



## modern dispatch #54

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ENTERTAINMENT

**12 to Midnight**

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## Suddenly...

By Shannon Kalvar

### Introduction

This issue of Modern Dispatch is an introduction to *Suddenly...Encounters*, a line of supplements produced by Adamant Entertainment. Each supplement contains a brief encounter, a discussion of how characters might interact with it, and an array of elements you can introduce to further complicate the situation. You can use the supplement to jump-start a stalled situation or as a jumping off point for an entirely new adventure.

This supplement introduces a staple of pulp adventures – an informant suddenly falls to the ground, dead by unseen means. At that moment why takes a back seat to what as characters scramble for their cover. They might get back to why after the action, or they may find themselves being measures for a long pine box.

### About the Line

Adamant Entertainment is releasing several additional *Suddenly...Encounters* as part of our **Thrilling Tales** line of pulp-genre D20 products. The first, *Suddenly...The Door Bursts In!* is already available.



### Suddenly He Falls...

**The Set Up:** The characters go back to a well-tapped information source with yet another round of questions. They might or might not bother with simple pleasantries and courtesies; most likely they get down to business immediately. Rather than holding a conversation they launch into a set of questions that would make a hostile mob lawyer proud.

These superficial interactions, especially with long standing characters not under player control, break any illusion of immersion. Pure exposition, especially forced exposition like that delivered by a flat character, also ruins the story's flow. In this case, though, make the best of the situation. Play up the target character's nervousness, the flatness of his responses, and his inability to interact normally. Then suddenly...

**The Event:** the informant slumps to the ground. A few seconds later the characters hear a soft crack. Then another person slumps forward, a blossom of red on the back of his head. If the characters fail to react one of them gets a bullet to the head next.

*D20 Event:* The Character Information section below contains stat block for the assailant. Select a block capable of challenging the characters without overwhelming them. The encounter starts with a surprise round. The target NPC fails his massive damage save and immediately dies.

In this case do not be afraid to use “timed” rounds. Give each player 30 seconds or less to decide his character’s action. If player takes longer the character loses his action for the round.

Working out the sniper’s location requires the characters to make (cumulatively) three Listen skill checks (DC 25). As soon as a character moves towards the sniper’s position he will run. Chasing him down depends entirely on what you need from the session – do you want to use the chase rules from Hot Pursuit or do you want the characters to catch him quickly for some bloody revenge.

*Story Structure:* We want to shake the characters up. At this point things have become routine. They do what they do, follow their routines, and get the job done. The sudden change, from routine to terrorist target, completely shifts the story around. The dull pace changes from plodding to frantic, with a corresponding change in writing style.

**Things That Happen:** During the combat you can use the following images:

1. One of the other characters in the scene

folds over, clutching his stomach

2. A character close by screams in panic as an ornamental object (lamp, vase, etc.) explodes due to a missed shot
3. A man is hit in the head by an object flung by another character. He takes off his hat to examine it for damage. As he feels the brim the sniper shoots him. The hat falls to the ground, unharmed.

### **Encounter Goals and Variations:**

Though the sniper’s attack initially seems random, he acts with both purpose and precision. His choices and the eventual outcome revolve around this purpose.

*Misdirection:* In this case the sniper works for or is someone the characters will cross. The attack, brutal and effective as it is, really serves as a way to distract the characters from their immediate goals. It leads them away from whatever the sniper protects, possibly into a trap or into further red herrings.

Misdirection works best when the characters have forward momentum. They will happily



crash forward, probably not even noticing the sudden change in plans. However, be careful not to accidentally derail their activities entirely.

*Retribution:* In this case the sniper wishes

to destroy one or more of the non-player characters. Alternately, he may wish to harm one of the characters by systematically destroying everything he (the character) holds dear.

Retribution works best when one or more of the characters wronged someone in the past. The sniper becomes the personification of their past misdeeds, and the death of the informant a tangible symbol of the damage they have done.

*Terror:* In this case the sniper wants to induce terror in someone (not necessarily the characters). Shortly after terrorizing he will issue demands then claim failure to meet those demands will “force” him to further acts of violence.

Terror works best when the characters routinely use similar tactics themselves. When they routinely bully, commit assault, and otherwise abuse others, having the tables turned causes a kind of queasy recognition most people find uncomfortable.

*Note: This is not a reference to current events, at least not unless you count the anarchist bombings of the 1910s-1920s as recent.*

## What Happens Next

Eventually the characters resolve the sniper attack. What happens next depends on the sniper’s goal and where the story needs to

go. We took the liberty of suggesting a few possibilities below.

**Misdirection:** Once the sniper stops firing the characters should ask “what was going on?” If they search they will find additional clues designed to drag them in an entirely new and useless direction. The ideas below suggest some traditional possibilities.

**M1)** The target of the characters’ current investigation ordered the hit to stop the informant from talking. The sniper leaves evidence (perhaps a dropped note at his firing position) indicating a third party was responsible. The characters can follow up on this clue or drop it, though they will still have to find a new information source.

**M2)** The mayor ordered the sniper to silence the informant because he gained information about a vote rigging scandal. The sniper, who works for a local bootlegging operation, does not actually know who ordered the hit. He just follows his orders and

leaves a receipt at the crime scene that leads back to one of the mayor’s political enemies.

**M3)** The target of the characters’ current investigation has secret and powerful protection from a corrupt prison official. This official allowed the sniper to get out of jail early with the understanding he would “take care of a problem”. The investigation leads the characters back to the jail, where they have to figure out how the sniper escaped in the first place.

**M4)** The sniper’s attack is psuedo-random. He believes the characters are members of a global anarchist conspiracy out to destroy the civilized world. The sniper will stop at nothing to prevent them from tearing







down the pillars of society, though he fears to directly attack them. Instead he rains bullets into the characters friends, family, and support network until finally captured.

**Retribution:** After someone carts the bodies away the characters will have to face the inevitable question of “Why did this happen around us?” Once bodies start piling up around them as the sniper strikes again, and again, and again this question should become even more important. Some traditional pulp answers include:

**R1)** Select a female in the past the characters abused, insulted, or simply ignored. This insulted lady’s husband, a none-too-stable

Civil War veteran, decided to hunt down the characters and “make them pay for their deeds.” The good news is he doesn’t really have very good eye-sight; the bad news is he likes to use his bolt-action rifle and he doesn’t much care who gets hurt.

**R2)** A member of the police force, his career blighted by the characters constant intervention into criminal affairs, decides to remove them from the scene after his wife leaves him for another man. However, he realizes that just removing the characters will not solve his problem. He must root out the characters entire “organization”, making the world safe for “decent working men everywhere”. The sniper stalks the

characters, slaughtering their friends wholesale until they can finally bring him to justice.

**R3)** A spurned woman/man from the characters lives develops a homicidal “fixation” on one of the character. Perhaps he resembles the spurned lover’s abusers, or some other complex context the character was unaware of. For whatever reason he decided the best way to deal with the character was to “cause him the pain he caused me” by removing important people from the characters life.

**R4)** The wife of someone the characters killed during one of their mass killing sprees in the name of justice hired the sniper. She worked unspeakable jobs, willingly delving into the worst parts of society, in order to raise the money. The sniper will happily give her up, but will the characters have the heart to destroy a woman sunk so low?

**Terror:** Once the sniper makes his point he flees into the shadows. A short time later the news papers print, or the characters intercept, his demands. The question then becomes “what will the characters do about it?”

**T1)** The sniper represents a splinter anarchist cell. If their demand for immediate revolution is not met they will begin a bombing campaign, eventually destroying the local National Guard Arsenal. They will also target individuals responsible for the maintenance of social order, including the

characters.

**T2)** The sniper represents a fringe movement within the labor organization. He killed the characters contact because he ratted out an organizational meeting to the cops, who attacked the meeting with their boozy wrath. In his note he demands freedom for workers and decent hours for the working class.

**T3)** The sniper is an independent professional paid for by one of the local landlords. The landlord ordered him to perform a random strike, and then pin the blame on “capitalist oppression of the working class”. The sniper issues a list of nonsense demands then vanishes into the woodwork.

**T4)** The sniper is one part of an elaborate plan to destabilize the city immediately before the next election. He blames his actions on the mayor’s corrupt government and demands their immediate removal. Every day he targets those who support the status quo, gunning them down with ruthless determination. At the same time a wide array of new newspapers appear with splashy headlines about government corruption. The characters can either participate in the madness, help shut the sniper down, or help him to clean the city up. However, they may never know who started the plot or what exactly he intends.

The description below provides some clues as to the sniper’s identity. The accompanying stat block gives information in the Modern

SRD format, about his potential abilities. The sniper relies on cover, surprise, and massive damage to deal with his foes; as such he does not present much of a threat in direct combat..

## The Sniper (Human Male)

*Description: The small man’s grey fedora falls from his head as he vaults the low retaining wall encircling the roof. From below you hear a crash, the creak of wood, and a shout from someone disturbed by his fall...*

### Stat Block

Fast 6; CR 6; Medium human criminal; HD 6d8+6; hp: 33; Mas 12; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 18, touch 18, flat-footed 18; BAB: +4; Grap +4; Atk +4 melee knife (1d4) or +6 (+8 aimed) ranged sniper rifle (2d10); Full Atk +4 melee knife (1d4) or +6 (+8 aimed) ranged sniper rifle (2d10); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +3; AP 4; Rep 2; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 10

**Skills:** Balance +9, Climb +4, Hide +13, Jump +11, Move Silently +13, Tumble +13

**Feats:** Acrobatic, Dead Aim, Far Shot, Focused, Personal Firearm Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Stealthy



**Talents (Fast):** Defensive Roll, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge 1

**Possessions:** Suit, Masterwork bolt action sniper rifle (2d10, 240 ft., RoF 1)

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