Aye, Dark Overlord!

Aye, Dark Overlord! is a card-based narrative party game for up to 8 players. One player acts as the Dark Overlord (similar to a game master) and the other players act as his pitiful, bumbling goblin servants. The goblins take turns inventing wild stories and passing the blame off on their fellow minions in an effort to explain why they have failed their latest mission.

The Cards

- Withering Look cards (which depict the Dark Overlord scowling) are handed out by the Overlord when a goblin’s story is not up to snuff. Start with the card on side 1. If you receive a second Withering Look, flip the card to side 2. If you receive a third, you lose!
- Hint Cards (skull back) depict items or events that you must incorporate into your stories.
- Action Cards (green goblin head back) show either two pointing hands (Pass the Buck), two raised palms (Freeze), or one of each. Cards with both symbols can be used as either a Pass the Buck or a Freeze.

Setup

- Choose a Dark Overlord and give him or her the 7 withering look cards.
- Deal 3 hint and 3 action cards to each goblin.
- Place the remaining hint cards and action cards in two stacks in the middle of the table.

How To Play

The Dark Overlord begins by berating his worthless minions for failing him yet again and explains the mission (e.g. “Well, you worthless green wart sacks, I see you have returned from the Caves of Peril without the magic Hair Tonic of Rapunzel!”). The Dark Overlord then randomly selects a goblin player to explain why the mission went awry.

First Goblin’s Turn: When questioned by the dark overlord, play any hint card from your hand. You must incorporate the item or event on that card into your story for why the mission went wrong. Once you have given your explanation, choose another goblin at the table and play a Pass the Buck card along with a second hint card (e.g. “We would have brought you the elixir, my lord, but Ratface over there accidentally packed the Water-Soluble Sword!”). Draw hint cards until you have 3 in your hand.

All Other Goblin Turns: Your turn starts when someone plays a pass the buck card along with a hint card and chooses you to continue the story. Draw 1 action card at the start of your turn. You must now use the hint card that was played with the Pass the Buck card in your story. You can also play up to two additional hint cards from your hand to expand your story. When you are done, play a Pass the Buck card along with a hint card and choose the next goblin. Draw
hint cards until you have 3 in your hand. If you do not have any Pass the Buck cards, you must accept a Withering Look and draw a new hand.

**Interrupts:** Any time during another goblin’s turn, you may play a Freeze card along with a hint card (e.g. “Wait Wormfoot, you forgot to tell the Dark Overlord about The Flying Ship!”). The interrupted player must immediately incorporate the hint card into their story, but it does not become your turn. You do not get to draw any new cards after interrupting.

**Dark Overlord:** At any time during a goblin’s turn, if you find their story lacking or their tone disrespectful, you may give them a Withering Look. When this happens, they choose a new card and you choose a new first goblin to continue the story. Once a goblin gets three withering looks, the game ends. You are always the winner of *Aye, Dark Overlord!*

**Discussion Questions**

1. Through bad luck, poor planning, or other players ganging up on you, you might have to accept a Withering Look because you don’t have any Pass the Buck cards in your hand. Is this a weakness in the game’s mechanics? How much does that really matter in a party game? How would you design the game differently?

2. The Dark Overlord always wins; the goblins simply compete not to lose. This is fitting with the tone of the game, but how does it affect gameplay?

3. Hint cards provide only a bare minimum of narrative prompting. Would the game benefit from more structured, or is this loose nature what makes the game fun?

4. Aside from the obvious challenges of natural language processing, how difficult would it be to build a bot to play *Aye, Dark Overlord!*? Would that be worth doing? Is the interpersonal contact one of the game’s primary strengths?