

SKYLUXE ADVENTURES BY AIR



SINGAPORE SLING



An Amazing Aerospace short story by Rupert W Brown

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“Amazing Aerospace” is a project where Rupert reimagines aircraft of the past and imagines what the future holds for human space exploration. These short stories (the burning line series) are to illustrate how people interacted with and will interact with these airships, aeroplanes and space craft. This story focusses on the Skyluxe Dreamship, a hot helium filled, diesel-electric airship, active from 1930 to 1940.

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Singapore Sling

She raised herself on her elbows and peered over the pillow. The scene was both unnerving and beautiful. Directly below was the huge window of the Skyluxe cabin and that was the only thing between her and the Andaman Sea hundreds of yards below. From this vantage point it looked so peaceful and so perfect, an undulating surface made the darkest blue by the light of a full moon. A ship, a tiny collection of lights, crossed her window leaving a thin wake that looked for all the world like a trail of silk. For years she had dreamed of returning to England, but not once, not in the wildest of those dreams, did she think she would be doing it first class. She knew she wouldn't sleep. She just had to watch as the airship, this gentle giant of the sky, silently, gracefully made its way across India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Turkey and then on over Europe to England.

The previous day she had loaded the camphor-wood chest, Mrs Wong and their travel bags into a taxi and made their way to the new airport at Kallang Basin. They had presented themselves to the Cerulean desk and had their passports and tickets checked, and their baggage taken away. Then they sat in the elegant Art Deco hall saying nothing. They couldn't believe it was happening. They prayed to be allowed to get on the ship, to be underway. She feared that at any minute somebody would come and tell them it was a mistake, that they had to stay. But it wasn't. Through the great windows of the terminal building they could see the huge form of the Skyluxe Dreamship, and soon they were walking across the circular field of the aerodrome to the ship's door. They walked up the ramp into the reception space, and then climbed the stairs to the Stratus Restaurant. Their names were checked off a list by the Purser, then a steward took them through the Moonlight Bar and central corridor to the Gallery. There he turned right to take them to their cabins on the port side of the ship.

She had been determined that, for once in her life, she would have the best there was, so she had paid for the Skyluxe room all for herself. The steward opened the door and she gasped as she saw the huge window in front of her. The geometry of the room made for limited floor space, but the window in the skin of the airship offered the best views in the world. The steward explained that when she wanted to retire for the night she should call for him and he would lower the bed from the ceiling and make it ready for sleeping. Her travel bag was already in the room and the camphor-wood chest was stowed in the nearest luggage compartment. Mrs Wong's room was opposite hers across the corridor. Mrs Wong felt a lot safer in the enclosed but cosy and very windowless Luxe room. She slipped the steward a Straits dollar for his trouble, checked that all was good with Mrs Wong and then went to change for dinner.

A little later they emerged from their cabins and laughed. Both had chosen to wear a cheongsam, hers a rich scarlet, Mrs Wong's a vibrant jade green. Arm in arm they made their way back to the restaurant, took glasses of champagne from a waiter and headed to the Observation deck. Mrs Wong noticed the door to the Air Deck. Tentatively they opened it. It was a balcony open to the sky. The air was warm and there was no wind. They walked out to the railing. The ship was still only a few yards from the ground. She could hear the shouts of the ground crew as they clung on to the mooring lines and made final preparations for launch. There was a sploosh as the Captain dumped some water ballast and then very gradually the ship began to rise. If she leaned over the railings and looked towards the back of the ship she could just see the engines, the propellers a blur of motion now as they climbed into the sky. Mrs Wong put an arm tight around her waist she was so worried about her falling.

In a few moments they had the most spectacular view of the whole of the aerodrome, Kallang Basin and the flying boats, Serangoon and then the whole of Singapore itself. The airship gently turned west by northwest and, as it picked up speed, it became too windy to stay on the Air Deck. They ventured back inside to the Stratus Restaurant and a waiter showed them to the table they would be sharing with Sir Peter Clutchington and his wife during dinner. She smiled at Mrs Wong after Sir Peter had introduced himself and wife Margot. There were over half a million Chinese and Malay people on the island of Singapore, and around eight thousand Europeans, most of whom came from England. She knew people like Sir Peter very well indeed.

Her journey to Singapore had started fifteen years ago. She was the daughter of civil servants, despatched to the colony to run some administrative function. Her father had never really talked about his work, but she knew it was something to do with regulating the port and keeping track of shipping. For a while they had a charmed life. They had a large bungalow in Bukit Timah, and an ancient amah whom she adored. They would spend long lazy afternoons beside the pool at the Tanglin Club and occasionally would get on their little boat and have a picnic on Pulau Ubin. She had always accepted that she was and would be an only child, but then out of the blue her mother announced she would be getting a brother or sister. Her parents had always wanted more children, but sometimes these things are difficult. Her parents seemed closer together than ever and deeply in love. It was a time of great excitement getting ready for the arrival of a baby! She had waved goodbye to her mother the day she went in to labour. She stayed at home with the amah. After what seemed like hours the news finally came through, and it was the worst it could possibly be. She just didn't believe it had

happened. Her mother had died in childbirth. The doctors had done everything they could, but it was not to be. Her mother and baby brother were dead.

Her world started to fall apart. Her own grief was too painful to bear, but when she reached out for her father, he was incapable of responding. He descended into his own private hell. Looking back at that time she realised that if amah hadn't been there, they both would have starved to death. They limped on as a broken family for six months till her father committed the ultimate act of betrayal. He took his own life and left her alone in the world. She was fourteen.

People she had never met started to make decisions about what she was going to do next. Her amah was sent away. Various friends took turns to look after her, and they were as kind as they could be, but they needed a more permanent solution for her. There was talk of sending her back to England, but nobody could be found who wanted her. Mr March was her legal guardian now. He was her father's senior manager in the civil service or something. Anyway, apparently she had to do what he said. The situation was finally resolved and she was sent to Katong Convent, run by the Sisters of the Infant Jesus.

The school wasn't bad but she pined for her old family life. Occasionally she raged against the injustice and the nuns would lock her away till she calmed down. She gradually came to realise she had to deal with her new life, nothing was going to bring the old one back. That didn't stop the pain, but it allowed her to focus on what she was doing.

One day the senior Sister called her into her office and calmly explained that Mr March had left Singapore and gone back to England, and it seems had taken all her inheritance with him. There was no longer any money to pay the school fees. But she could stay, and continue some lessons, if she agreed to work for the school. She had no choice. From that day, half her time she spent at school and the rest working in the kitchens and laundry. But in that place she also met the person who would ultimately save her life, Mrs Wong.

Thankfully Mrs Wong took an immediate liking to her. Mrs Wong was tiny standing only five feet tall and with muscles like whipcord. She was strict but patient. Mrs Wong would invest real time in showing her how to do things, and even though her English was not great, they still managed to talk a lot. She didn't like to ask Mrs Wong where she had come from, but the stories she told spoke to an outrageous and adventurous past. The fact she was a single older woman working in her own right in Singapore was a testament to her courage and independent thinking.

One night she was working alone in the kitchen, finishing the cleaning of the day. There was a noise outside in the street and then two men burst in off the alley and into the kitchen. She stood in shocked silence to see them there. Then they lunged at her. One grabbed her, pushed her to the floor and was dragging her out into the alleyway when a cry went up and Mrs Wong charged the other man and dispatched him with a blow to head using an old skillet. She struggled to get up off the floor. The second man wrestled to keep her down. She broke free then felt a stabbing pain across her shoulder blade as she went down again. This second man was a more vicious proposition than the first. He and Mrs Wong traded all manner of blows. She was able to crawl away and get to her feet. The fight was still intense but she could tell the extra weight of the man was wearing Mrs Wong down. Desperate to help in some way she grabbed a broom and brought it down square in the man's back. He lurched forward and it was enough for Mrs Wong to finish him with the skillet to the back of the head. Both stood there, breathing heavily, shocked at what had just happened. Then she felt a cold dampness on her back. She reached round to touch and her hand came back covered in blood. She took one look and fainted.

She woke in her bed. Her back was aching. Mrs Wong rose from her chair and took her hand. She explained that the Sister had called the Police. The two men, notorious house breakers, had been arrested and taken away. She had a nasty knife wound across her right shoulder blade that Mrs Wong had cleaned and stitched up. Even the English doctor had been impressed by her handiwork. Now she just had to rest and heal. The nuns were all in shock and were praying for her. They had employed two Japanese Ronin as night guards. But from that moment on she and Mrs Wong were inseparable. Her shoulder wound healed but she was left with a nasty scar. Over time Mrs Wong turned the scar into the most beautiful tattoo of a Chinese Loong. And they they practised Tai Chi sword form together, every day.

Sir Peter was true to form and waffled on continuously throughout dinner. But he was most impressed to discover she was a Countess. It probably made him feel like the evening hadn't been a total waste of time after all. They relaxed when he finally left to join the other men, having Port and cigars in the Salon. Margot it turns out is a sweet thing, accustomed to a comfortable and privileged life in return for being married to a harmless but rather boring man. Margot had been a science teacher and was fascinated by the airship. She talked enthusiastically about the diesel generators and the electric motors, and about how everything was built to be light. She pointed out they were sitting on bentwood wicker chairs, that the table was made of duralium, and that the carpet was specially woven to be as thin as possible. The helium in the gas bags was infinitely safer than hydrogen, and heating it provided

additional lift. She even knew about the water reclamation system that drew water from the air to offset the weight of the diesel being burned by the generators and to keep the ship in drinking water. Mrs Wong was intrigued and wanted to know more, so they ordered another bottle of champagne. Eventually Margot rose to join her husband. She and Mrs Wong took the last of the champagne and found the comfortable benches of the quiet Reception Space. Through the windows they could make out the lights Medan.

A year or so after the kitchen incident, Sister died. Sister was very old, and went very peacefully during her afternoon nap. But that made her sit up and really think. There was this old woman who had spent her entire life as a nun in the service of the infant Jesus. Sister had chosen and stuck to her path. But what was she to do? She couldn't spend her whole life working in the kitchen of a convent. There had to be more, so much more, and that started a whole series of deep discussions with Mrs Wong.

They realised their options were quite limited. They could try and make things and sell them. They could work in service, which they kind of already did. Maybe she could become a Governess to a European family. Then there were the rather more unsavoury occupations which included opium dealing and prostitution. Mrs Wong seemed to know a great deal about both but she just couldn't stand the thought of either. She had never been with a man, let alone for money. She was mulling over this problem one day when there was a knock on the Convent door. It was part of her job to welcome visitors so she opened the door to a handsome young man.

'Good Lord! You're very fine. You remind me of my old Matron,' and he smiled.

She was embarrassed and blushed.

'Can I help you?'

'Yes,' said the man, 'I'm here to see the new Sister, pay my respects She's expecting me. I'm Charles Leofric.'

'Come this way please.'

He followed her as she lead him to the Sister's study.

'Sorry about that, but you really do remind me of my old Matron. Lovely woman, would do anything for her.'

Later she recounted this story to Mrs Wong. Together they came up with a brilliant but rather perverse plan. The brothels of the day were miserable places for the girls. Often clients were violent, drunk and disease ridden, and sometimes would refuse to pay. When they did, the girls often lost most of their money to pimps and the brothel owners. If they were going to go into this business they had to have expert, clean girls and wealthy, well behaved gentlemen

clients. If those clients were typically English they would all know and respect a Matron figure. Every decent English boarding school had at least one Matron. That person would be key to keeping the whole operation working well. Mrs Wong would take a client into see Matron. These men would do anything Matron asked of them including dropping their trousers so that she could examine their wedding tackle for signs of disease, before allocating a girl to provide them with services. They set up their first shop in a disused part of the Convent, renting it from the nuns under a false name. Mrs Wong found two very pretty Chinese girls. She worked hard on her Matron's uniform including a thin wicker cane for 'probing members'. She almost exploded from self doubt with the arrival of their first client, but by that stage she and Mrs Wong were all in – it was all or nothing. Word soon spread about the new place that became known simply as "Matrons". The girls were happier than they ever had been because they weren't getting beaten up and they were earning a lot of money. The clients loved the Matron experience and the fact that the girls were clean and enthusiastic. In fact "seeing Matron" was regarded as more erotic than the sex that followed. Mrs Wong and the Ronin dealt with any bad behaviour. In short it became a great success and she and Mrs Wong left the convent to work full time in their palace of love. For the first time they were both making serious money.

They finished their champagne and left the Reception Space, making their way back through the Moonlight Bar. There was a tremendous party in full swing, but they didn't feel in that kind of mood. At their cabins they hugged each other and said goodnight. She washed and changed into her silk pyjamas, then climbed the ladder to the bed suspended over the huge Skyluxe window. She lay there gently rubbing her tummy. She knew it was getting bigger by the day. She knew she was carrying, making, a new life.

Charles Leofric became a regular visitor to Matrons. He flirted ruthlessly with her when she gave him the Matron examination. She marvelled at just how perverse those sessions really were. He was a very charming man, but she never succumbed. That was a rule she and Mrs Wong had lain down right at the start. They would run the place, but would never become part of the attractions - except that being Senior Matron, she had become the star attraction. One day Charles was just on his way out when he collapsed. She could tell it was some kind of seizure. They rushed him to Changi Hospital where he stayed for several weeks while the doctors examined him. The prognosis was not good. He had an aggressive form of brain cancer, tumours, and the Doctors gave him months, if not weeks to live. His family was back in England but the doctors advised against any form of travel. They just didn't think he'd survive the journey. There was little treatment they could give him, apart from an opium derived pain killer. Up to that point he had been staying in the Singapore club, but that was not really a suitable venue for a dying man. In the end she put him up in a room at Matrons and built a

system of carers around him. By this time there were other “Matrons” working in their establishment, so she could spend time with him.

They would talk, or she would read to him. The cancer and the drugs made him very tired, and he slept a lot of the time. The Doctors paid regular visits, and he began to realise that he had to put his affairs in order. He hired a solicitor and spent many hours discussing plans to be incorporated into a will. One day when she was alone with him he made his proposition. ‘I’m Charles Leofric, the Earl of Mercia, the last Earl actually, I have no heir. I have loads of money and a bloody great pile in Cheshire. I find I need to leave this to somebody and I want that to be you, for all the kindness you have shown. Please, will you marry me, before its too late.’

She was as stunned as she could be.

‘But what about your family at home?’

‘Why do you think I’m in Singapore? Can’t stand any of them really, all horrible hangers-on. Always trying to touch me up for a few quid. I’ve seen how you are. You could turn my house into something decent again. I haven’t done very well really, ran away, made a bit of a mess of things.’

‘Are you sure? I mean marriage is a big deal.’

‘So is dying, and if you turn out to be a dreadful wife I won’t have to put up with you for long will I,’ he smiled.

Her mind was racing at a thousand miles an hour, but despite all the possible problems and objections she knew she wouldn’t get a better offer, ever.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘yes Charles Leofric, I will marry you,’ and this time they both smiled.

Mrs Wong was thrilled too. The first thing she said though was ‘you must give him son.’

‘How? He’s too weak to, you know.’

‘No, no, never too weak, you see,’ and the twinkle in her eye meant that as ever, Mrs Wong had a plan.

They moved at full speed to get the marriage licence, special dispensation to get married in the room, an Anglican Priest, copies of documentation and the thing she was most insistent on, a photographer. His family in England had to see that she was real and know what she looked like. The ceremony was short and simple. The room was too small to hold many people, but some friends from the Singapore Club turned up, most of whom were good clients of Matrons. His solicitor was there, and the photographer did his best to get a record of the event. Later that night, as Mrs Wong had instructed, she used candlelight, soothing words and gentle massage to get from him what they needed. Then Mrs Wong using a syringe, bamboo straw and royal jelly gave her the best possible chance of bringing the next Earl of

Mercia into the world. And it worked. A month later and she was spending her mornings heaving over a sink. She would have been elated if only she didn't spend so much time feeling nauseous. Charles was thrilled. His demeanour became that of a man at peace. He spent an afternoon writing a letter to his family and another to his unborn child and then passed away.

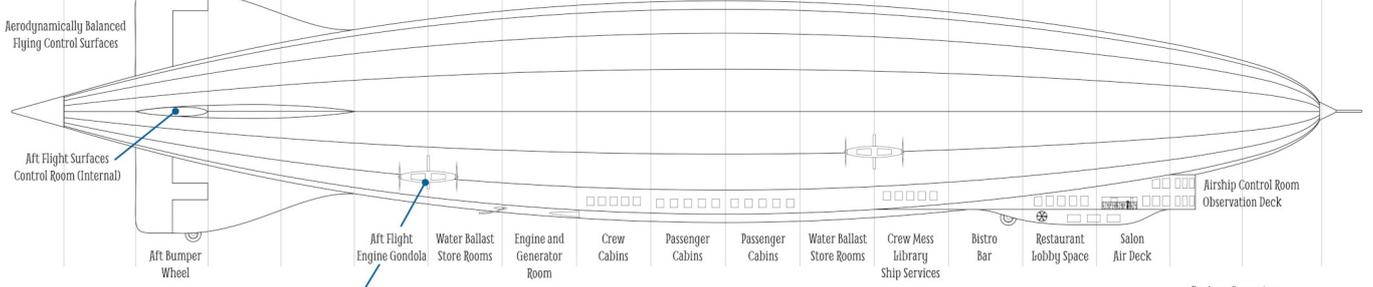
She had his body cremated because she was determined to return his remains to his estate in Cheshire. She and Mrs Wong did their best to secure the future of Matrons. Basically it would be an employee owned operation managed by the Ronin. They had no idea how long that structure would last, but at least they had done their best. They made arrangements to get their money out of Singapore and to England. They had to get travel documents. She reckoned that Mrs Wong shaved at least ten years off her real age in that process, but she could carry it off. Finally, when everything was ready they threw a party and said goodbye.

The airship was now over the Bay of Bengal. Soon they would see the coastline of India. She urged the ship onwards, desperate now to start this new life. She knew it would be difficult. She would be an interloper in an ancient family, but she felt confident, with the help of Mrs Wong, she could win them over. She prayed that her child, when he or she arrived, bore more than a passing resemblance to Charles. Her unborn child – there was now a burning line between herself, Countess of Mercia, and the Leofric estate. The future looked good. She would take control of this family, make it work well and make it her own. And if a certain Mr March still had a life, she promised to make it a lot more uncomfortable.

The End – 3987 words

SKYLUXE DREAMSHIP

Skyluxe DreamShip (Side View)



Flight Engine Gondola (Side View)

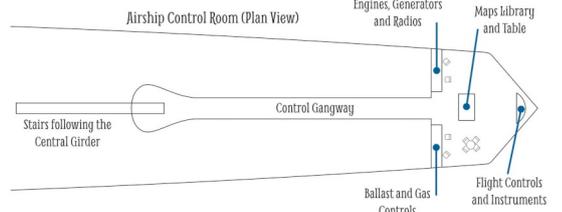
Working space sufficient for a Mechanic and Mate.

The Gondola can be accessed from the airship to enable in-flight maintenance and repairs.

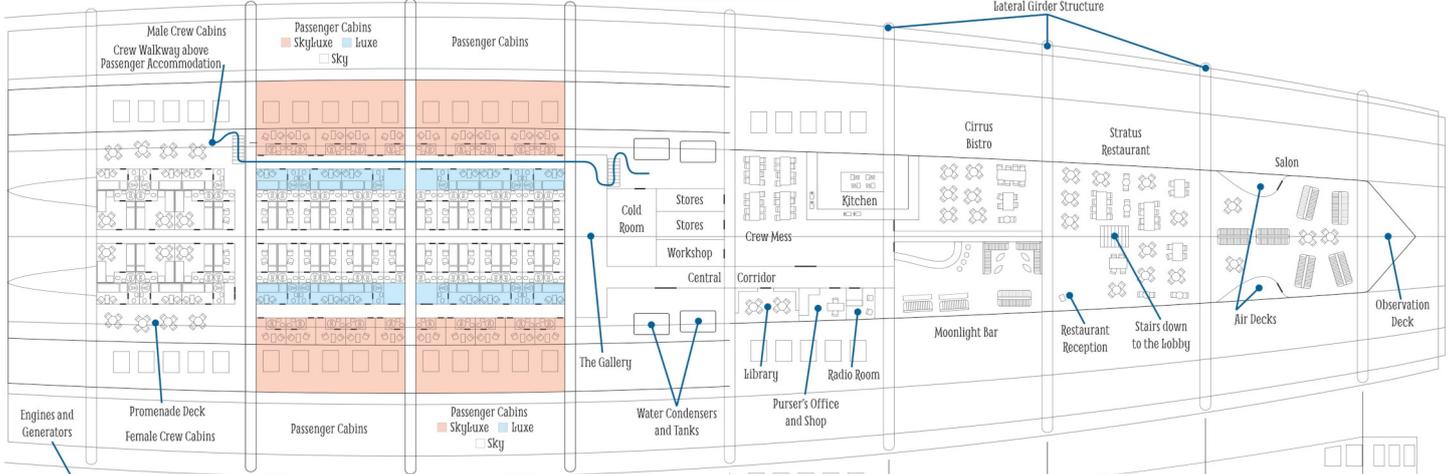
The Gondola is a "Push-Pull" Power Configuration.



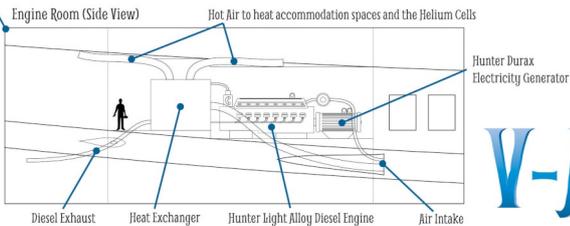
Airship Control Room (Plan View)



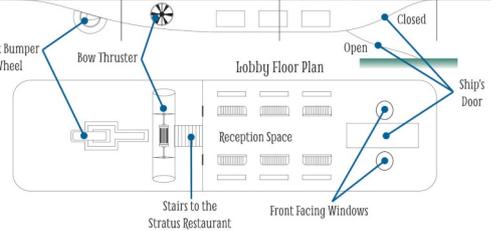
Accommodation Floor Plan



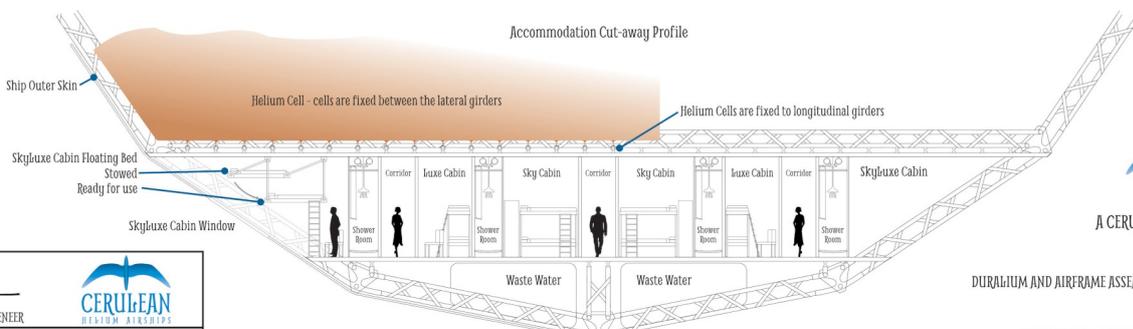
Engine Room (Side View)



V-AM 103



Accommodation Cut-away Profile



DRAWN BY <i>R. J. B.</i> CHIEF ENGINEER			
NAME: SKYLUXE DREAMSHIP V-AM 103			
CLASS: SKYLUXE	TYPE: HOT HELIUM AIRSHIP		
CERTIFICATION: DAY/NIGHT, TRANS-OCEAN <i>Certificate of airworthiness V-AM 103</i>			
PASSENGERS: 40 SKYLUXE CLASS - WITH WINDOW 24 LUXE CLASS - SUPERIOR CABIN SPACE 56 SKY CLASS - LUXURY IN THE CLOUDS			
CREW: 20 WOMEN 20 MEN		40 TOTAL	
LENGTH: 272 M	EMPTY WEIGHT: 128 TONNES		
WIDTH: 50 M	LIFT CAPABILITY: 161 TONNES		
RANGE: 7,100 KM	MAXIMUM SPEED: 126 KM/HR		
MAXIMUM ACCOMMODATION WIDTH: 20.5 M			



DURALIUM AND AIRFRAME ASSEMBLY BY:



ENGINES AND GENERATORS BY:



INSTRUMENTS AND CONTROL SYSTEMS BY:



FABRICS AND SPECIALIST LININGS BY:



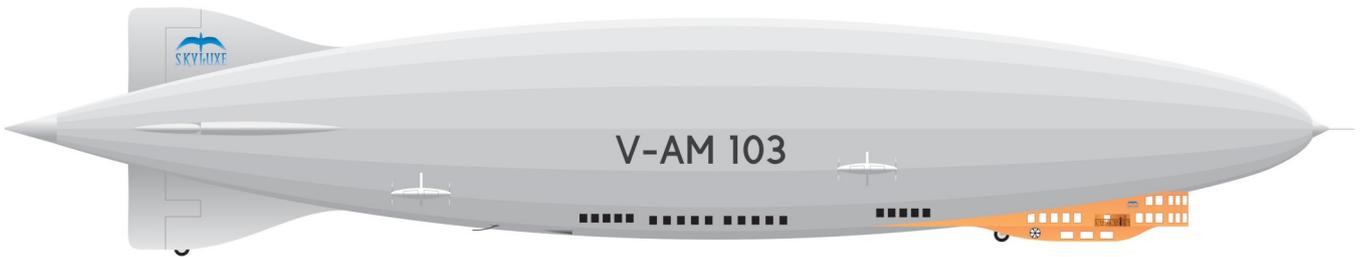
HELIUM AND SERVICES BY:



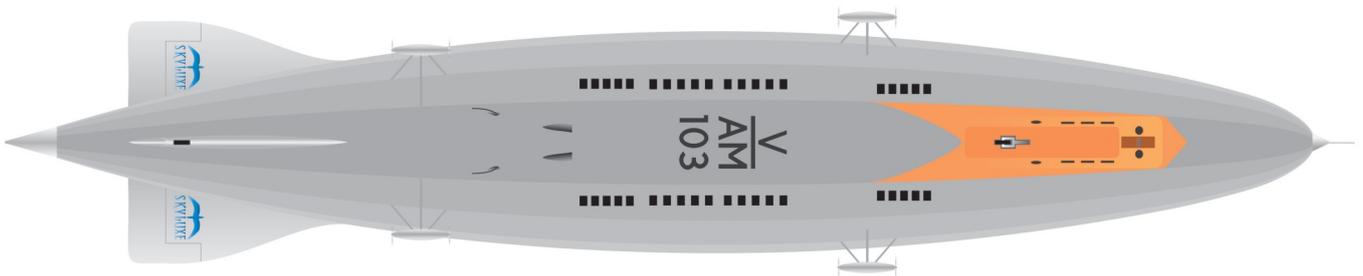
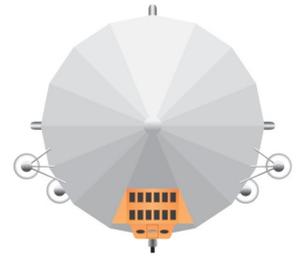
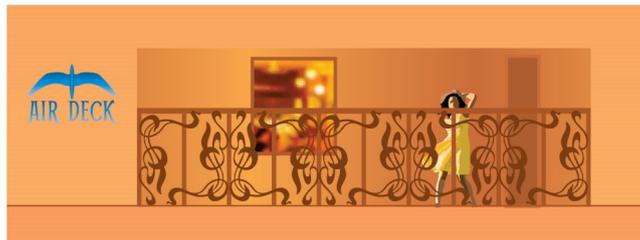
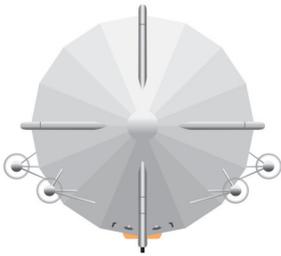
CABIN LUXURY AND COACHBUILDING BY:



SKYLUXE DREAMSHIP



V-AM 103



DRAWN BY  CHIEF ENGINEER			
NAME: SKYLUXE DREAMSHIP V-AM 103			
CLASS: SKYLUXE		TYPE: HOT HELIUM AIRSHIP	
CERTIFICATION: DAY/NIGHT, TRANS OCEAN <i>Certification as airship V-AM 103</i>			
PASSENGERS: 40 SKYLUXE CLASS - WITH WINDOW			
24 LUXE CLASS - SUPERIOR CABIN SPACE		120 TOTAL	
56 SKY CLASS - LUXURY IN THE CLOUDS			
CREW: 20 WOMEN		40 TOTAL	
20 MEN			
LENGTH: 272 M		EMPTY WEIGHT: 128 TONNES	
WIDTH: 50 M		LIFT CAPABILITY: 161 TONNES	
RANGE: 7,100 KM		MAXIMUM SPEED: 126 KM/HR	
MAXIMUM ACCOMMODATION WIDTH: 20.5 M			

A new ship to fly,
A new adventure begins,
With a sunlit stroll across a field of dreams,
A smile, a welcome aboard this restful giant,
Our silent, smooth climb into the clouds,
To stand as Gods in the Temple of Flight,
looking down on the wonders of the Earth,
The next great adventure of life,
Cerulean Skyluxe DreamShip.



SKYLUXE - A CERULEAN HELIUM AIRSHIP



DURALIUM AND AIRFRAME ASSEMBLY BY:



ENGINES AND GENERATORS BY:



INSTRUMENTS AND CONTROL SYSTEMS BY:



FABRICS AND SPECIALIST LININGS BY:



HELIUM AND SERVICES BY:



CABIN LUXURY AND COACHBUILDING BY:



PASSING FRIENDS



WIND-DRAGON ROUTE



MELBOURNE

ESSENDON FIELDS

SINGAPORE

CHANGI

PARIS

LE BOURGET

LONDON

CROYDON

Three classes of luxury cabin, all with washing facilities.
World-best views from the Salon with the unique Air Decks.



Two fine dining restaurants, and the Moonlight Bar.
Book today for your Skyluxe Dreamship Air Adventure.