

REIGN OF BLOOD

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ICM
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FADE IN:

EXT. KORMOR CITY - AERIAL SHOT - NIGHT

Craggy mountains loom over a remote valley where a walled city sleeps. Kormor Kirak, built in the style of Dubrovnik and Nordlingen. Cobblestone streets lined with peaked roof buildings evoke old-world charm. A fairytale-like castle to rival Neuschwanstein dominates the city's skyline.

EXT. THEATER OF EVERLASTING PEACE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

Abandoned for the evening. Under construction and thirty percent complete. When it's done, it'll be three stories with in-the-round audience capacity for a few thousand. Wood is the material of choice.

A man in a rumpled uniform, brass buttons, epaulets enters the site with a crate of Molotov Cocktails.

His name is Feeney, thirties, hair mussed, panicked. Nobody is around to watch him light the wicks of the bottle bombs, and throw them one after another at the vulnerable structure.

Feeney watches wild-eyed as the flames spread. When it's clear the site will burn to ash, he moves away with purpose.

Through clockwork eyes, a hooded figure watches him run. With a faint hydraulic hiss and grind of gears, this Automatic Assassin of steampunk technology pursues Feeney.

INT. ALBION CONSULATE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

Feeney enters and SLAMS the DOOR, locks it with a crossbar.

He moves to a part of the room where the plans for the Theater are pinned to a bulletin board. Various folders and files suggest this is where the construction job is managed.

Feeney sets the board ablaze, watches the plans catch fire, then races to the back of the room and an official-looking desk, behind which a complex vault door is set into the wall.

At the desk, Feeney types madly on the keys of an arcane coding machine, generating a paper strip of encrypted text.

EXT. ALBION CONSULATE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

The Automatic Assassin arrives before the two-story building. A placard identifies the: ALBION CONSULATE. The seal of the Albion Empire features a magnificent Griffin wielding two swords as it stands guard above a euro-style capital city.

With a metal hand, the Assassin tries the door, locked.

INT. ALBION CONSULATE - KORMOR CITY - CONTINUOUS

Feeney glances at the RATTLING DOOR then hurries to finish his coded message when WHAM! The outer door is struck with enough inhuman force to bend the metal crossbar.

Feeney yanks the message from the machine and runs for a staircase to the upper floor as, WHAM! The crossbar snaps, and the outer door shatters inward.

As Feeney runs up the stairs, he sees the Automatic Assassin enter through the ruined door, raising a pneumatic crossbow. Feeney ducks as several bolts strike the wall and banister, one pierces his shoulder, but he keeps on running, desperate.

EXT. ROOF DECK - ALBION CONSULATE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

Feeney bursts from the access door and makes haste for a Pigeon Coop. He enters, quickly sealing the coded message in the chest capsule of a Homing Pigeon.

As Feeney exits the coop to release the bird, the Assassin clatters through the access door, deadly crossbow in hand.

Feeney turns his back, taking two arrows meant for the bird. As he crumples to his knees, Feeney releases the entire pigeon flock from the coop, tossing his bird up to join them.

We abandon Feeney to his fate and fly away with his Pigeon.

EXT. SKY - FLYING AWAY FROM KORMOR CITY - DAWN

The Homing Pigeon flaps, surrounded by the other birds, several arrows meant for it, find them instead. As those birds drop away, the flock rises above the walled city.

The construction site burns, illuminating nearby buildings and streets with a flickering glow. Peaked roof ridges cast jagged shadows that stretch toward that ominous castle.

The flock rises into a stormy sky, enveloped by dark clouds.

EXT. SKY - FLYING OVER ALBION EMPIRE - VARIOUS - DAY

A MONTAGE of the bird's journey home. It begins as they wing through buffeting storm clouds. We HEAR a MAN'S VOICE --

BARRON (V.O.)

We believe that our empire is exceptional.

The birds emerge from the clouds, flying away from a mountain range that spans the horizon behind them. They soar above a busy caravan road, following it across a rocky wasteland.

BARRON

That we have been chosen by God to rule the world.

The birds skim forest treetops before crossing a battlefield where massed armies engage in trench warfare.

BARRON (CONT'D)

Others have challenged this belief. Claiming their own right to rule.

The birds thread the broadside exchange of war zeppelins.

BARRON (CONT'D)

For a hundred years, our beliefs have been in conflict, at a great cost of blood and treasure. A generation of children has only known a life of hardship and war.

The birds fly over a village where young men and women say goodbye to their stoic elders and march off with the army.

BARRON (CONT'D)

How fitting that a love affair between two such children will deliver what so many Politicians, Military Leaders, and brave Soldiers could not... peace.

The birds approach the capital city of the empire. It's ringed with armament factories, belching black smoke.

BARRON (CONT'D)

As Foreign Minister, I encourage you to open your hearts -- as did our young prince when he proposed marriage to the princess of our greatest enemy. Let us no longer believe it is might that makes right, but love that conquers all.

The final destination of the birds becomes clear, a cluster of imposing white marble buildings at the city center. We saw these emblazoned upon the Albion Seal. In the city's central plaza looms a grand statue of that sword-wielding Griffin.

EXT. GRAND STEPS - PARLIAMENT HOUSE - ALBION CAPITAL - DAY

Members of Parliament exit, men and women of diverse cultures and ages, dressed in uniforms that evoke Albion's martial ethos. Their mood is reserved as they drift down the steps in small groups toward Griffin Plaza. One last figure emerges --

BARRON WHITEHALLOW, sixties, is Albion's Foreign Minister. He's found a way to bring some flair to his uniform, adding a blood-red lining, a high collared vest, and a stylish cape. Barron exudes political charm, charisma, and kindness. As he descends the steps, his grim-faced colleagues accost him.

DUBIOUS COLLEAGUE

Staking the future of the empire on love? How is that a prudent course?

BARRON

Follow the math. Where hate and violence reduce our numbers. Love consistently does the reverse.

CORPULENT COLLEAGUE

Have you considered the economic price of peace? What will our great factories produce if not weapons and ammunition?

BARRON

When our Designers and Engineers turn their slide rules from machines of death to mechanisms of hope, prosperity will be the result.

WITHERED COLLEAGUE

Without a foreign villain, might the mob's attention turn domestic?

Barron reaches the bottom step. With the Griffin Statue as backdrop, he turns to look up the incline at his colleagues.

BARRON

Our citizens have endured decades of sacrifice. Bravely. Without any protest. It is not their attention that I fear. But my own ability to be worthy of their faith.

Barron turns his back on his colleagues and starts across the plaza. He coughs and brings a handkerchief to his mouth. When he pulls it away, the fabric is flecked with blood. He's ill.

MESSENGER BOY
Minister! Minister!

Barron finds a Messenger Boy running up to him, hand outstretched to deliver a familiar message capsule.

Barron accepts, unlocking it with a signet ring, he withdraws the message. As his eyes scan the code, his mood darkens. He crumples the tape and returns it to the Boy.

BARRON
Chew this up and swallow. Right?

MESSENGER BOY
By the emperor's grace, I serve.

The Messenger Boy does as he's told. While Barron moves on toward his waiting carriage. PRELAP the SOUND of ADDING MACHINES. CLICKETY-CLACK-DING! CLICKETY-CLICKETY-CLACK-

INT. COUNTING FLOOR - COUNTING HOUSE - ALBION CAPITAL - DAY

- DING! A high-ceilinged room filled with Accountants. Uniformed civil servants at individual desks, tapping away at their comptometers with various levels of intensity.

One woman is very intense. Her hands move with expert speed across the keys. Stacks of receipts indicate her workload and output are unrivaled by her colleagues. Her name is --

OLIVIA FAREN, twenties, serious, hair tied back. Her lips move as she works, compulsively checking her sums. Having finished a calculation, she pens the result into her ledger.

After Olivia moves the receipt from one pile to another, she picks up a necklace on the desk and opens its locket --

INSERT - LOCKET

An illustration of Albion's Prince with the Princess of Terrassia. They are both young, beautiful, and happy.

BACK TO OLIVIA

OLIVIA
By your grace, I serve.

Olivia seals the locket and returns to work, invigorated, but as she adds up the next receipt, she appears confused.

Now Olivia produces an object from her pocket, a hand-held mechanical calculator. A cylinder much like a pepper mill. Via its levers and switches, Olivia checks her sums.

INT. CHIEF ACCOUNTANT'S OFFICE - COUNTING HOUSE - DAY

One level above Olivia and her colleagues, a large window allows their boss to look down upon them as they work.

LORD WOOSTER, sixties, manicured, eccentric, shady, rises from his elaborate desk to warmly greet the Foreign Minister.

LORD WOOSTER
Barron Whitehallow, I presume! Oh,
how I've missed your giggle-mugg.

BARRON
Too rare, Benji. Too rare.

They clasp hands as old friends do, then turn to regard the many display cases that ring the room. These are filled with indigenous artifacts gathered from across the empire.

LORD WOOSTER
I've a new something or other in
custody for you to crow over.

Wooster retrieves a fragment of ancient pottery.

LORD WOOSTER (CONT'D)
From Gravinia. Pulled out of the
mud by a Trencher. He smuggled it
back aboard a hospital ship.

BARRON
Hidden in his coffin?

LORD WOOSTER
Fair play. In his rolled-up pants.
Lost his legs, didn't he? Plenty of
room. Cost me an arm and a leg. Ha!

BARRON
The spoils of war.

LORD WOOSTER
Are the rumors true? Will this
wedding bring it all to an end?

BARRON
Think of it as a beginning.

Barron moves to the window overlooking the Accountants.

BARRON (CONT'D)
I'm in need of a new assistant.
They must be precise. Confident.
And devoted to Albion.

Barron watches Olivia rise from her chair and confront another Accountant. Barron can't hear what's said, but from the way Olivia's emphatically waving a receipt, she's angry.

Lord Wooster joins Barron, watching beside him as Olivia moves off to confront a second Accountant, relentless.

LORD WOOSTER

Bally snaps! Always with the ranny-gazzoo, that one.

BARRON

Not what I'm looking for?

LORD WOOSTER

Olivia Faren. Bricky to a fault. Since her waif years at the orphanage. Snootered her first Task Manager 'til he reorganized the line. It tip-topped their efficiency. She's been levied to our dormitory ever since.

The men watch Olivia get into a shouting match with other Accountants. Shoving ensues as one of them tries to snatch the receipt from her hand. Olivia breaks free and runs, chased by the group, holding the receipt high. Barron laughs.

LORD WOOSTER (CONT'D)

Amusing it isn't. You don't have to live with her nonsense. She's far too detail-oriented if you ask me.

Olivia charges into the room, her pursuers wait at the door.

OLIVIA

My Lord! I've found an anomaly!

LORD WOOSTER

Yes, Olivia. I'm sure you have.

OLIVIA

Another receipt that defies classification. A direct payment from this office to a regimental corporal. A recent invalid, just back from the trenches of Gravinia.

Lord Wooster trades a furtive look with Barron.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

It may be more evidence of wrongdoing.

(MORE)

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

I don't yet know if they're smuggling medicine, weapons, or intelligence. But I believe we have a traitor in the counting house.

Olivia hands over the receipt to Lord Wooster, trusting.

LORD WOOSTER

I'll look into it personally.

OLIVIA

It's not worthy of your station, Sir. The burden of inquiry is mine.

LORD WOOSTER

I'm afraid that burden will be impossible for you to bear, Miss Faren. You're being reassigned at the Foreign Minister's request.

Olivia is shocked for a moment, glances at Barron in recognition, and then stands up straight, abashed.

OLIVIA

By the grace of our Divine Emperor, I serve Albion. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In life everlasting.

BARRON

I'm constantly inspired by the dedication of our imperial youth.

LORD WOOSTER

Fair play?

BARRON

I don't know about fair, but for you, it's positively fortuitous.
(to Olivia)
Pack a bag, Miss Faren.

OLIVIA

With what expectation, Sir?

BARRON

A journey to the furthest boundary of the empire.

Olivia's taken aback. Lord Wooster couldn't be happier.

LORD WOOSTER

Marvelous! Won't you be missed!

As Barron regards Olivia, her zeal fades to worry. She nervously clicks and spins her one-hand calculator. CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTING HOUSE - ALBION CAPITAL - DAY

Olivia exits, dressed for travel, locket around her neck, a Gladstone bag in each hand. She goes to Barron's carriage, where the Coachman waits. Olivia sets down her bags, peers inside to find Barron coughing, pocketing a handkerchief.

BARRON

My apologies for the hot scramble,
but we've an airship to catch.

Olivia hesitates, then takes a step back. She moves to recover her bags, but the Coachman's already got them.

OLIVIA

Oh, dear. This is my first time
away. Let alone traveling aloft.

BARRON

If it's good enough for the royal
family, it's good enough for us.

Olivia touches her locket reverently, then takes one last worried look back at the counting-house to see Lord Wooster and her colleagues visible in the windows. As Olivia climbs aboard the carriage, they let out a collective "Huzzah!"

INT. BARRON'S CARRIAGE - ON THE MOVE - DAY

Olivia gazes out the window, lips moving, absently manipulating her hand-held calculator. Barron observes.

BARRON

Forgive my query, Miss Faren. But
are you talking to yourself?

OLIVIA

In a way, Sir. When anticipation
threatens my nerves, I'm calmed by
the calculation of simple sums.

Out the window, Olivia notices a cluster of army troops marshaling in preparation to board a military train.

BARRON

Simple sums?

OLIVIA

Haversack, braces, knapsack,
ammunition, rifle. Four squads of
five in each platoon.

(MORE)

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

The cost to the empire would be thirteen thousand pounds and twenty, rounding for error.

BARRON

By what metric would you calculate the benefit of that expense?

OLIVIA

Sir?

BARRON

Would it be money well spent based on territory lost or taken?

OLIVIA

Taken. Expansion is the obligation of the Albion Empire.

BARRON

I'm afraid you've got a null set. Frontlines haven't moved in years.

OLIVIA

Haven't they?

BARRON

If those men and women have a twenty percent chance of surviving their first day of combat. Stabilizing at ten over their wartime service. How would you account for their potential loss to imperial productivity in peacetime?

OLIVIA

I'm not familiar with peacetime. Do you have any supporting statistics?

BARRON

If they even exist, they would be a hundred years out of date. I've any number of current tables regarding mortality, disability, and the lingering effects of battle trauma.

OLIVIA

The effects of trauma are subjective. I doubt they could be tallied with absolute confidence.

BARRON

Quite right. So please, Miss Faren. Never again calculate the cost of war using simple sums. Our troops deserve more nuanced reflection.

OLIVIA

Yes, Sir. I must admit my personal experience is limited. I've had no one to lose in the war.

BARRON

What of your friends? Did you not lose anyone to conscription?

Olivia gets her defensive walls up.

OLIVIA

As I said, Sir. I had no one.

BARRON

A blessing and a curse.

To avoid his sympathetic look, Olivia averts her eyes. She changes a setting on her calculator and resumes her sums.

EXT. RIDING RING - CAVALRY STABLE - DAY

A war stallion dressed for battle. A CAVALRY COUNT, late teens, tall in the saddle, rigid and chesty in his uniform.

CAVALRY COUNT

Enough dithering. Set those obstacles ablaze.

The Count is rudely addressing --

JACK WINBOW, thirties. Though he's dressed as a stable-hand, Jack is much more. An athletic war veteran with unkempt hair and kind eyes. He holds a burning torch in hand and speaks to the Count with easy confidence.

JACK

My Lord, on a first run, the obstacles can surprise you. Before your attempt, may I advise --

CAVALRY COUNT

Are you deaf? Light the damn fires!

Barron and Olivia arrive at ringside, watching as Jack moves to ignite a collection of gates, beams, and barrels designed to simulate the environment of a battlefield. Several mannequins are scattered about, holding wooden weapons.

As the smoke and flames rise, Jack waves to a horn player and percussionist, who begin a cacophonous racket of distraction.

Olivia watches the Count spur his horse into a gallop toward the first obstacle. She's rapt with admiration, anticipating a graceful leap, but the horse pulls up short, and the Count is pitched from the saddle, splashing down in the mud.

The embarrassed Count stalks over to his horse, takes the reins with one hand, prepares to smack it on the nose with the other. But his arm is grabbed mid-swing by Jack Winbow.

JACK

Easy there, my Lord.

CAVALRY COUNT

Unhand me, you rough-coated dog!

JACK

A stallion is proud. He won't respond to threats. You'll do better with a reassuring word.

The Count drops the reins and takes a swing at Jack, who easily steps out of the way. The Count stumbles, further annoyed. He readies his riding crop to whack the horse.

CAVALRY COUNT

After I've whipped this stupid beast, it'll be your turn, cur.

As the Count raises his crop, Jack casually shoves the man backward, knocking him into the mud. The enraged Count watches Jack swing up into the saddle of the stallion.

Olivia and Barron watch Jack guide the stallion through the treacherous obstacles. Leaping through smoke. Darting around fire. Spin-kicking the mannequins. It's a masterful display. The horn and drum duo accompany Jack's run with heroic music.

Jack reigns up the stallion before the awestruck Count, stroking the panting horse on the neck as he offers --

JACK

Treat him right, and this beast will save your life.

Jack alights from the saddle, landing before the Count.

JACK (CONT'D)

Treat him wrong, and this beast will take yours.

Jack's steely gaze deflates the Count's mud-soaked ego.

INT. BARN - CAVALRY STABLE - DAY

Barron and Olivia approach Jack, shirtless, pitching hay into a feed bin for a hungry horse. As Jack turns his back, Olivia notices he's gravely scarred. Parallel lines resemble the claw marks of an animal.

BARRON

On the last full moon's night, your room was ready and waiting.

Jack moves to replace the pitchfork on a wall of tools.

JACK

I was hunting in the hills.

BARRON

Did you catch anything?

JACK

Nobody you know.

Jack grins at Barron, then finally notices Olivia.

BARRON

Olivia Faren, Jack Winbow. Our guardian for this endeavor.

OLIVIA

I'm happy to make your acquaintance.

Jack smiles at her formality, offering his hand. Olivia is momentarily taken aback, then shakes his hand vigorously.

JACK

A firm grip for a lady.

OLIVIA

I'm not a lady. I'm an accountant.

BARRON

Pack-up your fighting kit. Our blimp goes bag up within the hour.

JACK

You're not concerned my presence might complicate your mission?

BARRON

Our destination is Kormor Kirak. So your affliction may prove advantageous.

OLIVIA

I admit I'm unfamiliar with Kormor Kirak. Is it near the front lines?

Jack moves to the tool rack, where multiple edged weapons also hang. He takes down an elegantly curved Shamsir. A pouch of throwing daggers. A thick cane some three feet in length hinged at one end. It's called a folding Spetum.

BARRON

The territory is remote. Neutral ground. Nothing to be afraid of.

She startles as Jack flicks the Spetum and a menacing central blade unfurls while a pair of side prongs click into place just above the hilt. The imposing weapon is six feet in total. More spear than sword. Olivia is wide-eyed.

EXT. SKY - ALTITUDE - DAY

Blue sky. A blimp rises into the frame. As it flies toward us, we favor the lower-deck wardroom in the gondola's nose. Through the observation glass, we see Barron, Jack, and Olivia inside, standing around a table, regarding a map.

BARRON

What I'm about to relay is for your ears only. It mustn't be discussed beyond our circle. Understood?

JACK

Who've I got to tell?

INT. WARDROOM - BARRON'S BLIMP - FLYING - DAY

Olivia grips the table edge, struggling not to be airsick.

BARRON

Miss Faren? Can you keep a secret?

Olivia opens her mouth to answer, burps, mortified.

BARRON (CONT'D)

I'll consider that a yes.

JACK

Don't lock your knees. It's like a sailing ship, just much higher.

OLIVIA

All forms of travel are new to me.

Barron resumes his briefing --

BARRON

The union of Albion's Prince to Terrassia's Princess is the world's best chance at peace in years. After much debate, a site for the royal wedding was agreed upon.

Barron indicates a location on the map. The flags of Albion and Terrassia are visible on either side of a mountain range. In the center of which is the tiny territory of Kormor Kirak.

BARRON (CONT'D)

The natural barrier of the Videks and the ever-present storms along the border makes it easy to secure.

Jack sees Olivia trying to keep her balance.

JACK

Loosen up. Go with the flow.

Jack sways to demonstrate. Olivia copies awkwardly.

BARRON

A venue for the event had been under construction. Designed such that while the marriage festivities carry on above, confidential peace negotiations might transpire below. But not days ago, the construction site was burned to the ground.

JACK

It wasn't an accident?

BARRON

Albion's Counsel has gone missing, so my information is limited.

OLIVIA

Who would commit such a crime? Against peace! Against love!

Barron and Jack are both taken aback by her vitriol.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Pardon my outburst, Sir. But it's positively ghastly.

BARRON

Indeed. Our job is to see that construction resumes and the work finished in time for the wedding.

Olivia looks like she's about to keel over. Jack gently takes her arm, walking her forward to the wide observation window.

JACK

Steady. Eyes on the horizon.

With Olivia and Jack at the window, Barron regards the map where Kormor Kirak is marked with an illustrated castle.

INT. ATTIC LAB - TERRASSIAN CONSULATE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

The castle is visible out the window. A WHIRR and CLICK of GEARS. The Automatic Assassin lies on a table, limbs splattered with blood and bits of gore from a recent murder.

A thirty-something MAN in a blood-stained apron cleans the machine with oil and brush. One of the man's own arms is a clockwork prosthetic. At the sound of a loud POUNDING on a downstairs DOOR, the man stops work and removes his apron.

EXT. TERRASSIAN CONSULATE - HIGH STREET - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

The man with the clockwork arm exits his building, putting on a crisp military jacket. We notice a placard next to the door identifies the place as the: TERRASSIAN CONSULATE.

The man sees Red Suited Guards pounding on the doors of every building on the block, summoning the occupants outside. The man with the clockwork arm gazes toward the looming castle.

EXT. TORONY CASTLE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

The spires of the castle reach toward the night sky. Light flickers in scattered windows. The glass is opaque. The royal residents within are intensely private. Most of them anyway.

A WOMAN on a horse gallops out of the castle gate, charging into town. She's a blur in a broad hat and flowing dress.

EXT. TERRASSIAN COUNSEL - HIGH STREET - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

The man with the clockwork arm and the other residents stand outside their buildings, lining the street, quiet and glum.

When the mysterious woman on the horse appears at one end of the street, they cheer and wave. After she races past, their faces fall, and silence returns. They re-enter their homes.

EXT. KERESKEDO MARKET - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

The oldest building in the city. A hub for commercial trade. Like a Silk Road Caravanserai, Persian Bazaar, or Souk.

ROZITO VALLIKOZO, thirties, stands out front, shifting nervously. As the market's resident fixer, his garb is eclectic. A mix of foreign fabrics and colorful patterns.

At the sound of clattering hooves, Rozito forces a smile and turns to wave at the approaching rider. The woman reigns the horse and dismounts, giving us our first good look at her.

SZERET VERESZ, twenties, is a goth princess. Though her garb is dark and evokes menace, her mood is cheery and delightful. She hands over the reins to a Red Guard and strides toward the market entrance, ignoring Rozito, who bows submissively.

SZERET

By the comet's tail, Rozito. Don't bow to me. We're friends.

Rozito hurries to catch up with her.

ROZITO

Royal blood requires respect.

SZERET

Ugh. You sound like my mother.

ROZITO

Please let her know that I'm a traditionalist and not to blame for your progressive interests.

SZERET

Did you tell the Guards of our appointment? The blaggards roused the good people from their beds.

ROZITO

So their dreams might be filled with visions of their most beloved princess.

SZERET

You were trying to spare them from having nightmares about their terrifying queen. How considerate.

ROZITO

What? No! That's not what I meant!

Szeret laughs as she enters the market. Rozito sees the spooky Red Guard holding Szeret's horse looking right at him.

ROZITO (CONT'D)

She said it! I didn't!

INT. MAIN AISLE - KERESKEDO MARKET - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

Szeret and Rozito walk the aisle between various vendors.

SZERET

I need a new dress for the Albion
Terrassia wedding.

ROZITO

Is that still happening?

SZERET

Have you heard otherwise?

ROZITO

How can they rebuild their theater
in time? That dreadful fire will
have set them back by months.

SZERET

What does the Albion Counsel say?

ROZITO

Feeney? He's missing. You wouldn't
happen to know anything about that?

Szeret moves on as if she hasn't heard the question.

INT. DRESS MAKER - KERESKEDO MARKET - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

Szeret and Rozito on a settee. They watch nervous young
models parade before them wearing different formal outfits.
Lots of ruffles and bustles. A matronly dressmaker
orchestrates this from the side. Szeret is not impressed.

SZERET

Mushroom.
(beat)
Tomato.
(beat)
Lettuce.

ROZITO

I didn't know you ate vegetables.

Szeret perks up at a Gawky Model in a leather bodysuit.

SZERET

Peach!

Szeret leaps up and starts removing her own dress. Rozito and
the rest are aghast as she strips on down to garter and hose.

The Gawky Model tries not to panic as Szeret approaches, snuggling up behind her. Szeret matches her arms and legs to the model's, then places her head on the woman's shoulder.

SZERET (CONT'D)
How do I look?

ROZITO
Like a two-headed prostitute.

SZERET
Flirty-Flirt-Flirt!

Szeret takes the hands of the bewildered model and leads her in a confident waltz around the room. Szeret dips the quivering young woman, holding her firm, face to face.

Szeret's lips draw back in a teeth-baring smile.

SZERET (CONT'D)
Does it bind?

The suit is so tight the woman can only manage a squeak in response. Szeret spins the pained model back onto her feet.

SZERET (CONT'D)
Delicious! I'll take it!

ROZITO
Your mother won't think it's too modern?

SZERET
Ugh. You're soooo provincial.
(to Gawky Model)
Ever been inside the castle?

The bewildered model shakes her head, Szeret smiles, leads her toward the door, still barely dressed.

ROZITO
Szeret! Your clothes!

SZERET
I'd only be taking them off again when I get home. Sweet dreams!

She's gone. Rozito glares at the self-satisfied Dress Maker.

ROZITO
I'll deny that I was ever here.

EXT. OBSERVATION DECK - BARRON'S BLIMP - FLYING - DAWN

Atop the blimp's gondola, under the massive gas bag. Olivia arrives from below decks. She moves toward the front, getting a glorious view of a distant mountain range on the horizon. She breathes it all in, savoring this new experience.

JACK (V.O.)
How are you feeling?

Olivia turns to find Jack Winbow dressed for training. His assorted weapons are available nearby.

OLIVIA
Healthy. Thank you.

JACK
You adapt quickly.

OLIVIA
Do I? No sooner have I mastered air travel do I learn we must transition to a carriage.

JACK
The Videk storms are notorious. They'd rip this gas bag apart.

Olivia returns her gaze forward, searching for any sign of this on the horizon. She hears CLATTERING BOOTS and turns to find Jack practicing fighting forms with his Shamsir blade.

Olivia is fascinated. She tracks his moves, lips counting.

OLIVIA
There's a four-four beat to your steps. You're moving in patterns.

Jack continues his workout as he answers.

JACK
My forms? They're just good for practice. When the music starts, these routines go to hell.

OLIVIA
What music would that be?

Jack swings his blade through the air as he explains.

JACK
The bugles of war. Drums of gun and cannon. You'll never see a delicate lunge and parry on a battlefield.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

Just a scrum of hacking and
slashing. Until the last exhausted
blade falls. Nothing left but a
pile of barely grown kids. All of
them screaming, crying, then quiet.
That silence will crush your heart
like an iron shroud.

Jack sobers up, finishing off his imaginary combat. Olivia
can see on his face that he's haunted by his past actions.

OLIVIA

Your passionate words convey the
critical nature of our mission.

JACK

I look forward to the day when our
young people will not practice for
battle but the dance floor.

Jack tries to change the mood with a quick dance step.

JACK (CONT'D)

When that music kicks off, it's all
about the well-rehearsed routine.

OLIVIA

Is it?

JACK

Do you prefer improvisation?

OLIVIA

I don't know.

JACK

Don't you dance?

OLIVIA

I've never had the occasion.

JACK

Then how do you celebrate joy?

OLIVIA

(flustered)

Excuse me, I must re-pack my kit
for the overland journey.

Olivia moves off, leaving Jack to watch her go, curious.

EXT. KORMOR CITY - DAY

TO ESTABLISH. The city, as viewed from outside its impenetrable walls. The single mountain road is choked with caravan traffic headed in both directions.

EXT. SOUTHERN GATE - KORMOR CITY - DAY

Olivia steps down from a carriage, stretching her arms. She regards the city's towering walls and the massive gate ahead, where she sees Barron and Jack haggling with some Red Guards.

Olivia cranes her neck to look up at the castle. Torony Piros straddles the wall. Half is protected behind the walls of the city, while the other half hangs over a vertical cliff.

Olivia sees a tiny flash of reflected light in a high window.

INT. SZERET'S BEDROOM - TORONY PIROS - KORMOR CITY - DAY

TELESCOPE POV - OLIVIA

The distant face of Olivia looks up at us.

BACK TO SCENE

Szeret steps away from the telescope, naked and intrigued. Behind her, the Gawky Model sleeps naked in a lavish bed.

EXT. CARRIAGE - MOVING - SOUTHERN GATE - KORMOR CITY - DAY

The carriage enters the city, Olivia visible in the window.

INT. CARRIAGE - MOVING - QUEEN'S ROAD - KORMOR CITY - DAY

Olivia stares out the window, absorbing sights and sounds.

Barron sits nearby, coughing into a handkerchief. Jack notices blood on the hanky and offers a look of concern. Barron disregards his interest with a question.

BARRON

Welcome to Kormor Kirak. It's your first time, isn't it, Jack?

JACK

It is. Though I did meet some of their local boys years ago.

BARRON

Of course, you did. An experience that left its mark. Will you seek them out for a reunion?

Barron nods grimly. Olivia hasn't been paying attention --

OLIVIA

Those symbols. I'm seeing them on many walls and doors. Do they identify the occupants somehow?

Barron follows her gaze, taking in the symbols.

BARRON

Their purpose is to protect the people inside.

OLIVIA

From what? A misunderstanding? To signify they've paid their taxes?

BARRON

They're wards of defense, against the attacks of evil spirits.

JACK

Woof.

OLIVIA

Though it's my first time afield, I'm surprised to find superstition so pervasive, let alone permitted. Is this common in the provinces?

BARRON

After my military service, I joined the diplomatic corps. Kormor city was my first posting, as General Counsel. When I arrived, my world-view was much like your own. Fixed. I encourage you to regard whatever you may encounter, no matter how strange, with open-minded curiosity.

OLIVIA

I'll try, Sir.

JACK

You could also try fear.

Barron and Olivia regard him.

JACK (CONT'D)

If something you encounter scares the hell out of you, run.

BARRON

Don't listen to Jack. There's
nothing for us to be afraid of.

Olivia looks past Barron to see Jack nod: "Yes, there is."

EXT. ROOFTOP - QUEEN'S ROAD - KORMOR CITY - DAY

As the carriage proceeds, something keeps pace with it above.

CREATURE POV - MOVING FAST

Across the rooftops. Keeping to the shadows. Leaping smoothly over the gaps between the buildings. Is it some kind of animal? Or is it that killer machine?

Not the latter. Because whatever we've been running with is now staring a few blocks ahead at the Automatic Assassin, who hides on another rooftop, preparing to ambush the carriage.

EXT. ROOFTOP - QUEEN'S ROAD - KORMOR CITY - DAY

As the Automatic Assassin tracks the approach of the carriage, it preps an explosive crossbow bolt. The arrow is oversized, its clear glass tip filled with flaming gel.

INT. CARRIAGE - STOPPED - CONSTRUCTION SITE - KORMOR CITY

Barron and the others look out the window at the charred ruins of the theater. Rebuilding it will take some time.

OLIVIA

Ghastly.

EXT. ROOFTOP - QUEENS' ROAD - KORMOR CITY - DAY

The Automatic Assassin nocks the arrow and takes aim at the carriage below. But before they can fire, a shape tackles them from behind. The ARROW shoots skyward and EXPLODES.

INT. CARRIAGE - STOPPED - CONSTRUCTION SITE - KORMOR CITY

The door swings open, and Jack stands ready with his sword, scanning for danger. Olivia pokes her head out for a look. They see a fading ball of smoke and fire in the air above.

INT. CARRIAGE - STOPPED - QUEEN'S ROAD - KORMOR CITY

Barron reaches for Olivia and gently pulls her back inside.

BARRON

Curiosity, yes. But in moderation.

Olivia settles back into her seat, trying to remain calm. Barron taps the roof with his cane and shouts to the driver.

BARRON (CONT'D)
To the Albion Consulate, please.

Jack swings back inside as the carriage gets underway.

EXT. ROOFTOP - QUEENS' ROAD - KORMOR CITY - DAY

The Automatic Assassin squirms on its back, pinned by the furry paw of an unseen CREATURE. With a low GROWL, the beast uses another paw to decapitate the machine. Its head rolls to a stop, neck cables leaking fluid, eyes dimming to darkness.

INT. ATTIC LAB - TERRASSIAN EMBASSY - KORMOR CITY - DAY

The man with the clockwork arm regards the screen of a radar-like device. It features a painted blueprint of the city. In the area near the construction site, a tiny blip fades away.

The man responds with a sigh, then turns to look across his esoteric laboratory toward a rack of mechanical limbs and heads. Plenty of spares to make more Automatic Assassins.

INT. ALBION CONSULATE - KORMOR CITY - DAY

Olivia and Jack follow Barron through the ruined door. The room has been ransacked. Everything is smashed and broken. Barron notes the charred remains of the construction plans.

OLIVIA
Why didn't the authorities stop the looting?

BARRON
The consulate is considered Albion territory. Within these walls, the Red Guards have no jurisdiction.

Olivia recovers a shattered picture frame just like the one she has in her locket, of the Albion Prince and Terrassian Princess. Disgusted, she sets it upright on the desk.

OLIVIA
I've never seen anything so awful.

Barron approaches the vault door in the wall at the back of the room. The surface is dented and burned from multiple attempts to get inside. The wall at its edges has been smashed away. But it appears the breaching efforts failed.

Barron removes his signet ring and affixes it face-down in a port adjacent to the door's lock. A TIMER begins to CLICK, prompting Barron to quickly spin a trio of combination dials.

A pneumatic KA-THUNK from the LOCK prompts Olivia and Jack to approach the vault door behind Barron. He steps aside so that Jack can take the handle of the heavy door and pull it open.

Olivia stares in abject horror at what's inside. Her jaw drops, eyes going wide in fear, and her body shudders. Her lips begin to move as she starts counting something.

OLIVIA'S POV

The inside of the vault has been ransacked. Any items of value have been removed. The walls and floor are caked with dried blood. The source of which is Feeney. Dead.

The man's naked body is suspended in a crude frame made of entwined branches. He's covered with hundreds of tiny wounds. These injuries are patterns, the runes of a demonic language.

BACK TO SCENE

Olivia's eyes flutter. She's about to faint. Jack anticipated this and swoops up from behind, catching her in his arms. His move jolts Olivia back to lucidity. She straightens, angry.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
I'm fine! I'm fine!

Jack releases her. With a shaky hand, Olivia produces her calculator. Her fingers moving over it reflexively but unsure what to sum. Jack follows Barron into the befouled vault.

JACK
If they tortured him for the combination, why was the door still locked?

BARRON
They used his pain to gain entry, but not that way. These wounds. This trellis. It's portal magic.

JACK
Some kind of druid ritual?

BARRON
The runes reek of necromancy. The manipulation of dead things for magical ends. An abominable craft.

JACK
What were they after?

BARRON
There would've been a robust
deposit of gold. To fund
construction of the theater.

OLIVIA (V.O.)
Eighty-Eight.

Barron and Jack turn back to see Olivia trying to be brave,
tears running down her cheeks, analog calculator in hand.

OLIVIA
If the average surface area of the
human body is twenty-two square
feet. And the observed
circumference of each mark is three
inches. There are eighty-eight
wounds on that man's body.

BARRON
It's been a long day. I've heard
the mistress of our hostel makes
delightful cocktails. Shall we
retreat and put her to the test?

Olivia regards him, still shocked, she nods.

EXT. BASTION INN - KORMOR CITY - SUNSET

ESTABLISHING SHOT. A two-story hostel. The Barron's signature
carriage parked out front. Also, a steam-powered carriage.

EPPY (V.O.)
Liquid courage.

INT. DINING HALL - BASTION INN - NIGHT

Olivia sits at a bar, on a stool, staring at an empty glass.
Barron sits adjacent, looking over new theater blueprints.

EPPY FLINDER, thirties, mixes a cocktail in a pitcher. She's
a free spirit with an earthy aesthetic. Her ears are uniquely
shaped, sleek with an elegant point. Eppy owns this place.

EPPY
That's what my Grandmother called
it. Dewrder Hylifol in her tongue.

OLIVIA
Miss Flinder, I must admit I've
never had an alcoholic beverage.

EPPY
Call me Eppy.

Olivia watches Eppy fill her glass.

OLIVIA
Eppy, should I fear intoxication?

EPPY
It won't burn those dreadful sights
out of your memory, but it will
help your thoughts move on.

Eppy watches as Olivia warily sips the drink. It tastes good.

OLIVIA
Sweet. Like honey.

Olivia turns to scan the room, drink in hand. Locals occupy dining tables. An area for dancing in front of a platform. A singer and instrumental trio perform a traditional folk song.

BARRON
Feeney was wise to place an extra
set of blueprints in your charge.

Olivia sees the walls are decorated with weapons, rugs, relics, and paintings of fantastic beasts and monsters. Unicorns. Werewolves. Oversized bats. Elves. And more.

BARRON (CONT'D)
When I was last here, Queen
Kiraline had outlawed any necrotic
practice. Has that changed?

Olivia notes a Trompe Loeil illustrated ceiling that features unfamiliar constellations and a falling comet. She turns back and sets down her now empty glass, which Eppy refills.

EPPY
Mind your sips, Olivia. Too much
sweet can end with a sour.
(to Barron)
Change hasn't come to Kormor Kirak
since the comet fell from the sky.

BARRON
If that were true, the gates would
still be closed to foreigners.

EPPY
The queen's favor can be bought.
But I can't imagine the price for
turning a blind eye to necromancy.

BARRON

The uprising of the Lich Cult was the only real threat to her reign.

OLIVIA

Lich? I don't know that word.

BARRON

A Lich is a powerful wizard, dead but resurrected. Their memories, skills, and agenda are intact.

OLIVIA

What is the local fascination with all of this paranormal poppy-cock?

Eppy and Barron share a smile.

EPPY

You live in the new world. We live in the old. Never shall they meet.

OLIVIA

Oh, dear. Have I offended you?

EPPY

If I was easy to offend, I'd be in the wrong job.

Olivia takes another drink, clearly enjoying it.

OLIVIA

You're in the right profession.

Olivia spots Jack playing cards at a table with a few other men. We recognize one of them by his clockwork arm. Olivia is more interested in his lapel pin, the flag of Terrassia.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Sir, are you aware that Jack is playing cards with a Terrassian?

BARRON

Kormor Kirak is neutral ground, Miss Faren. A place for commonality, not conflict.

Eppy and Barron watch Olivia chug the rest of her drink and start across the room toward the table, a little unsteady.

Barron returns to scrutinizing the plans for the theater.

Olivia arrives at the card table. Jack and the others react politely as she pulls up a chair.

JACK
Olivia. This is Rozito. Chulligan.
That's Pidge. And Devorlen Koss.

Olivia disregards the others. She's fascinated by Koss.

OLIVIA
You're Terrassian.

KOSS
The least remarkable element of my
identity.

OLIVIA
I've never met one of you before.

KOSS
War keeps the opposition separated.

JACK
Not on the battlefield.

ROZITO
That's why I prefer the card table.

OLIVIA
I hope you're looking forward to
the royal wedding as much as I am.

KOSS
Your hope is misplaced. I'm
revolted by the arranged marriage
of those leisure class infants.

Olivia is the only one shocked and offended by this.

OLIVIA
How dare you! It's not an arranged
marriage. The prince and princess
are in love.

KOSS
I don't see how. Not only have they
never met. But our princess is ten
years old. Yours is what, twelve?

Olivia pulls out her locket to check the image of the couple.

OLIVIA
Nonsense. They're obviously of age.
And devoted to one another. Look!

Devorlen can't help but laugh at her naivete.

KOSS

Your proof is in the illustration?
Let's hope the artwork on these
walls is nowhere near as accurate.

Olivia glances at all the painted monsters on the walls. Rather than get embarrassed, she gets angry. Jack sees she's about to toss his drink at Devorlen, pulls it from her reach.

JACK

You play cards, don't you 'Liv?

Olivia sees her companions holding playing cards. There's a small pot of money and trinkets at the center of the table.

OLIVIA

I don't approve of gambling.

JACK

There's some chance at work. But
it's skill-based. If you can count,
you should be able to pick it up.

Jack winks as he deals her in. Olivia intuits his wily intent and plays the part of an ingenue in over her head.

OLIVIA

Numbers? Oh, dear. It may take me a
few turns to get my bearings.

KOSS

As long as you can feed the kitty,
you're welcome to play.

Olivia puts her locket on the table, sliding it into the pot. Devorlen is amused, anticipating what should be an easy win.

THE CENTER OF THE TABLE - LATER

Now piled high with money and trinkets.

BACK TO SCENE

Olivia and Devorlen Koss are the only players still holding cards. The others have folded and watch the showdown. Olivia lays out her cards for everyone to see.

OLIVIA

Does this add up to victory?

Devorlen Koss flicks his clockwork fingers in disgust, shredding his cards. Jack, Rozito, and Mutt cheer for Olivia. Devorlen stands, straightening his coat in search of dignity.

KOSS

Lucky I've another event. Or you might end up taking my arm. I hope you'll indulge me in a rematch?

Olivia drags her winnings toward her, reclaiming her locket.

OLIVIA

Your hope is well placed. I'm saving money for a dress to wear at the royal wedding.

Devorlen takes his leave, heading toward Barron as he goes.

ROZITO

That was remarkable. Were you cheating?

OLIVIA

Never in my life!

Eppy steps up behind Jack, puts her hands on his shoulders.

EPPY

Which one of you is chasing away my customers?

JACK

'Liv has an affinity for numbers.

Olivia basks in the compliment, feeling close to Jack.

Eppy leans down behind Jack and whispers in his ear. Jack smiles at whatever wicked thing she's just said to him.

Olivia is not amused as Jack gets up from the table and follows Eppy to the dance floor.

ROZITO

I have a friend you should meet. She's fascinated by the world outside of Kormor Kirak.

Olivia watches Jack and Eppy partake in some coordinated moves. A mix of Bluegrass Clogging and Irish Square Dancing. Fast. Fun. Complicated. Is Olivia jealous or just curious?

ROZITO (CONT'D)

And looking forward to the wedding.

As Rozito talks, Olivia tracks the moves of Jack and Eppy. Her moving lips betray that she's calculating their steps.

ROZITO (CONT'D)
Szeret loves dancing.

OLIVIA
So do I.

Olivia pounds the rest of Jack's drink takes Rozito's hand, and pulls him onto the dance floor. He's startled but game.

Jack and Eppy are happy to be joined by Olivia and Rozito. The two couples twirl and maneuver around each other.

At first, Olivia's expression is serious as she counts her moves, executing what she's memorized. Gradually she loosens up. Matching the others step for step. Smiling and laughing.

This is the first time we've ever seen her joyful. And it could even be the first time she's ever been joyful. But it's also definitely the first time she's ever had alcohol. So --

Olivia's smile fades. She bolts off the dance floor, sick.

EXT. ENTRY COURT - TORONY CASTLE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

Red Guards at their posts. Torches light the grounds. The courtyard is filled with the parked carriages of visitors.

The RHYTHMIC PUFF of a STEAM POWERED VEHICLE heralds the arrival of Devorlen Koss and Barron Whitehallow. Riding together in the self-propelled carriage, they ease to a stop.

EXT. ENTRY PATH - TORONY CASTLE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

As they walk away from the vehicle toward the castle entrance, Barron has one of his signature coughing attacks.

KOSS
Sounds like I'm not the only one
with a gift from the trenches.

With his clockwork arm, he offers Barron a handkerchief.

KOSS (CONT'D)
Did you fight at Schaffen Platz?

Barron finishes wiping his mouth, pockets the handkerchief.

BARRON
The mounds at Barrow.

KOSS
The use of asphyxiating gas is a
great shame on my country. From one
soldier to another, I apologize.

BARRON

Let peace be the cure for what ails us.

KOSS

Will it grow my arm back?

BARRON

I'm afraid not. I'll take some metal lungs if you have them.

The affable enemies reach the entrance where a pair of Red Guards protect a double door. Devorlen flashes an invite to a uniformed Bouncer and receives an approving nod.

BARRON (CONT'D)

The Queen said if I ever found a reason to return, I could swing by the castle anytime, unannounced.

Barron pulls a gold medallion from his pocket. It features a dragon's head with amber eyes. The pupils are drops of blood. The Bouncer tips his hat, and the Red Guards open the doors.

INT. BALLROOM - TORONY CASTLE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

A non-traditional masquerade. A debauched affair lit by candled sconces and chandeliers. The guests wear Gothically Victorian attire. Men and Women of all races and sizes. Their faces are hidden behind elaborate masks made from animal hides, scales, fur, bones, and other earthy materials. Weird.

A performance is underway above the crowd, men, and women executing elaborate aerial gymnastics via ropes and wires.

We recognize Szeret, the princess is entwined with that Gawky Model from the Dress Shop. Szeret sees Barron entering with Devorlen and leaves the model to swing alone.

Szeret drops twenty feet, landing easily behind Barron.

SZERET

Is that a ghost I see?

Barron is startled by her jump-scare --

BARRON

Szeret! You haven't aged a day!

SZERET

You look decrepit.

BARRON

I'm told it's called dying.

SZERET

I wouldn't know about that.

BARRON

Then you wouldn't know anything about a necromancer on the loose.

SZERET

On the loose where, in hell?

BARRON

My consulate. I found my man riddled with dark marks, strung up in a wooden trellis, inside a locked vault. A Lich Cult portal.

SZERET

The Cult was before my time.

(to Koss)

Hello there, tick-tock. Bring me any new toys to play with?

KOSS

My bag is empty, Princess. Cleaned out by a cardsharp at the Bastion.

BARRON

Please, Szeret. If the Cult is rising in this modern age, I fear the spread of their dark ideology.

SZERET

You've become quite the worrywart. Mother's crushed them before. She'd have no bother doing it again.

A hush passes through the revelers. Szeret, Barron, and Koss react, looking toward an upper balcony and the entry of --

QUEEN KIRALINE VERESZ EROSZAKOS, forties, but eternal. Her clothes are layered with the ornamental bulk of couture. She moves as if weightless. Aglow with preternatural charisma and regal allure. Serene in her gaze as everyone takes a knee.

Kiraline basks in their submission, then gracefully motions for them to rise. As they do, the chatter and music resume.

Kiraline sees Barron in the crowd. Their eyes lock. Barron is transfixed by her beauty, lost in the moment. He blinks and --

-- suddenly, Kiraline is standing before him. Having crossed the room by magical means. Devorlen Koss is startled. Szeret rolls her eyes. Barron is almost overwhelmed by her presence.

KIRALINE

At last, you have returned to me.

BARRON

I bet you say that to all the boys.

KIRALINE

You are no longer a boy.

Kiraline affectionately strokes Barron's face with her hand.

INT. UPPER BALCONY - BALLROOM - TORONY CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Barron is disoriented to find himself alone with the queen. The ballroom floor is below. Barron stifles a cough.

BARRON

Forgive me, my constitution isn't what it used to be.

KIRALINE

Yet your spirit remains vital.

Barron tries not to waver as Kiraline moves close. Her lips find his in a gentle kiss. Once more, they are transported.

INT. QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER - TORONY CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Kiraline draws back from her kiss with Barron. He's clearly flustered. Affected by her sensual attention.

BARRON

Kiraline, you know I'm not well.

As Kiraline regards him, she licks his blood from her lips.

KIRALINE

Isn't that why you've returned?

BARRON

I've come because I fear my nation's interests are under attack from a threat we share.

KIRALINE

So you will not accept my offer?

BARRON

I will not be your slave.

KIRALINE

We have played that game before.

BARRON
My priorities have shifted.

KIRALINE
Beyond passion? Beyond pleasure?

BARRON
I've found my calling. To end the pain and suffering of the innocent.

KIRALINE
You want this for others while you refuse it for yourself.

BARRON
However intense my personal desires, I will not be turned away from my duty to the greater good.

KIRALINE
Not even by a queen's love?

BARRON
I'm sorry, Kiraline. My heart belongs to Albion.

KIRALINE
Yet here you are in Kormor Kirak. Where the rule of my heart is law.

Barron is startled as Kiraline goes full vampire. Her jaw unhinges, rows of serrated teeth on display, tongue snaking. She lunges toward him, but right before impact, we CUT TO:

INT. BALLROOM - TORONY CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Barron staggers backward, barely staying on his feet as he abruptly finds himself amidst the creepy crowd of guests.

Kiraline is on that upper balcony, no longer a vampire, looking down on him with a mischievous smile. She puts her palm over her heart, teasing that their romance is not over.

Szeret stands with Devorlen Koss. They watch Barron clumsily gather his wits, look at them, and then head for the exit.

KOSS
I'm his ride. Goodnight, Princess.

Koss moves after Barron. Szeret looks up at her mother.

SZERET (V.O.)
Did he ask you about the Cult?

INT. DUNGEON HALLWAY - TORONY CASTLE - NIGHT

Torches flicker as Szeret walks beside Kiraline.

KIRALINE

We discussed matters of the heart.

SZERET

Don't be foolish, mother. He knows they've returned.

KIRALINE

The Cult is our concern. Not his.

SZERET

He blames them for the attack.

KIRALINE

Does he? Why?

SZERET

Evidence of necromancy in his consulate. Do you think Barron will invite me in for a look?

Kiraline doesn't like the sound of that.

KIRALINE

Szeret, I'm worried about your interest in the outside world.

SZERET

You opened the gates of our city to them. Did you think I'd be unaffected by their influence?

The women arrive at a closed door.

KIRALINE

If I hadn't opened the gates, it would only have been a matter of time before the humans broke them down. I'd hoped within our walls, they would be vulnerable to our influence. I still believe that.

SZERET

Their war has kept them at each other's throats. If they ever find peace. Our days will be numbered.

KIRALINE

Stay away from them, Szeret.

DSZERET

Don't worry, Mother. I'll never forget what I am.

Szeret opens the dungeon door to reveal a half dozen cowering people in chains. We recognize them from the party above.

With paranormal speed, Kiraline and Szeret enter the room, the DOOR SLAMS behind them, and then... the screaming begins.

INT. ALBION CONSULATE - KORMOR CITY - DAY

Bloody water pools on the vault floor as a cleaning crew scrubs the walls. A cleaner wraps Feeney's dead body in muslin, throws it over their shoulder, then carries it out.

Olivia sits at the desk near the vault's entrance, going over construction facts and figures, trying not to look as the corpse goes past. But she can't help herself, watching as its passage disrupts a meeting in progress.

Barron stands with Devorlen Koss in front of the bulletin board where Eppy pins up the new set of theater plans.

A pair of roughnecks make way for the corpse. The woman is called ZAFFIR. The man is NERO. They harangue Barron --

NERO

You can't expect us to make the old deadline. It's a scratch job.

BARRON

Working around the clock will be required. My accountant is drafting a schedule. And Devorlen has suggested some uniquely Terrassian machinery to speed construction.

KOSS

Some training will be required.

NERO

If you want my crew workin' nights. They'll need to be protected.

Jack chimes in from a perch on the staircase.

JACK

Can't you handle that? You look like the kind of guy who doesn't mind a fight in the moonlight.

Nero regards Jack, sniffing the air.

NERO
Have we met?

JACK
Have we? I'm new in town.

Barron interjects --

BARRON
Nero. Zaffir. Please. This job is
by decree of Albion and Terrassia.

KOSS
You will be under our protection.

NERO
Maybe that has meaning in other
parts of the world. But the nights
of Kormor Kirak are filled with
threats you can't even imagine.

SZERET (V.O.)
Oh, Barron's quite familiar.

They all turn to find Szeret standing in the doorway. Rozito is visible behind, and a royal carriage with Red Guards. Everyone in the Consulate takes a knee, except for Barron.

SZERET
You needn't bow. You're on foreign
soil. May I come in, Sir?

BARRON
We would be honored.

Szeret enters, motioning for everyone to rise. She doesn't stop moving, having set her sights across the room on Olivia.

SZERET
Feet-feet-feet. There you go.
(to Nero and Zaffir)
Your queen supports this work.
Anyone who contributes to its rapid
completion will be in her good
graces. As will their families.

Nero and Zaffir like the sound of that.

NERO
My team will get the job done, your
highness.

Szeret ignores him. She reaches Olivia, who curtsies. But Szeret quickly takes both her hands and pulls her upright.

SZERET

I wouldn't mind having you kneel
before me, but not in public.

Szeret hasn't let go of Olivia's hands.

SZERET (CONT'D)

Your hands are shaking. Am I so
terrifying?

OLIVIA

Pardon my nerves. I've never been
in the presence of royalty.

SZERET

That makes me your first princess.

OLIVIA

Yes, your highness.

SZERET

If we're going to be friends, you
must call me Szeret, Miss...

OLIVIA

Faren. Olivia Faren.

Olivia is surprised as Szeret spins her in a waltz twirl. Olivia awkwardly complies. But she's grateful as Barron interrupts, deftly separating Olivia from Szeret's grasp.

BARRON

Hands off the help, Szeret. Miss
Faren is critical to the timely
completion of our endeavor. I won't
let you distract her from work.

SZERET

But that's why I'm here. To work.

BARRON

Excellent, Nero and Zaffir are off
to organize their crews. Maybe they
will lend you a hammer.

SZERET

Mother was adamant that I aid your
necromantic investigation.

BARRON

Was she? I'm glad she's taking the
threat seriously. Olivia was about
to go with Jack and Eppy to visit--

SZERET

The Market?

(to Olivia)

Oh, I must introduce you to my seamstress. Rozito mentioned that you're saving up for a new dress.

BARRON

No-no. Today they're following up on rumors of odd activity in the Hallaset Fields.

SZERET

The cemetery. During the day? Ughh.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - HALLASET FIELDS - DAY

On the outskirts of the city. One side of the plateau is a sheer cliff, beyond which distant mountains are cloaked in fog. The ground is covered with a reed-like grass, head-high.

A network of trails weaves through the grass, connecting several raised plinths where the dead are deposited. In a tradition similar to that of Tibet, the bodies are left to decompose under the elements, or devoured by carrion birds.

The setting is made all the more eerie by drifting mist.

Rozito sits atop the parked royal carriage, watching as the others enter the trailhead in two groups. He calls out --

ROZITO

Szeret! Can't we hunt necromancers in a place that's not so smelly?

Rozito sees one of the Red Guards looking up at him.

ROZITO (CONT'D)

Have I told you how grateful I am for your protection? Thank you.

EXT. WINDING TRAIL - HALLASET FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Szeret and Olivia walk, followed by two Red Guards

SZERET

Rozito's not wrong. We could be strolling in the Gillikoi Woods. Or dipping our toes in the Erdo Pools. Not treading through the Hallaset, in search of dark wizards.

OLIVIA
You don't believe in that
provincial nonsense, do you?

SZERET
Don't I?

OLIVIA
Necromancy. Paranormal poppy-cock.

SZERET
Wasn't there a dead man in your
vault?

OLIVIA
With eighty eight wounds on his
body. That's no proof of magic.

SZERET
I believe in things I haven't seen.

OLIVIA
What do you mean, like ghosts?

SZERET
You traveled here by airship.

OLIVIA
Most of the way.

SZERET
I take you at your word, though
I've never seen such a machine.

OLIVIA
Technology. That's different.

SZERET
Did you fly over the ocean?

OLIVIA
Briefly.

SZERET
I've never seen the ocean.

OLIVIA
You're not a traveler?

SZERET
That word has no meaning to me.

OLIVIA
This is my first trip. I'd never
been away from the Capital City.

SZERET
Where they have grand theaters, and
libraries, and elegant restaurants.

OLIVIA
Yes. But I never visited them.

SZERET
What about electric lights and
indoor plumbing?

OLIVIA
Have you never seen a toilet?

SZERET
I may be exaggerating, but just
because you haven't seen something
doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

Olivia considers the truth in that she begins looking around
the cemetery through new eyes. A bit freaked out. She
reflexively pulls out her analog computer and gets clicking.

SZERET (CONT'D)
Ooh! I've never seen one of those.

OLIVIA
A calculator. You know, for math.

SZERET
What's math?

Olivia's shock quickly becomes the enthusiasm to explain.

EXT. FUNERAL HUB - HALLASET FIELDS - DAY

Walking with Jack, Eppy plucks a stalk of Hallaset grass from
beside the trail. Jack watches her smell its fragrant flower.

JACK
How does the Hallaset grow so tall,
this high in the mountains?

EPPY
The soil is rich.

The trail leads them to a funeral hub, where they startle a
pair of carrion birds eating a fresh corpse atop a raised
plinth. The birds fly away, scattering body parts as they go.

JACK
A thousand years of fertilizer.

EPPY
I love it here. Don't you?

Jack scrutinizes memorial stones with freshly painted wards.

JACK
Surrounded by the dead? No thanks.

EPPY
Outside. Feeling the breeze. The
light. The spirits of the animals.
It's where I feel the most at home.

JACK
For most of my life, the army was
home.

EPPY
Was it all bad?

JACK
Not all. With my mates, together,
even under fire, it always felt
like we had a purpose. Conquering
the world for the greater glory of
the empire. It's funny what young
people are willing to believe.

EPPY
My ancestors ruled the world.
Really. It's true. So long ago that
the world forgot they ever existed.
Good thing. It helps the few of us
who remain to stay alive in secret.

JACK
Your secret's safe with me.

EPPY
Jack, when we're together, you
don't need to hide. I know what you
are.

JACK
Whatever you think you know about
me is none of your business.

EPPY
Not yet.

Eppy takes no offense, returns to the trail. Jack follows.

INT. ALBION CONSULATE - KORMOR CITY - DAY

As the cleaning crew packs up, Barron and Devorlen Koss look over the schedule Olivia prepared for the construction job.

BARRON

Your mechanisms had better deliver.
Otherwise we won't be done in time.

KOSS

One of my machines can do the work
of three men in half the time.

BARRON

I look forward to seeing what
they're capable of.

The last of the cleaners exit, leaving the two men alone.
Koss prepares himself to reveal something we already know --

KOSS

You already have. On the night of
the fire, one of my automatons
broke down that door.

BARRON

What the devil are you on about,
Koss? Are you admitting Terrassian
forces attacked Albion territory?

KOSS

It was in pursuit of the arsonist.
Your man, Feeney. He was the one
who set our theater ablaze.

Barron considers this for a moment.

KOSS (CONT'D)

You are not surprised?

BARRON

Feeney sent me a message.
Explaining what he'd done.

KOSS

Had he lost his mind?

BARRON

I wondered that myself. He claimed
the theater was to be exploited by
the Lich Cult. It wasn't until I
saw his mutilated body that I
considered the possibility.

KOSS

Necromancers only care about the dead. What is their interest?

BARRON

That's what we need to find out. Before, the most powerful people in the world gather under one roof.

Barron and Devorlen regard the plans of the theater. They fail to notice that in these new plans, there is no roof.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - HALLASET FIELDS - DAY

Rozito hops down from the roof of the carriage. He regards the trailhead, scanning for any sign of his companions. Nothing. He motions for the carriage driver to join him --

ROZITO

The princess has been gone too long for comfort.

As the driver steps beside him, Rozito produces a hidden blade and slits the man's throat. The driver slackens, and Rozito eases him to the ground.

ROZITO (CONT'D)

Help! Your man's down! Help!

The pair of Red Guards hurry over for a look, only to receive Rozito's blade in quick thrusts between their armor plates.

As they clatter to the ground, Rozito moves to the dead driver, slicing open the man's shirt to reveal bare chest.

Rozito sheaths his blade pulls a pair of elegant scalpels and gets to work on the driver's chest like it's a canvas.

EXT. HALLASET FIELDS - DAY

Olivia is teaching Szeret how to use the calculator.

OLIVIA

Slide, lift, twist to set the parameters of your calculation.

SZERET

Then crank?

OLIVIA

Like a pepper mill.

SZERET

Two hundred and fifty-seven! How remarkable! I love it! Thank you!

Olivia is startled as Szeret hugs her.

OLIVIA

I'm glad you like it. But that one's mine.

SZERET

Didn't you just give it to me?

OLIVIA

That was not my intention.

As the women discuss this, they don't notice something horrifying -- body parts moving along the ground. Hands, arms, feet, heads, fingers, etc. Sliding and rolling across the trail. Drawn from one side to the other and beyond.

Olivia and Szeret are startled as Jack and Eppy arrive, both holding weapons, bravely following the moving body parts.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Does that happen often?

SZERET

Not that I've seen.

JACK

To the carriage. Let's go.

Olivia and Eppy run while Jack covers. Szeret is in no rush.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - HALLASET FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Rozito has covered the dead driver's chest with bloody runes similar to those we saw on Feeny in the vault. But these wounds are the shape of a figure with a head, arms, and legs.

EXT. WINDING TRAIL - HALLASET FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Olivia and Eppy hurry down the trail toward a pair of Red Guards. Something barrels out of the grass and attacks the armored men. Olivia and Eppy scream in surprise to see --

The Necrotic Bulk, roughly the shape of a human. Made from the discarded parts of multiple corpses. The reanimated limbs writhe and entwine with each other into a sickening mass.

Olivia and Eppy watch as the Red Guards are dispatched. The women turn and run, almost crashing into Jack. For a moment, he raises his weapon to engage the beast -- then he runs too.

Szeret is surprised to find Olivia, Eppy, and Jack running her way. They motion for her to follow them. Szeret hesitates, then sees the Necrotic Bulk coming down the trail.

Szeret seems amused by it, then hurries after the others.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - HALLASET FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Rozito continues to carve up the dead driver's chest. He's interrupted by a Red Guard, flings a scalpel to kill him.

EXT. FUNERAL HUB - HALLASET FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Olivia, Eppy, and Jack enter the open area. Followed by Szeret. The Necrotic Bulk tromps through the grass at them.

As the creature attacks, the humans duck and dive around the raised plinth. Jack and Eppy slash at it with their blades.

Olivia thinks Szeret's in danger and tackles the princess to the ground as a necrotic limb whips over their heads.

SZERET

What are you doing?

OLIVIA

Saving you!

SZERET

Do I need saving?

Olivia drags Szeret out of harm's way. Then watches as Jack and Eppy fight the monster with their weapons. Olivia tracks their movements, her lips moving, doing her memorization. Then turns to Szeret, emphatic --

OLIVIA

Flee, your highness! We'll give you time to get away!

Olivia dashes toward Jack, taking one of his spare weapons and then joining the fight against the Necrotic Bulk. Jack and Eppy are surprised but glad to have her assistance.

Szeret watches the brave humans battle the hulking monster.

SZERET

You can't kill that thing.

EPY

Go, your highness!

SZERET

It's already dead.

JACK

Run!

Jack moves to push Szeret toward the trail. She pushes him away with remarkable strength.

SZERET

Enough. Someone's in control. I'll go find them. And make them stop.

JACK

How the hell will you do that?

The humans are stunned as before their eyes, Szeret transforms into a leopard-like beast. Ripping out of her clothes. No longer a bipedal woman -- a quadrupedal leopard.

For a beat, the humans think they'll have two monsters to fight. Then the Szeret-Leopard leaps onto the raised plinth.

Szeret-Leopard takes a quick look over the tall grass, and sees Rozito crouched over the body back at the carriage. With a raging growl, she charges off into the grass to get him.

Olivia shakes with shock as Jack and Eppy drag her in a fighting retreat to the trail, chased by the Necrotic Bulk.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - HALLASET FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Rozito is busy with his scalpels on the corpse. He doesn't see the Szeret-Leopard charging out of the grass behind. The beast knocks him clear and moves in for the kill, snarling.

We expect Rozito to beg for his life. Instead, he flings his scalpels at the Szeret-Leopard. The creature dodges easily.

Rozito pulls his blade as the Szeret-Leopard attacks.

EXT. WINDING TRAIL - HALLASET FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Oliva, Jack, and Eppy are running backward, fighting the bulk, when it spontaneously collapses, disassembling back into a pile of body parts, disgusting. Olivia throws-up.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - HALLASET FIELDS - DAY

Olivia, Jack, and Eppy exit the trail to regard the carriage. They can see the Szeret-Cat gobbling up Rozito. The beast looks back at them. Roars. Then gallops off toward town.

OLIVIA

The princess is a cat.

EPPY

The new world meets the old.

Olivia wouldn't believe it unless she'd just seen it.

EXT. BASTION INN - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING. Barron's carriage parked out front.

BARRON (V.O.)

When I sent you looking for clues,
I hadn't expected such a bounty.

INT. DINING HALL - BASTION INN - NIGHT

Barron sits at a table, scrutinizing Rozito's necromantic scalpels. Olivia, Jack, and Eppy sit with him, all drinking.

BARRON

Tomorrow we can follow up on this
Rozito fellow. He was a merchant?

EPPY

In charge of the Kereskedo Market.
It's an official position. A royal
appointment.

BARRON

That doesn't bode well. Does it?
I'll encourage the queen to have a
thorough look at her confidantes.

JACK

The princess may have already
shared the bad news. After she ate.

BARRON

Indeed. We have busy days ahead.

Barron has one of his coughing fits, uses a handkerchief, and rises from the table. The others watch him, concerned.

BARRON (CONT'D)

It's worst near bedtime. Before I
retire, know that I'm inspired by
your courage. I shall try to muster
some of my own. I'm afraid we're
going to need it. Goodnight.

As Barron moves toward the stairs, Olivia follows.

OLIVIA

Pardon me, Sir.

BARRON
Yes, Miss Faren?

Barron waits as Olivia struggles to speak honestly.

OLIVIA
You said there was nothing to be afraid of, Sir. You lied to me.

BARRON
It was the truth, based on past experience. I don't know if you'll take comfort in my being honest and wrong. If I had lied, at least it might have suggested I had more control over the situation. Either way, I'm sorry you were in danger. And I'm grateful that you're safe.

OLIVIA
Sir, I don't feel safe.

Barron regards her for a moment.

BARRON
If you'd like to return to the Capital, I can arrange it. Be a shame to lose you. You did such astounding work on that schedule.

OLIVIA
The Terrassian said the wedding isn't about love. He said they're just kids. That they've never met.

BARRON
That's not my understanding. So either he's lying, or human, like me, even with that automatic arm.

OLIVIA
But what if he's not wrong?

BARRON
I refuse to live by what-ifs. My job is to prepare that facility for not only a wedding but an event that will bring peace to the world. A job I take seriously. Don't you?

OLIVIA
By the grace of our Divine Emperor, I serve Albion. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In life everlasting.

BARRON

I am inspired by your dedication.

Barron starts up the stairs slowly, the strain triggers another cough. Olivia moves to help him ascend the stairs.

OLIVIA

Let me help you, Sir.

BARRON

Thank you, Miss Faren. It's a comfort having you at my side.

Olivia likes being appreciated and having clarity of purpose.

As they go, Jack unpacks his weapons at the abandoned table. The blades are stained with necrotic ichor. As he starts cleaning, he looks up to see Eppy at the bar, making tea.

JACK

Hey, Eppy Flinder?

EPPY

Yes, Jack Winbow?

JACK

I don't love it here.

EPPY

You will.

Eppy fills two mugs. Jack pushes an empty chair with his foot. Drawing attention to its availability. Eppy smiles.

INT. OLIVIA'S ROOM - BASTION INN - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

Olivia enters alone. Tired, she begins to undress. Checking her pocket for her little calculator. It's gone. Szeret? Olivia steps to the window, looking out at the dark castle.

INT. SZERET'S CHAMBER - TORONY CASTLE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

Szeret sits in a bathtub, the water red with gore. She fiddles with the calculator. Fascinated. Then she remembers something and looks over to the empty bed. Someone's missing.

Szeret looks across the room to see that too-tight bodysuit draped over a chair. Where has that Gawky Model gone?

Szeret returns to the calculator, mind on a new toy, Olivia.

INT. KIRALINE'S CHAMBER - TORONY CASTLE - KORMOR CITY - NIGHT

The Gawky Model, dead, naked in the trellis of a necromancer. A woman's hand uses a knife to apply a rune to the corpse.

Kiraline admires her handiwork. The queen is up to no good.

INT. BARRON'S ROOM - BASTION INN - DAY

Barron lies in bed, coughing in his sleep. He startles awake to find Kiraline seated at his bedside. The necromantic portal is visible behind her, on the other side of the room. Barron struggles to process what he's looking at --

BARRON

Kiraline? Why... How are you in here? I didn't invite you.

KIRALINE

Someone else bid me welcome.

BARRON

You're not welcome. Not by me.

KIRALINE

Why won't you accept my help?

BARRON

Your kind of help has consequences.

KIRALINE

What if we could carry out your life's calling, together? Ridding the world of pain and suffering. Isn't that what you want... Peace?

BARRON

Forgive my suspicion. It's not often a vampire queen invades a man's bed-chamber claiming benevolence.

KIRALINE

You are right to be wary. I'll explain everything, but first, I need to guarantee our trust is eternal.

Kiraline goes full vampire and attacks, as Barron recoils --

CUT TO BLACK.

-- END OF PILOT --

-- REIGN OF BLOOD: THE SERIES --

Jesse Alexander

Set in a Victorian-like age of empires, a brilliant but naïve young woman investigates murder and conspiracy in a remote city-state ruled by a Vampire Queen. The woman's unlikely ally is the Queen's daughter, a precocious Vampire Princess obsessed with the modern age. Mystery, mayhem, and romance ensue as they collaborate to save the world from paranormal threats. *Shadow & Bone, The Witcher, Cursed, Vampire Diaries.*

Olivia always believed in logic and the power of numbers, never in the supernatural. So her worldview is tested by her adventures in Kormor Kirak. Szeret becomes her paranormal guide and confidant. Over time, both will be transformed by their experiences and friendship.

After the events of the pilot, Olivia embraces her role as Barron Whitehallow's aide-de-camp. With Finn and Eppy, they must complete the theater in time for the wedding and peace conference. But mysterious and deadly threats are constantly trying to sabotage their work.

The enemy appears to be a cult of Lich worshiping anarchists. Their attacks on the project must be investigated and foiled. While dark and mysterious places must be found and explored to reveal their network.

In time, Olivia discovers that Barron has been turned by the Vampire Queen and is her unwitting agent. In fact, Kiralyne is the true enemy. She plots to use the wedding to claim the souls of the rich and powerful. To end the reign of humanity and unleash a paranormal age.

The show has a procedural case of the week element as Olivia investigates threats and attacks. A serialized plot of the season as our heroes unravel the identity and plans of the meta-villain. And soap opera-style dramatic arcs between all of our characters.

Olivia and Szeret are the emotional heart of the series. How much can these women from different worlds really trust each other? When the final enemy is revealed, the battle for peace begins, and Olivia and Szeret must pick sides -- Will they choose friendship or blood?

Themes to explore: Companionship as Salvation. Change versus Tradition. Convention and Rebellion. Facing darkness. Hazards of judgment. Immortality. Lost love. Motherhood. Complications of Nationalism. Overcoming fear. Vanity as a downfall. Wisdom of experience. Youth and Beauty. Optimism versus Pessimism. Do the ends justify the means? The futility of war. And the power of love to overcome impossible odds.