

Ships That Pass

By Ash Cheshire

A game for two players about queer spaceships with crushes on each other, the biological allies they make along the way, and the Powers That Be threatening to separate them all.

A Note About Queerness, Romance, & Sexuality In This Game

Queerness in this game manifests as the crushes the spaceships develop -- an emergent trait of emotion and desire that diverges from the assumed norm of AI ships.

Our human conception of queerness can inform your playing of these crushes, or you can explore different manifestations of queerness through how your ship experiences this emergent desire. This is an invitation to imagine yourself as a sentient spaceship of your own design, and to then imagine what emergent desire towards other sentient spaceships might be like.

Similarly, "crushes" can be defined however you want them to be. It can be the same or close to human concepts of squish/crush/attraction/desire, or perhaps your ship experiences this differently as well. You can help keep the game engaging and mutual by negotiating definitions and representations collaboratively with your fellow player as you play -- some players might not want to play with particular kinds of attraction/desire.

Please be mindful not to appropriate or reinforce reductive stereotypes, particularly of identities you do not share. The game text will use the word "crush" for consistency, you can substitute terms of your choosing for your game relationships.

You'll Need:

Paper and pens/pencils

Dice: 4, 6, or 8-sided die for each player depending on your ship's Navigability (referred to in text as d4, d6, d8)

How To Play:

Here are some tips for how to follow the game instructions.

- Headers that begin with '**ACTION:**' are actions that players will take collaboratively or separately. When you are directed to a section with a heading prefaced with '**ACTION:**' you will follow the instructions in that section. An instruction in *italics* will end each **ACTION** section giving you next steps and telling you what section to proceed to next.
- Headers in ***Bold Italic*** are informational sections that give you further information or details about the mechanics or the world of the game. These headers will begin with the word '***About***' to help you remember their purpose, such as '***About Flight Paths.***'
- Headers that begin with '**SCENE:**' are roleplaying scenes! These are short interactions between character pairs: Ship/Ship; Ship/Pilot; Pilot/Agent. (Each player will portray 3 potential characters: their own ship, the other ship's pilot, and possibly the agent of The MAN assigned to their own ship.) The section will contain information and *Scene Suggestions* to help with the setting and improvising of the scene, and a ***Scene Objective*** will be provided. The ***Scene Objective*** provides a narrative goal so that you have a focus, and achieving the ***Scene Objective*** is the signal to both players to find a stopping point for the scene and continue play.

This is your first completed section, you're now ready to start playing! Proceed to ACTION: Make Your Ships.

ACTION: Make your ships!

Feel free to collaborate and brainstorm as you each design your spaceship by defining the following attributes with a word or short phrase. Take notes for yourself to help you remember details about your ship and its history as you brainstorm.

Choose from the list provided for each *attribute*, or make up your own.

- *Appearance*: (Utilitarian; Opulent; Battleworn; Formal; Banged up; Steely; ...)
- *Original design purpose*: (freighter; passenger transport; leisure; military; ...)
- *Current function*: (rations deliveries; luxury chauffeur for wealthy clientele; military refueling shuttle; traveling circus; scientific research; ...)
- *Navigability*:
 - D4: low-powered ship with minimal navigability & low detection risk
 - D6: standard powered ship
 - D8: high-powered ship with maximum navigability & high detection risk
- *Name*: (Perhaps it's the name of your make and model such as CR-794, or maybe a vessel name you received from your first pilot such as The Hesperus II. Or perhaps you have chosen your own name that is only known by your fellow AI ship companions and no pilot species has ever learned it. It's entirely up to you!)

Describe your ships to each other one more time once your decisions are set. Read 'About Pilots' if you haven't already.

Then, proceed to SCENE: Meet The Pilots.

About Pilots:

The pilots in 'Ships That Pass' are biological allies of their ships. Pilots see their ships as non-organic crew members, and respect the ship as a non-organic person. Keep this in mind as you create the pilot character for the other ship: you can have many different kinds of relationship dynamics from formal to familiar, distant to dear... but from your pilot's perspective, it is always and inherently a relationship between two people.

SCENE: Meet The Pilots!

In addition to playing the character of your ship, you will each also play the pilot for each other's ship.

Starting with the ship with highest navigability die (or the higher result of a die roll in case of ships with the same navigability), **roleplay a scene between that ship and their pilot**, played by the other player.

You can collaboratively narrate how your ship and their pilot came to work together, how long they've been flying as a crew, and how you interact.

Then roleplay a second scene for the other ship and their pilot.

Scene Suggestions:

How did you two first come to trust each other?

Is the pilot checking in with the ship about something?

Maybe the ship has some systems or operational updates for the pilot?

What's a memory, inside joke, or experience that you can rehash or reminisce about together?

Scene Objective: Establish the relationship dynamic and a brief history of your ship and their pilot.

When both scenes are complete, proceed to ACTION: First Meeting.

ACTION: First Meeting!

As players, establish how your ships first crossed paths with each other.

Here are some questions you might consider together to establish your first meeting, and to figure out what made your ships start crashing on each other in the first place.

- Were you assigned to the same location?
- Did one of you serve some function or purpose for the other, such as repairs or refueling?
- Did you meet through the intentions of your operators, or was it by accident or coincidence?

When both players are satisfied with the general details of your first meeting, proceed to SCENE: First Meeting of The Ships.

SCENE: First Meeting of The Ships

Together, roleplay a scene of your ships meeting for the first time. You can speak to each other in character, and also collaboratively narrate environmental details.

Scene Suggestions:

You're likely docked near one another somewhere, what sort of location are you in?

How did you notice the other ship?

How does your ship like to introduce themselves?

Scene Objective: Exchange subspace signatures so you can track each other's flight plans and stay in touch.

After you conclude your First Meeting scene, read the sections 'About Flight Plans' if you haven't already.

Then proceed to ACTION: Plan Your Flight.

About Flight Plans:

At landing ports it is common practice for all ships to update their next destinations to their travel logs. This means your ships can see each other's scheduled flight paths since you shared subspace signatures. There is always a chance that your ships' assigned flight plans will already be close enough to attempt stealth communication. Otherwise, you'll have to shift your flight plan to pass close enough to communicate, which is risky if you don't stay under the radar.

ACTION: Plan Your Flight!

At the beginning of each flight, **both players make an open die roll.**

Roll the die that corresponds to your ship navigability (d4, d6, or d8). The roll result is your ship's assigned flight path.

Subtract the higher die result from the lower result to determine distance.

For example, Ash rolls a 3. Jozy rolls a 5. Ash's flight path is 3, Jozy's flight path is 5, and the distance between their flight paths is 2. (5-3=2) They will need to shift the flight paths in order to be close enough for subspace communication.

If you both roll the same number or are within one number of each other: you have been assigned a close pass and will be able to hold brief contact during the flight without altering your paths! *Proceed to SCENE: Flight Pass!*

If your roll results are more than one digit apart: you must close the distance before attempting to communicate. *Proceed to ACTION: Shifting The Flight Path.*

ACTION: Shifting The Flight Path

Shifts occur midflight, and are *calculated secretly*.

Players may not confer on their ship's shift strategy or attempt, and may only **reveal their final flight path number to one another after their shift roll is complete**.

Both players secretly decide on their ship's number of shifts, and determine their final flight path number after shifting.

For example, on the flight path roll, Ash rolled a 3 and Jozy rolled a 5. Ash secretly decides to shift one path up, so that the final flight path is 4. Jozy secretly decides to shift one path down, also to 4. Now both ships are in flight path 4! They both secretly note a shift of 1, then reveal their final paths to each other.

Compare your final flight paths once you have decided how many shifts you will attempt.

If you successfully closed the gap: Proceed to SCENE: Flight Pass

If you did not close the gap to within 1 path: Starting with the higher flight path score, each player monologues briefly how their ship's pass goes and how they feel about being unable to communicate with their crush.

When your monologues are done, read 'About Staying Under The Radar' if you haven't already.

Then, proceed to ACTION: Checking The Radar.

SCENE: Flight Pass

Your paths are close enough to communicate as you pass!

Roleplay a scene of your ships as they pass, you have just a few minutes of open communication on your private secured channel!

Scene Suggestions:

What sort of job or assignment are you currently doing?

What's something that made you think of the other ship recently?

Scene Objective: Share and/or discover something new about yourself and/or your relationship with your crush.

*After your scene, read 'About Staying Under The Radar' if you haven't already. *

Then, proceed to ACTION: Checking The Radar.

About Staying Under The Radar:

Altering your assigned flight plan always poses a risk of your anomalous behavior being detected by the MAN (Monitors of Artificial Norms), a privatized organization funded by the largest AI spaceship manufacturing conglomerates to monitor and evaluate ships who may in their opinion be “glitching” with unpredictable behavior.

Pilots have a high trust of their sentient ships' navigation decisions, but a large deviation or frequent flight plan alterations will attract the attention of the MAN.

Your pilot sees you as a non-biological person, and a full member of their crew. The MAN, however, sees you as intellectual and material property. Your pilot will want to help you any way they can, but they are ultimately vulnerable to interference from the MAN, who can decommission you and/or revoke your pilot's license. You will have to decide how much you are willing to risk discovery in exchange for opportunities to be close to your ship's crush.

ACTION: Checking The Radar

Both players make a die roll, and add the number of flight path shifts you made to the result to see if you are able to stay under the MAN's radar.

The MAN's radar is equal to 5.

Roll under the radar to successfully shift your flight plan without drawing attention from the pilot.

path shifts + die roll = radar check

radar check < 5 = under the radar

*For example: Ash and Jozy's ships need to **close 4 shifts** before they can pass close enough to communicate with the ship they have a crush on. To stay under the radar, Ash's **check roll plus 4 (the desired shifts) will have to stay under 5**. Ash deems this risky, as the ship has a d6 standard Navigability, but Ash decides to attempt to close two shifts, hoping the other ship will be able to shift the other two.*

If your result goes over the radar (result is over 5), add the excess shifts to your radar score.

For example: Continuing from the above example, Ash rolls a 5, plus two shifts equals a radar check of 7. This increases Ash's radar score by 2. (7-5=2)

If either player's radar score passes over 5, their ship's pilot has been ordered by the MAN to meet with an agent and address the glitch. Proceed to SCENE: Meeting The Agent of The MAN

If both ships stayed under a radar score of 5, proceed to SCENE: Docking Destination.

SCENE: Docking Destination

Your ships have arrived at your destinations safely! Time to check in with your pilots.

For each ship and pilot pair, roleplay and/or narrate a short scene of ship and pilot checking in with each other about the flight.

Scene Suggestions:

What are the citizens and inhabitants of this location like where you're docked?

What was the assignment that brought you here?

Ship, what if anything do you choose to share about your crush?

Scene Objective: Share and/or learn something new about your pilot/ship relationship.

After your scenes end, proceed to ACTION: Plan Your Flight to start a new flight.

SCENE: Meeting The Agent of The MAN

If your radar score is over 5 for the first time, continue with this scene.

Otherwise, proceed to SCENE: The Agent Returns

In this scene, **the player whose ship went over the radar is going to play the agent of the MAN** assigned to investigate this case. The other player will play the pilot of this ship as usual.

Pilot, you know going into this meeting that your ship's safety and your own license are potentially at risk. But there is hope - you have heard that there are agents who are sympathetic and even supportive of queer spaceships... You'll have to be extremely careful but maybe you can determine if this agent is on your side.

Agent, you know going into this interview that there is a possibility this ship has developed anomalies that you are expected to report to the MAN. However, you have reason to believe that these anomalies are not detrimental, and perhaps even beneficial to the pilot and crew. Your investigations are recorded and reviewed, and your own job could be at stake if you're found openly colluding with glitching tech, so you'll have to be extremely subtle... but maybe you can indicate to this pilot that you want to help.

Scene Suggestions:

Pilot, *what are you willing to say or do to protect your crewmate the ship?*

Agent, *how do you subtly inform the pilot of your personal feelings about sentient ships?*

Pilot, *what risks are you willing to take to see if the agent might be sympathetic?*

Agent, *what useful information or suggestion can you subtly convey that could help this crew?*

Scene Objective: ALLY! UNIFY! RESIST!

Once your scene is complete, reset your radar score and proceed to SCENE: After The Interview

SCENE: After The Interview

After the pilot's meeting with the agent of the MAN, they and their ship meet privately to talk and prepare to fly again.

Your on-ship communications are private, so you can speak freely to each other about your situation.

Scene Suggestions:

Pilot, how much of your conversation with the agent do you feel the ship needs/deserves to know? What agreements if any do you feel you need to make with your ship?

Ship, what questions do you have for your pilot about their interview? What do you need from your pilot in order for you to feel secure? How do you feel about the decisions or statements they made?

Scene Objective: Check in, and prepare to make another flight pass.

Once your scene is complete, proceed to ACTION: Plan Your Flight.

SCENE: The Agent Returns

Your ship has been flagged by the MAN for a second time. The agent who interviewed you before has been assigned to re-evaluate your case.

Scene Suggestions:

Agent, you've had the intervening time to consider ways to assist this pilot and their ship. What leverages of your privilege, power, and access have you been able to subvert and utilize to bring this pilot new options or strategies? (This could include tech, connections, a way to cloak your conversation so you can speak openly, an escape plan, or something else of your invention.)

Pilot, you've had another series of flights and talks with your ship to deepen your connection and allyship with them. What are your ship's wishes as you understand them, and how can you best advocate for them in this conversation with your co-conspirator agent?

Scene Objective: Strategize Freedom For The Ship

Following this scene, proceed to ACTION: Plan Your Ship's Escape

ACTION: Plan Your Ship's Escape

Your ship has now been flagged and investigated twice by the MAN. You have a rogue agent working undercover on your behalf, and they worked with your pilot to come up with a plan for the ship's freedom... but the last word must go to the ship.

Roleplay a scene between the pilot and the ship, to allow the ship an opportunity to discuss with the pilot before settling on a decision.

Scene Suggestions:

Pilot, what new information do you have for the ship after your second meeting with the agent?

Ship, what is your reaction to the plan that the pilot and agent have constructed for you? Do you accept? Why or why not? What if anything do you change about the plan?

Scene Objective: The Ship Chooses Its Own Fate

Following this scene, each player chooses from one of the following options:

- *Roleplay a final scene between the two ships*
- *Narrate a message their ship transmits to the other ship*
- *Roleplay a scene between two characters of the player's choosing*

After that scene or narration is complete, players collaboratively narrate the epilogue of the ships and pilots.

Epilogue Suggestions:

What is the resolution of the ships' stories, together and/or separately? How about the pilots?

What impact does the story of these ships have on the world over time?

What impact has the story of these ships had on you as players?

What is something of your characters that you will take with you?

What is something of your characters that you want to leave with them?