

UNCANNY ECHO

SERIALIZED ROLEPLAYING



ISSUE 6: BARGAINS

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
SIX

BARGAINS

Folklore and urban legends abound of musicians who are said to have traded their souls to the devil for either the talent and/or subsequent fame of becoming one of the greatest artists of all time.

In this issue of *Uncanny Echo*, you'll play one such musician. Maybe you traded your soul willingly; maybe you inherited this debt from your family, generations paying for the mistakes of those that came before. *How* your own soul got put on the line is up to you to define in play.

Banding together, all of the players will hatch a plan that hinges on the past experiences of the player characters' personal past experience and unique deal or pact with the devil. Then you'll play to find out if you can pull it off or not.

Win or lose—your very souls are *already* on the line, what else have you got to lose, right?

No contract or agreement is truly foolproof... and the devil, as they say, is in the details.





First Step: Make a six-sided Clock and fill it for a 3-4 hour game, or an eight-sided Clock for a slightly longer game. This Clock represents the abstracted progress of the characters' plan.

Each time the plan moves forward in the fiction, a segment of the Clock is filled in to represent that progress. The Clock's progress does not need to be exact; it is merely a helpful pacing tool in service to your fiction.

Second Step: Answer the Questions in order on page 8—both before and after you create your character using the one playbook available.

Third Step: Choose a stat line for your Mind, Resolve, and Soul:

+1, -1, +2

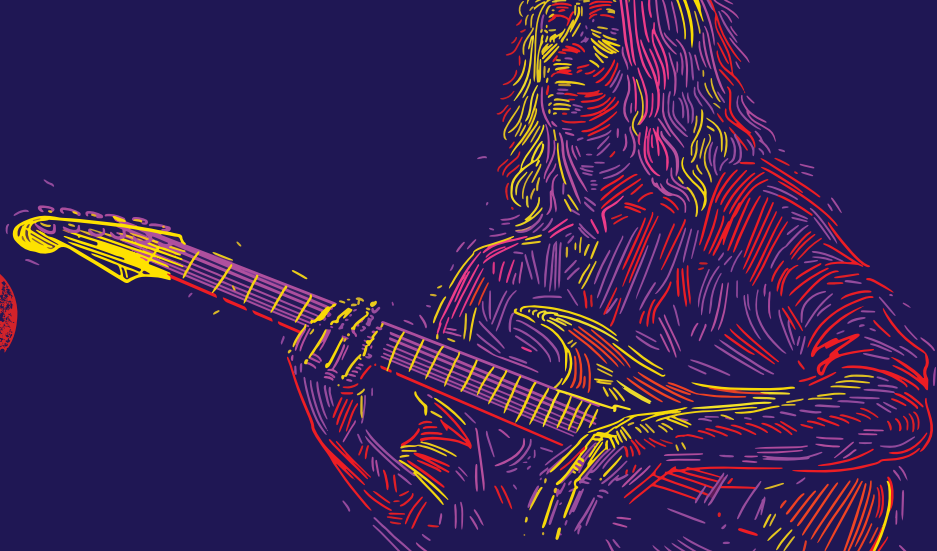
0, +1, +1

-2, 0, +3

Fourth Step: To help you create the player characters' plan to get their souls back from the devil, pick one of the following ideas, or make up your own.

- Kill the devil or avatar of them
- Find a loophole or invalidate a current contract or agreement
- Strike a new bargain
- Transfer the debt to someone else
- Blackmail them
- Give them something they'd rather have than your soul
- Perform some kind of a ritual or rite that does one of the above

TO



Fifth Step: Immediately after choosing the plan and discussing the broad strokes of what people think would be fun or interesting to see in the fiction, begin play with each player hitting their first key; revealing a detail of their own past that would contribute to their plan which is based on their own deal with the devil. The MC should view these details as though they are possible puzzle pieces needed to enact this plan, otherwise the devil would not be so vulnerable as to allow for this to possibly succeed.

In other words, their own past dealings expose a weakness in the devil and everyone exploits this knowledge to facilitate the plan chosen, MC and players both.

Then the players execute the plan with said knowledge, with the MC filling in segments of the Clock as they make progress.

A typical session will go something like this:

- The players create characters and choose a plan
- They answer the questions
- Players hit on their first key, crafting the Devil as each players' details reveal more about the devil and their weakness. Using info from this key, as well as others, they make progress in their plan
- As they make progress in setting up and implementing the plan, the MC will fill segments of the Clock in as appropriate for the pace.
- Player characters either fail or succeed in their plan, ending the session when either result is reached.

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) The Devil (circle applicable options):

- Can take the form of anyone *or* has one, uniform appearance
- Is subtle *or* overt when addressing obstacles
- Knows all of your past sins and with that knowledge: they themselves tempt ordinary folk into committing various sins *or* may only use various agents and proxies in the world to exert their will. And, reveal themselves: only when the opportunity presents itself *or* everywhere, all-of-the-time, in every thing corrupted, evil, or bad.

Create your characters, then answer:

1) Has anything pursued you while your soul has been in jeopardy? The devil themselves, hell hounds, strange occurrences, or signs that your soul is in jeopardy, etc.

2) Within the city, what marks, signs, objects, buildings, or occurrences gesture that the devil has had influence here?

BASIC MOVES

Search For Answers: When you consider the words of an individual, what you see before you, or a situation in which you attempt to learn more of, roll+Mind. On a 10+, ask 2. On a 7-9, ask 1.

- What do I notice despite an attempt to conceal it?
- How does this relate to _____?
- Am I being misdirected?
- How could I get ____ to _____?
- Does this feel truthful / accurate / authentic?
- Are their signs of the devil or their agents?

Stay The Course: When you must continue with a course of action despite danger, fear, or some other form of risk or peril roll+Resolve. 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 accomplish it.

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.

THE MUSICIAN

Name: Dolly, Barry, Hector, Kurt, Alanis, _____
Look: Intense, Trend Setter, Surreal, Fabricated, _____
Ethnicity: Asian or South Asian, Black, Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino,
Indigenous, Middle Eastern, _____
Gender Identity: _____
Fashion in keeping with your Look and your musical instrument of
choice.

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 a crucial detail of the plan you selected revealed to you in your own dealings with the devil (something that exposes them or make them vulnerable in keeping with your plan).
- Flashback to why you made your own bargain; what did you stand to gain and what was it like?
- Flashback or tell someone what the ramifications of the deal have been on your life from the deal to present day.

MOVES

- Like A Rolling Stone:** When you spill yourself into your music almost anything is possible; work with the MC to negotiate what it is you hope to accomplish and then Roll+Soul. On a 10+, it happens, no problem. On a 7-9, a cost or complication happens in so doing; a wrinkle in the overall plan, hell hounds are on your trail, etc.
- Runnin' With The Devil:** When you personify an aspect or personality trait of the Devil from yours or someone else's dealings with them, roll 3d6 instead of 2 and use the highest two die results to get your sum. If you roll a miss or a 7-9 however, decrease your Soul by 1, permanently.
- Man In The Mirror:** When you confess a sin or ask for forgiveness while Unleashing your music, you take +1 Forward to that same roll.

MIND

RESOLVE

SOUL

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:

- Create a devil unique to the PCs.
- Make the plan and details provided by the answers to the PCs keys central to the fiction.
- To play into or subvert the players' expectations regarding the Devil.
- Forge a self contained story about these individuals that still ends with a question or two unanswered, hanging there.
- Play to find out.
- Uncover the kind of tone the players want while doing so.

PRINCIPLES

Your best practices for this fiction are as follows:

- Make the fiction feel real and lived in.
- Shade everyone and everything as morally gray when possible, especially those that appear good or evil overtly in the fiction.
- Make music important and intrinsic to the players' lives.
- 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.

- Make the Devil or a proxy either grow closer to a PC or arrive.
- Make a sin feel good and human or forgiveness hard and inhumane.
- Complicate a moral decision.
- 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 line of the same height as the text, which is a characteristic element of the Patreon logo.

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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