

AIRSHIP PIRATES



RUINED EMPIRES

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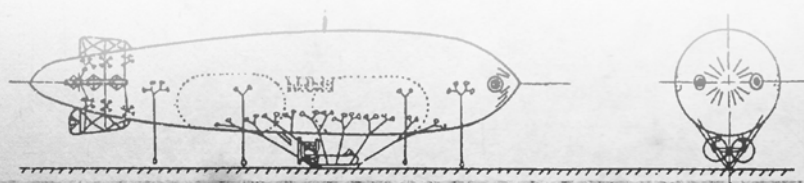
AN ADVENTURE FOR
ABNEY PARK'S

AIRSHIP PIRATES

BY PETER CAKEHEAD AND KEN WALTON

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

– Abney Park, *The End of Days*



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RUINED EMPIRES

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Sample file



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, playing 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.

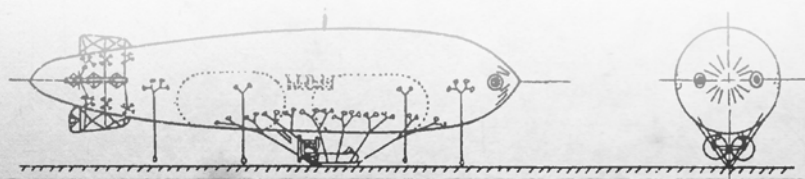
Zany ran to the center of the ring of vehicles, where an old brass bell hung on a pole, and rang the distinctive “clang clang cla-clang!” that meant “air raid”. Warriors scrambled out of caravans, an assortment

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.

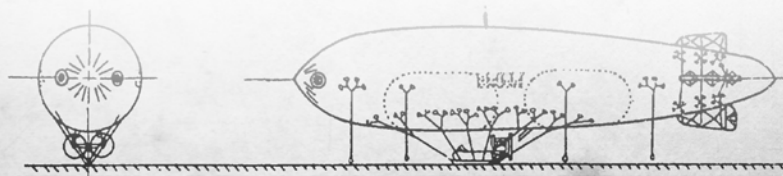
If his enemies thought he had been fighting well before, they were totally (if briefly) shocked now. Zany became a whirlwind of destruction, his hands and feet lashing out in all directions, leaving a trail of broken corpses as he sped toward the airship. But it was too late; the captain, deciding to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

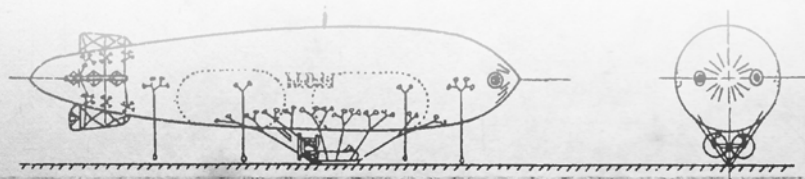
Part One: Buried Treasure – Play begins with the PCs resting up on Isla Aether, the Skyloft city also known as the “Jewel of the Skies”. The PCs are summoned by the Governor of Isla Aether, Vladimir Cumulo-Nimbus and asked to undertake a mission. The Governor has come across a treasure map showing the 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.

