

RUINED EMPIRES

BY PETER CAKEBREAD & KEN WALTON



AN ADVENTURE FOR ABNEY PARK'S

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PIRATES**

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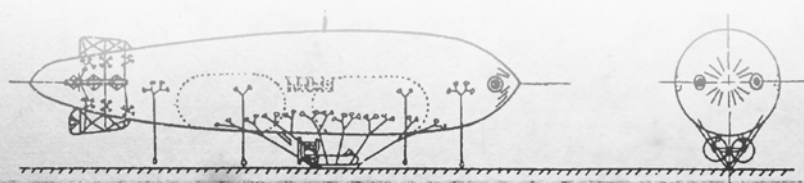
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*"Skeletons of rust reach to the sky
Ruined empires of days gone by."*

– Abney Park, *The End of Days*



AIRSHIP PIRATES



RUINED EMPIRES

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THE RAID

Dark clouds hung low over the mountains; a storm was brewing. James “Zany” Gray moved to comfort his robaut horse, *Lightning*, which seemed skittish – it tossed its head nervously, servo-motors whining. It was normally imperturbable, but the unusual weather, or something else, was making its fight-or-flight circuits kick in.

Zany looked round at the camp. He was a big man, with white dreadlocks and the scars of many a beast-fight about his body. He wasn’t the chief of the *Sequoia*, that was the shaman’s job, but people respected him for his experience. And his experience was telling him that something was wrong, something beyond the gathering storm-clouds. The massive *indrikki* in the corral were nervous too, their huge hooves shaking the ground. The tribe would normally be moving on, toward their trade rendezvous with the Western *Camelops* out toward the coast; but they’d decided to wait out the storm. Children rushed about, bringing in drying washing and hides, as the first heavy drops of rain began to fall.

Still Zany stood there, looking out over the scrubland and scattered trees for any sign of wild beasts. Nothing.

Then he heard it. A distant “thud-thud-thud” – the distinct sound of a steam-powered airship flying low. Few airships would risk flying in a storm, and only two possibilities sprang to mind – desperate pirates or *Chuno Ggun*. Neither was a welcome visitor to a *Neobedouin* encampment.

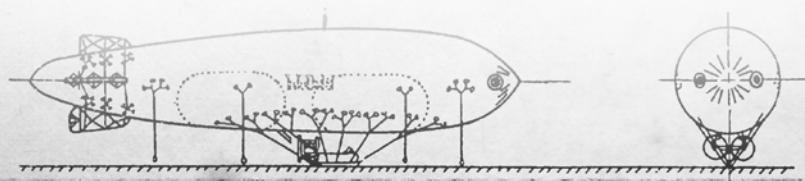
Zany ran to the center of the ring of vehicles, where an old brass bell hung on a pole, and rang the distinctive “clang clang cla-clang!” that meant “air raid”. Warriors scrambled out of caravans, an assortment

of guns clutched in their hands.

Gray pointed and shouted, “Airship, coming in low from the south-east!” Some of the tribesfolk climbed on the roofs of the wagons, scanning the sky. There! He could see it now, a growing dot beneath the low clouds, a ruby-red gasbag, bright against the black of the storm. Not Imperial then; pirates most likely, out of *High Tortuga*.

Thunder ripped across the sky, followed by a long flicker of lightning over the hills. The rain became heavier. Zany took his eyes off the airship for a moment to check that the microlite aircraft, their tribe’s chief treasure, was under cover. The *Skyfolk* had driven a hard bargain for that, and the *Sequoia* needed it to trade for diesel fuel with the Western *Camelops*. If the pirates took that, they’d be without fuel – and with no hogtrikes to run patrols, the chances of beast attacks were much higher.

The rain was pelting down now, splashing in the puddles that gathered on the sun-baked ground. A movement caught Zany’s eye – in the middle of the encampment, old Daniel Armadillo, the tribe’s shaman, was dancing in the pouring rain, calling on the spirits of earth and sky to save them from the pirates. Gray shook his head; the old man was already frail, dancing about in a downpour was going to finish him off, if the pirates didn’t! The warrior was about to rush across and try to persuade the shaman to get undercover when a shadow loomed overhead, darkening the already dim day even more – the massive bulk of the airship. He looked up at the wooden hull, smoke-blackened from the burning of countless caravans, just as dozens of ropes came coiling down from above, shortly followed by air sailors, many of them with knives clutched in their





teeth. He raised his rifle, shot and shot again, saw pirates fall, screaming, to the ground – but still more kept coming.

Soon the fighting was hand-to-hand in the lashing wind and rain. Lightning flickered in the goggles of a bearded pirate before Zany dropped him with a single kick to the head that snapped his neck. Another was in front of him, and another, and he forgot everything but the battle for survival, as the bodies piled up around him.

Suddenly, a woman's scream broke through his concentration. A cutlass grazed his ribs as he barely dodged a blow and looked in the direction of the caravans; a pirate had grabbed a girl of about ten, who kicked and struggled beneath one brawny arm while the thug ran her mother through with a rusty blade. Already, he could see other members of the tribe, mostly women and children, trussed up in rope, being winched up to the airship. Slavers! If there was one thing worse than pirates, it was slavers.

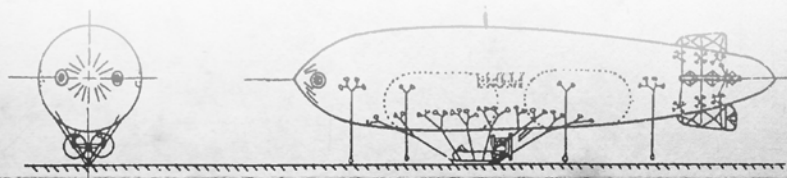
If his enemies thought he had been fighting well before, they were totally (if briefly) shocked now. Zany became a whirlwind of destruction, his hands and feet lashing out in all directions, leaving a trail of broken corpses as he sped toward the airship. But it was too late; the captain, deciding to cut his losses, set his vessel to rising, and its silhouette was soon lost in a haze of rain.

Dazed, the beast dancer looked around. There were corpses everywhere. Mostly they were pirates; mostly he'd killed them himself. A few parents cried over lost children, a few husbands raged over lost wives. Miraculously, only three of the tribe had been killed, though seven had been taken into slavery. But the microlite, which they needed for trade, was gone.

The rain stopped as quickly as it had started, and a wan sun shone through thinning clouds. In the center of the encampment, it shone on the shivering, huddled figure of the shaman, his hair plastered to

his head, his white robe stained with blood from a deep cut across his temple. He raised troubled eyes to Zany Gray. "I called on the gods to save us," he said, bewildered, "but they didn't answer." Then he collapsed unconscious at the beast dancer's feet.

Later that night, when the dead had been burned and the bereaved comforted, James "Zany" Gray sat out under the cloudy night sky. Once, for a few minutes, there came a series of distant rumbling booms, and the clouds on the horizon were lit from within by flashes of orange light. It may have been a distant storm, but more likely it was two airships battling in the high air. Perhaps the pirates who had raided his tribe were meeting their end in the clouds at the hands of the Imperial Air Navy. Perhaps that was all the answer the gods would give.





INTRODUCTION

Ruined Empires has been designed for a party of 3-6 airship pirates. If you are intending to run a PC (playing in the adventure), stop reading now! If you are the GM (who is going to run the adventure) – read on.

The following information is for the GM's eyes only!

This section gives a brief overview of the adventure and some of the events that might occur. Read through this summary carefully before attempting to run *Ruined Empires*.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Ruined Empires is presented in three parts. The following summary gives a brief synopsis of each section.

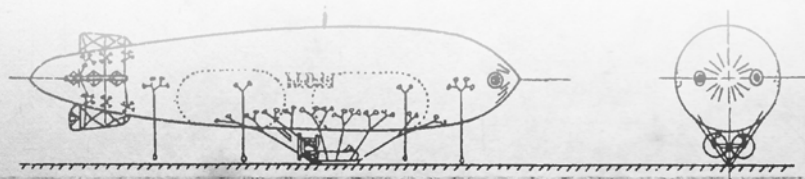
Part One: Buried Treasure – Play begins with the PCs resting up on Isla Aether, the Skyloft city also known as the “Jewel of the Skies”. The PCs are summoned by the Governor of Isla Aether, Vladimir Cumulo-Nimbus and asked to undertake a mission. The Governor has come across a treasure map showing the location of a ruined town from the old days, where there is almost certain to be ancient technology worth a small fortune. He offers the PCs a deal they can't refuse, and just to make sure the PCs don't double-cross him, has another privateer vessel track them, to make

sure they return with the treasure.

Part Two: Ruins and Rivals – The PCs arrive at the ruins, the remains of a small town completely overgrown by forest. They find a place to land and possibly tangle with some of the wildlife. The PCs get a chance to explore the ruins. They might find all sorts of rare and wonderful items, but they will find the ruins are not without peril. They will meet a tribe of Neobedouins, the Sequoya, who are also treasure hunting. They may make friends or enemies of the Neobedouin. They may also find that the “treasure” they went seeking is more dangerous than expected. Finally, the time will come to leave. The journey home will be fraught with danger – the privateer is still lurking in the distance, and the Imperial Air Navy frigate, the *HMS Imperious*, is patrolling the skies.

Part Three: Trials and Tribulations – On returning to Isla Aether, the PCs are immediately arrested. Their patron has been ousted from power, and the new governor has instigated a policy of no tolerance of pirates in her city. Some PCs may escape arrest, but those who are captured are put on trial. The PCs face betrayal and a death sentence. The PCs must escape prison and flee across a city in turmoil. Perhaps they can help to return their patron to power, or maybe they will skip town and take to the skies.

By the end of the adventure the PCs should have





made new friends and new enemies. Isla Aether may be in chaos, or the status quo restored. Depending on the actions of the PCs, they might find the Aetherians will treat them as heroes and penny dreadfuls enter circulation in which (wildly exaggerated) tales of their adventures are available for sale.

In Part Three, Trials and Tribulations, the PCs may find that one of their fellow pirates betrays them. It is worth giving some thought to whom this might be before running the game. It might be an existing rival, enemy or blackmailer – perhaps one of the more hostile contacts generated when the characters were created, or even a PC (if, for instance, one of them has an appropriate Complication, such as Spy). Be subtle – if it is an existing PC they must not let on, if it is an NPC then they should be introduced with care. A suitable NPC might be a disgruntled senior airman or woman, who feels he or she has not been given the recognition they deserve or should be given greater shares of any booty. Have them question the PCs' decisions throughout the voyage, but make sure they are more of a grumbling annoyance rather than a direct threat, so as not to have them removed before the finale.





PART I

BURIED TREASURE

ISLA AETHER

The PCs begin the adventure in a Momma Chiffon's House of Lard, on Isla Aether. Perhaps they are resting up between adventures, refueling or selling their ill-gotten gains from a previous escapade. A full description of Isla Aether can be found in *Airship Pirates*, p.187.

Briefly, Isla Aether is a Skyloft city. But, not just any Skyloft city. Perched atop Mount Whitney, Isla Aether is considered the Jewel of the Skies. The architecture is stunning. Impossible fairytale towers vie with sprawling palaces and mercantile mazes. As a center of trade it is second to none – if it can be purchased, then it probably exists somewhere on the sky platform. The place bustles with wealth, innovation and opportunity. As well as countless warrens leading to a myriad of souqs and bazaars, there are excellent docking and repair facilities and some of the best eateries aloft. Momma Chiffon's is not one of the best eateries aloft...except, once you've tasted some of the deep-fried goodness Momma offers, you always find yourself going back for more. Perhaps it's something she puts in the crispy breadcrumb coating that covers most of the fatty morsels on offer.

MOMMA CHIFFON'S HOUSE OF LARD

The PCs begin the game at Momma's (see *Airship Pirates*, p.145), probably chowing down on some greasy snacks. If your players are meeting to play

Airship Pirates for the first time, with a new set of PCs, now is a good opportunity for everyone to introduce themselves to each other. Allow each player to describe their PC a little, preferably "in character". If your players PCs have already adventured together, they might want a little time to catch up and (literally) chew the fat.

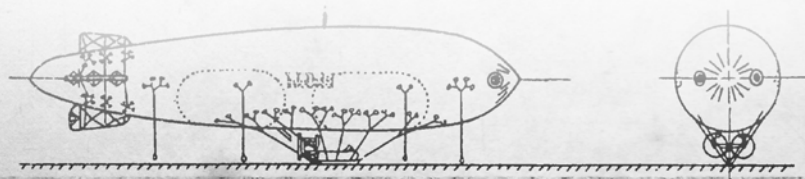
If the players ask about Momma Chiffon's, read or paraphrase the following:

Momma Chiffon's is (eerily) like all the other Momma Chiffon's aloft.

(It depends on whether the PCs have visited other Momma Chiffon's whether or not they know it is exactly the same – staffed by the same people and identical in every respect!).

The place is lit up with headache-inducing artificial light which emanates from dull fluorescent tubes. An even harsher light flickers near the windows. The sign outside, above the diner, seems to be on the blink. The public area inside the small diner has been designed to ensure every surface can be wiped down with ease. Comfort wasn't even an afterthought – the strange S-shaped benches maximizing any pre-existing aches and pains the PCs might have.

A server is splitting himself between attending to the cash register, clearing old wrapper-strewn trays from tables and wiping down surfaces (with a suspiciously dirty looking cloth). He seems to make little progress





with either reducing the queue or cleansing the establishment.

Every so often, from a door behind the counter, above the sounds of sizzling and the clattering of pans, Momma Chiffon's voice can be heard, as she barks orders to her server.

"You get those tables wiped, boy. They ain't wiping themselves. And when you're done, get your lazy ass back here. The fryer needs an uncloggin'. You unnerstand me?" and "You need a rocket up your backside, Catatonic Joe. Takin' you on was the worst mistake I ever made, 'part from putting salad in a bun. Never doin' that again. Lousy plant food'll kill a person."

Catatonic Joe doesn't look particularly concerned and certainly doesn't speed up any.

At some point, the door to Momma's opens and a smartly dressed woman enters:

Wearing darkened goggles and a well-tailored and extremely expensive looking suit, a tall, powerfully built, stranger walks over to your table. She speaks, her expression impassive:

"Ah, I was told I could find you here."

She gazes around, a trace of displeasure fleets across her expression, but then her jaw sets and her neutral demeanor returns.

"There's a job for you. Come with."

Hopefully the PCs will just agree, they are adventurers after all, although they will probably want to find out a little more.

The messenger is Henga Breeze, the Governor of Isla Aether's personal aide and trusted confidante.

HENGA BREEZE

Henga Breeze is the long-suffering personal assistant of Vladimir Cumulo-Nimbus, the Governor of Isla Aether. The consummate professional, Henga's job seems to include everything – bodyguard, negotiator, enforcer and advisor, and a whole heap of other stuff besides. She basically spends a lot of time clearing up Vladimir's messes and trying to minimize the damage caused by his negligence. Henga doesn't particularly like her employer, but she is extremely loyal. Henga was originally a slave and Vladimir bought her freedom in exchange for her contracting to work for him.

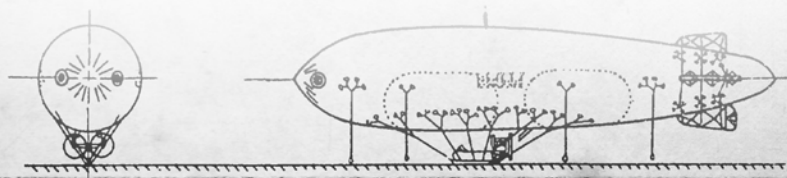
The relationship between Vladimir and Henga is purely platonic – Vladimir hasn't even hit on her, although whether that is because she frightens him, understands that without her he would be lost, or realizes that Henga already has a lover, isn't clear. Tall and powerfully built, Henga always turns out immaculately attired in sharp black suits and darkened goggles, designed to enhance her menacing demeanor.

Physical +9, **Mental** +6, **Skills:** Business 3, Conversation 4, Dodge 3, Firearms 5 [Steampistol 6 Damage], Fisticuffs 4, Intimidate 4

Health Dice: 00/00/00/00/00/00/00 – 00
- 2 / 00 -4 / 00 -8 / 00 -16

Henga will not willingly share any gossip with the PCs, but may offer them a little more information if they seem reluctant to accompany her.

"I work for an extremely influential employer. He has a proposition for you," and, "All I'm asking is that you come and attend a meeting. I assure you that it will be to everyone's benefit." If pushed, and the PCs refuse to leave without knowing who they are going to meet,





Henga will explain, “*The Governor wishes to see you. Best not to keep him waiting, huh?*”

The PCs will probably be happy to have the work, but if they do refuse they will find that Henga has the power to make life very difficult for them. For a start, she can impound their ship for a host of trumped-up bureaucratic infractions – if at any point the PCs seem to be wishing to back out of the mission, she can invoke these threats.

Once the PCs leave the House of Lard, Henga will motion for them to climb into the back of a long low steam-car, with black curtains pulled down over the windows. Henga will sit at the front, next to the driver. The doors will be locked tight (“*to keep everyone safe*”). Steam-cars are a rarity on Isla Aether – the roads aren’t designed for traffic as space is at a premium on the sky platform, but the driver expertly negotiates the narrow streets.

Describe the journey as the steam-car weaves through the trade quarters, narrowly avoiding customers, vendors and market stalls. Even the wealthy will try to stare in at the PCs – it really is a fine steam-car. The PCs will find it also comes equipped with what looks like a mini-bar, although it is locked (opens on a successful Average Pick Locks roll – no black dice. There is some fine champagne chilling in there). Before long, the PCs will find themselves being waved through the gates and into the grounds of the Governor’s palace.

MEETING THE GOVERNOR

The current Governor, Vladimir Cumulo-Nimbus, has a bad reputation. If the PCs ask, there are various rumors circulating about the Skyloft, some of which they may have already heard.

- Vladimir is a hopeless administrator.
- Vladimir is an incorrigible hedonist – rather than concentrating on his job, he splits his time between carous-

ing and debauchery.

- Vladimir has squandered the treasury on grand parties.
- Vladimir has drained the Aetherian Sky Navy of resources to pay for his pleasures.
- Vladimir has failed to ensure the city has adequate helium supplies.
- Caroline Cirro-Stratus, an ambitious member of the Council of Oligarchs, is attempting to get a vote of no-confidence through the Council, in order to oust Vladimir.

Aside from the helium supply, all of the above rumors are true. The helium supply may be too low – but aside from Windward Altostratus (see *Politics on Isla Aether*, below), no-one has really known for sure whether the city could float skyward in an emergency for many years.

POLITICS ON ISLA AETHER

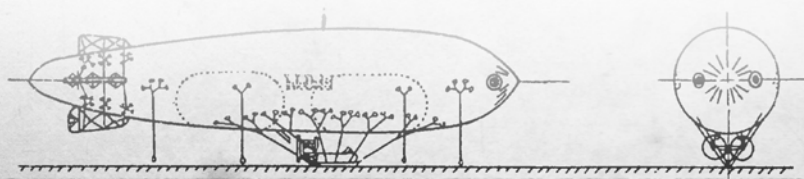
It is important when running the Isla Aether sections of *Ruined Empires* to keep in mind the political situation – in particular how the system works and a few of the key individuals (particularly when the PCs return to the city in the last section, *Trials and Tribulations*).

The Governor

The Governor, currently Vladimir, is responsible for ruling the city. The Aetherians expect their Governor to be a capable administrator and shrewd accountant. Vladimir is neither. His aide, Henga, tries to pick up the pieces, but Vladimir is heading for trouble.

The Council of Oligarchs

They are responsible for choosing (and sacking) the Governor and act as an undemocratic parliament, a forum for the wealthiest Aetherians. There has been talk in Council of passing a vote of no confidence in Vladimir.





Caroline Cirro-Stratus

A member of a merchant family, nearly, but not quite as wealthy as the Governor's, Caroline is the Governor's nemesis. She frantically works to bring him down, partly due to the fact that he is a complete incompetent, partly because she feels she should be doing the Governor's job herself.

The Chief Administrator

Based in mundane offices in the city Customs Rooms, Windward Altostratus is the chief administrator on Isla Aether. To those not "in the know" Windward seems to be a harassed junior official. In fact, he wields a lot of power in Isla Aether, his day-to-day decision-making authority, granted by the Council, surpassing that of the Governor. He tries to keep his true position a secret (so as not to become inundated with requests). He likes Henga Breeze, although doesn't think much of her employer.

The People

The population of Isla Aether don't care much about how they are governed, as long as the helium supply is secure and there is a minimum of interference in the running of their private households. The only laws they want are those that regulate the quality of goods traded in the city.

The Law

Generally laws on Isla Aether are all about ensuring trade goods are of a high quality – to retain the Skyloft's status as the premier mercantile center aloft. Slavery is legal, piracy admired and pretty much anything can be found – for the right price.

THE PALACE

The grounds of the Governor's palace are well maintained and contain two main buildings and private moorings. There are a few personal bodyguards around, although not as many as one might expect considering this is the Governor's residence. The first building, which the PCs will pass on their way to the palace proper, was originally an administration block. The administration block was used as an archive and to carry out routine bureaucratic duties – but Vladimir has had the place redesigned to suit his own tastes. The building now contains a bath-house, brothel and casino. Vladimir doesn't actually own the place, and doesn't reap the profits, so even though it acts as his pleasure den he pays on a nightly basis for the privilege of patronizing the establishment.

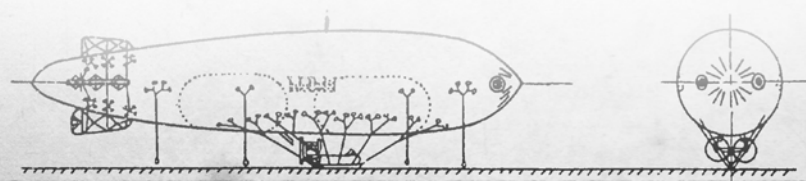
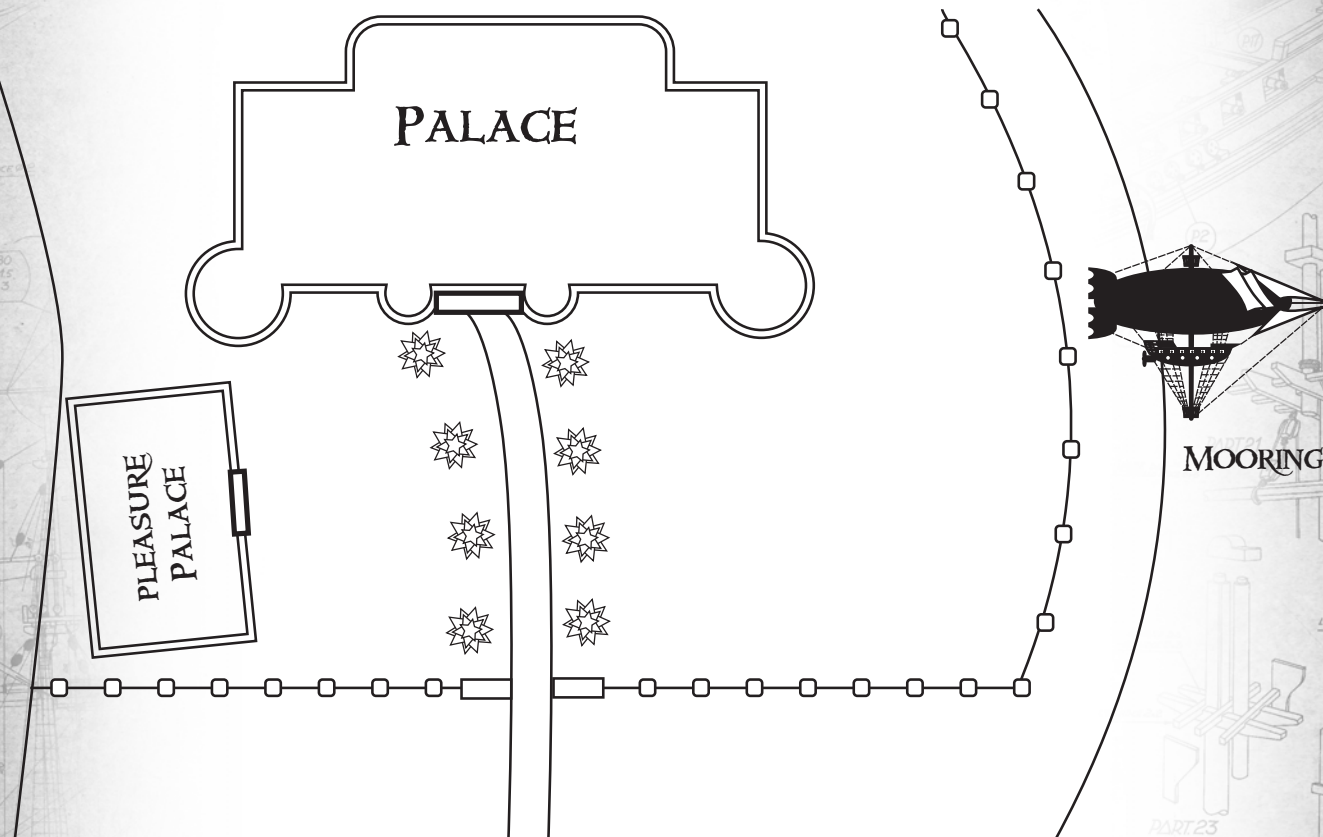
As you proceed up the short drive you pass a large low building to the left. Most of the curtains and blinds are drawn, but it appears there is some sort of party going on inside. Loud bass notes can be heard and brightly colored lights sneak out through gaps in the shutters.

If the PCs ask Henga about the building, she will be dismissive, although she frowns to herself as she considers Vladimir's frivolity.

A map of the Governor's palace and grounds can be found on the next page. There are only 20 guards scattered about the grounds, and most of them are either working as bouncers at the old administration block turned pleasure house, or partaking of the vices to be found therein.



GOVERNOR'S RESIDENCE AND GROUNDS





PALACE GUARDS

Physical +6, **Mental** +2; **Skills:** Firearms 1 [Steampistol 6 Damage], Fisticuffs 3 [Punch 1 Damage, Kick 2 Damage], Intimidate 2, Perception 1
Health Dice: OO/OO/OO/OO/OO – OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16)

Aside from the two main buildings, there are large private moorings where the (unused) private airboat of Vladimir is moored. There is ample room for other airships to dock – and it is to this mooring that Henga will ask the PCs to return after their mission.

When the PCs arrive at the palace, the guards on the main door (there are just two) will wave them through – straightening up and saluting when Henga approaches. The PCs will be led through to:

A magnificent reception room. There are expensive wall hangings and a host of gilded ornaments on display. A smartly dressed man, probably a slave or servant, approaches you and greets Henga.

“Ah, Henga. Vladimir is in the audience chamber waiting for you. He is in one of his excitable moods, I’m afraid.”

Henga looks at the man sternly, obviously displeased at such a breach of etiquette.

“Nanthang, please don’t tittle-tattle about your master, and particularly not in front of our guests. Now, lead us through.”

Nanthang, who is indeed one of Vladimir’s slaves, will lead the PCs into the audience chamber which adjoins the reception room. Inside, Vladimir is waiting excitedly.

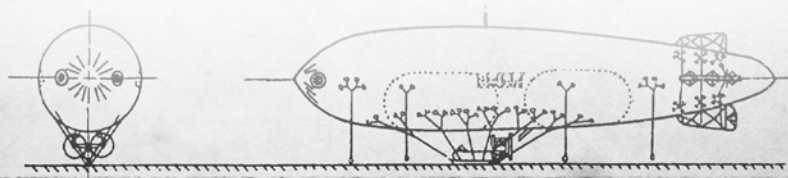
The large room was obviously once used for conferences. But on the huge table which dominates the center of the room, there are wide boards laid out, covered with model terrain. Above the scenery (which includes model mountains, miniature cities, and clockwork toy beasts), are beautifully crafted replica semi-automata airships, a remarkable feat of miniaturization, they are suspended by threads from the ceiling. Many of the models seem to emit steam, have tiny working propellers and are designed to collapse according to their proximity to other mini-airships, following the release of tiny black pellets, representing broadsides. The walls of the room are decorated with flags, many of which are recognizable as pirate emblems.

The room’s occupant, a tall thin man, is wearing a frilly flying jacket, an unfeasibly wide pirate hat and bejeweled goggles. He also has the largest, most carefully waxed and twizzled moustache you have ever seen. He is rushing around the table, plucking threads and shouting “Fire cannons! We need more lift! Sally forth, you swabs, it’s time to die.”

If nobody else interrupts, Henga will get Vladimir’s attention. He will lift his goggles (he can hardly see with them on), and beam a huge smile of greeting.

“So very pleased to meet you. Thank you for coming. Phew, glad you interrupted me there, I was losing quite badly. Nanthang, get us some rum, you lazy oaf!”

Vladimir has a mission for the PCs, but he will be unwilling to get to the details of it straight away. Instead he will urge the PCs to tell him tales of the skies and their piracy escapades. If they obliged he will be delighted, barely able to contain his excitement. If they just wish to get down to business, he will jut out his bottom lip like a disappointed child and reluctantly get on and explain the mission.



AIRSHIP PIRATES



RUINED EMPIRES

VLADIMIR CUMULO-NIMBUS

The Cumulo-Nimbii are the wealthiest merchants on Isla Aether (and possibly among all the Skyfolk). The shrewd business sense shared by Vladimir's father and grandfather are unfortunately lacking where Vladimir is concerned. Vladimir isn't stupid, as such, but he was never cut out for running the family business. The business went to his younger sister, Ingrid (breaking the family tradition of the business being inherited by the oldest heir), although before his death, Vladimir's father used his influence to get his son the Governor's job. Vladimir isn't cut out for that either. When he isn't pursuing such harmless pastimes as dreaming of being a pirate or playing with his toys, he spends his time gambling, whoring and throwing grand parties for his friends. Vladimir has rarely left Isla Aether – despite his love of model airships he is terrified by the prospect of air travel, a rare trait among the Skyfolk. Truth be told, he is scared of heights.

At first, the Oligarchs were happy to have Vladimir as a figurehead – after all, he scarcely scrutinizes their dealings, and the city pretty much runs itself (with the Chief Administrator Windward Altostratus lending a helping hand). But even their patience has started to wear rather thin. The ambitious Caroline Cirro-Stratus has been demanding Vladimir's sacking. She has presented evidence that Vladimir has depleted the Aetherian Navy to pay for his extravagant lifestyle, and is pushing for a vote of no confidence in his Governorship. The Council has asked to see the treasury accounts, pending a decision. Recently, Vladimir's assistant, Henga, has acquired a treasure map. He hopes it might hold the key to resolving his financial mess. Otherwise, he will have to turn to his sister for help, a situation he is hoping to avoid at all costs.

Physical +4, **Mental** +3, **Skills:** Art (miniature painting) 3, Charm 1, Culture (pirates) 3, Dance 3, Dodge 2, Etiquette 1, Fashion 2, Gambling 1, Seduction 2

Health Dice: OO/OO/OO/OO – OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16

"I have the most exciting news. Brace yourself. I have a map. Not just any map, but a treasure map!"

Vladimir will explain to the PCs that the city's coffers are rather low, and he needs to raise some revenue. If pushed, he will admit that failing to do so might lead him to being ousted from his position.

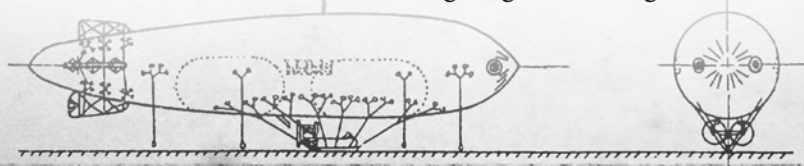
"Think of it. I would be happy to go if it weren't for that dreadful Cirro-Stratus. Her family have been jealous of mine for generations, just because my daddy was so much richer than hers. And what's more, she hates pirates. Can you imagine, an Aetherian who hates pirates? She has no romance in her soul, tut."

Remarkably, the treasure map is genuine and even Henga, who acquired it for Vladimir, believes in its authenticity. The map shows the location of a ruined town from the old days. What has excited Henga is that there is almost certain to be ancient technology to be found, worth a small fortune. Henga will explain:

"The map belonged to an ancient Neobedouin-turned-pirate. He found it in his youth. Not only does it show an old settlement, likely unexplored, but I have it on good authority that it might represent an even greater opportunity."

The Neobedouin found the map on the body of a dead Chuno Gunn agent, a fact that Henga is aware of, although she won't readily admit it to begin with. She doesn't want the PCs to worry about Imperial involvement. Concerned that the Chuno Ggun might have been laying a trap, combined with a disinterest in finding boring old scientific plans, the Neobedouin's pirate shipmates ignored him when he tried to interest them in exploring the ruins. The old man always maintained that the map led to a great treasure, but no-one would listen.

With no pension, and desperate to earn a coin, the penniless old pirate had heard rumors of how much the Governor of Isla Aether liked pirates. He might have been turned away, but Henga found the document intriguing. Following a conversation with Windward,





who has access to much of the intelligence gathered since Isla Aether first floated skyward, and even some which pre-dates the sky city, Henga gave the old man a fair price and acquired the map for Vladimir.

When it comes to the actual negotiations, Henga will take an active role in the bargaining, using her business skills first, and if that fails her powers of intimidation. Henga's first demand will be that the PCs keep the deal a secret, on pain of permanent banishment from Isla Aether and a variety of other cruel and imaginative punishments. Vladimir will appear horrified if Henga threatens the PCs, but not so much as to intervene – he really does need the money. Vladimir is prepared to let the PCs have access to the map and split the proceeds of any finds with them 50/50, but Henga will try to broker a better deal:

"There will likely be plenty of treasure scattered about the old ruins. We are prepared to halve the proceeds of any such cargo. In addition our intelligence sources suggest that there might be some plans in the area – from what I understand, scientific papers being carried by anti-Imperial forces aboard a river boat that fought one of the last skirmishes in the final days of the Great Rectification. The plans are of some sort of advanced automaton and said to be in an attache case aboard the boat. They might turn out to be worthless, but possibly not. The right contacts, and I have the right contacts, would be prepared to spend quite a sum to acquire the papers. Bring me them and I will authorize a 5,000 Helios bonus."

If the PCs successfully bargain, Henga will agree to allow them to keep the proceeds from all other finds if they bring back the attache case with the automata schematics. If this is still not enough and the PCs manage an Impressive (or better) success in their negotiations, then she will grudgingly agree a percentage of the sale price of the contents of the attache case; 50% is the maximum she will be prepared to allow them, but the PCs should have to work extremely hard to get her to budge to anywhere near that figure.

Once the PCs have agreed (and if they don't they will find that Henga is a difficult enemy, she has the power to impound their ship for any number of real or trumped up infractions) Henga will say:

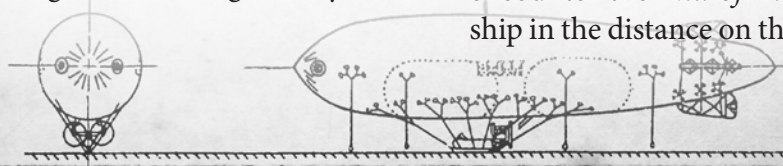
"Excellent. I would urge you to hurry. Remember, tell no-one of your mission. There are any number of privateers who would prey on you if you let slip the details of your journey. When you are done, return directly to the palace. We will make space for you at the moorings here so that your cargo, and hopefully the papers, can be directly unloaded and you can be quickly paid."

Vladimir adds, *"I do wish I was going with you, it sounds so exciting. You know, I will throw the most extravagant party in your honor on your return."*

INSURANCE

Henga doesn't trust the PCs. Even Vladimir is not so stupid as to trust pirates not to double-cross him – he is concerned they could easily run off with everything and not give him his rightful share. Henga has ordered a privateer ship – the *End of All Hope*, commanded by the infamous Captain Lilian Ash – to follow the the PCs' ship at a discreet distance. She wants to make sure they reach their destination and return to Isla Aether with any treasure. If the PCs show signs of not returning to Isla Aether when the job is done, the *End of All Hope* is to attack and rob the PCs, using their letters of marque as a reason to do so legitimately. Vladimir would have happily given the job of retrieving the loot to Captain Ash, but Henga is concerned that the mission on the ground might be extremely dangerous – and she wishes no harm to befall Captain Ash (who is her lover) or Ash's ship (which Henga has a stake in). If the PCs end up in a fight with the *End of All Hope* and Henga hears of it, it will have an impact on the PCs' later dealings with Henga.

There is more than one way that the PCs might first encounter the *End of All Hope*. They may sight the ship in the distance on their way to Calusa (see p.16).





Or, they may meet the ship on the return journey back to Isla Aether (see p.24). They might manage to befriend Captain Ash, or at least come to terms with her, in which case they might even fight alongside her (against the Imperial frigate, the *HMS Imperious* and later on in Part Three, Trials and Tribulations, against the forces of Caroline Cirro-Stratus). If the PCs try to double-cross Vladimir and Henga by not returning to Isla Aether, then they will have to do battle with her.

CAPTAIN LILIAN ASH

Lilian Ash is the captain of the *End of All Hope*, a privateer operating out of Isla Aether. She is never short of work, courtesy of her sometime lover, Henga Breeze, the Governor's aide. Henga is devoted to Lilian, and Lilian is not afraid to exploit that devotion to her advantage. That said, she is not completely without feelings for Henga. Truth be told, as well as having some affection for Henga, Lilian is also a little afraid of the former slave, although she would never admit it. Henga is about the only person Lilian is afraid of – otherwise she is full of bravado. This daring leads her into conflict with Henga, who feels that Lilian should avoid risky pursuits like piracy, and concentrate on legitimate business, such as flying diplomats between Isla Aether and other sky cities, and mundane mercantile work. Thus Lilian finds herself with the task of shadowing the PCs' ship, rather than investigating the ruins of Calusa herself.

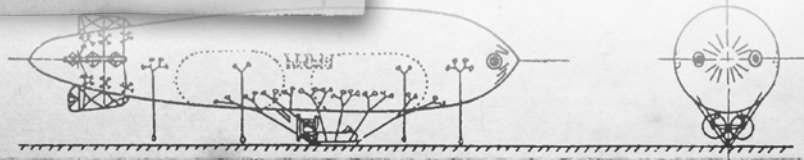
Physical: +5 **Mental:** +4 **Skills:** Dodge 2, Firearms 2 [Steampistol 6 Damage], Perception 4, Pilot 4, Swordplay 3 [Cutlass 7 Damage]

Health Dice: 00/00/00/00 – 00 -2 / 00 -4 / 00 -8 / 00 -16

DEPARTURE

The map is of an old town named Calusa, sited beside the Sacramento River, northwest from Isla Aether. The journey from Isla Aether to the area depicted on the map is about 450 miles and it should take them about 5 hours to get there. The usual range of the kind of airship the PCs are likely to be flying should allow them to get there and back – but unless they have extra fuel or contacts en route, they will likely have little leeway (the standard range for a Tigerfish is 1,000 miles).

Although Henga and Vladimir are happy to give the PCs a little time to round up their crew and prepare for the journey, they want the PCs to get on with it – they are aware of how little time Vladimir has before the Council replace him and want to head off a confrontation with Caroline Cirro-Stratus. If the PCs seem to be dilly-dallying, Henga will send them a stern reminder to get on with it.





PART II

RUINS AND RIVALS

THE RUINS

In the second part of *Ruined Empires*, the PCs visit the ruins of the town of Calusa, by the Sacramento River in what was once California. There they must deal with wild beasts and an initially hostile tribe of Neobedouin, the Sequoia. On top of that, they find that the treasure they have been sent to recover is rather more trouble than they anticipated. The journey from Isla Aether to the site of the supposed “treasure” is about 450 miles in a north-westerly direction. It should take about 5 hours to get there.

GETTING TO CALUSA

The journey to Calusa may well be uneventful. There is a chance that the PCs will sight the *End of All Hope* shadowing them on their journey. If they do there are a variety of possible outcomes.

An hour or so into the journey, and every hour thereafter, the *End of All Hope* might be spotted on the horizon. Have the pilot of the PCs’ ship make a Perception roll. If she succeeds then they will see the *End of All Hope*. If the PCs decide to run, don’t bother with the chase rules. Captain Ash knows where they are heading (she has a copy of the map) and wants to shepherd them back, not prevent them from getting there.

If the PCs decide to investigate remind them of the fact that they have limited fuel, but allow it. As long as they don’t move to attack her ship, Captain Ash will ask for a parley. Depending on how respectful the PCs are, she will explain that her role is to act as an escort

(she won’t explicitly explain her additional role as an enforcer on Henga and Vladimir’s behalf, although the PCs might deduce this from any conversation they have with her).

CALUSA

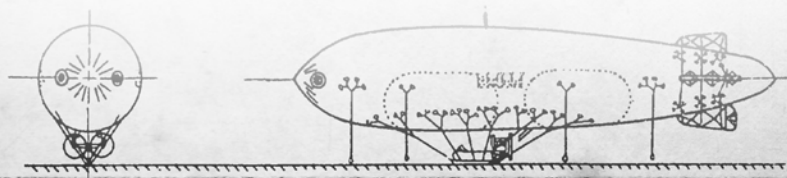
Calusa was once a town of about 5,000 people with many Victorian buildings, most of which have crumbled and fallen with age. The northern part of the town has reverted to swamp, due to the bursting of the levee holding in the Sacramento River in the late 21st century. It is now home to giant alligators and vicious mosquitoes. Further south the land is dryer, but much overgrown with trees, and home to shrub oxen and American lions. A few racids nest in abandoned houses in the suburbs.

WHAT’S GOING ON

There are four elements in this section of the adventure:

- The PCs are plagued by American lion attacks – see *The Lions of Calusa* (p.18).
- The PCs explore the town in search of treasure – see *Treasure Seeking* (p.20).
- The PCs have to deal with the arrival of a potentially hostile Neobedouin tribe, the Sequoia – see *Unexpected Visitors* (p.18).
- The PCs find the treasure that they came for, and it proves more problematic than they anticipated – see *X Marks the Spot* (p.21).

The GM can deal with each of these episodes as a separate incident (the PCs fend off lion attacks, search





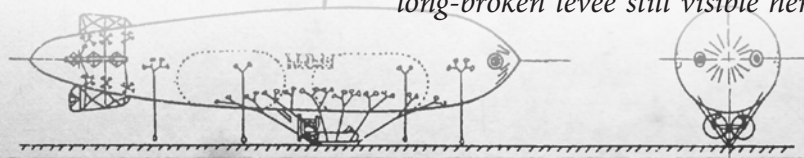
for treasure for a while, interact with the Neobedouin, then deal with the “treasure”), or all these things can be mixed together. For instance, the PCs may be plagued by lion attacks while looking for the treasure, be saved by the arrival of the Neobedouin who help them out of a sticky combat situation, then find the “treasure” only to have it cause problems with the Neobedouin.

It's best to read this entire section through before running it, so that you'll be ready to bring in each element, as the PCs choose in what order to do things.

ARRIVAL

The PCs, having followed the treasure map, find themselves over the remains of a town:

You find yourself flying over the remains of an ancient town, its grid of streets still just about visible through the overgrown vegetation. Most of the low-lying houses are crumbled almost to nothing, overgrown with vines, but here and there a taller building stands out, its windows broken, its bricks crumbling. The north end of town is partially underwater, the remains of a long-broken levee still visible here and there through





the waters of the river which flows along the northern border of the town. Further south, the area is covered in trees, though you can see a small clearing, where a few shrub oxen are grazing, which looks like it would be a good place to set your airship down.

Assuming the PCs decide to land here (and there really is nowhere better within the ruins themselves), a herd of shrub oxen flee, hooves thundering, and brightly colored birds fly up from the surrounding trees.

THE LIONS OF CALUSA

Once down, the PCs will probably wish to begin exploring. Whether they get the crew to help them with this or not, there's still a lot of territory to cover. One of the first problems they will have to deal with is a pride of American Lions (for full statistics see *Airship Pirates* p.263). There is one male and five female lions, three of whom have small cubs, and the airship has come down right in the middle of their territory.

Adult American Lion

Physical +12 [Bite 12 Damage], **Mental** +5, **Health Dice:** OO/OO/OO/OO/OO/OO/OO/OO/OO - OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16

At first the beasts will watch the airship from the vegetation on the edge of the park. A Perception roll with a 5 black dice penalty will spot something moving in the undergrowth, but it's impossible to tell quite what. Once there are people out in the open, the male lion and two of the females will rush forward to take some of the humans as prey. They will pick one person and cut him or her off from the rest. It's probably best if this is one of the crew rather than a PC, as these creatures are huge and can run at 60mph, so once someone is a target, they've not got much chance.

The first attack should act as something of a warning to the PCs. But if they don't do anything about it, the

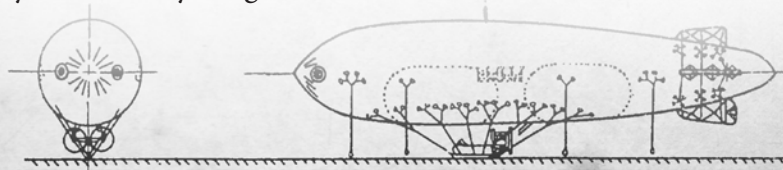
lions will be back; they'll attempt to take ten humans to feed themselves and their cubs, but will flee if one of their number is killed. However, their inbuilt hunger for human flesh, and the fact that the airship is right in their territory, means they will return a few hours later. Indeed they'll be back approximately every six hours, day and night, until all but one of the adults is killed.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS

THE SEQUOIA

The Sequoia are a small tribe of Neobedouin who live in the valleys of the Sierra Nevada mountains. They're allied with the Western Camelops (see *Airship Pirates*, p.200) but spend most of their time away from the Western Valley. A group of them have come over into Camelops territory to negotiate the barter of a microlite they obtained from Isla Aether, in return for a tanker of oil from the Camelops' secret refinery on the coast. Unfortunately, along the way they were attacked by pirates and the microlite stolen. To make matters worse, three of their outriders were killed, seven people (including 3 children) taken as slaves, and their shaman gravely wounded in the attack. They were all in favor of returning to their home territory, but James "Zany" Gray, a powerful warrior in the tribe, has persuaded them that they should visit the ruins in the hope of finding something else with which to barter with the Western Camelops. Understandably, they will be wary of the PCs and very untrusting of pirates.

The Sequoia consists of 30 fighters (a Rank 3 Competent "crew") and 20 non-combatants (old people, children, the sick and pregnant), as well as Zany Gray himself. They have three caravans pulled by indrikki, three hogtrikes, a car, two horses, and Gray's automaton horse, Lightning (see below).





THE ROBOTS OF DOCTOR TESLA

In the *Airship Pirates* timeline, the famous Serbian inventor Nikola Tesla developed a series of prototype automata in the late 1930s, which could be linked by an implant to a human user and become an extension of that person's will. He called these machines "robauts", joining together the Serbian word for slave, "rob", with the word automaton. After a series of unpleasant incidents with his "bodyguard" model, the robauts were banned, although a few were mothballed by an interested collector in Sacramento.

When the Emperor Victor I began his "Great Rectification", a bodyguard robaut (and the plans for how to build more) fell into the hands of rebels fighting against his policies. One of these was being shipped along the Sacramento River by boat when the rebels were attacked by the Chuno Ggun. The people on board the boat were killed, and the robaut bodyguard (not activated) has been lying in the half-sunken boat ever since.

But the robaut bodyguard isn't the only one of Tesla's creations in the area. The automaton horse belonging to Zany Gray is another of the inventor's models, discovered by Gray many years ago. Gray's knowledge of how his robaut mount works may prove useful to the PCs before the adventure ends.

Tesla's robauts are designed to "attune" to a particular user and follow his or her orders using mental commands. The user wears a "control node" which allows direct communication with the robaut. With this device implanted in his or her body, there is a direct connection between the two, which allows the robaut to sense the human's intentions and emotions and react accordingly. In the case of the horse, this allows for superb horsemanship. But in the case of the bodyguard, it means that the robaut reacts to any perceived threat – this can be especially dangerous if the user is of a nervous disposition.

JAMES "ZANY" GRAY

James Gray got his nickname due to his fighting style – he has been known to go up against a couple of American lions in single combat to help others get away, and he has the scars to prove it. He is in his fifties now, with gray hairs in his beard, and is getting a little past taking on uber-beasts single-handed, but no-one expects him to die in his bed of old age. Not everyone in the tribe agrees with him having taken over due to the shaman's injury, but since the shaman's apprentice is only sixteen, they're prepared to accept it at least until they're back in their home territory and have time to come up with a better long-term solution.

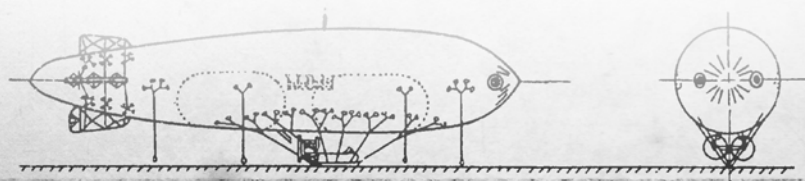
Physical +8, **Mental** +4; **Skills:** Athletics 4, Leadership 5, Firearms 5 [Steamrifle 9 Damage], Martial Arts (Beast Dancing) 6 [Punch 2 Damage, Kick 3 Damage], Riding 3 (8 when riding Lightning), Survival 4

Health Dice: 00/00/00/00/00/00 – 00 -2 / 00 -4 / 00 -8 / 00 -16

LIGHTNING

Lightning is a robaut horse created by Nikola Tesla at more or less the same time as he created the bodyguard Arnold. Gray is attuned to his artificial beast by a control node in the back of his neck. The robaut horse has the same stats as a normal horse (for full horse statistics see *Airship Pirates* p.267) but gives the person attuned to it a +5 pool bonus to their Riding skill. The horse will not work for anyone else, refusing to move, and standing very still if anyone other than Gray sits on it. If threatened with physical violence it will flee, while always attempting to stay close to Gray.

Physical +7 [Kick 5 Damage], **Mental** +2, **Health Dice:** 00/00/00/00 – 00 -2 / 00 -4 / 00 -8 / 00 -16





THE NEOBEDOUIN AND THE PIRATES

The first sign the PCs will have that the Neobedouin are around will be the distant sound of hogtrike engines on the southern outskirts of the ruins. The Neobedouins are nervous, having seen the PCs' airship over the trees – they're worried it might be the same pirates who attacked them before, or if not, another group of pirates who might be intent on attacking the tribe.

The leader of the Sequoia, Zany Gray, will then sneak closer on his robaut horse, Lightning, before dismounting for the final sneak up to where the PCs are moored in the clearing. PCs should make a Perception roll against Gray's Mental of +4 to see if they spot him. If they do, he will attempt to flee through the trees in order to get back to his tribe. If the PCs manage to capture him, he will be suspicious, and reluctant to reveal that his tribe is nearby, unless the PCs can convince him that they are not hostile. He will pretend that he is a lone treasure hunter, only admitting he is not alone if they tell him they have heard the sound of hogtrike engines. If the PCs hold him for more than 2 hours, six Neobedouin outriders will come looking for him, and will be prepared to fight to get him free. (Feel free to adjust this number according to the size of the PC's party – the outriders probably shouldn't outnumber the PCs by more than two).

NEOBEDOUIN OUTRIDERS

Physical +4, **Mental** +4; **Skills:** Archery 2 [Yew Bow 6 Damage], Firearms 2 [Steamrifle 9 Damage], Survival 3, Tracking 3

Health Dice: OO/OO/OO/OO – OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16

If the PCs manage to persuade Gray that they are not hostile and treat him well, he will admit that his tribe is in the vicinity, and offer to join forces on searching for treasure – all proceeds to be shared fifty-fifty. If the PCs tell him what they are looking for, he will let

them have it if he finds it first. Gray is an honorable man, and will uphold any agreements he has made with the PCs – but if they renege on their end of any bargains, he will be vengeful, attacking the pirates with his warriors if he gets the chance.

If the PCs are being attacked by American lions at the time he finds them, Gray will wade in on the PCs' side, and may well save someone's life. This should be a good start to any negotiations.

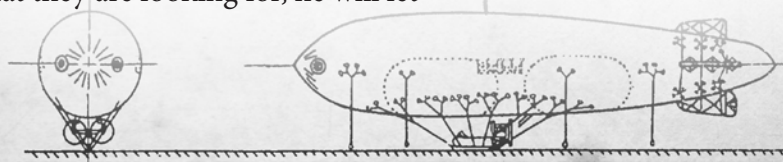
If one of the PCs has good medical skills and can heal the tribe's injured shaman (getting 7 successes on a Medicine roll will do the trick), this will be another way to gain the tribe's friendship.

Assuming the PCs do make friends with Gray, he will bring his tribe into the clearing, where they will set up camp around the airship moorings, keeping the place safe from lion attacks. The evenings the PCs spend with the Neobedouin will be filled with partying, dances, wrestling matches, flirtations and the like. The PCs will be given an insight into the life of a Neobedouin tribe and possibly forge alliances that will last beyond this adventure.

Of course, if one of the PCs becomes attuned to Arnold, the robaut bodyguard, this may cause trouble with the tribe, especially if the PC in question is wary of the Neobedouin. If it kills any of the tribe, they will at once withdraw, and Gray will demand compensation in treasure for the death(s) – half of what the PCs have found so far would satisfy him, though it will likely lower the morale of the PCs' own crew. If the PCs refuse to pay compensation, or their crew are dissatisfied with the arrangement, a pitched battle between the tribe and the crew may ensue. If Arnold is still active, it may be a bloodbath!

TREASURE SEEKING

The PCs have come with a certain aim in mind, but will almost certainly wish to explore further, as there are bound to be other treasures lost in the ruins. Refer





to the map for the following locations:

1. LANDING SITE

This is a clearing in the trees, once a park, the grass of which has been kept short by grazing oxen. There is plenty of space to get the airship in among the trees, and if it weren't for the pride of giant lions that uses it as a home base, it would be a perfect landing spot!

2. WRECKED BOAT

This is the boat that the PCs have come to find. For more details, see "X Marks the Spot", p.21.

3. RACID NEST

This is an area of small single-story suburban houses, most of which have crumbled into ruin in the centuries since they were last inhabited. Here and there, however, one is still standing. One in particular catches the PCs eyes – the door of a garage is partially open, and there is a gleam of metal from within. If the PCs enter the garage, they will find it cluttered with old rusty tools and tins of paint on shelves; and there is a strange acrid animal stink in the air. In the middle of the garage is a Diesel Age motorbike and sidecar, in pretty good condition. Anyone with Ad Hoc Repair or Engineering skill can tell that with a few hours work it could be got working again. Anyone moving further into the garage will find, tucked away in a dark corner, a large nest containing five football-sized eggs, still warm. They have stumbled on a racid nest, and mother racid is about to return...

There is no back entrance to the garage, so if the PCs are trapped inside when the mother returns, they're in trouble. Luckily, because the roof is so low compared to the height of a racid, the giant bird is fighting with a 3 black dice penalty to all rolls. For the full statistics for a Racid see *Airship Pirates* p.271.

Racid

Physical +10 [Peck 12 Damage], **Mental** +2, **Health Dice:** 00/00/00/00/00/00/00 – 00 -2 / 00

-4 / 00 -8 / 00 -16

The motorbike does not have any fuel, but when restored, has the following statistics.

Handling: 10 **Movement:** 80mph **Armor Points:** 0 **Passengers:** 2 **Range:** 180+ miles (diesel) **Cost:** He80 **Health:** 5 Health Dice **Weapons:** none

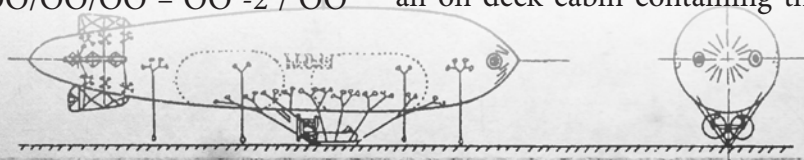
The Neobedouin will be willing to forgo a share of the treasure worth a corresponding amount, in return for the vehicle.

4. WAREHOUSES

These large warehouses are full of stored equipment. A lot of it has succumbed to the crumbling of age, but if the PCs put the crew to work finding useful things, 10 crew members will be able to find 1 Resource point of Manufactured Goods (see *Airship Pirates* p.155) for every four hours they spend searching, which can be sold at the going market rate (He80) in a major port such as Isla Aether or Helium City. But for every four hours the crew spends searching, roll a die; on a 6, the crew find a crate of rum, and spend the next four hours partying instead of working!

X MARKS THE SPOT

This is the boat that the PCs have come to find. It is a motor boat built by a small group of anti-Imperial rebels in the time of the Slow Apocalypse (probably in the 2020s) and is completely wrecked. It is jammed up on a mudbank against the central support of a concrete bridge over the river, its stern below the waterline, a tangle of weeds caught around it, pulled at by the current of the river. A successful Perception roll will allow the PCs to spot a number of giant alligators sunning themselves along the banks of the river. The boat is about twenty feet long, painted a dark military blue where the rust hasn't taken hold. A machine gun turret is partially submerged at the back of the craft, behind an open hatchway leading to a partially flooded hold, and nearer the front is an on-deck cabin containing the steering controls.





On close inspection, it shows signs of having been in combat, a long time ago, and the scattered bones of a human skeleton still litter the bottom of the cabin.

There are two ways of getting to the boat – either across the marshland and river in some sort of water vehicle, or by lowering someone down from the bridge (or the airship, come to that), on a rope. Either way, the giant alligators are going to get interested by the smell of fresh human food in their territory. At some point in the salvage operation, at least one giant alligator (see *Airship Pirates* p.265 for full statistics) will attack the party.

Physical +20 [Bite 20 Damage, Tail Swipe 10 Damage], **Mental** +2, **Armor** 10, **Health Dice:** OO/ OO - OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16

Clearly without some heavy weaponry the PCs will have little chance of standing and fighting. In the short term they would probably be best concentrating on getting out the way of the lumbering monster. They will have to work out some strategy for dealing with the beast. Using a dead animal (such as a lion or racid, or they may have to go shrub ox hunting – the Neobedouins might help with this) might distract it long enough for them to explore the boat.

The PCs are looking for a attache case containing the plans of some sort of automaton, little realizing that there is a real automaton aboard, about to cause some sort of trouble. Aboard the boat, the pirates will find two things:

THE ATTACHE CASE

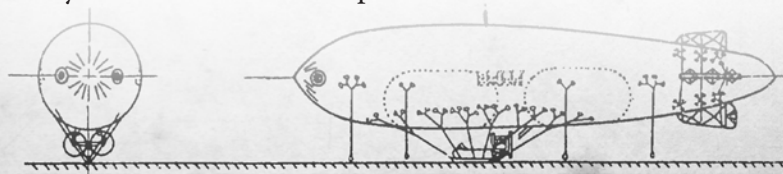
This leather case is in the wheelhouse of the ship, in a cupboard next to the wheel. Wrapped in plastic, the leather case within is rather moldy, but the contents have survived remarkably intact. There is a complete

set of blueprints for what is obviously some sort of heavily armed humanoid automaton. Also in the case is a small round, flat device, about an inch across, with spikes on one side. As soon as someone touches this device, it will fly from their fingers and attempt to embed itself in their wrist. It will do so, unless they are wearing heavy leather gauntlets or something else with at least 2 Armor Points of protection. The “benefactor” of this device will feel a slight stinging pain as the device bonds with their flesh, though nothing else will happen immediately. Once embedded, the device (which is a control node for the bodyguard robaut in the hold) will not be removable without a Medicine roll with a 5 black dice penalty. For what happens next, see *It's Alive!* below.

IN THE HOLD

The hold of the boat has been open to the elements for centuries, and the boat is half-full of water. Anyone peering in with the help of a light source will see a long, metallic box, something like a coffin, sticking half out of the water. It is heavy, and will take two people to lift. The water in the hold is chest-high.

The box, when recovered, will prove to be made of steel, with hinges along one side. Tape runs all the way around the box, emblazoned with the words “... DANGER – AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY – DO YOU HAVE CLEARANCE? – DANGER...” etc. If the tape is removed and the box opened, the PCs will find Arnold the robaut bodyguard. (See boxed text). If the robaut is found before it has been activated by the control node it will appear completely inert. If it is discovered while still activating its systems, this will be shown by a faint red glow in its left eye. If inert, nothing can be done to activate it – it is just a bunch of spare parts which would fetch around He100 in a sky city.





ARNOLD, THE ROBAUT BODYGUARD

Arnold is a prototype robaut bodyguard created by Nikola Tesla in the 1930s. Unlike the clockwork automatons of the the Neovictorians, it is not imbued with motivating essence, so is not conscious in any real way. It appears to be a ten-foot-tall humanoid made of metal, dressed in a trench-coat and fedora. One arm is replaced with a machine gun; the other is a normal hand (useful for reloading the gun, though it can also pack a mighty punch!).

Its job is to guard the person wearing the control node (see *The Attache Case*, p.22). It does not take orders, but relies on reading the anxiety level of the character to know who or what might be a threat. This is obviously a crude method of threat-detection, and can easily lead to fatal misunderstandings. Whenever the character who is being guarded is in a situation which the GM deems might cause anxiety, the character must roll Resolve with 1 black die. On a failure, Arnold will assume a combat stance in an obviously threatening manner – his gatling gun will begin spinning and will be pointed at the perceived threat. On a foul failure, the bodyguard will simply open fire without any warning! If the character is actually being attacked, Arnold will open fire. Otherwise the bonded character, if still anxious, must make a further Resolve roll, this time with 3 black dice, or Arnold will attack the perceived threat. The robaut will also respond to attacks upon its person with extreme force, unless it is the person who it is guarding who attacks it, in which case it will aim to knock the person unconscious rather than kill him or her.

Arnold does know a small number of commands, which must be thought silently through the control node rather than spoken aloud. These are:

Wait: Arnold will stay in the same place for half an hour. If the PC is not back in this time, the bodyguard will come and find the PC.

Friend: This must be thought while pointing at an

individual. That individual will never be targeted by the bodyguard, unless the next command is issued.

Kill: This must be thought while pointing at an individual. The robaut will open up with his gatling gun at the person or animal so designated.

If the PC attuned to the robaut doesn't figure this out, Gray (assuming he's friends with the PCs) can suggest something like this, as he has similar, although more benign, commands for Lightning.

The only way to get the bodyguard to deactivate is to tell it to wait, then have the control node surgically removed. (If Arnold isn't told to wait, he will perceive any surgical procedure as a hostile act and threaten the surgeon with his gun; if the surgeon continues, he will be shot).

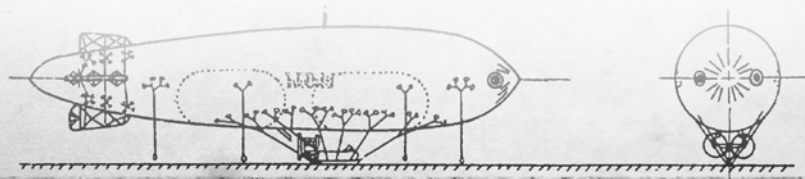
Note: Arnold is supposed to be more of a liability than an asset, a source of conflict within the game. If you find he is becoming too useful, tearing through enemies and making short work of your carefully designed adventures, you can always have his power-pack run out. It is an ancient design, not understood by the gadgeteers of the 22nd century, so once he's "dead" he probably can't be fixed. That said, you might decide differently – you might find he makes an interesting long-term companion and be happy for him to become a permanent asset.

Physical +12, Mental +2; Skills: Firearms 5 [Gatling Gun 20 Damage, range 100 yards], [Punch 3 Damage, Kick 4 Damage], Survival 4

Health Dice: OO/OO/OO/OO/OO/OO/OO/OO - OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16: Armor 6

IT'S ALIVE!

Once the device is implanted, a signal will be sent to the robaut, which will begin activating its systems. This will take about ten minutes, so there will be no obvious connection at first between the activation of the control node and the awakening of the robaut.





As soon as Arnold has finished activating, it will break out of its case (assuming it is still sealed in), and make its way to the person wearing the control node. It will take up a guard position immediately behind and to the left of the character, and will follow the character around, saying nothing. (See the Arnold text box for how the robaut will react to perceived threats).

OUT OF THE CLOUDS

Eventually the PCs will be ready to depart Calusa. They will hopefully have some treasure and possibly even the attache case with the robaut plans, along with Arnold himself. They may decide to head back to the moorings at the Governor's palace, or they might decide to go elsewhere. If they decide not to return to Isla Aether, and run off with the treasure, then they will be attacked by Captain Ash and the *End of All Hope* (see p.26).

If they do decide to return to Isla Aether, then they will still potentially have trouble on the way home. Captain James Sparkwell-Duran, commander of the *HMS Imperius*, is hunting pirates in the region. He has already downed one pirate ship, and although his ship is a trifle battered, and his crew and air marines are not at full strength, he would find it dishonorable not to even try to engage the PCs and their ship.

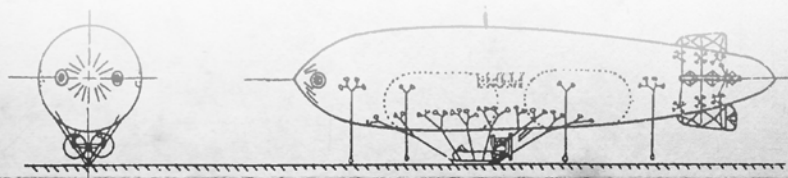
At the point that the PCs are safely aboard their own ship, and casting off, they will have been sighted by Captain Sparkwell-Duran, and the *Imperious* will be closing. Sighting isn't necessary. The PCs won't have been able to make out the enemy ship while on the ground, due to the trees, although once they are embarking they won't be able to avoid noticing it. The action starts with the *Imperious* at Far Range at the point the last of the PCs' party gets back onto their ship. At this point the PCs will have to decide whether to make a run for it, using the chase rules, or fight, using the airship combat rules.

HANDLING THE FIGHT

A fully operational Imperial Air Navy ship is no mean foe, even having sustained some losses in a previous battle, the *Imperious* is a very dangerous enemy. The PCs would probably be best advised to run (using the chase rules on p.133 of *Airship Pirates*).

If they do decide to stay and slug it out, and are losing, then they'll be aided by Captain Ash and the *End of All Hope*. Even if they have fallen out with her, she will rescue them, after all they have treasure. Ensure Captain Ash gets there in time – a couple of broadsides from the *Imperious* have the potential to knock a pirate ship out of the sky, although Sparkwell-Duran will possibly try to board and capture the PCs and their airship, rather than simply taking them down.

If the PCs and Captain Ash seem to be winning (which combined they should do) then Sparkwell-Duran will sound a retreat. He won't want to risk the *Imperious* being taken as a prize (although it might





be) and would rather he and his men lived to fight another day. In this case, he will have a grudge against the PCs and Ash, and will hope to avenge his defeat at a later time. If the PCs take the *Imperious* as a prize, they would probably be wise to strip her of her assets, rather than use or sell the airship – most Skyfolk, even pirates, would think twice before engaging in the provocative act of flying an IAN airship.

If the PCs' ship does get involved in aerial combat use the airship combat rules to determine who is winning the fight, casualties to crews and damage to airships, etc. But remember, this is the PCs' story, and they might have individual heroic actions that they wish to engage in during the battle.

HMS IMPERIOUS IMPERIAL AIR NAVY FRIGATE

Handling: 9 **Movement:** 110 mph

Armor Points: 7 **Crew:** 110 (150)/100

Resource Space: 150 **Range:** 3000 miles

Fixed Marine Quarters: 150

Cost: He49,280 (50,000)

Resources: 32 (40) large cannons (64 (80) ARPs), 2 Grappling Hooks (4 ARPs), Luxurious Cabin (5 ARPs), 3 (6) Standard Cabins (9 (18) ARPs), Sick Bay (5 ARPs)

Free Cargo Space: 39 ARPs

Weapons: 32 (40) Large Cannons (16 (20) on each side).

Broadside Damage: 240 (300)

Health: 30 (50) Health Dice

The *HMS Imperious* is an IAN patrol ship, tasked with hunting pirates. The vessel is commanded by Captain James Sparkwell-Duran. Captain Sparkwell-Duran is having a good day. He has already shot down one pirate ship (the one which raided the Sequoia)

and now it looks like he might bag another one, or even two! The statistics reflect the damage from the previous fight. Even in it's damaged state the *HMS Imperious* poses a real threat to any pirate ship.

CAPTAIN JAMES SPARKWELL-DURAN

Captain James Sparkwell-Duran is dedicated to his job – which is primarily pirate hunting. His men are loyal, as he is certainly an enlightened enough leader compared to his peers – he runs a tight ship, but doesn't exact life threatening punishments for small infractions, unlike some of his fellow IAN officers. He believes in fair play, doesn't question his orders and is a dedicated father and husband when on leave. Sparkwell-Duran will attempt to take down another pirate ship if he can, but he will order a retreat if he thinks the *Imperious* is in danger of being downed.

Physical +4, **Mental** +3; **Skills:** Etiquette 2, Leadership 2, Pilot 1, Swordplay 2 [Military Sword 7 Damage], Tactics 1

Health Dice: OO/OO/OO/OO – OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16

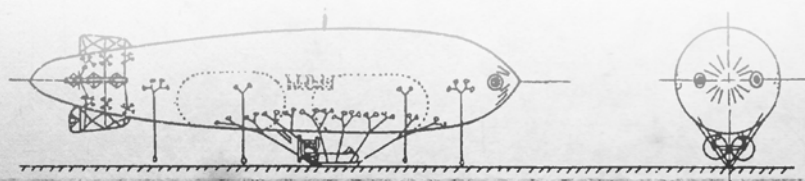
The Crew of the Imperious

The following statistics can be used for individual air sailors from the *Imperious*:

Physical +3, **Mental** +2; **Skills:** Fisticuffs 2 [Punch 1 Damage, Kick 2 Damage], Gunnery 1, Swordplay 2 [Cutlass 7 Damage]

Health Dice: OO/OO/OO – OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16

The crew of the the *Imperious* count as a Rank 11, Competent crew (at full strength the crew is 150, but they took casualties in their previous battle)





The Marines of the Imperious

The following statistics can be used for individual air marines from the *Imperious*:

Physical +3, **Mental** +2; **Skills:** Firearms 1 [Steamrifles 9 Damage], Fisticuffs 2 [Punch 1 Damage, Kick 2 Damage], Gunnery 1

Health Dice: OO/OO/OO – OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16

At full strength there is a air marine company of 150 – but following a previous boarding action, a lot of them went down with the enemy ship, so there are currently only 80 air marines left. They fight as a Rank 8 Scurvy crew.

Once the PCs have escaped from, or defeated, the *HMS Imperious*, with or without the help of the *End of All Hope*, they should be ready to return to Isla Aether. The rest of the journey home will be uneventful. They should follow their instructions, and head for the Governor's private moorings. Certainly if they don't, Captain Ash will challenge them before landing.

THE PRIVATEER SHIP: END OF ALL HOPE "BARRACUDA" CLASS

Handling: 11 **Movement:** 130 mph

Armor Points: 6 **Crew:** 100/80

Resource Space: 100 **Range:** 1500 miles

Fixed Cargo Space: 75

Cost: He21,880

Resources: 3 luxurious cabins, 4 standard cabins

Weapons: 20 large cannon

Broadside Damage: 150

Health: 34 Health Dice

These are the statistics for the *End of All Hope* with a full crew and when undamaged. When fully

operational the *End of All Hope* is a formidable ship. Capable of giving even an Imperial frigate a run for its money, this Barracuda class vessel has been adapted as a privateer. Commanded by Captain Lialian Ash, she tends to work as a gun for hire, rather than sticking to more peaceable mercantile pursuits. The crew are relatively loyal, although they are none to happy with their current task – shepherding the PCs home – feeling they could earn more looting the PCs or treasure hunting themselves.

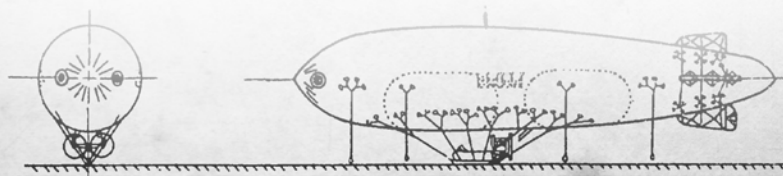
Individual members of the End of All Hope's crew are as follows:

End of All Hope air sailors

Physical +3, **Mental** +2, **Skills:** Dodge 1, Fisticuffs 2, Swordplay 2 [Cutlass 7 Damage]

Health Dice: OO/OO/OO – OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16

The crew of the *End of All Hope*, at full strength, count as a Rank 10 Competent crew.





PART III

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

Again, it is best to read this entire section before attempting to run it. Things have changed on Isla Aether, and how the PCs react to these changes might vary. Caroline Cirro-Stratus has led a successful coup against Vladimir Cumulo-Nimbus. For the PCs, this means they are likely to be imprisoned, betrayed, sentenced to death and have to make a daring escape.

However, there might be an opportunity for some of the PCs to avoid capture, leaving the party split, with some members locked up, while others plan a daring rescue. The PCs might decide to save their own skins, while not being too concerned with wider events on the sky city – or they might take an active part in trying to bring down the new regime.

Then there are the agendas of the various factions aboard Isla Aether. Caroline Cirro-Stratus has seized power and wishes to hold on to it, but her ideas are not as popular as she thinks; Captain Ash, if she is still alive, will want to secure the release of Henga, and will be willing to work with the PCs in order to achieve this; Windward won't act openly against the new regime, but likewise is unhappy that Henga has been imprisoned; and the citizenry are unhappy – they distrust Caroline, thinking of her as an usurper and killjoy.

WHAT'S GOING ON

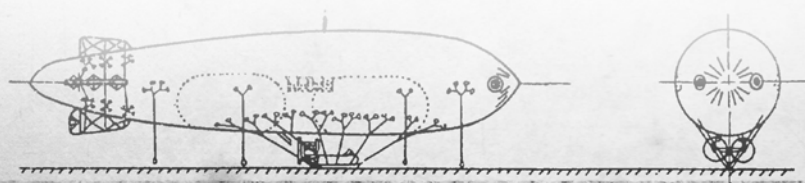
There are six elements in this section of the adventure:

- The PCs land on Isla Aether and some, or all, of them are arrested.
- Arrested PCs are taken to cells. They will meet Vladimir and be interviewed by Caroline.
- PCs who have escaped discover that the mood on the streets is by no means sympathetic to the new administration, and might find, or be found by, allies who wish to get rid of the new Governor.
- Imprisoned PCs will face a trial and betrayal by one of their own.
- The execution of Vladimir, Henga, and some, or all, of the PCs is the final scene. The PCs with, or without, help will need to save the day, or at least find a way of saving their own necks.
- The adventure will finish, rewards might be given, and depending on the actions of the PCs, their reputations will grow.

RETURN

Having been on a treasure hunt, befriending or alienating a tribe of Neobedouins, and possibly been engaged in a thrilling aerial battle, the PCs will no doubt be thinking it is all over, bar some hefty rewards. If they are thinking that, they will soon find they are very wrong. First appearances should give them few clues to exactly how much trouble is coming their way:

As you near the end of your journey home, a familiar





sight reaches your eyes. Isla Aether hoves into view, the immense platform perched above beautiful farm terraces that stretch down the slopes below Mount Whitney. The city looks as spectacular as ever. Airships from the Aetherian Navy patrol up in the skies, small dirigibles bob about, ferrying passengers around the city. Before long you can make out the moorings at the Governor's palace. Aside from his own private airboat there are no other vessels, so there is plenty of room for you to moor.

If the *End of All Hope* is accompanying the PCs' ship, they will also find room to dock, although they will land after the PCs (and, if they see what happens to the PCs, won't dock at all).

REGIME CHANGE

While the PCs have been away treasure hunting, Caroline Cirro-Stratus, has perpetrated a coup against Vladimir, had him locked up, alongside Henga, and appointed herself Governor (pending the Council's approval). She has instigated a policy of no tolerance of pirates in her city. She knows that the PCs are pirates, and thus criminals in her eyes, and she knows they are on a mission for Vladimir. Even in his reduced circumstances, Vladimir will have happily chatted to anyone who will listen about how he has met some pirates, and how jolly exciting it all was. Caroline has set up an ambush, wishing to capture the PCs and put them on trial for piracy and corruption. This fulfills both her goals of sending a message that piracy will no longer be tolerated aboard Isla Aether, and adds weight to the charges she is leveling against Vladimir and Henga. She will also attempt to impound their ship and its cargo.

CAROLINE CIRRO-STRATUS

Caroline comes from a wealthy Aetherian merchant family. Highly ambitious, Caroline took her place on the Council of Oligarchs aged only 25, an

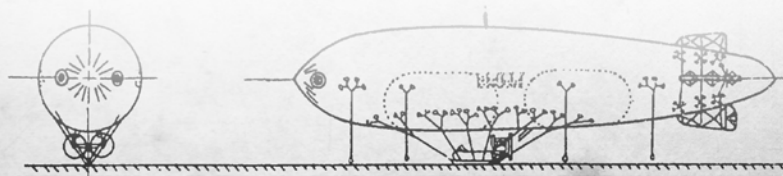
incredibly young age to join such an important decision-making body. Over the years, Caroline has become frustrated with the parochial nature of the Council, but most of all with the Governor of Isla Aether, Vladimir Cumulo-Nimbus. Vladimir epitomizes all that Caroline despises – immaturity, stupidity and a lurid fascination with pirate criminals. She has worked for the past five years (Caroline is 30 now) to destabilize the Governor and create her own power base in the city. Her original opposition, which was quite reasonable considering Vladimir was a useless Governor, slowly turned into an obsessive hatred of Vladimir and his incompetence.

Finally, after years of stalling, the Council has been forced to back her demands for an audit of the city accounts. Even this has just led to procrastination, so at last Caroline has taken matters into her own hands and led a coup against the Governor. She has a mercenary troop who easily overpowered the palace guards and has installed herself in the palace. The Council have named her as the transitional authority, but Caroline is using the title Governor, believing her fellow Councillors too weak-willed to oppose her. She also has the backing of the Aetherian Navy, who were unhappy with Vladimir's cutbacks and demobilizations (something he ordered to save money).

Since moving in to the palace, Caroline has been horrified by what she has found. She has had Vladimir's pirate regalia and toys removed and is trying to make the main building more in keeping with the diplomatic and stately purposes for which it was originally designed. She has had the pleasure building gutted and converted into a prison – where currently Vladimir and Henga, along with a few of the more loyal old palace guards, are kept under lock and key. If she can capture them, she will have the PCs imprisoned there as well.

Physical +3, **Mental** +7; **Skills:** Appraisal 4, Bull 2, Business 5, Etiquette 3, Intimidate 2, Perception 4, Skyclore 2

Health Dice: 00/00/00 – 00 -2 / 00 -4 / 00 -8 / 00 -16





Once they have landed, the PCs may well disembark and walk straight into the trap that Caroline has planned. The guards will look no different to Vladimir's guards (they will have donned the old guards' uniforms – Caroline has designed much snappier uniforms for her own mercenaries) and the mooring will seem quiet enough. On the other hand, they may be more cautious.

If they disembark and ask to see Henga and Vladimir, the guards will smile and wave them forward. At the point where it will be hard for the PCs to make it back to their ship, guards will pile out from the side and front of the mansion and level steamrifles at the party and any of their crew who are accompanying them. This could result in a big fight, particularly if Arnold is present, but it should be made clear that the opposition is probably overwhelming. Even if Arnold is cutting swathes through the guards, Caroline has the support of the Aetherian Navy, who will draw up ships behind the PCs' airship to cut off their escape that way, and there are a number of cannon and lightning guns that Caroline has had concealed in the grounds that she can bring to bear against the robaut. That said, the PCs should not be completely railroaded into captivity. There is no reason, if they have the means and the luck, that they shouldn't be able to achieve a victory, but given the forces assembled against them it is highly unlikely.

Caroline wants the PCs captured alive – she thinks that it is necessary that their crimes are exposed in order to corroborate her evidence against Vladimir, so give the PCs plenty of opportunities to surrender, and there will be medical care offered to any who are injured as a consequence of their apprehension.

Of course, some of the PCs may escape arrest. It may be that Caroline is less interested in some of the PCs than others (for instance, if one of them appears to offer no threat, likely a crew member who she thinks

is aboard primarily due to their schtick), PCs might make a successful break-out through the main gates, or they might successfully retreat back to their airship (although, as noted, the Aetherian Navy should deter them from trying to make a fight of it once aboard). Allow the party to split, if it seems realistic and you are happy to run the adventure that way – it might be interesting to have one group of PCs imprisoned and trying to escape, while another group plan a breakout and try to muster forces to oppose Caroline. Alternatively, have them all locked up and see how it plays out that way.

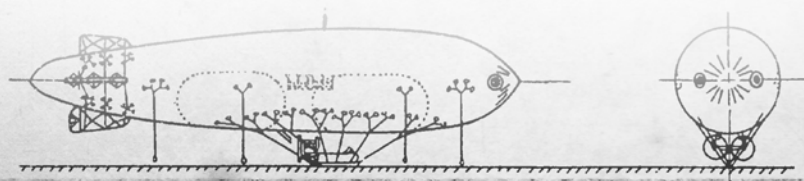
Those who are captured will be put on trial, charged with corruption (for agreeing the deal with Vladimir) and piracy.

RUNNING THE AMBUSH

Once the PCs are in front of the palace building read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the main doors to the Governor's mansion you realize something is amiss. Behind you, in the area between the mansion and the moorings, you can hear the tramping of boots on the ground, it seems a sizable force is coming in your direction. Simultaneously, figures begin to pour out of the pleasure rooms, near the main entrance to the palace complex, and from the main palace entrance, as well as a further force from the other side of the main palace in front of you. You are all but surrounded, on four sides, by groups of soldiers carrying steamrifles, wearing dark military uniforms adorned with gold and silver braiding. Over a loud hailer you can hear a woman's voice, demanding that you "Drop your weapons and surrender, at once!"

If the PCs are already split up, you might want to give those aboard their ship a last chance to abandon their comrades and make a dash for it – this is a good opportunity for splitting the party if you want to run





the game that way. If all the PCs have disembarked they will still have a chance to see the following:

Aetherian Navy ships which seemed merely to be on routine patrol now all disengage from the routes they were taking, and change course, heading for the moorings where your airship is docked. They are in numbers, and at least three are swinging round, near enough to give your ship a broadside.

If the PCs are not aboard, their crew will quickly strike the colors and surrender.

If the PCs near the palace co-operate and drop their weapons, they will be escorted to the prison (the old pleasure rooms).

Gruff guards take your arms and pin them behind you, slipping handcuffs over your wrists. Once your legs are also chained they lead you inside the sub-building, what had been the old Governor's brothel-cum-casino. It appears it is now being used as a prison.

The PCs will no doubt want to know what is going on, but the woman with the loud hailer has retreated back into the main palace building, and the guards merely grunt, refusing to give the PCs any useful information.

If the PCs try to make a fight of it, then the mercenaries will try to subdue them quickly. If they are impeded by Arnold, they will wheel out heavier ordinance, as below (statistics for cannon and lightning guns can be found in *Airship Pirates*, p.156). One or two PCs might be able to slip away in the chaos, particularly if the PCs' crew is also involved in the brawl, but otherwise it is jail for the lot of them.

TYPICAL AETHERIAN NAVY AIRSHIP

Handling: 10 **Movement:** 120 mph

Armor Points: 7 **Crew:** 80/60

Resource Space: 75 **Range:** 3000 miles

Fixed Marine Quarters: 50

Cost: He16,780

Resources: 20 large cannons (40 ARPs), 4 Grappling Hooks (8 ARPs), Luxurious Cabin (5 ARPs), 4 Standard Cabins (12 ARPs), Sick Bay (5 ARPs)

Free Cargo Space: 5 ARPs

Weapons: 20 large cannons (10 on each side).

Broadside Damage: 150

Health: 30 Health Dice

The warships of Isla Aether tend to be individually designed rather than built to a specific template. Nevertheless, this is typical of the type, relatively small and fast.

CAROLINE'S MERCENARIES

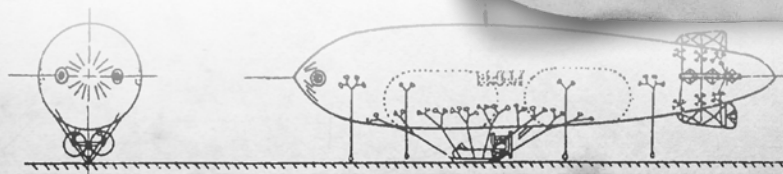
The mercenary outfit is skilled, and expensive. They are loyal to their employer, so long as they don't feel the odds against them are overwhelming. Like most guns for hire, they will melt away if they think their mission is doomed. But, up to that point, they will generally be highly professional and, unless somebody is able to make them a very good offer, fairly immune to corruption.

There are up to 80 mercenaries in the palace compound ready to spring the ambush, and they fight as a Level 8 Elite crew (their competency might drop, if they receive enough casualties).

If they are having difficulty with Arnold they are able to call on up to 40 reinforcements, who will haul out three portable lightning guns and a couple of small steamcannons.

Physical +6, **Mental** +2; **Skills:** Firearms 2 [Steamrifle 6 Damage], Fisticuffs 3 [Punch 1 Damage, Kick 2 Damage], Intimidate 2, Perception 1

Health Dice: 00/00/00/00/00 - 00 -2 / 00 -4 / 00 -8 / 00 -16)





Lilian Ash, aboard the *End of All Hope*, will probably already have made a break for it at the first sign of trouble. She might appear again, in one of the following two ways. If some of the PCs escaped, they might meet with her to plan a rescue. She will happily work with them in such a case; she wants to free Henga, and will do anything to achieve this. It is only now her partner has been jailed that she realizes quite how fond of her she is. Alternatively, if all the PCs have been jailed, Captain Ash will appear at their trial, see *The Trial*, below.

A CHANCE OF ESCAPE

If some, or even all, of the PCs managed to escape, that is not necessarily the end of the matter. Without doing something to change the situation on Isla Aether they will never be paid, and the city will be lost as a safe haven for pirates everywhere, at least for the time being. The citizens will probably get sick of Caroline sooner or later without the PCs' help. Of course, free PCs will probably want to rescue any of their imprisoned crewmates.

If some of the PCs have managed to avoid the ambush but remain on Isla Aether, you could allow them to slip into another mooring, under the noses of the Aetherian Navy. If they escaped aboard their ship, Windward will be aware of this, he is aware of all the comings and goings in the airdocks, and will cover their tracks for them. Or, they might have got out through the mansion entrance, in which case they will no doubt want to find somewhere they can lie low and plan their next move.

Handling events on the outside is dealt with in *The Mood on the Streets*, below.

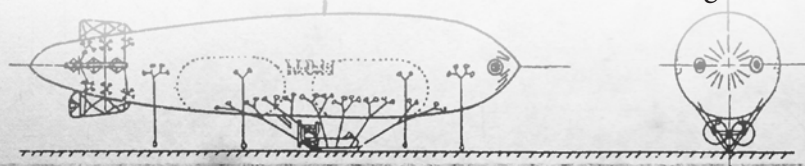
LOCKED UP

For those PCs that find themselves incarcerated, there are a variety of events that might occur before their trial, and following their trial, before hanging day. They will meet either Vladimir or Henga, depending on their gender. The women and men will be held in separate cells, beneath the building, in the cellars which were formerly used as a brothel by Vladimir and his friends. Any of the PCs' crew who have been captured will be led away to a separate part of the building, chained to the walls of the former casino. The new Governor, Caroline, won't be able to resist questioning the PCs – really she just wants an excuse to gloat. And, of course, the PCs might try to escape.

On first being taken to their cells, read or paraphrase the following:

You are led into the large building near the palace complex gates. The guards haven't relaxed the uncomfortable grip they have on your arms, and seem unmoved by any complaints. Once inside, you see the dimly lit reception is fairly chaotic. More guards are in this area, and they seem to be processing other prisoners (the PCs' crew, if they were captured, a few of the old guards if they weren't) and moving them into a large room to your right. It seems they have other plans for you as they bundle you down some steps, bizarrely, because you are on a platform, into a cellar. The cellar smells vaguely of a curious mixture of chemicals and perfume. Once there you are told to strip so that you can be searched.

If the PCs try to resist they will probably be knocked about a bit, but the guards might agree to allow female prisoners to be searched separately, by female guards, in the bath-house area. Basically, the guards are checking for concealed weapons, etc. You might allow a Very Difficult (6 black dice) Conceal roll, against the mercenaries' Perception (Easy) if PCs are determined to still attempt to conceal something (unless they come up with a suitably imaginative solution to avoid being searched, or manage to





distract the guards' attention). Once processed in this way:

You are led through a further set of doors, and then placed into cells.

Men are herded into the cell to the right and women to the left. Once in the cells, check the *Fellow Prisoners* section below for further information.

TRYING TO ESCAPE

The PCs might wait for the day scheduled for their hanging to escape. Certainly if they have compatriots outside (possibly other PCs with Lilian, or concerned citizens who dislike the new Governor) then they will be advised that the execution day offers the best chance of escape – the execution is to be carried out in public and it is not at all certain that the public won't use the opportunity to revolt. But they may not be so patient. If the PCs try to break out before then, they might succeed. Use the plans of the palace complex, and of the prison block to run such an escape attempt. At any one time there will be up to 20 mercenaries in the prison itself, and there are 120 mercenaries in the complex as a whole (slightly reduced if they took casualties when ambushing the PCs, although Caroline will reinforce them as quickly as she can).

If any PCs escaped arrest, they can co-ordinate a rescue attempt; if not, and they are determined to mount an early escape, they will have to use contacts, bribery, etc. If they do manage to get out of the main complex they will then have to flee across the city, get access to their ship and escape, with the mercenaries after them, every step of the way. They might be helped in these circumstances by the beginnings of a riot by the people of the city, who are angry about the crackdown on pirates.

If the PCs do manage to escape before execution day, they will have to decide whether to flee the platform, without their cargo or pay, or whether to work with

Captain Ash or Windward, etc., to rescue Vladimir and Henga (if they have not already done so). Henga will not wish to run away – she is determined to bring down Caroline, and thinks it would be better for Vladimir to beat her legally, rather than go underground as a traitor in his own city. Vladimir will probably listen to his aide over the party, but they should be given an opportunity to try and persuade him to flee with them.

THE PRISON

The pleasure house, formerly an administration building, has been put to use as a prison. Caroline Cirro-Stratus intends to use it to house any political dissidents who defy her, now she believes she is the legitimate Governor.

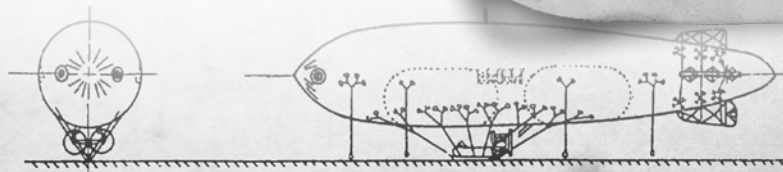
Built on two levels, the upper level was once a bar and casino, the lower one a brothel and bath-house. The lower area is therefore slung under the platform – the engineering is sound, but it does mean that if the party try to tunnel out, whether through the walls or the floor, they will be confronted by a very long drop, hundreds of feet of empty space in between them and an unpleasant landing on the mountain-side below.

MERCENARY PRISON GUARDS

Individual mercenary prison guards are no different to the other mercenaries, aside from the fact that they often use night sticks, rather than steamrifles, when subduing inmates.

Physical +6, **Mental** +2; **Skills:** Firearms 2 [Steamrifle 6 Damage], Fisticuffs 3 [Punch 1 Damage, Kick 2 Damage], Intimidate 2, Night Stick 1 [Damage 4], Perception 1

Health Dice: OO/OO/OO/OO/OO – OO -2 / OO -4 / OO -8 / OO -16)





The following location descriptions refer to the rooms on the Prison Map, p.34.

RECEPTION

What once resembled the reception in a night-club, is now a bit of a mess. The mercenaries are trying to reorganize the former pleasure house into a prison, but they haven't quite completed the transformation. Prisoners' belongings are jumbled up along with boxes of old disco lights, a discarded roulette wheel and other assorted fixtures and fittings. As days go by the chaos will subside. Stairs, to the left as you enter the room from outside, lead down to the cellar below, a door ahead leads into what was formerly the bar (and which is now guard quarters) and to the right into an area which was formerly the casino, and is now used to house common prisoners (Vladimir's old guards and any members of the PCs' crew who have been captured).

GUARD QUARTERS

The mercenaries who have been given the job of running the jail have made this their main quarters (although some of them also stay on the level below). Formerly a posh snug bar, the bar has been stripped out and basic bunks provided, alongside lockers in which the mercenaries stash their personal equipment. Doors lead out into both the reception area and the old casino area. Truth be told, the mercenaries consider themselves soldiers, not prison wardens, and they spend their off duty hours in here, moaning about being given such an unrewarding and ill-befitting job.

THE OLD CASINO

The old casino room has been gutted by the mercenaries, the card tables, roulette wheels and all the other gambling apparatus removed, leaving a large space in which common prisoners are to be housed. The old household guards are in here, chained by the ankles to each other, and at the end of each miserable line of prisoners, to the eastern-most wall (there is a

frame of metal girders, situated in the wall, part of the building's structure). A few guards oversee the prisoners. This is not a favorite job – these prisoners don't have access to toilet facilities, and are forced to use communal buckets. These buckets, despite being regularly emptied by the guards, and the lack of washing facilities, mean the room is quickly becoming unbearable. Doors lead out into the reception area and the bar, turned guards' quarters. Any rowdiness displayed by the prisoners is swiftly put down by guards, using night sticks.

DUTY ROOM

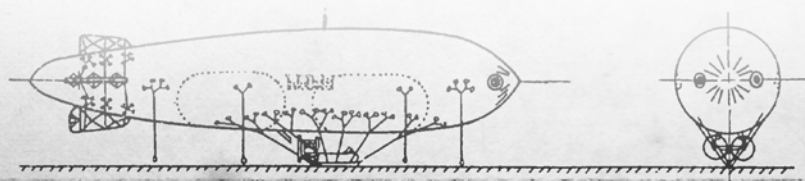
Formerly a pleasant reception room, this room has been stripped of all finery and now serves as a duty room, where a few guards sit and chat, ready to rush to help if the prisoners become rowdy upstairs, or if there are any issues with the more important prisoners on this level. This area will be where the PCs are stripped and searched. Exits are the stairs, which lead back up to the first floor, a door to the north which leads into the bath-house and a door which leads into the corridor outside the two large "private" cells.

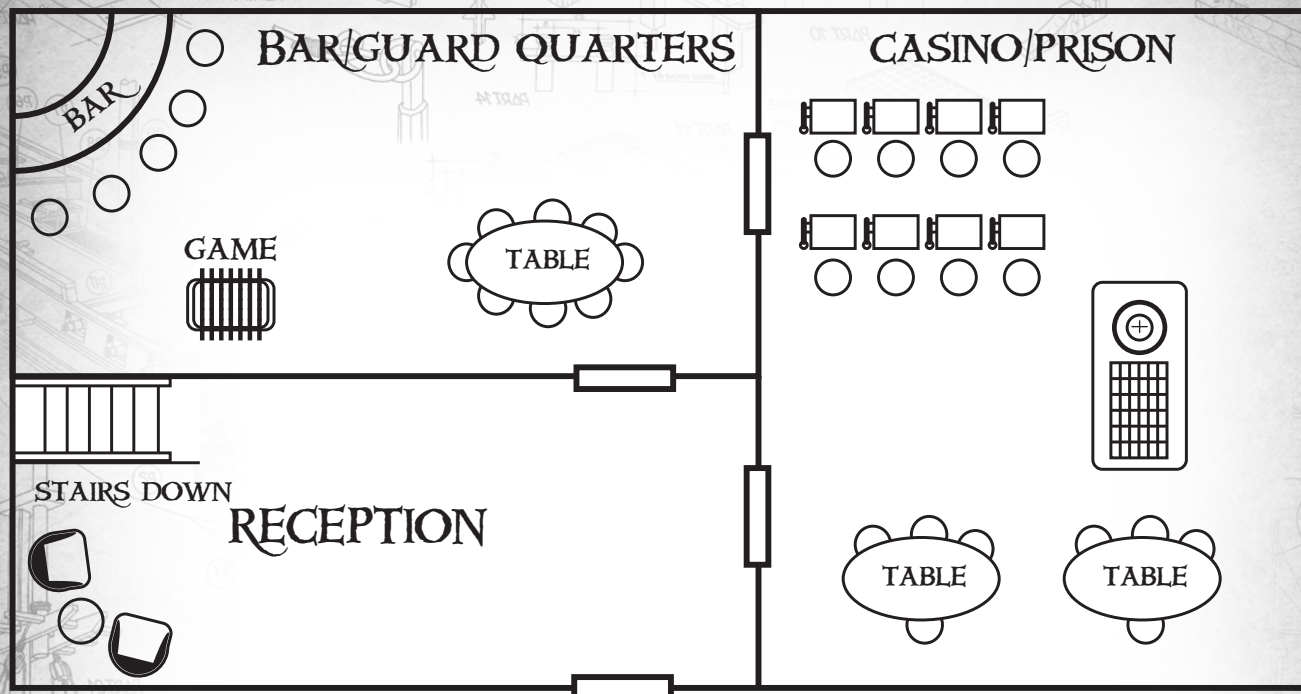
CORRIDOR

This corridor is always patrolled by at least three guards, charged with ensuring the PCs, Henga and Vladimir don't escape. They aren't best pleased with their job, but they are professional, and so won't fall for anything too obvious (calling for back up if one of the PCs mysteriously "takes ill", etc.).

THE BATH-HOUSE

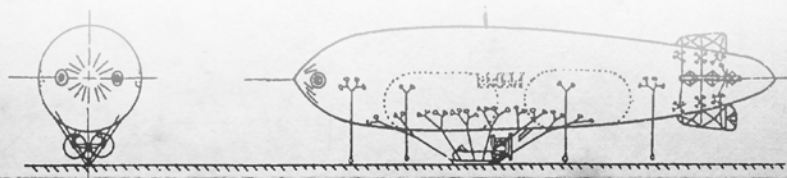
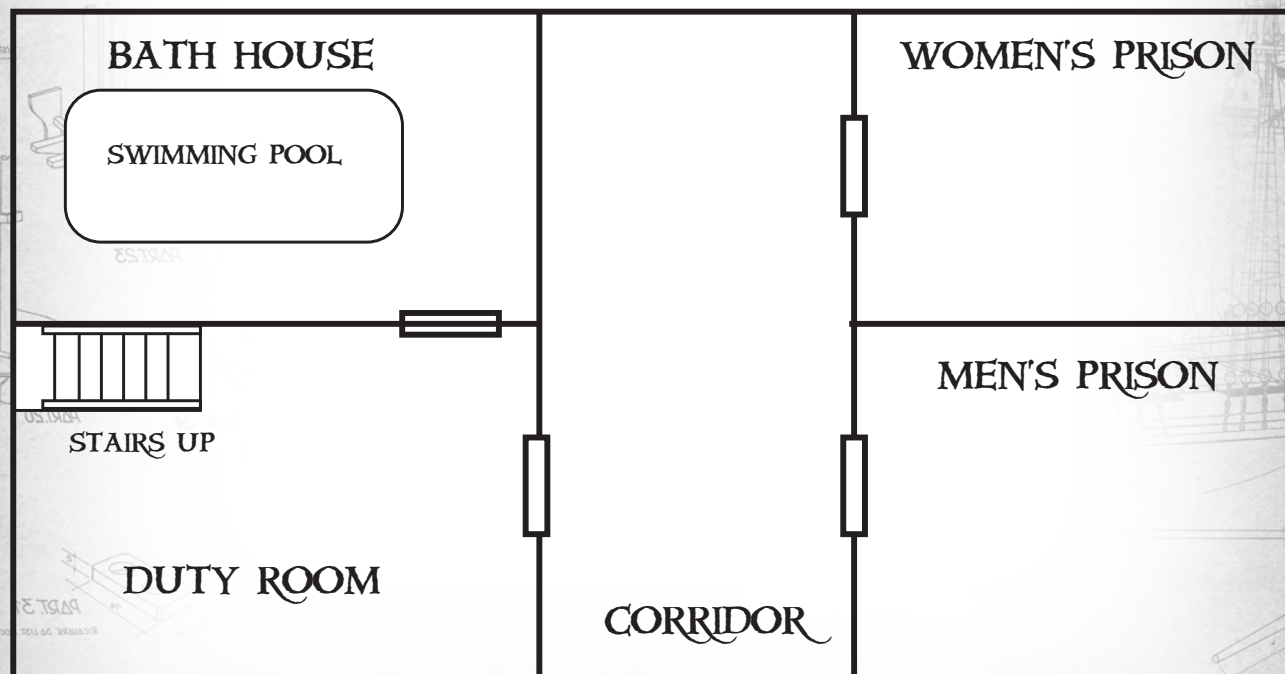
This was once the bath-house in which Vladimir used to enjoy reclining in before and after (and sometimes during) his extended visits to the private brothel. The base of the pool is transparent – this allowed light to shine up through the floor, and anyone diving down to be able to look out at the mountain below. Vladimir, not usually a fan of heights, nevertheless enjoyed daring himself to look through this window. The apparatus to pump in and heat the water for the





GROUND FLOOR

CELLAR





pool is located under the large shelved seating, fitted into the pool edges.

Currently there is no water in the pool. The room is being used to store confiscated weapons and other personal items of prisoners' equipment (including the PCs' belongings). The PCs' cargo will not be taken here, just the items they were carrying when captured.

WOMEN'S PRISON

Formerly a sumptuous bedroom, this room has been stripped of some of its hangings and furnishings, although a large four-poster bed (minus its curtains) and a small wash-room (with washing and toilet facilities) remains. The room was formerly the boudoir of one of Vladimir's favorite prostitutes, and the PCs might find some "interesting" items have been left in the chamber by the former occupant. There is a secret door in the wall that connects the two cells.

Henga is currently locked up in here, and any female PCs will be thrown in with her, to await trial. For information on Henga's current state of mind, see *Fellow Prisoners*, below.

MEN'S PRISON

Similar to the women's cell, this was once the boudoir of one of Vladimir's favorite prostitutes, and is now used as a cell in which he, alongside any male PCs, will be held prisoner until trial. For information on Vladimir's current state of mind, see *Fellow Prisoners*, below.

FELLOW PRISONERS

The PCs, Henga and Vladimir will all be kept bound in handcuffs with their legs in chains, to prevent them being able to easily run. Any PC with the skill might be able to pick the locks (the cuffs aren't so tight as to prevent this), although if a mercenary notices they will be more tightly bound next time.

The PCs will no doubt want to chat to Henga and/or Vladimir; if not the former Governor and his aide will

want to speak with them. The following information can be found out by chatting to them.

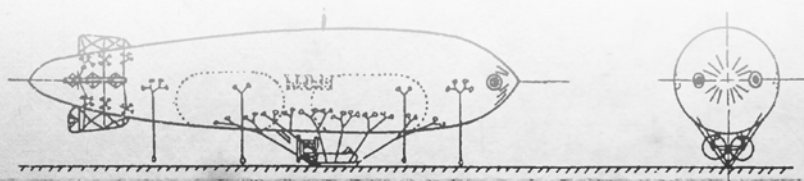
TALKING TO HENGA

Henga is hopping mad. She will explain that, soon after the PCs left, Caroline – with a few tame Oligarchs in tow – turned up at the palace. The guards on the gate were quickly overwhelmed but, to give them credit, the other guards tried to secure the main building and make a fight of it. Vladimir refused to fight a siege, claiming it must all be a misunderstanding and that he should go out and talk to Caroline. Seeing the heavy ordinance that Caroline's men were dragging through the gates and the number of mercenaries in her employ, Henga agreed that fighting was probably futile. So she knocked Vladimir out and tried to sneak him out of the building and on to his airboat. She might have managed it, but at the last minute Vladimir awoke and, terrified of flying, started to scream. They were quickly arrested and locked up.

Henga thinks that the best bet of securing everyone's freedom is to appeal to the Council of Oligarchs; perhaps to slip a message to Windward who might have a private word with each Councillor on the prisoners' behalf; or defeat the charges against the PCs, Vladimir and herself, in court. After all, Caroline is an usurper, and Vladimir has done nothing wrong (aside from being a bit of a wastrel).

TALKING TO VLADIMIR

Vladimir is inconsolable. He has a sore head (from when Henga concussed him), but he is much more upset about the fate of his pirate wargames and regalia, which he saw being dragged from the stateroom and thrown on a rubbish pile. He will explain that his collection of automaton miniatures was his "*life's work, and will take me an age to replace.*" He doesn't really have much of an awareness of how serious his circumstances are, but can be cheered up a little by the PCs if they talk to him about their adventures and act in an appropriately piratey fashion. He has no plan





about what to do next (although, if he thought about it, his rich sister Ingrid might be a good contact to approach for help).

THROUGH THE WALL

If the PCs think to ask, Vladimir will be able to show them a secret door that connects room 7 to 8, meaning the male and female members of the party can communicate. It won't occur to him that this is useful. The door was a convenience for if he wished to be entertained less privately when utilizing the brothel.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE GOVERNOR

At some point Caroline Cirro-Stratus will probably want to question the PCs. She will take no chances and have them brought before her individually, with plenty of mercenaries in tow to subdue them if she feels threatened. She will likely have them taken to the old bath-house for this interrogation, having them placed on a chair in the center of the old drained pool. Read or paraphrase the following:

You enter an old bath-house. There is quite a lot of junk scattered around the side of the bath, and lockers which probably once held towels but are now crammed full of weapons and personal effects. The water has been drained from the pool, revealing a transparent floor that gives a spectacular view of the mountain below. In the middle of the drained pool is a plain wooden chair. The mercenaries accompanying you roughly force you down onto the bath's bottom and dump you on the chair. A smartly dressed woman enters the room. Her hair is tied up neatly and she has a stern expression on her face. She almost looks through you as she considers your abject state.

Caroline will ask a variety of questions, all designed to entrap the PCs and Vladimir. Typical questions include:

"What mission were you given?"

"Who gave you the orders?"

"What were you sent to retrieve?"

"Were you commanded to attack other air-shipping?"

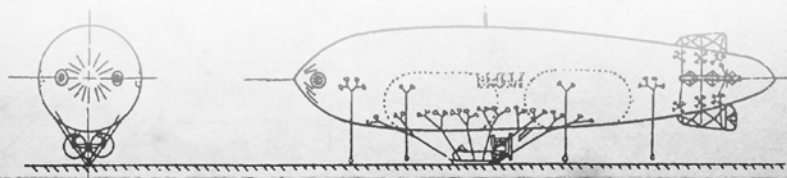
Caroline is becoming more megalomaniacal by the day. By the time of the execution she will be behaving like a full-blown tyrant. She will attempt to "cut a deal" with the PCs. They tell her what she wants to hear about Vladimir – that he was engaging the PCs to carry out covert criminal deals and acts of piracy, and she will be lenient.

If the PCs refuse to answer her questions, she will have them hosed down alternatively with icy water and hot water from a high-pressure hose by one of her mercenaries. The PC in question must make a Difficult (3 black dice) Resolve roll to avoid giving in and saying *something*, even if it's not the truth, but what she wants to hear – anything to make it stop. On a Foul Failure, the PC will become a gibbering wreck for the next 3d6 hours.

If they do co-operate she won't of course be more lenient at all, she will renege on any deal made. If the PCs appear to have any loyalty toward Vladimir she will be apoplectic with fury – how can anyone be loyal to such an idiot? She will not be interested in the PCs' treasure or cargo. If Henga comes up in conversation, then Caroline will appear perplexed at how such an obviously clever woman could work for an oaf like Vladimir. Once she has had a good gloat and shout she will order the PC to be taken back to his or her cell.

THE MOOD ON THE STREETS

The citizenry of Isla Aether are not happy. They didn't particularly admire their old Governor, but he was harmless enough and just let them get on with it. In the short time since Caroline has assumed office she has issued edicts banning pirates and regulating certain trade goods. Aetherians believe in a completely free market where the only issue is the quality of the goods on offer, not the type. Some fear she may even attempt to regulate slave ownership next.





If any of the PCs are at liberty they may decide to enlist the help of others, or they may be sought out and enlisted in a rebellion against Caroline. Of course, they may just want to concentrate on liberating any of the other PCs who are being held prisoner. There are a number of useful contacts that the PCs might work with, but feel free to improvise, they might just link up with some annoyed citizens who like pirates and resent the fact that they are being clamped down upon.

INGRID CUMULO-NIMBUS

If the PCs seek her out, Ingrid, Vladimir's sister, will be reluctant to give them an audience. She has the largest trading company aboard Isla Aether and is wealthy beyond imagination. She lives in a fine mansion; the height of good taste, the building oozes quality rather than ostentation. As her brother was Governor, Ingrid doesn't sit on the Council of Oligarchs – officially to avoid claims of corruption, in fact because she is embarrassed about her connection to Vladimir, whom she despises. That said, deep down she would rather he wasn't harmed (his exile would suit her best). If convinced that Caroline intends to have him hanged, Ingrid will intervene at the PCs' behest, speaking to fellow merchants and Oligarchs. The effect of this will be to boost the PCs' support in the final confrontation (see *Running a Big Fight*, p.40) and to persuade the Aetherian Navy to stand down, rather than support Caroline.

WINDWARD ALTOSTRATUS

If the PCs work out that Windward is a major political player in Isla Aether (either through talking to Henga, Captain Ash, or other citizens "in the know"), they may approach him in his unassuming offices in the Customs Rooms. Windward will offer little, while trying to garner all the information he can from the PCs. However, he is concerned about the situation and will try to subtly urge the PCs to rescue Vladimir and Henga (and any imprisoned PCs) at the execution – which will be a public affair.

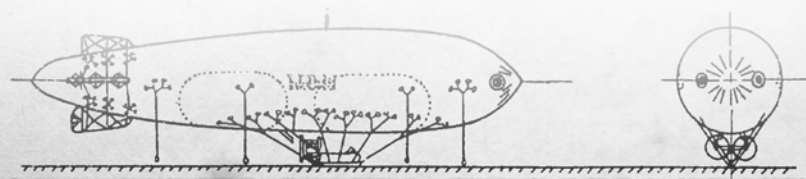
He will be extremely careful how he expresses this – he doesn't want to be seen as inciting treason, he will just hint that "*Caroline must be worried that security will be harder to maintain on the day*", that he "*does hope the crowd behaves. They have been known to become excitable at such events*", etc. If the PCs seem willing, he will try to lobby the Oligarchs on their behalf, mainly to neutralize their support for Caroline, and to assure the Aetherian Navy that if they stay uninvolved, they will not be treated so shoddily as they were under Vladimir's previous supervision, once Caroline has been ousted.

CAPTAIN ASH

If any of the PCs are at liberty, they will find that Captain Ash is still aloft, aboard Isla Aether. If they don't track her down, she will find them. She realizes how deeply she feels for Henga, now that she is not there, and will co-operate in any rescue attempt, suggesting that the execution day might offer the best chance of success. She will lobby the citizenry and try to whip up distrust of Caroline and her anti-piratical laws. If the PCs are all imprisoned, they will meet her in very different circumstances at the trial.

THE CITIZENRY

The citizens of Isla Aether are an independent lot – and they are not best pleased by having a potential tyrant in charge in the palace. They are used to being governed lightly, and truth be told, poorly. Someone enthusiastically making laws and trying to make things work more efficiently is the last thing they want to see – everyone suspects that more rules and regulations will lead to expense and inefficiency and there is no cause to fix something that isn't broken. If the PCs attempt to win over citizens to taking action





against Caroline then they will not just rise up on their say so, but might be willing to become involved more boldly and more speedily when a fight does break out.

THE TRIAL

After just a day or two (spin it out or speed it up as you see fit), the time will come for the PCs to be tried. Let's face it – it doesn't bode well for them. Caroline has appointed herself as judge (actually a genuine power of the Governor, although her Governorship has not been legally ratified by the procrastinating Oligarchs yet), there is no jury, and the defendants are not entitled to a defense lawyer.

Feel free to ham the trial up. Caroline will read a list of trumped up charges (mainly concerning fraud, corrupt practices and piracy); ask the defendants how they plead; have some dodgy evidence presented; and then don a black cap and sentence all and sundry to death. Nevertheless, some of the PCs might be under the same delusion that Henga is under, that there is some chance of having a fair trial. If so, let them argue, dissemble and blather – it won't help them, but they should be allowed to try, and if nothing else it will wind up Caroline, who is becoming increasingly frustrated when anybody dares to challenge her.

The trial will take place in the main reception room of the palace. It is to be a private trial, and will be overseen by Caroline herself, with a few tame Oligarchs the only spectators. The whole mansion is not mapped out, but aside from the main reception room the only other room on the ground floor is the former play-room of Vladimir, which has been stripped of all his pirate regalia, and restored to being a formal stateroom. The wide sweeping stairs, behind the raised dais on which Caroline presides over her makeshift court, lead up to her guards' quarters and her private chambers. The PCs, Henga and Vladimir will all be tried together (the crew and Vladimir's guards' fate will be considered at a later date). They will all be chained up and there will be an overwhelming number of mercenaries, both in the "court room" and in the palace grounds.

Read or paraphrase the following:

You enter the large main palace chamber. There has been a hastily assembled dais placed directly in front of you, a small group of rather timid looking officials sit to one side, and a rickety dock stands to the other. There are guards everywhere, up the stairs behind the dais, surrounding the dock area and on every door. You are urged to be seated on rough wooden benches beside the dock. Sweeping down the stairs, in an extremely fancy powdered wig and judge's gown, comes Caroline Cirro-Stratus. She looks pointedly at your group, wretchedly huddled on the low bench, and commands the mercenaries guarding you to "bring forward the first defendant".

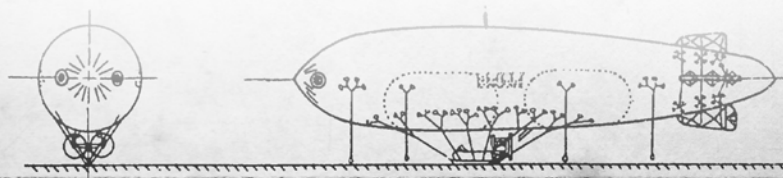
THE EVIDENCE

How much of the trial you wish to roleplay is down to your group's individual playing style. The trial is an excellent opportunity to give each player a stage to roleplay their PC, and so you could get them to individually defend themselves (alternatively, you could just skim through the trial, getting first to the betrayal (described in the next section) and then sentencing (described in the one after)).

Caroline will be witheringly dismissive of any attempts by the PCs to protest their innocence. She will take great pleasure in running rings around Vladimir, who will admit anything and everything, even though he didn't really do anything wrong – "So you admit you mismanaged the city finances?" "I'm sorry, I don't think I could have mismanaged them, I didn't manage them at all", etc. Vladimir will seem more concerned about his toy automata than he will about his own fate, and will use the opportunity of being interrogated by Caroline to whine at her, "Did you throw them all away? Even the hand-painted miniature portnoys? It took me ages to get the air sailors' eyes painted just right.", etc.

Henga will be prevented from giving any evidence, just asked whether she admits the charges, and then told to return to her seat, despite her protests.

When you have had enough of getting the PCs to





squirm (or if they are good at this sort of thing, the PCs getting Caroline increasingly riled and frustrated), move on to the betrayal below.

BETRAYAL

In the event that all the PCs are imprisoned and none of them have struck a deal with Captain Ash to co-operate in rescuing Henga and toppling Caroline, then Captain Lilian Ash will testify against the PCs and Vladimir, with her own version of how they attacked either her ship or the IAN ship without provocation.

Lilian has cut a deal. She has been promised that Henga will be released if she testifies against the PCs. Of course, she won't – instead, immediately after the trial, Captain Ash will also be arrested and thrown in jail, alongside those she has betrayed.

When the PCs say this is not true, a member of their own crew (the one who has been a constant problem to them throughout the voyage, or the PC who is acting as a spy, as described on p.6) will come forward to testify that what Ash says is true – he or she has been promised a pardon for testifying against the PCs.

SENTENCING

Inevitably the PCs, Vladimir and Henga will all be sentenced to death. Henga will be offered the opportunity to be rehabilitated if she speaks against Vladimir, which she will refuse. If Captain Ash is present she will gasp at this.

The sentence will be the same for everyone. Caroline will place a black cap upon her head and proclaim that *“the prisoners should be taken from this place, and returned to their cells, there to await execution at a time of my choosing. Erm, tomorrow morning, to be precise. At midday tomorrow they shall be hanged by the neck until dead. As an example to all pirates and their sympathizers, they shall be executed in public view and their bodies dangled in display cages, over the side of this most glorious platform, for all to see. Dismissed.”*

Straight after sentencing, Captain Ash, if she is present, will also be seized and arrested, and almost as an afterthought Caroline will say, *“and this pirate may as well hang as well”*. Henga will be furious, and try to struggle out of her bonds, shouting that the trial was a charade and Ash is a privateer, not a pirate. But it will be to no avail, and Ash will be locked up, alongside the other female prisoners. That evening, the prisoners will be able to hear the sounds of the gallows being constructed in the palace grounds.

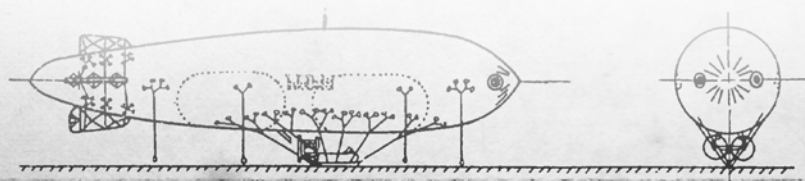
HANGING DAY

Hanging day is probably the best opportunity to run a big finale, bringing the adventure to a close in climactic style. It maybe that all the PCs face the noose, alongside Vladimir, Henga and Captain Ash. Or, some of the PCs might be in the crowd, ready to help spring their compatriots. A third possibility is that all of the PCs have escaped. If that is the case then they might be working with Captain Ash and others to free the condemned former Governor and Henga. If everyone is free, then Caroline will be reduced to merely hanging some of Vladimir's guards. This is the least ideal situation, but Henga will ask the PCs to help her free them and lead an insurrection against Caroline.

Most likely, at least some of the PCs will find themselves in a sticky situation:

As you are led out of the prison building, you can see a large crowd of citizens have gathered in the palace grounds. The atmosphere is electric with hostility and excitement. The crowd is being held back by hard-pressed mercenaries. They look worried, it seems they weren't quite expecting the numbers that have arrived to see your execution. As they begin to notice you, the crowd give a cheer. You can see, through the gap in the crowd, that a scaffold has been constructed outside the palace. There are as many nooses as there are condemned, it seems they intend for you to all swing together. A burly executioner, wearing a black hood, and with strongly sinewed arms, awaits menacingly.

The PCs will be led to the scaffold, prodded along





to ensure they don't deviate from the path through the crowd. Once up the steps they will be shoved forward, each prisoner forced to stand in front of a loop of rope, above a trapdoor. At this point there will be an almighty roar, not of approval, but of anger. Caroline has appeared on the palace steps, behind the scaffold. By now she is completely deluded and drunk with power. She imagines the crowd are booing the prisoners, and oblivious, she will climb down the steps, onto the scaffold, and inquire as to why the Oligarchs are not present to witness the event. She will ask the condemned if they have any last words, and then, in all probability, all hell will break loose.

INSURRECTION

The crowd are not going to passively stand by and watch their heroes die. Well, as long as something is done to get them going they won't. If the PCs appeal to the crowd, then the crowd will act. If the PCs don't make such an appeal, then Henga will.

The active combatants in the crowd will try to free the prisoners and give them weapons with which to fight, and start struggling with the mercenaries. The amount of insurrectionary citizens will vary according to whether any free PCs managed to get people on their side (see *The Mood on the Streets*, p.36 and *Running a Big Fight*, below).

At the first sign of violence Caroline will hide behind her mercenaries, who will aggressively subdue the crowd, up to the point where it is clear that they cannot win. This is the point at which any carefully laid plans made by the PCs might best be employed – if they had found other ways to cheat the executioner there is no reason not to let these plans play out – the big fight can be delayed until after the PCs have done whatever they were plotting. Likewise, if there are PCs in the crowd, let them lead the struggle against the mercenaries.

RUNNING A BIG FIGHT

The easiest way to run the big final fight is by using the crew rules from *Airship Pirates*, p.128. However, rather than just totaling up casualties on every side, emphasize the ebb and flow of the battle, rather than just saying, the mercenaries are winning, or the citizens have killed X number of mercenaries. For example:

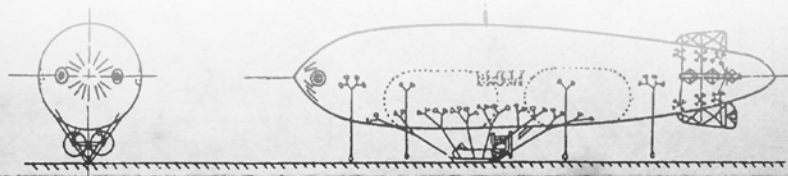
Citizens are being mown down by mercenaries; Mercenaries are being overwhelmed by Captain Ash's crew; some of the citizens are breaking into the prison, obviously intending to release those held within; Caroline is looking scared now, and trying to get back to the palace doors, but her way is blocked and her mercenaries are starting to look to their own safety, rather than hers; etc.

If, like Vladimir, you are fans of using miniatures, battlemaps, counters, etc., now is the time to use them. But the fight can be run just as well with good dynamic descriptions of the events as they unfold. In addition to the crew rules, it is better to describe each PC's individual battle in more detail, running each one as an individual combat. Remember, it is the PCs' story, and they should be given the opportunity to take center stage throughout the action.

In all, there are 120 mercenaries, who fight as a Rank 12 Elite crew at full strength, but not all of them can fight, the crowd is far too big. They will lose morale if, as the fight goes on, they are taking casualties, and will surrender if they see all is lost.

The crowd fight as a Rank 15 Scurvy crew, but you should add a couple of ranks for each successful ally that any of the PCs managed to make in the *Mood on the Streets* section (they will have spread the word). Again, if the PCs make a rousing last speech at the scaffold to the crowd of citizens, feel free to add another rank or two, or upgrade them from Scurvy to Common. There are far more than a hundred and fifty present, more like a few thousand, but they are not all capable of, or willing to, fight.

Such a rabble will be hard pushed to fight against the elite mercenaries, but there will be more assistance forthcoming. The crew of the *End of All Hope*, who at





full strength, count as a Rank 10 Competent crew are also scattered through the crowd, and will either try to free their captain, if Lilian is also on the scaffold, or will fight under Lilian, trying to free Henga, if their commander is still with them.

In addition to the mercenaries, citizens and the crew from the *End of All Hope*, the Aetherian Navy will have a vessel patrolling near the palace moorings. They may disembark to aid Caroline, but they will think twice if it is obvious the crowd are winning, and won't help Caroline at all if Windward or Ingrid has spoken to their commander. If they do join the fray, they fight as a Rank 8 Competent crew.

To summarize, the main groups of potential combatants are as follows:

The mercenaries; the citizens; the crew from the *End of All Hope*; the old palace guards and the PCs' crew, if they have been freed; possibly some of the Aetherian navy; the named NPCs such as Henga, Lilian, Vladimir and Caroline; and the PCs themselves.

Don't get too caught up in the maths, it is more important that the big battle should be fun and a memorable finale to the adventure than that you remember to mark off every casualty. The fight should be tense, present some personal danger to the PCs and end in a suitably climactic fashion.

The mercenaries could make more of a fight of it, bringing out their heavy weapons. The PCs might need the assistance of their own crew, if they can free them, and the 20 old palace guards that are still held in the prison. The elite mercenaries could make mincemeat of the crowd, particularly without the help of the PCs. As mentioned above, allow the PCs the limelight, perhaps they bring down Caroline, storm the mercenary who is holding the lightning gun, or rally the crowd, causing more citizens to join the fight. Alternatively, they might just try to sneak off in the confusion. Whether Caroline is killed or captured at the end of the battle is at your discretion – you might just want to see where the dice land.

Once Caroline has fallen and her troops have surrendered describe the scene to the PCs (probably

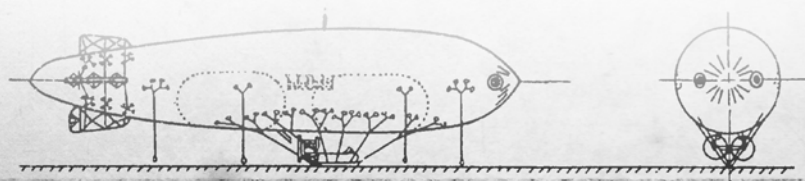
it will be one of carnage) and move on to the next section. Otherwise, if the PCs lost, distribute fresh character sheets and wish them better luck with the next adventure!

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

After the battle the PCs should be given their rewards (as below). They should have made new friends and enemies who may feature in future adventures that you wish to run. The PCs will no doubt wish to know what happens next on Isla Aether. This should, in part, have been determined by their own actions. Isla Aether might have a new Governor once more. If he survived the final battle, Vladimir will find himself returned to power. His people love him more than ever, while he will be more concerned about where his miniatures have got to, the whereabouts of his favorite whores and getting a stiff drink. That said, he will get up onto the scaffold and make a speech, thanking the citizenry and declaring that from henceforth on this date every year it will be national "dress up as a pirate" day, and there will be much partying and abandon. The PCs will be swept along in the celebrations, and, as long as they didn't run away, feted as heroes. If they have an appropriate schtick then no doubt the crowds will clamor for them to perform (unless they are mimes – as excited as the Aetherians are, they have their limits).

If the PCs escaped and merely ran away, the city might still be in the ever tightening grip of Caroline. Aside from the end of session experience you can skip the reward section, below, merely describing the massacre of innocent civilians and warning the PCs that they are wanted for piracy.

If they did act in a suitably heroic fashion, if the PCs leave Isla Aether and return at a later time, they will find there are already penny dreadfuls about their adventures (wildly exaggerated) and little pirate busts, immortalizing their features, available for sale.





REWARDS

If the PCs have successfully completed the adventure then feel free to bestow a few bonus experience points, on top of those awarded at the end of each session. Any deal they made with Henga and Vladimir will be honored, and they will be offered a further He10,000 by the city, as a token of gratitude (and a 10% reduction in any future airship repair fees when they use the Aetherian airdocks).

At your discretion the reward could even include a Chrononautilus. Henga or Vladimir might bestow the item on the PCs, explaining that they don't know what it is, but found it in a secret room in the palace, and

following some discrete inquiries, believe it to be an item of great value. Remember, give careful thought to bestowing a Chrononautilus on the PCs – if you give players a time travel device, then at some point they will want to use it, so make sure that you are ready to run that sort of game. There are plenty more opportunities for adventuring in the current time period, so don't rush this. If you do decide to grant them the device, alongside the rules for time travel in the main *Airship Pirates* book, there will be further detail on running time traveling adventures in the forthcoming *Blasting the Past* sourcebook.

