

THE BUTLER AT THE THRESHOLD

A storytelling game about small towns and cosmic horror.

For 2 to 5 players, over 2 to 3 hours

Goal of the Game

You're here to tell a story collaboratively. It's a story about ambition and intrigue on the eve of the apocalypse, about the residents of a small town coming to grips with the unknown - or ignored - horrors of their past, their inheritance, their identity even as they pursue their own driving obsessions. In this game, you'll define the town together, and play a notable character currently living in it. You'll take it in turns to be the focus of the story, working to succeed at your character's *goals* by gathering useful *assets* and employing them in the right ways.

You can work with - or against - the other player characters, benefiting from or borrowing or stealing or sabotaging their assets, but this game isn't competitive - you all should be looking for the best story.

As you pursue your *goals* and experience *revelations* you'll gain *insight* you can use to gain more powers and better your odds of success, even as it makes you strange. And all the while, the town is ticking closer to *Doom*.

Characters

There are 5 character types to play in **The Butler at the Threshold**:

- **The Scion:** You're the heir to your family's fortune - but is that all you'll inherit from them?
- **The Antiquarian:** You've spent your life gathering the lore of this town. But some things are a mystery even to you...
- **The Sleuth:** You don't like it here. But you know: somewhere in this town is the answer to all your questions.
- **The Outcast:** The things you've seen have pushed you to the town's fringes, but something still keeps you here.
- **The Seeker:** Inspiration burns like a fire behind your eyes. You must let it out. You must show them what you see!

Setup

1. Lay out the Location cards where everyone can see them.
2. Each player picks a Character card.
3. Each player answers the setup questions on their card - setting details, name, positive relationship, negative relationship.
4. Put out one more Goal card than there are players. Go clockwise picking one in turn until everyone has one. Discard the last.
5. Put out one more Asset card than there are players. Go anticlockwise picking one in turn until everyone has one. Discard the last.
6. Put out one more Goal card than there are players. Go clockwise picking one in turn until everyone has one. Discard the last. *Skip this step for a shorter, more adversarial game.*
7. Pick a Doom card. Place insight tokens on each empty space on it.
8. Play starts with the player who picked the last card.

Insight

Insight tokens are used to power your more dramatic abilities. You start with none, and gain them by completing goals or experiencing Revelations.

When you gain tokens, put them on your character sheet. This is your *pool*. When they're faceup, you can flip them to use your abilities or gain insight into the scene. When they're facedown, they're unusable until your next turn.

Increased Insight makes you strange and powerful. When your pool grows to 2 or more you gain a new ability. When it grows to 4 or more, you gain a second. You have these abilities whether the tokens are faceup or facedown.

Play

On your turn, flip any insight tokens in your pool face-up. Then pick one:

- Use your Character card's Revelation move.
- Play out a scene.

If you choose to play out a scene:

Step 1. Pick a location to have the scene in.

Using the 'Things to do' section on the location, say why you're going there.

Step 2. Pick another player Character to also be present.

They say why they're there.

Step 3. Start roleplaying.

Narrate the thoughts and actions of your character. The other players will narrate the actions of other parts of the fiction - appropriately to whatever they're playing (the NPCs present, the environment, the nameless horrors scratching at the threshold of perception, etc). Look to the location card if you need inspiration!

During the scene, players can use these key phrases, adapted from Matthijs Holter's *Archipelago 3*:

'TRY A DIFFERENT WAY.'

You're put off by something another player just narrated. Rewind to before they said it, and they narrate something else. You can give more detail on what you wanted to be different.

'DESCRIBE THAT IN DETAIL.'

You want to hear more about what they just described. The narrating player goes into more depth, paying attention to sensory details.

'THAT MIGHT NOT BE SO EASY.'

You think the action a player character has been described as taking is beyond an average person. Unless they can justify it with a character ability or an Asset, they must back down as per 'Try a Different Way'.

'I'M LOOKING FOR INSIGHT.'

The focus character flips a faceup Insight token and asks the other players one question from:

- What threats are hidden here?
- Who's in charge here?
- What's most useful here?

Each other player can suggest an answer - focus character picks one to be true. A player can make good use of an answer from this to justify an action that was met with 'That might not be so easy'.

Step 6. The Inflection Point

To mark the scene reaching its climax, the focus player uses the key phrase **'I'VE REACHED A DECISION'**. They then choose one:

- **Progress:** Discard an asset card whose symbol matches an uncovered symbol on a Goal. Move an Insight token from the Doom track to cover the symbol on your Goal. The group continues narration, to show how the asset is sacrificed to answer the goal. Once done, the scene ends.
- **Acquisition:** Draw two Asset cards from the deck, and pick one. Put the other on the bottom of the deck. The group continues narration, to show how the focus character obtains the Asset. Once done, the scene ends.

Step 7: End the Scene

If all symbols on a Goal are covered: Narrate the goal's completion, but make sure to leave lingering threads in play. Put one of tokens on it in your personal pool, put one back on the Doom track, and give one to the player who was the most help in achieving the Goal.

If a row of the Doom track is now completely uncovered: read out the revealed omen. Each player narrates one vignette of the omen's impact on the town.

Then pass focus clockwise to the next player.

End Game

The game ends if:

- One player has completed all their goals.
- A token needs to be drawn from the Doom track but none are present.

Go round the table, narrating an epilogue for your character. Include a rise in status, surprising fortune or moment of joy for each complete Goal, and some significant misfortune, persecution or misery for each incomplete Goal.

Finally, decide what happens to the town. Did the Doom subside, and things return to normal? Was the town forever changed by the Doom, but carry on bearing its scars? Or did the Doom destroy this town, wipe out its people, even end the world? It's your choice.