



modern dispatch #62

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ENTERTAINMENT

12 to Midnight

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Suddenly... A Whiff of Gas!

By David Cheever

Introduction

This issue of *Modern Dispatch* is another example of Adamant Entertainment's *Suddenly...Encounters* for the D20 Pulp line, *Thrilling Tales*. *Suddenly...Encounters* feature 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 jumpstart a stalled situation or as a jumping off point for an entirely new adventure.

This issue introduces another staple of pulp adventures - a sudden gas attack designed to impair or even silently kill. The characters must scramble to defeat this sudden and insidious attack. Once the immediate threat of the gas has passed they can look to assist innocent victims and determine who was behind it.

Suddenly...

The Set Up: At the conclusion of a day's activities, the characters gather at a neighborhood diner. Updates about the day's activities are exchanged and the conversation flows easily. After a time the conversation moves away from business and on to mutual interests and personal topics. Gradually the characters lose awareness of the other individuals in the diner and events going on around them.



About

THRILLING TALES

Thrilling Tales is Adamant Entertainment's line of pulp-genre gaming products for using with Modern D20. The line features Advanced Classes representing the major pulp hero archetypes, a Gamemaster's Guide, adventures and supplements (including *Suddenly...Encounters*, which features more encounters in the style presented in this issue).



At times characters, especially when allowed to assume some degree of control over the ongoing flow of the campaign, fall into a pattern of creating detailed plans for every encounter and attempting to micro-manage their environment. At these times the gamesmaster should remind them that they will never be in full in control of their destiny and the events proceeding around them. With every success comes a bit of notoriety and life will seek them out in unplanned ways. They will not be able to control events as suddenly...

The Event: A loud crash draws the characters attention as a mechanical automaton crashes through a wall of the diner. A large cloud of dust briefly obscures the metal man but as it clears the characters are able to make out the remnants of a large glass container built into the chest of the metal monster. A bilious yellow cloud leaks from the container driven by fans mounted on the shoulders of the automaton. At this point the characters begin to react.

D20 Event: A recommended stat block for the automaton is included at the end of this document. Throughout the encounter the automaton will be attempting to penetrate further into the diner and toward the target assigned by its controller. Do not be afraid to move the assault forward in real time even to the point of allowing the characters to freeze in indecision or squabble with each other.

The encounter starts with a surprise round, which will allow the gas to overcome most NPCs near the automaton and the rest will fall

unconscious in the next few rounds. Allow any player characters within the diner to hold their breath for a number of rounds equal to their Constitution. After this period of time, the character may attempt to continue holding their breath by making a Constitution check (DC 10) every round. Each round, the DC of the Constitution check increases by 1.

Remember that holding their breath will preclude any form of communication other than passing written notes and body gestures. Any attempt to speak to each other will immediately end that character's attempt to hold their breath and in the following round they will fall unconscious from the effects of the gas. The gas although a lurid color is a simple, although strong, knockout gas and will cause no long-term impairment to the characters.

Story Structure: This encounter is designed

to force the characters to make split second decisions without any time for discussion or to plan a coordinated effort. You should allow them to communicate their reactions to you without allowing them to coordinate verbally with each other. Attempt to have the characters demonstrate their basic strengths and weaknesses. Which characters will run and which will attempt to aid others in the diner? Who will attempt to take charge and either fail or succeed? This is a situation in which they can fail and not suffer any long-term consequences, but it should serve to remind them of their own mortality.

Things That Happen...

During the automaton's assault you can use the following images:

1. The good-looking waitress who has been



serving the characters is quickly overcome by the gas and sprawls awkwardly on the floor spilling a large amount of small change noisily across the floor.

2. The fans mounted on the shoulders of the automaton blow food and papers across the diner adding to the confusion and .

3. A couple in one of the corner booths immediately embrace and indulge a heartfelt and deep final kiss as the gas approaches.

Encounter Goals and Variations:

The automaton is being directed by an individual outside of the diner toward a specific individual inside the diner. The automaton, unless stopped by the characters, will approach that individual and leave a hand-written message on or near them. If stopped before reaching the individual or if the character manages to remain conscious, the automaton will throw the message toward them as a final gesture before fleeing or shutting down entirely. The individual serving as the focus of the attack and the nature of the individual controlling the automaton will be determined by which of the suggested motives or variations is selected.

Unrequited Love: One of the characters or another individual in the diner is the target of an unrequited love. The automaton moves toward this individual and lays a single rose and a brief poem of love beside them once they fall unconscious. In addition, the gas is scented with a perfume or cologne favored by the individual.

This option will be most successful if the actions of a player character toward other individuals have passed beyond the standards of good taste held by the majority of the group. It can serve as a reminder of the heavy weight that they bear as public figures and object of attention. It can also be utilized to introduce new characters into the group.

Attention Seeking: The person controlling the automaton is seeking to gain notoriety and attention for their own purpose or project. Dramatic and impulsive by nature the individual selects this method to announce his greatness and glory to the world. The target of the automaton will be a character or NPC employed as a newspaper reporter or columnist. The progress of the automaton across the diner will be accompanied by a loud fanfare of music coming from speakers within the metal man. The target will receive a “Press Release” extolling the genius of the automaton’s creator and promising further revelations to astound all.

This option will work best if the characters have achieved a level of public notoriety and fame within the local community. Their hard-won fame will be used in a cheap attempt to bolster that of another individual. Soon or later the characters will be forced into action simply to preserve their name and reputation.

The Cut Direct: The person controlling the automaton is using this very public event to announce his intention of seeking revenge on those who have personally harmed him or his associates. Before engaging in a no holds-barred

duel of wits with the characters and the public at large he wishes to increase their anxiety by proclaiming his intentions to the world. In this situation the automaton will move across the diner amid a loud martial march coming from speakers within the metal man. The target will receive notice of a “Duel of Wits” to end in their public embarrassment and the end of their life.

This option will work most effectively if the characters are publicly acknowledged as guardians or protectors of the inhabitants of the city where they live. Anything less than a public acceptance of the challenge would serve to lower them in the eyes of the public and change the course of their activities. It can also be effective when the characters are not responsible at all for the events, which led up to the challenge. Unjustly accused or not they are still forced to defend themselves or face the consequences.

What Happens Next...

Eventually the characters will stop the automaton or the device will complete its delivery and flee. The characters, even if they flee from the diner, will not see the controller of the automaton who must be the focus of their future efforts. Several possible options for future actions by the characters are offered for each of the three basic situations.

Unrequited Love: Following the encounter the characters will need to determine the true source of the attack and begin to search for any possible individuals behind the attack.

UL1) A former intimate friend of the targeted character has allowed envy and jealousy to taint their relationship. Watching as the character's star continues to quickly rise while remaining in obscurity has driven the friend into increasingly irrational acts to win back the love and attention of the character. The controller of the automaton was hired and paid well for his services, but does not know the identity of his client.

UL2) The builder and controller of the automaton has a "fatal attraction" for the targeted character. While the characters might possibly recognize the face on the controller as someone they have seen before, the characters have had no previous interaction with the stalker. The stalker will continue to step up the extravagance of the gestures and eventually attempt to kidnap the character unless stopped.

UL3) A low-level assistant to famed inventor in the city has taken advantage of the inventor's visit to another city and purloined the automaton designed by his boss. While the characters are familiar with the inventor and his creations it seems very unlikely that he would be sending love notes with one of his automatons.

UL4) One of the characters is the actual builder of the automaton. He has hired an acquaintance unknown to the other characters to stage to assault and deliver a love note to his secret love. The gas is designed to give the character a chance to

heroically rescue their romantic interest.

Attention Seeking: By the very nature of this sort of event, future episodes will continue to escalate in degree and seriousness as the need for ever more attention grows. The characters will need to resolve this quickly to avoid having innocents brought into danger and also to limit damage to their own reputations.

AS1) The scorned lover of one of the characters has approached a local publisher who agreed to hire a local inventor to stage the event. His paper will have exclusive photographs and the complete behind the scenes story of the scorned lover. The scorned lover will have their revenge in a most public way.

AS2) A rural inventor has decided to shake the dust of rural life from his shoes and showcase his skills on a stage appropriate to his stature. He has read of the characters in the papers and created this scene to gain publicity for his automaton. His next step will be to offer his automaton and skills to the police or local politicians in an attempt to serve the "good people of this fair city."

AS3) A gang of bank robbers have stolen an automaton from an inventor in a distant city. In an attempt to divert attention from their real goal and to test the functioning of the automaton they have created this scene. If the automaton was successful in knocking out the inhabitants of the diner and escaping, their next step will be to rob a local bank.

The fact that the characters were in the diner is only incidental.

AS4) The automaton which crashed into the diner is only one of several created for a large budget movie set to open in the near future. Although the entire scene was staged to generate publicity for the movie, the film company which owns the automaton will not accept responsibility, claiming instead that it was the action of a single crazed lover who had access to the automaton.

The Cut Direct: This encounter will only be the first in a series of ongoing events and lead into a long-term rivalry between the characters and the group behind the assault. In true "heroic" fashion neither side will ever be truly vanquished once and for all, but each will serve as a permanent thorn in the side of the other.

CD1) A large local paramilitary organization, frustrated by the characters several time in the past has seized upon this opportunity to publicly display their new hardware and collect a little payback at the same time. As the characters deserve to suffer for a time before any "final solution", automaton attacks on the characters will continue, gradually increasing in both the degree of violence and frequency. In addition, as the organization hopes to raise the fear level within the city bystanders and incidental victims will not be spared their righteous fury.

CD2) The son of an inventor investigated

by the characters has chosen this moment to announce his intention to avenge the death of his father. Although his father committed suicide in a very public manner, the son is convinced that the characters drove him to it. As his revenge is intensely personal, great lengths will be taken to ensure that none but the characters receive any permanent harm, but the frequency of the attacks and encounters will sharply increase and serve to frustrate any other plans the characters might have for that time in an attempt to drive them to the same end as his father.



CD3) A corrupt politician exposed by the crusading character with many friends still employed by the local police is seeking revenge by destroying the reputation of the characters. Rather than attempt to kill them he wishes to have them publicly disgraced and rendered impotent in the public eye. Every attempt will be made to make them pariahs among the public by destroying people and property in the vicinity of the characters, but their lives will not be taken unless by accident.

CD4) A group of rivals to the characters have staged the entire event in an attempt to discredit the characters in the public eye and publicly humiliate them. The gloves are now off and it is open war between the groups. Every effort will be made to upstage and outshine the characters in any future endeavor that they undertake.

Character Information:

The description below supplies the capabilities and skills of the automaton. These abilities can easily be modified to fit the needs of a specific campaign or to better match the strengths of the characters in your group.

The automaton is a large mechanical skeleton or armature with four legs and four appendages (3 pincers and 1 probe). It stands about 66 inches high with the four articulated legs making up the bottom 46 inches of height and the body being the top 20 inches. The body is spherical and

studded with a multitude of flashing lights and mechanical relays. The legs and appendages are in pairs equally spaced around the body of the automaton.

Automaton: CR 5; Large construct; HD 6d10+20; hp 55; Mas -; Init -1; Spd 25 ft; Defense 14 (-1 Size, +5 equipment), touch 9, flatfooted 14; BAB +4; Grp +15; Atk +8 melee (1D4+7 nonlethal, 3 pincers) or +8 melee (1D3+7 nonlethal, probe); FS 10 ft x 10 ft; Reach 10 ft.; SQ construct traits; AL owner; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AP 0; Rep +0; Str 24, Dex 11, Con -, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 5.

Locomotion: Multiple Legs (5)

Manipulators: Pincers (3), Probe (1)

Armor: Alumisteel Armor

Sensors: Class II Sensor System

Skill Software: Skill Chip Demolitions (8 ranks), Skill Chip Search (8 ranks)

Ability Upgrade: Dexterity Upgrade (+2) ; Strength Upgrade (+4)

Accessories: Fire Extinguisher (modified to hold and eject gas); AV Transmitter, Internal Storage Unit, Speakers, Fans

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