

UNCANNY ECHO

SERIALIZED ROLEPLAYING



ISSUE 0

WHAT THIS IS

Uncanny Echo is a serialized roleplaying game. It is based in part on the Apocalypse World engine created by D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker. Games using elements of the Apocalypse World engine are often referred to as Powered by the Apocalypse (PbtA)

Uncanny Echo's aim is to have small, contained stories rooted in mysterious or eerie events that unravel with each issue. Something somewhat normal becomes something else: surreal, unearthly... uncanny.

In this Issue, the story will be about a bank robbery, and is based very loosely on the movie *The Town*, with a twist: not all vaults are meant to contain money. What this one holds is up to you and the other players.

You'll use a stripped-down version of Apocalypse World engine to play this one specific event. Next month will be a different experience within the same game world. With each issue you'll discover how each event relates to the one before it—a process largely determined by you. Each one shot will be as pick-up-and-play as possible, within a system you already know, the goal being to form an ongoing serialized narrative that has a meta-narrative external from any given session. The story unfolds in an emergent manner.

These one shots will sometimes be directly connected to the next issue; other times you will decide how they fit together. They may simulate jump cuts to unrelated events, returning later to the circumstances in previous months just as a movie or TV show would from scene to scene or episode to episode. As more are released, you may choose to play them in whatever order you choose.

Within these modular experiences, each game will differ greatly with player input. Each uncanny story is of your own making. You to play to find out what happens with as little cognitive load as possible.



CHANGING THE GAME

You still use stats with modifiers as in most PbtA games. Each stat line is embedded in each playbook for you. Roll two six-sided dice plus the modifier, as normal.

However, since each game is meant to be a one shot, instead of XP or experience, you will instead have a list of Keys on your playbook. When you hit a Key in the fiction, that is you describe your character doing something described in said Key, you will be able to take another playbook move.

Each Key is roughly narratively joined to the pacing of the game, acting as a guidepost. When you have all your moves (or all the ones you want to use) it is time to corral the story to a conclusion.

Drive your characters like stolen cars. Remember: there is a larger fiction at work beyond this one story allowing you the freedom to envision circumstances in which this one character you embody now is someone you will return to, or perhaps someone you will never play again.





ISSUE

ZERO

THE HEIST

Ordinary folks doing things “regular” people would never dream of doing.

In *The Town*, mundane people with everyday problems are bank robbers—for a living. Is this a desperate action? Are they addicted to the thrill? Are they being manipulated? A taste of this story with the uncanny is what we are after.

In Issue 0 of *Uncanny Echo*, you’ll play people who are robbing a bank; playing to find out who they are, why they are doing this, and how well they execute their plan.

You’ll also be infusing the story with a sense of peculiarity, mystery, or surrealism. Dependent on what you feel you want your story and series to have. Make sure everyone at the table puts forth ideas of what this could be, including the person running the game.

In this way, the uncanny will become an emergent character in your story, one in which everyone has a say in creating

THE SETUP

First things first. You need to plan the robbery using the following procedure. Then, you're going to choose your playbook (if you are a player), make your Player Character (PC), and finally, use the first Key on your playbook to do a vignette to get the story started. After that, follow the fiction and your Keys to reach a conclusion. It's that simple.

As a group, search for banks or cool buildings Online (or however you like) and pick out ones you like the most. It can be for any reason. If you can see pictures of the inside, too, all the better to help plan the following.

Draw two Clocks, each with six segments. Label the first one "Job." In the last segment of the Clock write "Vault." Then, in the first three segments work together to write in three obstacles (security guards, surveillance, recordings, a panic alarm, armed customers—anything leading up to getting what it is you're after). These are the obstacles you know about; you will need to overcome each one. Next, tie each obstacle to a room within the bank. Everyone then adds a detail about this room, creating a clear mental picture of it for everyone. When you fill in the last segment of the Clock, bypassing the vault, you trigger the "Get The Goods" move. The undefined segments are for the MC; they have obstacles show up during play that you must deal with, too.

Label the other Clock "Heat." In the last segment of that Clock write "Out Of Time." This is the time you have until the police arrive. Whenever you roll the dice and it comes up a miss, the MC may fill in a segment of this Clock, as deemed appropriate by them at the time: soft moves, hard moves, Golden Opportunities, etc.

THE QUESTIONS

As in the format of adventure starters in The Gauntlet's monthly zine, Codex, some of the fiction should be devoted to evocative questions about the specific scenarios, circumstances, or locations. Choose from any of the following questions to answer, or pose some of your own.

1) **What kind of uncanny are you going for? Dark, gritty, intense, scary, etc.**

2) If you choose to have a short establishing shot of the city, what about it does the audience see that makes it *feel* like this is a living, breathing entity in it's own right.

3) What time of the day are you robbing the bank and why?

4) What inside the bank does the audience see (and the characters do not) as mundane at first, but is actually bizarre upon further scrutiny? Note: There is an ongoing Basic Move in order to remind you to be peppering uncanny details in throughout the game, as well.

5) There is something strange about the customers that frequent the bank. What is it?

6) There are stories of peculiar things happening in or around the vault of the bank. What have you heard? Urban legends, rumors, etc.

7) When you have a flashback during the bank robbery, hitting a Key, how does the audience watching this know this is a flashback? Is it in monotone, does the color pallet shift, are there auditory cues?

THE ARCHITECT

Name: Theo, Sylvia, Doug, Kace, Cybil, _____
Look: Townie, Socialite, Blue Collar, _____
Mask: Nun, Monster, President, Pop Idol, _____
Ethnicity: Asian or South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic/
Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____
Demeanor: Secretive, Friendly, Soothing, _____
Gender Identity: _____

You have: 1 Handgun (2 Harm Close reload), Zip Ties, a Radio, and a Bullet-Proof Vest.

KEYS

When you do the following in the fiction, you hit a Key.
When this happens you unlock any playbook move of your choosing.

- Flashback before entering the bank that explains your motivations for robbing it and what was surreal about how you obtained the job in the first place.
- Flashback about a mundane event that turned uncanny.
- Go out of your way to deescalate a situation.
- Help someone else with an obstacle.

MOVES

- **Wheel House:** When you Take Stock, you always roll 3 dice instead of 2, then use the highest 2 to get your total.
- **Clock Work:** Whenever you Take Stock the MC will also tell you how many segments of the Heat Clock are filled in.
- **The Smart Thing:** When you Put The Screws To Someone, you can do so by using reason, logic, or empathy instead.

SAVVY

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STEADY

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THE TRIGGER

Name: Ayo, Martina, Christobal, Leon, Jem, _____

Look: Townie, Socialite, Blue Collar, _____

Mask: Nun, Monster, President, Pop Idol, _____

Ethnicity: Asian or South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic/
Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____

Demeanor: On-edge, Intense, Egotistical, _____

Gender Identity: _____

You have: 1 Uzi (3 Harm area Close reload loud), Concealing clothes, a Radio, and a Bullet-Proof Vest.

KEYS

When you do the following in the fiction, you hit a Key. When this happens you unlock any playbook move of your choosing.

- Flashback before entering the bank that explains your motivations for robbing it and what was surreal about how you obtained the job in the first place.
- Flashback about a mundane event that turned uncanny.
- Go out of your way in order to escalate a situation.
- Take on an obstacle head on, by yourself.

MOVES

- **Not To Be Fucked With:** When you Put The Screws To Someone, you always roll 3 dice instead of 2, then use the highest 2 to get your total.
- **No Hesitation:** When you Get It Done, you can bump it up to a 7-9 if you miss a roll, but the MC considers it a Golden Opportunity if you do so.
- **I've Got This:** No one can Intervene in a roll you are making without your express permission.

SAVVY

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THE LOOKOUT

Name: Antonella, Kavya, Pablo, Fynn, Mateo, _____

Look: Townie, Socialite, Blue Collar, _____

Mask: Nun, Monster, President, Pop Idol, _____

Ethnicity: Asian or South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic/
Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____

Demeanor: Skittish, Empathetic, Confusing, _____

Gender Identity: _____

You have: 1 concealed weapon (2 Harm Close reload), A
backup change of clothes, a Radio, and a Bullet-Proof Vest.

KEYS

When you do the following in the fiction, you hit a Key.
When this happens you unlock any playbook move of your
choosing.

- Flashback before entering the bank that explains your motivations for robbing it and what was surreal about how you obtained the job in the first place.
- Flashback about a mundane event that turned uncanny.
- Stop the Heat Clock from increasing.
- Help to eliminate an obstacle by Taking Stock.

MOVES

- **Eagle Eye:** When you Take Stock roll an extra die, and the result comes from the highest two.
- **One Of Us:** When you use your radio for subterfuge in order to stop the Heat Clock from increasing, roll+Savvy. On a hit the MC reduces the Heat Clock by 1.
- **Miss Me:** Whensoever the Heat Clock is filled, the MC tells you first, then asks you what you do next in the fiction before anything or anyone else can act.

SAVVY

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STEADY

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THE TECHIE

Name: Felix, Ahmet, Pari, Kubra, Catalina, _____
Look: Townie, Socialite, Blue Collar, _____
Mask: Nun, Monster, President, Pop Idol, _____
Ethnicity: Asian or South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic/
Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____
Demeanor: Know-it-all, Thoughtful, Awkward, _____
Gender Identity: _____
You have: 1 Handgun (2 Harm Close reload), Any kind of
tech you want, a Radio, and a Bullet-Proof Vest.

KEYS

When you do the following in the fiction, you hit a Key.
When this happens you unlock any playbook move of your
choosing.

- Flashback before entering the bank that explains your motivations for robbing it and what was surreal about how you obtained the job in the first place.
- Flashback about a mundane event that turned uncanny.
- Eliminate an obstacle with technology.
- Reduce Heat by re-purposing technology.

MOVES

- **Mess With The Best:** When you use technology to do what you want, tell the MC what the ideal outcome is and roll+Savvy. On a 10+, you do it. On a 7-9, you gain Heat, it complicates another situation, or there is a hard choice.
- **All Your Base:** When you Take Stock, then use technology to overcome the obstacle, take +1 Forward (it stacks).
- **Intimate Details:** When you Put The Screws To Someone, tell them detail(s) about their life you know (Their address, spouse, family, etc.) and then take +1 Forward to the roll.

SAVVY

STEADY

RESOLUTE

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BASIC MOVES

WEAVE IN THE UNCANNY: Whenever a scene is described, by you or someone else, tell the table what you can see in it that is surreal, uncanny, or mysterious. Use this as fodder for later in the Get The Goods move.

GET IT DONE : When you do something that requires you to keep your shit together—in order to get it done correctly, swiftly, or precisely, roll+Steady. On a 10+, you do it, no problem. On a 7-9, you hesitate or flinch due to an unforeseen circumstance, it takes longer than you thought, or there is a cost or complication in the doing.

TAKE STOCK: When you size up an obstacle in order to bypass it, roll+Savvy. On a 10+, the MC will tell you its weakness(es) and you take +1 Forward when using this information. On a 7-9, the MC tells you a weakness—except the information is vague or incomplete.

PUT THE SCREWS TO SOMEONE: When you get someone to do what you need by telling them what you want and what you will do if you do not get it, verbally or physically, roll+Resolute. On a 10+, they either do what you say or else make you carry out your threat. On a 7-9, in addition to those choices they can also choose 1 from the following:

- Tell you something or give you something they think you want to know.
- Do what you say, then attempt to signal for help.
- Cause a scene.
- Run.

INTERVENE: When you help someone out or try to stop them from doing something, roll+Steady. If you're helping, they use your highest die roll and remove their lowest—after they roll. If you're not helping, instead swap your lowest die for their highest. The result implicates you both now.

PERIPHERAL MOVES

TAKE THE PAIN: When you take Harm, mark the number of boxes as Harm you took established in the fiction, then roll+Harm suffered.

On a 7-9, the MC tells you how the situation is worse than it originally seemed. Choose: you're hurt worse than you initially thought; the vest didn't catch the bullet; you panic, you drop something, the Heat grows closer, or your vest worked this once...but is now useless.

On a 10+, mark Harm as established, the vest didn't catch it and it is also now useless.

Whensoever you mark the fifth Harm box, you're dead.

GET THE GOODS: When you mark all the segments of the Job Clock and enter the vault, roll+Steady. Everyone tells the MC how what they were sent to steal is mysterious, surreal, or uncanny. On a hit, the MC may tell you how it is similar, the same, or an approximation or let your description stand. On a miss, the MC will tell you how it's worse than what you thought, now or later.

ESCAPE: When you leave the scene of the crime with the Heat on you, tell the MC what the escape plan is and then roll+the number of segments left on the Heat Clock. This will be the last scene in the game; if all the segments are filled in already, the MC treats the roll like a 10+.

On a miss, no one's the wiser and you're out of there.

On a 6-9, there is a standoff, you're being followed, or a cost or complication happens—right now.

On a 10+, the MC treats the result like they Put The Screws To Someone, and that someone is *you*. They tell you what the authorities do if you don't do something they want you to. You can either do what they say...or make them carry out their threat, your choice.

END THE SESSION: When the game is over (after the final escape scene or if the PCs leave without rolling Escape (your call), mark down the number of unfilled segments in the Heat Clock, as well as what was stolen from the vault for use with later issues of Uncanny Echo.

Think of the end of this game as a jump cut in a movie. Whether the issue that follows or the one you choose next to play is directly linked to this one or not, this last scene should end with some unresolved dramatic tension.

AGENDA

Above all else, behind every Principle and move you do, you need to make this Agenda the root of it all:

- During Flashbacks, root their lives in the mundane. During the robbery, root it in danger.
- Discover the kind of mystery, tone, and uncanny the players want for the game and series of games that follow.
- Forge a self contained story about these individuals that ends with a cliffhanger and leaves questions unanswered.
- Play to find out what happens.

PRINCIPLES

Your best practices for this fiction are as follows:

- Every now and then, make the mundane uncanny.
- Make it feel real, make it personal (if the player opens that door).
- Address the player character, not the player.
- Centralize the fiction on them.
- Name everyone.
- Linger on details; when you have the time to do so.
- Ask questions of the players and then incorporate the details.
- Give them a chance to think.
- Spotlight all the players.
- Show your moves through the fiction, do not speak them.

ALWAYS SAY

Like all Powered by the Apocalypse games, *Uncanny Echo* runs best when you keep your Agenda and your Principles in mind when you're making your moves—both soft moves and hard ones.

- ...what the Principles demand.
- ...what your Agenda demands of you.
- ...what the consequences and risks are.
- ...what honesty demands.

MC MOVES

When a miss is rolled, when you tell them the consequences and they act anyways (a Golden Opportunity), or when they look to you to see what happens next, you make a move.

- Tell them the possible consequences and ask what they do next.
- Foreshadow something bad coming in the fiction; now, or later.
- Offer an opportunity, with or without strings attached.
- Separate them.
- Inflict Harm or trade it, as established in the fiction.
- Put someone in a tough situation.
- Turn one of their own moves back on them.
- Take something away from them.
- Showcase consequences that affect the people they care about or the innocents around them effected by their actions.
- Twist something mundane into the uncanny.
- Make a small problem a big one.

PATREON

If you like this product, consider helping me out on Patreon, without which this project wouldn't exist. You can find an actual play ongoing podcast exclusive to subscribers there. Myself and other folks of the Gauntlet gaming community help playtest each issue. Find out how our own story is unfolding and how it differs from yours!

I also have a blog, Consuming Cyberpunk, where I review and talk about the genre. Lastly, I also edit other podcasts—if you are looking for an individual to provide those services, contact me!

If you want to support me in any or all of these things, simply click the logo below and become my patron. Hope to see you around soon!

The image shows the Patreon logo, which consists of the word "PATREON" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, centered within a solid red rectangular background. To the right of the word, there is a vertical white bar of the same height as the letters, which is a distinctive part of the logo's design.

PATREON

CREDITS

This product and other Powered by the Apocalypse games are iterations of *Apocalypse World*, which is a product of D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker. Both of which have a Patreon of their own. Click on either name in order to be taken to each of theirs, respectively.

This game and all of my games are always played as the wonderful Gauntlet Gaming Community. Come game! The community is always looking for more people to both run games as well as more players. They produce their own zine: Codex, too! It features terrific content every month, with a professional layout designer and fantastic art.

Layout, Design, Writing: Fraser Simons

Art: George Cotronis & Shutterstock

Developmental Editing: Jason Cordova

Special thanks to: Yoshi, Lauren, Ellen, and Lu for helping me playtest this issue, couldn't have done it without you all!!



