

UNCANNY ECHO



SERIALIZED
ROLEPLAYING
ISSUE 1

WHAT THIS IS

Uncanny Echo is a serialized roleplaying game. It borrows from part of 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 contains small, episodic stories rooted in mysterious or eerie events that unravel with each Issue. Something somewhat normal becomes something else: surreal, unearthly... uncanny.

Each Issue is a pick-up-and-play one shot, intended to form an ongoing serialized narrative that has a meta-narrative external from any given session. Within these modular experiences, each game will differ greatly with player input. Each uncanny story is of your own making, and unfolds in an emergent manner. You to play to find out what happens with as little cognitive load as possible.

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.

In Issue 0: The Heist (available for free), players robbed a bank, based very loosely on the movie *The Town*, with a twist: not all vaults are meant to contain money. What this bank vault kept secure is up to you and the other players.

This Issue connects to that story, exploring a specific uncanny event triggered by the bank heist. 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.

CHANGING THE GAME

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

However, instead of gaining XP or experience, you will instead advance your character using Keys in your playbook. Each Key prescribes specific actions or fiction for your character to play out in your game. When you describe these actions or fiction, you unlock a move in your playbook.

Each Key acts as a narrative guidepost to help pace your game. 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 single Issue. This one character you embody now might be someone you return to in a later Issue, or perhaps someone you will never play again. Either way, the story will move forward.

In Issue 0, you robbed a bank and possibly accrued some Heat. What was stolen from the vault is pertinent in this Issue, as well as the number of filled in segments from your Heat Clock.



ISSUE ONE

SUBURBIA

You play an eclectic sampling of folks living on the same street that find their lives upset what came out of the vault—the echo of that event finding their quiet, mundane little cul-de-sac.

Of course, the Home Owners Association would have you believe that your neighborhood isn't strange or extraordinary at all. Sure, there's Mrs. Henderson's exceptional rose garden, and Mr. Lee's occasional, fantastic soirées; but that is about as interesting as things get.

But you all know there is far more going on than the bake off next week.

As players, you'll work together to create an event; the echo of Issue 0.

You'll then explore the event's aftermath as the rest of the people on the block carry out their mundane lives. These once estranged neighbors will instead be sneaking about their lives to figure out just what is going on in Suburbia.

It's time to knock on their door and ask for more than a cup of sugar—if you want to get to the heart of this *Uncanny Echo*.

THE SETUP

Each player chooses a playbook and fills out the details to create their protagonist. Multiple playbooks may be chosen.

First, decide on where this event will take place as a group. It must be somewhere in the community.

Next, it's time to build the echo using one of two methods.

Either the MC shapes the echo for the group, describing something mundane that turns uncanny at this location. This will be tied to the events of Issue 0; either directly or tangentially in time. This connection could be by theme, motif, a natural extension or digression, etc.

Alternatively, the group builds the echo together. Everyone should pitch an idea before settling on the echo's features. If no one can think of something, try searching for unexplained events or photographs Online. Choose one in particular you all agree fits well with your event, theme, and tone.

After creating the echo, each player then describes how this event was vague or muddled for their character (It was too dark, they only saw it from a certain angle, they were hiding so they only saw a small portion of it; they remember details differently, they're in denial about a specific detail, etc.). Essentially, each character parses the experiences differently.

Lastly, everyone volunteers how they know everyone else's character also witnessed this event. It could be after the event or during; your choice, whatever you think would be most interesting. This knowledge connects this eclectic mix of people to lead an investigation into the strange, uncanny occurrence.

For the players to discover how and in what way this is an echo, you'll use two six-sided Clocks. Label the first Clock "Echo."

The Echo Clock represents a question the players want to answer about the echo. Each player should verbalize which part of the echo they want to explore before settling on the one question. As you discuss, consider how this question links to the events of Issue 0. This question will vary based on the nature of the original uncanny event, as well as what you ascribed the echo.

How is this related to the event at the vault? Or, is there more truth that you want uncovered about the echo itself? Why here, why now? Ascribe any one, single important question that all the players want answered to this Clock.

Similarly, the MC will make a Clock and label it "The Machination" to represent the threat. The MC will advance the Clock whenever a player rolls a miss, a Golden Opportunity is presented, or it otherwise feels appropriate for the events unfolding in the fiction. With each segment of this Clock filled in, there will be an obstruction to this truth the players are working toward. This obscurity can be anything pertaining to the question. Perhaps time is running out, or maybe there is an actual conspiracy underway, or the memory of the echo is fading. It is whatever you need it to be.

Whichever of these Clocks fills first "wins." If the players are successful, a truth is revealed. If The Machination is successful, the characters are unable to continue their investigation into the specified question regarding the echo.

Importantly, even if the players do fail, they still get an answer from the MC regarding the truth. The answer will, however, only approximate the truth.

The more segments marked in the Echo Clock, the clearer the answer. For instance, if all but one is marked; the players get most of the truth but one final detail or connection is withheld. The fewer segments marked, the more vague it becomes, or how much an untruth is integrated into the truth, it is at the MC's discretion. Perhaps it is a half truth, most of the truth, or but a shade of the truth, etc.

THE QUESTIONS

As in the format of adventure starters in The Gauntlet Codex, some of the fiction should be devoted to evocative questions about the specific scenario, circumstances, or location. Choose from any of the following questions to answer, or pose some of your own after character creation.

- 1) **What kind of uncanny are you going for? Dark, gritty, intense, scary, etc.**
- 2) One of your neighbors does something you find endearing or sweet and another does something you just cannot stand; what are they?
- 3) What rules are instituted and enforced in the community? Lights out by a certain time, noise restrictions, gardening restrictions, etc.
- 4) Is anyone acting strangely since the echo?
- 5) Are any of your characters from Issue 0? For example, does one of the bank robbers also live in the cul-de-sac, or perhaps a security guard?
- 6) Are there any local myths, legends, or superstitions that play into what occurred at the bank? If so, what are they?
- 7) In an aerial shot of the suburb, what makes it seem on camera that this place is extremely dull and mundane?
- 8) What does your house look like? How is it different than the others in the cul-de-sac? How is it the same?

THE KID

Name: Ara, Mia, Enzo, Constanza, Ewa, _____

Look: Glum, Popular, Jock, Emo, _____

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

Demeanor: Secretive, Friendly, Desperate, _____

Gender Identity: _____

You have: A Radio, Your Allowance, A Bike, and a Flashlight.

KEYS

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

- Describe a scene explaining your motivations for trying to get to the truth of the echo. Have more echoes occurred since?
- Sneak out to figure out what's going on by yourself.
- Get into a situation you know is dangerous.
- Tell an authority figure who doesn't believe you exactly what's happening around here once you've figured it out.

MOVES

- **Kid's Talk:** When you ask for information from someone your own age (or younger), roll+Wits. On a 10+, they tell you something useful. On a 7-9, they only tell you something interesting; it's on you to make it useful.
- **Night Owl:** When you sneak out, roll+Canny. On a 10+, you do it, no problem. On a 7-9, you have to leave something you need behind. The MC will tell you what it is—when you need it.
- **In The Thick Of It:** When you want to be in a scene that's way too dangerous, tell everyone where you're hiding and roll+Canny. On a 10+, nobody's the wiser. On a 7-9, you're hurt, discovered, or put in a spot afterward

WITS

2

BRAWN

-2

CANNY

1

HARM

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THE EX-COP

Name: Zofia, Oscar, Elzbieta, Maja, Isak, _____

Look: Trendy, Eccentric, Retro, Emo, _____

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

Demeanor: Gruff, Neighborly, Fake, _____

Gender Identity: _____

You have: A Cell Phone, a Wallet, a Car, a Flashlight, and a service weapon (2 Harm Close Reload), and a Badge (retired).

KEYS

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

- Describe a scene explaining your motivations for trying to get to the truth of the echo. Have more echoes occurred since?
- Downplay the severity of a situation someone else describes.
- Get someone else to play good-cop bad-cop with you.
- Tell someone about the worst case you ever worked while indulging in a vice you have (You Detail).

MOVES

○ **Old Favours:** When you tell someone you know on the job about that time you had their back in order to get information out of them, roll+Canny. On a 10+, they will give you a solid lead. On a 7-9, the lead is tenuous, clearly dangerous, or old.

○ **Cop Eyes:** Whenever someone lies and you are present, you know it—unless it's a Kid.

○ **Muscle Memory:** When you Turn To Violence with a gun, you roll three dice instead of two, then use the highest two to get the sum.

○ **Trust Me, OK?:** When you tell someone what they should do in a dangerous situation, they take +1 Forward if they listen to you.

WTS

-1

BRAWN

1

CANNY

1

HARM

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THE NOSY NEIGHBOR

Name: Emil, Zoey, Jorge, Veeti, Juho, _____

Look: Vibrant, Bohemian, Punk, Artsy, _____

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

Demeanor: Irritated, Empathetic, Considerate, _____

Gender Identity: _____

You have: The Neighborhood Watch, a Car, a Wallet, a Huge Flashlight, Everyone Phone Number & a Cell Phone.

KEYS

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

- Describe a scene explaining your motivations for trying to get to the truth of the echo. Have more echoes occurred since?
- Believe something far-fetched that someone tells you—except the Ex-Cop.
- Try and organize everyone into a neighborhood watch.
- Divulge private information about someone else to get more information from them.

MOVES

- **Eagle Eye:** Whenever something is happening within line of sight of your house, you know about it.
- **Outreach:** When someone tells you they will be in the neighborhood watch with you, no matter if they mean it or not, you can appear in any scene they are in. With or without clear explanation why.
- **Gossip Is Life:** When you call someone up and tell them the latest news in the cul-de-sac (You Detail) to get information you want, roll+Canny. On a 10+, they've heard a thing, and it's true. On a 7-9, there is a kernel of the truth in there, somewhere.

WITS

1

BRAWN

-2

CANNY

2

HARM

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THE CONSPIRACY THEORIST

Name: Frohike, Leevi, Birta, Sho, Ivan, _____
Look: Sparty, 70s, Gothic, Just No, _____
Ethnicity: Asian or South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____
Demeanor: Paranoid, Sleep-deprived, Sharp, _____
Gender Identity: _____
You have: A Sweet Computer Setup, a Cell Phone, a Wallet, a Huge Flashlight, a Gun (2 Harm Close Reload) and a GPS Tracker.

KEYS

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

- Describe a scene explaining your motivations for trying to get to the truth of the echo. Have more echoes occurred since?
- Plant your GPS tracker on something or someone.
- Detail a different strange event you know of after getting more information. Tied to this one in some way only you can parse.
- Protect someone else from being harmed.

MOVES

- **Hacker Extraordinaire:** When you use technology in order to get information you want, tell the MC what the ideal outcome is and roll+Canny. On a 10+, it happens. On a 7-9, it is incomplete, traced back to you, or puts someone in danger; now, or later.
- **Paranoid, Enough:** When someone enters your house they tell you a secret about themselves no one else knows. It must be found via the Internet. When you bring it up in order to Manipulate Someone, take +1 Forward.
- **Danger Zone:** When someone else tells you what information they have about the event, roll+Wits. On a hit, the MC will give you an extra detail people missed. They might ask you how you figured it out.

WITS

1

BRAWN

0

CANNY

1

HARM

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BASIC MOVES

For each segment of the Heat Clock that was filled in when playing Issue 0, the players gain a communal Hold pool. They may spend this Hold at any point during the game to increase a die result by +1, provided they tie the roll to something they could have heard about the robbers or the uncanny events in issue 0. Thereby creating a stronger connection between the two Issues.

BE BRAVE: When something happens to you or you do something that requires you to keep it together, roll+Wits. On a 10+, there is no problem or you do the thing, no worries. On a 7-9, you hesitate or flinch due to unforeseen circumstances, it takes longer than you thought, your flashlight stops working, or the situation simply gets worse.

MANIPULATE SOMEONE: When you have leverage on someone and manipulate them in order to get something you want, roll+Canny. On a 10+, they do it. On a 7-9, they do it, but they will also want something from you, right now. For PCs, if they agree to be manipulated they get 1 Hold, to spend it at any point to Help Or Hinder you at any time, across distance and boundaries.

TURN TO VIOLENCE: When you solve your problems with violence and can plausibly cause Harm to them, roll+Brawn. On a 10+, inflict Harm as established. On a 7-9, both of you inflict Harm as established.

CONNECT: When you attempt to truly understand and empathize with someone or something, roll+Wits. On a 10+, Hold 2. On a 7-9, Hold 1. Spend your Hold 1-for-1 to ask one of the following questions about the situation, person, or thing.

- What do you wish I'd do?
- How could I get you to ____?
- Is this going to get worse before it gets better?
- Are they telling the truth?
- What are they really feeling?

HELP OR HINDER: When you help someone they roll 3d6 instead of two and take the highest two to get the sum; if you Hinder them the same, except they use the lowest two.

PERIPHERAL MOVES

WEAVE IN THE UNCANNY: Whenever a scene is described, by you or someone else, tell the table what is occurring in the scene that is surreal, uncanny, or mysterious.

HOWDY, NEIGHBOR: When you decide to introduce a new NPC neighbor to the fiction, introduce them by name, look, and outlook.

BUILDING THE MYSTERY: When you find out information about what may be happening from the MC, tell them what you think might be happening in the suburb and then they will fill in one segment of a six-sided clock if you make progress toward the truth. When all six segments are filled in of either Clock, it's time to wrap up. How close they come to the truth is determined by the number of segments of the clock, detailed on page 7.

ENDING THE SESSION

When you discover the truth behind what is happening in the suburb, or a version of it, your session should naturally come to a close and an action must be taken to address the uncanny. Is it driven out, killed, finally understood? Remember, this is a facet of a larger narrative, the genesis of which is from the events in Issue 0. Do what you feel is most satisfying, resolving this particular uncanny echo, or leaving it unresolved. Use epilogues to show what becomes of these characters if it is resolved. Are things better, the same, worse?

Think of this ending as a jump cut in a movie. It's up to you whether the Issue that follows or the one you choose next to play is directly linked to this one or not, as this could be a contained story resounding from opening the vault. But it could also eventually tie into others. Since this is an emergent narrative, everyone at the table should do what they find most interesting for their own unfolding story in your fiction.

These Issues are starters, so slot them into your world and your fiction as needed to unravel the echoes of the uncanny.

AGENDA

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

- Make the suburb feel fake, artificial, and manufactured.
- Discover the kind of tone and kind of uncanny the players want.
- Forge a self contained story about these individuals that ends with a cliffhanger and leaves questions unanswered.
- Play to find out how the echo is tied to the vault, along with the players.

PRINCIPLES

Your best practices for this fiction are as follows:

- Make the echo feel real and their lives feel false.
- Make people or the community feel villainous.
- 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

You make a Move 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.

- Make an ordinary activity or event uncanny.
 - Make something safe seem fake, scary, or threatening.
 - Advance The Machination Clock and show it in the fiction.
 - 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.
 - Twist something mundane into the uncanny.
 - Make a small problem a big one.
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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 of myself and other folks of The Gauntlet Gaming Community playtesting each Issue every month. Find out how our story unfolds, and how it differs from yours!

I also have a blog, Consuming Cyberpunk, where I review and talk about all things cyberpunk (go figure). Additionally, I also edit other podcasts—if you are looking for an individual to provide those services, contact me!

Finally, if you want to support me in any or all of these things, simply click the logo below and become a patron. It would mean a lot to me if you did, 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 text, there is a vertical white bar that is part of the logo's design.

PATREON

CREDITS

This product and other Powered by the Apocalypse games are hacks of Apocalypse World, which is a product by D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker—both of whom have a Patreon of their own. Click on their names in order to be taken to each of theirs, respectively.

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

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