



**UNCANNY  
ECHO**

**SERIALIZED ROLEPLAYING**

**ISSUE 4: PRESENT**

# 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.









ISSUE  
FOUR

# PRESENT

*“I realised that my training was useful in less than ten percent of the calls, and saving lives was rarer than that. After a while, I grew to understand that my role was less about saving lives than about bearing witness. I was a grief mop. It was enough that I simply turned up.”*

— *Bringing Out The Dead*

This issue is more narrow in focus than others because it is based on a novel and movie, *Bringing Out The Dead*. This source material follows a burned-out nightshift paramedic who struggles with intense personal and spiritual trauma after too many years on the job.

You’ll find one playbook, the Medic; you’ll play someone experienced and trained in this field to the point where their job is habitual. They work with skill and precision but find that, more often than not, the outcome is not something in their purview.

Because this subject matter is intense and beyond my expertise, this issue is not concerned with simulating the actual care of the people medics tend to in real life. Instead, we will focus on the peripheral lives of the protagonists and the city at night, much like in *Bringing Out The Dead*. This issue interrogates the city, what it is and what it feels, and the altogether different lives and events most people never experience.

A life distinct from the day time hours and experiences of people not belonging to the machinations of evening and dawn—when the surreal and bizarre feel possible.

This issue is the most simple from a mechanical standpoint. There is a clear cycle, where the uncanny needs and wants one defined thing. The players’ duty is to express and vocalize these wants and needs, quantified as Grief. However, because this is a game Powered by the Apocalypse, something simple also becomes hard. Because to do it, you have to do it.

Easier said than done in this case.

The scenes should be relatively fast sequences, with the cycle of accruing and unloading Grief on display in a timely way so the game doesn't drag. The players handle call after call after call, with moments in-between where they cope with Grief. Because each scene is an aggressive cut to what matters, we simulate a specific aesthetic.

There is a fever dream quality to most of the source material, depicting a brutal cycle where grief and guilt haunt the main character; seeing it embodied in the faces of the transient nightly precession of patients and people witnessed from call to call.

Similarly, our protagonists experience a barrage of calls during this one evening where the Uncanny Echo takes place, distinct from their average shift. We focus on these mysterious events on the peripheral while the protagonists autopilot tending to patients, rather than simulating how well they do their job.

What matters in this fiction is what the medics witness during their nightshift, and how they deal with it.

Assumptions and procedures in the fiction for this issue:

- This issue's Echo should reflect or connect to the previous issue. If you aren't playing in order, use any previous issues' uncanny event or echo, or discover it emergently with the other players.
- When you craft the Echo in this issue, what it needs and wants is "built-in". It has a specific goal: to be heard and perpetuated.
- The process of gaining and alleviating Grief is the premise of the issue, and the basic moves are the mechanism for this cycle.

The following text will go into more detail.

# HOW TO BEGIN

**First Step:** Make a six-sided Clock for a 2-3 hour game, or an eight-sided Clock for a slightly longer game. This Clock represents the Echo and what it wants.

Next, discuss with the table what your particular Echo might be and therefore want, based on your previous issue's uncanny event in the nursing home. The Echo's clock only goes up when players try to articulate and talk about what they think "it" wants. It does not matter if they are right or wrong. What matters is that they were present, and that they participate in this cycle; what the Echo truly wants is to be heard and perpetuated.

When you look at the basic moves, you'll see they are simple and cyclic to fulfill build-up and letting go of Grief. Keep this in mind when you decide what your Echo will be, and how it is linked to the previous issue.

However, it's not an easy thing expressing or speaking about Grief, nor I imagine, experiencing the uncanny and surreal. Holding it in is a destructive force. If Grief is not expressed through Opening Up, characters cope by engaging in a Vice—such as sex, drugs, faith, sleep, and so on.

**Second Step:** Answer the Questions in order on page 10. Both before and after you create your character.

**Third Step:** Make the game's cycle explicit to the players so you can all work toward the same goals in the fiction. Grief will accrue and must be addressed—either by triggering Vice at 3 Grief or relieving it by Opening Up. Opening Up is the only way to increase the Clock for the Echo, which ends the game once it's complete

**Fourth Step:** Begin in medias res with Hitting The Streets and transition to Do No Harm.



A typical session will go something like this:

- The players arrive at a scene described by the MC. Depending on the tone of your established game they'll go into as much detail as is fitting; circumstances and particulars of the patient, etc. Remember: them saving the patient or their ability to do so is not what we play to find out in this issue. Rather, we play to discover what they bear witness to as their training kicks in and they go to work on autopilot. We focus on the peripheral events, which is why the player rolls+Peripheral.
- The first person to arrive at the scene rolls Hit The Streets, which the MC uses to insert what the Echo is trying to express (based on the previous conversation with the group).
- The next step is for people to Do No Harm with the patient. Multiple people can work on a patient, but note there are no helping mechanics. Fictionally we assume they're helping each other at their job, but mechanically we want to find out what each one witnesses on the peripheral.
- After this scene, free play begins where players can either engage in a Vice if their Grief triggers the move, or Open Up about it, increasing the Echo Clock as they do.
- The cycle begins again after this, with another call to Hit The Streets.

Whatever the characters think or articulate about what's happening, the meta narrative is the Echo's communication to the players and them speaking of it. As the Echo's clock increases, the MC should ramp up the Echo's communication to the players, attempting to articulate what the Echo wants to them.

When the Clock is full, the game moves to scenes to close out the game, narrated by the players.

*"I grew up in and where I had worked most as a medic, and it held more ghosts per square foot than any other. If I wasn't careful I could stop at a red light and forget where I was going, disappear into the past..."*

*—Bringing Out The Dead*

# 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.

- 1) **What kind of uncanny are you going for?** Dark, gritty, intense, scary, etc.
- 2) If this fictional city were an animal what would it be?
- 3) What stories have you heard of the uncanny in the city, have you seen ghosts?

## **After creating characters, then answer:**

- 1) Every Medic begins with Grief; how did you get yours?
- 2) Why did you become a Medic?
- 4) What does your Grief manifest as in your life? Choose an example or create your own:
  - Insomnia
  - Abuse Of A Substance
  - Faith
  - Depression
  - Narcissism or Cynicism

*"I'd always had nightmares, but now the ghosts didn't wait for me to sleep."  
— Bringing Out The Dead*

# BASIC MOVES

**Hit The Streets:** When you're the first to arrive at a call roll+Intuition. On a 10+, something about the Echo is clearly articulated through the scene. A person, the weather, a song, a noise, or a feeling. On a 7-9, the same, but the manifesting is confusing, alarming, far more subtle, or else frightening.

**Do No Harm:** When you work on a patient, roll+Peripheral. On 10+, choose and answer 2 questions. On a 7-9, choose and answer 1 question, then take +1 Grief. On a miss the MC chooses 1 question for you to answer and you take +1 Grief.

- What do you notice that is uncanny, surreal, or mysterious?
- What around you is mundane, but you perceive as a manifestation of your grief?
- What toll does this work take on you, physically or otherwise?
- What connection between you and someone or something else occurs as you work?
- How do the things around you remind you of a regret, something you take for granted, or a responsibility you've shirked?

**Open Up:** When you speak to someone in an effort to process and articulate what you've experienced and what you think it means, roll+Grief.

On a 10+, take +1 Forward and remove 1 Grief.

On a 7-9, you remove 1 Grief.

When you remove Grief you increase the Echo Clock by 1.

**Handle Yourself:** When you must be calm, collected, or precise in the face of an obstacle, danger, or the uncanny, roll+Peripheral. On a 10+, you do it, no problem. On a 7-9, there is a cost, a complication, or an important decision introduced before or after you do it.



# PERIPHERAL MOVES

**Vice:** When you accrue 3 Grief you need to indulge a vice to cope with it; sleep, sex, drugs, stimulants, depressants, saving lives, faith, etc. Choose one and then roll+Peripheral.

- On a 10+, increase your Peripheral by 1.
- On a 7-9, swap your Grief and your Peripheral stat.

*“I was good at my job; there were even periods when my hands moved with a speed and skill that were beyond me and my mind worked with a cool authority I had never known. I would scrap with depression, I drank too much, but every once in a while I participated in a miracle, breathing life back into a young asthmatic, holding a tiny just-born jewel in my hands.”*

*—Bringing Out The Dead*

# ENDING THE SESSION

When the Echo Clock is full the end of session is triggered. Have the players narrate epilogues for each character to close out the game.

Whether or not the Echo dissipates or the cycle goes on is up to you. Use the tone of the game established. Did the Echo only have that night to communicate, and did it succeed? Was the act of talking about what was happening satiate it? Are the player characters aware of the meta-narrative, and the Echo's connection to the previous event in the previous issue?

# THE MEDIC

Name: Vivaan, Omar, Aiden, Ava, Maja, \_\_\_\_\_  
Look: Furtive, Drained, Dewey, Naive, Expressive, \_\_\_\_\_  
Ethnicity: Asian or South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino,  
Indigenous, Middle Eastern, \_\_\_\_\_  
Gender Identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Lifestyle of your choice, money, access to your vice.

You have 4 points to spend on your stats, allocate them as you wish but your Grief must be either 1 or 2.

## KEYS

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

- Have you ever experienced an uncanny echo or event before, knowing or otherwise?
- Describe why you do this job, and what keeps you going to someone else (via a scene or a flashback, your choice).
- What have you seen in the city only at night or just before dawn?
- Reveal something personal you've never spoken of

## MOVES

- **Saving Grace:** When you save a life choose 1: decrease your Grief stat by 1 but do not increase the Echo Clock; or answer a question from Do No Harm.
- **Listless:** When you seek out answers regarding an Echo roll+Intuition. On a 10+, ask any one question of the MC and they will answer truthfully. On a 7-9, the MC asks you one in return.
- **Insight:** After you Open Up you take +1 Forward to Intuition.
- **Trust:** When you Open Up to someone you trust, and you tell them why, roll 3d6 and take the two highest for your result.

**PERIPHERAL**

**INTUITION**

**GRIEF**

**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:

- Make Grief a real and interrogate it when possible.
- Depict the cyclical nature of the Echo and Grief on the peripheral of the player characters as honest and distanced from characters actual medical skills, knowledge, training etc.
- 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.

# PRINCIPLES

Your best practices for this fiction are as follows:

- Make the city feel real, inhabited and altered by the night.
- Have the Echo's need to be spoken of aloud and articulated tied into the previous issue when possible.
- Show the will of the Echo in every move possible.
- Respect the boundaries of the players and considerate of the subject matter.
- 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.

- Present and speak as the Echo through anything in the city.
- Talk about, present, or depict Grief.
- Give them a moment to deal with Grief.
- 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.
- 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 that is part of the logo's design.

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# 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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