Prodigal: A Novel  
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One-sentence summary:

Interstellar colonists return to clash with Earth, and our hero rebels, first against his own (colonist) civilization, then against the apparent Utopia of Earth.

One-paragraph summary:

Sangh Fharha is a crewman on a spaceship leading an expedition to contact Earth, the ancestral home of the people of Prezghod, a planet several light-years away. Although he is supposed to be the diplomat representing the theocratic Empire of Prezghod, he is accused of treason and imprisoned by his captain, Willem Limhoon. Under pressure, Limhoon allows him to descend to the planet’s surface, where he falls in love with a seductive robotic woman, XC, and must flee with her when Limhoon seizes power in a Bolshevik-style coup. In the time Sangh has with her, he finds out some of the appalling whys and hows of the robots’ control of Earth for the supposed benefit of its citizens. The invasion fails, but Sangh and XC are captured by Limhoon and brought back in chains to Prezghod. With the help of the Jesuits and the shadowy Guild of Physicists, Sangh destroys XC (perhaps) and regains his freedom, as a fugitive.

Three key characters:

- Sangh Fharha: Exoanthropologist and diplomat representing Prezghod, a planet colonized almost two millennia ago by an expedition from Earth.

- Willem Limhoon, his commander, captain and confessor (“vhatta”) of HHS Cross

- XC, a robotic woman, representing Earth. (Her name is pronounced “sheess-ceh,” usually mangled by the Prezghodlings into “Sheessay.”)
Chapter-by-chapter synopsis, one sentence per chapter:


2. “Ambassadors”: XC blackmails Limhoon into appointing Sangh Ambassador to Earth, and Sangh descends to the surface in that capacity.

Chapter-by-chapter synopsis, one paragraph per chapter:

1. “Home?”: Her Holiness’s Ship Cross, representing the Empire of Prezghod, goes into orbit around Earth, and is met by a spacecraft named XC19. Its sole crewmember is a woman named Šheessay Dezeneauvee, who creates endless bureaucratic problems to solve before Cross will be allowed to land. Sangh, caught between Šheessay and Vhatta Limhoon, flubs the negotiation, and is imprisoned on a charge of treason by Limhoon, when Šheessay is revealed to be a sophisticated robot, a “Seque.” Because of the Empire’s historical clash with secularists using robots, the people of Prezghod have been taught that robots and computer networks are inherently demonic. Limhoon orders a landing and seizes a small chunk of territory near the Earth’s capital city, São Paulo.

2. “Ambassadors”: Šheessay blackmails Limhoon by revealing that she has recorded him fabricating orders that allow him to exceed his authority and intervene in Earth’s affairs if conditions allow it. Sangh gets Limhoon to reappoint him ambassador and allow him to descend to the planet’s surface. Limhoon reluctantly agrees, but sends Tralf Ghiller, Sangh’s best friend, along as co-ambassador. They land at the São Paulo airport, where they are greeted by the President of the Solar System. Sangh and Tralf are joined by Lieutenant Commander Kolfhaj, who commands the first landing party, and by Bewinda Wharbut, a historian in Kolfhaj’s group. She resents Sangh and distrusts the Seques. A motorcade takes them all to the Presidential Palace.