. You’ve got no chance of recovering The Ace with all of them there, so you just run. Nobody stops you.

For the rest of your life, you live in fear of retribution from this organization. But whoever ends up filling the power vacuum after the king dies, they don’t seem too interested in causing trouble for you. It’s possible this was an enemy of the king, and they feel they owe you a favour. Whatever the situation, nobody even comes to harass you about your debts anymore, and eventually your fears are nothing more than a background hum.

Ending 4: Shoot the moon ♦

Directly violating Jack's instructions, you take aim not at the king, but at The Ace itself, placing a bullet squarely into the body of the gemstone. You're not sure why you did it — some sort of contrarian spirit? The nihilistic impulse to destroy something beautiful? — but you definitely weren't expecting the results.

As soon as The Ace is hit, the entire room explodes in devastating flash of magical energy. It seems there was something to those old stories, after all. Everyone and everything in the bank is completely vaporized, and a half-mile radius around the city block you were in is totally leveled. This includes not just you and the king, but in fact almost all of the king's criminal organization. So I guess, silver lining is that those debts of yours are probably forgiven?

Ending 5: Royal flush

It's your first time admitting this to him, and your face goes a deep shade of red as you hang on his response.

“Oh, I love you too, Queenie,” he responds, using Jack's nickname for you. He kisses you, but it feels deeply deeply wrong. You realize now that something you can't pin down about the way the king speaks and moves around you feels forced and hollow — and now you're finding this impossible to ignore. As you finish the slow dance, your mind is miles away, thinking uneasy thoughts about this now-alien person inches away from you. How well do you actually know the person you've given up Jack for?

Ending 6: Discard ♥

It's not your first time saying this, but, unbeknownst to the king, it's your first time meaning it. You have a lovely night dancing, but the next time he tries to call you he finds that you've blocked his number, and when you go in to The Ace together for work you speak to him only when spoken to, and in the most stilted, impersonal way you can manage. It's difficult, but you harden your heart, and manage to keep it up for a long time, before eventually handing in your notice once you've found a job at another bar.

You regret losing the king, but much much more so you regret losing Jack. How can you have thrown everything away? And for what?

Ending 7: Knock-out whist ♠

As soon as your strength begins to fail, the king manages to wrestle you to the ground and pin you down. While all of the guards and prisoners continue to watch in shock, he bludgeons you forcefully. When he finally relents and stands up, dusting off his soiled regal garb, you're alive but badly beaten, and are unable to bring get up to your feet.

The king looks around him and wordlessly raises a fist. This show of strength was purely theatrical — he could easily have called for one of his guards to deal with you — but it was very successful theatrics. From this day on, the prisoners in The Ace speak about the king in hushed tones, and fall in order much more easily when the guards command them to.

Ending 8: Full house ♣

As you finish out the track, the room is elated. People have come from all corners to join the dance floor over just the course of the one song. Jack fistbumps you, an awed expression in his eye. “That was crazy, dude. You’re, like, Mozart or something.”

The king seems to agree. As you step down from the table, he walks up from the dance floor and says to you quietly.

“That was one performance you pulled off there, kid. Here’s my number — w’dya say we have a private conversation once this is over? My crown’s been feeling a little heavy lately — but it seems I may have found someone who knows how to handle heavy.”

Ending 9: The flop ♠

You tell yourself that you are strong. Dragging Jack behind you, you ignore your failing muscles and keep climbing higher — but you can't do it. Eventually, a rock slips, you are unable to regain your grip, and both of you fall to your deaths. Your bodies are found the next day by The Ace's guards.

Ending 10: Solitaire ♥

You decide this is not the moment to talk to the king. It's time to step back for a while, to do some introspection about how things got to this point. You spend a long time sitting in silence, reflecting on the events that have occurred in a mixture of self-pity, self-hatred, and resignation. Eventually, you decide that it's best to nip the relationship developing between you and the king in the bud. In the coming weeks, you remain friendly with him, but the whirlwind romance that's been beginning to develop is put on ice.

It's probably best for you to go it alone for a little while. Playing with hearts doesn't seem to suit you.

Ending II: Crazy eights ♦

You have no great love for the king, and are happy to offer the cops a whole bunch of juicy information in exchange for their dropping charges against you and placing you in witness protection. You hope you've given them enough to finally put the king behind bars.

But as you're living your new life in Albuquerque, you keep checking the news and hearing nothing about a big bust of the king's crime ring. Shouldn't this have happened by now?

One night, walking home from the bus stop, you find four people, faces masked, walking behind you at a fixed distance. Spooked, you pick up your pace — only to realize that there's four more people in identical masks in front of you. You're the only people on the street; when they kill you and dispose of your body there are no witnesses.

You were a fool to think you could outplay the king. He stays one step ahead of the law, and is not one to forgive attempted backstabbers.

Ending 12: The turn ♠

You turn on Jack completely, weaving an extravagant web of lies — not only was he the one who planned this escape attempt and forced you with threat of violence to assist him, he's *also* the head of an ongoing network of conspirators against the king.

Grateful for the information you provide about this conspiracy (it really does exist, although Jack is uninvolved, and the information you've given them is all fabricated), the guards at The Ace give you preferential treatment for the rest of your time there — you're generally assigned to lighter labour, and are often given extra breaks and rations. Your fellow prisoners treat you with suspicion and resentment.

Jack does not, though. Jack is executed by firing squad the dawn after you're captured.

Ending 13: Showing your hand ♣

As the day comes to a close, you know for sure that the king doesn't remember your name, and you suspect you will never get another invitation to The Ace. Nevertheless, you feel proud — you've found your authentic self, and appreciated music for the reasons you always used to, instead of just treating it as a tool in a quest for status. Jack is disappointed at first, but he recognizes that this was important for you, and that you're at peace with what happened, so eventually he's back to normal.

Ending 14: Two pair ♥

You marry Jack, but all the while you're going behind his back with the king. It's a terribly unstable arrangement, and a year down the line everything comes to a head and falls apart catastrophically.

Ending 15: Trump ♠

You decide that, in the end, mercy trumps violence. Even if you did succeed in killing the king here and now (which seems rather unlikely, because already the guards have their rifles trained on you, and are just waiting for a clear shot), what would you accomplish? It's true, the king's rule is brutal — but if you eliminate him, it seems likely that the vacuum will be filled by another ruler even more paranoid and authoritarian.

You decide to show the king mercy, and do not harm him. You expect to be executed, but he's actually somewhat touched by the gesture, and orders you spared. His regime remains oppressive, but you like to think you influenced him at least slightly towards compassion.

Ending 16: Meld ♥

This was fast. You had somewhat expected that this could be on the cards, but you are still caught totally off-guard. You suspect that even if you *had* been telling the truth and there was nothing going on with the king, this proposal would still feel out-of-the-blue. You gently decline Jack's offer.

Jack is disappointed that you've turned him down, but he understands. You remain in the same terrible state of limbo you've been all this time, getting closer and closer to the king while all the while pretending to Jack as though nothing is happening. Over time, your perceptions of the two relationships meld together — you can no longer remember which memories are of Jack and which are of the king. It's terribly confusing, and you want nothing more than to be able to cut one or both of them off. But still you can't bring yourself to do it.

Ending 17: The deal ♦

You're willing to make the deal, but you're not going to trust Jack blindly. You wait until he's put the money in your hand before revealing where you'd stashed the Ace — you buried it somewhere outside the premises before you entered. The arrangement is tense, as each of you is convinced the other would stab them in the back the first chance they got. However, the deal goes off without a hitch, and within the week you're living large in the Bahamas, your gambling debts paid off and then some. You wonder idly to yourself what made Jack so particularly excited about *this* diamond that he was willing to pay such an extravagant rate — but at this point, it's no longer your problem.

Ending 18: Fold ♠

You abandon the plan. Revenge is sweet, but life is sweeter — even in a place like The Ace. You and Jack live out the rest of your days in hard labour. Frequently, you look back and regret your cowardice in that fateful moment. But what's done is done. In the end, when it mattered, you chose yourself over your revolutionary principles.

Ending 19: Cut ♠

As you scale the fence, you're sure you will get spotted by the guards, or else will be unable to make it over the bales of barbed wire at the top and will fall to your death. However, though your entire body is torn and lacerated by the cruel barbs, you eventually manage to pull your way over and escape undetected. It'll be a long journey back to civilization now, and your safety is far from certain, but the hardest part of the escape is now over.

Ending 20: Misère ♠

You keep trying to dig your way through long after it's become clear that the ground is too deeply frozen for there to be any possibility of success. By the time the guards have found you some three hours later, you've almost succumbed from hypothermia anyway — but despite your miserable state you're alive enough for them to haul you back, and after a few months you're well enough for hard labour again.

Ending 21: Broken hearts ❤️

You tell Jack, firmly but as compassionately as you can, that this relationship just isn't working. You try to avoid mention of the king — it's better he thinks this part of things played no role. He takes it very hard regardless. You knew that he would. But at this point there's nothing more you can do. You turn off your phone and sit in silence for a long time.

Ending 22: Know when to run ♦

You haven't got The Ace — but you know when it's time to cut your losses. You high-tail it out of there as fast as you can, disappearing into the night. You get on the first plane you can find to anywhere-but-here — what with the king's crime ring, and possibly now the police, this town isn't safe for you. Your best hope is to try to start a new life from scratch somewhere else, and hope trouble doesn't follow you.

Ending 23: Bridge ♥

Although you and Jack are both in emotional distress, you feel in this moment that a strong bridge has been formed in your previously-struggling relationship. You've remembered how much you care about Jack, and suddenly none of the rest of it seems to matter. Your relationship is on somewhat rocky ground for a while — as are your finances, as you struggle to find a new job after leaving your old one without notice. But you put in the effort, and eventually these days of turmoil are nothing but a faint memory in a happy life.

Ending 24: Hold 'em ♠

You're shown into the king's torture chamber. He frowns when he sees you; he gestures to one of his lackeys to hold you while he accepts the strange metal device from the one who showed you in. You can't take the suspense. You tell him everything — all about Jack, the gang leader at The Ace, the anti-Royalist conspiracies you were a part of before they sent you here.

The secrets you shared end up costing the lives of many people very dear to you. But in the moment you revealed them you couldn't restrain yourself — you were guided only by that overwhelming sense of terror.

Ending 25: Cheater ♥

The cheater has become the cheated upon, you think to yourself, miserably. You should have known that the king, with his suave demeanor, and his playful yet insistent flirtation, was not to be trusted. In fact, the more you think back over events, the more you realize what a horrible creep that guy was. You feel incredibly stupid — how did you let *this* person manipulate you? How is it possible you thought you *loved* this person? That you gave up Jack for this person?

You never quite recover.

Ending 26: Go fish ♦

You beg with the king's men to give you more time — you can come up with the money, you were going to do so, you just got played. Eventually, they assent. You get one month. To come up with all of it.

You're not sure how this could possibly happen — but you know the king means business, so this is your only hope. And hey, if you'd pulled off this diamond heist you could have made it work, so at least it's theoretically possible. You go fishing for more jobs in the criminal underworld.

Ending 27: Patience ♦

You resist the urge to run — instead, you wait in the closet for a long time. You have no way to measure time — you don't know whether the units are hours, or possibly days. You wait long after the sirens have stopped, until the only sound you can hear is your own shallow breathing.

Eventually, you creep out slowly. You tiptoe through the deserted halls, keeping your head down in the hopes that maybe you won't be flagged by security cameras — although if someone is monitoring security cameras you know you're almost certainly lost. It seems that nobody is, though, and you manage to make it out of the building.

Once you do, you disappear into the forest, making your way on a several-day trek by foot back to civilization. You take out The Ace, cradling it in your hand. You hadn't noticed before, but upon closer inspection it seems to glow in a way you've never seen from another object, and to vibrate almost-imperceptibly when you hold it.

What you decide to do with The Ace now is another adventure.

Ending 28: Triple run ♦

You sprint out of the closet, booking it down the hallway at what feels like three times as fast as you've ever run before. But it's not fast enough — Jack's minions hear the sound of your footsteps, and come from all directions. Soon, they've taken The Ace from you, and you're entirely at Jack's mercy. He is not such a friendly guy when he no longer needs anything from you.

Ending 29: Check ♠

You inch the door open slightly and check outside. You can still see a guard in sight. You decide to wait to make a break for it until the coast is totally clear. Unfortunately, though, this never happens.

Your escape plan a bust, you rejoin the rest of the prisoners after the riot.

Ending 30: Pair ♣

Against all odds, Jack's addition to your song is incredible. He's rigged up some kind of electronic saxophone — you don't know the details, but whatever this is, it's clear he knows how to play it. It's definitely a strange addition — your dance mix of Radiohead was already *slightly* out there, but whatever Jack is cooking now has got to be it's own totally new genre.

It's a really, really good genre though. The crowd is absolutely enraptured. You shrug, and lean into it, mixing in some jazzy chord extensions, and giving Jack an extended instrumental section to solo over.

When it's over, the king approaches you.

“Never, in all my many years, have I heard anything like *that*. I want this to be the new sound of The Ace forever — we've already had the best-of-the-best existing music, but imagine this place home to an act unlike anything else in the world. This is unprecedented, but — how would the two of you feel about a dual monarchy?”

Ending 31: Bluff ♦

The lie detector doesn't work at all. You confidently feed him a bunch of nonsense, and he eats it all up.

Ending 32: The river ♠

You stay in the courtyard. You're there when the riot breaks out. You're swept up in a river of people, and end up trampled in the ensuing chaos.

Ending 33: Bomb pot ♦

You've been reduced to ashes — but so has Jack. Maybe it's worth it?

Ending 34: Grand slam ♠

You've been reduced to ashes — but so has the king. Maybe it's worth it?

Ending 35: Shuffle ♣

You shuffle off, embarrassed. Like I said, you're *really* more of a DJ than a singer. Especially under pressure.

Ending 36:

Ending 37:

Ending 38:

Ending 39:

Ending 40:

Ending 41:

Ending 42:

Ending 43:

Ending 44:

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Ending 46:

Ending 47:

Ending 48:

Ending 49:

Ending 50:

Ending 51:

Ending 52: