

ANOMALY

A GAME ABOUT A SUPERNATURAL INVESTIGATION

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Version 12

What Is Anomaly?

Anomaly is a tabletop roleplaying game about a team of researchers investigating a supernatural anomaly. Key media touchstones for the genre are the SCP Foundation, The Magnus Archives, Warehouse 13, Control, Men in Black and the Concern from Friends at the Table. From a game design perspective, much of the inspiration comes from Avery Alder's game The Quiet Year.

What is a Tabletop Roleplaying Game?

There are many ways of thinking about roleplaying games. The one Anomaly subscribes to is that the game functions as the mediator in an act of collaborative storytelling- the goal of a game of Anomaly is not the success or victory of any player or group, but to tell an interesting story.

Game Supplies

To play the game you will need several six-sided dice, a deck of tarot cards, and a few pieces of paper.

Starting the Game

Though the story of each game of Anomaly will be different, there are a few features that will remain constant. There will be a supernatural anomaly, an organization that is aiming to study the anomaly, a team of researchers and operatives sent to the anomaly for this task, a community of people living supposedly unaware of the anomaly's presence in this area, and the location the whole thing takes place in. Before the game starts, it is best to discuss these aspects and what they will look like so everyone is on something of a same page as to what type of story is aiming to be told. At the same time, a large part of the game is learning more about these things, so don't get into too much detail.

Think about giving a broad genre for each of these things. **For example, the organization could be:**

- A shady extra-governmental task force
- A Secret Society
- A University's paranormal investigations department
- A cult
- A cyberpunk megacorporation
- An institute of witchcraft and wizardry

The Anomaly Could be:

- A building with strange properties
- A cursed machine
- A piece of super advanced technology
- A broken piece of reality
- A strange creature

A Setting could be:

- A farming village
- A bustling city
- A military compound
- A planet and it's government
- A suburban neighborhood

All of these things are different, and will affect what the game looks like, but are still broad enough that they can be explored in play, while still sticking to the basic concept of the game's genre.

Safety Procedures

Anomaly is a horror game. This means, by its nature, the game will often contain disturbing imagery and content. Because of this, before you start the game, it is good to think about any content that you don't want to include in the game, and discuss it with the table. Nobody should need to justify why they don't want something to appear.

If during play, someone wants something another player suggests taken off the table, do it. You'll be able to come up with something else to replace it that won't make anyone at the table uncomfortable.

Action Draft

Once the basics are decided, take turns taking one of each action type (see the chart below). This further helps define the games starting scenario. Projects created during this phase do not advance until normal gameplay has commenced. Once this is finished, the regular cycle of the game begins.

Playing the game

Anomaly doesn't have any player characters; when playing the game, you primarily represent the perspective of the team; they are the central characters of the story, but also feel free to bring in the perspectives of the organization, the community, the Anomaly, or anything else that comes up.

At the start of the game, very little about the situation you're in will be known. Because of this, you have extreme freedom in early turns. Don't hesitate to say something big about the state of the world, the nature of the Anomaly, or anything else in these early turns; making big decisions quickly will give the other players more to build on.

The game operates in turns, during which a single player makes decisions and describes their thought process. While thinking of and coming up with something fun and cool is important, don't second guess yourself- there will be plenty of time to build on ideas in future turns, and the game will drag if every decision takes several minutes.

During a Players turn, they do three things:

1. Resolve a card
2. Advance Projects
3. Take an action

1. Resolving a card

At the start of each players turn, they draw a card from a deck of tarot cards. Each card has questions associated with it. For example:

Five of Pentacles	The locals have a legend that might be connected to the anomaly. What is it?	How do the locals feel about outsiders?
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If there are two questions, the player answers one of them, their choice, and the other is ignored.

Note that the availability of something as an action does not suggest you shouldn't be doing these things as part of answering questions. If the answer to a question endangers something, that is normal. If you have an idea for a character as part of the answer to a question, define that character, there's no need to wait for an "Introduce A Character" Action. The actions exist to add additional details and give a chance to use ideas, not to be the sole source of new characters or objects.

2. Advancing projects

Advance all project dice by one, narrating the results of any projects that tick down to zero. See Projects for more detail.

3. Taking an action

After advancing projects, the player then takes an action. On any turn, a player may start a project (See projects for more detail), hold a team meeting, or take an action based on the suit of the card they drew

Suit	Action Type
Pentacles	Introduce a Character
Swords	Secure or Endanger Something
Cups	Acquire or Lose Something
Wands	Add a Fact About Something
Major Arcana	Anomalous Action
Always	Start a Project
Always	Team Meeting

Introduce a character

Introduce a new character to the narrative. This can be creating someone entirely new, or adding details and motivation to someone who was previously an unnamed background character. After this action, people at the table should know who this person is and what their

deal is. Don't keep secrets- in this type of game, someone who's goal is mysterious is fine, but if you say that, be prepared for another player to have a good idea and do their own reveal.

Secure or Endanger Something

Either something that is at risk is removed from risk to some degree, or something not endangered is put into danger. Protecting something can help stop something interesting from being destroyed and allow it to be built on, or prevent outcomes that aren't interesting to you, while putting something in danger can create interesting conflict and set the story down a new path. In either case, discuss how this happens, and the consequences thereof. You can secure or endanger more than just the physical; something like "Trust" might be a fun thing to put in danger. Also, keep in mind sometimes protecting one thing might endanger another.

Acquire or lose something

Add a new object or resource to the narrative. What is it, who has it, and what can it be used for? Alternatively, what object or resource does someone not have, and why do they need it? Use this to create the potential for new interesting situations based around the object or resource, or the need for it.

Add a fact about something

Take any detail that's been discussed, and add something to make it more interesting. Use this action to bring spotlight to something you thought was interesting and add more to that conversation.

Anomalous Action

The Anomaly does something weird. Is it dangerous? Is it disruptive? Does it follow with what the Anomaly has been seen doing before? Use this to bring focus to the Anomaly and what it does, and push its story in an interesting direction.

Projects-

Projects are events that take multiple turns. They can be an effort to build something, destroy something, or take other actions that are too large in scale to be interestingly done quickly. Projects don't have to be tasks the team is undertaking: They can be from the community, any other person of significance, or even something the Anomaly is doing on a longer time scale. Choose a number between one and six when you start a project. This is how many turns it will take to complete. Place a dice to represent the project with the chosen number upwards. When projects advance, tick the die down. When it would go to zero, the player who started the project explains how it went in the end. Feel free to adjust the die when something happens that seems like it would affect how long it would take.

Team Meeting:

The team discusses something. Pose a question from the point of view of someone in the team, or a statement/order from someone in the organization. Each person responds, representing the perspective of another part of the team or organization, ending again with the person who posed the question.

Recording the Game

It isn't essential, but I recommend keeping a written record of what happens during the game. This will make it easier to go back during play and remind yourself what has happened, allowing you to pick up loose threads and events that haven't been followed up on and work them back into the narrative. Writing a single sentence to keep track of what was done each turn, as well as a list of characters and assets, will make keeping the narrative going much easier.

Accelerated Play:

A normal game of Anomaly takes between two and four hours. If you need to play in less time than that, my recommendation is to play as normally, but only take actions if you have an idea immediately. While actions are very useful and interesting, it can sometimes take a while to come up with a good one. If you're playing this way, I recommend focusing mainly on projects when you do take actions, as they are the action that most quickly directs the action of the game towards the conclusion.

Ending the Game:

The game ends when the team is no longer investigating the Anomaly. This could be because they found everything they were looking for, they abandoned their quest, the community turned against them and forced them out, or was destroyed and they had to flee. Feel free to discuss as a group what happened to the characters afterwards, but at this point their story no longer can be told with the game itself.

A game of anomaly typically lasts between two and four hours. A game will often naturally lead itself towards conclusion, but to help it get there, consider taking the more dramatic option when possible. For example: When drawing a major arcana, do the scarier thing that pops into your head. Start projects that will make big changes to the status quo and use projects from the point of view of the anomaly to create problems that need to be addressed to drive the story forward.

Card	
The Fool	A previous conclusion about the Anomaly is proven catastrophically wrong. What is it? What happens?
The Magician	Someone is discovered actively using the powers of the Anomaly for their own ends. Who? How did they discover this power?
The High Priestess	Those that Worship the anomaly take violent action against the team. What is lost in the attack?
The Empress	A second Anomaly is found, seemingly created by the first. How and why did this happen?
The Emperor	Another organization is acting on behalf of the Anomaly. Who are they? Why are they doing this?
The Hierophant	The Anomaly seized control of something the team was relying on. What can they no longer accomplish? What foolish risk could mitigate this?
The Lovers	One of the members of the team betrays them to defend the anomaly. Why? What personal consequences does this have for the rest of the team?
The Chariot	All the hard work the team is undertaking is undone. All Projects fail. What caused this setback?
Strength	The Anomaly displays raw power previously unseen. What does this demonstration of supernatural power look like?
The Hermit	How has the Anomaly stayed hidden all this time? What could this imply for where the team still hasn't seen its effects?
Wheel of Fortune	The Anomaly baffles all predictions. Roll All Project Dice. If there are no projects, everyone at the table starts a project.
Justice	The Anomaly punishes someone brutally for their crimes, which were previously unknown. Who were they? What did they do, and how does the punishment fit the crime?
The Hanged Man	The Anomaly demands a sacrifice, or it will create a terrible calamity. Does the team make the sacrifice? What is the cost they pay for their decision?
Death	The Anomaly kills a member of the team, suddenly, and quietly. Who finds the body? What do they do?
Temperance	A calming energy resides over the region. What conflicts are halted by this? What urgent matters are neglected?
The Devil	The anomaly ensnares a member of the team. Their death is assured, but they manage to leave a cryptic clue to save others. What is their warning, and what form does it take.

The Tower	Something critical is destroyed utterly. What is it? How does the team/community react?	
The Star	A previous victory in containing the anomaly is undone. Who is in danger as a result?	
The Moon	Something mundane is revealed to be another aspect of the Anomaly. How was this discovered, and how does it make the situation more perilous?	
The Sun	The Anomaly is responsible for some amount of prosperity in the local community. What is it, and what will the consequences of containing the anomaly be on those that benefit?	
Judgement	A conspiracy, centuries in the making, is uncovered. What role does the Anomaly play in it?	
The World	The Anomaly is found to be far more far reaching in its effects than the team feared. Just how big a scale is it?	
King of Cups	Someone powerful promises their support. Who are they? What is their agenda? What help could they provide?	Someone powerful promises their support. How could they help? What do they demand in return?
Queen of Cups	Someone discovers that the records of what supplies are in storage don't match what's actually there. What's missing?	Something is found in storage that shouldn't be there. What is it? Why is this worrying?
Knight of Cups	Someone on the team has stolen something. What? Why?	Someone on the team has found a way to use the anomaly for profit. What sort of profit? Is this safe?
Page of Cups	The team finds a way to accomplish something critically important, if they can get the community's help. What do they need to give up to secure this?	The team starts to recruit menial labour from the community. How much do they learn, and how does the team try to keep their secrets?
Ten of Cups	A member of the team is badly injured while researching the anomaly. How serious is the injury? How will the team manage without them?	A danger from the anomaly is found, and a costly solution is presented. What is the danger, and what costs must be paid to prevent it?
Nine of Cups	What's the scientific equipment the team uses like? Acquire it as an Asset	What does the team use to communicate with each other?
Eight of Cups	Who in the organization is overseeing the team? What is that relationship like?	Do the team ever return to the organization? What do they do then?
Seven of Cups	What relationships within the team create problematic conflicts?	Are any members of the team in romantic relationships?
Six of Cups	How does the team get supplies? Why is this a risk?	How much business does the team do with the community? What does this look like?

Five of Cups	A project fails , and the organization demands answers. Who takes the blame, and what really happened?	The organization pulls critical support. What does the team no longer have the resources to do?
Four of Cups	A shipment of supplies arrives from the organization, bearing something urgently needed. What problem can now be solved?	The team figures out how to make something they need from local supplies. What is it? How good is this makeshift solution?
Three of Cups	How are members of the team paid for their work?	What personal luxuries do members of the team not have access to?
Two of Cups	What does the team eat? Who is unhappy with this?	What does the community eat? How different is this from the team's diet?
Ace of Cups	What basic supplies does the team lack?	What useless supply does the team have an overabundance of?
King of Swords	Who has the chief position of authority in the team? Who is resentful of this?	Who has the chief position of authority in the team? Why aren't they qualified for the responsibility?
Queen of Swords	Someone makes a big mistake. How are they punished?	Someone makes a big mistake. How do they cover it up, and what problems does this cause?
Knight of Swords	Someone seizes an opportunity and takes a place of power in the community. How does the team think the anomaly was involved, and why does this worry them?	Someone seizes an opportunity, accomplishing something incredible despite the risks. What did they accomplish, and who was endangered to do it?
Page of Swords	Someone new joins the team. Where were they sent from, and what's their agenda?	Someone new joins the team. What must be neglected to train them?
Ten of Swords	A conflict amongst the team leads to bloodshed. Who is injured? Who is bitter about the resolution?	A conflict among the team leads to division. What are the sides on this conflict, and what problems does this failure in cooperation cause?
Nine of Swords	A member of the team in a position of power is acting paranoid. What are they worried about, and what poor decisions have they made as a result?	A member of the team is acting paranoid. What are they worried about, and how does this isolate them from the rest of the team?
Eight of Swords	Someone challenges the organizations authority, causing conflict. What's making them go against their superiors.	The organization pulls back an important member of the team to the headquarters. How does the team handle this sudden departure?
Seven of Swords	How does the team treat authority? Are they respectful, or resentful?	How do members of the team treat those they have power over?
Six of Swords	Do the team have any weapons? How are they stored? Who can use them?	How does the team handle injuries within the team? What do they do when someone outside the team is hurt by the anomaly?

Five of Swords	What principles do all the members of the team share?	What do members of the team do together to pass time?
Four of Swords	Who on the team are long-time friends? What is their relationship like?	Who on the team are bitter rivals? What is their relationship like?
Three of Swords	The Team has an insider in the community. Why is this person helping?	Someone in the team is stealing resources. What do they need it for? How are they hiding this?
Two of Swords	What are the basic rules the team operates by?	What is the punishment for breaking procedure?
Ace of Swords	A helpful suggestion is made by someone inexperienced. What is it, and how do others react?	Someone with authority has embarrassed themselves. What did they do?
King of Wands	The Organization sends another team, who hide key information from the existing researchers. What have they found, and why don't they want the others to know?	The team hides a key finding from the organization. What information is too dangerous for the organization to know? Who is unhappy about keeping this secret?
Queen of Wands	An Avenue of research just isn't working out. What is it? Why do the researchers decide to give it up	The researchers become frenzied working on a new breakthrough, working long nights and ignoring their health to find out more. What's worked them into such a frenzy?
Knight of Wands	A researcher has an extremely Dangerous but rewarding plan. Advance all projects, then take two Anomalous Actions. (Take another action as normal)	A research plan is scrapped for being too dangerous. Advance no projects this turn, and don't take an action.
Page of Wands	What sort of expertise is lacking in the team? How is this frustrating?	What are the teams specialities? What advantages does this have?
Ten of Wands	What faults in the teams equipment impede research?	What does the team do to avoid overworking themselves?
Nine of Wands	The team discovers a valuable practical use of the anomaly. What is it, and what does the organization want to use it for?	The team finds something that will help contain the anomaly. Who discovers it? Acquire it as an asset
Eight of Wands	A member of the team finds a connection to a previous anomaly the organization has contained. Why does this discovery lead them to quit the team?	A new member of the organization joins the team, saying they believe there is a connection to another anomaly they have worked on. What else aren't they telling the team yet?

Seven of Wands	A breakthrough is made, greatly advancing research. What great cost did this breakthrough come at?	The team decides to forgo a promising experiment due to ethical concerns. Who within the team argues for this? Against it?
Six of Wands	What's the most enjoyable part of researching the anomaly?	What's the most unpleasant part of researching the anomaly?
Five of Wands	A new behaviour of the anomaly is found and quickly studied. What allows the team to understand it so quickly?	A previously ignored data-point is finally connected in context. What unrelated events are proved inexorably linked?
Four of Wands	A report comes in from the organization, heavily redacted. What don't they want the team to know?	A report comes in from the organization, bearing bad news. What about the information terrifies the team?
Three of Wands	A member of the team suggests safety precautions. What setbacks will be caused by playing it safe?	A member of the team suggests safety precautions. What goes wrong because they aren't followed?
Two of Wands	An expert among the team makes a startling discovery. What's the discovery? What's their area of expertise?	The anomaly is defying conventional testing. How? What can the team learn from this?
Ace of Wands	What does the team think about the organization?	What special training does the team have as agents of the organization?
King of Pentacles	What groups or individual people have power in the area?	What costly endeavour could the team take to earn the locals trust?
Queen of Pentacles	The team discovers an event they assumed was supernatural was the work of the mundane. Why is this scarier?	The team discovers a lie told to hide the anomaly. What is it?
Knight of Pentacles	The team discovers a relevant event in the community's history that appears to involve the anomaly. What is it?	The team discovers when the anomaly first appeared in this area. How long has it been here?
Page of Pentacles	How populated is the area? Does this pose a problem in any way?	What is the wildlife in the area like? How are they affected by the anomaly?
Ten of Pentacles	Someone is found, miraculously having survived a previously assumed death. Who? How did they survive?	The organization sends much needed supplies and back up. What do they send? How does this avert disaster?
Nine of Pentacles	Something just feels wrong about this place. What?	Something about this place puts people at ease. What?
Eight of Pentacles	A conflict erupts between the team and the locals. What is it? What sacrifices does the team have to make to settle the conflict?	Another outsider arrives, their goals mysterious. Why does the team think they might have their eyes on the anomaly too? What makes this individual a possible threat to the team?

<u>Seven of Pentacles</u>	The Anomaly is actively corrupting something in the local environment. What is it? Who notices?	A member of the team makes a friend with a local. Who are they? What do they bond over?
<u>Six of Pentacles</u>	What's the weather like in the area? How does this effect the team's research?	What unusual local phenomenon first brought the area to the organizations attention?
<u>Five of Pentacles</u>	The locals have a legend that might be connected to the anomaly. What is it?	How do the locals feel about outsiders?
<u>Four of Pentacles</u>	What's a unique geographical feature of the area?	How does the anomaly impede movement around the area?
<u>Three of Pentacles</u>	A local has been killed by the anomaly. How? How does the community react to their death?	A local has been killed by the anomaly. How? How does the team cover up the death to better investigate? Introduce a Character who wants to find the truth.
<u>Two of Pentacles</u>	An Inquisitive Local is looking into the team's investigation. How does the team prevent her from discovering the truth?	An inquisitive local has discovered the secret but wants to help the team. What is their motivation? Does the team let them join?
<u>Ace of Pentacles</u>	There's a local population in this area, blissfully unaware of the anomaly but on the brink of disaster. How are they unaware? How might this devastatingly change?	There's a local population in the area, unknowingly benefitting from the anomaly in some way. How? How might this cause problems for the team?