



Aye, O Dark Overlord!



Rules
of
Play

Game Overview

Aye, Dark Overlord! is a fantasy-based party game with a humorous and easy-going tone. To play, you only need a bit of quick-thinking, some friends, and a willingness to have a lot of fun.

The game is simple to learn and easy to play. The wicked Servants of Rigor Mortis, the one and only Evil Genius, return home after their umpteenth failed mission and must justify themselves to their Master, inventing stories and unlikely excuses, and laying the blame as much as possible on their fellow toadies.

The player who plays the Evil Genius has an important role in the game, too. He holds absolute power, and the Servants are his to command. He can choose to punish them or accept yet another apology. He judges if their excuses are worthy and if a Servant is too hesitant or too disrespectful.

And to those who can't come up with an excuse, he doles out Withering Looks...

Game Contents

There are two different sets of *Aye, Dark Overlord!*: The Red Box and The Green Box. Both boxes include the same number of cards and contain minor differences as explained here in the rules. Each box can be played as a standalone game or combined with the other box for even more maniacal mayhem!

Each box contains:

- This Rulebook
- 121 Hint Cards
- 37 Action Cards
- 7 Withering Look Cards



Playing the Game

Player Roles

In *Aye, Dark Overlord!* players take on one of two different roles: the Servants or the Dark Overlord.

Before playing, decide who shall play the part of the Dark Overlord in the first game. The choice may be made by random selection, by fair vote, or even by highly biased popularity contest.

All the other players are the Dark Overlord's Servants, the sneakiest and most treacherous creatures from Kragmortha or any other fantasy world imaginable. They should all possess certain distinctive characteristics: ineptitude, clumsiness, and the inability to carry out even the simplest task.

The Cards

Aye, Dark Overlord! has two types of cards:

Hint Cards



The Hint Cards are the narrative cues that the player uses to create a story and justify himself to the Dark Overlord. When using a Hint Card, a player can draw inspiration from any part of the title, the description, or the illustration, as long as the association with the card's content is obvious and, of course, accepted by the Dark Overlord.

Note that the small icons in the top-left corner of the Hint Cards are only used when playing the *Aye, Dark Master!* variant set of rules (see page 14).



Action Cards



Action Cards must be played in combination with a Hint Card to perform a particular action. The actions allowed are represented by symbols:



PASS THE BUCK



FREEZE



BACK OF
THE LINE



NO WAY!

A **PASS THE BUCK** action (in both game boxes) shifts the blame to another player, forcing him to start his turn.

A **FREEZE** action (in both game boxes) attempts to disturb the narration of another player during his turn with a new Hint Card. (The player who plays the card does not take the turn; he simply pesters and generally annoys the player whose turn it is).

A **BACK OF THE LINE** action (in *The Green Box* only) can be played at the start of a player's turn, before making excuses. He trades his hand of cards with another player's hand of cards. He cannot look at the other player's cards before trading.

A **NO WAY!** action (in *The Green Box* only) can be played during another player's turn. The targeted player immediately discards all of his Action cards and draws one new card. Then, that player continues his turn as normal. If he did not draw a Pass the Buck card, he will receive a Withering Look card.

Most cards can do only one type of action; a few cards offer a choice between two actions (in *The Red Box* only).

Note that the small icons in the top-left corner of the Action Cards are only used when playing the *Aye, Dark Master!* variant set of rules (see page 14).



Withering Look Cards



WITHERING LOOK CARDS
FROM *THE RED BOX*



WITHERING LOOK CARDS
FROM *THE GREEN BOX*

The game also contains cards used by the Dark Overlord to dole out Withering Looks to the Servants. Withering Look Cards display roman numeral on the bottom of the card to indicate one of three levels of the Dark Overlord's anger.

The Withering Looks

The Dark Overlord gives Withering Looks to players during the game as the measure of his anger towards his Servants. The first player to receive a third Withering Look is considered responsible for the failure of the mission and is severely punished.

When a player receives his first Withering Look, he places a Withering Look Card showing the first level of anger in front of himself. When he receives a second Withering Look, he flips the card over to the side showing the second level of anger. When he receives his third Withering Look, the game is over.



Setup

1. Choose one player to be the Dark Overlord. This player takes on the role of Rigor Mortis, perhaps even wearing a long cloak to get into the part.
2. Sort the cards by type: Hint Cards, Action Cards, and Withering Look Cards. The Dark Overlord takes the Withering Look Cards and places them in front of him. Each of the other two decks is shuffled.
3. Deal each Servant player three Hint Cards and three Action Cards. After casting a long, baleful stare at his Servants, and observing a moment of ominous silence, the Dark Overlord starts the game.

Starting the Game

The Dark Overlord addresses one of his Servants, asking a question about the mission's results.

Examples

"Well my brave Servants. I COMMANDED you to kidnap the Princess and bring her to me. Did you carry out your mission?"

"Slaves, did you raze the village near the Small Big Horn to the ground as I ordered you?"

"My faithful minions, have you finally found the Wart Elixir?"

The choice of the first player to be grilled is completely at the whim of the Dark Overlord. Then, the player questioned must justify himself, and his turn begins.



The Servant's Turn

During his turn, the Servant makes excuses for his many failures and tries to avoid angering the Dark Overlord. The excuses invented by the players should not necessarily be realistic or even plausible, given the humorous nature of the game. The more absurd they are, the funnier the game is. However, all the excuses must be consistent with the Hint Cards played.

A player's turn begins when he is questioned by the Dark Overlord or is the target of a Pass the Buck card. His turn ends when he either receives a Withering Look or manages to play a Pass the Buck card on another player.

If the player was the target of a Pass the Buck card, he starts his turn by drawing a new Action Card from the deck. However, if the player was questioned directly by the Dark Overlord, he cannot draw an Action Card.

During his turn, a player must:

- Play at least one Hint Card to continue his tale.
- Play a maximum of three Hint Cards during his turn, including the one played along with the Pass the Buck card.
- End his turn by playing a Pass the Buck card along with a Hint Card to shift blame to another Servant.

At the end of his turn, after playing the Pass the Buck card, the player draws enough Hint Cards from the deck to bring his hand back up to three cards.

Excessive hesitation, an inability to continue his story, or an inability to end his turn by playing a Pass the Buck card will provoke the Dark Overlord's anger, and the player will receive a Withering Look.



If a player does not have a Hint Card at the beginning of his turn, he automatically receives a Withering Look from the Dark Overlord.

If a player does not have a Pass the Buck card, he can choose to immediately receive a Withering Look and end his turn.

Note: It is strongly recommended that players maintain a tone of respect when addressing the Dark Overlord. If a player does not show enough deference, the Dark Overlord may take offense and resort to a Withering Look...

Out-of-Turn Actions

Outside of his turn, a Servant can disrupt the active player's narration by playing either a Freeze card together with a Hint Card or a No Way! card.

The Freeze card must be introduced with an appropriate statement (such as "Actually, this is not true...") and must have a connection to the player's narration. An incorrectly played Freeze card may anger the Overlord. The target of the Freeze action must react quickly and alter his story to accommodate the forced change. The Freeze card cannot be played during a Pass the Buck action.

Note that playing a Freeze card does not allow a player to recover Hint or Action Cards.



The Servant's Hand

Each player starts the game with a hand of three Hint Cards and three Action Cards.

At the beginning of his turn, a player draws one Action Card if he has been targeted by a Pass the Buck card. If the Dark Overlord has directly questioned the player, he does not draw an Action Card at this time.

When the player ends his turn by playing a Pass the Buck card, he draws enough Hint Cards from the deck to have three in his hand.

When a player receives a Withering Look, he must discard all his cards and draw three new Action Cards and three New Hint Cards.

When a Freeze card is played, no other card is drawn.

The Dark Overlord

During the game, besides overseeing the various phases of the game, the Dark Overlord must keep the Servants on a razor's edge.

He has the power to:

- Interrupt the players to demand further explanation.
- Introduce new narrative elements, independently from the Hint Cards.
- Rebuke and reprimand players as much as he likes, regardless of whose turn it is.
- Comment on the players' narration.
- Urge them to go on (for example, "I am getting bored...and you DO NOT want me to get bored, do you?").



Mercy, My Lord, Mercy!

After receiving the third Withering Look, a Servant has a last opportunity to save himself by begging for mercy. If the Dark Overlord considers the plea adequate, the player can draw an Action Card from the deck. If the card does not display Rigor Mortis' skull, the Servant is safe and can continue the game as if he had never received the third Withering Look.



ACTION CARD WITH RIGOR MORTIS' SKULL

Otherwise, the final curtain falls on the miserable Servant. Rigor Mortis has found the person responsible for the failure, and immediately punishes him...or he may, instead, decide to retire to his secret lair to work out a much more cruel punishment.

The plea must be real, not a simple stammering, and must be presented in a funny way. It is important for the player to do his best to play the part of the slimy Servant, close to the final punishment and absolutely terrified at this prospect. Only with an adequate plea may the Servant hope to win the Dark Overlord's mercy.

End of the Game

A game of *Aye, Dark Overlord!* ends when a Servant gets eliminated by receiving three Withering Looks and fails to obtain mercy. At this point, players can begin a new game with the player who was just eliminated (or any other player, if all players agree) taking the role of the Dark Overlord.



Other Rules

The “First Round” Rule

To allow all players to take part in the game, each player must perform one free Pass the Buck action (without playing an Action Card) during the first round of the game. This action must be performed against the player sitting to his right. After the first round, it is then possible to play a Pass the Buck card as normal against other players.

During the first round, players are allowed to play Freeze cards. The Dark Overlord may distribute Withering Looks normally, but once a player receives one, the Dark Overlord must resume the game by questioning the player to the right of the Withering Look's target.

The “No Mirror Reflections” Rule

The Dark Overlord gets bored very easily, listening to his Servants' irrelevant blather. The only thing worse to listen to is a quarrel between two of them. If two players trade the blame between themselves repeatedly with the intent to cause one of them to receive a third Withering Look, the Dark Overlord may intervene in a much more impartial (and drastic) way by giving them both a Withering Look. At any rate, we strongly discourage more than two consecutive exchanges of the blame between two players.

The “Priority” Rule

If more than one card is played to disrupt a player's turn, the card played by the first person in clockwise order from the player whose turn is being disrupted takes precedence above all the others. The other players must withdraw their cards and play them later...

However, never forget that the Dark Overlord always has the final say...on everything!



Aye, Dark Master!

Welcome to *Aye, Dark Master!*, a variant set of rules for *Aye, Dark Overlord!* designed to provide more rules structure without sacrificing any of the fun!

Object of the Game

To win, a player must survive to the end of the game with the most Hint Cards played in front of him.

Components

The game uses the exact same Hint Cards, Action Cards, and Withering Look Cards as *Aye, Dark Overlord!*

Hint Cards

These cards provide narrative elements for the Servants' excuses. Each Hint Card has an icon to identify which of the six types it is:



Person: This excuse involves a specific individual the Servant encountered.



Object: This excuse involves a specific item the Servant sought or possessed.



Place: This excuse involves a specific location the Servant visited.



Monster: This excuse involves the Servant being harassed by a specific type of creature.



Event: This excuse involves an activity or something that inspires an activity the Servant was involved in.



Wild: This excuse is so powerful, it can be played as any of the other five types.



Action Cards

These cards are used for accusing and interrupting other Servants. They are also used by the Dark Master to challenge his minions' excuses and overrule their pitiful actions.

An Action Card with the Pass the Buck or Back of the Line symbol is played to compel someone else to play a Hint Card of a specific type. The Dark Master may play a Pass the Buck or Back of the Line card to challenge Hint Cards.

An Action Card with a Freeze or No Way! symbol is played to interrupt other players. The Dark Master may play a Freeze or No Way! card as a call for silence, negating the effects of an interruption.

Action Cards with two different symbols may be used as either type.

Action Cards have a small icon to identify which type of Hint Card is required to respond to it. When playing an Action Card with a Wild icon, the player must choose one of the other five icons.

Mercy and No Mercy

Action Cards without Rigor Mortis' skull may be used as a Mercy card to allow a player to avoid advancing to the next level of a Withering Look. However, the Dark Master may play them as a No Mercy card. A No Mercy card is played immediately after a Mercy card to negate its effects.

Withering Look Cards

The three levels of Withering Look Cards are used to track the severity of the Dark Master's anger.



Setup

1. Shuffle the Hint Cards and place the Hint deck facedown within reach of all players.
2. Shuffle the Action Cards and place the Action deck facedown within reach of all players, with room for a discard pile.
3. Withering Look Cards should be placed within reach of all players.
4. Deal a hand of five Hint Cards and three Action Cards to each player.
5. One player is selected to start as the Dark Master. How to choose this person? It should be utterly arbitrary and unfair. Just like real life.

Describing the Plan

Before the game begins, the Dark Master describes the original plan. The player who starts as the Dark Master draws three cards from the Hint deck to form the basis of the plan. They might provide what the ultimate goal had been, where the scheme was to unfold, or objects necessary to complete the plot. These cards should be left in the center of the table for players' reference, but are not counted in anyone's final tally of played Hint Cards.

Example: Donna starts the game as the Dark Master. She draws "The Wizard's Cloak," "The Dwarfish Beer," and "The Demonic Pyramid," placing them on the table.

"Miserable cretins! I asked for one simple thing, and yet you have failed me. If I am to ruin the Dwarves' precious outdoor beer festival, I must wear something warm! Do you want me to catch pneumonia? I ordered you to go to the top of the Demonic Pyramid to retrieve the fur-lined cloak, but it's still on the pyramid. Now someone explain to me—what happened?!"



The Game Round

A round of play is composed of three phases:

- Draw Phase
- Accusation Phase
- Adjust Withering Look Phase

At the end of the round, the title of Dark Master is passed to the player to the left of the current Dark Master.

Draw Phase

During the Draw Phase, players discard as many of their Action Cards as they wish and then draw their hands back up to a total of five Hint Cards and three Action Cards. Hint Cards may not be discarded, and this is the only time a player can draw Hint Cards. By contrast, a player draws three new Action Cards immediately after he has played the last Action Card in his hand.

When the Action Card deck is empty, reshuffle the cards in the discard pile and reuse them. If the Hint Card deck is depleted, no more Hint Cards may be drawn.

Accusation Phase

The Accusation Phase starts with the Dark Master choosing one of his Servants and making a general accusation. The Dark Master does not need to play any Action Cards to make this general accusation.

Example: Dark Master Donna turns her attention to Adam. "You! What's your sorry excuse for failing to retrieve the wonderful Wizard's Cloak?"



The target must answer by playing a Hint Card of any type. If the Hint Card has a Wild icon, he must choose one of the other five types. He plays the card faceup in front of himself and makes up an elaborate tale that incorporates the content of the Hint Card that he played, the Dark Master's original plan, and a healthy dose of self-aggrandizing.

Unless lost to a challenge from the Dark Master, the Hint Card remains in front of the person who played it and counts toward his final tally of played Hint Cards.

If the player does not play a Hint Card, he receives a Withering Look, and the round advances to the Adjust Withering Look Phase.

Example: Adam plays the "The Exotic Beauty" Hint Card. "Oh most malevolent Master. As I obediently began climbing the stairs of the Demonic Pyramid, I was momentarily distracted by a beautiful temptress. I tried to appear suave and manly, but I fell down the stairs and twisted my ankle."

When a Hint Card is played, one of these occurs:

- **The Dark Master Challenges.** The Dark Master can challenge the Hint Card by playing a Pass the Buck or Back of the Line card.
- **Another Player Interrupts.** If the Dark Master does not challenge, any other player may interrupt by using a Freeze or No Way! card. If more than one player attempts to interrupt, the Dark Master chooses who takes precedence. Neither the Dark Master nor the Servant who played the Hint Card may interrupt.
- **The Player Makes an Accusation.** If there's no challenge or interruption, the player who just played the Hint Card may accuse another player with a Pass the Buck or Back of the Line card.
- **The Dark Master Accuses Again.** If no one wants to challenge, interrupt, or accuse, the Dark Master makes another general accusation, as when the round began.



The Dark Master Challenges

Immediately after a Hint Card has been played and explained, the Dark Master may challenge it by playing a Pass the Buck or Back of the Line card. The card's icon indicates what type of Hint Card is required in response. If it is a Wild icon, the Dark Master must choose one of the five other types of icons when he plays it.

When challenging, the Dark Master should ask his underling a question appropriate to the type of Hint Card required for a response. If playing a card with a Person icon, he should ask who was involved in this story; if playing one with a Place icon, he should ask where this story happened. Remember, Action Cards are played then discarded.

Example: After Adam plays his "Exotic Beauty" Hint Card, Dark Master Donna challenges, playing a Pass the Buck card with an Event icon. "Wait one moment. You? Appear suave and manly? What exactly were you doing to achieve that effect?"

The person who played the original Hint Card must now play another card matching the Dark Master's card type.

Example: Adam must now play a Hint Card with an Event icon. He plays the "The Unstable Balloon" card. "I tried to impress her with my balloon, but as soon as I got in, it went 'PTHHBBT!' and I fell out." Adam now has two Hint Cards played in front of him.

Once the second Hint Card is played, the Dark Master may not challenge either of them further. Play continues with other players now having an opportunity to interrupt.

If the player does not play a second Hint Card, the Dark Master places the challenged Hint Card in front of himself, to be added to his total at the end of the game. The player who lost the challenge receives a Withering Look, and the round moves to the Adjust Withering Look Phase.



Another Player Interrupts

If the Dark Master does not challenge the Hint Card, another Servant may try to interrupt with a Freeze or No Way! card. By playing these cards, players get the chance to play more Hint Cards. If more than one player tries to interrupt, the Dark Master determines who actually succeeds.

To play a Freeze or No Way! card, it must have an icon that matches the Hint Card just played. A card with a Wild icon may be used as any of the other five types of icons. When interrupting, the player should use the type of icon as a transition from the interrupted player's flimsy excuse to his own important explanation.

Example: Belinda just played "The Stone Giant," a Hint Card with a Monster icon, and Carl interrupts with a Freeze card with a Monster icon. "By funny coincidence, while she was wasting time with the Stone Giant, I was having my own unavoidable interaction with horrible creatures."

Even if interrupted, a Hint Card still counts for the final tally of the Servant who played it.

Once played, the Action Card is discarded, and the player must follow it up by playing a Hint Card with the same icon. (If the card had a Wild icon, treat it as the icon it was used as.) After the Hint Card is played, play proceeds exactly as it did after the first Hint Card was played.

If a player does not follow his Freeze or No Way! card with a Hint Card, he receives a Withering Look and the round moves to the Adjust Withering Look Phase.

Example: Having interrupted, Carl must now play a Hint Card with a Monster icon. He plays "The Puppy" card. "I was at the top of the pyramid when I noticed that the most adorable little Spaniel had fallen asleep on top of the cloak. I tried to nudge the little fellow off of it, but he woke up and sunk his vicious fangs into my throat."



Silence!

Immediately after a player has interrupted with a Freeze or No Way! card, the Dark Master may forestall the interruption by playing a Freeze or No Way! card of his own and demanding “Silence!” The Dark Master may call for silence using any Freeze or No Way! card, regardless of the icon on it. Both Action Cards are discarded, and no further attempts to interrupt are allowed until a new Hint Card has been played.

Example: Belinda wants to interrupt Carl's story, playing a Freeze card with a Monster icon. “Your saccharine and frankly unconvincing tale of the small puppy calls to mind a creature—.”

Dark Master Donna, however, plays a Freeze card of her own and demands, “Silence!” Both Action Cards are discarded, and Carl continues as if the interruption never happened.

The Player Accuses Someone Else

If the Dark Master does not challenge and no one else interrupts, the Servant who played the Hint Card may accuse one of the other Servants by playing a Pass the Buck or Back of the Line card. The card can have any sort of icon on it, but if it is a Wild icon, the player must choose one of the five other types of icons when he plays it. Once the Action Card is played, it is discarded.

When accusing, the player should interrogate his peer in a way that is appropriate to the type of icon that is required for a response.

Example: Adam now wants to pass the blame on to Belinda. He plays a Pass the Buck card with a Monster icon. “What I want to know is why she was wasting time with some horrible beast while our precious Dark Master was stuck inside, cloakless. What sort of monster is more important than our dread lord's warmth?”



The targeted player must then play a Hint Card with an icon that matches the one on the Action Card just played. If an appropriate Hint Card is played, the round keeps going as before, with more challenges, interruptions, and accusations. If not, the targeted player receives a Withering Look and the round moves to the Adjust Withering Look Phase.

Of course, a player can never play a Pass the Buck or Back of the Line card on the Dark Master. If someone forgets and tries to do so, he receives a Withering Look and the round moves to the Adjust Withering Look Phase.

The Dark Master Accuses Again

If, after a Hint Card is played, no one wants to challenge, interrupt, or accuse, the Dark Master simply chooses a player and makes another general accusation, as when the round began. The Dark Master does not play an Action Card to do so, and, as always, any type of Hint Card can answer a general accusation.

Adjust Withering Look Phase

Anytime a player is called upon to play a Hint Card and doesn't – or if someone accidentally makes an accusation against the Dark Master – that player receives a Withering Look and the round moves to the Adjust Withering Look Phase. During this phase, the player that received the Withering Look must advance to the next level of anger unless able to successfully beg for mercy from the Dark Master.

When a player advances to the first level of anger, he places a Withering Look Card in front of himself with the first level face up. When he advances to the next level, he flips the card over to the second level. When a player must advance to the final level, the Dark Master gives him the Withering Look Card with the third level, signalling certain doom for that player and the end of the game.



Mercy or No Mercy

Action Cards without Rigor Mortis' skull may be played by Servants as Mercy cards or by the Dark Master as No Mercy cards. When a player receives a Withering Look, he may play a Mercy Card to avoid advancing to the next level of anger. Note that even if a Mercy Card is played, a new round still begins. When begging for mercy, the player should make a genuine attempt to beg for forgiveness.

Example: Carl has just received a Withering Look, and the round advances to the Adjust Withering Look Phase. To avoid advancing to next level of Withering Look, Carl plays a Mercy Card. "Please don't be angry with me, my most malevolent master! I am unworthy of your humblest of burps. I beseech you to forgive me."

If the Dark Master does nothing, the player leaves his Withering Look Card as it was and a new round begins. The Dark Master, however, can play a No Mercy Card in response. A No Mercy card cancels the Mercy card and the Withering Look Card is adjusted as normal.

Example: After Carl's plea for forgiveness, Dark Master Belinda negates the Mercy Card with a No Mercy Card. Both cards are discarded, and Carl flips his Withering Look Card over from the first level to the second.

Only one Mercy Card may be played per round. The icons on the Action Cards are disregarded when using the them as Mercy or No Mercy Cards.



Ending the Round

The round ends after the Adjust Withering Look Phase, even if the player who received the Withering Look played a Mercy Card and did not advance to the next level of anger. The title of Dark Master is passed one person to the left, and a new round begins.

Winning the Game

If a player advances to the third Withering Look Card, the Dark Master metes out his doom and the game is over. The winner is the surviving player with the most Hint Cards played in front of him. In case of a tie, whichever player has the most Hint Cards played in front of him and was most recently the Dark Master wins the game.

Credits

Rigor Mortis created by **Riccardo Crosa**.

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Publisher: Steven Kimball

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