

UNCANNY ECHO

SERIALIZED ROLEPLAYING



ISSUE 2: TAKERS

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.

Each 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 1: Suburbia, you played a group of neighbors that experienced an Uncanny Echo. You used a Clock to track how much of the truth you uncovered for a specific question you detailed about this Echo. In this issue, you'll be integrating the same Clock—specifically how many segments were marked—into this scenario. You'll be “taking” the truth that was unearthed; working to obliterate these segments, as well as anything pertaining to the Echo itself.





TAKERS

ISSUE
TWO

Most of us find the human mind difficult to comprehend. We still don't truly understand why we sleep and why we dream. The intricacies of how memory works, for example, still eludes us. However, in this issue you'll play individuals who have unraveled, at least in part, the mysteries of memories. The clockwork of our minds, and the importance vivid experiences have on our lives.

These uncanny events, and the Uncanny Echoes that follow, leave behind a cognitive residue. Ordinary people remember their experiences with the uncanny—until they don't.

That's where you come in, the Takers.

Takers subsist off the various ephemera left behind by the uncanny. Whether the truth was ferreted out completely or not in the previous issue, there are always the remnants of an Echo.

You're a team who go in and make sure every facet of an uncanny event and the subsequent echoes are destroyed, consumed, by you.

When you're done, it'll be like it never happened at all.

That consumption is all you know how to do.

This issue is meant to feel as if *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* had an *X-Files* component added into the mix. In that movie, the people choose to have their memories erased. In this fiction we play to find out and if it ever becomes relevant and interesting, the table works to answer that particular question together. The main thrust is that the characters in this issue are driven to eradicate the residual effects of an Echo in their entirety.

The exploration should feel similar, though. There is a wonderland out there of things we do not understand, in part, or at all. Some of these threads are tied to the conceit of this initial narrative, some to the playbooks.

I suggest having your Takers from this issue deal with the characters from Suburbia—especially if you played it previously. Taking may not always be consensual for the characters. However, using defined characters makes discussions around consent regarding how you Take, and from whom you Take, easier during character creation. You'll pose questions to yourself, essentially. And, given the added context, reveal more of them than you had known—while propelling the larger narrative forward.

Play to find out why these characters think there should be nothing instead of something. How the Echo has altered them, for better or for worse; and what removing that might do, in turn. Find the questions you are most interesting in posing and answering, and allow for them to only be answered in part when necessary. Sometimes the mere act of posing them is the point of playing a game like this one.

Assumptions and procedures in the fiction for this issue:

- Takers are a team of people, who have worked together before, that wipe clean the residue of an Uncanny Event or Echo.
- For the purposes of this issue, it is assumed that Takers are abolishing the residue of the Echo in the previous issue.
- The residue of an Echo is abstracted. The playbooks show you what residue is, then you apply the concepts of the playbooks to the events of the previous issue.
- MC crafts a Clock to abstract what the players need to do as Takers to get rid of the residue. Each Clock segment will correspond to the player using the playbook to carry out their goal.
- Each playbook has a move that allows them to navigate to what it is they are taking.
- Once located, the players Take until there is nothing left.

The following text will go into more detail.

HOW TO BEGIN

Recap the last issue for everyone, then:

First Step: take the Echo Clock used from the previous issue, Suburbia, and place it where everyone can see it. In Suburbia, the number of Clock segments represented how close the players got to the truth. But in this issue, it also abstracts the residue of the echo. It will be your direct opposition. As Takers, your goal is to eradicate that residue entirely.

This is the “strength” of the Echo’s abstracted impact left in its wake (referred to as residue). It is also what is being consumed by the Takers. When you reduce the Clock to the point where it has no segments left, there is no remainder of the residue left from the Echo.

Each playbook has a unique function which must be used to eradicate the Echo entirely, which abstracts a part of what was left behind: The memories of those who witnessed it, the subconscious and dreams elicited from doing so, the emotional residue anchoring these things, and finally, any visual remnants.

Second Step: have the players choose playbooks. Only the playbooks chosen are pertinent. Any playbooks not chosen are disregarded, and do not warrant explanation in the fiction; it is simply not addressed in the fiction, and that aspect of residue is handled off-screen if at all. Remember, it’s not pertinent, so don’t worry about it.

As **the Dreamer**, you'll enter people's minds as they sleep to locate those dreams you want or need to Take, as pertaining to the Echo's residue.

As **the Tinkerer**, the inner workings of their mind and people's memories are yours to both locate and Take. Whether this is a physical process or not is up to you, and will ascribe a certain tone. Being physically invasive versus abstracting it with technologies, for example, would result in widely different fictions.

As **the Painter**, you'll be reworking visual media. Things left behind: art, artifacts, a physical media or presence, something that can be seen that elicits the Echo within others, etc.

As **the Void**, you feel the emotional impact of an event, and you Take it. Do you help people process the experience before it is expunged? Or does the very act of expressing these things allow for you to Take it from them? As with all of the playbooks, *how* you take something will affect the tone of your fiction.

Third Step: Discuss any lines you don't want to cross, and your level of comfort with characters Taking from the characters in Suburbia. Takers inherently have agency over the characters they target, and how you exercise that power may cross a line for people that they didn't realize. There is also a high chance players will be targeting characters embodied in the last issue. As such, it's important to discuss any lines you don't want people to cross. The intent is to put you in circumstances where you are to excise a part of another character. I recommend playing with the X-Card.

The Takers' methods don't have to be gruesome or horrific. However, if your tone lends itself to darker themes, discussions around consent are even more pertinent. Either way, your approach as to how your Takers move and act is up to you. Remember: to do it, you do it. But what that actually looks like in the fiction is up to you.

Fourth Step: MC, either by yourself, or with the other players, assign each segment of the Clock specifically what remains of the Echo based on the playbooks chosen. If you have experienced last issue's events, you should have some idea of what needs to be Taken by the players in order to remove this Echo's residue from the world. At the very least you'll have context.

Each segment of the Clock both corresponds to something that makes sense for the previous issue's events, as well as something for each playbook to Take.

Each playbook has an abstracted goal to make it easier to fit the previous events, but remember, this is an evolving narrative. Make new things liberally when needed when doing this. Feel free to expound upon the previous issue's events to flesh out more of the story so the playbooks and their focuses central to the story are as interesting as possible.

Since the story is emergent and revolves around the meta-narrative that unravels with each new issue, it should be malleable, accepting new narrative with each issue such as this one, as we discover more of the world together.

The MC controls the Echo's residue. It is kept nebulous. It is an entity that wishes to preserve itself. Why it does so is up to you. Make no mistake, Takers are wresting something from an entity that exists in the memories of those experiences, the physical manifestations left behind, even the dreams and the subconsciousness where it might reside. It is dissembling something when a segment of the Clock is reduced. Look at your MC moves to show this in the fiction.

Note: If you did not play that issue, make a six-segment Clock and fill it in entirely. If you only just picked up this issue and do not have issue 1, consider playing issue 0 (available for free here), using the Heat Clock to create the Echo Clock in this issue. This issue assumes you have played the issue 1 and therefore experienced an Echo, but it could be applied to the Uncanny Event itself in issue 0.

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 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) How are teams of Takers formed, and do the characters know this origin?
- 3) If you do your task effectively, is your presence ever even noticed?
- 4) Are there more of you or those like you out there?
- 5) How much do you affect the daily lives of ordinary individuals, with or without their knowing?
- 6) Are there any local myths, legends, or superstitions that play into what you do as Takers?
- 7) Are you human, alien? What is the "nature" of a Taker?
- 8) Does anyone Take from you; would you know it if they did?
- 9) Is there a modus operandi for your team in place?

ABSTRACTING PLAY

After you've fleshed out what Takers do and how they do it, as well as the tone of your game, look to the each playbooks first moves. Each is a specific way in which that playbook navigates to the thing they Take. Memories, dreams, physical remnants, etc. They all are abstracted processes to give you the freedom to define the story how you wish.

Are Takers Men In Black agents or individuals who come together whenever echoes occur, heightening the uncanny aspect as all else is left undefined? Do they use force? Do they come and go unnoticed in the night. Are they willing to hurt people physically? These things should be more-or-less defined by the answering of the previous questions and conforming the fiction to your established tone and answers.

Player characters navigate to locate what it is they Take, and then do so. Searching and Taking is also abstracted further because the moves do not specify the exact scope either. When a Dreamer navigates to a dream that is going to be removed, do they do this when multiple individuals are asleep, taking the dreams from everyone? Or perhaps just one person at a time? Does the Tinkerer have actual tools to work on the human mind, or do they have other processes?

In this way while all fiction resulting from this issue will have Takers navigating using their moves and then using the basic move to Take, the rest is abstracted so as to allow for a wide breadth of fiction.

BASIC MOVES

STEEL YOURSELF: When you're under pressure to do something, you are exacting something delicate in nature, or intricate in implementation, roll+Resolute. On a 10+, it could not have gone better. On a 7-9, you stumble, hesitate, flinch, or a cost or complication occurs.

UNBALANCE: When you threaten another with leverage over them, or with a threat you intend to carry out, roll+Force. On a 10+, they either do it or make you carry out your threat. On a 7-9, in addition to those options they can choose to: fight back after your threat is carried out, attempt to get away, or only give you something they think you want—an approximation of what you desire due to your threat.

ASSAIL: When you strike at a problem by resorting to violence roll+Force. On a 10+, you inflict Harm as established. On a 7-9, you are also harmed, someone you wouldn't want knowing your location, does; or it works, but it also exacerbates a different problem.

TAKE: When you remove the residue of the uncanny, whether by imbibing it, destroying it, or otherwise eradicating it; roll+Resolute. On a hit it is consumed and you reduce the Echo Clock by one segment. On a 10+, you maintain control of yourself. On a 7-9, the MC may choose to either to have you take more than you intended, or be harmed or do Harm in the process. Alternatively, you may instead choose to be changed irrevocably should you go through with your intent.

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.

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. No matter the outcome, you are implicated and face the same consequences as the person you are Helping or Hindering.

ENDING THE SESSION

When you eradicate the Echo's residue entirely or abandon your task, the session is over.

This issue is more about the impact of Taking on the people being taken from and the impact on the Takers themselves, rather than if they will accomplish their task or not. This is still an open possibility to be explored by you should you wish it, but it was not a design goal. There is not much emphasis on Harm exchanged, the most interesting options are all to do with other aspects of the fiction.

These issues are starters, so slot them into your world and your fiction as needed to unravel the echoes of the uncanny. You may use this issue after other Echoes or events. You may choose to use it in a later issue once more have come out. With more releases the greater your choices in stringing together an emergent story, arranging them as you and your group pleases.

THE DREAMER

Name: Lena, Simon, Anas, Lilli, Tamás, _____

Look: Sad, Wanderlust, Affected, _____

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

Demeanor: Secretive, Dissociated, Silly, _____

Gender Identity: _____

You have: Whatever you need, within reason; consult the MC.

KEYS

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

- Reveal your motivation for being a Taker.
- Disclose if you have ever been taken from.
- Show how it is you became the Dreamer.
- Divulge how you know your life is not just a dream, that your life bleeds into your dreams and the ones you take from, or how you don't know that one or both of these things is true. You choose.

MOVES

- Tread Softly:** When you attempt to navigate your way to the dream(s) in which you want to Take, roll+Uncanny. On a 10+, you arrive no worse for wear. On a 7-9, you must offer up a piece of yourself first: a memory, a hope, one of your own dreams, etc. Otherwise you risk losing track of your objective or who you are, for a time.
- Dissonance:** When you would Unbalance someone you've seen the dreams of, roll 3d6 and take the highest two, so long as you tell them something you learned from their dream (You detail).
- Even Ground:** When you Assail someone in a dream, roll+uncanny instead of with Force.

RESOLUTE

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FORCE

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UNCANNY

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THE TINKERER

Name: Seo-yeon, Luka, Iker, Maja, Pol, _____

Look: Trendy, Eccentric, Retro, Pop, _____

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

Demeanor: Serious, Eccentric, Fake, _____

Gender Identity: _____

You have: Whatever you need, within reason; consult the MC. A blackjack (2 Harm hand)

KEYS

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

- Reveal your motivation for being a Taker.
- Disclose if you have ever been taken from.
- Show how it is you became the Tinkerer.
- Divulge what would happen should you not modify the memories of those affected by an Echo, from your perspective.

MOVES

○**Clockwork**: When you attempt to locate the memories you wish to Take from someone, roll+Uncanny. On a 10+, you do it with no difficulties. On a 7-9, they need coaxing, there is a cost or complication, or you are implicated in the very memory you locate.

○**Inner Workings**: When you pay attention to someone during a charged interaction in order to learn more of them, roll+Uncanny. On a 10+, Hold 2. On a 7-9, Hold 1. Spend your Hold 1 for 1 during an interaction with them to learn:

- If they are telling the truth.
- What they wish you would do.
- How _____ relates to _____.
- How you could get them to _____.

RESOLUTE

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UNCANNY

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HARM

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THE PAINTER

Name: Min-jun, Erik, Linnea, Yulia, Danil, _____

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: Whatever you need, within reason; consult the MC. A handgun (2 Harm close reload loud)

KEYS

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

- Reveal your motivation for being a Taker.
- Disclose if you have ever been taken from.
- Show how it is you became the Painter.
- Divulge how what you do affects the world in an uncanny, surreal, or mysterious way. Is it negative or positive, to what extent are you aware of it, personally?

MOVES

○**Pentimento**: When you rearrange a visual medium to obscure or subvert its meaning, roll+Uncanny. On a 10+, nothing remains of the original, only your intentions reside there now. On a 7-9, a link to the Echo is unearthed that was previously unknown (increase the Echo Clock by 1); you are harmed in the doing; or something still connected to the Echo mobilizes against you.

○**Motif**: When you assimilate ideas or knowledge through a visual medium, you may always ask the MC, “what secret is being kept here, hidden.”

RESOLUTE

FORCE

UNCANNY

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HARM

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THE VOID

Name: Ellie, Lotte, Maria, Dominvkas, Ivan, _____
Look: Sporty, 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: Whatever you need, within reason; consult the MC.

KEYS

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

- Reveal your motivation for being a Taker.
- Disclose if you have ever been taken from.
- Show how it is you became the Void.
- Divulge how you believe the emotional connections of an Echo's residue and how what you Take relates to the things the other Takers do.

MOVES

○ **Caretaker:** When you pay attention to someone, attempting to suss out the residue of an Echo ingrained in their emotional core, roll+Uncanny. On a 10+, you'll learn what to Take, as well as something useful regarding it. On a 7-9, the same, but what you learn will be dangerous for you or another, it costs time, or a complication occurs.

○ **Inner Workings:** When you share something of yourself to learn more of someone else, choose a question and they will answer it. Then they will ask you one in return under the same terms.

How, if anything, did an Echo alter your daily routine.

- How, if anything, did an Echo alter your daily routine.
- What do you wish you could tell someone?
- How would it make you feel to lose the impact of the Echo?

RESOLUTE

FORCE

UNCANNY

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HARM

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AGENDA

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

- Discover what impact Taking has on the Takers, as well as the people affected by an Echo.
- Find out why the Echo's remnants want to survive and live on in the various forms it inhabits within those who experienced it.
- Uncover the kind of tone the players want while doing so.
- Forge a self contained story about these individuals that still ends with a question or two unanswered, hanging there.
- Play to find out more of the world and why there are Takers at all.

PRINCIPLES

Your best practices for this fiction are as follows:

- Make Taking as invasive only as the players feel comfortable.
- Make the Echo's residue feel like a living, breathing person.
- 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.

- React as an NPC with the Motivation of protecting itself when the echo's residue decreases with each segment of the clock.
- Showcase the cost of Taking on individuals.
- Make an ordinary activity or event feel and seem uncanny.
- 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.

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 of the same height as the text, which is a stylized representation of the Patreon logo's vertical line.

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.

Layout, Design, Writing: Fraser Simons

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Line Editing: Lauren McManamon

Developmental Editing: Jason Cordova

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