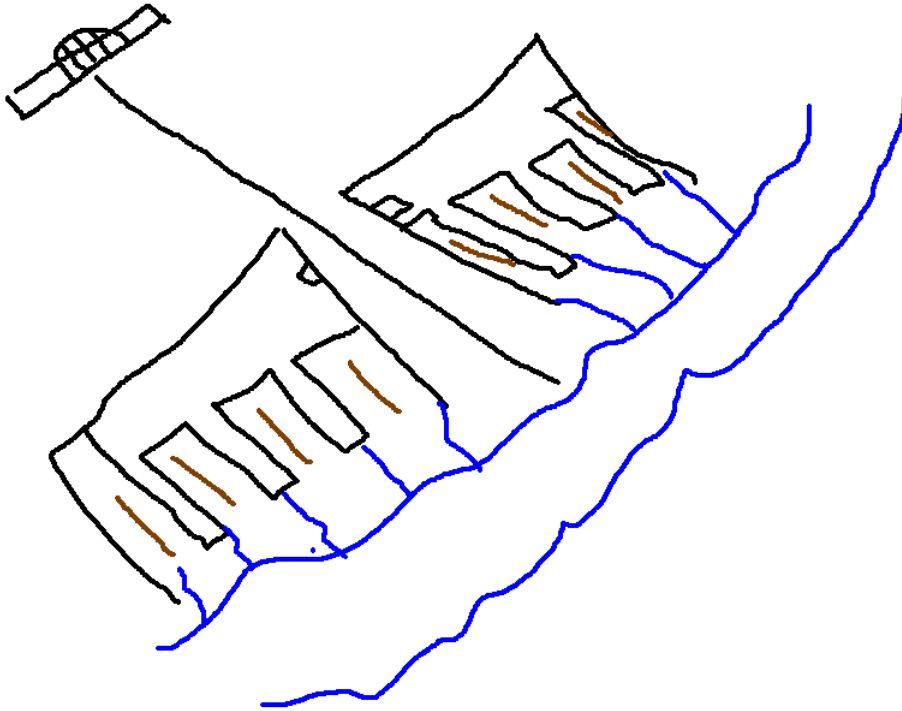


- Weather: It is approaching sunset and dark clouds fill the sky. Powerful gusts of wind are sweeping in from the seas far to the north, and with them, tempests of freezing rain and hail, turning much of the city into a mud pit.
- Describe hill and tactical situation again
- Describe patrols:
 - One headed to the east on road 3 (north)
 - Soldiers filing into mausoleum directly below
 - Patrol headed east from dead end on road 7
 - Patrol on road directly north, about half of which is in the street, the other half is checking the nearby buildings
- Sentries at 6 junctions with road blocks of merchant stalls, timbers, fencing from the outlying farms
- Block houses:
 - A fortified blockhouse lies in front of you, consisting of a fortified wooden door leading to the outside set into an arched alcove. Above the archway about fifteen feet is a bunkhouse. You can see several archers scanning the surrounding area from inside the cover of the murderholes. There are four housemen before the door, standing guard. One of them, a captain or lieutenant of some sort, has a bone horn hanging from his neck.
 - Inside bunkhouse: 3 archers. The sparse bunkhouse is filled with a few cots, chests, a makeshift ladder and a wench to open the gate.
- Outside:
 - The farmlands outlying the city are strangely serene, still as a grave, and at first all you can hear is the pattering of rain and hailstones against puddles and helmets. Then the patter is overtook by a stronger kind, hooves from the [north/south]. A detachment of two dozen mounted knights is thundering toward you from across the way with their swords and spears raised up. The sound of a battle horn blows through the air from their direction.
 - Take pursuit, run etc.
 - The road leading up to the docks is caked with mud and appears clear of enemies. The farmhouses lining the road appear to be barren and desolate, but you can see darting eyes and the momentary shadows of those moving within. The great Imperial gate leading to the docks lies ruined since the time of Clovis and Connacht. The massive gate bars, dozens of feet in height, are bent open as if an unimaginable beast burst through it, rendering the gate useless.

Dock:



- The road terminates at the river, beset on either side by the Alesian docks. The docks are like great barns, the side facing the river cut to access the waters. Within are piers connected to a platform at the back of the building for un and off loading maritime cargo. When you first entered the city there were a total of three other ships in your section of the docks, great warships bearing the banner of the black wolf. The outside walls of the dock are deeply saturated with rain water, taking on a dark brown hue. There is a set of dual wooden doors on the side facing the road for entry. You hear the cavalry nearing from behind you.
- Inside: The inside of the dock is dark and smells of sea water and fish. Barrels and boxes offloaded from the ships are piled up against the north wall. The whimpering oil lamps lighting the tall building are flickering, as the winds gushing in from outside nearly extinguish them. On the central pier next to your boat is the king Aethelred, with a dagger at the throat of Cassio, who sits bloodied on the ground. In front of him are several royal knights, Cenwalh of Volund and a man you have not seen before. He is blond haired, of heroic posture, a solid chin, with a great sword in his hand and plate as armor. His piercing eyes show no fear.
 - “Yield rats! Surrender what you have stolen from the mausoleum and I will only execute the men! You see Aethelwulf, Cenwalh, I spoke true of the Leptus dogs. They seek Sighere’s crafts to destroy our kingdom!”
 - Other royal knights step out from behind the boxes and crates
 - The cavalry arrives at the entrance of the docks and attacks.

- Cenwalh: pyrotechnics on oil lamp to burn docks (epic burning docks scene), call lightning, animate dead,
- Cenwalh/Aethelwulf realize the crown, stop attacking.
- “Aethelred” aka mahir charms them and they attack, but its dispelled if they approach Cruniac wielding holysword.
- They all go to attack Aethelred, his illusion dissipates, “ha ha ha ha if only this saved your precious people Angvard whoreson” he surrounded by a white mist and into crows and flies away.
- Aftermath:
 - The assembled knights and lieutenants stand shocked, silent, looking toward the river.
 - “The High King has returned! Hail!” shouts Aethelwulf
 - “Yes, but at what cost? That fiend may yet return!” Cenwalh
 - [talk for awhile hopefully]
 - When they walk outside, a rider approaches from the south from the marshes, coming at a pathetic pace. He appears to be slumped on his horse as if exhausted, and the horse staggers from side to side. As he nears you notice that he wears the familiar bronze armor that many of the serpent society don. He falls off his horse and appears unconscious, sinking into the thick mud of the farm fields.
- Rider:
 - Half conscious, dirty, bruised. It is Theodric of Seleucia, a veteran of the society. He speaks weak words “Cruniac... Harald... Cassio... they are moving through the Tharsus pass...” he falls back unconscious
 - [needs a healer etc]
 - “I was stationed on the east side of the mountain with Glappa and Frithuwald watching over the Plain. A little girl was there, of a race I have yet seen. Bronzed, with narrow eyes, she wore beads and silks. She was calling for help in a tongue I have never heard. She seemed lost.”
 - “When Glappa went to her she pointed at him and he fell dead instantly, and her eyes turned black. Frithuwald drew Mistilteinn and the Nine came upon us with a great host of ancient dead and bewitched men. Great beasts. Mistilteinn could not stop their magics, and Frithuwald fell after we slew hundreds of them atop a pile of corpses. I managed to slip away. They marched forward toward the Tharsus Gate.”
 - “I rode into the wilderness and called for the congress but could only find a few of our order. Either they are scattered or they are fallen.” “I fear by now they might very well be upon Hakonsfjord”

Story: In ancient times there was a pacifist, peaceful people to the south east of the plain (fremde), lead by nine magi, who were spiritual gurus but had no political power. The pre-Ascomanni enslaved them with absolute brutality and used them to create great barrows and monuments. They slaughtered them en masse, raped them and through the free labor, slowly warred amongst each other to consolidate into a single kingdom. While for the hundreds of years the slaughter and enslavement escalated, none of the

Ascomanni warlords threatened to violate the most sacred Fremde aspect: the living form of the Fremde fertility goddess, whose avatar, a little girl, wanders the jungles of the Fremde homeland. The first consolidated king Yfeldan, in an attempt to break the Fremde spirit, captured this avatar, raped, killed and cannibalized her. The rage of the magi was such that they forsook their pacifist creeds and began to raise those who had been slain by the Ascomanni, attacking them with terrible fury. While the magi once used their magic to heal and to grow, they were twisted into terrible forms and taught their people murder. The Ascomanni kingdom was instantly set into a retreat, unable to defend against the magi's magic.