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# **SUDDENLY...** **ENCOUNTERS**

# SUDDENLY... ENCOUNTERS

BY SHANNON KALVAR

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Suddenly...Encounters*. This product contains a collection of brief encounters, each with a discussion of how characters might interact, and an array of elements you can introduce to further complicate the situation. You can use the encounters to jumpstart a stalled situation or as jumping off points for an entirely new adventures.

The *Suddenly...* line was introduced with two teaser products -- *Suddenly...The Door Bursts In*, and *Modern Dispatch: Suddenly...*-- both are included in this collection.



## SUDDENLY... THE DOOR BURSTS IN!

**The Set Up:** The characters shut themselves in a room. For whatever reason they refuse to move, idling away their time rather than seeking out adventure. That's okay. Adventure will seek them out with a vengeance.

Stalls like this frustrate Game Masters, players, and writers. However, in this case play it up a bit. Focus on the mundanely of the characters actions and how this contrasts with their usual mode. Emphasize the character, plot, and emotional conflicts paralyzing the situation. Then suddenly...

**The Event:** The door bursts in. A well-dressed man strides forward, blazing away with a pistol. He grabs one character (the biggest/strongest) with one hand, throws him into another character, and shoots a third in one smooth motion. At this point the characters begin to react.

*D20 Event:* The Character Information

section below contains a scaled stat block for the assailant. Select a block capable of challenging the characters without overwhelming them. The encounter starts with a surprise round, though you can let the players roll Listen checks (DC 100) if you wish. The “strong” character will fail his grapple check, even if you have to ignore the rules. It helps set up the combat flow.

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.

*Story Structure:* We want to restart the action after allowing, creating, or falling into a lull. This is a dramatic, symbolic transition; from a neutral/negative state the characters come face to face with direct danger and must respond. Their reactions tell us a great deal about them as people. It can also highlight places where they need to grow.

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



1. The well-dressed man’s hat gets knocked off in the struggle. He picks it up and reseats it while pistol-whipping the character that dislodged it.
2. One of the characters ends up face first in the radio.
3. The well-dressed man pushes one of the characters out a window.

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

The well-dressed man’s attack, though seemingly random, does have a purpose. That purpose determines the tactics he uses and how long he will stick around. The suggested purposes for the attack include assassination, intimidation, and the wake-up call.

*Assassination:* In this case the adversary wishes to remove one or more of the characters. He focuses his attacks on his targets until they collapse. He makes a hasty escape after achieving his goal.

Assassination works best as a goal when it targets a single character. The assailant attacks without mercy, hounding them though the room. Other characters get dismissed from the fight as quickly as possible.

*Intimidation:* In this case the adversary wants to scare the characters a bit. He roughs them up, slams the big guys into the walls, and raises a ruckus. He then leaves



after delivering a semi-cryptic warning. Appropriate warnings include “Don’t show your face around the bar anymore” or “The Councilman is off limits”.

Intimidation works best when the characters have crossed one or more powerful men. The warning should give them enough information to figure out who sent the bruiser with a little thought.

*The Wake-Up Call:* In this case the adversary works for the characters’ erstwhile allies. He wants the characters to start moving again. His hard and fast attack will, he hopes, shake them out of their doldrums. After a round or two he calls a halt to the fight by “surrendering”. When things calm down the adversary delivers a warning and some information the characters need to get moving again.

The wake-up call works best when the characters stalled themselves out by arguing or over-thinking the problem. It’s a reminder to both the characters and the players/readers that this is pulp – things need to move or they fall apart.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT...

Eventually the characters resolve the attack. What happens next depends on the well-dressed man’s goal and where the story needs to go. We took the liberty of suggesting a few possibilities below.

**Assassination:** After the encounter the characters should ask “Who ordered the hit” and “Why did they order it.” The ideas below suggest some traditional possibilities.

**A1)** A mob boss, angered by the characters interference with his bootlegging operations, ordered a hit on one of the characters. If they continue to interfere he will send set another “appointment in a church” for another character.

**A2)** A city councilman wants to remove one of the characters before a crusading police officer gets to him. The target character does not even know he holds evidence against the councilman. The crusader will get in touch with the character shortly after the assassination attempt.

**A3)** One of the characters’ former enemies came into money. He hired the assassin to clean up old business while focusing on his new life. The characters can choose to go after him or try to deal with the assassin directly.

**A4)** The enemy of a character’s father decided to murder his foe’s child. The

assassin will disfigure the downed character (e.g. cutting off a finger) before making his escape. If the target dies his father will contact the other characters to find out what happened. If not, then the assassin will return shortly to do his job.

**Intimidation:** After the encounter the characters should ask “Who ordered the attack” and “What do they want us not to do.” The ideas below suggest some traditional possibilities.

**I1)** The would-be beau of one of the character’s lady-friends sent the adversary to remove the character’s impediment to his suit. The rivalry may only exist in the beau’s imagination. The adversary warns the target character to stay away from his lady-friend.

**I2)** One of the characters’ good deeds annoyed an Irish gang. They worked themselves into a tizzy. Fortunately, before they went off half cocked, one of the local politicians sent his “friend” over to talk with the characters. The adversary warns the characters never to come around the Irish neighborhood again.

**I3)** The police want the characters to stop interfering with their comfortable lifestyle. They called in a favor from one of their supporters (either a politician or a criminal) who sent the adversary to deal with the problem. The assailant warns the characters to “stay out of other people’s business.”

**I4)** An unknown cult stalks one of the characters friends. The assailant is their representative; he came to warn the characters to avoid associating with the stalking target. This, unfortunately, actually tips their hand. The characters now know the target is in danger.

**The Wake-Up Call:** The well-dressed man will, in this case, answer the characters’ questions. However he tailors his answers to drive the characters back into action. He reveals as little as necessary, leaving mysteries to help goad them on. The ideas below suggest some traditional possibilities.

**W1)** A friendly but exasperated old patron sent the well-dressed man with information about their latest investigation. The adversary became so frustrated listening to the characters’ dither that he eventually broke down the door just to get them to shut up.

**W2)** The well-dressed man represents the Jesuits. They have information of interest to the characters recent activities but do not wish to divulge it to the unworthy. He attacked them to test their reflexes and their moral strength.

**W3)** The well-dressed man represents a criminal organization interested in assisting the characters out of their latest predicament. He attacked them to establish his credibility; he hopes the characters will listen to him after he knocks them around a bit.

**W4)** An old enemy sent the well-dressed man with information designed to both assist and trap the characters. The well-dressed man attacked them to establish himself as a valid threat. His information contains both rewards for doing as the old enemy requests and naked threats about what will happen if the characters fail to comply.

## CHARACTER INFORMATION

The description below provides some clues as to the well-dressed man's identity. The accompanying stat block gives d20 Modern information about his potential abilities. These abilities scale with the characters' allowing him to present a credible threat against even a fairly established group.



## The Well Dressed Man

*Description: A broad shouldered man wearing a charcoal grey Italian cut suit of raw silk, a white shirt, and a perfectly knotted ascot bursts through the door. The ascot's diamond stud glitters as he lifts <insert character name here> with one heavy hand.*

### Low Level (Strong 2/Tough 2)

CR 4; Medium human criminal; HD 2d8+6 plus 2d10+6; hp: 34; Mas 16; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 15, touch 15, flat-footed 14; BAB: +3; Grap +5; Atk +6 melee pistol whip (1d4+3) or +5 ranged pistol (2d6); Full Atk +6 melee pistol whip (1d4+3) or +5 ranged pistol (2d6); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SV Fort +7, Ref +1, Will +1; AP 1; Rep 0; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 14

**Skills:** Climb +7, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (streetwise) +5, Profession (enforcer) +5

**Feats:** Heroic Surge, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Personal Firearm Proficiency, Weapon Focus (Colt .45 pistol)

**Talents (Strong):** Melee Smash

**Talents (Tough):** Robust

**Possessions:** Expensive Suit, Colt .45 (2d6, 20, 30 ft., RoF 5)



## **Mid Level** (Strong 5/Tough 5)

CR 10; Medium human criminal; HD 5d8+15 plus 5d10+15; hp: 87; Mas 16; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 17, touch 17, flat-footed 16; BAB: +8; Grap +10; Atk +11 melee pistol whip (2d4+5) or +10 ranged pistol (2d6); Full Atk +11/+6 melee pistol whip (2d4+5 /1d4+5) or +10/+5 ranged pistol (2d6); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SV Fort +9, Ref +5, Will +3; AP 6; Rep 2; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 16

**Skills:** Climb +10, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (streetwise) +5, Knowledge (tactics) +3, Profession (enforcer) +10

**Feats:** Brawl, Heroic Surge, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Personal Firearm Proficiency, Streetfighting, Toughness, Weapon Focus (Colt .45 pistol),

**Talents (Strong):** Melee Smash, Improved Melee Smash, Advanced Melee Smash

**Talents (Tough):** Robust, Damage Reduction 1/-, Damage Reduction 2/-

**Possessions:** Expensive Suit, Colt .45 (2d6, 20, 30 ft., RoF 5)

## **High Level** (Strong 5/Tough 5/Soldier 5)

CR 15; Medium human criminal; HD 5d8+15 plus 5d10+15 plus 5d10 +15; hp: 129; Mas 16; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 20, touch 20, flat-footed 19; BAB: +11; Grap +13; Atk +15 melee pistol whip (2d4+7) or +14 ranged pistol (2d6+2); Full Atk +15/+10/+5 melee pistol whip (2d4+7/1d4+7/1d4+7) or +14/+9/+4 ranged pistol (2d6+2); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SV Fort +12, Ref +8, Will +6; AP 8; Rep 3; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 17, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 16

**Skills:** Climb 10, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (streetwise) +5, Knowledge (tactics) +3, Listen +7, Profession (enforcer) +10, Spot +7

**Feats:** Knockout Punch, Brawl, Heroic Surge, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Initiative, Improved Knockout Punch, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Personal Firearm Proficiency, Streetfighting, Toughness, Weapon Focus (pistol),

**Talents (Strong):** Melee Smash, Improved Melee Smash, Advanced Melee Smash

**Talents (Tough):** Robust, Damage Reduction 1/-, Damage Reduction 2/-

**Features (Soldier):** Weapon Focus (Colt .45), Weapon Specialization (Colt. 45), Tactical Aid, Improved Critical

**Possessions:** Expensive Suit, Colt .45 (2d6, 20, 30 ft., RoF 5)

## 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.

## **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 pseudo-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.



## CHARACTER INFORMATION

The description below provides some clues as to the sniper's identity. The accompanying stat block gives d20 Modern information 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)



## SUDDENLY... HE PULLS A KNIFE!

**The Set Up:** The characters go about their normal daily routine – eating, cleaning up, prowling around looking for miscreants, etc. As the day reaches a lull one of the characters finds himself speaking to a relatively innocent character. Perhaps it's the newsboy who brings them their broadsheets or a dairy delivery boy who brings them pastries from the local patisserie with the morning milk.

In this situation the characters allow the banality of ordinary life to overcome their forward momentum. Such pauses, only one step removed from shopping, do in fact have a place in an adventure. Even the most hardened characters need a moment or two to breathe. However, this becomes a problem when the moment to breathe stretches out indefinitely. To solve the problem we focus on a simple interaction with an innocent then suddenly...

**The Event:** The innocent pulls a switchblade and attacks. He strikes viciously, aiming for a vital part readily available to shorter assailants. After the surprise round he runs off, lashing out at characters who cross his path.

*D20 Event:* The Character Information section contains a stat block for the assailant. Select a block depending on whether or not the innocent is truly out of his mind or actually a gang member. The encounter starts with a surprise round.

In this case the flow of combat means less than the players' shock and confusion. Let them sit and stew, ask questions, and even call you names. After all, this encounter should shock them out of their rut.

This is, effectively, a chase. Adamant Entertainment publishes a set of chase rules (*Hot Pursuit*) which works well to model this situation.

*Story Structure:* For whatever personal, psychological, or narrative reason they lost the thread of motion. Book-keeping and banality overwhelmed the wonder and excitement of their adventure. We want to spark the characters back into action by attacking from an unexpected quarter.

**Things That Happen:** During the conflict/chase you can use the following images:

1. A shopkeeper steps into the boy's path and gets a knife in the gut for his trouble
2. The kid drops and rolls under a fence
3. The kid overturns a street vendor's cart, causing a stream of Polish curses to erupt.

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

Though the innocent's attack initially seems random something precipitates it. Some traditional reasons are suggested

below:

*Amok:* In this case the innocent suffers from an episode of “nervous agitation”. He lashes out with the switch blade he carried in self defense, then goes for a long run through the streets.

Amok works best when the characters need a bit of action infused with human drama. They have to chase down the innocent while simultaneously preventing the locals from gunning him down. When they finally do catch up with him he struggles a bit then falls limp.

*Assault:* In this case the “innocent” actually belongs to a local youth gang. He uses his day job to cover casing buildings and setting up people for robberies. His assault marks the opening gambit in a very dangerous game.

Assault works best when the characters have a history of taking in strays or reacting in a very hot-headed fashion. In the first case the assailant rushes off, then uses a fresh face and lies to weasel his way into the building. In the second the attack drags the characters out of their domicile so the gang can sack it in peace. In either scenario the “innocent” tries to extend the chase as long as possible so the characters become committed to his capture or stay out of their home for a while, respectively.

*Mesmerism:* In this case the innocent acts as a puppet for some third party. He has no control over his actions during the surprise round then awakens to the situation. The

moment awareness returns, he runs, realizing the characters might well wish to kill him. As the armed adults chase down a frightened child the third party evaluates them.

Mesmerism works best when the characters have either crossed a cult in the past or are about to. The ability to control others through hypnotism/mesmerism turns up in many horror and psychic pulps so this encounter makes a good introduction for such themes.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT...

Eventually, the characters either catch the innocent or lose him in the crowd. What happens next depends on the innocent’s motivation and where the story needs to go. We took the liberty of suggesting a few possibilities below.

**Amok:** Once they catch the amok innocent the characters should ask the question “What the heck happened?” The ideas below suggest some traditional possibilities.

**A1)** The innocent’s witnessed a man “assaulting” his mother several days ago. He tried to keep the anger and feeling of helplessness in but it broke out at the worst possible time. The assailant resembles the attacked character; it might be a doppelganger or an actor practicing to replace the character for some nefarious purpose.



**A2)** The innocent just snapped. The stress of living on the streets, eating rats, and trying to take care of his baby sister finally overwhelmed him. He is bright, if uneducated, and could be a good man if given a chance.

**A3)** The innocent's family recently moved to the Kentucky coal-mines. He's alone, afraid, and living on the streets. Close investigation reveals they did not actually move; instead someone kidnapped them to work in a silver mine somewhere in the trackless west. This scenario works best when the characters are involved with various labor related issues.

**A4)** The innocent lost control because he felt threatened. A youth gang recently tried to recruit him. They still follow him around, bad-mouthing his customers and pushing him around. He caught sight of a gang member just before initiating his attack.

**Assault:** Once the characters either lose or capture the "innocent" they must answer the question "What do we do with this kid?" Some traditional answers dredged up from the pulps include:

**As1)** The "innocent" just joined the gang under duress. He leads the characters away from their home then lets them capture him. Once captured, he will beg for protection. As proof of his good faith he tells the characters about a hit planned on a local cigarette store that night.

**As2)** The "innocent" leads the characters on a merry chase. He uses his knife to cut awnings, spill barrels, and generally make life difficult for those chasing him. He also assaults a few people in passing as a way to distract the characters. By the time they catch him and get back to their home the young gang has ransacked it.

**As3)** The "innocent" leads the characters into a trap. The gang attacks after a brief chase leading into a blind alley. There are four youths to every character in the group. They attack from range, relying on thrown bricks and some simple traps to overwhelm their opponents. The gang attack is not random; one of the characters enemies hired them to do the deed.

**As4)** The innocent leads the characters into a trap. In this case, though, the gang's leader ordered the attack because someone mesmerized him. He now believes the characters were responsible for his parents' deaths. He therefore whips his gang into an enraged frenzy. More importantly, if the characters escape he will continue to attack, directly or indirectly, until they finally defeat him or break the control.

**Mesmerism:** The innocent flees once he realized what happened. When the characters finally catch this confused, damaged innocent they must deal with the question “Why did this happen?”. Some traditional pulp answers include:

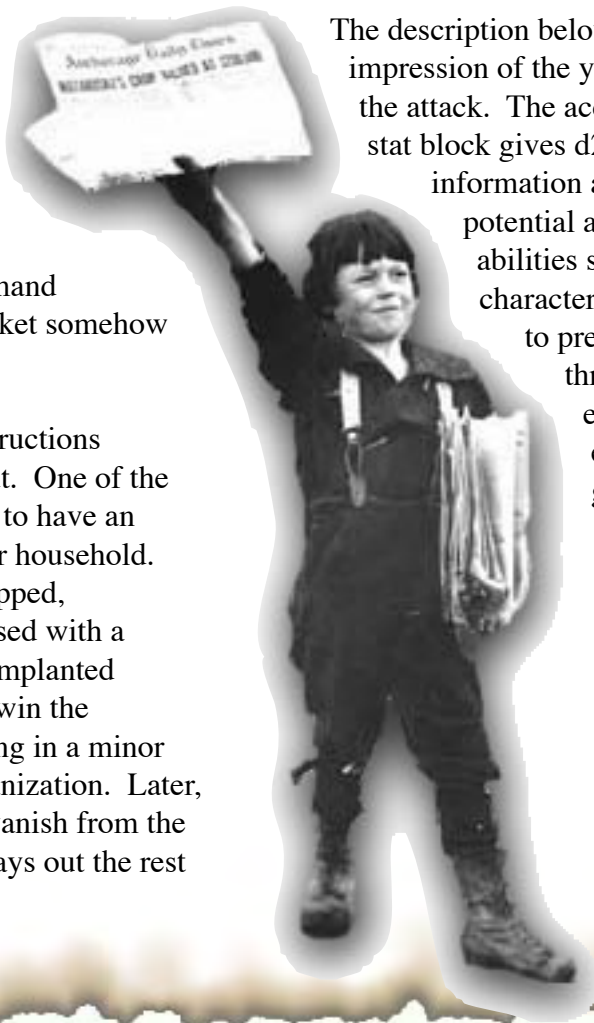
**M1)** The innocent ran afoul with a “thing from beyond space and time”. It lurks in his neighborhood, sending out mesmerized minions to do insane deeds. The local rags report all kinds of crazy activities, linked together by a “growing gang threat”.

**M2)** The innocent’s father recently joined an underground cult. He, being a petty criminal himself, tried out his newfound powers on his child. Unfortunately, the command he implanted to pickpocket somehow went awry.

**M3)** The innocent’s instructions have not fully played out. One of the characters enemies paid to have an informant placed in their household. The innocent was kidnapped, programmed, then released with a sob story and a host of implanted commands. He tries to win the characters trust by turning in a minor part of the enemy’s organization. Later, long after these events vanish from the characters’ minds, he plays out the rest of his commands.

**M4)** The innocent ran afoul of a cult when his gang tried to raid its lair. All of the gang members were mesmerized to forget the incident and commit random crimes leading to their inevitable incarceration. A skilled mesmerist might be able to pull the information out of the innocent’s addled mind, leading him to a society of mesmerists who want to take over the world.

## CHARACTER INFORMATION



The description below provides an impression of the youth during the attack. The accompanying stat block gives d20 Modern information about his potential abilities. These abilities scale with the characters’ allowing him to present a credible threat against even a fairly established group.

## **The Innocent (Human Male)**

*Description: You see a glint of metal in the young boy's hand. An instant later fire traces up your legs towards your private parts. As he turns to run you see tears in his eyes...*

### **Real Innocent**

Real Innocent (Dedicated 1) CR 1; Medium human; HD 1d8; hp: 4; Mas 10; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; Defense 13, touch 13, flat-footed 11; BAB: +0; Grap +0; Atk +0 melee knife (1d4); Full Atk +0 melee knife (1d4); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +2; AP 1; Rep 0; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 11

**Skills:** Gamble +5, Knowledge (streetwise) +5, Profession (delivery boy) +5, Sense Motive +5, Spot +5, Treat Injury +5

**Feats:** Dodge, Mobility

**Talent** (Dedicated): Healing Knack

**Possessions:** Street clothes, knife (1d4)

## **Gang Member**

Youth gang member (Fast 2); CR 2; Medium human criminal; HD 2d8; hp: 9; Mas 10; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; Defense 16, touch 16, flat-footed 14; BAB: +1; Grap +2; Atk +3 melee fist (1d6+1 nonlethal) or +3 melee knife (1d4+1) or +3 ranged knife (1d4+1); Full Atk +3 melee fist (1d6+1 nonlethal) or +3 melee knife (1d4+1) or +3 ranged knife (1d4+1); FS 5 ft. by 5 ft.; Reach 5 ft.; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0; AP 1; Rep 0; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 11

**Skills:** Balance +7, Bluff +4, Knowledge (streetwise) +6, Move Silently +7, Profession (criminal) +5, Sleight of Hand +7

**Feats:** Brawl, Deceptive, Dodge, Weapon Finesse (knife)

**Talent** (Fast): Increased Speed

**Possessions:** Street clothes, knife (1d4)



## SUDDENLY... THE BELL RINGS!

**The Set Up:** The characters, fresh from their latest exploits, settle down for a well-deserved breakfast. However, breakfast brings with it more than just the morning sheets. An unexpected visitor arrives bearing all of the wonder of the world with him.

In this situation the characters allow the characters a moment's peace before the storm descends. Let them plan out a lazy day, maybe drop some hints about local betting activities, and possibly some evening's entertainment. After all, even the most hard-boiled of heroes needs to relax every once in a while. Then suddenly the bell rings...

**The Event:** ...as a panicked young woman desperately cries for help on their doorstep. Her panicked pleas only grow louder and more strident as the sun begins to rise. When the characters open their door she tries to fling herself in, disregarding common courtesy and sense. Anyone who tries to stop her, even to help, will suffer a buffeting round of slaps and sharp kicks. All the while she babbles about the "bad men" and what they will do to her.

*D20 Event:* The Character Information section below does not contain combat information about the young woman. Any character can subdue her, causing harm or not as they choose. It does, however, contain information both about talking the

young woman down and some sample stat blocks for pursuers.

In this case the young woman's panic acts as a cover (intentional or not) for the danger nipping at her heels. Let the characters get involved with her, pulling their focus away from potential threats and to the strange creature in their midst. Then spring the danger on them just as things start to settle down.

*Story Structure:* This set-up represents an application of classical misdirection. The panicked girl poses a social and emotional challenge to the characters while a physical/metaphysical threat lurks in the background. Once the characters' attention cements on the girl's plight the threat strikes, creating additional tension, and sparking another adventure.

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

1. The character who opens the door sees what looks like a babbling mound of rags
2. A shadow passes over the young woman as she stands on the character's stoop, causing her to cringe and cry
3. The young woman throws herself at one of the character's feet, pleading for her life



**Encounter Goals and Variations:** The young woman's babbling seems random at first, or at least out of control. However she does have very good reason to fear for her life. The list below presents three possible reasons, though more certainly exist.

*Assaulted:* In this case the young woman survived a brutal, and ongoing, criminal attack. Her tattered clothes conceal a variety of wounds and her tears deep psychological trauma. The attackers will arrive moments after she does, demanding

that the characters turn "their sister" over to them. If the characters refuse things will get nasty fast.

Assaulted works best when the characters display an occasional heroic streak. The young lady's plight should pull at their heart-strings, giving the criminals time to act.

*Hounded:* In this case the young lady has problems of an aggressive but not criminal nature. Her rich but tattered clothing speaks to a background of wealth and privilege. Her determined efforts to avoid capture hint at dark things in her past. The polite but powerful men who come asking after her pointedly remark on the dangers of crossing the social elite.

Hounded works best when the characters display iconoclastic tendencies. The more rebellious, stubborn, and pig headed the characters act, the more appropriate this motivation becomes. As the weeping young lady begs them for protection the social elite sweep down; the characters must divert them without injuring or maiming otherwise upright citizens who control the city's infrastructure and political apparatus.

*Marked:* In this case something sinister stalks the young lady. For nefarious and inscrutable reasons a cult dedicated to some antique religion wants her as a sacrifice. Though guile and pluck she's remained out of the cult's hands for this long. Now, at the end of her rope, she turns to the characters for help. Just as the

characters begin to make sense of her story the cult makes a final bid to capture her.

Marked works best when the characters display the kind of hard-headed materialism common in pulp heroes. The more they use reason to solve problems the more of a foil the cult becomes. The conflict of the rational, progressive world against the ancient, closed world of history makes riveting adventuring/reading.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT...

Eventually the characters will see past the young woman's distraction. What happens next depends almost entirely on who hunts for her and why.

**Assaulted:** Once the characters get the young lady calmed down her criminal assailants will appear, demanding that the characters hand her over. What, exactly, then intend for her depends on their motivations and her circumstances. Its unlikely the criminals will immediately attack the characters but they will definitely return in greater numbers to finish the affair.

The list below provides a few possibilities culled from the pulps.

**A1)** The young woman is a lady of the street who wishes to escape from her lifestyle. Her heart, as yet unhardened, still yearns for a purer life. Unfortunately the men chasing her wish to keep her chained in a house of

ill-repute. Should the characters stand up to them, they will discover dozens of young American girls trapped in a situation created by their terrible foreign masters.

*(Note: This plays on some of the more xenophobic and isolationist fears prevalent during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Do not use it if it would offend the players or readers.)*

**A2)** The young lady became involved though her brother, a cad who got involved with some ladies of the evening down at a local gambling establishment. She went down there herself to redeem his marker but the criminals wanted more than she would give. Now she needs help and the characters have a reputation for helping those in trouble. She begs them to help her, offering them money or anything else they might desire. The characters can redeem the boy's marker, make another arrangement with the criminals, or even go gambling to get the debt transferred to them.

**A3)** The young woman stumbled into a terrible crime late last night. The criminals following her need her silence more than they need the anonymity of the dark. This is the only case in which the criminals attack, guns blazing, in an attempt to kill the young woman before she can talk. Later they will come back for the characters, just in case she spilled her guts before expiring in a hail of bullets.



**A4)** The young woman is a kidnapped heiress. The criminals want her back so they can meet their part of the ransom bargain. Unfortunately the young woman's brother, who arranged the kidnapping to remove her from the inheritance, has no desire to see her returned alive. Nor does her stepmother, though proving that will take more than just detective work.

**Hounded:** Once the characters get the young lady calmed down her generally good manners reassert themselves. Moments later, their bell rings again as a youth arrives, carrying her luggage. After the characters get the door shut the bell rings yet a third time, opening to reveal...

**H1)** ...the young lady's erstwhile husband, a notorious local lothario and heir to an industrial empire. He and his thug friends intended to collect his bought bride from the station. She, being of feisty spirit, refused, bit his hand when he tried to grab her, and ran for her life. Should the characters try to stop him he will bring the down the full force of his father's wrath.

**H2)** ...the young lady's father, a dour Southern preacher wearing a broad-brimmed black hat. He explains to the characters that his daughter, a highly excitable young woman, simply got over stimulated in the big city. She also, he claims, suffers from a nervous disorder making it difficult to know whether she's talking about "fantasy or reality".

Whatever wild claims she made during the initial contact were, clearly, just the result of her condition.

The reality is bad enough, though the old man will not talk about it. She's tried to escape his clutches and her patent formulas that keep her docile for years.

**H3)** ...the young lady's brother, come to take her home after a wild night out on the town. Both of them are in considerable trouble with both the law and the criminal element thanks to her feckless ways. They owe vast amounts of money and considerable favors to men who rarely make deals a person can refuse. The brother tries to usher the young woman out before she sobs out their whole, sorry story onto a stranger's shoulder.

**H4)** ...the young lady's Indian guardian. He says very little to the characters, simply demanding they turn over his charge. If they resist he will retreat, muttering about his "master's coming". Shortly thereafter one of the oldest, most powerful men in the city pays the characters a discrete visit. He demands they return his "niece" to him. The girl's constantly rising hysteria makes it difficult or impossible to get coherent answers out of her.

**Marked:** Once the character's clam the young lady down something strange and unnatural happens. The sinister forces hunting for the girl's blood. If they catch her they will kill her in a horrible manner in keeping with their archaic beliefs.

**M1)** A few minutes after the young woman arrives the bell rings again. This time the characters find a polite, well-dressed middle-aged man with a German accent standing outside. He politely requests the character's return his "cousin" to him, as she ran off from a family gathering. The formerly calm girl begins to scream as soon as she sees him. If the character's put him off he will return that night with an army of mesmerized thugs to secure his sacrifice.

**M2)** The characters first clue that the young woman is not a raving lunatic comes in the form of a firebomb thrown through their window. It is followed moments later by an utterly silent group of the poor and homeless. Should the characters beat them off, they will discover the poor sods were mesmerized/possessed and forced to attack.

**M3)** The young woman screams in fight as soon as the characters close the door. She tells them she cannot bear to be in closed spaces any longer; not since that horrid night when the men came to her room, stole her away, and nearly killed her because of her resemblance to some long-dead woman. The cultists are still after her, she claims, just waiting for

a chance to catch her when her guard flags.

**M4)** The young woman calms down enough to explain she things she's being chased by ghosts. This is, in fact, slightly inaccurate – her pursuers are in fact wraiths. Bound to this world by a promise to her great, great grandfather they intend to drain her life and bring an end to her family line. Once she dies they can move on to the great beyond.

## CHARACTER INFORMATION

The description below gives the characters initial impression of the young woman. The further details provide a guide to calming her down and extracting whatever sorry tale she wishes to relate.

### The Young Woman (Human Female)

*Description: You catch a glimpse of bright brown hair and streaming eyes before the ragamuffin collapses, clutching at your knees for support. Broken sobs sound loudly in the foyer as the trembling bundle whispers over and over again "Mercy, mercy..."*

Tough Ordinary 1 CR 1; Medium-size humanoid; HD 1d10+1; HP 5; Mas 9; Init +2; Spd 30 ft; Defense 13, touch 13, flatfooted 11 (+0 size, +2 Dex, +1 class); BAB +0; Grap +1; Atk +1 melee, or +2 ranged; FS 5 ft by 5 ft; Reach 5 ft; SQ; AL none; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0; AP 0; Rep +1; Str 12, Dex 15, Con 9, Int 7,

Wis 10, Cha 14.

Occupation: Dilettante (Knowledge [Current Events])

**Skills:** Balance +4, Concentration +1, Drive +3, Knowledge (Current Events) +1, Ride +3, Spot +1

**Feats:** Dodge, Focused

**Possessions:** Tattered Clothing

### **Soothing the Panicked Young Woman**

In order to sooth the young woman the characters must succeed at two Diplomacy skill checks (DC 30). If the characters have sufficient skill they may wish to just make the dice rolls and be done with it. However, they may also use the following approach.

#### **Declare Approach**

Each character who wishes to clam the young woman declares his approach – bracing or soothing. Characters who choose the bracing approach try to get her to calm down though masculine manners. Characters choosing the soothing approach try to calm her down by listening and understanding.

A character who chooses the bracing approach may declare a number of actions from the list below equal to his Charisma modifier. Similarly, a character taking the soothing approach may choose a number of actions from the list below equal to his Wisdom modifier. Each character may declare one and resolve one action each “round”. When all eligible characters have declared and resolved their actions a new round begins.

If the characters fail to succeed at two Diplomacy skill checks by the end of their actions then the girl passes out from panic and poor handling. If they succeed all participating characters receive a reward equal to 50 XP x their character level.

#### **Possible Actions**

Characters may take one of the following actions each round. They may describe the action as they wish, but the action description must use the verb provided below.

*Assure:* you give the young woman your assurances. You may make a Bluff skill check (DC 20). If you succeed you reduce the DC of the Diplomacy skill checks by your Charisma modifier. If you fail you increase the DCs by the same amount.

*Calm:* you try to calm the young woman down. You may make a Diplomacy skill check against the current DC. If you succeed you mark one success against the two needed. If you fail reset the DC to 30.

*Comfort:* you provide the young woman with psychological comfort. You may make a Knowledge (behavioral sciences) skill check (DC 20). If you succeed you reduce the DC of the Diplomacy skill checks by your Wisdom modifier. If you fail you increase the DCs by the same amount.

*Listen:* you listen to what the young woman has to say. You may make a Sense Motive skill check (DC 20). If you succeed you grant a bonus to skill checks



made in the next round equal to your Intelligence modifier.

*Protect:* you offer the young woman your protection. You may make an Intimidation skill check (DC 20). If you succeed you reduce the DC of the Diplomacy skill checks by your Strength modifier. If you fail you increase the DCs by the same amount.

*Offer:* you give the young woman something soothing. You may make a Knowledge (popular culture) skill check (DC 20). If you succeed you reduce the DC of the Diplomacy skill checks by your Intelligence modifier. If you fail you increase the DCs by the same amount.

## SUDDENLY... THE ROOF FALLS IN!

**The Set Up:** The characters begin yet another routine shakedown. They have done this a thousand times – walk into the area, shake up a few mooks, bust a few heads, then move on to the next location. It always plays out the same way. Some loudmouth talks big in front of his friends. Some little sleaze tries to slip out the back. A beautiful woman with a smoky voice sings in the background.

In this situation the characters allow their rote activities to take over. “Adventure” and “ambiance” take a back seat to dice rolling and the every-day drama of beating information from thugs. The activities, all normal parts of a pulp hero’s life, no longer hold much luster or challenge. The players know they can get away with everything and the characters know nothing serious threatens them. You want to play up this lack of challenge, then suddenly...

**The Event:** the characters hear a muffled boom. A moment later the roof begins to fall in as fire dances along wooden surfaces. Any bottles of bootlegged gin burst, adding a touch of blue to the cheerily red and yellow flames. The characters must get themselves and any innocent bystanders clear before discovering the explosions cause.

*D20 Event:* For once a d20 encounter does not involve a hostile character, a monster, or a thing man was not meant to

know. Instead the characters must dodge, jump, and pull their way to freedom while avoiding falling debris and panicked civilians. The Encounter Information section below contains a suggested set of tasks for the characters to overcome on their way out the door.

Players who expect every encounter to involve a fist full of bullets will experience trouble negotiating this situation for the first few rounds. In order to minimize confusion the Game Master should ask the player to choose between two or three possible actions each round. As the players begin to understand their predicament the Game Master should give them a bit freer hand.

*Story Structure:* This scene focuses on reader rather than character response. The characters should respond with typical pulp fervor. The readers, on the other hand, should be blindsided by the sudden turn of events. Inconsequential characters, the same people the heroes came to abuse, move from being stock villains to terrified civilians in need of help. Characters the heroes regularly lean on, criminals and other pulp bigwigs, scream for help as the roof caves in.

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

1. A huge man beats vainly at the flames with his fedora
2. A young woman screams as her beau, a thin young man with a freckled face, passes out
3. A tall, blond man tries to help an older man to his feet but collapses as a bit of flaming roof falls on his head.

**Encounter Goals and Variations:** The explosion may be random, targeted at the characters, or targeted at someone in the establishment. Although these three reasons have almost no bearing on what the characters do to survive, they radically alter how the explosion occurred and what happens next.

*Random Event:* In this case the building's collapse and the fire occur because of a freak natural accident. American and European cities in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century suffered from such things on a fairly regular basis. Explosions and fires occurred on a fairly regular basis.

A random event works best when the accident ties in to some other plotline. Nothing really happens by chance in a story; this explosion should result from some action the characters took or are about to take. However, their involvement with it should occur at three or four steps

removed.

*Character Target:* In this case someone wants to kill one of the characters enough to murder a building full of people. He selected a target location, arranged or planned for the character to be there, then detonated the device with no regard for the lives of others.

Targeting a character works best when the character truly did something worthy of such rage. The character himself may or may not have any idea why someone would target him with such fury. If the target survives the mad bomber will strike again, and again, and again until someone stops him.

*NPC Target:* In this case the characters' involvement occurs by simple bad luck. The real target struggles to escape with the mob then fades into the background. If the characters investigate the bombing they quickly discover a plot reaching far beyond their usual concerns.

A secondary target works best when the characters become too focused on their own concerns. The bombing and subsequent fire presents an opportunity to remind them that the world continues to turn, even if its heroes attend to other matters. If the characters choose to ignore these events bombs continue to go off until the target finally falls.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT...

Eventually the characters scramble free of the rubble either covered with glory for saving others or simply lucky to be alive. What happens next depends on why the explosion occurred when and where it did.

**Random Event:** Once the dust settles the characters should have the opportunity to ask "What happened?" The ideas below suggest some traditional possibilities leading the characters towards unhappy but not sinister circumstances.

**R1)** The explosion resulted from a backed-up steam tunnel. The tunnel vents hot steam into the characters' location, leading a scalded bystander to trip over a lit stove. The resulting combination of a pressure explosion and fire made it look like a bomb went off. Of course, the local political machine goes into overdrive, blaming the "bombing" on whatever public enemies seem handy. The characters can try to set the record straight or join in the witch-hunt for their own ends.

**R2)** The explosion originated in a local coal storage facility. Some hobos camped out by a silo, lit up, and ignited hell. The massive explosion took out the silo, the warehouse, and the surrounding area. The characters just happened to be in it. They might get involved with the local hobos working out what happened, or have to learn hobo-signs to really understand the event.



**R3)** The explosion started out as a little fire down in the city sewers. It smoldered for a few days then encountered a patch of “bad air”. The resulting flash fire broke through the street, the building the characters were in, and the local housing. Survivors might justifiably wonder why a subterranean fire burned for several days without someone in authority taking care of it. Should they investigate, they will discover the authorities were well aware of the situation but chose not to put the fire out in the hope it would do enough underground damage for them to condemn the area.

**R4)** The explosion came from an old anarchist bomb, left over from a plot stifled two decades ago. As it aged the explosives became unstable, eventually detonating when a rat gave it a hard shove. Investigation by the characters will turn up the plot and that several members of the current city government actively supported it in order to further their political agenda.

**Character Target:** Once dust settles the characters will start to ask “What happened?” In cases where someone deliberately targeted the characters they might discover one or more of the following complications.

**C1)** The explosive came from one of the local criminal gangs the characters tangle with on a regular basis. The gang’s leading “father” was an anarchist back in the ‘90s who still remembers

how to pack a powder bomb. He built it at his friends’ request but does not care what happens to the characters. He will not, however, turn on his friends if the characters come calling. Instead he detonates an old bomb of his own design, killing himself and sealing his secrets in the grave.

**C2)** The explosive came from a local Army base. One of the endless waves of criminals the characters dealt with was the brother of a sergeant in the engineering corps. When his brother ended up dead or in jail the sergeant built a bomb and went out hunting for them. The innocent bystanders just died because they happened to be in the same place as the characters when the sergeant caught up with them. Whether the characters will suffer from more attacks depends entirely on whether or not the bomber survived.

**C3)** The explosion originated in the characters car. The bomber, a long time rival of the characters, set the bomb to go off when the characters would ordinarily be on their way to a leisure activity. Their slight deviation from routine leads to the deaths of dozens and vast property destruction. The rival, horrified by the results, will try to flee without offering an explanation.

**C4)** The explosion originated from an exotic cocktail of chemicals unknown to modern science. Its explosive impact far exceeded that of ordinary dynamite. It came from a cult the characters

unknowingly crossed, a cult which will continue to haunt them until they root it out. In the end the characters will have to confront a secret society of evil men bent on overthrowing the US government and installing an oligarchy of “wise men”.

**NPC Target:** Once the fires go out the characters will start to ask “What happened?” In this case, they will face not only the bomber and his deeds but also the angry reactions of the real targets. Exactly what happens next depends on who the target was, who targeted him, and why. Some answers culled from the pulps below provide a starting place for further expansion

**N1)** The explosion targeted a group of local businessmen gathered at the establishment when the characters happened to come in. They were organizing resistance against a protection racket; now their widows will make easy prey to the criminals who killed them. The gang moves in quickly, putting pressure on the widows the next day.

**N2)** The explosion targeted gang’s rival. The gang that set the bomb may or may not have connections with anarchists or some other radical group. They did, however, buy the bomb from someone. That there is a mercenary bomber on the streets, willing to sell explosives to the highest bidder, should send a chill down the spine of even the most hardened character.

**N3)** The explosion targeted someone holding a state secret. The bombers, a group of Nazi 5<sup>th</sup> column agents, wanted to kill him before he delivered it to the government. The characters, in their efforts to survive or save people, ended up carrying the object containing the information the Nazi’s want/want to intercept. The Nazis will turn their attention to the characters until the information either arrives at its destination or falls into their eager hands.

**N4)** The explosion targeted a local “man about town” in retribution for his callous treatment of a young man’s sister. He used the skills he developed as a railway foreman to construct a bomb suitable for dealing with the situation. The brother also hired one of the local ladies to make sure the lothario would arrive in the right place at the right time. The young lady’s death, though unintended, was an inevitable side effect. Assuming the lothario dies the bomber will retire quietly to live out the rest of life.

## ENCOUNTER INFORMATION

The description and suggested encounter structure below provide one way to play out the explosion and its aftermath. However the Game Master chooses to do it, though, the characters should feel as if they had to make difficult, dangerous choices during the encounter.

### The Explosion

Description <addressed to one player>: *You see the window glass shatter as flames race up from the floorboards. A muffled roar sounds close by, followed by screams as the ceiling begins to fall in...*

### Environment By Round

The environment steadily degenerates as the collapse accelerates and the fire spreads. The encounter lasts for five rounds, after which the fire brigade will have to dig any remaining characters out of the rubble.

The following chart provides the base damage, save DC, and check DC for each round. In general, the longer a character stays in the building the more difficult it becomes for him to act or survive. The actions a character takes may increase one or more of these variables.

Damage is assessed at the end of the round. Characters roll initiative as they would in a normal combat.

### Possible Actions

Characters caught in the explosion must make decisions about what they wish to do. Some will run, some will cower, and some will step up to save other's lives. Some suggested actions and their consequences/requirements appear below.

*Brace:* the character uses his mind or muscle to slow the building's decay. He may make a Strength check or a Craft (structural) skill check at the round's Check DC. If he succeeds the round progress "halts" for one round as his efforts contribute to the structure's stability. If he fails he takes an additional +1d6 damage from falling debris.

*Carry Out:* the character saves a bystander. He may make a Strength check with a DC equal to round's Check DC. If he succeeds he saves one person by bodily removing them from harm. If he fails he does not save the person but he does gain a +2 bonus to his next Carry Out attempt. In neither case does the character escape from the fire.

Round	Damage	Reflex Save DC (Half Damage)	Check DC
1	4d6 + 1d6 fire	12	13
2	2d6 + 2d6 fire	15	16
3	2d6 + 3d6 fire	18	19
4	3d6 + 3d6 fire	21	22
5	4d6 + 4d6 fire	24	25



*Cover:* one character shields another with his body. The covering character automatically fails his saving throw against the damage. The covered character gains a +2 bonus to his saving throw and automatically takes half damage. If the covered character succeeds at his saving throw he takes no damage. A character with Evasion who uses the cover action takes half damage.

*Escape:* the character attempts to escape. He must make an Escape Artist, Jump, or Tumble skill check at the Check DC. If he succeeds he leaves the building. If he fails he remains in the building as it degrades. A successful character takes damage for this round but does not take damage on subsequent rounds unless he wishes to take another action.

*Hunker Down:* the character pulls something over his head and crouches down. He automatically takes half damage but loses his place in the initiative order.

*Search:* the character searches though the dust and smoke for either a way out or a trapped bystander. He makes a Search skill check and declares whether he wishes to find a way out or trapped bystanders. If he exceeds the Check DC for the round he adds a +2 bonus to either those taking an escape action or those performing the carry out action respectively. He gains a corresponding bonus to his own saving throw.

