



UNCANNY ECHO

SERIALIZED ROLEPLAYING
ISSUE 9: LIES

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 NINE LIES

Once escaped, players portray someone who now gets dragged back into a criminal underworld filled with revolvers, death, and drugs to find a missing person they care about; a friend, a lover, a sibling—they decide. In order to find them they'll have to navigate a world that claws them back in or risk never finding the answers they seek.

This noir, hard-boiled tale being spun has a further twist, though.

High school can be hell. When you're young it feels deadly serious. As deadly as death, even. This time it is. This story takes place in high school, riffing on the often exclusionary nature of cliques and literalizing the feelings that come with high school's microworld.

The players will have to contend with the realities of being a hard-boiled detective as a student. As such, death and the serious, dramatic beats go without saying in this issue.

Integrating another twist, each playbook is actually a different aspect of the main protagonist the players will be portraying; playing into the tropes often found in the genre.

This issue is inspired by the 2005 film *Brick*.





HOW TO BEGIN

First Step: Make one six-sided Clocks for a 3-4 hour game, or an eight-sided Clock for a slightly longer game. Label one the Progress Clock representing the player characters' progress toward their goal of finding out what happened to the person who's gone missing.

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 9—both before and after you create your shared character.

Third Step: The MC will tell you the mysterious circumstances surrounding your friends disappearance.

Fourth Step: Play to find out.

A typical session will have the players create the one character and take turns having narrative control in the goal of discovering what happened. They may give narrative control over to any player at any time. Whoever has an idea of what they should do next should go—but everyone should work together to make sure everyone gets spotlight.

Follow the moves, all geared toward garnering more information and dealing with any problems that may arise.

The MC should use clubs and cliques as a basis for creating allegories to noir tropes. For instance, the major players in the drug organization might be the drama club manipulating people. Their muscle could be the jocks; the drug dealers could be as simple as the stoners, or it could be the chemistry club or debate team.

There should be a layer of intrigue and dramatization to each interaction with people embroiled in the underworld—reiterating that although high school, this is fundamentally noir.

There could be a player at school that's a femme fatale; consequences for trying to gain entry to this other world, often resulting in the protagonist getting roughed up. Mystique, jazz, and sly people being evasive as ever, treating information as a currency.

Fundamentally, the protagonist will follow their lead(s) into this dark world they left behind; trying not to get played, and being the smartest or toughest in the room, as the situation demands.

And of course, everyone should work toward showing the uncanny, further literalizing aspects of the often uncanny nature of a criminal underbelly into actual uncanny events and motifs.

Find a link to common stylized terms used in film noir at: <https://www.miskatonic.org/slang.html>

Find common noir tropes here: <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FilmNoir>



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.

Work together to create your shared protagonist, then answer:

2)Which club or clique were you a part of, and subsequently left, and was your connection to the criminal underworld at school?

3)What fallout was there between you and the person you're searching for to drive a wedge between you?

3)By what method did this person enter the criminal underworld? Your old clique/club, another?

THE FIERCE FIST

Decide on a Name, Ethnicity, and Gender Identity together

Give yourself a -1 or a +2 in either of your stats.

You start with fashion in keeping with your Look and anything a high school student may plausibly have.

KEYS

When you hit a key you gain 1 Hold (max 2). Spend it 1-for-1 to trigger a move from another playbook, unlock a new move, or to have someone else roll 3d6 and keep the highest during a roll.

- Go bad cop on someone
- Address a problem with violence
- Intimidate someone else by showing your strength
- Escalate a situation instead of diffusing one
- Act out instead of communicating verbally
- Describe how something normally mundane is uncanny

MOVES

Get The Straight: When you intimidate someone tell the MC how far you're willing to go and then roll+Flex. On a 10+, they tell it to you straight. On a 7-9, you only get a taste of the information and otherwise have to go further than you were willing. On a 6-, you cross whatever line you drew for yourself completely...or it's a Golden Opportunity, you choose, either way you get some information.

The Broderick: When you aim to take someone down, either by bullet or fist, roll+Muscle. On a 10+, you do what you set out to do; describe it. On a 7-9, you do it, but you also take Harm in the doing. On a 6-, you take a lot more than you get (double the Harm).

HOLD

FLEX

MUSCLE

HARM

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THE SILVER TONGUE

Decide on a Name, Ethnicity, and Gender Identity together
Give yourself a -1 or a +2 in either of your Stats.
You start with fashion in keeping with your Look and anything a high school student may plausibly have.

KEYS

When you hit a key you gain 1 Hold (max 2). Spend it 1-for-1 to trigger a move from another playbook, unlock a new move, or to have someone else roll 3d6 and keep the highest during a roll.

- Deescalate a situation
- Redirect blame onto someone else to further your agenda
- Lie to someone you trust
- Use stylized language when dealing with criminal elements
- Manipulate someone into danger for your own benefit
- Describe how something normally mundane is uncanny

MOVES

Work Your Angle: When you attempt to manipulate someone into serving your interests using only words, roll+Play. On a 10+, you work your angle and get what you want. On a 7-9, they need to be reassured first and ask for something and they'll hold you to it; If you don't pony up it'll come back on you. On a 6-, you get more than you bargained for.

Fast Talk: When you deal with imminent danger with words, roll+Brains. On a 10+, you do it, no problem. On a 7-9, you give away something you didn't intend, the best you can manage is a stopgap, or something of value breaks.

HOLD

BRAINS

PLAY

HARM

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THE KEEN MIND

Decide on a Name, Look, Ethnicity, and Gender Identity together
Give yourself a -1 or a +2 in either of your Stats.

You start with fashion in keeping with your Look and anything a high school student may plausibly have.

KEYS

When you hit a key you gain 1 Hold (max 2). Spend it 1-for-1 to trigger a move from another playbook, unlock a new move, or to have someone else roll 3d6 and keep the highest during a roll.

- Discern where someone has been or is going
- Play one NPC against another
- Find a lead
- Downplay how smart you are
- Obsess over small details
- Describe how something normally mundane is uncanny

MOVES

Connect The Dots: When you have a part of the puzzle (a lead, clue, etc) and use it to find the next, roll+Resolve. On a 10+, you get put on the right track. On a 7-9, the same but there's a cost or complication; either on route or on your arrival. On a 6-, you find exactly what you were supposed to find, nothing more, nothing less.

Operator: When you scrutinize someone in order to extrapolate useful information about them, tell the MC what you're looking for specifically and then roll+Canny. On a 10+, the answer is clear, honest, and not misleading. On a 7-9, the MC picks 2, the information is either: clear, honest, or misleading. On a 6-, the MC picks 1.

HOLD

CANNY

RESOLVE

HARM

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THE COOL CONNECT

Decide on a Name, Ethnicity, and Gender Identity together
Give yourself a -1 or a +2 in either of your Stats.
You start with fashion in keeping with your Look and anything a high school student may plausibly have.

KEYS

When you hit a key you gain 1 Hold (max 2). Spend it 1-for-1 to trigger a move from another playbook, unlock a new move, or to have someone else roll 3d6 and keep the highest during a roll.

- Show up where you're least expected and wanted
- Make reference to how the scene has changed since you've left
- Use stylized language with your friend
- Get into someone else's business
- Get your hands on something you shouldn't
- Describe how something normally mundane is uncanny

MOVES

Fingers In Every Pie: When you put your ear to ground roll+Instinct. On a hit, you get wind of something clandestine and useful to your interests. On a 10+, a major player you need is there. On a 6-, something finds you.

Inside Line: You have a friend willing to help you out, who are they? When you go to them for a thing—a phone, a car, etc—roll+Pull. On a 10+, they've got what you're looking for, no problem. On a 7-9, choose one:

- You get it right now,
- It's good quality (it'll work more than once) or,
- This is the last time you'll be able to get something from them

HOLD

PULL

INSTINCT

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:

- Tie into events from another *Uncanny Echo* issue, if possible
- Tell a noir tale that gives the players a fair shake
- 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 high school feel dangerous, dramatic, and high stakes
- Place noir tropes within the microworld of a high school
- Make obstacles multi-faceted and more complex than initially perceived
- Respect the boundaries of the players and be considerate of the subject matter
- Address the player character, not the player
- Centralize the fiction on them
- Name everyone important
- Linger on details when you have the time to do so
- Ask questions of the players and incorporate the details into the fiction
- Give them a chance to think
- Spotlight all the players
- Show your moves through the fiction

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.

- Insert a new major player
- Impose an uncanny element that defies initial perceptions
- Complicate an obstacle being interacted with
- Make an ordinary activity or event feel and/or seem uncanny
- Foreshadow something bad coming in the fiction
- Offer an opportunity with strings attached
- Separate them from something valuable
- Inflict Harm or trade it, using a bullet from a handgun (2 Harm close) to gauge how much harm should be inflicted
- Escalate a conflict (words to a fight, a fight to a gun, etc.)
- Turn a move back on them
- Take something they value 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, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a solid red rectangular background. To the right of the text is a vertical white line of the same height as the text.

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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