AURORA
RPG

A MODULAR TABLETOP GAME
OF ORACLES & OVERCOMING
BY ADAM VASS
WORLD CHAMP GAME CO.

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by Adam Vass / World Champ Game Co.

Aurora is a tabletop roleplaying game of unity and over-coming. Players will craft, read, and write elements of a world under extreme duress and the beings who aim to persevere together.

The game is played in three modular phases. Your group can pick and choose which ones to pursue and how much time/effort you want to put into them. They are also each designed to be usable in both in-person and online play to accomodate for the strange worldly circumstances when the game was written as well as the hopeful future when that strange circumstance dissipates.

In phase one, **CRAFTING**, players create their own unique deck of oracle cards using the mail to randomize elements of the cards. You can draw, write, color, or other-wise customize your deck to your Group. While this phase takes part from a distance, its energy stays creative and collaborative, an energy the players will reflect in-character later on.

In phase two, **READING**, players use their created cards to generate a location and characters. Worldbuilding is a collective effort and relies on inferences made from card art & text to make novel settings and protagonists. If skipping the first phase, this can be done with any deck of oracle cards or by simply using the random prompts from the Crafting phase.

In phase three, **WRITING**, players will examine and elaborate on the story of the people and places defined in phase two. While the setting is defined by the players, the arc is generally the same: our society is at risk of collapse and our citizens are determined to do something about it. Writing is a gm-less storytelling system and can be played independent of the other two phases using any oracle cards or list of prompts. Rules may be added later to make the Writing phase an even stronger standalone system.

Aurora can be played with 2-6 players. Bend and break the game to suit any particular needs of your group not covered by these rules.

Safety

The comfort of all involved players is paramount and takes precedence over any aspect of the game itself. Because of the modular nature of Aurora, certain tools will work better at times than others. Of course, the best safety tool in this game is open and honest communication with your fellow players.

OPEN DOOR

Players should feel free to quit playing at any time they need to. This is especially true in the first phase where, since players are at the whim of the postal service, timing may be unpredictable. Your obligation to do what's right for yourself outweighs that to finishing cards for your fellow players. Be upfront if you need to leave and be understanding if a fellow player decides to do so.

CATS

CATS is an acronym that stands for Concept, Aim, Subject Matter, and Tone. Before diving into play, go over these with each player in your group to make sure everyone is on board and knows what they're signing up for.

Concept: Aurora is a game about overcoming unfortunate circumstances. While our protagonists are representative of positive things, they will likely come into contact with dark elements.

Aim: To explore the flaws of the city and the people in it. To overcome those flaws through unity. To be champions of the story arc over that of individual successes. To enjoy a creative activity with one another.

Tone: Hopeful, while occasionally grim or dire for dramatic tension and to make victory more meaningful. Humor can be used when appropriate but is not the focus.

Subject Matter: The Darkness or Flaw of the city and its people is defined by the group, caution should be taken when exploring examples of this.

LINES & VEILS

Before the game begins, players are encouraged to voice anything they don't want included at all—these are **Lines** and should not be crossed. Topics established as Lines can still exist in the world of your story, but will not be explored or discussed at all during play. Lines are often used to avoid offensive content or content a player finds upsetting or triggering. **Veils** are things that you are comfortable including in your story but want to control how overt they are. Metaphorically, these events or topics are hidden behind a veil—they happen in the world of the story but you won't be describing them in detail. Veils are often used for censoring graphic content such as sex or violence that may serve some purpose in your story but does not need to be described explicitly.

OOC CHANNEL

Make sure you have convenient and accessible means of communication outside of the game. This is especially helpful in early phases of the game that may be played remotely. This channel is most effective when it is distinct from the channel you use to play (ie. if you plan to play the game using Discord and Roll20, an email thread or group text for communication outside of the game would be ideal). With this channel established, you can comfortably ask for guidance, confront confusing rules or any that you'd like to tweak/replace/ignore, or otherwise change the game to your liking without feeling as if you're interrupting the progress of the game itself.

Phase I. Crafting

You are making a unique deck of cards, a deck full of power and wonder. Places you've been, places you'll go, and places you reside in now will determine the nature of your cards—it is up to you to deduce that nature and record it for your fellow players.

To begin, you need some blank cards and drawing tools. For the sake of mailing, you can use a letter-sized piece of paper to make nine 2x3" playing cards (template available at worldchampgameco. itch.io/aurora). This will easily be under the 1oz weight limit for USPS First Class Mail so it will only use one Forever stamp to ship within the US. When complete, you can put these in a card sleeve with a regular poker card to make it more sturdy for play. You may also choose to use index cards or larger/different sized cards. Make your deck your own and ignore any size or format restrictions that you find cumbersome. Heavier paper or bigger envelopes may require extra postage, so be sure to consult with a scale and your fellow players before beginning.

Aurora does not require a gamemaster for any of the three phases, but it does help to have someone who can act as a leader and coordinate mailing things, scheduling play sessions, and referencing the rules. Since you're reading this text, you are likely that person! We'll call you the **Card Keeper**. Other players can take on the role of Card Keeper during different phases of the game if it helps ease pressure from any one individual—games should be fun and satisfying, not obligatory or burdening. The Card Keeper isn't inherently more or less powerful or active in the play of the game.

PLAYERS	ACTIONS-PER-TURN	TOTAL DECK
2	5	20
3	3	18
4	5	20
5	4	20
6	3	18

Play begins by having the Card Keeper send a letter or package to another player through the mail. Inside will be some blank cards (include notecards or a printed template sheet from worldchampgameco.itch.io/aurora) and the Crafting rules–most urgently the Prompt table. Feel free to edit the prompt table or write your own if you want to create a deck with a particular flavor. The recipient of this parcel will begin with the rules detailed in *On Your Turn*, creating cards and passing them on to the next player. Continue this cycle until you've completed cards equal to the Total Deck determined by your player count.

On Your Turn

When you receive the cards in the mail, keep the envelope or package that they arrived in. Look at the zipcode from which the parcel came and consult the Prompt Table. While this game supposes it is used within the United States where we have a five-digit zip code, feel free to use any numbers on the parcel's return address or envelope as needed. Consult the Actions-Per-Turn table on the previous page to figure out how many prompts you'll need, ranging from 2-5 depending on player count.

The first digit of the zip code corresponds to Items, the second digit to People and so on. Choose the prompts that speak to you, are most interesting, or otherwise appeal. In 3, 5, and 6 player games, you won't need to use every digit, so look for the ones that inspire or speak to you the most.

These prompts can be interpreted as literally or figuratively as you like. You may even end up seeing a prompt recur, at which point you'll really want to stretch its meaning to come up with dynamic and diverse cards in your deck.

When you've determined the prompts you need, you'll now put them on cards. You can do this in one of two ways: giving a card **Art** or a **Label**. At any point after the first mailing, you may choose to **Embellish** an existing card which does not count as an action.

On your turn, take the appropriate number of Actions by doing any combination of the following:

⚘ Give Art to a card that only has a Label
⚘ Give a Label to a card with only Art
⚘ Give either Art or Label to a blank card

You may not give Art & Label to the same card on a single turn.

Prompt Table

	ITEMS	PEOPLE	CONCEPTS	NATURE	TIME
0	Shield	Stranger	Humor	Bird	Ancient
1	Bread	Leader	Wealth	Insect	Extinct
2	Dice	Couple	Life	Lightning	Frozen
3	Money	Child	Goodness	Bear	Clock
4	Hammer	Worker	Knowledge	Tree	Present
5	Clothing	Corpse	Weakness	Mountain	Born
6	Rope	Threat	Evil	Sun	Aged
7	Book	Activist	Death	Fruit	Seconds
8	Blade	Healer	Faith	Stone	Hourglass
9	Wheel	Teacher	Power	River	Distant

ART

To create card art is to fill out a bulk of the space on the card with imagery. This can be drawing, coloring, collage, painting, doodling, writing, anything. Don't feel burdened or stressed if you think you can't draw (you can!), card art can be anything. It may even help to be more abstract or obscure with your art as it will let inferences in phases 2 & 3 of the game be more broad and free.

Using your prompt, fill out the space of the card with some visual aspect. Leave enough room empty for a Label to be written somewhere on the card later on. Understand that your art may be altered by other players later on–this is the beginning of a collaborative process.

LABEL

Giving a card a Label is to simply title the card. Write the card's Label anywhere on its face. Don't write too big–the Label is not meant to supersede the card's Art.

You may simply write the prompt verbatim as a card's label or you may stretch that prompt to a fitting word or phrase. Be as creative or liberal as you'd like in interpreting the prompt for labeling. While it helps to have card Labels in a uniform position across the entire deck, it isn't necessary and you shouldn't feel burdened by uniformity. If a prompt is begging for you to write the Label in a particular space, do it. If you think it should be bigger or smaller, cursive and ornate or messy and ugly, do it. Try to keep them somewhat legible as you'll reference them later on.

EMBELLISH

You may add to existing cards freely when they are in your possession. All cards are a product of every players' creativity and no one person has ownership over any card. To embellish a card, simply add visual quality to a card that already has Art or Label. Fill in a shape with color, add an extra outline, draw some texture or value, put a sticker on it, anything you'd like that furthers the quality of the card without destroying the existing work on it. This allows you to get your creativity flowing and make each card in the deck unique and personal to every player. Embellishing is optional and does not count as one of the actions you take on your turn.

After you've given Art and/or Labels equal to the number of Actions-Per-Turn determined by your group's size, your turn is over. Pass the cards and rules along to the next player via mail, making sure to accomodate for any extra shipping weight if you made more cards or included more paper in the envelope.

maybe send your friend a gift like a zine or a craft and include the cards & rules in there to save money vs shipping separately. The mail is a great way to stay close when we're forced to be physically distant.

Continue the cycle of using your predecessor's zip code to generate prompts, filling out a number of cards, and mailing to the following player, until you have completed a deck determined by your group size of cards that have both Art and Label. You've now created your **Oracle Deck** and are ready to move on to using your unique cards in play for phase 2: **Reading**.
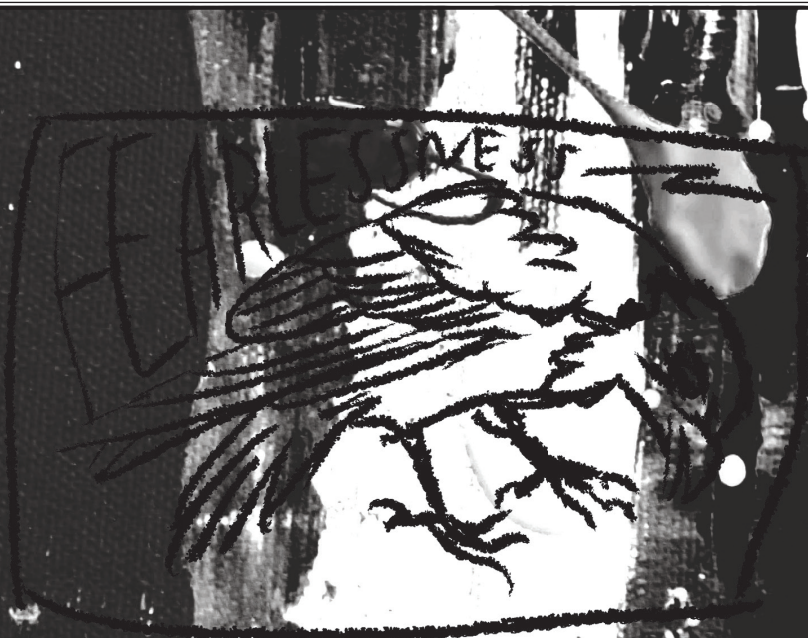
Phase II: Reading

In the second phase, we build a city and its inhabitants. The city has an inherent flaw called **Darkness** that ripples through its society in various ways you'll explain and explore through play. The citizens have been affected by this Darkness in various ways, but possess an admiration for **Light**, a power, system, or symbol of hope to combat the Darkness and improve their society in ways small and large.

To play Phase 2, every player should be present and interacting in real time (as opposed to Phase I when things were happening in distant time). Gather in person if you are able or get together digitally in your preferred method. The only material thing you need is your completed oracle deck from Phase I (or another deck of your choosing, such as tarot, loteria, intuiti, etc.) shuffled and accessible to all players. It may help to have paper and writing tools to write down/draw details that you establish in this phase to make them more easily accessible in Phase 3: Writing.

Your city will be built as a grid of 3x3 cards. Laying the cards out as you go is adequate to make a map, but feel free to embellish or create as much as you desire, like drawing a city map together (ornate, detailed, abstract, anything!) using drawn cards as inspiration.

Reading is a loose and freeform collaborative activity. Name a Card Keeper to facilitate things, but remember again that all players have equal power and authority in this phase of play. This phase does away with the more traditional turn structure, allowing all players to give ideas at every step of the way.
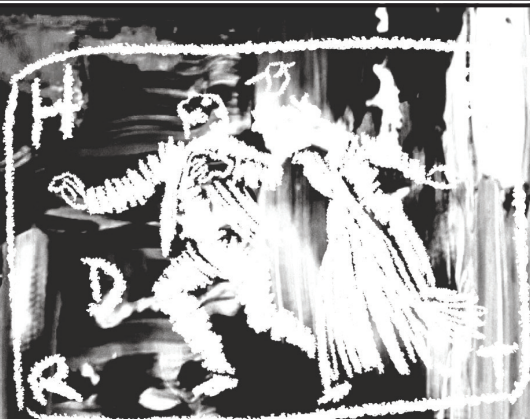
Reading Your City

The first thing your group does is establish the Darkness and Light. Reveal the top two cards from your oracle deck and allow all players to see them. One will be used as the Darkness, the other as Light. Brainstorm together to infer what the cards could mean, how they could apply to your world and what effects they would have on the setting, society, and citizens. Time is an interesting and important thing to explore here as well: a Darkness that involves technology might be a very different time period than one involving nature. Use Darkness and Light to set your world in your story setting of choice if you want to aim towards a particular style of story in Phase 3.

Darkness may include: societal flaws (*wealth distribution, injustice*), ethical dilemmas (*greed, distrust*), political shortcomings (*totalitarian government, lack of leadership*), acts of god (*earthquakes, volcanos*), or any negative energies.

Light may include: group dynamics (*rebellion, love*), supernatural effects (*powers, otherworldly visitors*), natural boons (*plant growth, weather shifts*), important people (*political rebels, faith leaders*), ethical aspects (*hospitality, education, communication*), or any positive energies.

When you've interpreted these two cards, you'll place them into your empty 3x3 of cards to begin creating a map. This map is not necessarily to scale, these are merely noteworthy locations and where they stand relative to one another, feel free to explore differences of scale and the places in between during Phase 3. Place the card determined as Darkness first and describe a location in the city that strongly represents that Darkness. Then repeat the process with the Light card.

(ex: your card has an illustration of a bear scratching a tree and is labeled "Protection." Your group decides this Darkness is isolation and your city is walled off from outside cultures, even going so far as to section off portions of the city interior. When placing this card on the map, a player suggests the location most strongly associated with this Darkness is The Portcullis, a large metal gate that prevents intruders from accessing the city or citizens from escaping, and places the card in the grid.)

You made two locations on the map! Now, build on that to fill out the grid of nine cards. For the remaining locations, reveal only one card at a time, and choose from the following list of location types. There are more types than there are empty spaces on the map, ignore types you don't like or that seem inappropriate for your setting. You may wish to deduce meaning from a card before consulting the list or use a selection from the list before framing your card, your means of interpreting and defining these locations is your own.

A Place Of...

- COMFORT
- HISTORY
- FAITH
- HOSTILITY
- COMMUNITY
- EDUCATION
- ECONOMY
- STRUGGLE
- CURSES

Continue drawing, inferring, and placing cards on the map until you've filled the 3x3 grid. Consider how their arrangement affects their purpose (a location very near the Darkness may have different social or political strength/weakness compared to a similar location on the opposite side of the city). When you're finished, record the map in some way (take a photo or screenshot, write down their locations, etc).

FATED

Reading Your Characters

Now that the map is complete, it's time to learn about the people who live there. These people will be affected by both Darkness and Light, some will inherently be at more extreme points on that spectrum and some will sit more comfortably in the middle. You'll learn more about each of them in time. It is important to note that at this stage, no character is your character. Everyone is still acting on a level playing field with creative input at each stage, creating a pool of available characters that aren't assigned to any individual player.

Shuffle your deck of oracle cards again, then deal two cards to each player facedown. Each character is composed of a **Pillar** (an item/trait/value they hold in high esteem and brings them closer to Light than Darkness) and a **Fault** (a personality flaw/belief/corruption that brings them closer to Darkness than Light). Since your group established the Darkness and Light already, these values are already well informed by the world you've created.

Consult the two cards you were dealt and infer meaning from them. Assign one as your character's Pillar and the other as their Fault. Consider how those two traits interact, in harmony or dissonance, to make dynamic characters with varied ambitions and fears. Feel free to consult with other players, asking for ideas or holding straw polls when you're torn between options, but you will make the final decisions about the character created from these two particular cards.

When a character has both Pillar and Fault, give them a name and pronouns. Consider if they have a title, whether it is related to their social status, profession, political stance, etc. Picture them in your mind and prescribe some physical characteristics to the character. Then, introduce them to the rest of your play group. Take turns doing this so all players are aware of all the characters being made.

As mentioned, between Darkness and Light is a spectrum and these characters inevitably fall at varied points on that spectrum. Not every character created will be a hero, nor should every character be a villain. You'll want a varied cast to utilize in Phase 3, so make the characters different and dynamic with opportunities for drama.

After you introduce your character, draw two more cards and repeat the process. Allow other players to introduce their created characters before you do more, share the creative spotlight and offer assistance to those players who may be having difficulty. Every player will create a few characters, the number will vary based on the size of your play group.

Continue until every card in the deck has been drawn and used, resulting in 9-10 available characters. You're now ready to explore these characters and locations further in **Phase 3: Writing**.

Phase III: Writing

In the third and final phase, we will narratively explore the world and characters created in Phase 2, using the cards created in Phase I to frame a series of scenes and moments in an epilogue. We witness our world overcome with Darkness and examine the lives and trials of those inhabitants who represent Light. As in Phase 2, this portion of the game is designed to be played in real time.

To play, you simply need a way to interface with other players (in person or digitally) and the resources created in earlier phases. The cards, map, and characters should be accessible to all players. In this phase, there is no longer a Card Keeper—players instead take turns being in the driver's seat and framing scenes, choosing locations and characters present, and pushing the story in various directions. This phase of the game often takes about two hours, but feel free to stay in scenes longer if you're comfortable there and everyone has ample time.

CHARACTER ASSIGNMENTS

Before beginning to tell the story, your group should decide on the style of roleplaying experience you prefer. Because the characters created in Phase 2 are communal, there are a variety of ways to utilize them here.

Character Monogamy is the first method and may be more comfortable for players used to more traditional RPGs. In this version of the game, each player will draft a character from the pool of those available, portraying that singular character for the duration of the game. You'll describe that character's actions and thoughts, give them a voice, push them towards their goals, and protect them from imposing Darkness. There are no stats or health points in this game, so you don't need to worry about an optimal build or what makes a character "the best." Simply engage with the story using the perspective of a singular character in pursuit of the coolest or most interesting story for your group. In this mode, each player has one character whom they portray when needed for any given scene for the entire game.

Troupe Style is the other method and may be more suitable for story-forward players. In this version, every character continues to belong to every player, creative control and autonomy is shared. Think of it like having a box of action figures, you get to play with the wrestler for a while and I'll play the astronaut—when the time feels right, you can take over the astronaut and I can grab something new from the box, like a horse. With Troupe Style play, your options are much wider when framing scenes, creating drama, exploring Darkness and Light, and the ways they bleed into many aspects of life in this city. When framing a scene, each player will pick an available character from the pool (start with the player whose turn it is and go clockwise). In this method, you will naturally favor particular characters over others in time and that is okay. Allow your heroes and villains to reveal themselves and follow their story arcs through subsequent scenes.

SCENE STRUCTURE

Our story is told in a sequence of **Scenes**, moments in time explored by the players that examine aspects of our world and characters. These scenes are structured like a movie, as our story is told in a single movement instead of a long-running campaign (like a tv show). The story has four groupings of scene types called **Acts** that will steer your story towards a natural dramatic arc while allowing you the freedom to push in any direction your characters' or players' whims desire.

Act I: Exposition. (3 Scenes)
In which we explore the status quo of the city and our characters. Examine their relationships, daily routines, the effects of Darkness, and the ways Light manifests in their lives.

Act II: Rising Action (3 Scenes)
In which our characters are called to action in conflict with Darkness. Examine the struggles and strife of trying to shift a status quo, the characters or institutions that would stand in the way of their success, the ways they help one another, and their overall resilience in service of a greater good (despite what their individual motivations may be)

Act III: Climax (3 Scenes)
In which our characters on behalf of Light go toe-to-toe against a representative of Darkness. These scenes tend to be higher risk and (hopefully) higher reward with moments of action, combat, conflict, protest, and revolution. Examine the strengths of characters, the overcoming of weakness, the familial bonding in service of the group's greater goals, and the scale and spectacle of their central conflict.

Act IV: Epilogue (9 Moments)
In which we examine the fallout of our characters' actions in varied forms. In the epilogue, Scenes are replaced with Moments. Instead of choosing characters, framing scenes, conversing in character, and offering more rich details, you offer glimpses of life that occur after the Climax. Examine a character's new life, the ripple effects of Light on Darkness, the redemption of those who make penance for past failures, and the punishment of those who justify it.

FRAMING SCENES

Players will take turns framing scenes, dictating where they occur, what characters are present, what they're doing when the scene begins, and gently pushing the narrative in particular directions.

1. To frame a scene, first **draw two cards** from the deck. One you will use to inspire some aspect of your scene, the other you will add to the Epilogue pile (for now, think of it as a discard, but know that you'll still use these cards later on if that affects your decision). Your inference from the card can be as literal or abstract as you'd like, but you must take some element of the card to inspire the actions or goals of the following scene. Explain to the group what you got from the drawn card and how you integrate it into the scene. Gather input from other players if you're stumped—the story works best when all players contribute and you'll find yourself pleasantly surprised at the twists and turns your story takes when you share control.

2. Next, **pick a location** on the map. This is where your scene will begin (though it may not always end there). If this is the first scene of the game, all locations are available. In subsequent scenes, the location chosen must be adjacent to the location from the scene prior (diagonal is fine). Remember, your map was built on a 3x3 grid, so you'll always have at least three location options when framing a scene.

3. When you know what you want to happen and where it takes place, **dictate what characters are present**. What situation are these characters currently in? Not all characters need to be present in every scene and that is ok. If you aren't given a role to play during a scene, feel free to chime in offering sensory details to the setting (what does this room smell like, how does the light bend, what sounds from outside bleed in, etc.) or voicing lesser characters when needed (a nameless foot soldier, a courier, a local child, whatever is necessary and useful), or just sit back and enjoy the story at hand.

Once a scene is framed, act it out together. Engage with the characters and your story in whatever ways are comfortable, including but not limited to conversing in-character, describing camera shots, dictating actions and events, offering character inner-thoughts and secrets for dramatic irony, building upon drama or tension of other characters, or highlighting aspects of the Darkness and Light.

When it feels natural to end a scene, do so. Say "scene" or "cut," make a gesture with your arms, or otherwise make it clear to all players that this scene has ended. The player to your left will then take a turn framing the next scene, continuing play around the group clockwise until Acts I, II, and III have been completed.

There is no system of skill testing or conflict resolution in this game. The story takes the direction you want it to. When a character fails, they do so because the players decide it makes the narrative more dramatic and rich. When a character triumphs, they do so because it is an earned important moment in the arc of the story being told. Always make choices in favor of your fellow players and your collaborative story over your character or individual player goals.

Scene Suggestions

ACT I: EXPOSITION

a secret meeting, arriving home, a shared meal, a secret told, a moment of peace, a hurried morning, a shimmer of hope, a problem solved, a brush with danger, a dramatic past, a glimpse of future

ACT II: RISING ACTION

an escalating danger, a greater purpose, a secret meeting, an exploitation of weakness, a brighter light, a major setback, a table turned, a new friend, a mole revealed, a chase through the streets, a fire extinguished

ACT III: CLIMAX

a final confrontation, an untimely end, a devil's bargain, a step in the right direction, a subversion of authority, a realization of destiny, an ever present danger, a meaningful sacrifice, a punishing retreat, a dream actualized, a mountain climbed

EPILOGUE

When you've told your story through nine scenes across three acts, you approach the ending. The Light by now should have a strong effect on Darkness; maybe not completely eradicating the society's flaw but at least tipping the scales in the right direction. The credits of your movie are beginning to roll, but there's still time enough to show how your characters and world have changed as a result of your actions.

We shift play now from Scenes to Moments.

- Begin play with the player who would've next framed a scene (or abandon turn order if any players have timely creative ideas).
- Draw a card from the discard, the unchosen scene prompts from the previous three acts. (in a 2, 4, or 5 player game, feel free to include the 2 extra cards from the deck)
- Infer some meaning from your drawn card and use it to frame a brief moment in the world of your story that occurs after the Climax. Don't act it out, just describe what is happening in a couple short sentences.
- Continue play clockwise, drawing a card from the discard and using it to inform a brief moment of consequence after our story's end.
- When you are out of cards, your story is over.

Moments tend to begin with a tight scope: look at the lives of your characters and how they fundamentally changed. These could occur immediately after the last scene or years down the line. As you continue creating moments, broaden the scope to examine the world around your characters, the shifting tides in the battle of Darkness and Light, and the hope this society now has for a better future.

Look around at your fellow players and smile.
You created a world in which to tell stories, a dramatic narrative in that world, and even the random means by which your story is generated. Recognize that in having fun, being creative, collaborating, and respecting one another, you were acting in favor of Light in the face of Darkness.

CARRY THAT LIGHT WITH YOU AS YOU GO OUT INTO THE WORLD AND CONTINUE TO BE A FORCE FOR GOOD.
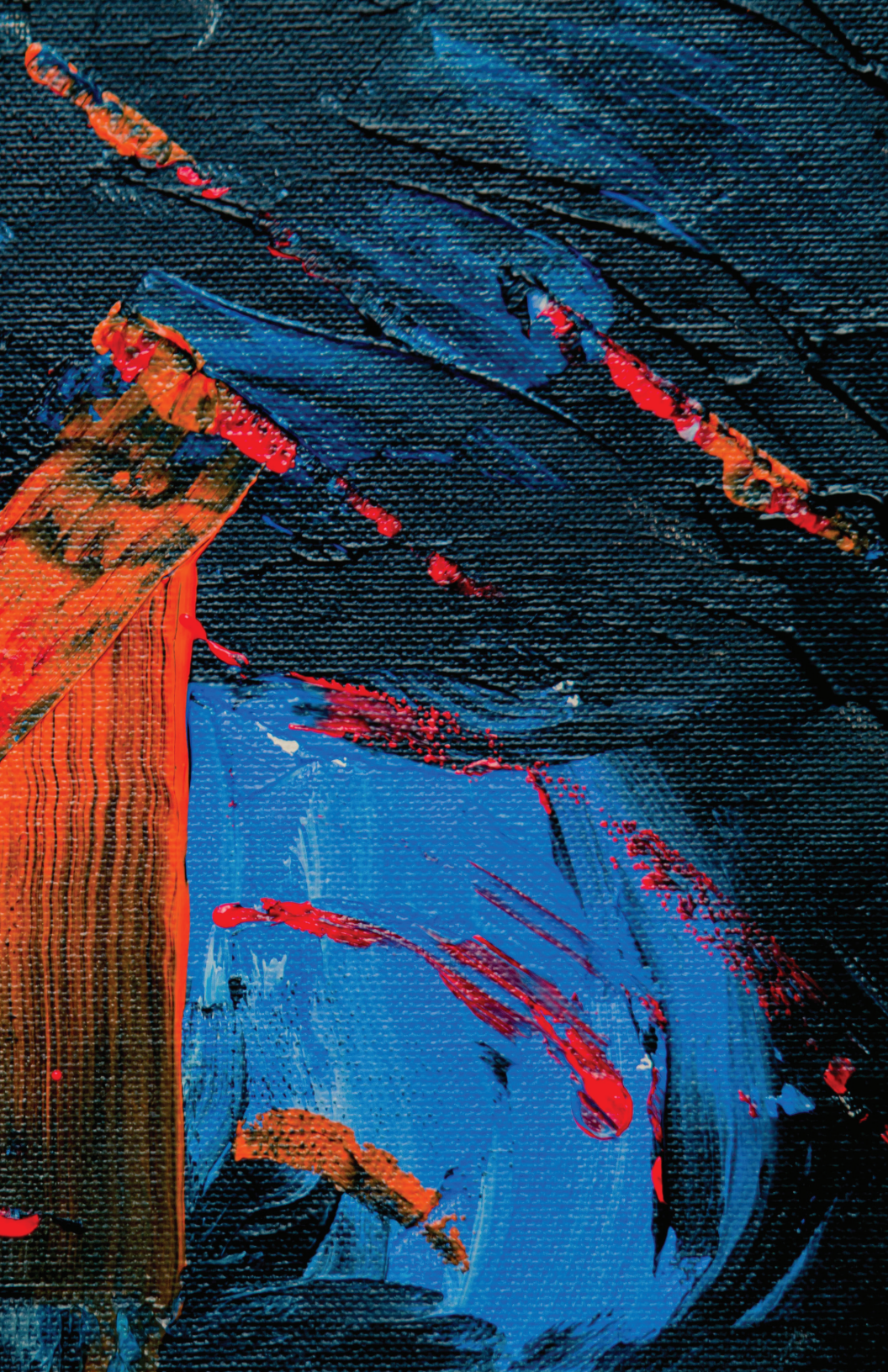
Aurora is a tabletop roleplaying game for 2-6 players. Your story is built and told in three modular phases:

1. Crafting a unique deck of Oracle cards through the mail, using your friends zipcodes to randomize prompts and elements of your illustrations.

2. Using those cards to build a flawed City corrupted by darkness and populate it with hopeful citizens who aspire to overcome those flaws.

3. Acting out the story of the overcoming of darkness in favor of light, using your characters and cards from prior phases to bring hope and revolution to your world.

To play, you need a few friends, some paper or note cards to write and draw on, and a method to communicate. This game is deliberately designed to be played comfortably while practicing social distancing or together around a communal table when the necessity for distancing has ceased.