

PRAYER BOOK

Humble Counsel on Surviving
from Speculative Fiction



all images are from Cristy C. Road's Next World Tarot

Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction. All organizing is science fiction. Organizers and activists dedicate their lives to creating and envisioning another world, or many other worlds—so what better venue for organizers to explore their work than science fiction stories?

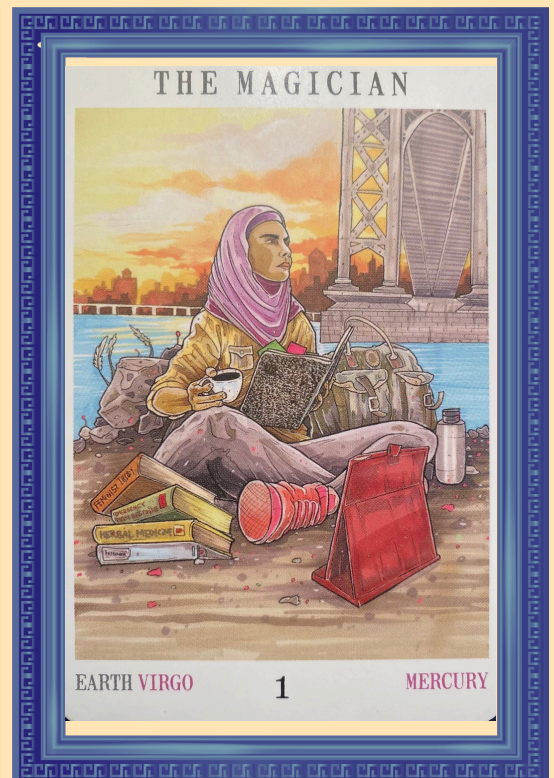
-Walida Imarisha, Octavia's Brood, p3



The First and Last Page

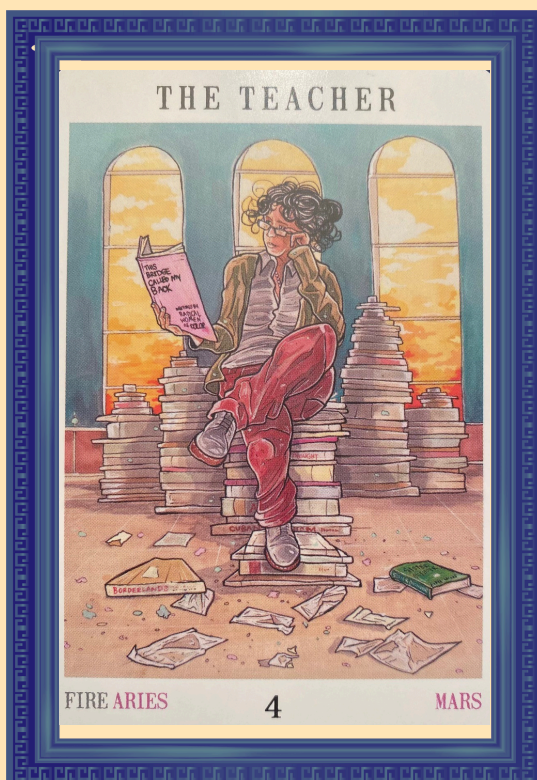
“A bookshop on a hill. Two front doors, two walkways lined with blank slates and grass, two identical signs welcoming customers to the First and Last page, and a great blue building in the middle... Nobody knew how many books were inside that building, not even Molly, the owner. But if you couldn't find it there, they probably hadn't written it down yet.”

-Charlie Jane Anders, *The Book Store at the End of America, A People's Future of the United States*, p3



What do the first and last page of the Book of Apocalypse read?

What do the first and last page of the Balm in Gilead read?



A Few Seeds

“Everybody needs books, Molly figured. No matter where they live, how they love, what they believe, whom they want to kill. We all want books. The moment you start thinking of books as some exclusive club or the loving of books as a high distinction, then you’re a bad bookseller... An author is just someone who tried to make sense of their own mess, and maybe their failure contains a few seeds to help you with yours”

-Charlie Jane Anders, “The Book Store at the End of America,” *A People’s Future of the United States*, 5

If the seed is today, and the sprout is tomorrow, what is the burning bush?
What is the beacon set ablaze by God that does not burn the living plant,
yet lights our way into the future?

The Book of Your Body

I was the one who was meant to cut the first page of the book of Silas Sharp. That's what you did if the book was your parent.

The librarians rolled up their sleeves. Arms tattooed in a hundred colors and designs, the secret history of the former world. They had shaved heads beneath their hats, and their heads were wrapped with Ada Lovelace and Hypatia and Malcolm, with the speeches of Shirley Chisholm, with

Chelsea Manning, with the decoded diagrams of Voynich Manuscript. Their arms were annotated with Etty Hillesum's diary of life before Auschwitz, with Sappho's fragments, with Angela Davis, with Giordano Bruno, with Julian of Norwich, with bell hooks, with the story of the Union soldier who began as Jennie Hodgers and volunteered herself to fight as Albert Cashier, with Bruno Schulz, with Scheherazade, with Ruth Bader Ginsberg, with Danez Smith, with Roxanne Gay, with Kuzhali Manickavel, with the motions of the planets, with the regrets of those who'd dropped bombs, with the sequencing of DNA, with the names of the dead, with almanacs and maps, with methods for purifying water, with primers for teacher letters, with names of criminals, stories of pain, dreams of better things...

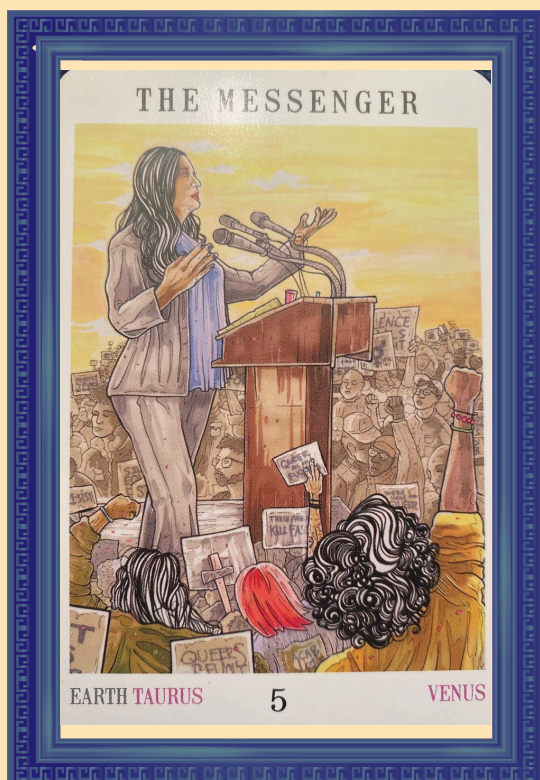
'Which should be the first page of my daddy?' I asked
'I'd say you should start there, with Silas's heart.'

-Maria Dahvana Headley, "Read After Burning," *A People's Future of the United States*, 68-69



What book is written on your body?

Where is the first page tattooed on you? What words would you save with your own skin, and give to future generations in your death?



A'tugwewinu: Storyteller

Andwànikàndjigan: to Record, to Mark Down

“How do you mark yourselves?” one asked.

“We don’t,” she responded. “When someone shares a story and we listen, the marks appear, and then, when we press it, we can, in turn, share the exact story, word for word.” he peered around her, the strangers’ faces

were dumbfounded. “Would you like to see?” she asked.

Several nodded. A'tugwewinu took a deep breath and reached for the markings near her right shoulder. She pressed it and words came out of her.

“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth—”

...the spirits have told me that our way of sharing stories can't stay within our people anymore; it's time to share this way of learning with others...

“I was hoping you would give me the honor of the mark, as I would also like to pledge myself to this role,” Bèl asked.

A'tugwewinu nodded. With a practiced hand, she deftly carved the marks into Bèl's skin above their left pectoral.

“I am no longer the last Andwànikàndjigan,” she whispered.

-Gabriel Castelloux Calderon, “Andwànikàndjigan,” Love After the End, p104 & 111

How do you mark yourself?

What words come out when you press your markings?



Its In the Water

“It was,” she said, “the perfect weapon. Simply slip a dose of the formula into any food or drink consumed by the subject. After a minimal gestation period, the [Genetic Time Bomb] would activate, acting directly upon the subject’s transacental development at the most fundamental genetic level... The formula was put into the water supply, and people began transitioning. And then somehow it went viral... It triggered mass transitioning across the United States and then across the world...

Mr. President, you gave the order to deploy Operation Clean Sweep because you thought—we all did—that it would be a clean sweep of our country’s racial diversity, restoring America to the white Christian nation we believed it had once been. But that was a myth. America has always been an ethnically diverse mix, a melting pot of races and cultures... When we deployed the formula into the drinking water supply of American cities, what happened wasn’t the erasure of people of color and immigrants. It was the exact opposite.

We restored America to the way it ought to have been. Native Americans became the dominant racial group in our history... And everything else changed too... One of the side effects was a substantial acceleration in technological advancement. By eliminating violence, weaponry, and war from our history we developed much faster in every respect.”

-Ashok K. Banker, “By His Bootstraps,” A People’s Future of the United States, p140 - 143

What could be put in the water to change everything?

What would the world be like after transition?

THE QUEEN OF CUPS



THE THRONE OF EMOTION

Only Love Remains

She smiled at him. “Habiba, love, I’m your wife. Its strange how I remember everything but you don’t. They said it would happen this way for a while. In time, the memories of the alternative genetic timeline fade, and the contradictions self-resolve...”

“I...” he said, then the air around him seemed to ripple slightly and the scent of ripe mango came to the visitor’s senses.

In the place where the white man in the bathrobe had been standing, there was now a transgender person of the same age with almost identical features. They looked around,

then found the visitor. They smiled with relief.

“Fatima,” they said, “what happened?”

The visitor took the president’s hand in her own. “You transitioned, Habiba.”

“Then it worked?” the president said in wonderment.

“Yes. No suicide attempt this time, no throwing yourself through the window, nor running half naked out onto Pennsylvania Avenue... it worked like a charm.”

“It was your presence,” said the president. “It soothed me.” They frowned slightly, touching the greying hairs on their right temple. “I think it did. I don’t remember much.”

“It’s better that way,” Fatima said. “I remember too much. I wish I didn’t. We were all such horrible people before. I don’t know how we lived with ourselves.”

“Hatefully,” said the President. “We lived hatefully, hating ourselves and hating everyone else. But that’s all gone now.”

“Yes,” Fatima said, staring deeply into the eyes of her life partner. “Now only love remains.”

-Ashok K. Banker, “By His Bootstraps,” A People’s Future of the United States, p140 - 143

What scenario can you imagine where only love remains?

How does the entire world become overwhelmed by love?

CORRECTION: SCIENTISTS CONFIRM: WE ARE LIVING IN A SIMULATION

An earlier edition of this story reported that cosmologists had confirmed this universe and everything in it to be the product of a computer program.

Cosmologists have since revised the statement of their findings to reflect new information.

“Turns out, the evidence of simulation was itself a simulation,” said the Einstein-Bot9000, the world’s leading cosmologist and itself a simulation of several thousands of history’s most brilliant scientists.

“If nothing’s real, then everything’s real.

We’re reviewing it as kind of a good news-bad news situation.”

We regret the error. This story is still developing.

-Charles Yu, “Good News, Bad News,” A People’s Future of the United States, p319-320



What is the good news?

THE 6 OF CUPS



REUNION

SUN IN SCORPIO

A Van Full of Grinning Fools

He is late, but he is alone, which hadn't been the case with the last one. He is also the right age, his fourteen-year-old baby face just starting to harden in the wake of puberty. He seems to know the drill, no phone or electronics on, but he passes Darla money, which she refuses, then tries to give it to me. He must not yet know how it works and I wonder, but cannot ask, how long ago his parents had been disappeared. I could imagine him as a son of pastors, high enough in the church hierarchy to be designated an

influential black individual" and detained for questioning. The Justice Department is looking for him now, hoping to leverage him to will his family's compliance.

I see the way Darla stares at him and I know she sees her son, Jaden, in his face. It's always like that with the boys. I see a nice kid, but if I let myself, there is Nathaniel.

Okechukwukereokeonyekozuru. Nate. There is my son waiting for us to fix the world.

When the boy spots Adaeze sprawled like a sultan in her sleep, he grins, and I like him the more for it. He grins at me, at Darla, and we can't help returning his delight, and we are a minivan full of grinning fools driving to the next checkpoint."

-Lesley Nneka Arimah, "The Referendum," *A People's Future of the United States*, p189-190

How is a grin related to a prayer?

From what well will grins be raised while driving through checkpoints?

Organic, Dynamic:

A Fight

Manny's been in New York for less than an hour and yet he knows, he knows, that cities are organic, dynamic systems. They are built to incorporate newness. But some new things become part of a city, helping it grow and strengthen—while some new things can tear it apart.”

-N.K. Jemison, *The City We Became*, p46



Traffic's flying past on Seventh, hurrying to get through the light before a million pedestrians start trying to get to Macy's or K-Town karaoke and barbeque. All these things belong; they are rightness. But his eyes stutter over a TGI Fridays and he twitches a little, lip curling in involuntary distaste. Something about its façade feels foreign, intrusive, jarring. A tiny, cluttered shoe-repair shop next to it does not elicit the same feeling, nor does a vape shop next door. Just the chain stores Manny sees—a Foot Locker, a Sbarro, all the sorts of stores one normally finds at a low-end suburban mall. Except these mall stores are here, in the heart of Manhattan, and their presence is... not truly harmful, but irritating. Like paper cuts or quick slaps to the face.”

-N.K. Jemison, *The City We Became*, p34

What strengthens your city? What harms it?

THE CHARIOT



City Midwife

“Cities travers the layers.” In this world Bronca points at the skyline that rises above the trees of Bridge Park, on their side of the river. “People tell stories of how terrible the Bronx is. At the same time, somewhere, some realtor is talking up how amazing it is, so that people with money will come and buy up everything. At the same time there are folks who live here, for whom it’s neither terrible no amazing; it just is. All of these things are true, and that’s just within our own reality. It’s not just decisions, is what

I’m trying to say. It’s.. Every legend of this city, every lie, those become new worlds too. All of them add to the mass that is New York, until finally all of it collapses under its own weight... and becomes something new. Something alive. -N.K. Jemison, *The City We Became*, 166

This process? It happens all the time. All over the world, wherever there’s a city. Enough human beings occupy one space, tell enough stories about it, develop a unique enough culture, and all those layers of reality start to compact and metamorphose. Eventually when its close to that, uh, moment...the city picks someone to be its... midwife. Champion. A person who represents the city and protects it, as we do. -N.K. Jemison, *The City We Became*, 303-304

What will help your city come alive? What character is its midwife?

Its champion? Who is your city, if your city is a person?

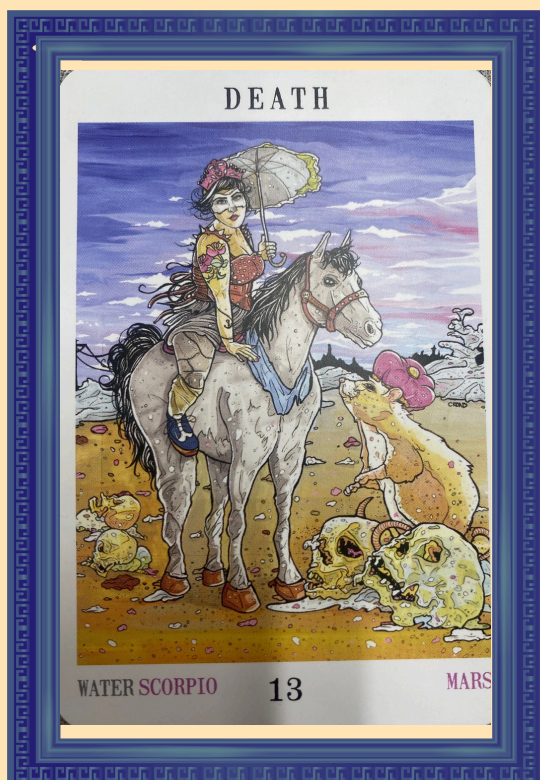
Necessary Pursuit

A forest floor, the Woodland villagers knew, is a living thing. Vast civilizations lay within the mosaic of dirt: hymenopteran labyrinths, rodential panic rooms, life-giving airways sculpted by the traffic of worms, hopeful spiders' hunting cabins, crash pads for nomadic beetles, trees shyly locking toes with one another... Disturbing these lives through digging was a violence—though sometimes a needed one, as demonstrated by the birds and white skunks who brashly kicked the humus away in necessary pursuit of a full belly. Still, the human residents of this place were judicious about what constituted actual necessity, and as such, disturbed the ground as little as possible.

-Becky Chambers, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*, p26



How do you discern what constitutes actual necessity?



Survival and Monsters

Brooklyn's expression turns grim. To Bronca, she says, "You said becoming a city punches through other universes... so what happens to those universes that our city punches through?" ...

"They die," Bronca says. She's decided to be compassionate about it, but relentless. None of them can

afford sentimentality. "The punching through? It's a mortal wound, and that universe folds out of existence... The process of our creation, what makes us alive, is the deaths of hundreds of thousands of other closely related universes, and every living thing in them..."

-N.K. Jemison, *The City We Became*, p306

"Many things die so that something else can live. Since we're the ones who get to live, who should offer thanks to those worlds for contributing themselves to our survival—and we owe it to them, as well as our own world's people, to struggle as hard as we can."

Queens and Veneza stare at her. This is a general problem of city-people, Bronca knows—because she, too, was born and raised in a city, and had to learn the lesson late in life. Chris took her hunting once, over her vehement objections. And though Bronca would not fire the gun that took down the deer, Chris and the other Indigenous woman they'd been hunting with had made Bronca help with the butchery. It was important, they'd told her, to know where her food came from, and to understand that not just one, but many deaths had enabled her survival. Therefore it was crucial that she use every part of the animal, as much as she could, and take no more than she needed. To kill under those circumstances, or to survive, was respectful. To kill for any other reason was monstrous." -N.K. Jemison, *The City We Became*, p308

What has died so you can live? How do you honor that?

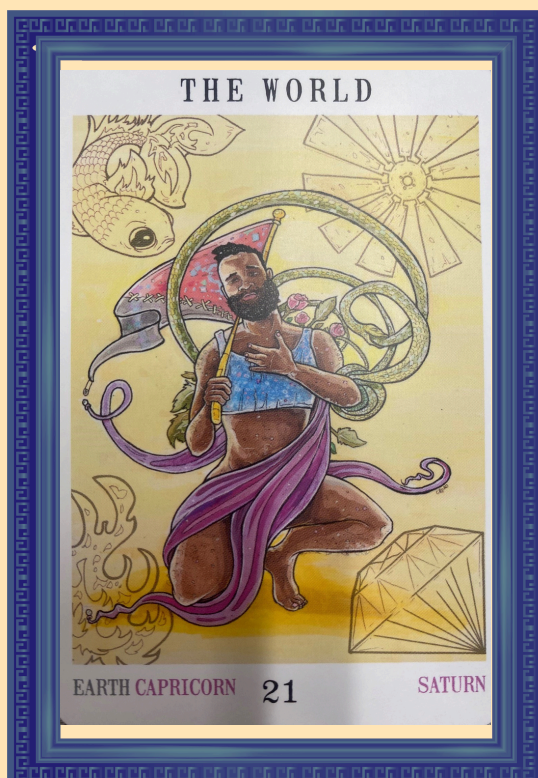
A Limit A Victory

Fifty percent of Panga's single continent was left to nature, and the ocean was barely touched at all. It was a crazy split, if you thought about it: half the land for a single species, half for the hundreds of thousands of others. But then, humans had a knack for throwing things out of balance. Finding a limit they'd stick to was victory enough.

-Becky Chambers, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*, p18-19



What is a fair share of space among species?
How do we find it? How do we make it?



A Labyrinth of Mutual Thriving

After two years, traveling the quiet highways between Panga's villages was no longer a matter of mental mapping but of sensory input. Here in the woods of the Inkthorn Pass, Dex knew they were close to the highway's namesake not because of the signs that said so,

but because of the smell: sulfur and minerals, bound together in a slight thickening of humidity. Milky green hot springs came into view a few minutes later, as expected, as well as the smooth white dome of the energy plant standing alongside, exhaling steam through its chimneys. There had been nothing like this in the Shrublands, where Dex had woken up that morning. There, you'd find solar farms built in the untended fields, which smelled of sun-warmed scrub and wildflowers. In a week's time, there'd be yet another transition, as Dex's route took them back out of the Timberfall and down to the Buckland coast, where salty air kept wind blades spinning. But for now, Dex would keep company with the scent of the forest."

-Becky Chambers, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*, p25

How would you move through a labyrinth of a world of mutual thriving?
What would life be like if our main challenges were meaning and mortality,
because life was built on cooperation and companionship
rather than competition and domination?

The Writing on the Wall

Sustainable dwellings like this were the progenitors of the buildings people lived in now, and it was important to remember that such places had existed pre-Transition. Not everything in the Factory Age burned oil. There had been those who had seen the writing on the wall, who had made places such as this to serve as example of what could be. But these were merely islands in a toxic sea. The good intentions of a few had not been enough, could never have been enough to upend a paradigm entirely. What the world had needed, in the end, was to change everything.”

-Becky Chambers, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built*, p128



What is the writing on the wall?

What could upend the paradigm entirely?



You Are Allowed to Just Live

You're an animal, Sibling Dex. You are not separate or other. You're an animal. And animals have no purpose. Nothing has a purpose. The world simply is. If you want to do things that are meaningful to others, fine! Good! So do I! But if I wanted to simply crawl into a cave and watch stalagmites with Frostfrog for the remainder of my days, that would also be both fine and good. You keep asking why your work

not enough, and I don't know how to answer that, because it is enough to simply exist in the world and marvel at it. You don't need to justify that, or earn it. You are allowed to just live. That is all most animals do." Mosschap pointed at the bear pendant nestled against Dex's throat. "You love your bears so much, but I think I know what a bear's about much better than you. You're talking like you should be wearing this instead." Mosschap opened the panel in its chest and pointed at the factory plate—Wescon Textiles, Inc.

-Becky Chambers, A Psalm for the Wild-Built, p138-9

When do you believe you are allowed to just live?

When do you act like you are a machine in a factory?

What tools help you break free of automated thinking?

Exhibit E

Letter from Alexis after capitalism to Alexis during capitalism, retrieved from email residue algorithm, received in inbox alexispauline@gmail.com on 9/13/10, send date category echo, referenced and archived in Drix's lecture capsule:

Dear Lexi,

Breathe deep, baby girl, we won. Now life, though not exactly easier, is life all the time. Not chopped down into illable minutes, not narrowed into excuses to hurt and forget each other. I am writing to you from the future to remind you to act on your belief, to live your life as a tribute to our victory and not a stifling reaction to the past...

Your heart sings everyday because your ancestors are thrilled with themselves, a.k.a. all of us. Just breathing is like a choir. And I have the presence of mind and the generosity of spirit to even be proud of the you that I was when you are reading this, back in capitalism with all of our fear, and all of our scarcity-driven behavior contradicting and cutting down our visionary words...

But breathe this deep because this is the message. We did it. We shifted the paradigm. We rewrote the meaning of life with our living. And this is how we did it. We let go. And then we got scared and held on and then we let go again. Of everything that would shackle us to sameness. Of our deeply held belief that our lives could be measured or disconnected from anything. We let go and re-taught ourselves to breathe the presence of the energy that we are that cannot be destroyed, but only transformed and transforming everything.

Breathe deep, beloved young and frightened self, and then let go. And you will hold on. So then let go again.

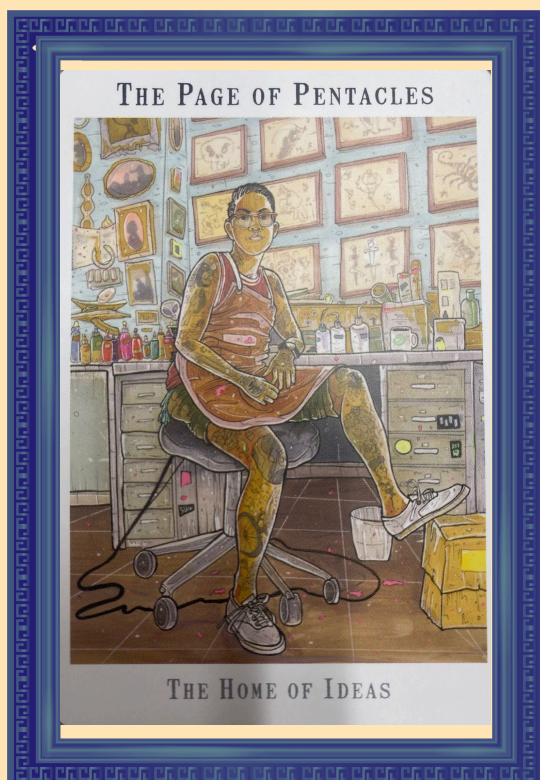
With all the love and the sky and the land and
the water,

Lex

-Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "Evidence," Octavia's Brood, p39-41



What letter does your future self write to your present self?



Instruction Guide

I'm passing this on to you... you might need the help of an instruction guide for a 2spirit girl living in the apocalypse.

I don't know if or when I will come home. Or if home will even mean the same thing to me once I've left. But I hope you'll read what I've written here and remember the stories of all the people that I love... and once you've read it all, you can add stories of your own.

I don't know your name. I don't know who your kin are. But I know you're worth it, niijiikwe. And I know now that the only way to survive the apocalypse is to make your own world.

So let's get started.

-Kai Minosh Pyle, *How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls, Love After the End*, p94

Our Final Tool

[As our final tool], we have our collective science-fiction/visionary fiction writing workshops. Our premise is that if we want worlds that work for more of us, we have to have more of us involved in the visioning process. One of the ways we perpetuate individualism is by ideating alone, literally coming up with ideas in solitude and then competing to bring them to life. Our workshops are designed to encourage collaborative ideation. Together we identify issues that are relevant to the local community and build a world in which to explore the issue and possible solutions.

In each workshop, we start out by asking ourselves what in our community needs visions, with the idea that we can apply our collective ideation to it like a healing salve.

We identify lead characters—often pairs or groups of lead characters to disrupt the solitary hero narrative—and we intentionally move those voices that are often marginalized in our society to the center of the world-building.

We then build the setting, identifying where we are in time, creating a geography and conditions, naming any shared assumptions we have, and determining what the major conflict will be in that world. What is the change our characters seek? Who else is seeking change?

Once these elements are laid out, we send people off to spend time writing their stories in this shared world. So far, no matter how much time we give people, they are still writing when the timer goes off. The imagination just needs a little nudge to run wild.

-adrienne marie brown, “Outro,” *Octavia’s Brood*, p281

