

The Case of the Aerial Phantom

Dark Deeds in an Airship Factory in Steampunk Victorian London

In a Victorian London of steam-powered wonders, a stalwart company of private investigators take on what seems to be a routine case of burglary. And yet, it is a case which has left the police baffled...

This is a scenario that I ran at a few conventions by way of a demonstration of the then-upcoming [*HARP Steampunk*](#), using the sample PCs which can be found on the same Web page as this. Hence, it includes some appropriate prompts for the GM, and assumes use that those are the PCs in use. Still, it should be reasonably adaptable.

Game Setup

Begin by explaining a bit about the game (**HARP**) and the supplement (*HARP Steampunk*). The book could be used for all sorts of steampunk games, but this demo is set in a weird version of Victorian London, infested with mad scientists who can create clockwork and steam-powered automatons and conduct all sorts of bizarre experiments on living things. Indeed, one of the available PCs is the product of weird science. It may be significant to this scenario that the physics of the setting has more in common with Victorian-period theories than with 21st century scientific knowledge, and the science is frankly mad-science pulpy; players should please not sweat any logical problems too much.

Which is a cue to distribute the PCs and explain a bit about the character sheets and the mechanics; it's a class-and-level system, and character creation is a bit complex, but the mechanics are quite straightforward. Pretty much everything is a percentile roll, add your skill Total Bonus, and the higher the better. Very low rolls (01-05 for non-combat skills, specific ranges for weapons) may be fumbles; very high ones (96-00) may be open-ended – roll again and add. Do mention *Fate Points*, which have all sorts of uses.

One specific thing to mention: I didn't bother going into detail on the characters' money and equipment, but on the basis of the rules, Captain Fortescue has 10x Base Wealth and a vehicle – the team's steam car – while the Lewisons have 4x Base Wealth. If anyone has any specific extra gear they think they ought to have on hand, do just ask.

Talking of which – **The Steam Car** available to the PCs is the “Advanced Steam Car” detailed on p. 99 and p. 112 of *HARP Steampunk*.

Background (GM Only)

The case, as presented to the PCs, is a number of mysterious thefts from the *Garrison Airship Works*, a company that manufactures the latest in aerial transportation. However, the story they must uncover goes back five years, to the *Great Franco-Prussian War*, this universe's version of that 19th century conflict – or in fact, to the period leading up to it.

In the run-up to the war, faced with a Prussian advantage in technology, the French government looked around for anything that might even the odds, and so were susceptible to an approach by **Dr Terence Morgan**, a brilliant scientist who had some difficulty finding backers for his ideas, and who had in fact been asked to leave the Royal College of Chemistry in South Kensington, London, after neglecting basic safety concerns and accepted scientific protocols in his experimental work (which wasn't terribly official anyway, as the College was supposed to be more of a training school for science teachers). Morgan offered the French a new design of airship, with a light, streamlined structure but more importantly a new type of powerful but quiet engines, “aetherium motors,” which

could even power features such as searchlights and lightning projectors. Unfortunately, this project also involved disregarding the problems inherent in aetherium power...

One prototype, *L'Espoir du Ciel*, was completed just in time for the start of the war, and was thrown into action with minimal testing the moment the conflict began. It scored a number of useful victories striking behind Prussian lines and out-fighting enemy airships, but over time, the drawback of the aetherium motor became evident; the whole vessel, including the crew and its captain, *Thibault Lenoir*, became "aetherically unstable," periodically slipping partly out of phase with normal matter. Dr Morgan tried to solve the problem, but unfortunately, all he could do was retune the motor to keep anything within its radius of effect more or less aetherically stable – enough to keep the crew alive, at least. The French army, horrified at these side-effects (and at the increasing cost of the whole project), was disinclined to finance any more of Morgan's ideas, while the crew of *L'Espoir du Ciel*, considering themselves to have become damned phantoms, took off in the airship one night. They were officially never seen again, though rumours began to spread in the Prussian army of *Das Luftphantom*, a terror which emerged from the night to strike at outposts and scouting forces, leaving few survivors.

After the war, Dr Morgan returned to Britain, the French government refusing to give him credit for his work; they told him that they would "generously" refrain from assigning him any public blame. (In truth, they were of course sweeping the whole incident under the carpet.) He had some difficulty finding employment, but he managed to find work in airship engineering, and his undeniable brilliance allowed him to work his way up to a senior position at the Garrison Airship Works. Meanwhile, Captain Lenoir and the crew of *L'Espoir*, considering themselves to be damned souls, chose to continue their own private war against the hated Prussians, raiding military bases and stealing supplies all across Germany. Of course, the efficient Prussian government came to realise that the feared and legendary *Luftphantom* clearly had some kind of reality, and assigned a detachment of intelligence officers to track and discover it.

Recent Events (Scenario Set-Up)

Although the crew of *L'Espoir* have been obtaining conventional supplies from the army outposts that they have been raiding, even Dr Morgan's brilliantly designed devices must begin to fail eventually – and if the aetherium motor shuts down, the crew will be doomed. (They only maintain any kind of physical existence by subjecting themselves to painful continuous electrical stimulation.) So, as the engine started showing signs of unreliability, Lenoir began to cast around for ways to repair it. A raid on a technical library enabled him to learn of Dr Morgan's career, and he realised that Morgan might be able to help them – and as he seemed to be researching aetherium technology again, he might well have access to materials that they need to keep the motor running for now. (He didn't dare hope that Morgan might be able to find a cure for their condition.) So *L'Espoir* set out for London. Meanwhile, the Prussian secret service have become quite adept at tracking the *Luftphantom* from reports of mysterious robberies and sightings of strange airships, so they worked out that their quarry was heading west, and assigned agents to determine what it was up to.

Arriving in London, Lenoir established a base of operations in an abandoned farmhouse on the shores of the Thames Estuary, then sent a series of letters to Morgan at his office in the Airship Works, demanding a meeting and threatening to expose his unethical activities during the war. Morgan, spooked, has ignored these so far; he thought that *L'Espoir* was long lost, and still doubts that the letters are really from Lenoir. Meanwhile, Lenoir and the crew, needing supplies to keep *L'Espoir* more or less functional, have started raiding the Garrison works every few nights. Using the airship's stealthy design and some tricks they developed in their private war on Prussia (such as use of "fog bombs" to cover their arrival), they have not only been successful so far, but have created quite a mystery. However, this sort of mystery is exactly the sort of thing that the Prussian Secret Service have learned to look out for, and Prussian agent *Erdmann Schulte* has been sent to the area to

determine if this is indeed the *Luftphantom*, and if so, whether that problem is in fact a devious British plot.

Which is where the PCs come in.

The Case

The Lewisons (and the other PCs, who are present) receive a telegram late one autumn morning requesting that they attend on **Sir Edmund Garrison** at the **Garrison Airship Works Ltd.**, where he is the chairman. A successful Easy (+40) *Lore: London* or *Lore: East End* test recalls that the Garrison Works are based in the east of the city, in Hackney Wick, and are a successful company in the new industry of airship construction. Assuming that they respond to this – and they can assume that this will be an offer of the kind of work which they undertake – they can reach the Works in the steam car in an hour or so (even with London traffic), and the fellow on the gate, who was evidently told to expect them, directs them to the management offices.

Sir Edmund proves to be a smartly-dressed middle-aged gentleman; a successful Light (+20) *Etiquette* test recognises that, while he is smart and polite enough, he has a slightly rough-hewn way about him – he’s evidently a self-made man, and the knighthood thus says that he’s a successful one. He greets the PCs politely, offers them tea, then explains that he has a problem with which the consulting detectives may be able to assist, and they’ve been recommended to him by a previous client with whom he is acquainted. He will of course meet their usual fees. (If any of the players want to try a *Trading* roll to ensure an especially favourable rate, they’re welcome to try, but funnily enough, they’ll be opposed by Sir Edmund’s own *Trading* bonus of +60. He won’t take the attempt amiss, though.)

He explains that his company builds light airships, the latest thing in aerial transport, for civilian and military customers. Although they do not consider themselves especially vulnerable to criminal activity, they naturally hold a fair stock of components and supplies for this work on hand, not to mention money for the workers’ wages (held in an appropriately substantial safe) and plans for airships and other machinery which have some value as trade secrets. Hence, they have adequate but not exceptional security. However, for the past few days, the Works have been subjected to a series of mysterious nighttime robberies.

Specifically, materials and supplies have been disappearing from the stores areas, mostly cylinders of hydrogen gas and some structural materials, but also some materials from the workshops where new ideas are developed (“which have additional locks, you understand”) and some supplies from the canteen (“I suppose the miscreants must have been hungry”). There have been no signs of damage to the fences around the site or break-ins at the gate, which suggests some clever thieves, especially as some of the stolen goods are too bulky and weighty to be moved easily; likewise, the couple of nightwatchmen who were on duty the first couple of nights didn’t report seeing anything – and they’re sound, trustworthy fellows.

Well, it’s a large enough site that capable intruders could perhaps evade detection by the usual nightwatchmen, so last night, after the first two robberies, the company put three more watchmen on overnight duty, in case the thieves came back – which they did. “*Unfortunately, it was quite a foggy night, but surely not foggy enough for them to entirely escape detection.*” And yet, come the morning, more materials were missing, and the watchmen swore that they had seen nothing.

Note regarding the fog: If any of the players ask, a Light (+20) *Insight* test (i.e. a roll with twice their total **In** bonus added; Good Memory gets +50 to this) tells them that last night didn’t seem especially foggy – but this is Steampunk London, so every night is somewhat foggy, especially this time of year. If they ask about this, Sir Edmund or anyone else at the works will scratch their heads and say no,

they didn't think it was especially foggy – but the site is on low ground close to a river, so fog *is* especially prevalent here.

Naturally, the company notified the police as soon as the thefts began; the police took things seriously enough, but clearly assumed that this was essentially pilferage. After the second night, they cast aspersions on the company's security, but supported the extra arrangements. Now, they're making a lot of noise about detailed investigations, but Sir Edmund can see that they're baffled. So he'd appreciate some fresh eyes on the problem, and he understands that the PCs employ the latest in scientific forensic methods.

Garrison does not appear to be at all evasive during this conversation; a Hard (-20) *Perception* test, made by the GM, reinforces this impression. He'll answer more questions, but it's pretty clear that he doesn't actually know every possible detail himself, and he politely suggests that the best way for the PCs to discover what they need to know is for them to look for themselves. He will of course instruct his employees to provide them with any reasonable help and support. He himself has other business to take care of, and he suggests that his managers can tell them more of the details than he can. He assigns one of his secretaries, **Peter Jorks**, to guide them around and vouch for them to other employees.

The Scene of the Crimes

The Garrison Works occupy a large site in the Lea Valley; the River Lea (a tributary of the Thames) flows past one edge of the site, just beyond the fence. Three large sheds each hold two airships in various stages of construction, and are surrounded by a cluster of smaller brick buildings holding workshops, stores, a canteen, and offices, plus a couple of wooden sheds, hinting at the speed with which the company has grown. The fence around the site is thirty or forty metres from the nearest building, with grassy open space in between; all three construction sheds face on a large open tarmac area, from which the completed craft presumably take flight. There are secure tethering points for the craft, along with tanks of water for use as ballast. A few metres of rough scrubland separate the fence from the growing developments of terraced housing that mark the rapid expansion of London into this area of what was previously common ground.

Peter Jorks responds to any requests reasonably, but basically hands the lead off to the PCs at this point. The players get to decide what to do first, and how to apply their efforts.

On the Ground

As they begin looking round the site, there are two chances to pick up an immediate clue:

1. Harry gets a Medium (+0) *Perception* test, rolled by the GM, thanks to his *Enhanced Scent*; on a success, he notices an odd, unfamiliar chemical scent. Of course, this could be caused by some process performed by the factory, but still, it catches his attention; it seems to be widespread in the open space.
2. Everyone gets a Very Hard (-40) *Perception* test, rolled by the GM, to notice a fine layer of greyish dust, seemingly scattered around the site and clinging to many surfaces.

The scent is that of the dust, as will quickly become clear if anyone starts looking. Yes, the people on the site might have noticed this, but it isn't obvious, and anyone who did presumably dismissed it as unimportant. An Easy (+40) *Forensics* roll and five minutes of work allow somebody to gather up a sample of the dust in sufficient quantities for later analysis; a Light (+20) *Tracking* roll, with the bonus for *Enhanced Scent* applicable, allows anyone to determine that the dust covers a very roughly circular area in the middle of the site, but it doesn't lead anywhere. This is a little odd, as anyone who was handling the dust would likely have left a scent trail, but there are many possible explanations.

The substance can be analysed in a chemical laboratory; the PCs have one at home, of course, but if they ask, they can borrow use of the company's own lab (normally used for developing special materials and so on). Testing takes about thirty minutes and requiring a Medium (+0) *Chemistry* roll. Multiple attempts are permitted, but each requires that a new sample be gathered, and the test rolls take cumulative -10 penalties after the first. One assistant can also make a +40 *Chemistry* roll to provide a Bonus to the primary tester's roll. (The obvious team here is Beatrice taking lead with Sunil as assistant.) On a success, the tester identifies this as primarily the kind of thing used in chemical smoke bombs, but with additional traces of some kind of organic chemical. A second, Very Hard (-40) *Chemistry* test, again taking 30 minutes and with assistance permitted, would be needed to identify this as a mild hallucinogen.

The Stolen Goods

As Sir Edmund said, various things were taken:

1. The bulkiest were a number of compressed hydrogen cylinders, along with some airship fabrics and some varnishes and adhesives. These were stowed in an unlocked shed adjacent to the launch area; everyone thought that they were too bulky to need much security, and they weren't especially valuable. The largest items involved could easily be moved by two people, or one at a pinch, but the number taken in any given theft would require a few people or a few minutes – and this stuff couldn't exactly be lobbed over the fence.
2. The canteen staff have reported some thefts from the larders – canned foods, tea, coffee, and so on, on the first and third night. The larders, which are located not far from the launch area, were padlocked, but the padlocks were broken. If anyone asks to look at the padlocks, an Easy (+40) *Locks and Traps* roll spots that something slightly strange has happened here; it's as if somebody inveigled some kind of tool into the lock, and then wrecked it from the inside, leaving no marks on the outer casing.
3. There was also some pilferage from the Development Workshop, but *“That's Doctor Morgan's fief; you'll have to ask him about that.”* See *The Development Workshop* below.

At this point, the players may well be guessing that the mystery thieves are using an airship, and stealing supplies to keep it running. If they raise this with anyone around the works, they'll agree that, yes, this seems very logical – except that nobody has reported any airship operating in this area during the night, and despite the extra watchmen being drafted in last night, none of them reported seeing or hearing anything. *“And you know how it is with steam engines. Hard not to hear them buzzing around the place. Gets quite loud out on the launch site when we send one up.”* Any of the PCs can vouch for this from general experience of steam engines, and a Light (+20) roll on any vaguely relevant *Engineering* skill will confirm that the sort of power output needed for an airship engine precludes entirely silent operation.

The Development Workshop

The Development Department is housed in one of the smarter brick buildings around the site; once the PCs have found it, they'll discover a certain amount of disorder, as a side door has been broken or forced. If anyone declares that they're inspecting this closely, once again, an Easy (+40) *Locks and Traps* roll spots that strange effect, as if somebody inveigled some kind of tool into the lock and then wrecked it from the inside.

Anyhow, the PCs will find themselves talking to a keen, junior-looking technician, **David Wilson**, who'll confirm that the place has now been burgled, twice – *“We'd just fixed the door after the first time when the blighters came back.”* He's puzzled over the thefts, as what was taken were an assortment of materials being used in the current development work – *“Rather expensive, to be sure, but not exactly saleable.”* If the PCs ask for more details, Wilson will be rather condescending –

“Very advanced stuff, not something a layman would understand. Have you ever heard of aetherium power?”

PCs get a Medium (+0) *Physics, Chemistry, or Duping* roll to answer this convincingly in the affirmative; aetherium technology is a very advanced idea being discussed in the abstract, involving direct interaction with the luminiferous aether as a source of electrical power. In theory, it could provide an impressive source of electrical energy, but unfortunately, it’s proving very hard to make it work. Someone knowing this will impress Wilson enough that he’ll keep talking – *“Yes, but Doctor Morgan has some ideas that might resolve some of those problems. He’s quite brilliant. Well, he’s brilliant at persuading old man Garrison to pay for us to work on it.”*

Questions about Dr Morgan will get them some general information, filtered through definite hero worship. Apparently, he has an academic background, having gained his doctorate from the Royal College of Chemistry (a +20 roll on *Lore: London* or a -20 roll on any science skill to recall that the Royal College is in Kensington); *“We’re very lucky to have him here.”* Further questions on the aetherium research will lead to the explanation that, while oscillations in the luminiferous aether can be tapped to create an electrical potential, the field effects involved generate fundamental instabilities in the mechanism. *“Usually, the mechanism simply breaks after a little use. Worse, sometimes, it damages other nearby materials. They just crumble. We’re working on stabilising the aetheric fields, but old Morgan is a stickler for safety.”*

However, attempts to learn more about anything here will get the PCs directed to **Dr Terence Morgan** himself, who they’ll probably want to speak to anyway. Morgan turns out to be a thin, balding, bespectacled fellow in his 40s, who’s looking very nervous; in fact, a -20 *Perception* roll, made by the GM, can pick up that he seems disproportionately worried about something, but he won’t say what. He’ll initially meet the PCs in the workshop, but suggest that they talk in his office – which, it turns out, only has room for a couple of visitors, or three if one doesn’t mind standing and looming a bit.

He’ll explain, with a bit of mumbling, that the burglars took some of the lab’s supply of cupro-aetheric alloy and chromium-glass modulator tubes on their first visit, and more of the same along with some tools and some high-capacity lead-acid accumulators last night. Asked what this might be used for, he’ll say someone must be conducting their own research into aetherium power, but breaking into his laboratory seems like a very odd way of stocking up on supplies. If anyone asks if the thief could have working aetherium technology and need supplies to keep it working, a +0 *Perception* check notes that he starts and looks very flustered for a moment; then he agrees that, yes, in theory, that would be consistent – but as nobody has aetherium power working for practical use as yet, that can’t be the answer. He’ll stonewall any further discussion of this, pointing out that if anybody had the science working, they would be selling it, and would hardly have to play at thieves in the night. *“We’re making progress here, but safety is a large concern. Aetheric fields are difficult to balance.”*

Anybody in Morgan’s office gets a -40 *Perception* roll to spot a couple of similar envelopes in the wicker wastepaper basket; somebody has been writing to him “Strictly Personally” in his office. Also, if anyone thinks to ask, Morgan will agree that an aetherium motor would be much quieter than steam power – *“Electrical devices have far fewer moving parts...”*

Investigating Dr Morgan

Given that he’s probably the biggest and most evasive oddity that they’ve met so far, the PCs may decide to look into Dr Morgan’s background. His assistants don’t know much about his personal history apart from his qualifications from the Royal College of Chemistry, so the PCs will have to ask further afield. They can try asking Sir Edmund, but he’s a busy man who thinks his staff should be able to answer any questions, so a +0 *Charm* roll will be needed to speak to him personally at this stage; he’ll allow that he hired Morgan personally, being impressed by his intelligence and vision, and the possibilities of aetherium technology. He knows that the chap studied at the Royal College, and

his former colleagues there speak well of him (“*Though I think some of them lack his vision*”); apparently, he spent a few years conducting private research after gaining his doctorate, before running short of funds and seeking a place in industry.

Alternatively, the PCs can go to the company’s personnel department; staff records are supposed to be private, but on the other hand, the PCs are investigating these distressing thefts... so a +20 *Diplomacy* roll will get them what they want. The staff records show a drier but more precise version of the same story; Dr Morgan has confirmed qualifications from the Royal College, but a four-year lacuna in his career, marked as involving “Private Research”.

Interrogating Morgan himself on a more hostile basis isn’t really feasible – the PCs have no grounds to suspect him of theft from his own employer, after all. If they ask him about the gap in his career, he’ll look very annoyed but say that he was able to conduct some private research, having “*adequate funds for the purpose.*” If they want to know more about him, they’ll have to go off site.

The Police

If the PCs ask, they receive confirmation that the local police were called this morning, came in, took statements from everybody, and then went away again saying that they would conduct further enquiries in due course. A +40 *Vocation: Copper* roll confirms that this all sounds like they haven’t much of a clue, and will be hoping that something else comes up to resolve this problem. If they want to actually talk to the police, a visit to the station and a +0 *Vocation: Copper* or *Diplomacy* roll gets them a chat with **Inspector Waltham**, who’s officially in charge of this case. His current theory is that this is some kind of fraud being pulled by someone high up in the at the company, and once he has permission from higher up in the Force, he’s going to pull in a lot of the managers and cross-examine them until someone breaks. It should become clear that Waltham isn’t actually stupid or corrupt, but he’s latched onto an idea and decided to run with it. Faced with evidence of alternative possibilities, he’s happy to have the PCs either waste their time or do his job for him.

Spotting the Observer

After an hour or two looking around and questioning witnesses, all of the PCs get a Very Hard (-40) *Perception* roll, made by the GM. On a success, they notice a glint of light from some bushes on the other side of the fence around the site. Whoever scores highest on the roll spots this first.

What they’ve (possibly) detected is **Erdmann Schulte**, watching the site through binoculars; he’s smart and sneaky enough that the PCs won’t be able to make out any more by looking, even using binoculars of their own – and that would be hard to keep secret. Schulte is cautious and professional; if he realises that he’s been spotted, he’ll prepare to depart. His own *Perception* bonus, to be used to spot giveaway actions by PCs and to oppose uses of *Stalking and Hiding* to sneak up on him, is +35. Getting to him sneakily would take several minutes, as a PC would have to slip out the site main gate and slip through the scrub on the other side of the fence; PCs will have to be quite careful and successful on a couple of *Stalking and Hiding* rolls to reach him undetected, one at +0 to get into his general vicinity, another at +0 to get close, and optionally a third at -20 to sneak up right behind him without him noticing; if the last fails, the starting distance becomes 15m.

If he does realise in time that he’s been detected and that people are heading his way, Schulte will get on the bicycle that he has stowed close to hand by a road and ride off, quickly disappearing into the streets of terraced housing nearby. Getting on a bike takes him one turn; it then moves off 3m on the first round, and 12m each subsequent turn, generally allowing him to get away from anyone. If anyone gets close enough to engage him in combat, Schulte will fight defensively, relying on his ability to talk his way out of problems in the worst case and maintaining a façade of innocence. Note that fighting in light brush like this gives -5 OB to all attacks.

Erdmann Schulte: Initiative +10, DB +10, BMR 2.8m
Perception +35, Stamina Resistance +20, Will Resistance +25.
Acrobatics +20, Brawling +20, Charm+10, Diplomacy +15, Duping +15, Stalking & Hiding +15,
Trickery +10.
Endurance Points: **85**

If the PCs get hold of him, Schulte will claim to be an innocent birdwatcher, giving his name as “**Edward Sholto**”; his only reason for fleeing from them was that they looked oddly threatening. (This isn’t wildly implausible, but he doesn’t have any notebooks or birding books on him – just a good pair of binoculars.) He will use his *Duping* skill against others’ *Will Resistance* to convince them that he’s a red herring. His English is excellent, but anyone talking to him gets a +0 *Insight* roll (i.e. total bonus is 2x *In* bonus) to notice that his speech patterns are a little odd – English may not be his first language. If anyone does spot this, anyone who speaks German (i.e. Beatrice) gets a +20 *Insight* roll to guess that he’s a German speaker.

Interrogation skill used on him is opposed by his own *Will Resistance*, but this will take a fair few minutes, as he has a semi-plausible cover story and is a professional spy. (Physical violence would speed things up, but is illegal as well as immoral, especially as the PCs are private citizens.) If an interrogator succeeds, he’ll still deny any involvement in any thefts from that factory (because that’s the truth), but say “*Perhaps I am curious about matters other than birds. Have you heard of the tales of the Luftphantom? There are some strange stories in other lands. Perhaps that aerial phantom has decided to haunt this place now.*” If a successful interrogator points out that he has a slight German accent, he’ll say “*Well, if I am a visitor to this country, I could say that I am being treated very impolitely. Do you think your authorities would want to deal with complaints from a foreign ambassador?*” A second successful *Interrogation* use will be needed to get more out of him; at this point, it will become clear that he is a foreign agent, but he will insist, convincingly, that he has nothing to do with any thefts from this factory; rather, he is investigating reports that the *Luftphantom*, an all-too-real seeming ghost that has been terrorising Prussian military outposts ever since the Great Franco-Prussian War, five years ago. (“*The French government deny any knowledge of these attacks. The Kaiser’s government cannot prove that they are dissembling.*”) the Prussian authorities have been tracing reports and sightings of the phantom, which they believe has now crossed the North Sea to this part of the world; as it must be assumed to be an airship, and rumours place it in this area, he has been investigating the Garrison works.

It’s possible that at this point, the PCs will suggest that they join forces with Schulte. He will agree, but very cautiously; so far as he’s concerned, this may all be some perfidious British plot. However, if they do open up to him, they may mention Dr Morgan, and he’ll mention the name in a report to his superiors. They’ll recognise Morgan as a mercenary engineer who worked for France during the late war, all of which will lead Schulte to risk getting in touch with the PCs and telling them about this piece of history.

If the PCs fail to catch him, or succeed but fail to break his story, they have little choice but to let him go. However, Schulte will now have realised that these locals are also investigating the matter of the aerial phantom, and assuming that they weren’t too hostile to him, he’ll not only watch their activities, but possibly throw the odd clue their way later on, especially if they lose track of the opposition at any crucial moments.

The Nightwatchmen

The PCs may wish to speak with the five watchmen who were supposed to be on site preventing any further thefts last night. As they were up all night, they were sent home after they all gave statements to the police. They should be coming in again this evening, but if the players wish to speak with them sooner, the company will supply their home addresses if asked. The PCs will be aware that the sort of

fellows trusted with such jobs are often ex-military, and might respond well to someone with a military manner.

Three of them (**Carter, McJeffry, and Quill**) are currently asleep; +0 *Charm* or *Duping* rolls with vaguely plausible explanations will convince their wives to wake them, and them to provide such information as they can. Two (**Allinson and Whiley**), though, are still awake, and have met up at Whiley's house, where they're sitting together over mugs of strong tea. On entering the room, PCs get a *Perception* roll, at -20 for most people but +30 for someone with *Enhanced Scent*, to guess that there's a shot of whisky in that tea.

All of them will give the same basic account; they were told to watch out for intruders and to deal with any who showed up as criminals; they all had truncheons, revolvers, and police whistles. (No, that might not have been enough to deal with desperate, violent criminals – but this seemed more like a case of sneak thievery.) However, a heavy fog came down in the small hours of the night – “*Could barely see your hand in front of yer face, guv*” – making it difficult to patrol the site properly, and as dawn approached and the fog lifted, it became clear that somebody had got in again. Carter, McJeffry, and Quill have little more to tell than this; they don't recall hearing or seeing anything out of the ordinary. They're embarrassed by the whole business; having goods stolen out from under their noses obviously reflects badly. They will also say that Allinson and Whiley claimed in the morning to have seen something, though they didn't say anything at the time; they seemed spooked somehow.

Allinson and Whiley are indeed spooked, and will initially seem evasive and disturbed; success on a +0 *Leadership* roll will speed things up considerably. “*We was out on patrol after the fog came down*” Allinson explains, “*an' I thought I saw something. So I called out, and Whiley here came up with me.*”

“*I saws it too,*” Whiley agrees. “*In the fog – a fellow, dressed in dark clothes, I thought. Hard to see, though. I'd swear there was a kind of blue fire about him, too, but maybe I imagined that. So's we shouted at 'im, but if he was there at all, 'e didn't hear or didn't pay no heed...*”

Whiley trails off here, unless that *Leadership* roll was made; it may take some prompting to get him to finish. “*So o' course we went up to 'im...*” Allinson will eventually declare, “*but when we got closer, it was like 'e faded into the fog. Though I think I saw that hellfire – I mean, that blue fire on him.*”

Whiley nods. “*Like 'e was a ghost,*” he declares. “*We couldn't lay hands on 'im.*”

Which is about as far as this goes. Whiley and Allinson are badly spooked, and pointing out that these “ghosts” seem to have run off with some very material bits and pieces won't help. They *won't* be turning up to work tonight; whatever they actually saw, they think of it as a ghost, and aren't paid enough to tackle the supernatural.

Around the Area

The PCs may wish to cast their net a little wider. Terraces of houses have grown out this way from the East End, stopping just a few metres short of the fence on three sides – the Lea defines the fourth side. This is a working class neighbourhood, but quite solid and respectable of its kind; the houses are the sort associated with skilled workmen. Still, *Streetwise* is a plausible skill to employ at this point; working class communities like this one can be suspicious of outsiders asking questions.

This is especially true in the pubs which occupy several corner sites in the neighbourhood; these are moderately busy at lunchtimes and downright loud in the evenings. Making contacts among the women or street urchins of the district is more a matter of wandering the streets in daylight, finding groups on street corners or in the shops, and convincing them of your goodwill. Good roleplaying or use of *Charm* for housewives or *Streetwise* for the urchins against their typical *Will Resistance* of +5 should cover this.

Local Gossip

However, the people in these parts don't actually know *much* of relevance. They've heard that there's some kind of pilferage problem at the airship works, but they mostly assume that this is just clever thievery. (Hints that it's something more dramatic will actually draw some positive attention, because they're exciting.) However, conversation will soon turn to other recent gossip, as someone will offer the theory that it must be "*them bloomin' foreigners.*"

Asking further about *that* will get the person who talked about this laughed at a little by their friends, as it's a low-level rumour that doesn't amount to much. However, it's no great secret; it's simply that local people have encountered a couple of odd characters lately, which has led to all sorts of wild talk. First, Mr Samuels, who serves at the small local Post Office branch, was just shutting the place up one evening when a funny-looking fellow who he didn't recognise came in – "*All dressed in black, he was, with a navy sort of cap pulled down, and Mr Samuels thought that he was a ghost – 'e says – 'e'd already locked up*" – and spoke to him in a foreign accent – "*Mr Samuels reckoned he was French.*" The joke is, though, that "*the really weird thing is that this dark foreigner was **buying stamps.***" And second, several local people have talked about meeting a respectable-looking gent, in tweeds, with a pair of binoculars. "*Asked for directions to the airship works one time. Says he's a birdwatcher, but he must have a big thing for pigeons and sparrers in that case, 'cause that's all he'll see round here. Anyhow, he talks all stiff and formal, even for a gent, so some folks reckon he must be foreign.*"

The Spy, Again

That second story may put the PCs on the trail of Erdmann Schulte from a different direction. He spends the day hiding in the undergrowth around the airship works, then takes a break to go and get a bite to eat, before returning to the area with a thermos flask of strong coffee, to watch for nighttime raids, improvise as necessary around PC attempts to locate and catch him, as above.

Background Research

The PCs may have picked up on some mystery surrounding Doctor Morgan, or want to investigate aetherium technology independently. They'll need a good scientific library to find out much for themselves, and those of them who know anything about science will realise that it would take a lot of time and study to learn much of significance. It might be better to go to people who might know him and the field on their own account.

The Royal College of Chemistry

The PCs may have picked up pointers to the Royal College; if they want to make enquiries there, they can reach the place in the steam car in an hour or so, or a bit longer by public transport. That means that they'll need to start fairly promptly if they want to find anyone to talk to on the first day of the enquiry, but they can always leave things until a subsequent day.

The College is a moderately grand institution, but is clearly more of a practical school of chemistry and geology than an academic research institute. Gaining access to anyone who can help would ideally mean use of *Diplomacy*, but unfortunately nobody in the party has that skill, so the PCs will have to come up with an alternative approach; getting Sir Edmund to send a telegram on their behalf would get them through the front door, as would competent use of *Duping*. Waving scientific or medical qualifications around could get them access to the library, though it wouldn't establish personal contacts. Be reasonably generous about this; the PCs should have a fair chance of finding help here.

The person they'll end up talking to is **Dr Archibald Simonson**, a mid-ranking instructor who is happy to chat with people who are tolerably polite to him, especially if they successfully use *Charm*

against his *Will Resistance* of +10. He recalls Morgan, and shakes his head at the mention of the name. “*Used to be here, but was asked to leave about five years ago now. Very bright fellow, but not really suited to this place. Much too interested in pursuing his own research instead of teaching our students.*” From there on, let the players direct the conversation with their questions:

What was that research about? He shrugs. “*Aetheric phenomena, as I recall. Fascinating stuff, of course, but not very practical. We didn’t mind him running a few experiments out of hours, but he didn’t pay much attention to basic safety concerns. Destroyed a whole bench and some rather expensive electrical equipment.*”

How? “*Rendered it aetherically out of phase for a moment, I believe. Matter starts to pass through other matter if you aren’t careful, and he wasn’t careful.*”

Where did he go? “*Nobody was sure. There were rumours he found a position in France. Some of the institutes over there are very keen to steal a march on everybody else.*” (At this point, listeners should make a *Re+In*-based test; on a success, they’ll note that this would have put Morgan in France around the time of the *Great Franco-Prussian War*. Players who just ask about the dates may be given the same information for free.)

If anyone describes the weird phenomena encountered at the airship works in this context, Simonson will agree that these might imply some kind of aetheric destabilisation effects. If anyone suggests that a **person** might have been aetherically destabilised, he’ll wince and say that it’s theoretically possible, but he’d hope not. “*Wouldn’t be very pleasant for them, I imagine.*”

If anyone asks how to affect aetherically destabilised matter, he’ll suggest that an oscillating electrical field might work. “*Rig up something with a battery and an alternator. Not really my field, I’m afraid, but from what I’ve seen in the literature, it should do the trick.*”

Standing Watch Overnight

One obvious option is for the PCs to stand watch at the Works site overnight; this will be in company with four watchmen, three of whom were on watch the previous night – “*But Allinson and Whiley sent word they wouldn’t be coming in, for some reason.*” (A clue if the PCs haven’t picked up on those watchmen and their bad experience yet; if anyone chooses to track them down, they’ll find them at Whiley’s house, but somewhat the worse for wear after a few nerve-steadying whiskies.) They may want some protection from the enhanced fog bomb effect, if they’ve identified that problem; steampunk gas masks are available from suppliers known to some of the PCs, though fetching them will require a run in the steam car and some expense. The PCs can persuade the watchmen to wear them too if they try. These masks limit peripheral vision slightly, give -15 to other vision-based perception rolls, and block the wearer’s sense of smell and muffle their voice (-30 to any roll that involves understanding what the wearer says).

The good news is that, yes, the raiders return, at around one in the morning. However, they are no longer after materials; rather, they’ve decided to grab Morgan and force him to assist them, and for this, they need his address.

The Raiders

Having got the hang of the site layout on previous nights, they know where the personnel office is, and they’re going to hit that from above. However, they realise that the site will be guarded, so they intend to prevent anyone from inconveniencing them.

The Airship: If anyone makes a *Perception* test at -20 (for lighting conditions and possible sleepiness), or at -0 if they said that they were maintaining a continuing watch on the skies, they see the airship arrive, swooping out of the night sky. However, it is weirdly silent; anyone expecting to *hear* it

coming will be surprised. As it approaches, it is suddenly surrounded by a flickering blue glow like St Elmo's fire, as crew render it temporarily tangible to enable them to attack – which does also make it vulnerable to attacks itself.

The Fog Bombs: When it arrives, its crew open proceedings by dropping a couple of fog bombs, which flood the area for ten or twenty minutes. The fog reduces visibility severely, to 10 metres maximum in the open, and gives a -30 penalty to anything that requires making out details even within that distance. Also, if anyone *isn't* wearing a gas mask, the psychoactive component of the “fog” causes minor hallucinatory effects; anyone breathing it has to make a *Stamina Resistance* roll at -40 or start seeing everything as distorted, weird, and slightly sinister – among other things, the airship overhead seems to be looming and sinister, while any intruders encountered appear inhuman and spectral – taking a -20 penalty to mental tests of any kind and ranged attacks. On the other hand, anyone with *Enhanced Scent* (i.e. Harry) gets a +20 *Perception* Test, *not* affected by that penalty, to recognise a distinctly peculiar, heady quality to the scent of the fog.

Shooting Back

Some PCs may get a good enough view of the airship to take one shot at it before it moves to a position immediately above the administration building, making more shots infeasible. It's at an effective range of 100m; a personal weapon used against a vehicle has its Size Modifier and Damage Cap both reduced by 50 and uses the Vehicle Damage Critical Table if it hits. The airship isn't attempting any fancy manoeuvres, so its *Defensive Bonus* is -23 (+5 for Armour, -28 for Manoeuvrability – see below).

The Airship: Top speed 93 kph (58 mph), Init -25, Structural Hits 20, Armour 5, Manoeuvrability Rating -28.

Attack from Above

The raiders then focus on the company administration office – they're after the staff records. The airship moves over that building, and dark figures drop out of the gondola onto the roof, where they smash their way through the skylights.

Presumably, the PCs will want to intercept them, which means running over to the administration block and getting inside. Unfortunately, it's locked... If someone wants to try picking it with *Locks & Traps* (p. 44) the lock is *Medium* Difficulty, so picking it takes 4 rounds and a *Locks & Traps* roll at +0. Alternatively, someone can find and ask one of the regular nightwatchmen, who do have keys, though if they don't have gasmasks, they'll be freaking out at this point. Breaking in probably isn't feasible, as the door is solidly built and the windows have grills, but they can try; that's a ST-based Manoeuvre Roll (2x Strength Bonus) against a Very Hard difficulty (-40), with a result of 100+ required to force the door.

Confronting the Intruders

If and when the PCs get into the building, they can make their way through along a corridor and up a flight of stairs. If they gained access reasonably quickly, they'll find three shadowy black-clad figures, each surrounded by a faint aura of blue sparks, in the **Staff Records Office**, ransacking the filing cabinets by the light of a couple of acetylene torches. As the first PC arrives, one of them waves a sheaf of papers at the others and says, **in French**, “*Here it is! We've found it!*” (“*Le voilà ! Nous l'avons trouvé!*”) Then the intruder with the papers stuffs them in a pouch attached to his belt, and they turn to leave. At this point, A *Vocation: Soldiering* roll (+0 difficulty) will allow a character to recognise that these people seem to be wearing rather shabby French military uniforms.

The intruders are here to acquire this information, and will regard the PCs as nuisances at most. The problem with trying to fight them is that they're wearing electrical devices that give them a limited

degree of control over their aetheric instability, and they've practised with these; as a result, they can flicker "out of phase" and let physical attacks pass through them. (There's a solution to this, but the PCs are unlikely to have learned of it yet.) The only way to hurt them at this point is to hit them completely by surprise, *or* to work out what's going on, and then instead of attacking, wait for them to attack and attack yourself on the moment they "materialise", taking a -10 OB for the tricky timing. Surprise might be possible, using stealth; they have *Perception* +10 to oppose PCs' *Stalking and Hiding*. If they aren't taken down, they'll just leave the office, walking right through any PC who tries to block the doorway. The PCs will notice that the blue sparks briefly disappear when one of these people fades through an attack or walks through something.

If the PCs do manage to disable one of these intruders, they'll fall to the floor, flickering in and out of partial tangibility. Eventually, if forced to remain away from the airship for very long, dead or alive, these unfortunates disintegrate into semi-tangible dust. This would be an opportunity to capture one of the devices that allows them to become fully tangible for brief periods, which could even be reverse engineered to help construct weapons that can affect the "phantoms", though the PCs will need some specialist help to achieve this, as the device's rest state is intangibility.

If the PCs were delayed getting in, but did so reasonably efficiently, they'll be just in time to see the intruders emerging from the Records Office, holding that sheaf of papers. They can give chase, but the intruders have a 7 m start.

The intruders will run down the corridor (BMR 2.7 m, Fast Run 8.1 m), entering a large storeroom. This has two skylights, which have been smashed; three ropes are dangling through the holes from the airship. As the airship and ropes are intangible, the intruders will switch off their electrical devices as they grab a rope each, though there's a few flickers visible at the waist of the one with the papers (that pouch was rigged to allow them to carry small amounts of ordinary matter while insubstantial).

If anyone just asks these people who they are, one of them says, with a noticeable French accent, "*We are the damned, who were the hope of the skies.*"

Pursuit

The airship now sets off towards the nearby terraced housing. On board, the crew examine the records, identify Dr Morgan's home address, go there, break in, kidnap Morgan, and head for their temporary base. The PCs may, of course, attempt to interfere; given that the airship has to remain substantial while it is carrying Morgan (as is indicated by the blue flickering), they can even take shots at it – range is 20m while it's hovering over Morgan's digs, 100m while it's in flight.

The PCs can't keep up with the airship on foot, but can pursue it quite effectively in the steam car, which has higher speed (120 kph vs. 93 kph, though of course they have to negotiate the local streets). A +20 *Driving* roll will likely allow them to reach Morgan's digs just as the kidnappers are hustling him out and dragging him up to the ropes by which they'll be hauled back on board. After that, they'll have to use the *Pursuit* rules (*HARP Steampunk*, p. 133); declare a speed, make a *Driving* roll with a modifier based on the percentage of the vehicle's top speed chosen and the vehicle's Manoeuvrability Rating (-8 for the steam car), read the result off the *Percentage* column of the Manoeuvre Table, and move at that percentage of the chosen speed. The airship pilot will choose a speed of 69 kph (-20 to roll) and has a +40 *Piloting* skill bonus, while the vehicle has a -28 Manoeuvrability Rating, giving a net -8 bonus. Fortunately, the airship's chosen course is fairly close to some good roads, at least until they get close to their base.

However, if pursuing PCs draw attention to themselves, say by continuing to shoot at the airship, the crew will retaliate. They'll swing around and make an *Attack Run*, requiring a *Piloting* roll: +40 for skill, with -10 for speed, -10 for bad light, enough *Combat Piloting* skill to reduce the combat penalty for that to -20, and a -28 Manoeuvrability Rating, making for a net penalty of -28. The car driver will

presumably want to make an *Evade* manoeuvre, rolling skill at -50 for combat, -10 for bad light, a speed penalty, and a -8 Manoeuvrability Rating. Then, the airship gunner fires a lightning projector with +20 skill bonus and *half* the Attack Run manoeuvre Action Result as a bonus or penalty, at a range of 40 metres (-0 penalty); the car gets its full *Evade* manoeuvre Action Result as a bonus or penalty to its DB, along with +2 for Armour and -8 for Manoeuvrability. On a hit, the attacker rolls on the **Vehicle Damage Critical Table**, with +10 for a Large weapon size and a Damage Cap of 110. Whatever happens, the airship makes just the one run, then turns back for home, hoping that the pursuers have been scared off; this should be the cue for another *Pursuit* test.

(The lightning projector is an experimental modern vehicular weapon. The PCs may have heard passing reports of such things being in development, but they aren't in widespread use.)

If the PCs are able to sustain pursuit, they'll eventually realise that the airship is heading for an area of open country on the Essex coast. The road layout doesn't permit the car to follow all the way, but they can get close enough to identify an abandoned farmhouse on a low headland – or at least, it looks abandoned, with an overgrown track leading to it, but now the PCs can see lights from the location. If the PCs want to act immediately, getting close in the dark requires a *Foraging/Survival: Forest* roll at +0 (other *Foraging/Survival* specialities are at -20 here), else the group gets lost and tired and must either rest up until daylight or they're at -10 on all rolls when they reach the farmhouse. On the other hand, if they attack immediately and while it's dark, their opponents will be surprised and disorganised.

Alternatives to Immediate Pursuit

If the PCs don't keep watch overnight, or fail to engage and pursue the intruders, the airship crew get into the staff records, use the information they find there to locate Dr Morgan's home, kidnap him, and take him off to their temporary base. The PCs will likely hear about this in the morning, and will need to get back in the game. Likewise, if they lose the trail of the airship, they're going to have to reacquire it somehow. Fortunately, the airship is visible enough that there will be a trail of witnesses – shift workers, nightwatchmen, insomniacs, and the like – who'll be glad to have someone believing them. The PCs may have to split up and seek out witnesses; this will justify some rolls against Influence skills or *Streetwise*. They may also get some cooperation from the local police, who can send out a bunch of constables to go door to door. This will all take a nail-biting day or so, but eventually the PCs will have a pointer to a desolate patch of the Essex coastline, and a glance at an Ordnance Survey map will show that there is little there – except that a *Geography* or *Navigation* roll at +20, or extended examination of the map, will notice a farm building, marked on the map as “Abandoned”, that could be in the about the right place.

(Some of the supplied example character sheets are missing *Navigation*; for them, note that it's a *Re/In* skill, so they'll be at the same level as, say, a version of *Engineering* in which they're not trained.)

Further Hints

Also, Erdmann Schulte will by now be putting some clues together, and may have contacted his superiors by encrypted telegram, and will decide that the PCs may be able to solve his employers' problem for them, given a little nudge. (This can also be a way of kicking the PCs onto the right track if all else fails!) He'll approach the PCs as quietly as possible, perhaps finding some opportunity to contact them as “a birdwatcher”, and tell them what he knows in a roundabout fashion – something like:

*“I was in Prussia last year – birdwatching, you understand – and I chanced to fall into conversation with some gentlemen from the army. They had some improbable stories about something they called **Das Luftphantom**, the Aerial Phantom, which haunts army outposts, appearing suddenly as if from*

nowhere in a cloud of fog to cause death and devastation. Foolish superstition, of course, but it reminded me of something I heard back during the war between Prussia and France.

“Apparently, there was an English scientist who sold his services to the French – an expert in aetheric science, it was said, helping them build advanced airships. But whatever he created for them apparently ended badly, and he left their service. Or so I heard; that is the kind of thing that the French would perhaps wish to keep secret.

“All very strange, but it probably means nothing. But one cannot but wonder what happened to that scientist, and whatever he built for the French.

“Anyway, I thought that you might be amused by the story. But I must not detain you further...”

Dr Morgan’s Rooms

If the PCs think to take a look at the rooms from which Dr Morgan was abducted – which wouldn’t be hard to get into in the confusion of the moment, though they might have to offer his landlady some kind of semi-plausible story in the early stages, or find an excuse to get past the local police later – they’ll find a tidy bachelor apartment. However, a methodical search will find two items of interest:

1. A small workbench, set up to allow scientific tinkering. This is currently occupied by a partly dismantled contraption involving a battery and some kind of compact electrical device. A +20 *Physics* test will identify an alternator; assembling this thing and connecting it to a metallic conductor (such as a sword) will enable it to create an electrical field for a few minutes before the battery is drained. Having identified this function, a +20 *Engineering: Gunsmithing* (or similar) roll can assemble it and attach it to a military belt for practical use.
2. A locked writing desk. (The landlady will say that this is part of the room’s furnishings, and Dr Morgan probably has the key on him.) The lock is *Light* difficulty, taking 3 rounds to pick with a +20 *Locks & Traps* roll. Inside are a sheaf of routine letters and bills, but also two recent letters in French. In brief, these say address Morgan as “Dr Morgan”; the first says that *“We of The Hope of Heaven [L’Espoir du Ciel in the original French] still live, and know that you continue to study aetheric technology. You must thus have resolved some of the problems that damned us, and we would have you bring your new knowledge to save us from damnation. Meet us outside the gates of your new place of employment, at midnight tonight.”* It is signed “Lenoir”. The second letter expresses disappointment that Morgan did not attend his appointment, apologises that the writer had to play the brigand in acquiring certain supplies to sustain their lives, and demands that he appears this evening, or suffer consequences that he would not enjoy.

Other Help

The PCs might at some stage go back to the Royal College of Chemistry. There, Dr Simonson can be induced to help them, especially if they describe their experiences; he’ll realise that these intruders must be aetherically unstable, which must be unpleasant for them. (*“If the effect cannot be reversed, they will eventually dissipate – like dust on the wind!”*) If he’s asked how they can be fought, given their ability to become intangible when attacked, he’ll frown and then suggest that an alternating electrical field would enable ordinary matter to interact with them; given a couple of hours, and the resources of his own laboratory, he can knock up something similar to the device (above) that Morgan was working on.

Final Confrontation and Resolution

Hopefully, one way or another, the PCs will have enough information to locate the mystery intruders and move to a final confrontation. They might be in a position to bring the local police in on this, but this won’t achieve much; the Inspector they end up dealing with will find the whole story bizarre and

implausible, and prevaricate about taking any action. (“We’ll need a search warrant, of course. What was the address, and the name of the residents?”) In any case, a bunch of unimaginative constables will likely be little use against intangible airship pirates. Hopefully, the players can be driven to conclude that they should take this matter into their own hands.

The Abandoned Farmhouse

The crew of the phantom airship have set up what amounts to a temporary encampment in the abandoned farmhouse, with a number of electrical devices rigged up to provide safe sleeping and cooking facilities. A small aetheric generator in one corner of the hollowed-out shell of a house provides power for all these systems (and ironically exposes the crew to continuing aetheric influences at the same time, ultimately making their problem worse). The airship itself is hidden in a large but almost completely ruined barn adjacent to the house; the stolen supplies are stashed there too, and include some hydrogen cylinders that could be rigged to explode by somebody with *Demolitions* skill if they want to make things excessively dramatic. It’s all a bit spartan, but sufficient.

When the PCs arrive, all five of the airship crew are present, along with Dr Morgan. The crew will be haranguing Morgan **in French**, insisting that he should be able to restore their stable material existence; he’ll be protesting that he’s no more able to do this than he was in the past, but that he can help them maintain the technology that keeps them alive – if they will only let him go so he can return to his workshop. However, it doesn’t seem that they trust him much.

Fighting the “Ghosts”

The surviving crew of *L’Espoir du Ciel* consists of four ordinary crewmen and Captain Lenoir. All five are desperate and somewhat deranged; so far as they’re concerned, getting Morgan to restore them to materiality is their last hope. There are three ways to engage with and injure these “ghosts”; attack them by surprise, so they aren’t able to disincorporate through any attacks; wait for them to attack and attack yourself on the moment they “materialise”, taking a -10 OB for the tricky timing; or use metal weapons charged with oscillating electrical currents. Given the numbers, surprise would be a good idea anyway.

Fortunately for the PCs, the crew can’t use missile weapons effectively, as the bullets in any gun they carry for any length of time become immaterial and hence ineffective against material opponents – even if the gun is rendered material as it fires, the bullet moves out of the oscillating electrical field and becomes insubstantial again. Hence, they’ve come to depend on melee weapons, which they employ in a relatively prosaic fashion – leave the fancy Combat Actions to the PCs.

Captain Lenoir: Initiative +10, DB +10, BMR 2.7m
Perception +10, Stamina Resistance +20, Will Resistance +20.
Acrobatics +15, Brawling +15, Thrusting Blades +35.
Usual Attack: Foil, Fumble 01-03, Small Puncture.
Endurance Points: **90**

Crewmen: Initiative +6, DB +5, BMR 2.7m
Perception +10, Stamina Resistance +15, Will Resistance +15.
Brawling +20, Short Blades +25.
Usual Attack: Dagger, Fumble 01-02, Small Slash.
Endurance Points (1): **60**
Endurance Points (2): **60**
Endurance Points (3): **60**
Endurance Points (4): **60**

Dramatic Ending (Optional)

If things bog down or time is running short, the captive Dr Morgan will make his own desperation move. With his captors distracted, he'll jump to the aetheric generator, yell at everyone to stop, point out what this thing is, say that if he overloads it the crew will be obliterated, and demand that they surrender. The crew will pause at this, and come to the conclusion that they'd rather accept their deaths than throw themselves on the mercy of that "callous English brute".

Hopefully, the PCs will intervene at this point and try to talk both sides down, but if not, Lenoir (or if necessary one of the crew) will lunge towards the generator. Morgan will slam a knife switch down, but at the same moment, Lenoir will trust his immaterial blade inside the machine and then render it and himself fully material. This will result in a dramatic electrical explosion, and when everyone's vision returns, they'll see that Morgan was caught in the blast and killed, while the crew, having suffered one last blast of aetheric energy, are equally if more picturesquely dead, disintegrating to intangible dust.

Conclusions

Solving the mystery and ideally rescuing Morgan would be an ideal, and that "Every NPC Dies" melodramatic ending at least keeps things simple, but the players may be looking for a proper long-term solution to the problem. Play out whatever the players seem to be able to work towards, but Morgan isn't at all confident that he can solve their problem. Keeping the crew prisoners is likely to be tricky when their default state is immaterial; they may just have to be allowed to go, perhaps declaring that they accept that they can neither be saved nor find revenge, and all they can do is set off on one last voyage, who knows where...