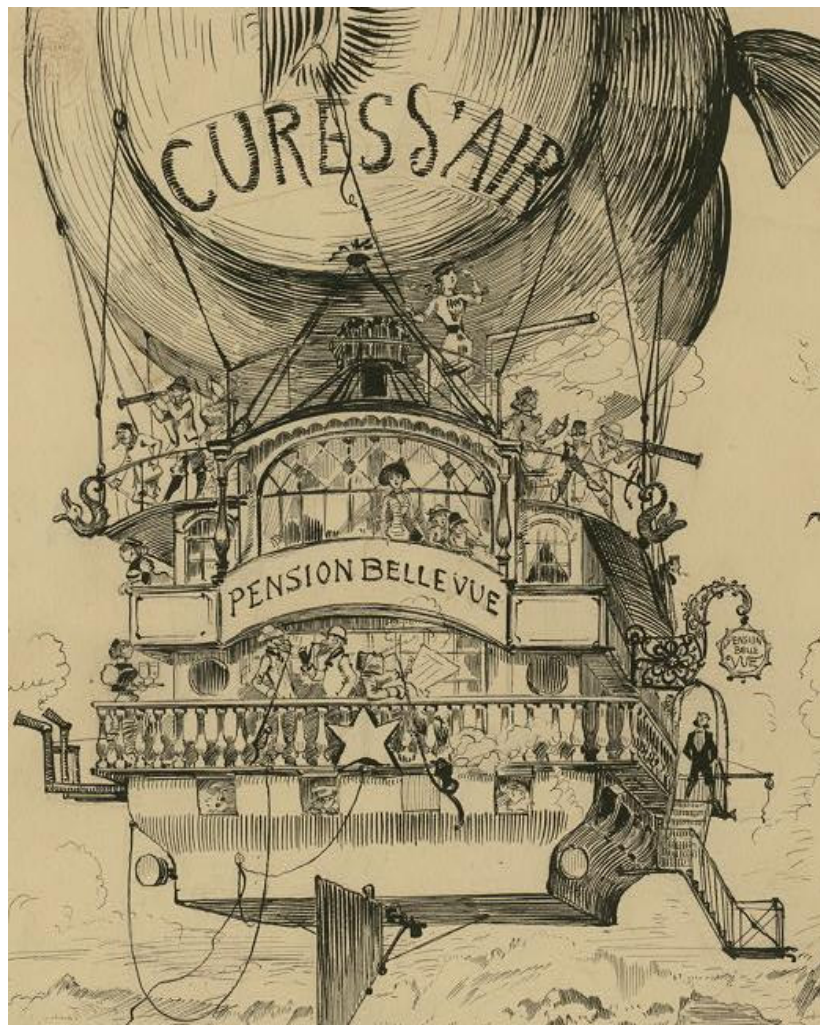


# ROMANCE IN THE AIR

by Bill White (billwhite@ganakagok.com)



*Ah, those giddy days before the war! The floating salons and aerial hotels cruising lazily through European skies! The ardent young men, and the fetching young ladies beside them, swooping in sky-coupes to see and be seen in the great cities of the continent! Dashing sky-hussars in their tres recherche bearskin cloaks and leather helmets, fashionable ladies in ornate gowns and airworthy hats, smart gentlemen in tuxedos and aviator scarves. All met in a great cavalcade of society's best and brightest, richest and grandest, and all unaware of the vast and dire conflagration soon to engulf Europa and indeed the world. It was most certainly a Belle Epoque—or, as some said, a romance dans l'air.*



**This is a game about love, longing, and loss in a Europe that never was. Four to eight players (or perhaps a few more) take on the roles of members of an elite social circle, each of whom wants or needs something from someone else. The characters inhabit a privileged stratum of antebellum aerial aristocrats who literally float above the plebeian world, drifting from place to place in order to soak up gorgeous vistas, attend stylish happenings, and participate in airborne revelries.**

**The Pension Bellevue is a skyborne spa for the wealthy and beautiful; it floats freely across the landscape, crossing borders and venturing to far-off places at the whim of its paying clientele, who come for days, weeks, and months, returning time and again to renew old acquaintances and dabble in high-flown pursuits.**

# ACT I

	Mlle. Natalie Gaudan, flirtatious nymphet. Vivacious but vain. ○ coquettish ● charming		Mr. Rene Balmer, sophomoric undergraduate. Fond of callow japes. ○ crass ● witty
	Aimee Bourg, a maid. Discreet confidant. Clever beyond her years and station. ○ nosy ● comforting		Mr. Jean-Paul Aloysien, earnest chauffeur. Handsome but diffident. ○ shy ● sensitive
	Mlle. Elodie Prideaux, able governess. Fashionable and taste-conscious. ○ judgmental ● discerning		Capt. Thibaut Nerond, stylish sky-hussar. Martial popinjay, serious and stern. ○ vainglorious ● courageous
	Mlle. Isabeau Baillie, wealthy heiress. A woman of modern sensibilities. ○ shrill ● strong-willed		Col. Henri Bose-Batonne, supercilious martinet. Refined manner, high standards. ○ snide ● incisive
	Mlle. Camille Duchamp, sad-eyed poetess. A fading rose. ○ morbid ● rueful		Mr. Yves Chevalier, bombastic industrialist. Incapable of withholding his opinion. ○ boorish ● hearty
	Mme. Adela Arroget, giddy matron. A slave to the opera and the pops. ○ flighty ● free-spirited		Dr. Pascal Gravois, kindly physician. Perceptive but uncritical. ○ credulous ● open-minded
	Mme. Bridget Duchamp, amiable widow. Concerned for her daughter's happiness. ○ indiscriminate ● friendly		Prof. Raymond Arroget, brilliant academician. Encyclopedic knowledge of his field. ○ pedantic ● insightful
	Dame Ada Desmarais, Comtesse d'Agnon. A true blue-blood, relict of a nobler age. ○ cantankerous ● matriarchal		Ambassador Heinrich Dunkelfeld. A visiting dignitary, fond of the ladies. ○ lecherous ● gallant

In a randomly determined order, each player selects a character from the list of dramatis personae above to be his or her hero or heroine, noting the character's *vice* (○) and his or her *virtue* (●). Players then each deliver a monologue to identify:

- his or her character's **Object** for the game—Money, Reputation, or Love—and the *specific other character* who can grant that Object to the character, or otherwise represents its attainment. Note that Money, Reputation and Love can be defined broadly, with **Money** being anything reasonably related to economic power or political influence, **Reputation** being anything more-or-less connected to social status, rank, or community standing, and **Love** being anything conceivably tied to interpersonal dealings, relations, or feelings. The specific other character so identified does not have to be one selected by another player, but it should be one of the dramatis personae listed above.
- who or what is preventing the character from achieving his or her Object.
- how the character hopes to overcome those obstacles achieve his or her Object, and how those hopes or other reasons bring the character to Pension Bellevue.

# ACT II

Act II comprises three to five *scenes*. Each scene consists of one or more *plot points*; a plot point is an interaction between a pair of characters.

In each scene, one player is the *Fifth Business* (the term is from old-school opera). In the first scene, the Fifth Business is the player of the *oldest character* (i.e., lowest on the list above, ties in favor of the woman); in each succeeding scene, the player of the next younger character becomes Fifth Business. The Fifth Business frames a scene by selecting a *mise en scene* (see sidebar) and two characters (including the youngest) to participate in the first plot point. He or she designates one as the *actant* and the other as the *reactant* by virtue of the motivations being ascribed to the characters in setting up the plot point.

	Reactant's Play	
Actant's Play	Vicious (○)	Virtuous (●)
Vicious (○)	Both gain 1 tally	Actant gains 5 tallies
Virtuous (●)	Reactant gains 5 tallies	Both gain 3 tallies

The Fifth Business plays any character not chosen by another player as his or her own, or recruits a disinterested player to do so. Play continues until, in the judgment of the Fifth Business, both characters have demonstrated either their virtuous or their vicious quality. The Fifth Business then awards tallies to each character based on the nature of their play, as shown in the table above.

The scene continues with the reactant becoming the actant and a new character becoming the reactant in a new plot point. The Fifth Business frames up their interaction, taking care to move background events forward. The scene ends after each player has had a chance to play his or her character in the scene.

# ACT III

Each player secretly assigns the tallies his or her character has received among Money, Reputation, and Love. Unplayed characters with tallies have them distributed by a disinterested player. Compare the tallies assigned to the relevant Object by the character and a rival or other character liable to resist or oppose him or her. Adjust this rule as needed to produce plausible outcomes.

If the former has a higher tally, he or she realizes his desire; otherwise, he or she fails. Play out a short scene showing how the character gets or doesn't get his or her desire.

Remember that in a few months the war will come and bring an end to the era of Romance in the Air.

*Mise en scene* refers to the setting or location of a scene.

1. **Fireworks on the Seine.** Guests watch festive explosions from the upper decks of the Pension Bellevue; old memories are recalled to mind.

2. **An Air Coupe Excursion.** Guests pair up for a sight-seeing tour by air in two-person mini-dirigibles, perhaps landing to picnic in a scenic locale.

3. **What A Bother!** The Bellevue is boarded by customs inspectors or other tedious functionaries, which gets some of the guests in a lather.

4. **A Night at the Opera.** Guests visit the opera house in a fashionable city. Some are shocked by the racy plot, but others find it titillating.