

Xel-J-Tea: The Dungeon of Doom

An adventure suitable for three to five 1st to 3rd level characters

by Jerry Stratton

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The decay of Rome

War ravages the countryside. From the far northern border walls to the walls of Rome itself, the empire is under siege and barbarians run free. No village or city is safe from the depredations of bandits or rogue militaries. If it isn't a bandit tribe of the northern goblins, there are also the roving bands of deserters from the Roman army itself. The army is crumbling, and soldiers of the once proud force are fallen to raids on Roman towns.

No one is safe. The border walls to the north are now goblin territory. Those to the east are overrun by orcs. Xolome have come down from the southwest mountains and run wild along the coastal cliffs in the west. The roads to the Elven hills in the northeast are blocked by goblin, orc, and xolome. Rome is cut off from any outside assistance, even if anyone were willing to assist this dying giant.

Within the city of Rome, even as the empire crumbles, factional violence threatens the government. The emperor is dead, his family murdered, and dozens of pretenders vie for the high throne. Legends surround the whereabouts of young Prince Seneal, whose body was never found. Some legends state that he helped murder his family; in others, the Emperor sent him to the Elves for assistance under the old treaties.

"Rome" here is used as a stand-in for any decaying empire. You may replace it with any Rome-like empire in decline.

The doom of Condurat

From the chaos a prophet has arisen: Condurat, the warrior-priestess, golden-haired and charismatic. Determined to restore Rome to peace and its former borders, Condurat began her campaign by freeing Bourbon Court in the northwest from goblin control. Bourbon Court, on Bourbon Bay, is an important and strategic city.

Condurat seeks the Scion of Rome to restore him to the throne. She cites visions from Diana, Minerva, and Mercury that the last scion is alive, and held captive beneath the earth.

The player characters

The player characters are the last remnants of the defenders of Polosita, a makeshift keep on the new northeastern border, a hundred miles from the old, walled border. A season past, the old commander shared honey wine with the new, local, commander, and the army left to aid the city of Rome.

The player characters should be first to third level, with no more than one prophet or sorcerer, and no monk. The rest should be warriors and thieves.

You should let the players know everything from the previous two sections about the decline of Rome and the prophecies of Condurat.

The siege of Polosita

The keep is under siege by a fierce goblin tribe, and it will fall.

There are about six hundred goblins in this monstrous bandit tribe, complete with archers, swordsmen, and battering rams. They don't act it, but they've become an army, and while not disciplined their numbers make a formidable force.

They do not care about surrender, and are toying with the keep's defenses as a cat might a mouse hole. There are fifty-six soldiers defending Polosita.

You can play out one, a couple, or several attacks on the keep. If the goblins gain entrance, they will kill some of the soldiers and lock the rest in the dungeon for later use.

The ransom of Polosita

Polosita is not a strategic location, but the valor of her defenders has reached Condurat. Condurat, aware that the bandit army consists of many different tribes, has sent a small group of scouts to bargain with one of them for the safety of the soldiers. Condurat has met the fierce bandit-queen Dagitar-Fal and is aware of her independence and desires. Licia Pericol, her scout, brings a cask of fiery honey wine, golden and sweet with a deep strength for Dagitar-Fal. Honey wine is the traditional gift in the Empire between Lords of high status.

If the keep has not yet been taken, Licia will negotiate with Dagitar-Fal for a safe escape in the dark of night. Once the escape has been negotiated, one of Licia's scouts will sneak in to Polosita to explain that Condurat suggests joining with her forces; Polosita will fall no matter what, but valiant soldiers such as these have a place in Condurat's army.

The soldiers, all fifty or so, will need to sneak out past the rest of the forces, but Dagitar-Fal will uphold her end of the bargain. When the soldiers have left, her tribe will take the keep.

On the way out, if the soldiers manage to move quietly, and if they've held the keep after many battles, Dagitar-Fal will stand atop her battlecart and salute the commander of the guard as they leave.

The tears of Rome

Licia Pericol will guide the remaining Polosita soldiers through enemy territory, east and slightly south, then circle north and go back to the west, as this is the safest route that his men have been able to find. There may well be battles with orcs, goblins, or xolome on this journey, but Licia's scouts should be able to keep them clear of any large groups.

In the east, one of the places they'll hide and be given meager food and bedding is the ruined Meritros House. Overrun and then abandoned by orcs, Meritros House now holds several poor families who eke out barely enough food from the surrounding fields and who seek to avoid goblin and orc bandits whenever possible.

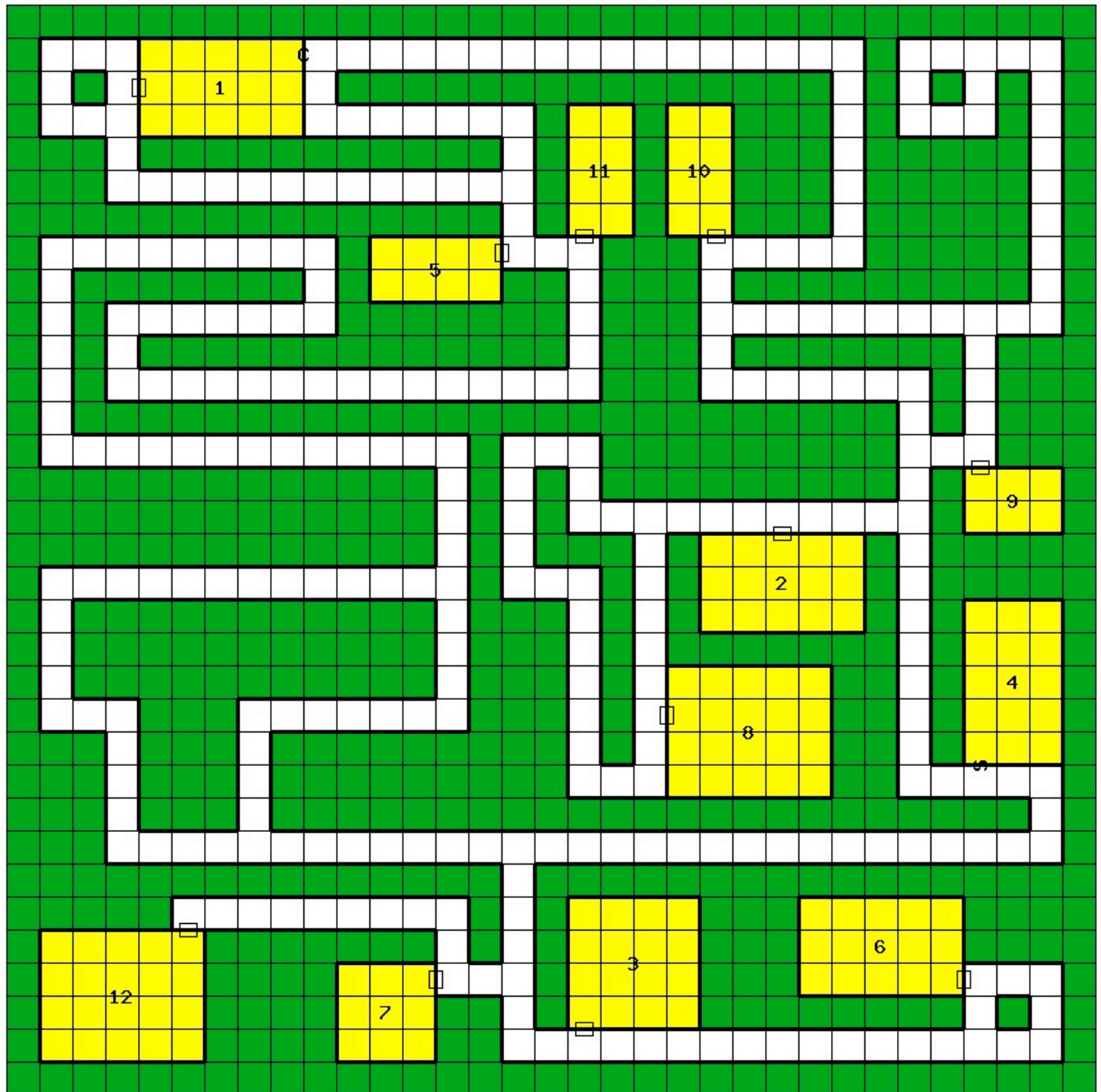
Legends of the heroes of Polosita have reached these refugees, all of whom yearn for the return of the Pax Romana. The soldiers will be treated well within this house, or at least as well as the house can afford.

Within Meritros House, the player characters will discover the rumors that bring them to the halls of Xel-I-Tec.

- One of the poor family members has seen a warrior Elf entering a hole in the mountains. Describing where it is would be difficult, but he could lead them to the vicinity. The characters will then need to follow tracks to the hole.
- Tiny bands of xolome have been venturing from the mountains to steal food from travelers and kitchens.
- A strange knight wanders the mountain lanes at night, sometimes stopping to stare west across the lands.

No individual knows all of the rumors, but the player characters should receive them as everyone wants to gossip with them. You may wish to add some more that you know will pique your characters' interest.

Xel-J-Tec



Before he died, the emperor sent his youngest son to the Elven hills to request assistance according to the old treaties. But Prince Seneal was betrayed by Thamiian, his Elven guide. Thamiian took Seneal into captivity in a xolome tunnel system. The xolome or Thamiian occasionally steal human food to feed the prince.

A crawling mist runs throughout these tunnels. It reduces visibility to about half or three quarters what it would otherwise be.

Each square is five feet. Tunnel height is generally five to seven feet. Room height is generally seven to eight feet. The hole opens in the upper left of the map, near room 1.

You walk down the steep and winding cave into a thin, cool mist. You drop into a fifteen-foot long, five-foot-wide carved area, with openings ahead of you on the north and south ends of the long eastern wall.

A great serpentine black cat bares gleaming teeth directly ahead of you. This carved and painted image on the wall almost leaps out at you from the darkness.

The small hall is cramped and cold, and reeks of age.

Anyone with knowledge of Xolome culture will recognize the style as similar to the Xolome of the west.

Door traps

When doors have traps on them, they are generally triggered when the door is more than half-way opened.

1. The Cat-Guard

The xolome guards will generally be aware of any parties coming down the hole, and will position themselves slightly to the north and slightly to the south so as to get a good shot at invaders. Unless someone makes a really good lie, the two xolome will assume that any humans need to be shot.

As you round the huge central pillar of this hall, you see a wooden door set in the eastern stone. Only the upper half of the door is there. Below it is a dark, square hole through which a grey mist twines thinly.

Each half of the door has two hinges on it. Neither half locks. However, the top half is attached to a trap. Opening it causes a blade to slice down on the hallward side. Anyone

standing in the doorway outside of the room when the blade drops must make an Evasion roll or lose d8 survival.

The two xolome guards also have a trained panther. The panther will protect the xolome and can be commanded to attack. The panther can go through both the lower side of the normal door and through the hidden door.

The hidden door is a hanging wooden door, hidden behind a small tapestry of angular designs reminiscent of Mayan symbolism.

The xolome wear leather armor and use short bows and spears. They have sixteen arrows each and three spears each. They also have a backpack which contains a hundred Roman silver coins, a single candle, and some six small iron spikes. One iron spike is holding the lower half of the western door open.

Hidden beneath a loose stone in the floor is a small, three foot chamber that contains 60 silver Elven coins. Anyone looking for something secret will find it on a standard Perception roll.

Xolome (Faerie: 1-1; Survival: 5, 6; Move: 8; Attacks: short bow or spear; Damage: 1d6; Defense: 4; Moral Code: Ordered Evil)

Panther (Animal: 3; Survival: 18; Move: 18; Attacks: 2 claws or bite; Damage: 1d6/1d6 or 1d8; Defense: 4)

2. The Temple of Tec-li-Tec

Tec-li-tec is the xolome cat-god. It resembles a long, dark, snake-like thing that slinks through the deep corridors of the earth.

The wooden door to this room has swollen some from the dampness and is difficult to open. The xolome usually use spikes to pry it open.

(You burst upon...) A curved symbol, like a fanged snake, runs throughout the floor of this room. Stones of various colors and shapes are scattered throughout the room in some obscene arrangement.

In a recess in the far wall, a black, twisting carving of a fanged and leering creature reflects your light back upon you.

The obsidian carving of tec-li-tec ought to be worth twenty to forty shillings if a collector can stomach its hideousness. It is bad luck to steal the idol, however. Whoever bears the idol will gain a penalty of one on all saving rolls, attack rolls, and ability rolls unless they can come under the protection of some better deity.

3. Thamiian's Office

Thamiian's door is always kept locked. It is a wooden door.

A tall, gaunt man greets you in the Roman tongue. "I would have welcomed you, had you knocked. Who are you, and why are you here?"

He has an arrow in a bow ready to fire. The light mist swirls slowly around the arrow's tip as it hangs in the air.

Thamiian is the Elf who was to guide Prince Seneal to the Elven hills but instead brought him here. Thamiian expects to gain a ransom from Prince Seneal. His spies in Rome have not yet reported back on the death of royal family. When they do, he may choose to ransom the Prince to someone else, or he may just kill the prince and cut his losses. Thamiian is a very practical double-crosser. He is not afraid to fight when he knows he will win, but he will avoid an unnecessary or deadly fight if given the option.

Thamiian, Elven Traitor: Warrior Level 3, Thief Level 2, Intelligence 10, Wisdom 11, Charisma 13, Strength 15, Agility 14, Endurance 11, Survival Potential 26. Specialties: Species (Elf), Blindfighting (+2). Moral Code: Ordered Evil.

Thief Skills (+6 each of four): Move Silently (13), Hide (12), Forgery (12), Climb Walls (18)

Skills (5): Native Culture (Elvish), Languages (Roman, Xolome, Goblin, Read/Write), Etiquette (Roman).

Weapon Familiarities (5+): bow, sword, spear, dagger, short sword.

Age: 330, Height: 6'4", Weight: 174 lbs.

Armor: full plate, large shield, full helmet.

Normally he will not be wearing plate armor unless he had warning of an impending fight. Sometimes the armor is not even with him here, but with his horse. He also has leather armor, which he can wear more quickly, and which he is likely to use within the halls of Xel-i-tec.

Thamiian has a bow, a sword, two daggers, and a short sword. He has 60 arrows, though he usually only carries 20 at a time. His short sword is Roman. His normal sword is Elven, and finely crafted. It is worth 70 silver coins and is clearly Elvish to anyone who has seen Elvish workmanship.

He has a fine set of thieves' tools, worth 15 monetary units for their craftsmanship and materials. He has a silver ring that identifies him as on a mission from the Roman emperor. This ring is worth 40 silver coins as a ring and a hundred silver coins to someone aware of its political value.

He has an amulet marked with the sign of tec-li-tec. This allows him entrance to Prince Seneal's prison. He also has a key to Prince Seneal's chains.

He has a pack that contains his normal traveling gear, including oil, ink, paper, quills, a blanket, and a lantern. The pack also has 65 silver Elven coins and 175 silver Roman coins.

He has a warhorse hidden in an abandoned building up top. He will often leave his plate with the horse, hidden under some boards.

4. Prince Seneal's Cell

The door is disguised as part of the stone wall. It is triggered through the appropriate movement of some triggers (shaped as rocks) on the left of the door. About half of the xolome know the trigger movements, as does Thamiian.

The door is four feet tall when fully opened. It is three feet wide.

The rock slides back and up, grinding against the stone wall. A blue-green mist eddies out from the opening. The eddies appear to almost nip at your feet as the mist pours out.

A strange smell, oddly sour, accompanies the mist. You hear a low whistle, or rush of wind, beyond the door.

As you bend down to peer into the room, two great cats leap towards you, claws extended.

Between the cats is a copper-green brazier. Blue-green flames burn high from the brazier, swirling blue-green mist around them.

Beyond the brazier, you see a large shape, a huge stone block or altar, and something upon it.

A lantern, unlit, hangs from the ceiling.

The cats are obsidian statues, very finely crafted and lifelike. They weight about a hundred pounds each and would be difficult to drag out without harming, but would be worth three to five hundred silver coins apiece if they could be brought to a major city.

Behind the brazier and the cats, Prince Seneal is chained to a blue-veined green altar. His chain is locked into the stone. The lock may be picked as normal.

Only cats and those wearing an amulet of tec-li-tec may come within five feet of the brazier and cats without danger. The brazier has enslaved three whistling spirits: creatures of mist that can twist through even the smallest openings in the tunnels of the earth. Their bite is a cold that burns. Their grasp numbs whatever it touches.

Whistling spirit (Fantastic: 3; Survival: 17; Move: 24; Attacks: bite and grasp; Damage: 1d4/special; Defense: 6; Special attack: numbing; Special Defenses: immune to normal weapons, or cold)

The mist rises around you as three ghostly cats, serpentine, slink towards you, mouths agape and fangs dripping mist. You hear a distant whistle as of a wind in a deep place, and the jaws snap shut and the cold serpentine body coils around your chest.

Anyone successfully grasped (as a called attack) by the spirit must make a Willpower roll or lose any remaining actions this round, and be at a penalty of two on any actions in the next round.

5. Arts & Crafts

A puddle of scummy water reaches slightly out from under this iron-bound door.

The door to this room is locked. It may be picked as normal.

A kiln lies in the far end of this room, with a pipe that goes down into the earth to suck the heat away. There is oil here to help fuel the kiln, a crate filled with hammers and other tools, and an iron maiden in the middle of the south wall. There is a vat of scummy water to the left of the door, and a puddle just in front of the door that also goes out into the hallway a few inches.

6. Orc and wolf

Barafail, an orc emissary, has come to the xolome to see if they are easily defeated or if they would be worth aligning with. He now is considering either taking or making an offer for Prince Seneal.

He brought them gifts of dwarf-meat and copper Roman coins.

He keeps the stone door blocked shut with a spike when he is inside. The door itself is trapped with a poison needle that Barafail has restored and keeps filled. The poison is strength 0, an action time of one minute, and causes a loss of 1d6 survival.

Barafail has a pet wolf Cagramil. Cagramil is with him most of the time and is as ferocious as Barafail.

The room was once another temple, but the xolome do not use it for this any more. They offered it to the orc because they don't care if he lives or dies and find either outcome interesting. The room has a small domed ceiling in the center. Cold air rises to the dome, and puddles of some strange slime form beneath it.

You finally get the heavy door open and rush in upon this small, messy room. The first thing you notice is the cold, somehow deeper than the mere lack of sun of the rest of this underground complex.

Characters rushing in must make an Evasion roll at a bonus of 4 or slip in the slime and fall.

A huge, ugly creature brandishes a sword at you and some growling furry creature rushes at you teeth gleaming in your light.

Barafail has 208 silver Roman coins, 54 silver Dwarven coins, and 58 silver coins from the Aramesh far across the mountains to the east.

Barafail uses a sword in battle, and wears leather armor. He carries his personal belongings in a small crate wrapped with twine. It includes some torches, some spikes, more twine, and oddly disturbing carvings of orc gods in green soapstone.

Barafail (Orc: 2+1; Survival: 14; Move: 12; Attacks: sword; Damage: 1d8+1; Defense: 3, Moral Code: Ordered Evil)

Cagramil (Wolf: 3; Survival: 17; Move: 16; Attacks: claws or bite; Damage: 1d4/1d4 or 1d8; Defense: 3)

The slime puddles occasionally bubble, the light pop of the bubbles breaking the still air of the chamber.

7. Storage

The wooden door on this room is neither locked nor stuck. Inside are discarded leather armor, spears, bows, and arrows that need repair, as well as other items such as carts and clothing.

There are rocks and pieces of wall scattered about the discarded items, and a large hole in the southwest corner. The hole leads to their underground root fields and then deep into the xolome kingdoms beneath the mountain.

Hanging on the north wall is a small horn. If blown, it can be heard throughout the complex. All xolome will come to the storage area with weapons and armor. See rooms 1, 8, and 12.

8. Xolome Council

The door to this room is wooden, and slightly swollen from moisture. It sticks when shut. Normally the door will not be closed, but if the Xolome hear someone coming they may choose to shut it until the danger passes. Anyone bashing their way in is likely to be caught slightly off guard when they come in.

When the door is opened without disabling the trap, an arrow shoots out of the far wall and into whoever is in the doorway. Anyone entering must make an Evasion roll or lose d6 survival. The Evasion roll is at a penalty of 2 if the victim forced their way in.

The xolome are aware of this trap and will be off to each side if they expect someone to set it off.

There are tiny misshapen human-like creatures up against the left and right walls, all brandishing spears at you.

The xolome are likely to attack anyone who forces their way in here, but could be convinced to a peace.

Xolome (Faerie: 1-1; Survival: 2, 2, 3, 4, 5, 1; Move: 8; Attacks: spear; Damage: 1d6; Defense: 4; Moral Code: Ordered Evil)

One of the xolome wears an amulet of tec-li-tec.

There are many foodstuffs here in sacks, mostly root plants the deeps, resembling over-grown eye-filled potatoes. They are edible, however unappetizing they appear.

Of all the rooms, this is the one most likely to conjure an image of better days.

There is what looks like a wardrobe on the far wall, a broken door partially slide aside, with racks of clothing and food hanging inside.

In the corner of the wardrobe is a small box with 42 silver Roman coins.

9. Empty room

The door to this room is different from the others. It is a thin iron sheet that slides freely from left to right. There's nothing here, however.

10. Empty room

A wooden door, stuck because of moisture, bars entry into this room. It's an empty room, however.

11. The caldron

The iron-bound door to this room is trapped to trigger a spear to anyone opening it. Anyone in the doorway when the spear is triggered must make an Evasion roll or lose 1d6 survival points.

There is a large copper-green caldron in the far end of this room, but nothing else. Anyone putting their ears near the caldron's opening will hear a low, distant whistle, as of a far wind.

12. Xolome treasure

The wooden door to this room is normally open, however, if the xolome hear someone coming they are likely to close it and lock it.

Several of the misshapen creatures line the walls, their spears towering above their strange heads but lowering as they rush towards you.

Xolome (Faerie: 1-1; Survival: 3, 6, 5, 5, 1, 2, 4; Move: 8; Attacks: spear; Damage: 1d6; Defense: 4; Moral Code: Ordered Evil)

One of the xolome wears an amulet of tec-li-tec and also a key. The key unlocks Prince Seneal's chains.

Iron bars poke out of a mound of rubble that might once have been part of an alcove or small room. A broken door lies atop the rubble, and the rubble partially obscures a grey relief carved into the far right wall.

A close examination of the relief shows that it is an image of the world as seen by the xolome, with the xolome in complex intertwining tunnels.

These xolome have benefited well from the chaos in Rome. This is where they keep their treasure. A huge bucket of some blue-green slime hides 52 gold Roman coins, and 480 silver Roman coins. The slime is not alive, and it does not have a corrosive effect, but it is very difficult to remove from human skin.

After the adventure

After the adventure, there are lots of possibilities. Did they find the prince and bring him to Condurat? Perhaps they need to now find proof that he is a prince of the blood. Even if they have that proof, they'll need to convince the warring factions in Rome to unite in support of him. Or perhaps they'll want to continue on to the Elven hills and request outside assistance. This will be a journey through hostile lands to a place that few Romans have visited in centuries.

And those choices all basically assume that Condurat's vision is of a future that the characters want to support. Change the basic assumptions, and those possibilities change as well.

Barcelas

Before Markesh Prelin was replaced by an Usilar Prelin on the Aquali Throne there were other crises in the Barcelasian Empire. The late second millennia saw the Barcelasian Empire contract several times. This adventure can be placed in one of those contractions.

Polosita would be best placed north and east of Hamokera. There may be a few Barcelasians left, but it is now mostly manned by Usilar (humans) left behind when the main Barcelasian force was recalled. It is under attack by Saulabar (goblins). The player characters should probably be Usilar, but could also be Barcelasian.

Prince Seneal is a Barcelasian, a tall, powerful lizard-like creature, the ruling race of this world. Condurat might be a Barcelasian, or she might be a loyal Usilar. In the latter case, her loyalty, if successful, may well be part of the sequence of events that eventually led to an Usilar on the throne a few centuries later.

Why would Usilar stay in a Barcelasian fort? Many of the Usilar have assimilated into the empire, and have sworn to uphold it. It also is probably the safest place in the area: bandits do roam the countryside, after all. Their fields will be nearby, and with trade routes closing down they could starve without their crops. It may be that no one was expecting on attack on Polosita, that the Saulabar here were scattered and unaggressive towards the inhabitants, but some event triggered either an invasion or a more aggressive stance.

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