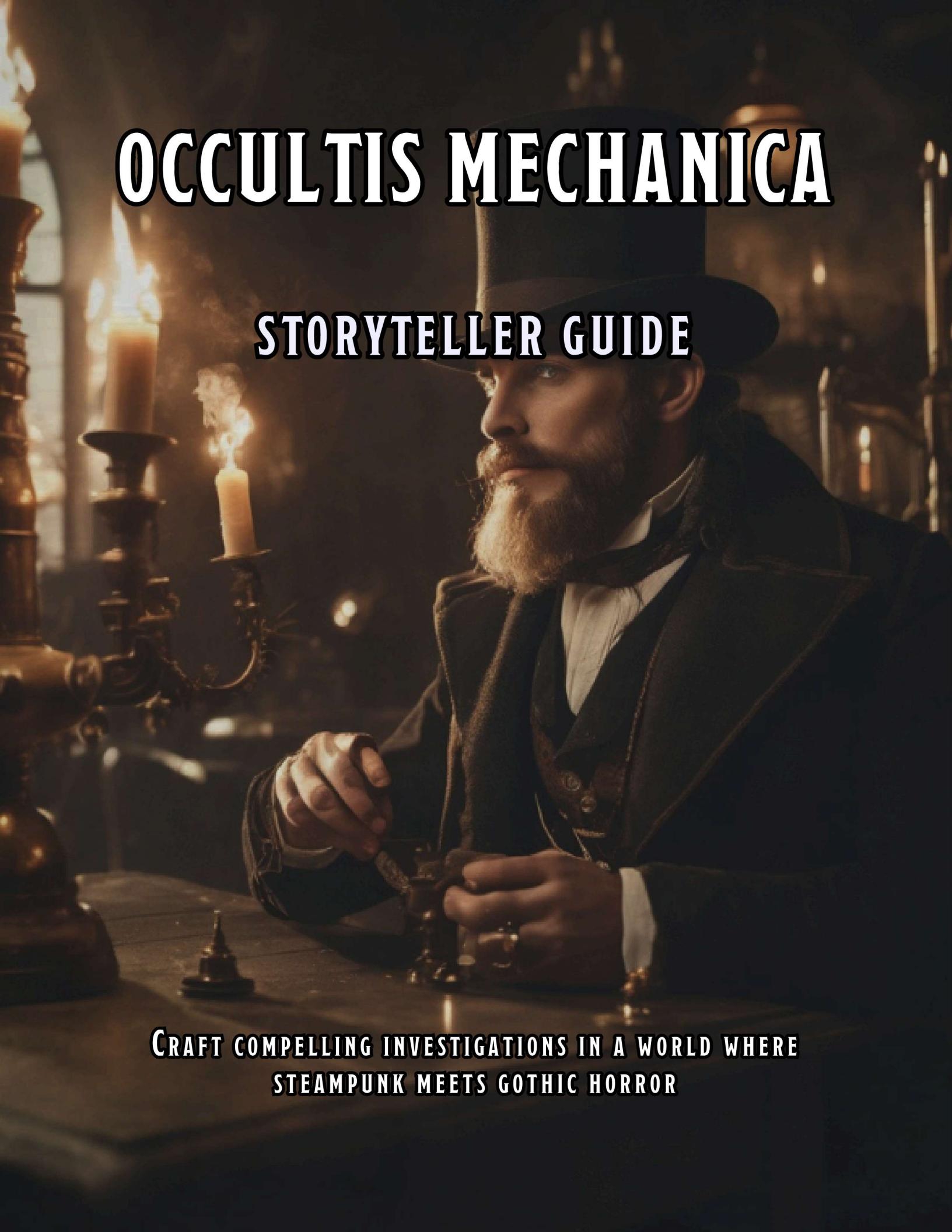# OCCULTIS MECHANICA

STORYTELLER GUIDE

Craft compelling investigations in a world where steampunk meets gothic horror

OCCULTIS MECHANICA

Storyteller Guide

Running investigations in steampunk-gothic Empyria

Contents

Your Role as Storyteller

You're not running a traditional fantasy quest. You're running investigations in a world where steam-powered industry coexists with supernatural horror, where clockwork automatons patrol gaslit streets and spirits whisper secrets from beyond the veil.

Your job is to make this world feel real, dangerous, and mysterious—while keeping it exciting enough that your players want to delve deeper into its shadows.

Running Occultis Mechanica

The Core Challenge

Occultis Mechanica presents a unique storytelling challenge: how do you balance the rational, industrial world with supernatural horror that defies explanation?

The answer: tension between what should be and what is.

The factories run. The gaslights illuminate. The clockwork turns. Everything has a rational explanation—until it doesn't. When the machinery of the world encounters the unexplainable, that's where your investigators operate.

What Makes Occultis Mechanica Different

Technology is Progress

Steam power, clockwork automation, and industrial manufacturing represent humanity's triumph over nature. This has consequences:

- People expect rational explanations for everything
- The supernatural is officially denied or suppressed
- Industrial accidents sometimes have darker causes
- Not everyone can afford the latest innovations

Authority Exists and Denies

Unlike some settings, Empyria has:

- Professional law enforcement (with limitations)
- Government agencies (DOSS) that suppress occult knowledge
- Industrial guilds protecting their interests
- Aristocratic power structures

  Your investigators often work despite authority, not with it. Official channels either can't help or won't acknowledge the problem.

Horror Has Consequences

Supernatural encounters should be disturbing:

- Witnesses may be traumatized or silenced
- Evidence tends to disappear or be explained away
- Those who see too much attract dangerous attention
- Some knowledge cannot be unlearned

  Investigation should have weight. Make your players consider what they're willing to discover.

Core Responsibilities

Create a Living World

Empyria continues whether investigators are watching or not. Show this:

Factory shifts change. Political tensions simmer. Criminal organizations operate. Research continues in hidden laboratories. People go about their lives, unaware of what lurks beneath.

Your NPCs have goals independent of the investigators. Let the world feel active and responsive, not frozen until the players arrive.

Maintain the Tone

Occultis Mechanica is steampunk gothic horror. That means:

Professional Competence

Investigators should feel capable, not helpless. They have skills, resources, and knowledge. Challenges should test their abilities, not make them look foolish.

Rational Meets Irrational

Investigations often start with apparent rational explanations. The horror emerges when those explanations prove inadequate.

Creeping Dread

Horror works best through atmosphere and implication. Not every threat needs to be visible. Sometimes the worst horror is what the investigators imagine.

Victorian Sensibilities

Include period-appropriate concerns:

- Class distinctions and social propriety
- Industrial progress vs. tradition
- Scientific rationalism vs. superstition
- Imperial ambition and its costs

Adjudicate Fairly

You're potentially running two different systems. Be consistent:

Know how challenges work in your chosen system. Apply the same standards to NPCs and investigators. Let dice tell the story but don't let bad luck kill a campaign.

When in doubt, favor drama over realism, investigator success over punishment, and interesting complications over frustrating obstacles.

Balance Investigator Agency

When to Say Yes

Investigators propose creative solutions using their skills and the world's capabilities. If it makes sense and they've invested resources, let it work.

When to Complicate

Success doesn't mean easy. A brilliant deduction might be correct but lead somewhere dangerous. Finding evidence might attract unwanted attention. Victory can have costs.

When to Say No

Some things don't work because they break the world:

- Solutions that trivialize future challenges
- Actions that ignore established consequences
- Technology that doesn't exist in Empyria
- Supernatural abilities without cost

The Steampunk-Gothic Balance

Technology Level

Empyria is Victorian-industrial, not modern:

What Exists

Steam engines, clockwork mechanisms, gaslighting, telegraph communication, early photography, pneumatic tubes, dirigibles, basic firearms, alchemical preparations

What Doesn't Exist

Electricity (as common infrastructure), internal combustion engines, radio, aircraft (beyond dirigibles), automatic weapons, modern medicine, computers

The Rule

If it could exist in a late Victorian setting enhanced by steam power and clockwork precision, Empyria probably has it. If it requires 20th century technology, it doesn't exist.

Supernatural Elements

The occult in Empyria follows certain patterns:

Spirits and Hauntings

The dead sometimes linger. They may be benevolent, malevolent, or simply confused. Communication is possible through mediums, but never reliable.

Eldritch Forces

Things exist beyond normal reality. They don't follow rational rules. Encountering them risks sanity and safety.

Artifacts and Relics

Objects can hold power, curses, or connections to other realms. They're dangerous, valuable, and sought by many factions.

Rituals and Practices

Occult knowledge can produce real effects. This is why DOSS suppresses it—not because it's fake, but because it's dangerous.

Balancing the Elements

Early Investigation

Start with apparent rational explanations. Factory accident. Missing person. Strange sounds. Let investigators pursue normal leads before the supernatural emerges.

Building Dread

Introduce supernatural elements gradually. Unexplained details. Inconsistent testimony. Evidence that doesn't quite fit. The rational explanation starts showing cracks.

Revelation

The truth emerges—and it's worse than expected. The supernatural element is real. The investigators must now decide what to do about it.

Resolution

How do investigators address something that official channels won't acknowledge exists? This is where creative problem-solving matters most.

Equipment in Empyria

Equipment in Occultis Mechanica falls into two categories: things that define your investigator's capabilities, and things that enable specific solutions. As Storyteller, your job is knowing the difference.

Equipment Philosophy

Background Equipment

Investigators have access to tools of their trade. Don't make them track every mundane item. If they're a gearsmith, assume they have basic tools. If they're a detective, assume they have standard investigation supplies.

Signature Equipment

Some items matter to character identity. A custom-built clockwork device. A family heirloom with mysterious properties. A weapon with history. These are part of who they are.

Specialized Equipment

Some problems need specific tools. Breaking into a vault needs proper equipment. Conducting a séance requires appropriate materials. These require planning, resources, or connections.

Restricted Equipment

Military weapons, experimental technology, occult artifacts, forbidden texts. These are story hooks, not shopping lists. Acquisition should be an adventure.

Equipment Examples
Personal Technology

Pocket Watch

Essential for any professional. Quality varies from basic timepieces to precision instruments with additional functions (compass, hidden compartment, etc.).

Writing Kit

Portable writing supplies including pen, ink, and paper. Essential for note-taking and correspondence.

Photographic Equipment

Bulky and requiring preparation, but invaluable for documenting evidence. Photographs can capture things the eye might miss.

Lantern or Torch

Light sources for dark investigations. Oil lanterns, candles, or chemical glow-sticks for different situations.

Investigation Tools

Magnifying Glass

Essential for examining evidence, reading fine print, and spotting details invisible to the naked eye.

Evidence Collection Kit

Containers, tweezers, envelopes, and labeling supplies for preserving evidence.

Lock Picks

Tools for bypassing locks. Possession may be illegal depending on circumstances.

Listening Device

Mechanical or acoustic devices for eavesdropping. Range and quality vary significantly.

Weapons

Concealed Weapons

Small pistols, daggers, or canes with hidden blades. Designed to avoid notice.

Personal Defense

Revolvers, walking sticks, brass knuckles. Common self-defense items for dangerous work.

Professional Weapons

Military-grade firearms, swords, specialized ammunition. Restricted and attention-grabbing.

Occult Items

Spirit Board

Tool for attempted communication with spirits. Effectiveness debatable. Dangers real.

Crystal Ball or Scrying Mirror

Focus for divination attempts. Requires training to use effectively.

Protective Charms

Amulets, talismans, or blessed items believed to offer protection. May or may not work.

Occult Texts

Books of forbidden knowledge. Reading them is dangerous. Owning them attracts attention.

Creating Threats

Threats in Occultis Mechanica aren't just monsters. They're corrupt industrialists, malfunctioning automatons, vengeful spirits, secret societies, and yes, occasionally, things with too many eyes and not enough regard for human sanity.

Threat Types in Empyria

Human Threats

The Industrialist

Wealthy factory owner pursuing profit without regard for worker safety or ethical constraints. Dangerous because of resources, connections, and legal protection.

Tactics: Lawyers, hired thugs, political influence, economic pressure, accidents that aren't accidents

Weakness: Public scandal, evidence of crimes, worker solidarity, rival industrialists

The Cultist

True believer in occult forces, willing to sacrifice anything—including others—for power or forbidden knowledge.

Tactics: Deception, fanatical dedication, occult knowledge, ritual preparation

Weakness: Exposed beliefs, disrupted rituals, turned followers, destroyed materials

Supernatural Threats

The Haunting

Spirit of the dead, lingering due to unfinished business, violent death, or deliberate binding. May be hostile, confused, or seeking help.

Tactics: Manifestation, possession, environmental manipulation, psychological pressure

Weakness: Resolution of unfinished business, exorcism rituals, destruction of anchor objects

The Eldritch Presence

Something from beyond normal reality. Doesn't follow rational rules. Contact damages sanity. Motivations unknowable.

Tactics: Reality distortion, madness induction, corruption, impossible geometry

Weakness: Specific banishment rituals, severing connection to our reality, sacrifice

The Shade

Malevolent entity of darkness and fear. May be spirit, demon, or something else entirely.

Tactics: Fear manipulation, darkness control, physical attacks when corporeal

Weakness: Light, specific wards, courage, disrupting its anchors

Mechanical Threats

The Rogue Automaton

Clockwork creation operating outside its intended parameters. May be malfunctioning, reprogrammed, or somehow awakened.

Tactics: Tireless pursuit, mechanical precision, following corrupted instructions

Weakness: Shutdown codes, mechanical vulnerabilities, creator knowledge

The Experiment Gone Wrong

Scientific or alchemical creation that exceeded its creator's control. Possibly alive, possibly something else.

Tactics: Unpredictable abilities, desperation, possibly still evolving

Weakness: Creator's knowledge, original design flaws, specific countermeasures

Organizational Threats

DOSS Investigation

Government agents investigating occult activity. May target investigators as threats to public order.

Tactics: Legal authority, resources, suppression of evidence, detainment

Weakness: Jurisdictional limits, bureaucracy, internal politics, public scrutiny

Criminal Syndicate

Organized crime with interests that conflict with investigation. May be smuggling occult items, running forbidden services, or protecting guilty parties.

Tactics: Violence, intimidation, bribery, extensive networks

Weakness: Internal rivalries, law enforcement pressure, exposure of activities

Secret Society

Hidden organization with its own agenda. May be occult practitioners, political conspirators, or something stranger.

Tactics: Secrecy, infiltration, resources, forbidden knowledge

Weakness: Exposure, disrupted rituals, turned members, destroyed resources

Example Threats

The Whispering Shade

Small Eldritch Horror

Capabilities: Moderate physical threat, fear-inducing presence
Special Abilities:

- Can shift between corporeal and incorporeal
- Fear aura affects nearby characters
- Feeds on terror

Tactics: Stalks victims, builds fear before attacking, retreats when seriously threatened
Weakness: Bright light, courage, specific banishment words

Invasive Shade

Large Eldritch Horror

Capabilities: Significant physical threat, reality-warping presence
Special Abilities:

- Corporeal/incorporeal shifting
- Multiple attacks
- Darkness generation
- Corrupting touch

Tactics: Overwhelms opposition, uses darkness to advantage, targets weakest first
Weakness: Sustained bright light, coordinated resistance, holy symbols

Rogue Automaton

Mechanical Threat

Capabilities: Strong physical threat, tireless pursuit
Special Abilities:

- Immune to fatigue, fear, and many physical effects
- Precise attacks
- Resistant to damage
- May have specialized functions

Tactics: Follows programming literally, pursues designated targets, ignores non-threats
Weakness: Shutdown codes, mechanical vulnerabilities, electrical discharge, creator override

DOSS Inquisitor

Human Threat

Capabilities: Trained combatant, occult knowledge, legal authority
Special Abilities:

- Combat training
- Occult suppression techniques
- Government resources
- Interrogation expertise

Tactics: Investigation, intimidation, legal pressure, suppression of evidence
Weakness: Bureaucratic oversight, public attention, evidence of wrongdoing, jurisdictional limits

Building Investigations

Investigations in Occultis Mechanica start with mysteries—unexplained events, missing persons, strange occurrences—and peel back layers until the truth emerges. Your job is creating those layers and letting investigators discover them.

Starting Small

The Initial Hook

Give investigators a clear, manageable mystery with obvious stakes:

Personal Cases

Someone needs help the authorities won't provide. Examples: missing family member, unexplained death, stolen heirloom, threatening letters

Professional Work

Hired for investigation work. Examples: insurance fraud investigation, background check gone strange, corporate espionage with odd angles

Accidental Involvement

Wrong place, wrong time, now invested. Examples: witnessed something impossible, received mysterious package, old acquaintance appears with wild story

Organizational Assignment

Everwatch or Veilkeeper mission. Examples: investigate reported haunting, recover stolen artifact, assess potential threat

The First Session

Establish Normalcy

Show investigators how Empyria works normally before introducing the abnormal. The contrast makes horror more effective.

Provide Clear Direction

Don't make them guess where to start. Give obvious first leads, accessible information, clear next steps.

Allow Progress

First session should feel productive. Investigators should learn things, make connections, feel competent.

Introduce the Wrongness

Something doesn't fit. A detail that can't be explained. A witness whose story doesn't match the evidence. The first hint that this isn't a normal case.

End with Questions

Session ends with investigators knowing more but understanding less. What seemed simple is becoming complicated.

Complications and Development

The First Twist

Hidden Connections

Victim was involved in something secret. The case connects to larger events.

Supernatural Element

What seemed natural has unnatural causes. Evidence of something impossible.

Dangerous Attention

Someone doesn't want this investigated. Warnings, threats, or obstruction.

Moral Complexity

Simple case becomes complicated. Victim wasn't innocent. Perpetrator has sympathetic motives.

Campaign Seeds

The Clockwork Conspiracy

A series of "accidents" at various factories share impossible commonalities. Investigation reveals malfunctioning automatons—but they're not malfunctioning. Someone is reprogramming them, and the pattern suggests a larger plan.

Scale: Starts as industrial accident investigation. Grows to city-wide conspiracy.

The Haunting of Ravenholm Manor

Classic ghost story with complications. The haunting is real, but the spirit isn't the victim everyone assumes. Uncovering the truth means exposing a prominent family's dark secrets—and they have resources to stop the investigation.

Scale: Starts as haunted house case. Grows to aristocratic scandal with supernatural dimensions.

The Parliament's Game

Investigators stumble onto evidence of the Parliament of Shadows. Now they're targets. Survival requires understanding what they're facing—and that means delving deeper into darkness than any sane person would choose.

Scale: Starts as strange coincidences. Grows to confrontation with major conspiracy.

The Thing Beneath

Something is wrong in the Mechanika Quarters. Workers disappear. Machines malfunction in specific patterns. Something lives in the tunnels beneath the factories—something that was awakened by industrial excavation.

Scale: Starts as missing persons case. Grows to existential threat from below.

The Medium's Warning

A respected medium delivers a warning: something terrible is coming, and specific individuals must work together to stop it. But the medium dies before explaining, and the investigators must piece together the prophecy while unknown forces work against them.

Scale: Starts as mysterious message. Grows to race against apocalyptic threat.

DOSS Defector

A DOSS agent approaches the investigators with evidence of terrible experiments conducted in Suppression Chambers. They want to expose the truth but need help staying alive long enough to do it. DOSS will do anything to prevent exposure.

Scale: Starts as protection job. Grows to government conspiracy.

Quick Adventure Reference

The Clockwork Assassin

A high-profile politician has been found dead, seemingly killed by a mysterious clockwork automaton. Investigators must follow the trail of the mechanical assassin to uncover the conspiracy behind the murder.

The Alchemical Catastrophe

A renowned alchemist's experiment goes awry, causing an explosion that unleashes dangerous alchemical creatures upon the city. The investigators must contain the chaos and neutralize the threat.

The Missing Heirloom

A noble family seeks help recovering a stolen family heirloom. The heist scene is spotless of clues except for residual eldritch energy and a single gear piece. The trail leads to a shadowy underworld.

The Seance of Whispers

A spiritualist medium holds a séance to communicate with the departed, but something goes horribly wrong. Investigators must unravel the dark secrets of the medium's past and confront vengeful spirits.

The Enchanted Masquerade

A lavish masquerade ball hosted by an enigmatic noble turns deadly as guests start disappearing. Uncover the malevolent enchantments and hidden motives behind the festivities.

The Clockwork Abomination

A series of gruesome murders leads investigators to a mad scientist's lair, where they encounter a grotesque clockwork abomination. Delve into the depths of depraved experiments to end the threat.

The Curse of the Ancient Relic

An ancient relic with a cursed past resurfaces, bringing calamity to its possessors. The investigators must navigate a trail of bodies, uncover forbidden knowledge, and lift the curse.

The Factory Floor Horror

Workers at a steam mill report seeing impossible things during night shifts. Management dismisses it as fatigue, but the accidents are increasing. Something inhabits the machinery itself.

Your Story Begins

You have everything you need. A world where steam-powered progress masks ancient horrors. Where gaslit streets hide shadows that shouldn't exist. Where investigators pursue truth that official channels deny.

Your players have investigators with skills, resources, and determination. They're not helpless victims—they're professionals entering dangerous situations because someone has to find the answers.

Start small. A mystery, a case, an unexplained event. Something manageable with clear stakes and obvious first steps. Let them investigate. Let them feel competent.

Then introduce the wrongness. The detail that doesn't fit. The evidence that can't be explained. The moment when the rational world shows its cracks.

Build from there. Each session adds complications. Each answer raises new questions. The investigation deepens. The stakes rise. The truth emerges—and it's worse than anyone imagined.

Empyria is yours to shape. The threats you create, the NPCs you voice, the mysteries you weave—these make the world real. Your players bring the investigators. You bring everything else.

Check your notes. Know what lurks in the shadows. Understand what happens if no one investigates.

Then let your players surprise you.