



# MODERN

## DISTANT

# SIGNALS



By Rich Redman

A Short d20 Modern Adventure for Four 3rd-Level Characters

A hero finds a note and a set of truck keys in his pocket. The note instructs the heroes to locate a particular panel truck and deliver its cargo to a specified location. But where did the note come from, and what's in the truck?

*Distant Signals* is an adventure that finds the heroes, wherever they may be. It is best used as a brief interlude between regular adventures in the campaign. The scenario outlines a task and describes those who oppose its completion. In addition, information is given about what “punishments” are levied against heroes who elect not to undertake the task at all.

This adventure requires no specific location. It can be played in an urban or a rural area; simply choose a location appropriate for your campaign. Most towns and cities have Tourism or Chamber of Commerce sites on the Internet that can supply details about weather, local plants and animals, and other features of the location to help you provide a sense of place.

Once you decide where to set the adventure, you may want to change the name of the locations mentioned to fit the area chosen. For example, if you choose to place the adventure in your home town, you may wish to change the name of the intersecting streets where the movie shoot occurs to important streets in your city.

### LEVELS

*Distant Signals* is a short scenario for four 3rd-level heroes. With slight modifications, you can make it suitable for heroes at other levels (or groups as large or small as you're comfortable adjudicating). See the Scaling the Adventure sidebar for guidelines on adapting it for other groups.

You, the Game Master (GM), need a copy of the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game* to run this adventure. To get started, print out the adventure and read it through. Familiarize yourself with the basic situation as well as the GM characters, their motives, and their

abilities. Then make sure you are comfortable with the rules for combat, movement, and cover from Chapter 5 of the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*. If you have not run the two previous installments of this series, download them and read through them to make sure you fully understand the background for this one.

The text that appears in shaded boxes should be read aloud or paraphrased for the players. Opponents' statistics are provided in abbreviated form.

## CAMPAIGN MODELS

*Distant Signals* is a basic, low-FX (or even no-FX) adventure with eerie overtones. It can easily be adapted for any of the campaign models presented in Chapter Nine of the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game* simply by adding elements unique to the desired model, such as Mindwreckers or fiends, or by changing the security guards into bugbears.

## BACKGROUND

While dressing in the morning, a hero finds a note in his pocket directing him to find a particular panel truck and deliver its contents to a specified location. You as GM must decide the exact source of the note, and whether its means of delivery is technological or supernatural in nature.

## The Mission

The heroes have a few hours to find a particular panel truck, drive it to a specified location, and deliver the goods that it contains.

### Links to Other Adventures

*Distant Signals* is the third in the *Grim Frequencies* adventure series, each of which begins with a bizarre transmission. Each of these short adventures can easily be incorporated into an existing campaign.

These adventures do not provide enough rewards to advance the heroes in level. They should expect to advance via the main action of the campaign, with the *Grim Frequencies* missions providing brief interludes.

Each *Grim Frequencies* adventure puts the heroes in an increasingly complex moral conflict. Ultimately, the heroes must decide for themselves whether the end justifies the means.

This adventure series may not be the next great work of American fiction, but it should provide a fun ride. Jump on!

### Scaling the Adventure

*Distant Signals* is designed for four 3rd-level heroes. The encounters reflect the danger inherent in modern-era gunfights. If your heroes find them too easy, or if you want to use the adventure with higher-level heroes, add character levels to the opponents in each encounter rather than adding opponents.

## The Opposition

The intersection specified for the delivery is the site of a movie shoot for Darryl Brzezinski's current film. Frank Oakley (see the GM Characters section) is in charge of security on location, and he's not interested in any story the heroes have to tell. In fact, he's had a particularly hard week and is spoiling for a fight.

## SYNOPSIS

The heroes can either follow the instructions given to them via the mysterious note or not. If they don't, unfortunate incidents begin to occur. If they do follow instructions, they must successfully deliver the goods to the site of the movie shoot.

By making their delivery, the heroes divert a chain of events that would have resulted in a terrible tragedy if allowed to unfold, though they do not realize they have done so. What the heroes choose to do thereafter is of no consequence, as long as they deliver the goods.

The immediate consequences of failure are outlined in the Punishment, below. In addition, the world slowly and imperceptibly drifts toward a horrible fate—unless the heroes manage to avert it in later adventures.

## Character Hooks

As GM, you know best how to involve your players and their characters in an adventure. In this case, however, the hook is simple: The heroes do what they're told or bad things will happen. However, they might choose to get involved for other reasons as well. Below are a few possible situations that could set the events of this scenario into motion. As always, feel free to modify the details to fit your heroes.

### Department-7 in This Adventure

If you adapt this adventure for use with one of the standard campaign models (see the Campaign Models section), that model defines the role of Department-7. If you don't use it with a specific campaign model, consider the following suggestions for Department-7's involvement.

**No Department-7:** If Department-7 doesn't figure prominently in your game, you don't need it here.

**Homeland Security:** Make Department-7 a branch of Homeland Security, or the appropriate organization in the country where your adventure is set. In the course of tracking a terrorist threat, the department is investigating the transmissions that started the previous adventures in the series (*Far Voices* and *Faint Transmissions*) and the heroes' involvement with them.

**FCC:** Make Department-7 a branch of the Federal Communications Commission, or the appropriate organization in the country where your adventure is set. The FCC routinely investigates pirate radio transmissions, and the broadcasts in the previous two adventures fall into that category.



- The heroes want to break into the movie business.
- The heroes are angry about someone breaking into one of their homes to plant the note (see Background), and they hope that some investigation will get them closer to the perpetrator.
- The heroes are curious about where this note and the mysterious transmissions from previous adventures came from and want to find out more.

## BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure begins when one of the heroes finds a set of truck keys and a note in his pocket while getting dressed in the morning. Time is of the essence in this adventure, and the heroes should have at least two hours to accomplish their mission. Thus, if the hero who found the note usually sleeps later, then he woke up unusually early today for some reason. If he habitually gets up early, it's fine to allow more time. Read or paraphrase the following to the affected hero when this event occurs.

You're getting ready for your day when you hear what sounds like a piece of paper crackling in one of your pockets. Your clothes are clean, so it's not likely that you left any paper in that pocket. You can also feel an irregular lump there that may be a set of keys.

At this point, take aside the player whose hero found the note and keys and read or paraphrase the text below.

The paper in your pocket seems to be a note written in an unfamiliar hand. It says, "An unmarked white panel truck parked at A&M Warehouses is loaded with lighting equipment and cables for filming. Drive it to the intersection of 5th and Lennox, where you will find a production company filming a movie. You have the keys to the truck. Deliver the lighting equipment to the production company before noon today. Do not fail." The hard, irregular object is indeed a set of keys, and they appear to be the sort that operate a truck.

Return the player you took aside to the main group and let her tell her fellow players whatever she wishes.

**Development:** Heroes who take a bit of time to analyze the note can uncover the following information with a successful DC 15 Investigate check.

- The paper is ordinary. The watermark indicates that was manufactured by Schumway Paper Products, Inc.
- Schumway markets that particular kind of paper all over the country.
- The printing was most likely done with a laser printer.
- Neither the paper nor the keys bear any fingerprints at all.
- The key ring is a simple metal circle with no identifying logos or marks.

Analyzing the hero's room or residence requires another DC 15 Investigate check. Though the doors are locked and any alarm systems are active when the heroes check them, a few signs indicate that the locks were picked and the alarms were bypassed. No strange hairs, fibers, or tracks give any indication of the intruder's identity, however, nor do the heroes find any indication of how an intruder would know which clothes the hero intended to wear, or how the break-in was accomplished so quietly.

If you want to award XP for this investigative work, treat it as a no-threat EL 3 encounter (see Awarding Experience Points in Chapter Seven: Gamemastering of the *d20 MODERN Core Rulebook*).

## THE SETTING: THE MOVIE SHOOT

The movie shoot is taking place at the intersection of 5th and Lennox, a pair of two-lane roads. Except for the presence of the movie company and its equipment (see encounter B), the intersection is unremarkable.

## THE ACTION

The action proceeds in the order presented below unless the characters' actions dictate otherwise.

### A. The Truck

The heroes have no trouble finding the truck; it is parked at the warehouse indicated on the note. (If you need statistics for it, use the ones for the moving truck in Chapter Four: Equipment of the core rulebook.) No other white panel trucks, marked or unmarked, are in evidence, and the parking lot has no security to stop the heroes from taking the truck.

The truck is in fact loaded with lights, light stands, disassembled scaffolding, and wiring. Its cargo is completely innocent and exactly as it appears, but the heroes are welcome to attempt all the skill checks they have time to make before their delivery deadline.

### B. No Admittance

Wooden sawhorse barriers stenciled with the name "Organized Productions" block both 5th and Lennox except for one lane. A security guard with a clipboard and a gun belt is checking people and vehicles through the open lane when the heroes arrive. Beyond him, the street is crowded with trailers, lighting equipment, RVs, cameras, wiring cables, craft tables, cars, extras, actors, and production staff.

The security guard is Frank Oakley (see GM characters), and the heroes' delivery is not on his list. He simply refuses to let them through his "gate" because the production company's security policy requires authorization for every visitor and vehicle. His initial attitude is unfriendly.

The heroes have several options. Each of the most likely ones is detailed below; simply choose the most appropriate of the following encounters depending on the heroes' actions.

### BI. Bully Frank

Follow the rules for whichever skill check the heroes decide to use to adjust Frank's attitude. If the heroes win, he

becomes polite or submissive, as appropriate, but he still sticks to the rules and in fact calls for backup.

A number of security guards equal to the number of heroes arrive 2 rounds after Frank's call. Their attitudes are unfriendly, but they defer to Frank's instructions. If heroes ask for an assistant director (AD) or production assistant (PA) at this point, Frank refuses to call for one unless his attitude has become indifferent or better.

If he does call for an AD or PA, the desired person arrives in 2 rounds. She is expecting the delivery and takes the heroes through the gate. The delivery then proceeds normally.

**Security Guards:** Use Frank's statistics for each security guard.

### B2. Fight Frank

If the heroes decide to attack Frank, he fights back to the best of his ability. A number of security guards equal to the number of heroes arrive 2 rounds after the fight starts and join in to protect Frank. The police arrive 2d6 minutes after the fight begins. Go to encounter C.

### B3. Tell the Truth

If the heroes tell Frank that they're following instructions they found in a mysterious note, he asks them to wait and then moves off to speak into his radio. Once he is out of earshot, he calls for the police. He then moves back to the heroes and tries to stall them until the police arrive. Go to encounter D.

### B4. Go around Frank

Any other gate the heroes approach has an indifferent guard rather than an unfriendly one. However, the delivery still isn't on the list and the heroes are still refused admittance.

### B5. Call Darryl

If the heroes played through *Faint Transmissions*, they may recognize Organized Productions as the name of Darryl Brzezinski's production company. If they made friends with Darryl at the end of that adventure, they can call on him now for assistance. When he realizes who they are, he fires Frank Oakley on the spot and accepts the delivery personally. If they did not make friends with him, no one is willing to call the director just to sort out a delivery.

## C. The Law

The police arrive on the scene 2d6 minutes after Frank calls them or after any fight breaks out. Four low-level police officers (see Chapter Eight: Friends and Foes in the core rulebook for statistics) arrive in two police cruisers. Use the Ford Crown Victoria in Chapter Four: Equipment of the core rulebook if you need statistics for their vehicles, and see Chapter Two of the *URBAN ARCANA Campaign Setting* for additional information about police cruisers.

If anyone is showing a weapon or fighting, the initial attitude of the officers is hostile and they arrest everyone on the spot. If the heroes insist that they're following instructions left by a note they found in someone's pocket, the police

take them to a mental hospital for evaluation while bomb-sniffing dogs go over the truck. If even one of the heroes has a criminal record (possibly from one of the two previous adventures in this series), the police draw guns and attempt to take them into custody by force if need be.

## THE GM CHARACTERS

The attitudes, motivations, and statistics of the various GM characters are given below.

### Darryl Brzezinski

Darryl became entranced with Hollywood films smuggled into the Soviet Union when he was a boy. As a teenager, he defected to the United States and helped build up Russian organized crime on the East Coast. When he had enough money, he left for UCLA's film school. His first independent films were hailed as groundbreaking, and he moved on to make several successful studio films. But his last few movies have been bizarre horror films of questionable worth, and the critics have begun questioning his sanity.

As noted above, Darryl is in town shooting portions of his next horror film. (If your campaign is set in southern California, Darryl and his crew need not have traveled at all, since their studio is there.) Because Darryl is connected with the Russian organizatsiya, he tends to hire thugs and bullies who can protect his interests in more than just the movie field.

**Darryl Brzezinski (Male human Smart Hero 3/ Charismatic Hero 3):** CR 6; Medium-size human; HD 6d6–6; hp 19; Mas 8; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; Def 14 (+1 light under-cover shirt, +1 Dex, +2 class), touch 13, flat-footed 13; BAB +2; Grp +2; Atk or Full Atk +3 melee (1d6/19–20, masterwork metal baton) or +4 ranged (2d6, Glock 20); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL Investor's Circle; AP 3; Rep +6; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 15, Wis 12, Cha 15.

*Skills and Feats:* Bluff +10\*, Craft (visual arts) +17, Craft (writing) +14, Diplomacy +5\*, Disguise +8, Forgery +8, Gamble +3\*, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (art) +8, Knowledge (current events) +8, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (popular culture) +8, Knowledge (technology) +8, Profession +7, Read/Write English, Read/Write Russian, Research +8, Search +8, Speak English, Speak Russian; Confident, Creative, Deceptive, Iron Will, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Renown, Simple Weapons Proficiency.

\*Situational bonus from fast-talk talent applies.

*Starting Occupation:* Creative (class skills: Craft [visual art] and Craft [writing]).

*Talents (Smart Hero):* Plan, savant (Craft [visual arts]).

*Talents (Charismatic Hero):* Dazzle, fast-talk.

**Dazzle:** Darryl can dazzle a target through the sheer force of his personality, coupled with a winning smile and some fast talk. Only a creature with an Intelligence score of 3 or higher is susceptible to a dazzle attempt, and the target must be within 30 feet of Darryl and able to see, hear, and understand him.

To dazzle, Darryl must use an attack action and make a DC 15 Charisma check with a +3 bonus. If the check succeeds, the target can try to resist by making a DC 15 Will saving throw. If the save fails, the target takes a –1 penalty on attack rolls,



ability checks, skill checks, and saving throws for the next 2 rounds. Dazzle is a mind-affecting ability.

**Fast-Talk:** Darryl has a way with words when attempting to deceive others. This talent allows him to apply a +3 competence bonus to any Bluff, Diplomacy, or Gamble checks he makes while attempting to lie, cheat, or otherwise bend the truth.

**Plan:** Prior to an encounter, Darryl can develop a plan of action to handle the situation. Because using this talent requires preparation, he can't do so when surprised or otherwise unprepared. Creating a plan requires 1 minute.

After creating his plan, Darryl makes a DC 10 Intelligence check with a +3 bonus. He can't take 10 or 20 when making this check. The result of the check provides him and his allies with a circumstance bonus as given on the table below.

CHECK RESULT	BONUS
9 or lower	+0 (check failed)
10–14	+1
15–24	+2
25 or higher	+3

This bonus can be applied to all skill checks and attack rolls made by Darryl and his allies for the first 3 rounds after he makes the plan. Thereafter, reduce the bonus by 1 point (to a minimum of +0) for every additional round the situation continues, since the vagaries of circumstance can unravel even the best-laid plans.

**Possessions:** Light undercover shirt, Glock 20 (10mm autoloader), laser sight, concealed carry holster, masterwork metal baton, cell phone, PDA, various personal belongings.

## Frank Oakley

Frank is a bully, and he's been having a tough week. His girlfriend left him, he's deep into his bookie for lost bets, and he's unable to make the payments. Consequently, his car was repossessed, and he was so late getting to work this morning that he hasn't had time for his normal coffee.

**Frank Oakley (Male human Strong Ordinary 3/Tough Ordinary 3):** CR 5; Medium-size humanoid; HD 3d8+6 plus 3d10+6; hp 41; Mas 14; Init +0 (+0 Dex); Spd 30 ft.; Def 16 (+2 light undercover shirt, +4 class), touch 14, flat-footed 16; BAB +5; Grp +8; Atk or Full Atk +9 melee (1d6+3 nonlethal, unarmed strike) or +8 melee (1d3+4 plus special, stun gun) or +5 ranged (2d6, Beretta 92F) or +5 ranged (special, pepper spray); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; AL Tiburon Security Company; AP 0; Rep +1; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +3; Str 16, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 13.

**Skills and Feats:** Diplomacy +4, Drive +3, Gamble +4, Intimidate +6, Knowledge (streetwise) +2, Profession +4, Read/Write English, Speak English, Spot +4; Armor Proficiency (light), Brawl, Confident, Personal Firearms Proficiency<sup>B</sup>, Point Blank Shot, Simple Weapons Proficiency<sup>B</sup>.

**Starting Occupation:** Law Enforcement (class skills: Diplomacy and Intimidate).

**Possessions:** Light undercover shirt, Beretta 92F (9mm autoloader), 2 spare box magazines (loaded), 5 rounds of 9mm pistol ammunition, armor license, firearms license, pepper spray, stun gun, 25 zip-tie handcuffs, professional walkie-talkie, cell phone, various personal belongings.

## THE PUNISHMENT

If the heroes announce that they have no intention of obeying the instructions given by the mysterious note, little things start going wrong for them immediately. Lights turn red, buses and accidents block traffic, the bottom melts out of a coffee cup and spills hot coffee on the lap of the hero who found the note, and so forth. These incidents cost no money and deal no significant damage—they are merely clear signs that the universe has turned against the heroes.

If the heroes fail to make the delivery, either because they failed to get through security or because they don't reach the site in time, then Organized Productions is forced to reduce the film's budget. The movie loses much of its impact and doesn't change the world for the better. In addition, the heroes have a significant stroke of ill fortune within a day of the incident. Choose an event that is directly and obviously related to the hero who received the note. Possible choices include the following.

- The hero forgets an important tool and doesn't remember it until a critical moment in a job.
- The hero's car is stolen. (This punishment is especially obvious if the car is very difficult to steal, or if nothing has ever been stolen from the heroes before, or if the car isn't worth stealing.)
- One of the hero's favorite tools or weapons malfunctions in a way that it never has before, and at a critical moment.
- A contact refuses to speak to the hero ever again based on an issue the hero recognizes as a mistake, such as mistaken identity, false accusation, or the like.

Regardless of the precise punishments used, no evidence should be left behind, and the heroes should have no way to track down the responsible party. You as GM must determine who is ultimately responsible (see Campaign Models for suggestions), but the heroes shouldn't be able to do so.

## CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

This adventure has two possible conclusions, which are detailed below.

**Success:** If heroes deliver the lights, the shooting goes on as scheduled. The heroes have diverted a chain of events that would have resulted in a terrible tragedy—though they have no way of knowing that.

**Failure:** Consequences of failure include the punishments outlined above. In addition, the world slowly drifts toward a more horrible fate, unless the heroes avert that outcome in later adventures.

## REWARDS

The rewards for this adventure should be based on making the delivery. The heroes cannot earn enough rewards from this source to attain a new level, but this adventure is a very short one. The lion's share of their advancement should come from regular adventures in the campaign.

## CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

This adventure purposely leaves many questions unanswered. You may want to pursue some of them further in your own campaign by tying them into future adventures.

- Why was the delivery left off security's list? Perhaps it wasn't a simple, accidental omission.
- What is the movie about? The answer to this question may vary based on your campaign.
- Are the heroes crazy? Depending on your campaign, the answer might be yes, though in fact these events, no matter how inexplicable, really are happening. However, mysterious notes and strange radio transmissions (see *Far Voices* and *Faint Transmissions*) sound pretty crazy to most people and could get the heroes locked up briefly for observation.

Future installments of the *Grim Frequencies* series will provide the answers to some of these questions and offer additional insight into Darryl Brzezinski and his film. Look for *Dire Wavelengths* next month!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Before Rich Redman came to Wizards of the Coast's RPG R&D department, he had been an Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast's Customer Service department. Rich is a prolific game designer, having worked on the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game, the *d20 MODERN Roleplaying Game*, the *Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game*, and *Dark\*Matter*. When he's not working as vice president of The Game Mechanics, a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and practices yoga, tai chi, and silat. For more, check out [www.richredman.ws](http://www.richredman.ws) and [www.thegamemechanics.com](http://www.thegamemechanics.com).

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