

ECHOES

WRETCHED
& LONE

*I'm just tired of everything... even the echoes.
There is nothing in my life but echoes...
Echoes of lost hopes and dreams and joys.
They're beautiful and mocking.*

L.M. Montgomery, Anne of Avonlea

*In time,
everyone fades away,
transfiguring into
echoes that latch
onto our memories
and bleed our hearts dry.*

Barbara Garay, Beneath the Surface: A Book of Poems

*See my shadow changing,
Stretching up and over me.
Soften this old armor.
Hoping I can clear the way by
Stepping through my shadow,
Coming out the other side.
Step into the shadow.
Forty six and two are just ahead of me.*

Forty-Six and Two, Tool

WRETCHED & ALONE

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DISCLAIMER

The game written within contains scenes of death, gore, violence, loss of agency and mental degradation that some readers may find disturbing.

Discretion is advised.

WHO YOU ARE

A loved one who's eternally departed from you and with whom you had a tumultuous existence has mysteriously mailed you a letter, asking you to come find them. The envelope is not extraordinary--no stamp, no address, just simple scrawled handwriting with your name placed upon it. Inside you find a letter and a photograph of this person and you.

It was hard dealing with them, especially when they got sick. You tried your best to be a good person and help them whenever you could, but you found yourself beginning to resent them. You had a close relationship the majority of the years--until they passed away suddenly. Perhaps you felt joy for being free of them or perhaps guilt of the way you treated them.

Regardless they are gone--or at least you thought so.

You followed the letter's directions to a small town. It was mostly as you had remembered--but vacant of any other life. The buildings are worn down and it seems the very earth has begun to reclaim it. Roads stand like vacant flower beds of broken pavement, twisting their way like veins into the distance. A heavy chill hangs in the air, cooling you to the bone.

That is when you feel the heavy mist roll in. You try as you might to find a path out, but the longer you stand within it the more the chill grips you. Frost begins to build on your flesh and feeling resigned you settle back into the town once more.

You reach for your cell phone and you sit down. You try to call someone, but all you hear is a shrill static in space of any ringing. The call drops a moment later and you click the lock button in frustration. You suddenly look up as something catches your eye.

Strange things seem to call the mist home, bathing in its frosty arms. Everyday is a struggle to stay safe and warm with limited food and water and the constant threat of being annihilated.

Will you survive the mists once and for all and return to the world you knew? Probably not. Will some creature lurch from the night and devour you whole as you slumber? Probably so.

What you need fear most, though, is that which you brought with you.

WHAT IS ECHOES?

Echoes is a game about atonement or damnation; about fear of the real and the obscure. It is about resilience in the face of adversity both physically and mentally. It is about exploring the suppressed and repressed aspects of your mind and either projecting them into your new reality or denying them and projecting them unto others. You are alone, afraid, lost and without hope.

You play the lone searcher for your loved one. You have seen and performed terrible things in your time and watched those you loved wither away into dust. Nothing in this new world feels like it has any sense or purpose. You're isolated from anyone who ever knew you.

You struggle to survive on the fringes of your physical and mental limits. You're degrading more each day as the familiarity of food and water are scarce and the supernatural creatures of the Mist take their toll on your mind. Does this loved one even exist within the confines of this realm? Was it just an elaborate trap to make you pay for misdeeds?

It is unknown--but what is known is that your odds of surviving this are slim to none. Maybe, just maybe, if you do, you'll learn a little about your true self.

Echoes is inspired by the music of Tool and Morton S. Garson, the studies of Carl Jung, as well as video games such as Planescape:Torment, Resident Evil and Silent Hill.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

You will need a standard deck of playing cards with the jokers removed, a single 6-sided die, a tumbling block tower, and 10 tokens of some kind or a 10-sided die that you'll use to count down on. You can play without the block tower if you are afraid or don't have one; though, the game is better with it.

You will also need some way to record the events of your time within the town. Recording your session with a microphone or camera would work best, but you may use whatever medium that is best for you and at your disposal--whether that is a physical journal, word processor or something else.

There are two positive ways out of this scenario.

1. You can confront the dread that is hiding in your heart and make a bargain for your soul. Giving up pieces of yourself (represented by the tokens) to gain your escape, though you'll never be the same person again.
2. You find a breach in the mists and survive long enough to escape.

The number of ways you can perish is much greater and far more likely.

Lastly you'll need an open mind and a heart for storytelling.

BEGINNING PLAY

Set up the tumbling block tower as you normally would for games of that nature. Roll your die, and complete that many pulls from the tower. The tower represents the state of your mental well being--those shadows buried deep within your unconscious. When pulling, you should remove a block from your tumbling block tower from any row other than the incomplete top row and the row directly below it using just one hand. Do not stabilize the tower with your free hand. Then place the removed block on the top row. When starting a new row, blocks should be placed perpendicular to the completed top row that you are building on.

If it falls at any time, you have lost all hope and are lost forever within the town. You will likely starve to death or be hunted off by the many creatures that call the mists their home. If you do not have access to a block tower you do not need to use one and may ignore any instance that would require you to pull from the tower. Your mind will always be steeled against all manner of horrors--you will simply die of exhaustion forever lost within the town.

Shuffle the deck of playing cards and place them face down within easy reach. If you wish to play a shorter game, place the Ace of Hearts at the top of the card deck.

Record your first journal entry from the script below:

Day 1. I have found myself trapped within the town of [your choice] with no sight of [loved one's name]. The mist seems to have no end and I can see nothing beyond its depths. The air is heavy like a blanket made of frost and I hear scratching and creatures baying deep within the fog. Everything here is rotting from the inside out. It's as if the entire city has been abandoned for decades and merely stands on spite alone. I hope I can manage to fend them off, whatever THEY are, long enough until I find [loved one's name] or at least find a way out of this place. [loved one's name], why did you bring me here? What is it you have to show me?

All subsequent journal entries should begin with "Day [x]" in order to assist with an accurate reconstruction of your tale of demise within the city should it ever be recovered or found by another lost soul. The content of the rest of this journal is entirely up to you, but should at least summarize the events of the day.

You are now ready to begin.

THE DAY

The game is divided into days.

Each day has two phases: **The Tasks** and **The Journal**.

Phase One: The Tasks

- Roll your die and draw that number of cards from the deck, keeping them face down.
- Turn over the first card you drew and consult the Grimoire. If the Grimoire asks you to do a specific thing, do it.
- Continue turning over cards and consulting the Grimoire until your tasks are completed.
- When you have completed all your tasks for the day, discard the cards you have used unless you are told otherwise.

Phase Two: The Journal

- Take a moment to consider the events that transpired, keeping in mind what you have learned about your environment, the mists, the echoes of those long past or your own self exploration. Also, bear in mind how you are feeling at that moment.
- Record your journal entry for that day.

THE GRIMOIRE

Consult the Grimoire each time you draw a card and complete the task it suggests for you. Sections are separated by suits, each with 13 tasks possible depending on the value. Sometimes these tasks will involve pulling a brick from the tower, placing or removing tokens or shuffling a card back into the deck. Others will require a moment of introspection or answering questions pertinent to the situation. Others may just end your existence.

♥ Hearts

Hearts represent **The Mists** around you, the uneasiness of the freezing, unending veil and your search for escape into the physical realm. When you draw a heart, you must peruse this new space and defend yourself from physical threats and dread.

♣ Clubs

Clubs represent the **Departed**--the immediate friends and family who have long since passed into the Realm of the Dead, perhaps lost forever in the ether or interjecting their presence into your new reality. When you draw a club, you must face the absence of their reality.

♦ Diamonds

Diamonds represents the **Town** and all the terrible pitfalls, creatures and tragedies that will consume your body, spirit and mind. When you draw a diamond, you confront these obstacles to guard your well being.

♠ Spades

Spades represent **The Shadow**--an unconscious complex that essentially represents the repressed and suppressed aspects of yourself; lingering emotion and events that you see either as missing or distorted and how they shape or warp your reality.

HEARTS - THE MISTS

A The guilt in your soul is overflowing and you find yourself begging for sanctuary. Perhaps in finding forgiveness from your loved one, you can find escape--though you will never be the same person who came in ever again. **Pull from the tower. Do not discard this card** - instead, put it to one side and place 10 tokens on it. At the end of each day, after writing in your journal, roll your die. On a result of 6, remove a token from the card.

If you successfully remove all tokens, you make one final plea to your loved one. **Make a final pull from the tower.** If the tower stands, you are forgiven for your transgressions and allowed to leave the Mists, forever changed. If the tower falls, you are stripped of your flesh and made into another one of the lost and wandering shadows. You are dead, and the game is over.

2 You find yourself staring long into the mist and see shadowy shapes moving freely within it. What do you see that unsettles you? **Pull from the tower.**

3 During the evening, the small fire you have built up to keep the unending cold from freezing your flesh suddenly dies just before you awake. In what odd way does it look to have been extinguished?

4 You hear rustling outside of a small structure you're searching and force yourself into the attic and wait with unsteady breaths. How long did you have to wait before the sounds passed and what did you find in the attic from your past?

5 You have set up a crude alarm system of rusted cans on a string to signal approaching dangers. You awake to see the cans have been crushed into small spheres of twisted metal. You fear you will never be safe. **Pull from the tower.**

6 Pain wracks your insides and you can taste the warmth of irony blood against the back of your tongue. You manage to locate some pill bottles but are unsure of their contents. Do you take them or wait for the pain to subside? **Pull from the tower.**

7 Try as you might, you can find nothing to eat for days. Finally in a frantic state you come across the body of a deceased individual, their flesh still warm. Do you know this person? Do you consume them? **Pull from the tower.**

8 What does it feel like to stare out into the empty blackness of night with nothing but the smallest glow of your fire to give any comfort while shapes and sounds consume the velvety night?

9 Thirst overwhelms you. You manage to find a single working faucet but the water gushing forth is red with corrosion and doesn't seem to clear no matter how long you wait. Do you drink of it or does your caution outweigh all else?

10 One morning you find a singular light floating just down an alleyway. As you follow it, it seems to have moved to another, almost as if beckoning you further. Do you continue to follow it, and if so, where does it take you?

J You spend the day holding up in an abandoned house, trying your best to secure all the entries and exits. Rotten wood soaked with moisture splinters under every attempt to fasten it and all the banging may have drawn unwanted attention. You abandon it and move on. **Pull from the tower.**

Q Entering an abandoning hospital, you quickly find yourself lost in a maze of twisting corridors. It's as if every step you take leads you in the wrong direction and you find yourself passing the same station over and over. **Pull from the tower.**

K Looking for sustenance, you swear you see and hear something stalking after you. Fearful of discovery, you have moments to decide what to do. How will you hide yourself from this new threat without discovery?

Do not discard this card. Place it where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you have collapsed exhausted, hungry and alone within the town with no strength to pull you out. You are nothing but carrion and a feast for worms. The game is over.

DIAMONDS - THE TOWN

- A** You have managed to scrounge up a strange grimoire filled with occult secrets locked away, nestled deep within the remains of a broken hovel. Amongst the rotten stench of decaying herbs and animal carcasses, a rusted lock easily falls apart against a hammer strike, but the sound of the metal clattering to the ground has alerted some fiend to your location. How do you protect yourself from the creature? **Pull from the tower. Do not discard this card.** Place it where you can see it. While this card and the Ace of Hearts is in play, a roll of 5 or 6 will remove a token from it.
- 2** You scramble through some debris looking for resources and manage to twist your leg as the floor beneath you collapses. You take the time to carefully pull yourself free, but you're bleeding--and it is unknown whether the creatures in the mist can smell your life essence draining away. **Pull from the tower.**
- 3** Fleeing from a pack of strange bipedal animals, you dive under the porch of a small homestead. You can hear the creatures overhead of you as dust falls onto your face with each step they take. After what feels like an excruciatingly long time, they depart. **Pull from the tower.**
- 4** You find another person wandering an abandoned building on the staircase. She is covered in blood from head to toe and just stares at you whenever you try to speak. As you draw closer, she shrieks and swings a knife at you, narrowly missing the soft meat of your neck. As you catch your breath, you see her run up the steps and disappear from sight. Moving cautiously up the steps, you find no trace of her in the floor above.
- 5** You find an old 2-way radio and excitedly turn it on. You hear static for the longest time, until you hear the voice of your loved one answer back. What do they say to you? **Pull from the tower.**
- 6** During the night, you cough yourself awake. As your eyes open you are greeted with a smoky interior and flames have begun to envelope the entire structure you've camped in. You narrowly escape as flaming beams collapse the upper floor behind you. **Pull from the tower.**
- 7** You pry open the gate to a convenience store and manage to find several cans of food that may be edible. As your spirits are lifted by this, you excitedly open them to find they are full of nothing but writhing maggots that seems so spill forth without end. **Pull from the tower.**
- 8** You have found a number of rats have found their way into your food and water stores, spoiling them entirely. You spend the greater part of your day acquiring more resources but they are meager and you fear for the future.
- 9** You are ambushed by a terrible creature and just manage to tuck yourself away into a storm drain. It tries to rip and tear at you through the small opening, crimson saliva and eyes displaying its ferocity and hunger. How do you escape? **Pull from the tower.**
- 10** You're assaulted by a canine-like creature that latches onto your arm. It's teeth sink deep and you can feel the blood gushing from the wound. How do you manage to escape and how do you feel now with a broken, useless arm? **Pull from the tower. Do not replace this block at the top of the tower--remove it from the game.**
- J** You find yourself lost in a heavy fog that lays over the town. Stumbling about, nearly blind, you begin to realize you're wandering outside the limits of the town proper. Your flesh begins to freeze and you frantically run. Pain grips as you finally manage to remove yourself of it.. **Pull from the tower. Do not replace this block at the top of the tower--remove it from the game.**
- Q** You are being chased through the town by unseen forces. You feverishly run and unwittingly turn a corner. Where there should be hard pavement there is nothing but blackness as you cascade into a massive sinkhole. You are fairly sure you have broken ribs. **Pull from the tower. Do not replace this block at the top of the tower--remove it from the game.**
- K** You have found yourself in the presence of several cultists that worship the mist. After some back and forth, they grow furious and begin to pursue you across the town. You have lost them after some time, but they now know of your existence and search out for you daily.
- Do not discard this card.** Place it where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you have been discovered by the cultists and they sacrifice you in honor of the Mist. The game is over

CLUBS - THE DEPARTED

- A** You find a letter from your loved one, saying they are so sorry for how they treated you during their illness. They beg for forgiveness and plead for you to be happy. *The next time you are required to pull from the tower, you may choose not to.*
- 2** Your loved one had a favorite stuffed animal from their childhood which they kept the entirety of their life. What was it and what was its name?
- 3** What was your favorite memory of your loved one?
- 4** Your loved one got into a heated argument with another person. You felt embarrassed and exited the scene. Did they ever forgive you for that?
- 5** You found the body of a person who resembled your loved one and ran up on it thinking you had found them. You notice their face is twisted into a smile even in death. How did this make you feel?
- 6** You were very ill and nearly died. Your loved one stayed by your side the entire time and took very good care of you--unlike you did them. Do you feel guilty about that?
- 7** What was the last thing you said to your loved one that you truly regret?
- 8** What was the illness your loved one died from?
- 9** Why did you turn your back on your loved one when they needed you the most?
- 10** You brought something on your journey to the town that you felt was sentimental to your loved one. What was it?
- J** You recall the day you watched your loved one die. It was hard to bring any tears forth and you just stared at them as they said their goodbye. They mumbled something as the light faded from their eyes that will haunt you till your own dying day. What did they say? **Pull from the tower.**
- Q** Wandering the city you find a trail of black roses on the street. Curious, you follow it to find a large hole excavated from the earth and a single grave marker with your name on it. What does the epitaph say? **Pull from the tower.**
- K** You dream into the night about your loved one returning and blaming you for their death. You can see as their flesh melts from their body exposing the gray and shivering organs that spill forth from the recesses of the skeleton, but the words still flow from missing lips as it continues to accuse you. How did you end your loved one's suffering?

Do not discard this card. Place it where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, your body seizes as the very life force of your body is drained into the mist and you forever become a part of the town. The game is over.

SPADES - THE SHADOW

A You find another wanderer within the town who is immediately violent. You manage to kill them in a rather cruel way. What is it? *If you have previously drawn the King of Spades, you may reshuffle it back into the deck.*

2 You were always angry. You would lash out in the most childish of ways--always a cauldron of bitterness and pettiness. It made your loved one feel insignificant. What was your most fearsome outburst over? **Pull from the tower.**

3 Did you really want your loved one dead?

If yes, why did you wish them gone? **Remove a token** if you have more than one token remaining. **Pull from the tower. Do not replace this block at the top of the tower--remove it from the game.**

If not, reshuffle this card back into the deck. **Pull from the tower.**

4 You find yourself humming a song that was your loved one's favorite. What was their favorite song? **Pull from the tower.**

5 You see an image of your loved one calling for you. Rushing to meet them, you notice you have been lured into a trap by several creatures. They surround you and begin to attack, but in a blood lust, you manage to tear them apart with your hands and teeth. What do they taste like? **Pull from the tower.**

6 You constantly hear whispers around every corner, chiding you and saying terrible things about you. What are you most self-conscious of? **Pull from the tower.**

7 You can't bring yourself from your bedroll this morning. Try as you might, you feel entirely lethargic and hopeless. Maybe sleeping the remainder of the day would be best. Reshuffle the remainder of your tasks for this day. **Pull from the tower.**

8 Why do you think your loved one brought you here? **Pull from the tower.**

9 You find a photo of you and your loved one tucked into a random book you find in an abandoned house. On the page, you see in blood red writing "I forgive you" scrawled across it. What are you being forgiven for? **Pull from the tower.**

10 Is this place a symbol of your treachery or is it a place to atone for your sins? **Pull from the tower.**

J Where is your loved one within this town? Why can you not reach them? **Pull from the tower.**

Q You always denied being unfaithful while your loved one suffered. You made up excuses for your treachery. What is the biggest lie you told your loved one and the biggest one you told yourself that you actually believed? **Pull from the tower.**

K You have been having nightmares about your loved one and what they will say to you if you actually see them here. What is your last nightmare about?

Do not discard this card. Place it where you can see it. If this is the fourth King you have drawn, you have accepted your sins and pay recompense with your life. The game is over.

JOURNEY'S END

My, you were a terrible person in life, weren't you? Take a moment. It wasn't really you, at least, let's hope it wasn't. Let those moral quandaries seep in. Do they expose anything inside you that you were afraid to see the light of day?

What happened in the cage you were in?

You probably tried to barter for your own soul, to make amends and say you were sorry for all the awful things you had done. Everything would be all right in the end if you could just look them in the eyes one last time and say you were sorry.

No, that isn't true at all.

You have been telling yourself a story so full of denial and projection during this game that what is true and what is false is blurred--like the event horizon of space and time. The rules in this are but a path to a story and they were told to you by an unreliable narrator--the capacity for hope and redemption, of reunion and restitution.

There never was any hope. The best you could do was pray you could find a way out of this hellish nightmare, but there was never any chance to actually redeem yourself. The likelihood of the former was even stacked against you from the first time you drew a card. All you could do was cling to hope that maybe, just maybe, you would survive this tale.

You were meant to lose. To experience loss, grief and despair.

Maybe the journal you left behind will help the next poor soul who is driven into the town, to let them know of the dangers they face and what little real hope remains there.

The quickest way to see your loved one again is to die anyway, right? The real question is: who knows if you'll both be going to the same place.

It doesn't matter in the end.

You have no legacy.

You and all you did will not be forgiven--just forgotten.

WHAT YOU NEED FEAR MOST, IS THAT WHICH YOU BROUGHT WITH YOU

Echoes is a game about atonement or damnation. A game about fear and the obscure and resilience in the face of adversity both physically and mentally. You will explore the suppressed and repressed aspects of your mind and either project them into your new reality or deny them by projecting them onto others.

You are alone.

You are afraid.

You are without hope.

Maybe if you survive, you'll learn something about your true self.