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Preface

The Dark Eye—for more than 30 years, this game has immersed players in the world of Aventuria, a place of magic and adventure.

What keeps fans fascinated after all this time? Simple. *The Dark Eye* (TDE, for short) is a living game.

Time marches on in this fantasy world, and epic adventures have lasting effects on in-game history, society, and everyday life. The players, who portray heroes in the game, stay right in the middle of the action. When orc armies, servants of the Netherhells, or the intrigues of the Nameless One threaten the world, your character is there.

Unlike with other game lines, the authors and editors of *The Dark Eye* are not the only ones who keep Aventuria alive. TDE also evolves via the creativity of players, who can influence the game in several ways, such as by writing articles for the *Aventurian Herald*, the in-game and out-of-game news magazine for TDE. Player ideas stand a chance of becoming canon and contributing to the wealth of detail that makes the game feel real. Some truly devoted players know Aventurian plants, wildlife, and geography, or the laws of the Middenrealm, better than they know their earthly equivalents.

While this new edition of TDE has been re-designed so that everyone, veterans of Aventuria and new players alike, will find it easy to access, it still provides the loving detail and engrossing history that fans have come to expect. Keeping the game fun for everyone was no easy task, since veteran players already know every corner of the game world, but beginners want an immense amount of detail regarding the rules and the setting.

A game needs rules to be playable, but we invested a great deal of time in keeping the introductory rules as simple as possible, so everyone will be able to understand them. This book is the first step on your journey to Aventuria, but it is only that: one step. Over the past few decades, the setting and rules of TDE have grown tremendously. Many advanced rules, options, and setting details will appear in upcoming books and supplements, refining the basic mechanisms of the game and providing deeper insights into the world of Aventuria and all of its races, cultures, and societies.

Breaking with tradition, we editors decided against completing the game in-house and publishing a final product without running a beta-test of the rules. We premiered the beta version of this latest edition at Role Play Convention 2014 in Cologne and incorporated player feedback into the book you now hold in your hands. We had never done this before, and we were amazed by the positive reception and creative input from the playing community. We gladly incorporated some of the great ideas we received, and even re-wrote entire passages of the core book. We posted many ideas in our online forum and let the community debate their merits, to ensure we were on the right track.

Many things changed between the beta rules and the final book. We corrected errors, reworked rules that needed clarification, and fine-tuned everything with a gamma-test.

Of course, we can't satisfy everyone, but we think we have included the best concepts and advice and created a solid game.

A preface tends to be the least exciting part of a rulebook, so I will stop writing at this point and wish all of you much fun and excitement reading and playing the English-language edition of *The Dark Eye*.

Alex Spohr (for the editors)
Frankfurt on the Main,
on a winter's day in February, 2015



Chapter 1: Introduction

“Every adventurous journey starts with a first step into the unknown. He who dares to be a hero must take this first step.”

– ancient proverb

“These marvelous artifacts bear many names. The people of Gyldenland call them Optoliths. In the Lands of the Tulamydes, they are known as Al-Satafri, the Eyes of the Night. Most Adventurians, however, know these mysterious orbs as Dark Eyes. The gods themselves are said to have thrown these objects from their heavenly fortress Alveran onto the face of Dere, to aid the greatest heroes in their most desperate times and allow them to glimpse far distant places in Aventuria and other worlds. Some of them are rumored to look into long gone pasts, others show the future, and some of them are even cursed, showing pictures that shred the minds of the careless. Only a select few people, chosen by destiny, ever came into possession of a Dark Eye, and more than once an orb became more of a burden than a helpful tool.”

– Encyclopaedia Magica, Garethian Edition, 1001 after the Fall of Bosparan

This book provides everything you need to enter the magical realm of Germany's most popular roleplaying game, *The Dark Eye*. Even though the game mechanics are quite simple, it is somewhat difficult to explain exactly what a roleplaying game is and how it works. Imagine the game as being a sort of improvised play staged in a fantasy world. In fact, the game is much more than this, but that simple description will suffice as an introduction. The rest of this book explains how much more there is to *The Dark Eye*, and how you can become one of the heroes of Aventuria.

So, what kind of game is this? What is it about? What do you have to do? What do you need to know about the world in which the game is set? And what, exactly, is a Dark Eye?

This first chapter of the book answers all of these questions and more. We introduce you to the basic rules of the game and explain the role of the Game Master. We show you what to expect at the game table and how to get started.



What is The Dark Eye?

The Dark Eye is a pen-and-paper fantasy roleplaying game. You gather with other gamers to take on the role of an adventurer and explore a strange fantasy world where you solve mysteries and fight orcs, dragons, and other monsters.

If you are already familiar with roleplaying games on the computer or on a gaming console, you will see certain parallels between those games and *The Dark Eye*. Some things, however, are very different, and those differences are what make a pen-and-paper roleplaying game a special experience. Although an adventure follows a certain storyline or plot, your character is mostly free to go wherever you want and do whatever you like. It doesn't matter by which route you clear a dungeon to get to the kidnapped princess, as long as you get there. If you can find a way to avoid the dungeon entirely, that would also be fine. If you set off on a quest to free the princess and can succeed at bringing her back safely to the king, you will have reached the end of that adventure, but the next one could be waiting just around the corner.

A pen-and-paper roleplaying game knows no bounds—you are totally free in your decisions. While most people in your gaming group play heroes, one of you must take on the role of the Game Master. The Game Master, or GM, describes the results of your actions and plays all the world's inhabitants aside from the player characters. The GM presents you with quests and fills them with danger, suspicion, gold, and glory.

Terminology

The terms *Game Master (GM)* and *referee* are interchangeable, as are the terms *hero*, *adventurer*, *character*, and *player character*. So, if we talk about a hero or an adventurer, we usually mean a player character.

◊ In *The Dark Eye*, both genders choose lives as adventuring heroes. Just like their male counterparts, female heroes may try to save their kidnapped lovers, or go on quests to drive monsters out of a region, or serve in the ranks of guard units seeking to stop the depredations of marauding bandits.

You might be asking where all this leads. *The Dark Eye* is a cooperative game where players in the group work together to reach the goal of the quest. Do not think of the Game Master as the group's enemy. It is the GM's responsibility to provide a fun adventure for everyone and to act as a referee in case of dispute. For example, if you try to solve a riddle to rescue the duke's only son

from the hands of evil cultists, you do it together as a group. And when you have brought the duke's son back home and collected your reward for that specific adventure, the GM knows your next quest

Why Is the Game Called *The Dark Eye*?

The game is named after the most intriguing magical artifacts it has to offer—the Dark Eyes, extremely powerful orbs that are very rare and hard to find. Wizards of eras long gone used them to look at far distant places, even other worlds, or to glimpse scenes from the distant past. Creating such an artifact calls for very powerful magic and a huge quantity of meteoritic iron. When fashioned into a Dark Eye, the iron takes on the form of an orb or, in very exceptional cases, an eye, hence the name.

already lurks around the corner. Fulfilling quests and having adventures is the purpose of a roleplaying game, and play can continue as long as you want.

Game Master and Players

Even though the entire gaming group plays *The Dark Eye*, the GM has a special role. While each player in the group has to take care of only one specific character (that is, act like the character, manage the hero's game stats, and roll the dice when needed), the GM must portray the entire game world of Aventuria. The characters controlled by the GM are called *non-player characters*, or *NPCs*. *NPCs* are everyone (and their dogs) that the heroes encounter, such as men and women at the market, dark cultists of the Nameless One, orc bandits in the woods, or the Empress of the Middenrealm. The GM portrays all of these characters, and more. In addition, the GM describes the scenes and what happens. The GM is basically the director of an improvised play. And when not running a purchased adventure, the GM becomes the author as well, and must set up the entire adventure, tell the tale, and lead the players through it, leaving all the adventurers' decisions to them.

To reduce the time spent preparing for a game session, you can buy pre-generated adventures that provide all the plot and *NPCs* you need. Think of an adventure as a sort of script that establishes a background, puts the events and scenes of a quest in loose order, and describes the surroundings and details of given scenes.

Geron
Bladebreaker



Dashing Heroes, Evil Villains, or Something In Between?

In *The Dark Eye*, player characters are usually called heroes. However, this does not mean they cannot be cunning thieves, smirking scoundrels, or even demon-summoning dark mages. In many pre-generated adventures, you play dashing heroes who fight the good fight for law and order, but there are many possible quests for characters with moral codes of a more questionable nature. When everyone creates characters, the gaming group should discuss whether they want quests that require adventurous knights in shining armor, or dark villains, or something in the middle.

What is Aventuria?

If you want to play a game of heroic adventuring, you first require a world in desperate need of heroes. The setting of *The Dark Eye* is Aventuria, a continent of diverse regions ranging from rainforests and swamps ruled by lizardfolk to the mountain kingdoms of the dwarves, and from the northern wastelands of the orcs and the forests of the elves to the cold lands of the Fjarning Barbarians. Aventuria offers adventures, challenges, and dangers for every kind of hero, from a questing knight to a powerful archmage.

A World of Adventure

The *Middenrealm* (1) stretches through the heart of Aventuria. It is an empire nominally ruled by the young Empress Rohaja, but is in reality controlled by powerful regional lords and ladies. The land is home to chivalrous knights as well as grim dwarves that live in huge underground cities. The capital of the realm is Gareth, by far the largest city in all of Aventuria. Gareth alone is so huge and diverse that the city can spawn hundreds of interesting, dangerous, and entertaining adventures.

In the plains along the northwestern border of the *Middenrealm* lie the *Orclands* (2), where the orcs of Aventuria make their home. Called "coal pelts" by many humans due to their heavy black fur, orcs are always at war with the neighboring empire, and are usually thought to be barbaric, cruel, brutal, and willing to test their strength against anyone stupid enough to challenge them.

West of the *Orclands* sits the land of *Thorwal* (3), home to fearless sailors and raiders who worship a whale god called *Swafnir* and whose longboats threaten the western *Aventurian* shores.

South of *Thorwal* are the two small kingdoms of *Nostria* (4) and *Andergast* (5). Most people believe those realms to be somewhat antiquated and underdeveloped. They have a long and very tangled history of border disputes and wars, as they consider themselves "dearest enemies."

South of the *Middenrealm*, the progressive *Horasian Empire* (6) is home to artists and poets. The cities of this fertile land are ruled by patricians, nobles, and councilors who strive constantly to outdo their rivals or weaken them via intrigue. The ruler of the realm is called the *Horas*, a man who, as the son of a dragon, governs with uncanny foresight.

Just off the *Horasian* coast lies the archipelago of the *Cyclops Islands* (7), wooded home of cyclopes, minotaurs, and fairies. Politically, the islands belong to the *Horasian Empire*, but their human population has a unique culture of their own, very different from their cousins on the mainland.

In the south lies the Empire of *Al'Anfa* (8). Its capital of the same name, sometimes called the *Boil of the South*, is filled with intrigues and decadence. There a stranger's life is worth only what it can fetch in the slave markets. Most slaves are sold to great landowners, and work farms and groves to increase their owners' wealth.

The jungles of the *Far South* (9) and the *Forest Islands* are home to the *Utulus* and the *Forest Folk*, whose daily struggles for survival include facing threats from *Al'Anfan* manhunters and other slavers. Off the coast, the *Southern Sea* (10) is dotted with countless small, self-governed islands ruled by colonists or pirates. Here, it is rumored, one can find legendary buried treasures or even set sail for the unexplored continent of *Uthuria*.

Beyond the mountains to the east of the *Horasian Empire*, *Novadi* tribes rule the huge *Khôm Desert*. Many caravans fall victim to the unforgiving *Khôm* and these nomadic warriors of the *Caliphate* (11). The *Novadi* people worship a single god named *Rastullah*, and just sneer at polytheistic outsiders (whom they consider ignorant heathens.)

Even further east are the *Lands of the Tulamydes* (12), ruled by sultans and emirs. The many small city-states of this region are famous for their djinn summoners, wily thieves, and bazaars full of exotic goods.

The largest realm of the *Tulamydes*, excluding the *Novadi Caliphate*, is *Arania* (13). It is a very fertile land that once belonged to the *Middenrealm* before it gained autonomy. Here the traditions and cultures of both the *Tulamydes* and the *Middenrealm* blend in a unique mix, and while *Aranian* men dwell in idleness, *Aranian* women wield true power in the realm.

Beyond the *Lands of the Tulamydes* and the *Tuzak Bay* lies the large island of *Maraskan* (14). The *Tulamydes* believe the island to be cursed due to its many poisonous animals and plants, mysterious assassins, and the strange dualistic religion of its inhabitants, who worship the Twin Gods *Rur* and *Gror*.

The *Shadowlands* (15) was once a province of the *Middenrealm*. Some years ago they fell under the rule of demon summoners and necromancers, the servants



of powerful archdemons. It is a dangerous land where unscrupulous nobles pursue their own agendas, unfettered by either human or divine law.

The northern forests and grasslands around the *Salamander Stones* (16) are the natural habitat of the elves. Orcs and humans stay away from the mountains and the woods surrounding them, for the elves resent intruders. While praised for their beauty and elegance, the elves are also feared for their cruel treatment of those who inadvertently trespass in their realm. They are magical beings who seemingly originate from light itself and are rumored to be blessed with an immortality filled with music and song.

The *Valley of the Svellt* (17) separates the elven hunting grounds from the Orclands. Some time ago, a league of merchant cities prospered in this area, but orcs have raided the valley for many years, demanding tribute from the human settlers. Only the strong survive in this region, and those who dare to travel through this land would do best to arm themselves.

The northeastern part of Aventuria is *Bornland* (18). Consisting mostly of vast, dark forests, this kingdom is ruled by the Bronnjars, Bornland's poverty-stricken nobility. Life here is hard and full of suffering, especially for the bondsmen. Many mysteries are hidden deep in the woods, secrets that date back to the time of the long-gone Order of the Theater Knights, whose successors are believed to be the Bronnjars.

North of the Bornland lies nothing but snow, frost, and icy wastes. Few people wander the *Far North* (19), some of them trappers, some gold prospectors. The Ejarnings, a barbaric tribe, are the only humans who brave the ice deserts, along with yetis, dark elves, and some of the land's oldest mysteries and secrets.

Aventuria is just one of many continents on the world of Dere. Beyond the *Eternal Edge*, one of the highest mountain ranges in all of Aventuria, is the legendary *Riesland*, which some scholars call *Rakshazar*. And only a short while ago, explorers found a huge land mass beyond the Southern Sea. *Uthuria*, called the realm of the 12,000 gods, is filled with unimagined adventures and riches.

Beyond the ocean to the west of Aventuria lies *Gyldenland*, the original home of the Thorwalers and all other Aventurian humans, waiting for brave sailors to visit. It is a strange continent, hard to reach because of unfavorable winds and dangerous currents. Ships sailing for *Myranor*—Gyldenland's name in the tongue of its inhabitants—usually sink before reaching their destination, but now and then, one actually lands on its shores. No one in Aventuria knows what other shores wait to be explored beyond the seas, or beneath the surface, or even above the clouds, though legends claim there is much more to discover.

Measuring Time

The kingdoms of Aventuria use various calendars and measure time in different ways. The most common method, used by the followers of the Twelvegods, reckons time before or after "the Fall of Bosparan" (FB, for short). Over a thousand years ago, Bosparan was the most powerful city on Aventuria, but decades of intrigue, war, and uprisings led to its destruction. The current year in the official campaign is 1038 FB.

A World Full of Magic

Aventuria is saturated with magic. Three-headed dragons, slaving ghouls, emerald spiders, and many other monstrosities inhabit the continent and are a danger to the people. But there are not only monsters. People born with Mada's Gift to control and manipulate magic study mysterious powers in academies or with private teachers. Magicians and wizards might control a person's free will, or vanish, reappear, and throw fire at their enemies. And there are many more magical traditions. For example, witches call themselves Daughters of Satuarua and view magic as a gift from their goddess. They are usually accompanied by magical familiars such as cats, crows, or toads, with which they can converse. Elves have a more intuitive connection to magic, viewing it as part of Nature and using it to aid hunting and survival.

A World of Gods

Magic is not the only source of supernatural powers. The Blessed Ones, priests of the Aventurian gods, can work miracles and invoke wonders. Their gods lend them the powers they need to perform such feats. Most people in Aventuria firmly believe in the Twelvegods. These gods are twelve siblings. Praios, the god of Law and Order, is their lord. A simple peasant might never see a mage or a monster, but will witness the wonders of the Twelvegods through the miracles performed by the village's Blessed One, be they in the form of rain that comes in response to prayer, or the healing of an extreme wound.

But the gods also have enemies. The Shadowlands in the east are ruled by demon summoners and necromancers, who in turn serve archdemon lords. Together they defy order and fight against the gods themselves. Armies of undead march from the Shadowlands to spread fear among the servants of the Twelvegods and destroy the free realms of Aventuria.

And then there is the Nameless One, the so-called thirteenth god, who secretly plots against the Twelvegods and sends forth servants to spread his will.

The land conceals forgotten magical societies, strange legends that might be true, and religious mysteries that are as old as time itself.

The Gods of Aventuria

The following table lists the Twelvegods, their individual aspects, and their holy animals or items. Gender is indicated in parentheses (*m* or *f*). The

Twelvegods are worshipped almost everywhere, though in some places their churches exist alongside, or even blend with, those of other deities.

Deity	Aspects	Holy Animal or Item
Praios ♂	justice, truth, dispelling magic	griffon
Rondra ♀	honor, combat, bravery	lioness
Efferd ♂	storm, water, wind	dolphin
Travia ♀	matrimony, hospitality, loyalty	Brant goose
Boron ♂	sleep, death, oblivion	raven
Hesinde ♀	crafts, magic, knowledge	snake
Firun ♂	ice, hunting, nature	polar bear
Tsa ♀	youth, life, rebirth	lizard
Phex ♂	thieves, luck, bargaining	fox
Peraine ♀	farming, healing, herding	stork
Ingerimm ♂	fire, trade, forging	hammer and anvil
Rahja ♀	love, ecstasy, beauty	horse



The greatest nemesis of the Twelvegods is the *Nameless One*, known to most cultures as the embodiment of Evil and—ironically—by many different names. The archdemons (see page 316) are fierce enemies of the Twelvegods. Dwarves worship *Angrosh* (called *Ingerimm* in the faith of the Twelvegods) and his daughter *Simia*. The elves have no gods, and instead worship aspects of Nature, namely *nurdra* (life, growth, becoming), *zerza* (death, decay, leaving), and *dha* (existence). The concept of *dhaza*, the eternal foe, is their version of the *Nameless One*.

Aside from these gods, there are other deities of some importance. *Rastullah* is the sole god of the Novadi desert people. The people living on the island of Maraskan worship the *Twin Gods*, *Rur* and *Gror*, who are both male

and female. The whale god of the Thorwalian pirates is called *Swafnir*. The people of Nivese worship the *Sky Wolves*, the Forest Folk worship a jaguar-like god called *Kamaluq*, the druids worship the earth mother *Sumu*, and *Satuaris* is the goddess of witches and warlocks.

For more about the religious beliefs of the various peoples of Aventuria, see *Chapter 5: Cultures* (page 95).

The Demigods of Aventuria

The following table lists important demigods and their aspects, as well as noteworthy traits. Gender is indicated in parentheses (*m* or *f*). Some of these figures are saints in the faith of the Twelvegods. For more information about these beings, see the supplement *The Aventuria Almanac*.

Demigod	Aspects	Notes
Aves ♂	travel and adventures	son of Phex and Rahja
Ifirn ♀	bringer of Spring	daughter of Firun and a mortal woman
Kor ♂	lord of war and patron of mercenaries	son of Rondra and Famerlor
Levthan ♂	god of lust	son of Rahja
Mada ♀	the moon	daughter of Hesinde
Marbo ♀	called upon for a quick and peaceful death	the gentle daughter of Boron
Nandus ♂	lord of riddles	son of Phex and Hesinde
Simia ♂	the inventive	son of Ingerimm and Tsa
Swafnir ♂	defender against sea monsters	son of Efferd and Rondra
Ucuri ♂	messenger of the gods	son of Praios (Ucuri had no mother)
Xeledon ♂	the mocker; ridicules human craftsmanship	son of Hesinde and a mortal man

The High Dragons

The following table lists the six High Dragons, their aspects, and noteworthy traits. All of them are male. The High Dragons figure prominently in the

Church of the Twelvegods, and some even receive a certain amount of worship themselves. For more information about these exalted beings, see the supplement *The Aventuria Almanac*.

Dragon	Aspect	Noteworthy Trait
Branibor	dragon of justice	a servant of Praios
Darador	dragon of anti-magic	a servant of Praios
Famerlor	guardian of Alveran	Rondra's husband
Naclador	dragon of wisdom	a servant of Hesinde
Menacor	guardian of Limbo	daughter of Hesinde
Yalsicor	dragon of friendship	friend to Travia



Gameplay Example: The Heroes of Alriksford

The following play example introduces you to *The Dark Eye* and describes what a game session might look like. It follows a group of four adventurers who are on the trail of some orc raiders. The orcs just terrorized a small village and have taken two children hostage.

The fifth member of the gaming group acts as the GM, who directs the adventure and plays the role of the orcs and all other NPCs. The four heroes are *Layariel Treetopglint*, a female elf wyldrinner; *Geron Bladebreaker*, a brave human mercenary; *Mirhiban al'Orhima*, a clever female mage; and *Brother Hilbert*, a good-natured Blessed One of Peraine.

Prior to the gaming session, the GM planned the adventure and noted all important information, such as the quest's background story. The GM's notes read: A group of five orc raiders left their usual hunting grounds and have been harassing the small village of Alriksford for several days. The orcs thought they would find valuables and other loot in the village and attacked not long before the heroes arrived. To ensure that the villagers would not follow them, they took two children hostage. The orcs retreated to an old tower, which they plan to use as their base for further plundering. The heroes arrive in Alriksford just after the orcs have left with their hostages.

Our four heroes have known each other for a long time. Currently, they are on their way to Gareth, the capital of the Middenrealm, to attend the famous annual imperial tournament. When they reach Alriksford, they can see from a distance that there is something wrong. Many houses are burning or lie in ruins, and dead farm animals of every kind line the street. The surviving villagers have gathered in the central square to mourn their losses. If asked, they explain that a group of orc raiders plundered Alriksford just a few hours ago. The orcs stole silver, animals, and food, and kidnapped both children of

Erngrimm, one of the local farmers. Malor, the mayor, sent for the guard of the local baroness, but the orcs ambushed the messenger, ending any hope of rescuing the children. Will the heroes save them?

Quest design can vary widely. While this brief scene is ideal for our example, an adventure can last much longer. GMs can either design adventures themselves or buy pre-generated quests for *The Dark Eye*. For more about designing and running adventures, see *Chapter 15: Game Tips* on page 388.

The quest begins on the road to Alriksford with the GM describing what the heroes perceive. Each player controls one hero and speaks as if they are their characters.

GM: "Your journey started early in the morning. You are traveling on the road to Gareth, where the great imperial tournament will be held in less than two weeks. Since the tournament also marks the beginning of the new year, you are in quite a hurry to get to the city and avoid being on the road during the Five Days of the Nameless One. You should be able to reach the capital just in time, unless something unexpected happens. After about two hours, you near the village of Alriksford, where you can take a rest. Just as you are about to clear the last hill before the village, you smell burning wood."

Hilbert: "Maybe some charcoal burners?"

Geron: "Hmm, that close to the village? Charburners would be living deeper in the woods. And I don't think you could smell them from this far away."

Mirhiban: "I have a bad feeling about this. Let's clear the top of the hill. From there we may see what is burning."

The players describe their characters' next actions to the GM: "We want to continue walking cautiously up the hill, observing the area."