

# The Space

Duncan Spark

## Acknowledgements

The Author would like to thank the following people for reading through this game and giving valuable feedback:

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## Setting

The wilds and the city have started to merge. The outside is no longer outside. Never before seen natural pockets have sprung up around cities over the world. They are simply known as "The Spaces". You know they are alive. Everyone thinks this is beautiful. Everyone wants to exist in these spaces. Everyone that is, apart from you. What you see is not what they see. To you The Spaces are disgusting, unbearable. The thought of interacting makes you shiver. No one else seems to understand. People have started to call you unnatural.

You meet together at the edge of a Space to try and make sense of this.

Things that are always true:

- The Spaces are never hostile or dangerous and will never touch you if you do not want them to.
- The Spaces want you to spend time in them.
- The Spaces appear differently to everyone who perceives them. Those who find them beautiful are not wrong in what they see and feel. Neither are you.

Other than the above, the world is yours to make as you wish.

Note: This is a game about people who do not desire things that are considered natural to desire by society. It has been written with something like a sex adverse asexual perspective in mind. However, the author (who refers to himself in the third person apparently) would like to stress a few things:

- Not all Asexuals experience sex aversion, neither is it a uniquely asexual experience. Many Asexuals possess a neutral attitude towards sex and many others enjoy and seek out sexual intimacy. All that is required to be asexual is that one experiences little to no sexual attraction, and even that is an oversimplification. Allosexuals can also experience sex aversion.
- Furthermore, not all those who are sex adverse experience aversion in the same way. This game focuses on disgust and repulsion but that is not the only sex adverse experience.
- Most people who experience sex aversion do not think sex is immoral or wrong. It is simply something they do not wish to participate in.
- While the author has written this with a specific experience in mind, he hopes that this game will resonate with anyone who has found themselves, at one time or another, at odds with society's expectations as to what they should want.
- This isn't what it is like. It's just what it feels like sometimes. To the author anyway. He hopes it might resonate but even if he's shouting into the void, he thinks that the

act of shouting is important and would encourage people to give it a try. But only if they feel like it. He can't tell you what to do. He's not your Dad.

### Content warnings

- Disgust, unpleasant aspects of nature, social and emotional isolation, societal pressure, feeling out of place, characters imagining unpleasant touch.

### Safety

- No one will be touched in this game – There will be discussions and descriptions of touching that should be tailored to the group's comfort level but the game does not and should never require anyone to make physical contact with other players (or anyone or anything else).
- Safety Tools – The author encourages players to use the safety tools that their group. Suggestions for safety tools are a lines and veils discussion before the game starts; open door policy and an agreed upon way to stop, discuss and redirect play if anyone is uncomfortable. A safe experience should never be sacrificed at the altar of immersion. If you're not having a good time, fuck immersion, break the game and do what's right for you in the moment. This is the only time the author will encourage you to fuck something.

### Technical notes

- This game is for 2-4 players aged 18 + including 1 facilitator. The facilitator takes part in all aspects of the game but it's useful to have one person who has read through the game beforehand.
- The game itself should take about 2 and a half hours including set up, character creation and debrief.
- You will need 2 timers for the game. 1 to time the discussion portion of the game to ensure things don't go on for too long and one to count down a series of 15 minute intervals. The second timer will need an audible alarm. Be sure to check in with all players in case they find any particular type of sound or volume level upsetting.
- You will need a private room. Part of this room should be cordoned off. This is The Space and should be completely empty. Players or characters will never enter The Space.

### Character Creation

Spend 15 to 30 minutes before the game creating characters. You can discuss these characters with your fellow players but it is important to note that none of the characters know each other in game. Answer the following questions:

1. What is your Name?

2. What is your Gender Identity (Pronouns etc.)?
3. How old are you
4. What sort of things do you enjoy doing?
5. What do you most desire?

### The Game

Scene 1 – Everyone stands in a line facing The Space with their eyes closed. Your characters are on the edge of The Space nearest to where you live. One by one starting from left to right answer the following questions out loud in character:

1. What does The Space look like to you? Make it full of the most unpleasant and disgusting natural phenomena that your character can think of. Don't just focus on visuals here. Think about what it sounds like, smells like. No one person sees the same thing when looking at a Space. Maybe one person sees fungus and rot, the place smells of death and they can hear the sound of rotting in real time. Another person could see a sludgy mess, a mixture of chalk and stale water, where the staleness pervades their nose and their ears are plagued by a constant gooey drip.
2. Even from the outside you can sense that The Space is aching for you to come closer. To spend time with it. To touch it, though it won't do anything unless you want it to. How does it signal this to you? Maybe it sings to you with the sound of wet decay. Maybe it lets out an even more pungent scent whenever you're close. How does that make you feel?
3. What do you think it would feel like if you let The Space touch you? If you let the mushrooms and rot brush their way over your skin. If you let the chalky water flow over you, the feeling of grit and sludge.

Scene 2 – You can open your eyes and turn away from the space and sit down. This is the meeting/discussion portion of the game. It should last around 60 minutes. The facilitator will start the meeting and give everyone a chance to introduce themselves. What is discussed in this meeting is entirely up to your characters. This is their time to talk in a world that doesn't understand them and might shut them down. Below are some suggestions of discussion points.

- You plucked up the courage to have a conversation with someone you were close to about your experiences with The Spaces. They didn't understand and started looking at you differently afterwards. Summarise the conversation and how it made you feel.
- You saw somebody else interacting with a Space, maybe this one. Either on a visual program (TV, movie etc) or somebody invited you to join them while they were interacting with The Space and you backed out of entering. What did it look like? What did it feel like watching this happen?

- Everyone who's opened up to you about interacting with The Spaces talks about it as a positive thing. Some are coy about it, some are very open. How do you feel about these conversations?
- "It's only natural" or "It's only human" are phrases that often come up when people talk about their time spent with The Spaces and their enjoyment of it. How does this make you feel?
- There seems to be an undercurrent that one's life is "incomplete" without a natural relationship with a Space. Does this sort of talk make you doubt the completeness of your life? What makes you whole?
- If you have a romantic partner that enjoys The Spaces they may have asked you to join them in a Space to show intimacy before they knew about your feelings related to the Spaces. Mutual time spent together in a Space has been accepted as a way for partners to connect on "a deeper level". How did it feel when they brought up the idea of you sharing this experience together? How did they react when you declined? (Note, this is not and was not intended to be a game exploring themes of sexual assault or coercion so please do not describe a partner forcing or pressuring a character to spend time in the space unless everyone in your group is 100% comfortable and engaged in exploring these themes).
- Following from the above question, do your friends know you haven't shared this intimacy? Have they made comments regarding your relationship?

Every 15 minutes during this scene, The Space will assert itself represented out of game by the 15 minute timer. It is important that the timer can be heard by all players.

Like how The Space tries to attract them, how it asserts itself is different to each character. It is always disgusting and upsetting, however it never involves anything that crosses a character's physical boundary. It is up to you whether your character acknowledges and reacts to this assertion or tries to ignore it and continue on.

Scene 3 – Stand in a line facing The Space as you did at the start of Scene 1 with your eyes closed. Your characters are about to leave. The Space is listening. Each player will answer the following question out loud in character.

What do you want to say to The Space?

Once everyone has said what they need to say, it is time to get rid of The Space. Get rid of the boundary delineating The Space. It is no longer there. It can no longer want you. This marks the end of the game.

### Debrief

Take some time to decompress. Discuss the game and how it made you feel if you like or discuss something completely different if you prefer. If there's anything that resonated with you that you'd like to share, do so. If you want to share bad puns, do that. Do whatever is needed so that everyone is back in the real world.