

BEYOND REACH

BY ANNIE JOHNSTON-GLICK

You were assigned to one another. Neither of you had a choice in the matter. Perhaps you have had a hundred pilots before, perhaps you are fresh off the factory line. Maybe you are a seasoned fighter, maybe you have never seen combat outside training. Whatever the case, the powers that be who keep you in this bitter war have decided it is unnecessary for you to communicate. You will do your jobs, never quite knowing if the other is there, or how they might feel...

This is a play by post game about falling in love with someone unattainable to you, someone beyond your reach. Play at your own pace, just have a way to reveal some information and keep some hidden, i.e. a shared document and individual unshared documents.

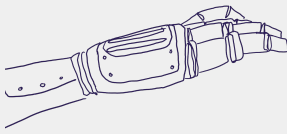
Choose one player to be the **mech**. They know their pilot is here, but have no way of communicating with them. They write letters in frustration at the barrier. The other player is the **pilot**. They do not know the mech is more than a machine, but sometimes think they feel a presence. They write letters to something they assume is a figment of their imagination to stave off loneliness.

To start play, take turns describing yourselves only by what someone could assume by looking at you.

Next the pilot, in one sentence, describes when they first climbed into their mech.

The mech responds by writing a short letter to the pilot that they may never see. Do not show the other player. Tell them in one sentence how you behaved around the time you wrote your letter. If you were angry, maybe you stormed off, or your systems were less





responsive. If you were pinning, how might you have ineffectually reached out?

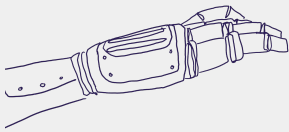
The pilot responds the same way, writing an unseen letter and describing their behavior in a sentence to the mech.

Write two letters each in this way. Decide together how much time passes between each one. It could be hours, days, even months or years. The person who just wrote a letter should roll 1d6 to determine what happened during the following downtime.

1. A battle went badly. Injuries or damage was sustained but you both managed to pull through.
2. A battle was won, victory was celebrated.
3. Idle work. The higher ups assigned meaningless tasks to distract from the anticipation of unpredictable attack.
4. Maintenance. You were careful and thorough.
5. Time apart. You were separated for a time for more training or upgrades or as punishment for a transgression.
6. Uneventful patrol. You got to see more of this world together.

Intermission: Show how you work together even without direct communication. The pair of you have been chosen for a bigger mission than you are usually assigned. The mech should briefly describe the mission, i.e. “Infiltrate their base,” “Take down the enemy,” “Defend our base.” The pilot responds in one sentence, describing how they help the mech to achieve the objective. Trade off sentences until the mission is won or lost. You can choose to cooperate with what you think your partner is doing, or try to push your own idea. When the mission is complete, each give a sentence describing how you celebrate or how you lament.





Continue to write two more letters each, starting this time with the pilot writing in response to the events of the intermission. Roll downtime between other letters.

Finale: When you have written all your letters roll 2d6. Your feelings may have grown, progressed, but the war continues and feels not. You might not escape its consequences.

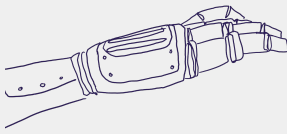
1-6 One of you has died. If in the course of play, one of you makes more sense to have been lost than the other go with that character. If not, roll another d6. Odds the pilot died, evens the mech was destroyed. The other finally receives the letters.

7-9 Both of you live, but the pilot is reassigned. The letters are never seen.

10+ You both live, and receive the letters.

Briefly describe how you live your life going forward, or, if necessary, where you were buried. In all cases, both *players* can now read all the letters. You can use them to talk about how things might have gone, if only they'd been able to communicate, or use their contents to lean into the dramatic irony of your epilogues, or describe how your characters react to finally receiving the other's words





[STEP BY STEP ORDER OF PLAY]

1. Describe yourselves
2. Pilot describes first time in cockpit
3. Mech writes secret letter and describes a behavior
4. Mech rolls for downtime
5. Pilot writes secret letter and describes a behavior
6. Pilot rolls for downtime
7. Mech writes secret letter and describes behavior
8. Mech rolls for downtime
9. Pilot writes secret letter and describes behavior
10. Intermission
 - a. Mech describes mission
 - b. Pilot makes a move
 - c. Mech makes a move
 - d. Repeat until mission is resolved
 - e. Each gives a sentence on how they behave as a result of mission
11. Pilot writes a secret letter in response to events of mission and describes behavior
12. Pilot rolls downtime
13. Mech writes secret letter and describes behavior
14. Mech rolls downtime
15. Pilot writes secret letter and describes behavior
16. Pilot rolls downtime
17. Mech writes secret letter and describes behavior
18. Finale
 - a. Roll to see how things turned out
 - b. Read all letters
 - c. Use letters and roll to inform your epilogues

For a longer game, repeat the intermission a second time and write two more letters.

THANK YOU!

@yrgirlkv, @P_H_Lee, @PawsHella, @jaceaddax, @MathewGuz, @rowanhighwater, @mountliang, @harpydora, SleepySappho, and everyone else who encouraged this sad mech production!

