

BETWEEN SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

a concise tabletop role-playing game
of ordinary people experiencing
the extraordinary

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I welcome feedback and suggestions!
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1. INTRODUCTION

Set within the late 1950's to early 1960's, **BETWEEN SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE** is a concise tabletop role-playing game inspired by the sci-fi and horror anthology television series of the time.

You portray an ordinary person caught up in extraordinary events. Along with others, you will investigate the unusual and disturbing to shed light on what lurks just beyond our familiar existence.

Another player, referred to hereafter as the narrator, introduces a mystery adventure, portrays setting characters, and adjudicates the rules.

You will use a pencil, paper, and the following dice* while playing:

- Standard, a six-sided die referred to as the "base die,"
- Six-sided dice marked 0 through 2, repeated twice, referred to as "mod dice,"
- A six-sided die with one side marked ©, referred to as the "exception die."

(*Note: The rules also include options for playing with only standard, six-sided dice - see **11. Dice Options**).

2. YOUR CHARACTER

BACKGROUND: With the setting in mind, choose a name, appearance, occupation, avocation, and motivation. (See **9. Player Tables** for inspiration or to select randomly!)

ABILITIES: Seven abilities rate your competencies:

- Charisma: Interpersonal skills and presence
- Constitution: Stamina and physical resilience
- Dexterity: Nimbleness and physical coordination
- Education: Knowledge and mental acumen
- Perception: Awareness and sensory acuity
- Strength: Physical power and force
- Willpower: Mental fortitude and determination

Create scores by rolling a mod die for each ability and noting the result.

POOLS: Two pools represent your capacity to withstand trauma:

- Vigor begins at 10 plus your constitution score and is reduced by physical damage.
- Moxy begins at 10 plus your willpower score and is reduced by psychological distress.

These values are the maximum. Also note the half value of each, rounded up.

PLOT TWISTS: You begin each game session with two plot twists. At the narrator's discretion, a plot twist can be "spent" to influence the story, perhaps by doing one of the following:

- Ask the narrator a "yes" or "no" question that will nudge the story forward.
- Find a small item of little value but very useful in your situation.

- Remember some obscure fact that you have no reason to know.
- Reach out to a contact you can trust for help.
- Suggest a setting detail.
- Automatically succeed on an ability roll (see **3. Using Abilities**).

STUFF: You begin with enough pocket money to last a week or two without hardship and several useful personal items you would reasonably possess.

IMPROVEMENT: After each mystery adventure, or at the narrator's discretion, choose an ability and roll a base die. If the result is higher than the chosen ability's score, increase it by 1.

If constitution or willpower is increased, also increase your maximum vigor or moxy by 1, respectively, and note the half value, rounded up.

3. USING ABILITIES

When the outcome of an action is uncertain and you are directed to do so by the narrator, make an ability roll by rolling the base die, a number of mod dice equal to the relevant ability score, and the exception die. If your background gives you relevant experience or an advantage, add 1 more mod die.

The action is successful if the total of base die and mod dice meets or exceeds a target number. When making an ability roll and there is no active opponent, the default target number is 4. When there is an active opponent, the target number is 4 plus the opponent's relevant ability score.

At the narrator's discretion, factors such as assistance, equipment, environment, and time availability might alter the target number in either case.

If you rolled ☉ on the exception die, the success or failure of your ability roll is exceptional. Along with the narrator, determine and describe the exceptional result.

LUCK: Sometimes, the result of a situation comes down to pure chance. Do the batteries in the flashlight you just found still hold a charge? Did the ticket agent have her coffee yet this morning? Does the stolen dinghy have a flare gun? When the narrator calls for it, roll a base die. If the result is 4 or greater, things go your way. Otherwise, you are... well... out of luck.

4. COMBAT

Combat is resolved in rounds each lasting several seconds. The battlefield is represented by zones ranging in size from several steps (such as a room or corridor) to a stone's throw (such as a forest clearing or parking lot).

At the beginning of combat, everyone makes a dexterity roll to determine initiative. Whoever gets the highest result goes first each round, then the others - including the narrator - take their turn in clockwise order.

However, if one of the combatant parties has surprised the other, each member of the surprising party takes a turn before the initiative is determined.

On your turn, you can attack, move, or, at the narrator's discretion, perform some other quick action such as opening an unlocked door.

To attack, make a strength roll for close combat or a dexterity roll for ranged combat. If successful, you deal damage equal to a base die roll plus your weapon rating less your opponent's armor rating, if any (see **Weapons** and **Armor**).

To move, you can run to an adjacent zone. (Running within a zone is a free action and does not count as a move.) You might be required to make a dexterity roll in either case if there are obstacles.

When you are targeted on an enemy's turn, you can attempt to defend by opposing:

- A close combat attack with a dexterity roll to dodge or, with a suitable weapon, a strength roll to parry. You can defend this way several times per round. However, the target number increases by 1 for each attempt beyond the first.

- A ranged combat attack with a dexterity roll to dive for cover. You can only do this once per round and you lose your next turn.

If you fail to defend, you suffer damage equal to a base die roll plus your opponent's weapon rating less your armor rating, if any (see **Weapons** and **Armor**).

WEAPONS

Rating Examples

- 1* What you're born with - fist, foot, head
- 0 Small and improvised weapons - dagger, slingshot, chair leg, 9-iron
- +1 Things meant to kill - axe, sword, spear, pistol, ray gun
- +4 Big things meant to kill - rifle, shotgun, ray blaster

***Note:** the minimum damage is 1.

RANGE: Thrown weapons have a range of the same zone, handguns can reach adjacent zones, and shoulder-fired guns and bows can reach 2 zones beyond the zone of origin.

ARMOR: In this setting, bullet-proof armor does not normally exist. However, in modern or sci-fi settings, assign an armor rating of 1, 2, or 4 for light, medium, or heavy armor.

OTHER CONTESTS: Contests other than combat can be decided using a similar procedure. Create temporary pools by adding 10 to each participant's applicable ability score. A successful ability roll reduces the opponent's pool by a base die roll. The conflict concludes when one participant reduces the other's pool to 0 or less. Examples include charisma versus charisma for an argument or dexterity versus perception for sneaking into a guarded building.

5. HORROR

When encountering the supernatural or experiencing something otherwise horrible, you may be directed by the narrator to make a willpower roll. If you succeed, you suffer psychological distress equal to the horror rating of the situation. If you fail, you suffer distress equal to a base die roll plus the horror rating.

HORROR

Rating	Examples
---------------	-----------------

0	Unsettling
1	Frightening
3	Horrifying
6	Unbearable

6. TRAUMA

You remain relatively functional until your vigor or moxy is reduced to 0 or less or is reduced by more than half the maximum (rounded up) in a single instance. At that point, roll a base die and consult the following appropriate table below:

PHYSICAL INJURY

Roll	Result
-------------	---------------

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | You are knocked unconscious for a base die roll of rounds. |
| 2 | You are wracked with pain and unable to act for a base die roll of rounds. |
| 3 | You got your bell rung, are confused, and unable to act for a base die roll of rounds |
| 4 | Target numbers for all ability rolls increase by 1 until you get a night's rest. |
| 5 | Your maximum vigor is permanently reduced by 1. Note this and the new half value, rounded up. |
| 6 | You succumb to your wounds and die. |

PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURY

Roll	Result
-------------	---------------

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | You faint for a base die roll of rounds. |
| 2 | You flee for a base die roll of rounds. |
| 3 | You fight recklessly and are unable to Defend for a base die roll of rounds. |
| 4 | Target numbers for all ability rolls increase by 1 until you get a solid night's rest. |
| 5 | Your max moxy is permanently reduced by 1. Note this and the new half value, rounded up. |
| 6 | You immediately become overwhelmed by horror, flee, and retire. |

Besides combat, there are other dumb ways to die:

- A fall onto a hard surface deals a base die roll of damage per ten feet.
- Exposure to fire deals a base die roll of damage per round.
- Ingesting poison deals a base die roll of damage per hour until an antidote is taken.
- Disease deals a base die roll of damage per day until cured.

If you suffer additional damage when your vigor is 0 or less, you succumb to your wounds and die immediately. If you suffer additional distress when your moxy is 0 or less, you immediately become overwhelmed by horror, flee, and retire.

7. RECOVERY

You can perform first aid on someone else with a successful intelligence roll to restore base die roll of vigor. You can also help someone else "snap out of it" with a successful charisma roll to restore a base die roll of moxy.

You can *offer* first aid and stabilization as described above however many times you need to, but you can only *receive* treatment once each per day.

With proper rest, shelter, nourishment, and care between game sessions, you heal and regain all vigor and moxy points.

8. CREATURES AND SETTING CHARACTERS

Each creature and setting character is described much as you are, but most have something special they can do. Assume all ability scores are 1. If the score is different, it will be listed under Special(s).

CULTIST

Appearance: Humans of all shapes and sizes, often adorned with the accoutrements of quasi-religious ritual.

Motivation: To hasten the end of the world, and to get you to help.

Special(s):

- **Charisma:** 3
- **Life Drain:** Once per combat, by means of a sacrificial dagger, a cultist is able to gain an amount of vigor equal to damage inflicted.

GHOUL

Appearance: Ragged and gaunt once-humans covered in the dirt and mud of cemeteries.

Motivation: To feast upon the flesh of the dead.

Special(s):

- **Armor Rating:** 1
- **Horror Rating:** 2
- **Dexterity:** 2
- **Strength:** 3
- **Vigor:** 15
- **Claws:** weapon rating of 1.
- **Paralyzing Touch:** On a successful close combat attack, the victim must make a successful constitution roll or be paralyzed for one base die roll of rounds.

GREMLIN

Appearance: Small creatures with wiry builds, dark grey skin, sharp teeth, long thin limbs with claws, and glowing eyes.

Motivation: To cause mischief with machines and their operators.

Special(s):

- **Horror Rating:** 1
- **Dexterity:** 2
- **Strength:** -1
- **Vigor:** 5
- **Invisibility:** Gremlins may choose who can and cannot see them.

THE HORROR FROM PLANET X5

Appearance: Hulking, slug-like biped with thick blue-green skin, long clawed limbs, and a tapering tail.

Motivation: To get home.

Special(s):

- **Armor Rating:** 2
- **Horror Rating:** 3
- **Dexterity:** 0
- **Strength:** 5
- **Vigor:** 25
- **Claws:** Two attacks per turn, weapon rating of 2.
- **Tail:** Weapon rating of 3.

LITTLE GREY MEN

Appearance: Diminutive humanoids with blue-grey skin, bulbous heads, and minimal facial features other than their large black eyes.

Motivation: To probe the universe in order to learn and understand.

Special(s):

- **Horror Rating:** 1
- **Constitution:** 0
- **Intelligence:** 4
- **Strength:** 0
- **Advanced Technology:** Little grey men use an assortment of gadgets and gizmos which allow them to twist time and space.
- **Ray Gun:** Weapon rating of 1.

VENUSIAN DEATH TRAP

Appearance: Knee-high, carnivorous plants.

Motivation: To lure in prey.

Special(s):

- **Horror Rating:** 1
- **Dexterity:** 3
- **Intelligence:** -2
- **Vigor:** 8
- **Lunging Attack:** Treat this attack as ranged. Teeth have a weapon rating of 1.
- **Death Hold:** On a successful attack, the plant latches onto its prey and automatically deals damage each round.

WITCH

Appearance: A sweet grandma.

Motivation: To watch over and protect children and the innocent.

Special(s):

- **Charisma:** 4
- **Intelligence:** 2
- **Charm:** A witch can charm an intelligent being, making the target regard her as a trusted friend and ally. The target can resist the charm with a successful charisma roll.
- **Wishes:** In exchange for a favor, a witch can grant your group 3 plot twists.
- **Blueberry Muffins:** A witch can expertly bake the most delectable treats.

9. PLAYER TABLES

Use the following tables as suggestions, choose from them, or roll on them. Some tables require you roll a single base die. Others require you roll two base dice and use the first result for the "tens" digit and the second for the "ones" digit.

FIRST NAME

11 Ace	31 Ethel	51 Kitty
12 Anthony	32 Flora	52 Kurt
13 Archibald	33 Frances	53 Laurette
14 Barbara Jean	34 Franklin	54 Millicent
15 Barney	35 Gart	55 Nora
16 Bartlett	36 Gregory	56 Romney
21 Bolie	41 Hardy	61 Roscoe
22 Booth	42 Harvey	62 Sid
23 Chester	43 Hector	63 Susanna
24 Clegg	44 Hugh	64 Terrance
25 Edith	45 Jerry	65 Vinnie
26 Edna	46 Jody	66 Walter

LAST NAME

11 Bedeker	31 Foley	51 Rathmann
12 Beechcroft	32 Forster	52 Renard
13 Bemis	33 Grimbley	53 Shackelforth
14 Canfield	34 Hearnandan	54 Sloan
15 Castle	35 Helpstead	55 Sterig
16 Caswell	36 Hotaling	56 Templeton
21 Cavanaugh	41 Kamener	61 Tennyson
22 Denton	42 Kittridge	62 Valentine
23 Dingle	43 Lanser	63 Van Horn
24 Embry	44 Marshak	64 Wellington
25 Finchley	45 Misrell	65 Wickwire
26 Flueger	46 Padgett	66 Wordsworth

APPEARANCE

- 11 Adorned: Decorated with accessories or details.
- 12 Bedraggled: Dirty, untidy, or disheveled.
- 13 Bland: Unremarkable and uninteresting.
- 14 Bohemian: Free-spirited, unconventional, artsy.
- 15 Chic: Fashionable, stylish, and elegant.
- 16 Dapper: Neat, stylish, and fashionably dressed.
- 21 Dignified: Gravely composed with a sense of honor
- 22 Dowdy: Outdated or unfashionable.
- 23 Eclectic: A unique mix of diverse styles.
- 24 Effortless: Appearing natural and without strain.
- 25 Frayed: Showing signs of wear and tear.
- 26 Gaunt: Emaciated and thin, often due to illness.
- 31 Gawky: Awkward or ungainly.
- 32 Imposing: Impressive in appearance or size.
- 33 Jaunty: Lively, cheerful, and self-confident.
- 34 Lanky: Tall, thin, and awkward.
- 35 Meticulous: Extremely precise and careful.
- 36 Prim: Neat and proper, often to excess.
- 41 Pristine: Immaculately clean and well-kept.
- 42 Quirky: Unconventional, unique, and eccentric.
- 43 Rakish: Stylishly unconventional.
- 44 Rugged: Strong, tough, and robust.
- 45 Rumpled: Wrinkled, crumpled, or disheveled.
- 46 Slouchy: Poor posture or a hunched appearance.
- 51 Slovenly: Untidy, careless, or unkempt.
- 52 Sophisticated: Refined and elegant in style.
- 53 Sporty: Stylish in an active or athletic manner.
- 54 Stylish: Fashionable with a sense of trends.
- 55 Svelte: Slender, elegant, and graceful.
- 56 Swaggering: Confident and arrogant.
- 61 Tattered: Worn-out, torn, or shabby clothing.
- 62 Tousled: Messy or disheveled in a carefree way.
- 63 Understated: Subtle, not overly conspicuous.
- 64 Urbane: Polished and suave.
- 65 Vivacious: Lively, animated, full of energy.
- 66 Wholesome: Healthy, innocent, and pure.

OCCUPATION

11 Exhibit Shooter	31 Psychiatrist	51 Astronaut
12 Store Santa	32 Prison Guard	52 Mechanic
13 Sidewalk Peddler	33 Ad Executive	53 Inventor
14 Pawn Shop Owner	34 Petty Crook	54 Soldier
15 Musician/Singer	35 Maid/Butler	55 Police
16 Insurance Agent	36 Food Critic	56 Lawyer
21 Aging Film Star	41 Bank Teller	61 Farmer
22 School Teacher	42 Playwright	62 Dancer
23 Medical Doctor	43 Scientist	63 Clergy
24 Film Director	44 Professor	64 Pilot
25 Ticket Agent	45 Custodian	65 Nurse
26 Talent Agent	46 Bartender	66 Boxer

AVOCATION

11 Amateur (HAM) Radio	41 Lapidary
12 Antiques	42 Model Rocketry
13 Archaeology	43 Model Trains
14 Astrology	44 Motorcycling
15 Astronomy	45 Numismatics
16 Boxing	46 Outdoorsman
21 Classic Cars	51 Philately
22 Classic Film	52 Photography
23 Classic Literature	53 Rare Books
24 Comic Books	54 Sailing
25 Cooking	55 Science Fiction
26 Cryptology	56 Social Dance
31 Electronics	61 Spelunking
32 Experimental Music	62 Stage Magic
33 Fencing	63 Storm Chasing
34 Folklore & Mythology	64 Vintage Clothing
35 Gardening	65 War Gaming
36 Home Brewing	66 Woodworking

MOTIVATION

- 1 Sense of Duty: You have a strong sense of responsibility to uncover the truth due to your moral compass.
- 2 Protecting Loved Ones: You investigate to ensure the safety and well-being of family and friends.
- 3 Guilt or Redemption: You are haunted by a past event and feel responsible for something bad. Investigating mysteries is a means of seeking redemption or making amends.
- 4 Obsession: You are obsessed with the unknown, The occult, and the supernatural. You seek to unravel secrets that others fear to explore.
- 5 Confronting Fears: You investigate mysteries as a way to confront your fears, attempting to overcome what terrifies you.
- 6 Personal Curiosity: You are naturally curious, interested in the unknown and driven to uncover secrets and solve puzzles.

10. NARRATOR TABLES

ALIEN MOTIVATIONS FOR VISTING EARTH

- 1 Invade and conquer
- 2 Establish a penal colony for misfits and convicts
- 3 Gather resources, which may include us
- 4 Observe us and, perhaps, perform experiments
- 5 Seek asylum or refuge
- 6 Retrieve embedded spies or rescue stranded explorers

WHAT THE CADRE OF SCIENTISTS IS UP TO

- 1 Faking an alien invasion to unite humanity
- 2 Inventing dangerous weapons with varying degrees of caution
- 3 Tampering with nature
- 4 Building an intrusive, pervasive, security monitoring device
- 5 Imprisoning aliens for scientific research
- 6 Unlocking hidden dimensions

11. DICE OPTIONS

If you do not have "mod" or "exception" dice, you can use a standard, six-sided die (d6) and modify the rules as follows:

- When creating agility scores (see **2. Your Character**), roll a d6 and use half the result, rounded down.
- When making ability rolls (see **3. Using Abilities**), roll a d6 and add the relevant ability score to the result. If your background gives you relevant experience or an advantage, add 1 more.
- When making ability rolls, roll an additional d6, preferably of a different color. The success or failure of your ability roll is exceptional if you roll a "6" on this die.

Using a d6 as the "base die" for ability rolls gives you limited flexibility for adjusting target numbers and designing creatures. If this is an issue, consider using 2d6 or a d20 instead.

"Mod dice" can seem too swingy for some gamers. However, during playtesting, players really seemed to enjoy the added variability and the opportunity to roll more dice! If this approach doesn't work for you, simply add the ability score to the base die for ability rolls instead of using the "mod dice."

Finally, using the "exception" die results in a higher percentage of better or worse rolls compared to most other systems. With that in mind, I suggest not treating them as extreme "criticals" and "fumbles," but more as "breakthroughs" and "setbacks."

BETWEEN SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE CHARACTER SHEET

BACKGROUND

	3. OCCUPATION
1. NAME	4. AVOCATION
2. APPEARANCE	5. MOTIVATION

ABILITIES

	4. EDUCATION
1. CHARISMA	5. PERCEPTION
2. CONSTITUTION	6. STRENGTH
3. DEXTERITY	7. WILLPOWER

POOLS

	MAX	½	CURRENT
1. VIGOR			
2. MOXY			

PLOT TWISTS:

STUFF/NOTES:

