

For Referees Only

DIASPORA

Early Fallen

AVENGER ENTERPRISES

TNE ADVENTURE 1: *EARLY FALLEN*

FOR *TRAVELLER: THE NEW ERA*

BASED ON THE AWARD-WINNING *TRAVELLER* GAME SYSTEM AND UNIVERSE BY MARC MILLER

Avenger Enterprises is the private venture of Martin J Dougherty, *Traveller* line editor at QuikLink Interactive. Avenger adventures and supplements are published under license through QuikLink Interactive.

Avenger Enterprises' TNE Supplements and Adventures are presented without game mechanics or stats to allow their use with any rules system. Familiarity with the New Era background is important to these products. We recommend possession of the TNE supplement *Path of Tears*, at the very least, if these products are to be used in the 'official' background. If the Referee prefers to transplant them into a different setting then obviously there is no need to possess TNE game materials.

These adventures and supplements will not only present information on and scenarios set within the Recovery Period (1200-1248) but will also flesh out the story of the Reformation Coalition and other groups, leading up to the 1248 situation described in the QLI supplement *Bearers of the Flame*. These adventures will allow player-characters to be present at some of the momentous events in Trailing region of the old Third Imperium. These events may merit a mere sentence or two in a history of the Recovery, but to those who lived through them they were life-changing events.

The adventures will be tied into various historical threads; where it is important these will be identified. For example, this adventure is part of the 'Star Vikings' thread which details the events that made the Star Vikings who and what they were. Other threads will deal with important historical events: the alliance with Sufren, the Solee War, and the cleansing of the Vampire Highway.

Traveller: The New Era (TNE) is the third incarnation of the Traveller roleplaying game. Published by Games Designers Workshop in the early 1990s and using radically different rules to previous or later versions of the game, TNE was set after the fall of the Third Imperium, in the 'Recovery Period' leading up to the New Era which was to begin sometime later. Exactly when this New Era began is a matter for some conjecture; different societies place the date anywhere between the years 1200 and 1248.

The Official Traveller Universe (OTU) takes the start date of the New Era as the year 1248 of the old Imperial calendar; the year in which a new Emperor ascended the Vacant Throne of the Fourth Imperium and the survivors of the Grand Fleets came home. It was also the year that the Star Vikings departed on their last great mission, an heroic plunge into the unknown to save an entire people. The story of the Fourth Imperium and of the Great Rescue will be told, but for now they lie in the future. Times are dark in the chaos following the fall of the Third Imperium and Humaniti teeters on the brink of extinction. It is a time for great courage and greater deeds; a time when the last beacons of civilization flicker and fade in the night.

In these darkening days, the last, best hope for all Humaniti may be the two-dozen worlds of the Reformation Coalition; an unlikely alliance of very different cultures. These are desperate times, and only the desperate courage of the Star Vikings can hold back the night. Perhaps it will even be enough to rekindle the light of civilization. Or perhaps the Coalition is ultimately doomed. Whatever happens, the Star Vikings will not accept their fate meekly. They are the tragic heroes of the New Era. They may have blood on their hands and sadness in their souls, but upon their brows rest wreathes of eternal glory.

This is the story of the men and women who bled and died to build a future, knowing that it had no place for them.

TNE Adventure 1: Early Fallen is set in Diaspora Sector of the Official Traveller Universe, in the year 1202. As such it is compatible with the official Hard Times – Collapse – Recovery – New Era timeline but will not fit very well into an alternate wherein the assassination of Emperor Strephon did not occur.

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To Absent Friends

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INTRODUCTION

"I give you a toast.

To the heroes who went before to show the way.
To the ones who challenged the darkness.
To the proud fallen, our dear lost brothers and sisters.

To absent friends."

- A version of the 'Absent Friends' toast, recorded aboard RCES *Apollo*, late 1202

*True, they tell us wreathes of glory
Ever more adorn his brow
But this soothes the anguish only
Sweeping o'er our heartstrings now.*

*Sleep today, O early fallen,
In thy green and narrow bed
Dirges from the pine and cypress
Mingle with the tears we shed.*

- 'The Vacant Chair' – (Trad.)

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

For several years I bought no games products at all. 'If I wanted to play it I'd write it' was my credo, and I lived up to it.

Traveller: the New Era changed all that. After taking a look at the boxed set in a shop (not sure what I was doing there since I never bought anything, but there you are...), I went home and started writing a game that looked a lot like TNE. A few days later I bowed to the obvious and went back to buy the damn thing.

Supplements followed, and suddenly I was buying at an alarming rate. Before I knew it I'd taken it into my head to start writing a TNE novel, which I pitched to GDW in 1994. The result was a long phone call from Dave Nilsen and the offer of a novel contract, but before things could be finalized GDW had to close its doors. I also wrote some New Era fiction that was well-received but did not see publication before the demise of GDW.

I finished the novel. It was published in 2004 by QuikLink Interactive as Diaspora Phoenix. The short fiction I published on the QI website. More importantly, I never ceased to love the New Era with its message of hope and renewal among the wreckage of the past. I never ceased trying to find a way to pick up the storyline once again and move it on from 1202. That will be happening very soon with the publication of Bearers of the Flame, a sourcebook dealing with the rise of the Fourth Imperium from 1248 onwards. But what becomes of the Star Vikings, the bloody-handed tragic heroes of the New Era? What of the future they bought in blood? Where does their Path of Tears end?

Truth is, it doesn't have an end. The Star Vikings leave Charted Space in 1248 on a new mission. What they leave behind is a world they built knowing they would have no place in it. What they find is another story; a new purpose and a grand adventure worthy of the heroes they have become. But these are tales for another day; legends of a future yet to be born.

For now, in 1202, the Star Vikings are pitted against a desperate future. The path ahead is hard. It leads through a darkness lit only by the fires of destruction. Many will fall along the way, martyrs to hope and courage. But the darkness must be braved; it must be rolled back with courage and compassion. It must be fought with both wisdom and star-hot plasma. The future will question the deeds and the motivations of the Star Vikings, but without their deeds that future would not exist at all.

Those living in more comfortable times may look back and call the Star Vikings barbarians, robbers, thugs and murderers, but how can anyone who did not suffer and struggle through those times understand them? Only those who were there can truly see what it was like to live on the edge of extinction; to rebuild civilization with nothing but sweat and blood.

Yes, the Star Vikings do indeed have bloody hands and troubled souls. But their brows, to misquote an old, old song, will be decked forever more with wreathes of glory.

Their actions cannot be comprehended by those who did not live in those times; the only way to truly understand what it was to be a Star Viking is to fight alongside them, to share in the building of a future that will condemn them. And so, at last, we give you that opportunity.

STANDARDS AND ASSUMPTIONS

In order to play this adventure you will need one or another of the *Traveller* rules sets. There are no rules mechanics or stats in this booklet; the Referee will need to create suitable stats. We assume that the adventure will take place in a game setting that looks and feels a lot like the Official *Traveller* Universe (OTU), and that the normal *Traveller* conventions (one-week Jumps, no FTL communications and so forth) apply. If your game universe varies significantly, some tweaking may be necessary.

You will also need some dice as appropriate to your chosen rules set. Pens, pencils and paper are useful, plus maybe something to drink and munchies of some kind. Avenger Enterprises recommends corned beef & potato pie to pacify ravenous players, but tastes vary...

Timeline: All dates correspond to the standard Imperial calendar or the Reformation Coalition calendar. The start date of this adventure is 22/X/1202. A month ago a Star Viking team returned from Promise with an apparently stable and friendly Virus entity calling itself 'Sandman'. Sandman's existence (and his presence within the Coalition) is a secret. Debate over what to do with him rages at the highest levels.

Promise itself, long ruled by several Viral entities, has recently seen massive upheaval and the overthrow of the robotic forces that kept organic life in a state of thralldom around the starport, or hiding in the hills eking out a marginal existence. The world is an important objective in Reformation Coalition policy. There are plans to salvage the remains of the starport/viral stronghold to further fuel Coalition expansion. However, Promise is absorbing a lot of resources that are needed elsewhere. The world lies on the infamous 'Vampire Highway', and needs a heavy commitment of naval forces to clear it – forces that are simply not available.

Elsewhere, tensions with the Empire of Solee (to Trailing of Coalition space) are growing, dragging naval resources in that direction as well. The increasing frequency of Vampire ship raids into Coalition space, of which the assault on Nike Nimbus in IV/1202 was the worst to date, has a lot of Coalition planners worried.

A few months ago, contact was made with the Covenant of Sufren, a small group of worlds to Coreward. The possibility of cooperation and even alliance between Sufren and the RC is attractive, but contact is difficult across several parsecs of space which include segments of the Vampire Highway.

Out in Diaspora Sector, a political entity calling itself Imperial Raymore and presumable centered on the world of that name is engaging in aggressive expansion. Raymore is known to be backed by the Mercantile Guild, and is working to eliminate enemies of the Guild. One such enemy is the Lerun Trade Federation, a cluster of worlds which has retained a little starfaring capability and so far managed to maintain an interstellar civilization of sorts. Agents of the Dawn League Intelligence Service operating under the banner of Project Stardust are known to have contacted the Lerun Federation and reported it to be essentially benign in nature.

All surviving Stardust agents are now part of the Reformation Coalition Exploration Service intelligence department codenamed Moonshadow; those assigned to the Lerun Federation are all missing, presumed dead, and no reports have been received in a long time.

Place: This adventure takes place outside the Primary Area of Operations, on the world of Amoy in Promise Subsector of Diaspora Sector.

Theme: The characters arrive on Amoy to investigate the world as a possible stopover on the route to Sufren. They discover the fate of a missing Star Viking explorer and finish his self-assumed task – that of freeing the people of Amoy from oppression.

CHARACTERS

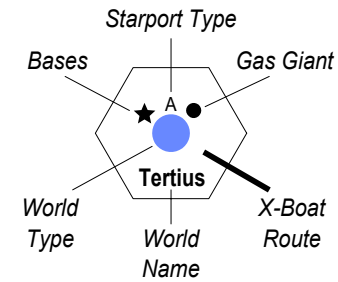
The adventure can be played by a non Reformation Coalition group, for example a Free Trader crew, but is intended for a Star Viking (or 'Lancer') team operating out of Reformation Coalition space.

This adventure can be played (and completed successfully) by almost any group of adventurers if they are able to think creatively and maximize their strengths. There are no encounters or challenges in this adventure aimed at any specific type of character. Different characters will use different approaches and may struggle in some circumstances, but adventuring is not about having the right weapons, skills or equipment to meet a challenge; it is about meeting what the universe throws at you with what you have and finding a way to win – or at least survive.

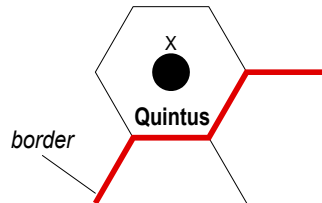
EQUIPMENT

No special equipment is necessary for this adventure, though weapons and tools are always useful. The characters will need to get to Amoy somehow. RC personnel will be dropped off by a ship headed out on a longer mission. If the team has a ship of their own then this may make it a bit too easy to escape from the world if events begin to get out of control. If so, the Referee might decide to have a prowling Vampire ship in the system, forcing the characters to keep their vessel hidden and effectively preventing escape from Amoy.

MAP LEGEND



Travel Zone Code (Red)
No Gas Giant



WORLD CHARACTERISTICS

- No Water Present
- Water Present
- Asteroid Belt

BASES

- ★ Imperial Naval Base
- ▲ Imperial Scout Base
- X Exile Camp
- P Prison Camp

TRAVEL ZONES

Amber Zone

Red Zone

POPULATION

Secundus under one billion

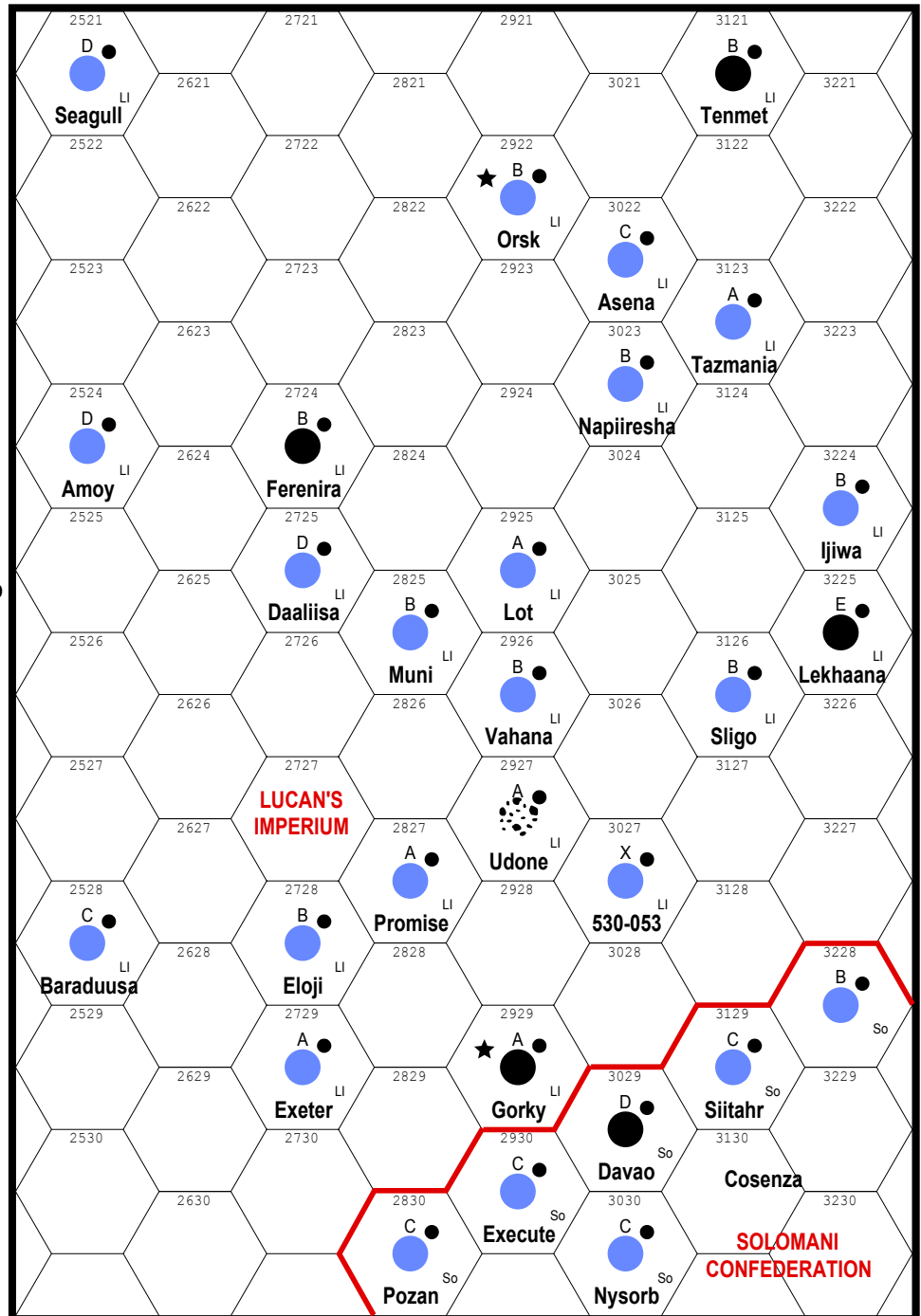
PRIMUS over one billion

World names in red are subsector capitals

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P

Pasdaruu

The Blight

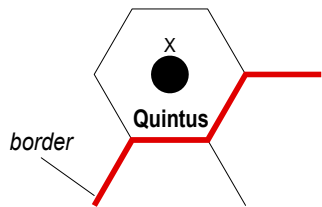
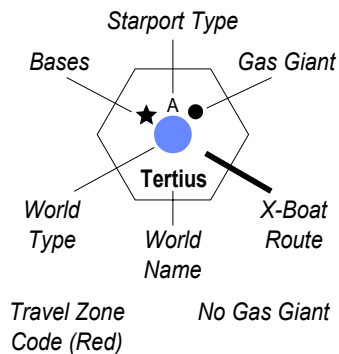


Promise Subsector

(subsector L of Diaspora Sector sector)

Rebellion-Era data

MAP LEGEND



WORLD CHARACTERISTICS

- No Water Present
- Water Present
- Asteroid Belt

BASES

- ★ Imperial Naval Base
- ▲ Imperial Scout Base
- X Exile Camp
- P Prison Camp

TRAVEL ZONES

Amber Zone

Red Zone

POPULATION

Secundus under one billion

PRIMUS over one billion

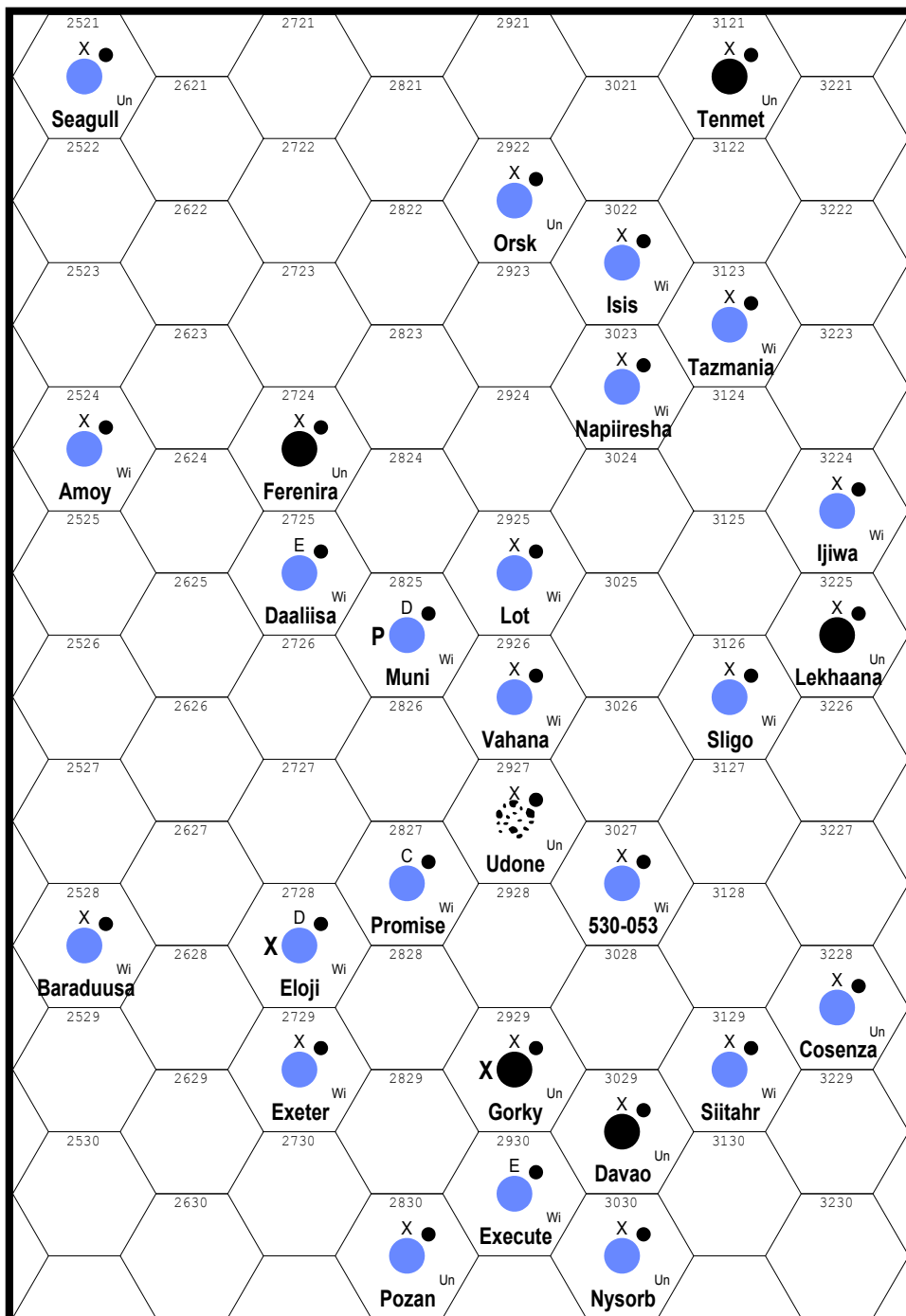
World names in red are subsector capitals

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P

Pasdaruu

The Blight

Theozent



Khulam

Promise Subsector

(subsector L of Diaspora Sector sector)

1202 data

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

BACKSTORY

The resources of the Reformation Coalition are desperately overstretched at present, a situation only made worse by internal political wrangling over where ships are to be built and the purposes they are to be put to. Time to find a solution is running out fast as tensions with Solee rise and operations on the Vampire Highway become increasingly dangerous. The ambitious plan to drive a route through to Sufren and maybe the Lerun Trade Federation, if it still survives, is in danger of being abandoned permanently for lack of suitable interstellar vessels.

It may be that the Reformation Coalition has peaked, and is about to fall back into the wreckage of history. However, if that happens it will not be for lack of effort. With few ships available, a lot can still be accomplished on the ground. For many of the personnel of the RCES and the freelancers working with them there is nothing for it but to have faith and get on with the job at hand.

That itself is nothing new. Incredible things have already been achieved by those who believed. One such was John Hargreave Mitchells, known to his Star Viking buddies as 'Cynic' for his constant grouching and willingness to interpret everything in the worst possible light. Cynic was a crewmember on the Dawn League exploratory cruiser *Ridgerunner* and later RCES *Marathon Victrix* before volunteering for service with a Moonshadow covert intelligence gathering operation.

Despite his nickname Cynic was a solid and dependable, if unheroic, member of the RCES. He sent back a series of excellent reports via the Free Trader Network or covert contacts with RCES ships in orbit around worlds he was scouting. The last that was heard of him was in late 1201. His final message stated that he was headed Spinward aboard a Free Trader and would report back when he could.

Cynic wandered around aboard the Free Trader *Banson's Gem* for several months until the vessel paid a visit at Amoy. There, the crew were murdered by the world's most powerful Technologically Elevated Dictator (TED) and the ship stripped of whatever could be salvaged. The locals were unable to make much use of many of the ship's systems and effectively wrecked the vessel in the process of stripping it.

Cynic was able to escape the massacre, mainly due to his inherent mistrust of everything and everyone. Escaping into the countryside, he eventually reached a village whose inhabitants, at considerable risk to themselves, took him in and nursed his wounds. Cynic, once he had recovered, decided to do what he could for the people of Amoy. He helped as best he could among the local villages, and became a kind of one-man Bootstrap team. For six months he was the only doctor or technician for kilometers. He walked between the villages and towns of Amoy and everywhere he went, he made things a little better.

The TED, who went by the title of Imperial Governor, sent out several teams to find Cynic, rightly supposing that the lone Star Viking posed a threat to his rule. Open rebellion broke out when a 'security' team tried to arrest Cynic in the village of Arkshea's Crossing. The resulting clampdown brought only more revolts, but it was obvious where things were going. Hundreds of innocent people were liable to be killed unless the matter could be resolved. Either Cynic or the Imperial Governor had to be removed from the equation.

And so John Hargreave Mitchells, probably the most cynical and the least heroic of men, set out alone to bring down the world government. He failed of course, and his bullet-riddled corpse was displayed above the gates of the governor's palace for some weeks. A new wave of violence swept the region, and was quelled with ever-greater brutality. Peace – of a sort – descended upon Amoy.

But it would not last, for Cynic knew that some day other Star Vikings would reach Amoy. He taught his villager friends how to operate his personal communications unit and promised them that good people would one day come from the stars to liberate them. With nothing left to them now but hope, the people of Amoy clung to the cynic's promise.

The Reformation Coalition has begun sending out missions to find a good route to Sufren. Ideally, a Jump-3 route will be established that avoids the Guild strongholds at Jump and Bail4, and also the Vampire-haunted Imperial Navy depot in Alurza subsector. If the worlds picked as waystations on the Sufren-Coalition route are inhabited and can be induced to support a small base in return for assistance, they will be important forward bases for the eventual incorporation of Diaspora Sector.

Amoy is a possible site for such a base. And so the Star Vikings have come to Amoy, as Cynic promised. Though their hero is dead, the ordinary folk of Amoy see their salvation in the form of the exploratory team. There is an opportunity here to do some real good, making the lives of decent people better whilst reaching out to distant friends in Sufren. It will have to be done on a shoestring, of course, and in difficult conditions, but this is what the Star Vikings are famous for!

THE WORLD OF AMOY

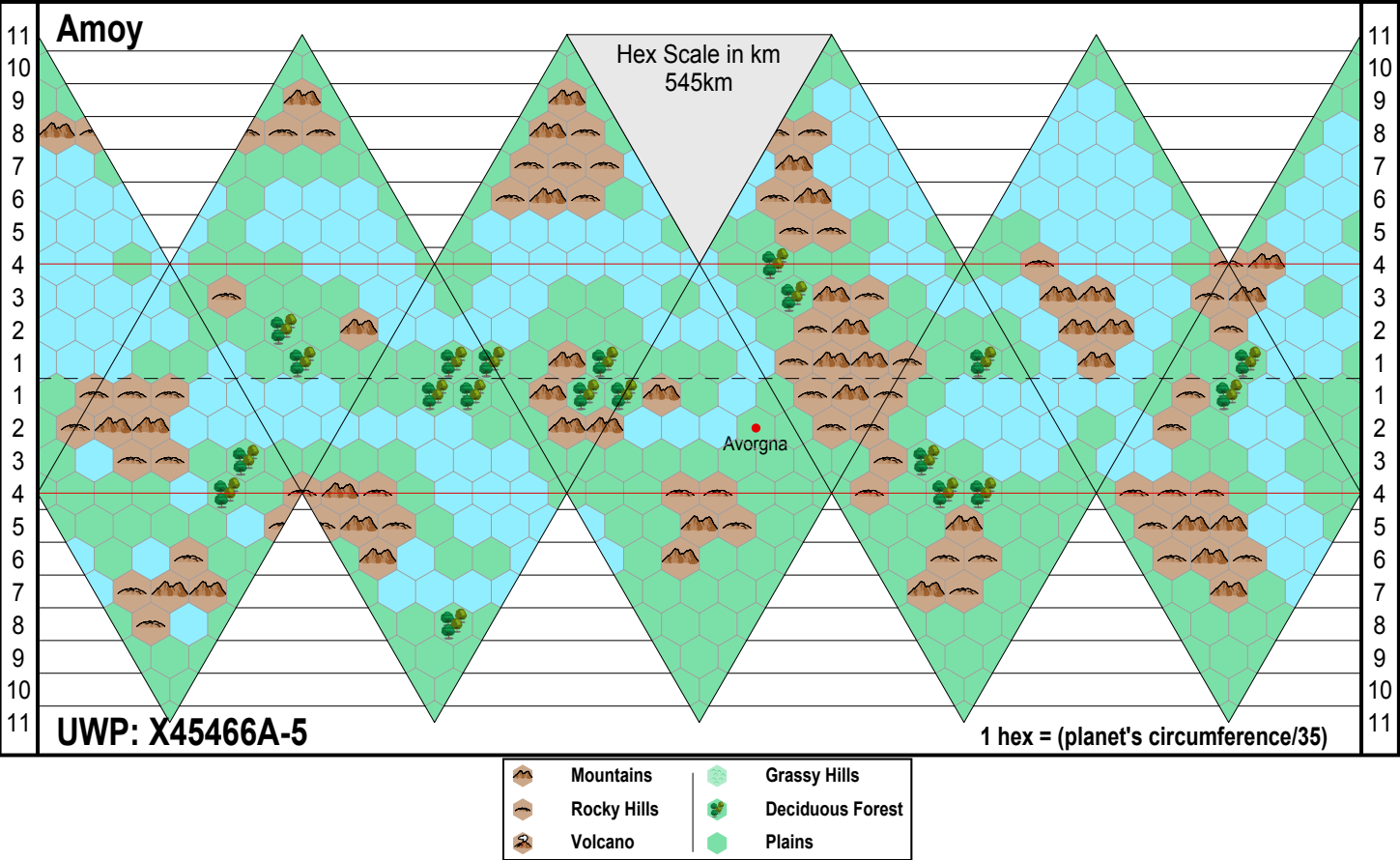
Amoy (X45466A-5 Ag Ni) lies 2 parsecs from the Promise Main in Promise Subsector of Diaspora Sector, and as such has been spared the constant Vampire activity that plagues worlds on the Main. However, the world was hit hard enough by the Collapse and the subsequent Viral Plague, falling from TL-8 to TL-5.

Amoy was always a backwater. Its Class D Starport served the needs of the 3 million or so (mainly human) inhabitants but attracted little trade or offworld interest. The port is long gone now; decayed to a weed-littered field stripped of what little resources remained there. Ironically, the fact that there was little on Amoy in the first place is what saved it from the worst of the disaster and now makes it a good prospect for a nearly recovery.

The world itself is fairly small, with a surface gravity of 0.54g and a thin atmosphere. Amoy is also rather dry, with only 40% surface water. However, the regions settled by humans are well-watered enough to support an agricultural society both before and after the Collapse. Once a laid-back society governed by an hereditary caste of landowners, Amoy is now a semi-feudal society run by an 'Imperial Governor' whose possession of relic TL-8 equipment gives him lordship over a number of lesser 'regional governors'. They in turn rule the masses by simple brutality. Possession of weapons is punishable by death outside a strict social elite loyal to the governors, and their personal forces.

The world's nominal TL is 5, but this is confined to a small number of manufacturing centers controlled by the governors. The Imperial Governor is gradually eliminating TL-5 production and maintenance outside his own immediate domain as a means of control. Thus while 'Imperial' forces have access to TL-5 gear and a limited quantity of TL-8 relic equipment, regional forces have only TL-4 equipment with a handful of TL-5 items. The peasantry are not even that fortunate.

The world is occasionally visited by Vampire ships to which the Imperial Governor pays tribute in the form of crew-slaves and sometimes receives a gift in return. He has learned to be wary of such gifts. The capital, once a minor industrial town named Raihal, is defended by a battery of PAD missiles. They are in bad repair and may or not function when fired – occasional tracking malfunctions have resulted in a couple of devastated regions where a nuclear-tipped missile has come down. Although the missiles are maintained and operated by rote, there is a significant chance that the Imperial Governor could defend his capital from an airborne attack. Thus the Vampires normally send a boat down to an agreed location outside the capital and an uneasy truce prevails.



GOVERNMENT FORCES

Each of the 30 or so Regional Governors has a small force of 4-500 personal troops available. These are used for policing and tax-collecting duty more than full-scale combat, so tend to fight as individuals or small groups at best. About 80% are infantry equipped with simple breech loading rifles. The remainder are mounted on horses and armed with sabers (equivalent to a cutlass) plus 6-shot revolvers. Hardly any of the Regional Governors have any vehicles available to them.

Regional Forces

Forces of a typical Regional Governor are as follows:

Line Infantry

Typically organized for administrative purposes as 50-strong or 100-man companies, regional line infantry in practice tend to be parceled out as garrisons or on 'policing' duties near the regional capital. Equipment is fairly basic – TL 4-5 breech loading single-shot rifles are standard, ensuring that the infantry can deal with unarmed peasants but can pose no real threat to the Imperial Governor's forces. Most regional overlords maintain about 300-400 line infantry who see little action beyond bullying peasants. Occasional inter-governor feuds provide a little combat experience but most forces are comprised of armed thugs rather than trained soldiers.

All infantry forces include a 'pioneer' component; about 10% of the men are supposedly trained to undertake construction and demolition work such as building field fortifications and improving roads. In practice the capability is negligible as training is lax and tools in short supply. This makes it difficult to keep any decent sized force supplied on the move.

Cavalry

Generally grouped for administrative purposes as a squadron of up to 100 men, cavalry are armed with TL-4 or sometimes TL-5 revolvers and sabers. Some governors favor the lance for style and the implicit threat. The cavalry patrols the more distant regions and the roads and tends to be more experienced than the infantry. All the same, cavalry are good mainly for internal security work and would be dismayed by a real fight.

Artillery

Most governors have access to a couple of artillery pieces. These are normally breech loading 75mm field guns mounted on light carriages and drawn by horses. Some have a medium machinegun or two which could in theory be mounted on a field carriage and taken out for operations. In practice, such weapons tend to be used in static positions to defend the stronghold of the owning governor.

Other Forces

Each Regional Governor maintains a personal guard with slightly better equipment; usually rifles and SMGs. These troops, rarely numbering more than a couple of dozen, are the social elite – modern-day household knights. Their loyalty is built over many years of favored treatment and ensured by the fact that their families are housed in the Regional Governor's personal enclosure. Some of them (the most trusted) have their own strongholds holding down critical areas. Leaders of field units are drawn from this elite, who are recruited for loyalty first and competence second.

'Imperial' Forces

The Imperial Governor maintains a similar police/military force (numbering about 15000 men), but it is better equipped and is at least partially trained for open combat. Comprising about 70% infantry armed with rifles and 20% 'dragoons' (some mounted infantry and some actual cavalry) on horseback with carbines and revolvers (they have sabers for show but tend to use them for bullying rather than combat). The remainder of the 'Imperial' forces are a mix of artillery, crude armored forces and household elite troops equipped with TL-8 weaponry (assault rifles and light machineguns), body armor and even radios. The handful of working ground vehicles and a lone air/raft are operated by these 'Troops of the Imperial Household', as are the PAD missiles and associated technology.

A breakdown of government forces follows:

Line Infantry

Organized as battalions of 400 men, in 8 companies of 50 men. 6 companies are 'line' companies equipped with TL-5 rifles and bayonets. 1 company is 'light' and equipped with close-assault weapons (TL-5 submachineguns). 1 company is 'support' and includes the battalion headquarters detachment plus a couple of light (60mm) mortars, usually a radio of dubious reliability and any TL-8 relic equipment that may be available. This is usually nothing more than a single light machinegun or a couple of assault rifles. Support assets are parceled out as needed.

Elite Infantry

Nominally organized into an oversized battalion, the elite infantry ('elite' in this case means 'armed with a reasonable proportion of TL-8 weapons' are normally deployed in 50-man companies to stiffen a line formation or as an assault force. There are 10 companies of elite infantry available. About half of any company have TL-5 rifles, carbines or SMGs according to the unit's envisaged role, with the remainder being equipped with TL-8 gear including assault rifles, light machineguns and possibly a few grenade launchers. Body armor of any sort is uncommon and reserved for commanders and 'household' forces.

Mounted Infantry

The Mounted Infantry battalions use a mix of horses and relic trucks for mobility. They rarely fight as cavalry but dismount for combat. Mounted infantry are armed with TL-5 carbines and horse- or truck-drawn medium machineguns. In a standard 8-company battalion about 75% of personnel are mounted on horseback with the remainder in an assortment of ground cars and trucks. The horsed troops are actually more mobile than the tired old relic vehicles that accompany them.

Cavalry

The Imperial Governor uses cavalry for fast operations and policing, and unlike the mounted infantry these troops are trained to fight from horseback. Troopers are uniformly armed with a pair of TL-5 revolvers, a saber and a carbine, with 10% of each company carrying an SMG instead of the carbine. A few individuals may have relic TL-8 handguns or even SMGs. Cavalry deploys in regiments of 6 50-man squadrons, and trains more for mounted skirmishing and 'police' duties than a full-on battlefield charge.

Armored Troops

The Imperial Governor's trump card is his 'armored' battalion. This comprises a mix of TL-5 armored cars (equivalent to the 'Pathie' type) and armed with a medium machinegun, plus the best of his relic TL-8 trucks, which have been fitted with light armor plate and a machinegun or two. Armor deploys singly for internal security duties and in squadrons of 4 vehicles (breakdowns normally reduce this to 2-3 vehicles per squadron at best). There are 4 'field armor' squadrons and a recovery & support squadron.

Artillery

The Imperial Governor has an assortment of guns available. As well as two batteries each of 6 field guns of the type already encountered,

he has a handful of TL-8 artillery pieces including 3 field guns, a 120mm mortar mounted in a truck and even a 150mm self-propelled howitzer. The artillery is his main advantage over any alliance of regional leaders that may arise, and is defended by detachments of trusted infantry.

The Imperial Governor's Household

The Imperial Governor also maintains a household force of about 1300 nominally TL-8 troops. This is organized as four battalions. The Bodyguard, 200 strong in 4 50-man companies is the Imperial Governor's personal guard. It is armed mainly with TL-8 close-quarters weapons such as handguns and SMGs, plus a couple of unreliable laser weapons. Two companies are infantry, one is equipped as cavalry, and one crews the best of the vehicles, including an Air/raft and a handful of armored trucks. As actual TL-8 weapons wear out they are replaced with whatever can be bought from the Guild or with crude replacements made in the palace workshops.

The second battalion is the Palace Garrison. A 300-strong mix of assault rifle-armed infantry and crews for the various heavy weapons that guard the capital and the leader's fortress there. This force rarely deploys in the field.

Third battalion is the 'technical and support battalion' which mans and guards the critical radar stations, PAD missile sites and remaining TL-8 workshops at the capital. It is some 300 strong and armed mainly with TL-5 weapons except for the security detachments, who have assault rifles and SMGs.

The remaining 500 or so household troops include four independent 'Infantry Companies of the Governor's Household' and the Governor's Companions. The former are TL-8 infantry with horses and some vehicles for mobility. They are armed with assault rifles, machineguns and a handful of precious heavy weapons including Guild-manufactured Crunch Guns, relic LAGs and even some light anti-armor weapons. The independent household companies are often used as special forces since they can overwhelm a rebellious regional governor with little or no trouble.

The Companions are the close friends and cronies of the Imperial Governor. Each is armed differently, with whatever relic equipment is available. Cloth body armor and even the odd suit of Combat Armor protects the members, who function as a personal retinue, a source of troubleshooters, and a group of trusted assistants to hold down critical fortresses. The Companions have access to whatever vehicles they wish.

THE COUNTRYSIDE

The countryside of Amoy is dotted with small villages, mainly numbering less than 200 residents. Few have any sort of garrison; fear of the frequent (but random) spot-searches carried out by government troops keeps most areas in line, and if that does not work then an entire village will be rounded up for tribute.

The peasantry are not permitted any sort of weapon, and places where the people might gather (e.g. market towns) are closely watched by spies and the Regional Governor's troops. This, plus the practice of searching a random village every now and then, makes it difficult for the common folk to organize or equip any sort of resistance.

Despite the difficulties, however, some locals cling to the hope that they will some day overthrow their oppressors. Cynic helped fire this hope. A dedicated band of men and women keeps watch for offworlders while others secretly train with the few precious firearms they have managed to save.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

After arriving on Amoy as a covert intelligence-gathering team, the characters become involved in a revolt against a local lord. The peasants have no chance but are inspired by some sort of legendary savior, who turns out to be a missing Star Viking! The locals' blind faith in their hero and his long-promised aid creates a moral imperative for the team.

The revolt quickly spreads, becoming a civil war which involves the planetary governor's forces. Even the defection of a couple of regional overlords (for their own reasons) to join the rebellion is not enough to make any real difference. A passing Free Trader with ties to the Reformation Coalition offers to extract the team or to carry a message to the nearest Star Viking force. Perhaps if the characters can hold the rebellion together long enough, and if assistance is forthcoming, there may be a glimmer of hope for the people of Amoy. If not, their heroic revolt will win them glory, but it will be ultimately meaningless.

The prize is a friendly mid-tech world on the way to Sufren. The stakes are high and the odds are not good at all. The revolt goes to the knife, with the government forces surrounding the rebels and steadily crushing them. Finally, the locals' faith is rewarded. Two Star Viking vessels, acting wholly without orders, have come to Amoy to bring liberation and hope – just as Cynic promised.

PLAYERS' INFORMATION

STARDUST/MOONSHADOW MISSIONS

The Dawn League was in many ways stupidly optimistic, but its leaders had at least one good idea. While they were seeking fast results by sending unarmed trade ships off into the darkness to be massacred, they set up a longer-term operation which was to gather information from across the surrounding sectors. Codenamed Stardust, the mission consisted of brave and resourceful agents who would go out into the unknown for years on end, hitching a ride on Free Traders wherever they could. Their reports might take a long time to filter back and some of them would undoubtedly disappear without trace, but the Dawn League felt that the possibility of uncovering some critical piece of world-changing information, or of having an agent in place at just the right time, was worth the risk.

When the Dawn League became the Reformation Coalition, Project Stardust was absorbed into the wider RCES intelligence gathering function. Long-range agents still headed off into the depths of space, but more common were targeted Moonshadow missions. The latter were intended to gather information and make contact with possible allies on specific worlds. Some Stardust agents were located on those worlds and proved invaluable. Some continue their missions, never knowing that things have changed back home. And some, of course, are lost forever.

THE COVENANT OF SUFREN

Contact with Sufren has been limited and fleeting, but so far very beneficial. Sharing of anti-Viral technologies has led to great leaps forward in defensive and clearance methods. More concrete cooperation can only lead to a better future for both parties, but this requires a safe Jump 2/3 route across half a sector. Resources to reconnoiter and clear that route are extremely limited, but pro-Sufren proponents believe that it may be the most important ask the Coalition has undertaken to date. No other developed starfaring state has been discovered that is as friendly or as compatible with Coalition goals.

In short, the Reformation Coalition needs Sufren. And therefore, it needs a route across Diaspora sector to maintain contact. Opportunities to make this goal a reality are to be exploited wherever possible.

AMOY/DIASPORA

Amoy is known to have been a TL-8 backwater with a Class D starport and a breathable atmosphere. What little data is available suggests that a significant population has survived and maintains a technological base of some kind. Vampire activity is thought to be moderate to low despite proximity to the Vampire Highway.

Little is known about culture or society, except that the original government structure was an hereditary system of landownership and was both relaxed and tolerant. Some version of this society is likely to exist today.

THE MISSION

The mission is a standard Moonshadow intelligence-gathering operation. The team will be covertly dropped off well away from habitation by the 'Lancer vessel *Ardent Hope*, a Jump-2 Far Trader. *Ardent Hope* will proceed with its mission, a loop through the Thicket Cluster then back to Coalition space via Elusive and Baraduusa.

The team will remain on Amoy for a period of approximately 6-8 weeks before being picked up by another RC vessel. This is scheduled to be the Multimission Scout *RCES Tanskar* but may be a little late or early, and/or a different vessel. This is fairly common with missions of this type. A follow-on mission will be planned based on the team's data. Whether this is a raid, a bootstrap operation or diplomatic contact will depend very much on the team's findings.

Moonshadow teams are normally covert-only observing the locals before blending in with them to gather what information they can without making 'contact'. Revealing the existence or interest of the Coalition is normally an extreme-cases-only situation, but this mission is a little different. Because the world may be important for the Sufren expedition and both time and resources are short, the team has discretion to make contact if this seems like the best course of action.

The team is to proceed with the covert gathering of information on Amoy, with a view to making the world a link on the Sufren Route. Its suitability must be assessed along with the chances of successful diplomatic operations. The team must at all times remember that successful contact with this world depends upon not creating ill-feeling towards the Coalition.

Specific Mission goals are as follows:

- Determine the level and distribution of population, industry and technology levels
- Obtain general information on society, culture and outlook
- Determine the government type and structure, and how amenable it might be to friendly RC contact
- Ascertain information on the level of Vampire and Virus activity
- Determine the level of Guild activity and other offworld contact
- Reconnoiter the main government center if possible and a major town if not, to obtain an indication of the level of military force available to the word rulers, if any
- If possible, make friendly contact in a low-key manner, posing as trade scouts and/or ambassadors from a benign and fairly distant power
- Avoid any action that will prejudice locals against Coalition contact.

The team has considerable latitude in interpreting its orders, as is typical. The Coalition has a policy of backing the decisions of the person on the ground at the time over ideal solutions formulated by planners back home.

EQUIPMENT

Each team member will have his or her own personal equipment and weapons of course, and the following will be provided for use by the team:

- Communications relay kit (backpack sized)
- Large medical kit
- Personal (belt) medikit per team member
- 3 Months' survival rations per team member
- Wilderness survival/camp gear including portable fusion stove, water purification equipment and tentage
- Personal 'bush kit' per team member
- RC-standard cold weather clothing kit per team member
- A selection of typical 'farmer/worker' clothing
- Non-RC 'dress' clothing for 'ambassadorial' situations
- 1 Blade/Large survival knife per team member
- 1 7.6mm autopistol per team member, with webbing, 5 magazines and 200 rounds for each
- 2 7.6mm SMGs, plus 5 magazines and 500 rounds for each
- 1 2.5mm grenade launcher with 30 rounds each of HE and HEDP
- Trade & Contact kit (backpack sized): see below

Weapons are in addition to whatever the team has provided itself with. They are intended as backups for the inevitable lost or damaged weapons rather than to enable the team to fight a war. Indeed, the low-key nature of the mission is such that teams with access to battle dress and fusion weapons (and even more extreme weapons outfits) will not be permitted to take them to Amoy. The Coalition wants its covert teams to be able to defend themselves; it is not so keen on the prospect of them devastating continents or being killed and their powerful equipment taken into hostile service. For this reason, Moonshadow teams are rarely assigned or allowed to carry weapons capable of penetrating standard RC unpowered battle dress. 'Covert' means 'unseen, not even suspected', not 'stealthy high-firepower special assault troops'!

No vehicles are assigned to the operation. This is fairly standard since they are expensive, conspicuous and hard to maintain in the field. The team will be walking wherever they go. However, if team members have grav belts then they will be allowed to take these. Note that the RC does not replace equipment lost or damaged in the field.

The trade pack is a backpack-sized unit containing trade samples suitable to the target. Thus its contents are different when contacting TL-1 primitives than when approaching TL-7 city-dwellers. Mistakes HAVE been made in the past, but the team's pack in this case is the standard mid-tech contact kit. It contains:

- A selection of small gold, silver and platinum ingots as hard currency
- Similar ingots of aluminum, steel, titanium and some specialist alloys (e.g. high-strength alloys)
- A selection of artificial jewelry
- A selection of machined tools and components, e.g. drill bits, blades and such like
- 4 'walkie-talkie' radios capable of sending and receiving to one another only. Batteries are good for 2-3 months
- Small, long-range radio operating on a RCES frequency reserved for Trade Pack communicators. It can talk to a ship in orbit, a standard RCES communicator or another Trade Pack radio.
- A selection of common multipurpose high-tech circuit components (to facilitate repairs of local equipment)
- A basic electronic toolkit
- A basic TL-10 hand computer 'dumbed down' to perform mathematical functions of use in TL-4-9 engineering without giving away technical data
- Samples of durable, beautiful and heat-resistant textiles (each normally has one or two of these features rather than all of them!)
- A basic medical & drugs kit including anesthetics, broad-spectrum antibiotics and anti-venom agents
- A very high quality non-RC model 9mm autopistol with 3 magazines and 50 spare rounds. The weapon is concealed in the pack to be given as a symbol of trust type gift or used for self-defense by the RC team.

The trade kit is intended to be used to demonstrate the sort of things the RC can provide in trade, with the exception of the gold etc which can be used as hard currency in many places. Many mid-tech communities, unimpressed at the idea of regaining the stars, become excited at the idea of improved healthcare, more durable tools and/or the ability to manufacture special alloys. The jewelry, cloth and hand computer tend to interest various types of leaders.

The uses of trade pack items vary considerably. One team might use the jewelry to bribe local officials. Others might use it as an example of what can be done with high-tech manufacturing. A team with a dozen trade packs might set up a communications net among local settlements, allowing response to threats like bandits or natural disasters. The tools can be used to fix broken relic equipment or given as a gift to a local engineer. Contact teams are free to use the pack as they like – the applications are as limitless as their imagination.

TNE ADVENTURE 1: *EARLY FALLEN*

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

The team arrives on Amoy at the start of the adventure. Any fun and games the Referee feels like throwing in along the way is fine, but it's a separate adventure. It really does not matter how the team gets on-planet so long as they do not have extensive vehicle and equipment support and cannot simply jump aboard their ship and depart. If the characters are not a Moonshadow team at all but the crew of a crippled survey or exploration ship downed on Amoy, the storyline will be unaffected.

Initially, the team will likely wander around a bit, getting a feeling for the place. At some point they pick up a faint transmission from somewhere nearby. Investigating, they come across a party of government soldiers rounding up the people of a village. Those who resist are shot out of hand. A desperate plea for aid to the Star Vikings comes over the radio – the locals know about the Coalition and seem to expect Star Viking aid!

Investigating, the characters discover the fate of one of their colleagues, who has become a hero among the locals. This, coupled with the terrible oppression that the peasants live under, has driven them into rebellion. The early stages of this adventure deal with the team's part in the rebellion as local lords try to crush the revolt. A passing RC ship offers to extract the team at this point, but by now the Vikings are heroes among the locals. Deserting them will be hard, though a prudent team may decide to do so!

Then comes a decisive moment; some of the more moderate regional governors offer to come over to the rebels' side and fight against the Imperial Governor who rules the planet. The team is involved in setting up the alliance, and before long the whole region is in flames. Government forces, hastily deployed to the region, are defeated at first but rapidly gain the upper hand.

The rebellion begins to falter and, as some of the new allies betray their friends, the team is involved in a desperate last stand against the forces of the Imperial Governor, who has sworn to slaughter the rebels and ship the survivors offworld as tribute to his Vampire allies. At the height of the battle, RCES troops begin a meteoric assault on the enemy, supported by orbital fire.

With the governor's field army routed, the region is free. All that remains to do is make the situation permanent and explain to the team's superiors how instigating a national revolt, drawing two RCES vessels away from their important mission, and getting the Coalition involved in a ground war on Amoy constitutes 'making friendly contact in a low-key manner'.

Note that the scale and scope of this adventure starts quite small but increases throughout the story. Events keep on getting bigger until the actions of a handful of Star Vikings seem insignificant against the great upheavals taking place. Yet all great events are moved by the people involved, and the Vikings do have a pivotal part to play.

The Referee can gloss over the events of the rebellion and treat *Early Fallen* as an episodic adventure to be played out fairly quickly, or he can dwell on the actions of the characters against the backdrop of planetary chaos. There are so many things that might happen along the way – the characters may decide to set up a hospital and train doctors, forge an alliance, train up a raiding force of cavalry; whatever they like! Only so much can be presented in an adventure of this size – the Referee must adjudicate the rest, but that's what the Referee is for!

Thus *Early Fallen* can be an adventure or an entire minicampaign depending upon the level of detail the Referee wants.

ARRIVALS

The characters' ship slips into orbit over Amoy and descends through the night sky to deposit the team in a rural area some kilometers from the nearest village. It lifts immediately, leaving the team to set up a camp and conceal it. That first night is a strange one, spent under foreign stars listening to the noises of an alien night. Nothing untoward occurs however.

There is little sign of current habitation around as dawn breaks, but even a cursory look around shows that Amoy is not what it once was. Away to the north the ruins of a small town can be seen, the wide road leading to it now a pitted and broken-up straight line of rubble choked with weeds. The skeletons of vehicles can be seen on the sides of the road here and there.

Nearer the villages, it is obvious that the locals have fallen back on a small-town/farming village model, and that they have little transport available. There are some tracks here and there used by herders or leading to the local market town, but obviously most people stay within a few hours' walk of their home village.

As the characters are making their initial reconnaissance, they pick up a burst of static and a garbled transmission. It is gone in seconds and not repeated, making a trace impossible, and there is no reply to any response they make. The strange thing is that the transmission was on an RCES Tacnet frequency, and none of the team knows anything about a Star Viking operation out here. The signal came from somewhere fairly close by; within a few kilometers. There is a village about the right distance away; perhaps some answers might be found there?

FRIENDLY CONTACT...?

The village ahead is known to the locals as Maiteen. It is typical of its type, a cluster of wooden homes with a couple of barns, surrounded by fields and livestock enclosures. There are a couple of unidentifiable larger buildings – maybe a church, town hall or similar amenities. Even from a distance, the place looks poor. It is also very obvious that all is not well.

A large number of people – possibly the entire population of the village – is standing in a cattle enclosure while several armed men mounted on horses guard them with what appears to be a mix of handguns and curved swords. The guards are obviously to control the villagers and keep them from escaping rather than to protect them. Other armed men, all wearing a uniform of sorts, are moving in and out of the buildings, sometimes coming out with objects. It is not possible to see what they are collecting from this distance.

Some of the villagers have been segregated, and others are being selected from the mass to join them. These individuals are also guarded; some of them are 'encouraged' with blows if they do not move quickly enough. There are a couple of unmoving bodies on the ground near one of the big buildings; unarmed civilians who have been put up against a wall and shot.

If the team are at all stealthy in their approach to the village they will not be noticed by the complacent guards until they are very close. By then, the team will have picked up another Tacnet transmission. It is on the emergency all-units distress frequency, like the last one. It is scrambled and encoded, and comes through clearly. Star Viking comms sets identify the caller as 'Cynic, status Unknown', but the caller is no Star Viking.

A trembling young girl's voice comes over the radio: "If you're there, please help us. They're going to take the ones they want and shoot the rest of us. He said you'd come... oh please..." there is a moment of silence punctuated by harsh adrenaline-forced breathing. If the characters transmit there is no answer – the unknown caller may not even know how to receive.

A couple of soldiers go into another house, and the sound of the door banging can be heard over the radio. A final plea is whispered into the headset, followed by a shout and the unmistakable soft whipcrack of laser fire in an atmosphere. The plea becomes a wordless snarl, there is a single gunshot, and a soldier reels out into the street before collapsing face down, his wounds smoking.

Every head in town turns as a girl or young woman staggers out into the street clutching a Star Viking-issue Personal Defense Laser. She has apparently been shot. The girl is definitely no Viking operative; she is about 14, blonde and dressed in the same clothing as the rest of the townsfolk. She would be very attractive in other circumstances.

There is a moment of shocked silence across the entire town. All that can be heard is the girl's harsh breathing and a faint whimper every time she takes a step. A couple of the townsfolk take a step towards her, others more wisely dive to the ground or drag others down, and all hell breaks loose.

The soldiers open fire with their revolvers. A couple shoot down helpless villagers while others fire at the girl. The range is fairly long and the initial shots miss as the girl clamps down the trigger and empties her weapon at the nearest soldiers. After it stops firing she gazes at it numbly for a second then drops it to the ground, breaking into a stumbling run away from the soldiers, towards the edge of the village.

There is no coherent response. Some of the soldiers continue to fire, some give chase. Some try to control the villagers with sword and pistol, but the people have nothing left to lose. The crowd tries to scatter as the braver souls attack the nearest soldiers with their bare hands, dragging men from their horses and stomping them to death. Others are shot down before they can reach their targets. The Star Vikings came here to make friendly contact if possible and instead have received a request for help from people who are being massacred before their eyes. There is a strong argument in favor of hiding and observing, but even if the characters' morals permitted it, they have seen Star Viking equipment in use and if the soldiers win it will be taken back to their commander with the news that it was used against them.

The team will have to do something...

Forces in the Village

There are about 20-25 soldiers remaining in the village. All are equipped with a leather or quilt jerkin that offers no protection against firearms but looks 'tough' and might stop a peasant's improvised weapon, a 6-shot 9mm revolver and a saber. They are typical of the type – quite capable of beating on a peasant or shooting someone at close range but they are not even decent marksmen on foot, let alone from horseback. They can be driven off by any serious threat and are not likely to fight as a unit, though odd individuals might team up here and there.

The villagers are unarmed but desperate. There are some fallen weapons and a few objects that could be turned into weapons lying around. For the most part the villagers will just scatter or head for cover with a few brave souls fighting back against the soldiers. Some may confuse the situation by milling around or even trying to attack the characters. Anything that makes the locals think that the characters are Star Vikings (recognizable equipment, or just shouting out something like 'we're here!' will be enough) will galvanize the locals to stupidly heroic efforts.

AFTER THE BATTLE

The mood in the village of Maiteen ranges from terror to euphoria. Many are dead, but the soldiers were probably going to massacre the entire populace other than the ones they wanted for tribute. They have been driven off, but everyone knows that they will be back. Governor Questell, the local overlord, will send hundreds of troops to level the village within days. Nobody knows what to do.

Yet at the same time, the locals are delighted to see the Star Vikings. Amid the babble, the story emerges of how Cynic came to the village on his travels and helped fix an old generator that was being used to power the workshop used by the village craftsmen. It was the heart of the village's prosperity until it broke down, and after it was fixed things were better – until the soldiers took it away.

More tales of Cynic come out; how he single-handedly saved three people from a fire, waded into a rising river to rescue a drowning herdsman, healed the sick, drove off wild animals, fixed stuff and even gave good relationship advice to a troubled couple. Some of the tales are obviously exaggerated, some are outright invention, but at the core of it there is an obvious truth: this lone Star Viking has become a culture hero to these people.

The locals say that the story is the same in other villages; wherever he went Cynic drank, groused, swore, occasionally brawled and sometimes seduced married women, but he always left things better than they were when he arrived. He even took the time to teach some young men and women the rudiments of field medicine and sent them out into the world to teach others. Of course, the regional governor sent troops to arrest him, and Cynic had to leave. Eventually he is said to have gone up against the planetary governor and been killed. But before he went away he left a legacy among the people of the villages.

Cynic stayed for a long while in Maiteen, and came back more than once. He lived with a local woman, a widow, and her young daughter, and was considered to be a part of the community. The girl, Lauren, he adopted as his daughter and heir, and taught her to use his radio. He always maintained that some days 'the good guys' would come from the stars and save his adopted kinfolk.

Even when the soldiers came and killed Cynic's wife, destroying everything that he had worked so hard to repair, Lauren kept the faith and hid her foster-father's gear. She would call for aid whenever there was a shooting star, as Cynic had taught her, just in case it was a Star Viking ship. Now Lauren is severely wounded, the village is about to be destroyed and everyone from it hunted down to be taken as 'tribute', and things look bleak indeed.

But Cynic always said that when things looked blackest, that was the time to believe. Salvation would come, he said, if they only believed.

Notes:

Lauren and some of the other wounded villagers will live if they can be treated properly. One of the unidentified buildings is a makeshift wooden hospital that has clearly been purpose built by someone who knew what he was doing. It has been smashed up by the soldiers but might be salvageable. People used to be brought here from other villages to be cared for by Cynic's students. If there was ever any doubt his story is real, the proof is in what he built right here.

The locals do not know for certain what happens to those taken as 'tribute'. They are never seen again. The usual choices are young men and women, and anyone who seems to have any technical aptitude. The latter sometimes turn up in the entourage of a Regional Governor, but more often disappear like the rest. There are rumors that some are taken as slaves to the regional or Imperial governor, and that others are shipped offworld aboard mysterious starships that land near the capital.

THE FLAMES OF REBELLION

The villagers are desperate. They do not know what to do. All villages are forbidden to take in wanderers, so anyone leaving his or her home to escape retribution must either take to the wilderness or live as a bandit on the fringes of civilization. The locals genuinely believe that the Star Vikings have answers to this problem, and seem to expect hundreds of heroic Viking Marines to land at any minute and fix all their problems.

Nothing much happens for a few days. Governor Questell has his mounted forces scattered all over the region, and calls them in. He then puts together a punitive expedition to burn the village (and maybe a couple of nearby ones too, just to make the point), comprising most of his mounted forces, some 50 or so men. His infantry would take three days to march up to the village, so as usual he deploys his fast troops to deal with what he thinks is an insurrection among ill-armed locals. Reports of exotic weaponry are discounted as the excuses of incompetents.

Meanwhile, in the Maiteen region, word has gone around the local villages. The Star Vikings are here! People begin to arrive at the village to see for themselves. Most are just curious, but a few come in with weapons they have kept hidden (risking instant execution) for years. By the time word comes in that a mounted column is approaching the village there are 30 or so armed locals present, all determined to fight their oppressors.

The locals have a mix of weapons, mainly revolvers and breech loading rifles or carbines. A few shotguns, relics of a time when farmers were allowed varmint-guns, make their appearance. The locals are determined but basically clueless. They may inflict a few casualties on the column but are essentially doomed.

The governor's tactics are simple. Normally it is enough for the troops to show up and ride into town with weapons drawn to quell any disturbance. Since there has been violence against his men he plans to come in hard, shooting down anyone who resists, but he does not expect serious opposition and is very overconfident. A fast charge into the center of town and a few pistol shots should see the locals falling over themselves to surrender, or else chased helplessly into their homes where they can be arrested at leisure. Even the presence of barricades will not deter this approach. The troops have had it their own way for far too long.

Thus the column approaches the town, halts a few hundred meters away, then just rides in at speed, men whooping and firing weapons at anything that moves. Up until the violence starts the troopers' mood is one of amusement; a bit of sadistic excitement to break the monotony of bullying. There is little loot to be had in a town like this, but atrocities will be expected rather than punished. The sort of men (and a women) who would sign up to serve in this manner relish or at least will not object to such things.

The villagers and their new armed allies of course resist, and the fighting spirit of the mounted troops turns out to be rather brittle. Laser or automatic weapon fire causes dismay and panic; actual casualties are viewed with disbelief. The attack is broken in seconds. Rallying well out of range, the survivors form up for a second, more deliberate, charge. It hardly even gets going before petering out. The troopers have never faced anything like this and they don't like it.

Messengers are sent off to bring up infantry, and the remaining cavalry settle down to watch the town and prevent anyone escaping.

During the 4 days it will take to bring up infantry reinforcements, the Star Vikings have an opportunity to make life difficult for the watchers. If they have decent rifles, they will discover that what the cavalry think is 'out of range' is very much too close for comfort. It may be that rather than bottling up the village, the governor's force may end up just trying not to be driven away.

A few dozen mounted troops cannot cordon off a whole village effectively, and messengers slip both out and in, along with more recruits. Few have any weapons but most arrive with a sharp implement of some kind and the expectation to be handed some kind of Star Viking uber-weapon. Disappointed in that area, the new recruits are still willing to stay and find a way to fight.

Eventually, a scout slips into town with the news that a large force of some 400 or so riflemen is approaching, accompanied by horse-drawn wagons (probably loaded with provisions and ammunition), a handful of cavalry and what sounds like a crude breech loading cannon. The battle has begun in earnest.

THE BATTLE OF MAITEEN

The governor does not really appreciate the seriousness of the situation, but he knows that he must squash this rebellion, and fast, or else he will have to answer to the Imperial Governor. The idea that he might actually be defeated by the rebels is laughable. He has decided to personally deal with the situation however, and accompanies the force on horseback.

Having rushed the defenses and failed, the governor has a new plan. His foot troops are organized into eight roughly 50-man companies; he will deploy six of them widely spread to surround the town, with one to defend the wagons and the cannon and one in reserve. His remaining horsed troops will remain well back to chase down anyone who tries to escape from the village or to make a final charge as necessary.

The crux of the plan is the cannon. It is neither big nor fast-firing but is quite capable of blasting the town apart with explosive shells. (Treat this gun as a 7.5cm rifled field gun as per *World Tamers' Handbook*, but it loads from the breech and uses single-part shells rather than separate powder and projectile.) The governor's plan is simply to destroy the town around the locals' ears, and to drive out the survivors to be shot down by the infantry. The wreckage can then be cleared and burned to the ground.

The plan is entirely workable, but does not take into account the presence of offworld weapons. All the same, it will be a hard fight, with nearly 400 rifle-armed troops outside the town and rather fewer than that within, even counting the determined but unarmed volunteers. The governor's infantry have occasionally clashed with those of other governors, and know enough to fight dispersed as skirmishers, but they are neither well disciplined nor highly skilled. As with the cavalry, they will be dismayed by grenades, automatic weapons or significant casualties. Even just 3-4 men in a company downed within the space of a minute would be a terrible shock to these troops who rarely lose a man.

If the gun can be taken out somehow, or the crew killed, then the governor will have to resort to a conventional infantry attack. Lacking the discipline or the resolve necessary to take casualties and keep going, the infantry will put in such an attack in very half-hearted fashion and can be driven back. Things may become rather fraught for a time, with assault parties actually entering the village, but it should be possible to hold out.

Finally, as the day begins to darken, the governor decides to make a 'final push' that will break the defenders for sure. He signals a general assault by all the encircling infantry, feeds in his reserves, and then throws the cavalry into the fight. He himself, naturally, remains at a safe distance surrounded by picked guards.

This is the turning point. With enemies coming in from all sides and everyone looking to the Star Vikings for both leadership and heroic solutions to the situation, this is the moment where the rebellion will really take root – or be stamped out for good. In the latter case, it won't matter to the Star Vikings as those who are not killed in the fighting will be rounded up and either shot or traded to a Vampire ship (after being tortured for information) as an extra-special tribute.

Things are desperate enough for anyone, but the resolve of the attackers is brittle. The assault cannot be sustained and any defeat will drive the company receiving the setback into full retreat. It may rally, but only so many times. At last, the sun goes down and the attacks peter out. The governor pulls his men back to surround and observe the town, and tries to collect weapons from the battlefield to prevent the locals from using them on the morrow.

If the characters can survive this first day, the initiative shifts to them. Governor Questell does not know what to do about a successful rebellion and has been demoralized by the defeat of his troops. Other than raging at his commanders to make a greater effort in the morning, he can only think to keep pushing until one side or the other breaks. The alternative is a siege while he calls for help from the Imperial Governor, and that would mean a serious loss of face. Questell is caught between desperation and cluelessness, a dangerous place to be.

The Star Vikings might decide to make life difficult for the besiegers by attacking them in their camp. The first time they do this it will be a total surprise. Despite their losses the government forces are still very complacent; no bunch of peasants would dare assault them during the night! It might even be possible to kill the governor and plunge his forces into leaderless chaos (not that it would be much different to the present situation).

The following morning, if the government forces have taken too many casualties for too little gain they may instead decide to withdraw. Even if the attack is renewed it is even more half-hearted than before unless there are clear signs that the defenders are caving in. At some point, the governor (or his field commander) will decide that an assault is not possible. It is only a short step from here to deciding to pack up and retreat to the capital until reinforcements arrive. This decision may be helped along a little by raids and attacks by the Star Vikings and/or their followers.

It may take several days, but eventually the government forces will pull out. If they are harried they will abandon stocks of ammunition and other equipment in their haste to get away. They may even be harassed by parties of guerillas on the way back home. Whatever happens, the Star Vikings have saved (whatever is left of) Maiteen village and confirmed the legend of Cynic. News begins to come in of a wider uprising, and everywhere the word is the same – the Star Vikings have come to Amoy; things are about to get better for everyone.

The rebels have captured some weapons and ammunition. They may have an opportunity to storm Governor Questell's stronghold and overthrow him, seizing yet more arms in the process. Maybe they can even march on the capital and free everyone! Anything seems possible in these jubilant days if people just believe. And that's the problem the Star Vikings face, for what these people believe in to desperately is the legend of a single man, distorted to almost religious proportions.

And the onus of that belief falls right on them – a Moonshadow team in way over their heads.

THE TAKING OF AVORGNA

It is not long before the whole region is aflame with rebellion. Long-concealed weapons come out of hiding and increasing numbers of locals descend on wherever the Star Vikings are, asking to be armed or trained, or both. The more aggressive rebels have already begun ambushing government patrols, driving what remains of the government forces back into the regional capital, Avorgna. There are even rumors that other governors are 'having trouble' with their peasants.

Governor Questell (or his successor) is virtually a prisoner in his stronghold at Avorgna, defended by the demoralized remnant of his troops. No relief force has yet been sighted, so there may be an opportunity here to storm the city and liberate it. This would not only give access to the weapons of the garrison but also what limited manufacturing capabilities Questell commands. The rebels are going to need guns and ammunition if they are to repel the Imperial Governor's response when it finally comes.

Even if the Star Vikings are opposed to the scheme, the rebels will attack anyway.

Questell's stronghold is not really designed to resist a determined assault. It is simply a walled enclosure within the town with heavy gates and a firing step for troops. There are three breech loading cannon like the one already encountered but nowhere to mount them on the walls. Within the wall is a complex of warehouses, workshops, barracks and of course the governor's rather grand residence. Like the rest of the complex it was built in the last 50 years or so, mainly of TL-5 brickwork. It is a strong and sturdy house, but the idea that it might be the final redoubt of a lord who had lost control of the countryside never occurred to the designers. It is obvious that it would not hold out for long. Thus the defense will concentrate on holding the outer perimeter and responding to any penetration with mobile reserves.

The cannon will be sited to cover breaches in the walls, firing canister over open sights into any group assaulting through them while rifle squads advance with the bayonet or saber-armed cavalry charge across open spaces in the compound to scatter the survivors. The defenders have no illusions about their fate if they fall into the hands of the rebels – too many years of oppression and casual mistreatment have ensured they will meet a sticky fate.

The governor's men are thus rather desperate, though their morale is brittle at best. If the walls are taken (or the gates are breached) then the defenders will fall back in disorder. And try to make a stand in the nearest buildings. A frontal assault will be costly, especially if the house must be stormed, but it is possible that a clever ruse or stealthy infiltration may succeed instead of brute force. If the governor's men can be made to see the defense is hopeless then offered a suitable guarantee of their safety (this will be a tough one to negotiate!) then they may be willing to surrender.

The rebels will indeed give anyone they capture short shrift unless persuaded otherwise. They are surprisingly merciful in their justice, in that they will favor shooting enemies out of hand like vermin rather than the rigmarole of show trials and torture sessions. Convincing the rebels to spare those that fought against them may be hard, and there will even be incidents of violence against the governor's family and those of his men. Some rebel leaders will try to protect the noncombatants; others will lead a slaughter if given the chance.

The aftermath of the battle may well be more difficult than the actual combat.

THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM

The rebels have more or less cleared one region of government forces. Other areas are suffering uprisings, but nothing on the same scale as here. It seems obvious that either the local governors will march to suppress the rebellion, or the Imperial Governor will bring his own forces – perhaps both. The rebels have a little time to prepare, and the resources of the city to work with. These are not impressive, but

with some hard work and innovation it should be possible to turn out a few revolvers and carbines or rifles every day, plus quantities of ammunition.

The rebels are desperately short of weapons though, and ammunition is even scarcer. Improvised weapons are going to be necessary, and it is a sign of how determined the rebels are that they are prepared to field units equipped with cavalry sabers, pikes and hatchets if there is nothing else available.

There is nothing for it but to prepare as well as possible and to look at other ways to fight the coming war. Small parties of armed rebels might be able to skirmish with advancing enemies and delay them for a time, whilst others raid supply lines to make life difficult for the government forces. These are delaying tactics only however.

A few of the ideas thrown about by the rebels (or obvious to the Star Vikings) include:

- We have (or can get) more horses than guns. How about creating a unit of lancers?
- How about using some of the horses to mount infantry for mobility, dismounting to fight then retreating?
- Close-assault units equipped with hand weapons and sabers could be effective in urban fighting
- The cannon could be augmented with rocket batteries. These would be crude and random but better than nothing
- The town is not fortified, but surely the Star Vikings know how to build defenses against rifles and artillery fire?
- The radios from the trade pack could be used to coordinate forces and maximize their value
- The Vikings' weapons will make them a deadly force at the critical point, but in a mass battle their value will be more limited

Amid these feverish preparations, the Star Vikings receive a transmission on their radios. It is from a starship in orbit!

The vessel is a Free Trader, the *Borkhan Lara*, which has had dealings with the Coalition in the past. She is headed back into Coalition space after a trading cruise and seeking trade opportunities as she goes. Her captain has not heard the rumors of what happened to *Banson's Gem* on Amoy, and will appreciate the warning. The ship has a set of 'friendly codes' aboard given by the Coalition and will be inclined to trust anyone who can identify themselves as Vikings.

Indeed, Captain Salen Durna of the *Borkhan Lara* is sufficiently grateful that she offers to extract the team if they want. Their situation is pretty desperate and they are in way over their heads; no-one could fault them for jumping aboard the first ship off Amoy. Nobody but the desperate rebels who see them as glorious saviors, of course.

If the characters choose to leave: The adventure is over. They will arrive back at base to a brief inquiry that establishes that no blame should fall on them. Remaining on Amoy would have been reckless in the extreme, and would probably only have succeeded in depriving the Coalition of a Moonshadow team. When the Coalition returns to Amoy the rebellion has been crushed and the leaders executed. The Imperial Governor will be in the process of obtaining weapons to fight off a return by Star Vikings, and the common folk will harbor a bitter resentment for their ex-heroes. The chance to make Amoy a link on the Sufren Run has been missed.

If the characters decline to leave: Captain Durna expressed a mix of admiration and disbelief at their stubbornness. She offers to take their report to Coalition space as fast as possible, on the off-chance that help might arrive in time. She also conducts a quick sensor sweep of the area and gives the team an updated map which shows several forces converging on the region from nearby cities, and a larger army marching from the capital. Finally, she has her crew donate every spare weapon aboard the ship; a motley assortment of handguns, shotguns and a couple of mid-tech assault rifles they have picked up along the way. She shrugs off thanks with the suggestion that maybe she can get a cheap refit out of it someday.

After the Free Trader has left, the locals settle down to their preparations. Enemy forces are just days away now, and there is an air of both excitement and terror about the city. Durna's assessment places the approaching force as three columns of about 500 infantry and 100 cavalry each, all headed for a point a short distance from the city. Each group contains a couple of field guns.

There is also a larger group of about 1000 infantry marching quickly up from a different direction, headed for the city. Its associated cavalry, about 150 of them, are moving fast on ahead and – curiously – are displaying a white flag.

AN HISTORIC MEETING

The cavalry are seeking a parlay. They are a joint force serving two other governors; Reese and Orander. Both are known to be more moderate than Questell and many of the others, but neither is particularly pleasant to live under all the same. They do, however, have an offer to make.

If the characters can make a peaceful contact with Governors Reese and Orander, they explain that they are willing to throw in with the rebels against the other governors. Their motivations are not altogether altruistic; they do not like the increasingly heavy tribute and taxation being placed upon them, and they have feuds with some of the other governors. Neither has been particularly kind to their people over the years, but they are less deliberately cruel than some. More importantly perhaps, they are here with a thousand rifles.

The deal Reese and Orander offer is simple: if they can inflict a sharp reverse on the other lords and make it clear to the Imperial Governor that he cannot regain control of the region without heavy losses, they may be able to negotiate a settlement whereby they, along with the leader of the rebels (they think in terms of lords and governors rather than people) become a triumvirate ruling the area. They will negotiate greatly reduced tributes in return for not prolonging the struggle.

It is a gamble, but a swift victory here may convince the Imperial Governor to take what is being offered rather than risk losing more. To this end, they propose that their force approaches the three other governors' armies as they muster as if to join them, then attack suddenly. The rebels can then come out of their positions to complete the victory.

Both regional governors actually mean to carry out this plan, and think that it can work. If their idea is rejected they will join forces with the others as if they had always intended to and share in the spoils of a crushed rebellion, perhaps gaining a slice of Questell's territory for themselves. Neither is an especially good man; they will take what they can get out of the situation.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

There is little hope for the rebels if the governors' forces unite. 2500 riflemen, a dozen cannon and 450 or so cavalry will surely be enough to crush them sooner or later. There are two possibilities, however. The Star Vikings might fight an inspired defensive battle to keep the enemy from uniting, lunging against first one column then another using the radios and Durna's maps to coordinate their strikes. A single defeat would be the end for the rebels, but if they can achieve local superiority they might break one or more enemy columns and reduce the overall odds to a manageable level. Alternatively, if they accept the offer then Reese and Orander will indeed play their part. In this case, the odds are about even and the governors' troops will be in a state of shock at being attacked by allies. A sharp victory is indeed possible, though it will still be a hard fight.

Afterward, things get difficult. Reese and Orander act like great lords and do not appreciate the advice or non-compliance of others. They are not totally unreasonable and do not make unacceptable demands, but they tend to give orders without regard to the fact that they are in the conquered city of the last leader to try that around here. Rebel commanders, their positions bought in courage and blood, do not appreciate being talked down to or given orders by lowly riflemen. Fights are not uncommon, and even the odd shooting.

However, a compromise can be hammered out if the Star Vikings are determined enough. The factories are turning out handfuls of firearms and people are coming in from all over the region to be trained with them. The Imperial Governor's army is moving slowly, hampered by a hostile countryside and the need to protect its supply chain. But it is coming, no doubt of that.

It will be fully 6 weeks from the storming of Governor Questell's stronghold to the arrival of the Imperial Governor's army in the region. In that time, the Star Vikings have plenty to do. There are troops to train, scouts to send out, expeditions by local governors trying their luck to be fended off, fortifications to be put in place, disputes to mediate... and if they have time to spare the team could even try to improve things for the locals by training medics and fixing relic equipment!

None of the surrounding regions is as beset by rebellion as here, but by providing a few guns and an advisor or two, the Star Vikings can help keep the local lords from assisting the Imperial Governor and his men. A handful of motivated individuals, especially ones sent by the legendary Star Vikings, can make a huge nuisance of themselves and maybe even trigger a new uprising.

However, late in the sixth week, news comes in that the Imperial Governor is close to the River Alroy. It is a pretty fair obstacle but once across he is just days from the city. He has about 8,000 men with him, some of whom are mounted in relic vehicles and armed with TL-8 weapons. The rebels have approximately equal numbers but are less well equipped and trained. A few have already started to drift away despite the rallying call of their leaders.

The beginning of the rebellion is over and the endgame is about to begin.

DEFENDING FORWARD

The river Alroy represents a major obstacle to the majority of the Imperial Governor's forces. There are few crossing points suitable for artillery, vehicles and supply wagons. It is obvious that a forward defense has certain critical advantages to offer. First, there is very real defensive value of the river, and just as importantly there is the political factor. If the enemy can be halted at the river, it will demonstrate the rebels' control of the region and strengthen support among the populace. There are rumors that some of the regional governors are thinking of making an accommodation with the rebels or even joining them, but this depends on showing them that there is a good chance at victory.

In addition to all that, once across the Alroy there is really no good place to stop the Imperial Governor's advance short of Avorgna. To accept siege in the city means exposing its population to the horrors of war and the loss of the initiative. Abandoning the city would be politically disastrous in addition to losing the production from its workshops.

In short, there are horrific risks in defending forward at the river, but there seems to be no other option. Even if the Star Vikings are dead-set against the plan, so many rebel leaders support it that it will go ahead anyway. The only result of dissention will be to cause unease in the rebel camp.

And so the rebel 'army' marches to the Alroy Crossings, a region where the river is shallow and forded at several places. A couple of villages, Dokeen and Alroybank, offer ready-made (if flimsy) defensive positions which can be improved by some spade work in the little time remaining. Dire warnings from the Star Vikings about the power of artillery will not dissuade the rebels from the plan – there are simply no alternatives.

Just a couple of days after the rebels arrive, horsemen are sighted on the far bank. Advancing under fire, they make a half-hearted reconnaissance of the fords and retire quickly. It is obvious that an attack is imminent.

At this point the rebels' field force numbers about 5000 riflemen, of whom about 1000 are professionals – as much as that means on Amoy – under Governors Reese and Orander. After a few weeks of training the rebel militia has achieved a basic level of competence at shooting and maneuvering, but discipline and organization quickly break down even on exercise. Individually brave, the rebels are simply not a cohesive fighting force. Fortunately the enemy is little better.

The rebel rifles are supported by whatever the Star Vikings can scrape together; a couple of cannon, improvised rocket batteries and maybe a few more modern weapons. A small force of mounted infantry is available to scout the river and detect flanking attempts. All in all, it is just about possible that the rebels can hold the crossings. If they can, perhaps a settlement can be negotiated. And even if not, there are a few rays of hope.

Small groups of riflemen and mounted infantry have slipped across the river to harass the enemy supply lines, which are quite long and almost certainly inadequate. Armed parties come in daily offering to fight alongside the famous heroes of the rebellion and there are rumors that at least one regional governor has been overthrown or is marching to join the rebels in return for keeping his position under the new regime. In short, every day bought at the fords makes the Imperial Governor weaker and the rebels stronger – and of course there is the outside chance that tomorrow's sky might be lit by Star Viking assault capsules.

The First Assault

The first clash comes in the form of the Advance Guard and the Cavalry Division (see the army description in the Dramatis Personae) trying to force the river crossings in a rush. About 1200 infantry, 600 cavalry (or mounted infantry) and 2-3 armored cars are available. The plan is to rush some cavalry across the river in a frontal assault covered by the machineguns of the armored cars firing from the far bank, then follow up with infantry. The remainder of the cavalry will attempt to flank the main defenses by crossing higher and lower on the river. This will either let them into the rebels' rear or divert some forces from holding the river.

The assault is rushed and ill-planned, and stands little chance in the face of determined resistance. The rebels are quite capable of squatting in foxholes and shooting down the hated government troops as they flounder across the river. Machineguns and the volume of rifle fire from the far bank are more than the average rebel was prepared for. Some areas of the defenses may be taken and require a counterattack to restore the situation, but for the most part there is no real danger of a government success here.

The government commander will feed in reinforcements until well after success has become impossible, but by the end of the day the riverbank defenses are still in rebel hands and the demoralized advance guard retires into camp. The following morning a routine of sniping across the river begins, which lasts for three days as the main force comes up.

Forcing the Crossings

At dawn on the fourth day, the Imperial Governor's forces are ready to begin their attack. This is a much more deliberate affair, with artillery and mortar fire spotted from the air/raft (which stays well back from the river) and accurate rifle and machinegun fire (including crunch guns and LAGs) directed at rebel artillery and command posts visible from the far bank. This goes on all day and even, intermittently, during the night.

In the last hours before dawn, assault troops move up into ready positions and cannon are wheeled forward to pre-marked positions. Protected by sandbags they are ready to fire explosive shells and anti-personnel canister rounds across the river. At first light, the action is opened by vehicles (mainly the armor but also infantry trucks protected by sandbags. These advance close to the riverbank and act as mobile strongpoints to direct heavy fire onto the rebels' main centers of resistance.

Then the cannon open up, blasting the front-line positions into wreckage as the Household troops even expend a few precious anti-armor rounds here and there. Amid this maelstrom the lead infantry units, stiffened by a handful of Companions and a company of the Household infantry, advance and begin to force the crossing.

The stunned defenders do little at first. Some rebels are already fleeing their positions while others cower behind the parapet and pray or swear according to their beliefs. A few fire back ineffectually into the oncoming tide, their shots merely attracting the attentions of enemy sharpshooters on the far bank whose orders are to quickly eliminate anyone who looks like the center of a pocket of resistance. It is quite obvious that, without heroic efforts, the river will be lost. Anyone trying to lead such an effort is taking an almost suicidal risk, however. And to cap it all there are reports of smaller forces probing other crossings up and downriver.

The rebel position at the Alroy Crossings is doomed. With strenuous effort it might be possible to hold on until nightfall, inflicting heavy losses in the process, and slip away in the darkness. If so, the political and morale damage will be limited as the rebels can claim they made the governor's troops buy the crossings at great cost, then moved back to prepare a new ambush or some such. Fleeing in disarray from a force with good cavalry support and all day to exploit it is another matter – if the rebels break before midafternoon, there is little chance of escape.

Scenes from the Battle

The battle of the Alroy Crossings is a fairly large and chaotic event. It is not possible to play it out in detail. The characters should instead witness some critical moments and scenes from the fight, and perhaps contribute to them:

- **The evacuation of the front line:** Open to devastating fire from the far bank, the front trench line is untenable. Getting the remnants of the defenders out (with their wounded comrades) is a difficult task at best, as is keeping the retreat from becoming a rout. The example of the Star Vikings may be the critical element that holds the defenders together long enough to make a fight

at the second line.

- **Fighting to the muzzle:** A rebel cannon, emplaced to sweep the river with canister, is inflicting tremendous damage on the enemy and receiving the attentions of several enemy sharpshooters. Keeping it in action for as long as possible means feeding in replacement crewmembers and suppressing the enemy trying to kill them. If the gun is overrun, retaking it may be necessary. The crew will fight until enemy infantry reach the very muzzle of their piece so long as someone supports them.
- **At the aid station:** Less combat-minded characters may be called upon to render aid to the hordes of wounded brought in from the battle. The wounded must then be evacuated before the enemy overruns the defense line.
- **Governor Reese the hero:** if anyone doubts the sincerity of Reese and his men, their doubts are dispelled as the enemy storms a section of the second trench line. Reese leads a charge of his horsemen right into the enemy, attacking with sabers and revolvers. When that is thrown back he gathers a company of his infantry and leads them in, still on horseback with a bloody saber in his hand. After that he leads a scratch force of rebels and his own men into the fight, finally going down amid a desperate melee. He later turns up exhausted, slightly wounded and a bit dazed, fighting among the rearguard.
- **At the charge:** Some government cavalry have managed to get across the river and are trying to attack the rear of the rebel position. A handful of inept rebels on horseback decide to countercharge them, with results that might be heroic, farcical or tragic.
- **Shoring up the line:** As the second and final defense lines are strained to breaking point, they must be reinforced with whatever forces are to hand. Leaders are called upon to rally nearby stragglers, shell-shocked survivors and walking wounded and lead them back into the fight.
- **...or give me night:** Finally the sun goes down with the final line in tatters but somehow holding. Hundreds of dead on both sides choke the river and its blood-slick banks, and it is obvious that the rebels cannot take another day like this. A retreat is going to have to begin, and immediately. In order to buy time, a rearguard will remain in place until the last possible moment, preserving the illusion that the rebel army is still holding the line. There is little hope for such a force to survive, of course.

VIKINGS AT BAY

What remains of the rebel army begins its weary retreat under cover of darkness. A handful of volunteers come forward to remain in the trenches. Some are heroes, some are simply too wounded or too exhausted to try to march to safety. And some are shamed into it. While Governor Reese was taking suicidal risks, Orander hung back. Now, with Reese still dazed and wounded, Orander volunteers his infantry (and himself) as a rearguard. His is the most intact force remaining, but it will be a tough decision to trust him. His performance was hardly stellar today, and all he has to do is get a messenger across to the government forces to inform them that the lines are not held in strength to doom the rebellion and perhaps earn mercy for his treachery.

In the event, Orander's men are true to their word. They hold the trenches until near dawn, sniping at the loyalists, then scatter into the countryside. Most are chased down by government cavalry but even that distracts enemy forces from the pursuit. The rebels, meantime, stagger towards Avorgna and a last stand. They are joined by a few additional reinforcements, some of whom melt away almost instantly when they see the state of the rebel army. By the end of the first day a little under 3000 troops remain under the rebels' banner, and the numbers are dwindling all the time.

An Understandable Betrayal

Before dawn on the second day of the retreat, Governor Reese and his 200 or so surviving men depart. The governor is still in a state of shock. He is pale and shaking all the time, his nerve completely gone. His men have taken massive casualties and now it seems to have been for nothing. There is little the rebels can do about this situation – Reese's men have fought alongside them and are not offering any violence. Indeed, some are discreetly leaving behind packs full of rations and ammunition.

The departure of Reese triggers another round of desertion. The effects might be reduced by some suitable oratory or other dramatic actions by the Star Vikings, but by midday the 'army' is down to 2000 dispirited stragglers, and the Imperial Governor's cavalry are nipping at their heels.

The Pressure Mounts

Although they are tired too, the Imperial Governor's forces can move a lot faster than the rebels, who are worn out and burdened by wounded. The few armored cars and trucks that have not broken down yet are moving up to bring machineguns within range of the rearguard. Cavalry constantly skirmish with the rebels and overrun stragglers, and the infantry are beginning to press in too. A couple of hours before nightfall, and well short of Avorgna, the rebel army is forced to turn and fight.

If there is still an army at nightfall, it might be possible to break contact and either scatter or make for the city, though in both cases this is effectively an acceptance of defeat. There is nothing for it though. The rebellion is out of time. There is no point in surrendering; the governor has promised to hang or shoot everyone involved. All that remains is to make a last stand, to go down fighting and defiant to the last.

... and to pray for a miracle.

The Miracle at Avorgna

As the rebels turn at bay and the skirmishing intensifies into all-out battle, dusk settles over the bloody ground as the government forces relentlessly push forward. Now the Imperial Governor has no qualms about deploying his TL-8 troops, which have mostly been held back in reserve. If he can break the rebels now the city that has been the symbol of rebellion will fall without a fight, removing the necessity to destroy it. There is little fight left in the rebels, and government forces are already lapping around their flanks. Total victory is within his grasp, and the Imperial Governor knows it.

The fighting is brief. In a matter of 30 minutes organized resistance is gone. After that the battle dissolves into a confused mass of disintegrating rebel units being chased down and shattered. It looks like it's all over – but not quite. For the Imperial Governor's forces are under attack from an unexpected quarter. Scraping the bottom of the barrel, the population of Avorgna have armed themselves with the few rifles and other weapons remaining in town – often one rifle among several potential fighters, on the assumption that wounded and dead rebels will drop weapons which can be used by others – and come out to fight. They are led by contingents from other regions, and by a force of cavalry armed mainly with lances. Cynic's adopted daughter Lauren rides with the latter, clutching a borrowed revolver. Even Governor Reese, having recovered his nerve somewhat, has turned about and fallen on the nearest government troops.

It has long been said that defeat is within oneself while victory lies in the mind of the enemy commander, and in those last minutes of daylight the rebels are still undefeated while the Imperial Governor is shaken and dismayed by the sudden setbacks his men encounter. But the firepower available to him is just too much. Increasingly desperate charges by Lauren's cavalry are shot apart, and the renewed spirit of the rebels begins to melt away. As dusk turns to night, the remains of the rebel army reels defeated.

And then, over the Star Vikings' radio sets, comes the long-awaited signal:

'THIS IS RCES *APOLLO*, ENTERING AMOY ORBIT. RCES *APOLLO* TO VIKINGS AND ANY FRIENDLIES ON THE GROUND. PREPARE FOR ORBITAL FIRE SUPPORT. GROUND TROOPS ARE AWAY, REPEAT GROUND TROOPS INBOUND YOUR POSITION. CAPSULES AND LANDERS ARE MINUTES OUT; SUPPORT BOATS ENTERING ATMOSPHERE NOW'

Overhead, the darkening sky is lit by the trails of assault boats, support speeders and a *Victrix* ship hurtling down to shatter the government forces with plasma and laser fire. Drop capsules crash to the ground and RC Marines in battledress pour fusion-gun and gauss rifle fire into the shocked loyalist army. For days now the Star Vikings have been on the receiving end of their normal advantages – firepower and technology – but now the tables are turned and in just minutes of savage fighting the loyalist army is scattered.

IN THY GREEN AND NARROW BED

The following morning, dawn breaks on a scene of carnage. The line of the retreat is littered with dead, and there are armed bands of government soldiers all over the countryside. The people of Amoy are not as delighted as they might have been with the situation – they always thought that the Star Vikings would come and make everything good again, but what has happened has been brutal and horrific.

There is a real respect among the newly-arrived Viking forces for the people of Amoy though. They have bought their freedom dearly and though there is still much work to do, there is a real chance to create a worthy future here. There are still a lot of problems however:

- The capital is still held by the governor's forces including the PAD missile batteries. The latter fired a few shots at the RC ships as they entered atmosphere but the missiles were shot down easily enough. Their guidance seemed fairly poor.
- Most of the region is in chaos, with some regional governors holding out and others being replaced by rebels who are probably just as bad as they were
- The two RC ships are here without orders, having been told of the situation by the *Borkhan Lara* as they headed out on a totally different mission. The captains of the two ships decided that Amoy was critical to the Sufren Run and worth a change of plans to secure. Command might have a different opinion, in which case all concerned are in big trouble...
- However, the opportunity here is simply too good to waste. The *Apollo* will leave a contingent of Marines and volunteer crewmembers to assist in getting some kind of government set up.
- If the capital region will not surrender, it is going to have to be stormed. The PAD missile battery seems to be a bit of a paper tiger – those fired at the Viking ships were not effective, and it appears that at some point one was lobbed at Avorgna to solve the rebel problem rather finally. It came down well short and did not detonate, but there is no guarantee that the next one will also malfunction.

In addition to all of this, there is other work to do. The dead will have to be buried and the living taught to govern their world. It will be a big job, too big for the personnel currently available, but there is nobody else available. The rebels have discovered a number of natural leaders among their ranks; this will be a starting point but they will need guidance and advice for some time to come.

If the characters want to return to Coalition space, they can leave aboard RCES *Apollo*. If they prefer, their new friends on Amoy would be glad to have them remain as ambassadors, advisors and heroes-in-residence. But as the Vikings are about to find out, building a peace can be harder than fighting a war.

Their work here is far from done.

Whether they choose to leave or stay, the characters are feted as heroes in Avorgna, and a few days after the battle they are asked to accompany Lauren back to her home at Maiteen. There, she shows the characters the little wooden house where once a hero lived, the villages that he walked among and made things better, and the little cemetery where they secretly brought his body to lie beside that of his wife in all but name. For now it is a family grave, but in times to come this place will be a shrine to the future and to the power of belief.

For here in his green and narrow bed sleeps the cynic who gave hope to an entire world.

EPILOGUE: THE ROAD TO SUFREN

The powers that be back in Reformation Coalition space throw a fit when they hear what has happened on Amoy. Cynic's actions are

above reproach, and it is understandable for the Moonshadow team to become involved in events given that they heard what seemed to be a request for help from a fellow Viking. But from then on... they should have gotten out when they could, say many critics. By not doing so they derailed several vital missions involving two RCES ships. And as for the captains of those ships, why they should be cashiered! Haring off into the Wilds on a 'buckaroo intervention', risking priceless assets to cross the Vampire Highway without orders... losing personnel in an unauthorized ground action...

... but when the dust settles, the hard facts remain. A friendly government is emerging on Amoy, which will be the first link on the Sufren Run. Much of the fuss stems from the fact that now even more assets and funding must be prized loose to support a Bootstrap operation to Amoy, the construction of a port, security for the outpost... and of course the next step on the road to Sufren.

Finally the decision is formally made the way everyone knew it had to be; the opportunity is too good not to seize. Amoy will receive support. The captains involved (and the Moonshadow team) will be cautiously commended on their initiative. And most importantly the drive to Sufren will be expanded with assets found from... somewhere.

This may be the most important decision ever made in the Reformation Coalition, or it may be utterest folly. Either way, the dice are cast – and not by the Coalition's leaders. This outcome was ordained when the people of Amoy chose to believe in a lone Star Viking, and when others came as he said they would. The decision to drive through to Sufren, with all its consequences, was made on the ground by lowly Star Vikings who believed in that they were doing.

There are those who say that so long as you believe, you are unstoppable. Now, late in 1202, it certainly looks that way.

THE IMPERIAL GOVERNOR'S FIELD ARMY

The Governor has about 8000 troops under his immediate command, plus about 3000 more guarding his supply line. The bulk of this force is infantry equipped to TL-5 but with a few higher-tech items such as portable radios and a handful of automatic weapons for support. Most of the remainder of the force is TL-5 cavalry or mounted infantry equipped to TL-5.

The forces scattered along the supply line include 6 infantry battalions (2400 men) and about 500 cavalry dispersed in company-sized units.

The Imperial Governor 's force is organized as follows:

Advance Guard

The force intended to reconnoiter and make initial contact with the enemy is light. Its usual orders are to locate and pin the enemy for a powerful assault by the main force, or to overrun minor opposition if possible. The Advance Guard comprises one infantry brigade of 3 Line battalions plus a cavalry 'brigade' of 300 or so men, made up of elements of several regiments.

Combat Division

The main combat force is comprised of 3 brigades each of 3 Line infantry battalions supported by one company of Imperial Household Infantry, a 300-man cavalry 'brigade' and a single squadron of armored cars, plus one full battery of 75mm breech loading field guns. Its function is to engage and destroy the enemy in frontal battle.

Cavalry Division

The cavalry 'Division' in fact comprises a single 'brigade' of 300 cavalry supported by one squadron of armored cars. Its function is to screen, conduct long-range recon, and where possible to flank or overrun enemy forces with speed and firepower.

Headquarters Division

The command and reserve force of the Imperial Governor's field army, this formation includes most of the artillery and one squadron or armor plus one brigade of line infantry (3 battalions) and a Household Brigade formed of about half the Companions plus the Bodyguard battalion and two companies of the Imperial Household Infantry (totaling about 400 decent quality TL-8 troops with some support and anti-armor weapons).

The Imperial Governor expects to detach forces from his HQ formation as necessary to support the other formations, or possibly use it as a 'hammer' to smash a wavering enemy. His tactics have been used successfully in the past, against the occasional coalition of regional governors. Execution of any complex plan is beyond the training of this force and the governor is realistic enough to know it. Thus he tends to rely on his overwhelming numbers and the huge advantages offered by being able to deliver artillery fire, armored charges (of a sort) and assault rifle firepower at the critical point on a battlefield. He has never fought an enemy that can counter these advantages nor one that can respond in kind – and is not expecting to.

FINAL NOTES

The establishment of a pro-Coalition government on Amoy is a significant step towards a chain of bases leading to Sufren. However, there is still a lot to do to make that dream a reality. The defeat of the Imperial Governor's army must be followed up by the creation of a fair and workable system of government – and that government may have to be rammed down the throats of the regional governors. There will be work and adventures on Amoy for many kinds of RC personnel – diplomats, Bootstrap advisors, technicians, engineers, doctors and of course security personnel to protect them.

The development of Amoy might be a source of ongoing adventure seeds, or it may be part of the background for an ongoing campaign. What is certain is that whatever is done on Amoy will be done on a shoestring by people who believe in what they are doing. Even if they have to do everything the hard way, the Star Vikings intend to succeed in the end.