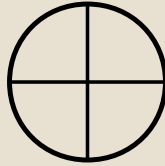

THE ETERNAL COURT
FILE · EC · TIMELI · EDITION I · MDCCXCIII



Timeline

& the Escalation Track

The five-phase clock that runs behind every scene — from the city's quiet hours to the night the comet is overhead.

KORMOR KIRAK · VIDEK · ANNO 1793

FORMAT
Reference · A5

USE
Behind the Screen

PHASES
I–V

Overview: The Queen's Ascension

The world does not wait for heroic intervention. Queen Kiraline's plan to harness the comet's power through the Comet Chamber is a ticking clock, as inevitable as the celestial body itself. This escalation track describes what happens in Kormor Kirak if the player characters do nothing -- or more importantly, how events spiral forward regardless of whether they engage with them.

The progression is divided into *six escalation phases*, each spanning roughly one week. At each phase, visible signs of the Queen's influence spread through the city, NPCs respond to mounting pressure, and the resistance either gains ground or crumbles. Key branching points allow the GM to alter the timeline based on significant player actions -- a successful assassination attempt, a sabotaged ritual, or a failed resistance cell all shift the track forward or backward.

Think of this not as railroad tracks but as a river: the general current flows toward the Queen's victory, but players can create eddies and undertow that change the course. The city itself becomes a character, transforming from a place of commerce and shadow politics into an outright necropolis.

Core Mechanics of the Escalation Track

PHASE ADVANCEMENT: A new phase begins roughly every seven days, though major events can trigger advancement or regression.

VISIBLE SIGNS: The aspects of the city that common people notice. These drive fear, migration, and collapse of normalcy.

HIDDEN DEVELOPMENTS: The machinations happening in Castle Torony Piros, the catacombs, and shadowy meeting halls. NPCs pursuing their own agendas under pressure.

NPC IMPACT: How the escalation affects key figures. Do they grow more desperate? Do they turn on allies? Do they disappear entirely?

NEW THREATS: Creatures, cultists, or mechanical complications that emerge as the Queen's power expands.

BRANCH POINTS: Moments where player action *resets, delays, or accelerates* the track. A sabotaged Comet Chamber ritual might set the Queen back one full phase.

Phase 1: Whispers in the Stone (Days 1-7)

Visible Signs

The city appears almost normal, but those who know where to look sense the shift. The Red Guard patrols have become more methodical, moving in tighter formations through Kereskedo Marketplace. Notices appear throughout Kormor Kirak announcing new "security taxes" for merchants -- an increase of coin flowing into the castle. Street musicians and beggars report unusual suppression; enforcers move them along more aggressively.

Most noticeably, construction crews begin work on the eastern tower of Castle Torony Piros. The Queen announces this as a "monument to the eternal reign," but the scale is enormous. Scaffolding rises like a skeleton against the night sky.

Hidden Developments

In the Comet Chamber deep beneath the castle, court sorcerers begin the first incantations. The chamber is ancient -- predating even the Queen's rule by

centuries -- but its lattice of crystalline structures requires *attuning* to the Queen's will. This process takes weeks and must follow specific astronomical alignments.

General Markos receives new orders: identify and eliminate potential insurrectionists before they organize. He begins creating dossiers on known resistance sympathizers, political rivals, and merchants with suspicious holdings.

The Lich Cult, operating through intermediaries like Devorlen Koss, senses the escalation. They begin their own subtle movements, acquiring rare alchemical components. Some cells believe they merely exploit the Queen's tolerance; others already move according to Barron's hidden agenda without understanding how far he has redirected them.

Brother Aldric at the monastery notes increased disappearances among his flock -- young, strong-bodied men and women conscripted for labor on the tower. He begins documenting these names in secret.

NPC Reactions

Barron Whitehallow: Aware something is stirring. He convenes the resistance in secret, moving meetings from The Bastion Inn to the catacombs beneath the city. His network is still fragmented, but now paranoia sets in: who is the Queen's spy?

JACK WINBOW: Senses opportunity. Black market prices for iron, stone, and rare materials spike. He begins positioning himself as a supplier, making contact with both resistance members and Red Guard officers who might want to line their pockets.

Eppy Flinder: Notes increased Red Guard visits and tightened patrols outside the Bastion Inn. She begins quietly stockpiling supplies and warning regulars that trouble is coming.

Devorlen Koss: Encrypted messages flow through his shop. Rumors move between Lich Cult cells, opportunists, and Barron's shadow network: if the resistance softens the Queen's position, the cult may try to claim the Comet Chamber for itself. Koss relays these signals to Barron Whitehallow without fully understanding where they truly originate.

LADY MIREVA: Plants rumors at court that foreign powers (Albion, specifically) are sponsoring resistance cells. This inflames the Queen's paranoia and justifies further crackdowns.

New Threats

No new creatures yet, but *increased Red Guard presence* becomes a constant resource drain. Every venture into the city risks checkpoints and searches.

BRANCH POINT -- PHASE 1: If players successfully assassinate or discredit a high-ranking Red Guard officer, *reset to Phase 1* and Barron's network gains +1 confidence. If they publicly oppose the tower's construction, they draw the Queen's direct attention (skip ahead to Phase 3 if they fail to disappear).

Phase 2: The Tower Rises (Days 8-14)

Visible Signs

Construction accelerates dramatically. The tower now extends above the castle's eastern wall, visible from anywhere in Kormor Kirak. Entire districts of the city are conscripted for labor -- workers report strange, bone-deep exhaustion after shifts. Some workers don't return home.

Food prices spike as conscription reduces availability of farm labor. Shortages appear in markets. The Bastion Inn runs low on common staples.

The Albion Embassy sends a formal complaint about labor practices. Ambassador Harken is politely ignored by the Queen's bureaucracy.

Red Guard patrols now include uniformed Vampire Thralls -- visibly undead soldiers with pale skin and slow, predatory gaits. Rumors spread that the Queen is raising an army of the damned.

Hidden Developments

The first test of the Comet Chamber's attunement ritual succeeds, but partially. The Queen observes what appears to be a comet's light reflected in the chamber's crystalline array, weeks before the actual celestial event. Encouraged, she orders the next phase of work accelerated. But she also senses *interference* -- the Lich Cult's agents are subtly trying to corrupt the attunement, preparing for their own claims on the power.

General Markos's dossiers are complete. Arrests begin. Political rivals disappear into the Dungeons. Three members of Barron's outer circle vanish in a single night. Their bodies are found days later, exsanguinated, in Hallaset Fields cemetery.

Istvan the Jailer reports to the Queen that he can extract *no useful intelligence* from the arrested resisters -- they know almost nothing of the true network's organization. The Queen orders him to turn the dungeons into a statement: public executions begin, scheduled for the end of the week.

The Lich Cult accelerates their own timeline. Through a catspaw merchant, they acquire a shipment of rare necrotic artifacts bound for the castle. They also begin whispering to desperate resistance members: *Join us. We can offer you power in the new world.*

NPC Reactions

BARRON WHITEHALLOW: Reeling from arrests. He decides on a dangerous gambit: attempt to assassinate General Markos or rescue captured resisters. He requests aid from the player characters for the first time, his desperation clear.

PRINCESS SZERET: Begins secretly reaching out to resistance sympathizers, offering her protection in exchange for future favors. She is still bound by her mother's will but seeks to establish her own power base. She may become a valuable ally or dangerous informant, depending on how players approach her.

JACK WINBOW: Now openly dealing with both sides. He's acquired a ship moored at the city's edge and is preparing an escape route -- for a price. He hints that the resistance could disappear the players if the heat gets too intense.

DEVORLEN KOSS: The Lich Cult's presence becomes undeniable. His shop becomes a dead drop for cultist messages. If pressured, he might reveal that the cult is moving against the Queen, or he might betray the players to the cult for protection.

CAPTAIN ASHFORD: Albion's military attaché arrives at the embassy, authorized to "assess the situation." He begins discreet inquiries about the resistance, offering secret support if they can be useful to Albion's interests.

BROTHER ALDRIC: His monastery becomes a waystation for escaped workers and refugees. The Queen has not moved against him yet, but he is on borrowed time.

New Threats

VAMPIRE THRALLS: Undead soldiers now patrol alongside Red Guard. They are faster, stronger, and utterly immune to persuasion. They also do not tire, allowing 24-hour patrols.

CONSCRIPTION SQUADS: Armed recruitment details move through lower districts, taking anyone young and able-bodied. Resistance to conscription is met with violence.

PUBLIC EXECUTIONS: The first scheduled mass execution draws crowds. This is partly ritual, partly terror -- the Queen's message is that resistance leads only to the gallows or the blood altar.

Branch Point == Phase 2:

- If players successfully prevent the public execution (rescue, distraction, sabotage), *regress to Phase 1*. The Queen, furious, becomes personally involved in security.
 - If players join the Lich Cult or make a pact with them, receive access to necrotic magic but face a dangerous debt.
 - If players rescue significant resistance members or bring Princess Szeret into active opposition, *shift the track laterally* -- Phase 2 continues but with increased internal court chaos.
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Phase 3: The Astronomical Window Opens (Days 15-21)

Visible Signs

The sky darkens at midnight in ways that the natural calendar cannot explain. Astronomers report the comet is now visible to the naked eye -- a ghostly streak approaching the zenith. The Queen announces the "Convergence Festival" -- a week-long celebration culminating in the comet's closest approach. All citizens are required to attend public ceremonies in Kereskedo Marketplace.

The tower is now complete. An impossible structure of black stone and crystal, it pierces the night sky and pulses with a sickly luminescence visible for miles. This is the Comet Chamber's focal point, designed to catch and channel the comet's power directly into the castle.

Entire neighborhoods are abandoned as panic spreads. Refugees flee toward Albion's borders. The Magistrate Voron, once useful, is executed publicly --

the Queen has no more patience for middlemen. A new administrator from the castle takes direct control of the lower city.

Food prices collapse as markets fail. Black market dealers now control most commerce. Jack Winbow's smuggling operation becomes the de facto supply line for the city's desperate.

Hidden Developments

The Lich Cult makes its move. In a secret catacomb ritual, they attempt to create a *Necrotic Bulk* -- a massive undead construct designed to interrupt the Comet Chamber's attunement at the crucial moment. The ritual succeeds partially; the Necrotic Bulk awakens, but it is only semi-stable. It writhes beneath Hallaset Fields, close to consciousness.

The Lich Cult now makes an open offer to the resistance: Help us prevent the Queen from reaching the comet's power, and we will help you create a new order.

Princess Szeret reveals herself to the Queen -- her mother has learned of her secret communications with resistance sympathizers. The Queen, coldly furious, locks her daughter in a high tower, stripped of status. Szeret's only contact with the outside world is through one trusted chambermaid.

Within the castle, General Markos consolidates absolute power. Any general or noble who shows hesitation about the Queen's ascension is quietly removed. The court becomes pure loyalty or fear.

Devorlen Koss is murdered by Lich Cultists, who have decided he is a liability. His death sends a message: neutrality is no longer possible.

NPC Reactions

BARRON WHITEHALLOW: Faces a crisis of leadership. Half his network wants to ally with the Lich Cult; the other half views them as another tyranny waiting to

bloom. He approaches the player characters with a desperate plea: *We need something -- anything -- to disrupt the Queen's timeline. Otherwise, we lose.*

JACK WINBOW: Now controls the city's underground economy. He offers to get anyone out -- for the right price. He also reveals he has contacts in Albion's military. If the players are interesting enough (and have demonstrated capability), he offers them the truth: Albion is *waiting* for the Queen to fail. They cannot openly intervene, but they can arm and support resistance efforts.

CAPTAIN ASHFORD: Receives authorization to provide "non-official" military support to resistance forces. This means weapons, intelligence on Red Guard positions, and plans for coordinating with Albion forces *if* the city collapses into civil war.

BROTHER ALDRIC: The monastery is raided by Red Guard, searching for Barron Whitehallow (who was never there). Aldric is arrested. However, his network of refugee helpers disperses, and secret safe houses activate throughout the city.

AMBASSADOR HARKEN: Demands an audience with the Queen, which is denied. Frustrated and suspicious, he begins secretly supporting resistance activities, positioning Albion to claim the city if the Queen's regime topples.

GENERAL MARKOS: Becomes something more than human. The Queen, in an intimate ritual, offers him a gift: partial vampirism. He will not become undead, but his strength, speed, and loyalty are magnified. He becomes an *Automatic Assassin* -- a weapon given targets and the will to achieve them.

New Threats

THE NECROTIC BULK: A massive, semi-conscious mass of bone, sinew, and necrotic magic stirring beneath Hallaset Fields. Its emergence is unpredictable -- it could awaken during the Convergence Festival itself.

GENERAL MARKOS, ASCENDED: Now a near-immortal enforcer with the Queen's direct mandate. He is no longer a military commander but a personal instrument of death. Players who have opposed him directly are marked for elimination.

THE AUTOMATIC ASSASSIN: A second creature -- not yet named or defined by the players -- is awakened in the Dungeons. This is the Queen's backup plan if Markos fails.

LICH CULTIST CELLS: Operating openly now, recruiting from desperation and promising power. They control certain districts and are actively sabotaging Queen's plans while maintaining the appearance of loyalty.

Branch Point -- Phase 3:

- If players successfully ally with the Lich Cult, gain access to their resources but risk losing control of the outcome.
- If players rescue Princess Szeret from her tower, she becomes a major political asset and potential future leader of Kormor Kirak.
- If players sabotage the Comet Chamber directly (a dangerous undertaking), *reset to Phase 2* -- the Queen's timeline is disrupted, but her fury is absolute.
- If players eliminate General Markos, it weakens the Queen's immediate power but prompts her to take more direct action herself.

Phase 4: The Convergence Festival Begins (Days 22=28)

Visible Signs

Kereskedo Marketplace transforms into a necropolis of celebration. The Queen descends from Castle Torony Piros in ritual procession, accompanied by Red Guard and Vampire Thralls. Citizens are herded into the marketplace

for mandatory attendance. The atmosphere is surreal -- forced joy masking absolute terror.

The comet is now brilliant in the night sky, approaching its moment of culmination. The tower glows with barely contained power.

Refugees flood the borders, creating a humanitarian crisis. Albion's government is forced to respond, opening camps for displaced Kormor Kiraks. Ambassador Harken uses this moment to demand the Queen's government restore order or face international intervention.

The Lich Cult's attempts at sabotage become visible. Several Red Guard outposts are found completely drained of blood. The Queen blames the resistance; the populace blames the cult. Paranoia reaches fever pitch.

Hidden Developments

The Comet Chamber's final attunement ritual is prepared. It will take place during the comet's closest approach -- mere days away now. If it succeeds, the Queen will absorb power that will make her *literally unstoppable*: immortality beyond vampirism, magical abilities of immense scope, perhaps even the ability to alter reality itself within Kormor Kirak.

The Necrotic Bulk moves closer to the surface. Its emergence seems inevitable, but timing is uncertain.

The Lich Cult launches their most ambitious sabotage: an attempt to corrupt the comet's energies themselves, redirecting its power away from the Queen's chamber. This is a ritualistic working that will take hours and requires the players' interference to succeed -- but if it succeeds, the Comet Chamber becomes a liability to the Queen rather than a triumph.

Princess Szeret, locked in her tower, receives a message from her chambermaid: *The players have proven themselves. Will you risk everything for freedom?* She responds: *Yes.* Arrangements for her escape are made.

Within the castle, even loyal nobles sense the end times. Some begin transferring wealth in preparation for fleeing. Markos executes three of them as examples.

NPC Reactions

BARRON WHITEHALLOW: Realizes he has only days to act meaningfully. He commits his entire remaining network to a final, coordinated resistance movement. He asks the players directly: *Will you be at the Convergence? Will you act when the moment comes?*

JACK WINBOW: Makes his final profit and prepares to depart. He will smuggle anyone important out of the city for an exorbitant price. His ship is stocked and waiting.

CAPTAIN ASHFORD: Receives authorization for limited military intervention. Albion will not openly declare war, but if the players succeed in destabilizing the Queen's regime, Albion forces will "defend Albion's interests" -- which means seizing the city.

BROTHER ALDRIC: Imprisoned in the Dungeons, he becomes a focal point for resistance members. His faith becomes a rallying cry. The Queen is tempted to execute him publicly but delays -- Aldric's death might inspire exactly the uprising she seeks to prevent.

PRINCESS SZERET: Escapes her tower with outside help. She is now fugitive and hunted, but she is *free*. She becomes a symbol and a potential alternative leader if the Queen falls.

New Threats

THE NECROTIC BULK: Breaks the surface during the Convergence Festival itself, a kilometer away from Kereskedo Marketplace but visible to all. It is a moving disaster, killing and consuming anything in its path. Is it the Lich

Cult's creation spiraling out of control? Is it the Queen's failsafe activating? Confusion reigns.

GENERAL MARKOS'S ASSASSINS: Teams of enhanced soldiers move through the city hunting specific targets -- Barron Whitehallow, Princess Szeret, key resistance figures, and the player characters themselves.

ASTRONOMICAL PHENOMENON: The comet's approach causes strange effects: temporal distortions, reality warping in localized areas, spontaneous undead manifestations, dreams bleeding into waking. The boundary between worlds is thin.

Branch Point -- Phase 4:

- The Convergence Festival is the *critical branching point*. This is the moment when player actions determine the city's fate.
- If players successfully sabotage the Comet Chamber during the Festival, the Queen's ritual fails catastrophically. *Move to Phase 5 (Collapse)*.
- If players rescue Princess Szeret and present her as an alternative leader, the city is offered a choice. Barron Whitehallow could transfer power to her, creating a competing government.
- If players fully ally with the Lich Cult, both the Queen and the cult move to eliminate them and seize absolute control.
- If players do nothing or act too late, *advance to Phase 5 (Ascension)*.

Phase 5a: The Queen's Ascension (Days 29+)

== If Players Fail

Visible Signs

The comet reaches its zenith. The tower erupts with light so brilliant it is visible from Albion, leagues away. For a moment, night becomes day.

The light fades. Queen Kiraline stands before Kereskedo Marketplace, but she is changed. Her form seems to occupy more space than it should. Shadows move around her as if she is a hole in reality. She speaks, and her voice echoes across the entire city simultaneously -- heard in the marketplace, in homes, in the countryside beyond.

She announces the *Eternal Reign*: a new era where death itself is subject to her will, where time moves at her pleasure, where Kormor Kirak is truly eternal. She demonstrates this by raising the dead of Hallaset Fields -- thousands of skeletal warriors march from the cemetery in perfect formation, a testament to power absolute.

The city's resistance collapses. Barron Whitehallow is captured and executed publicly -- slowly, immortalized in undeath as a warning. Those who flee are hunted. Within weeks, the Queen's will extends across Albion's borders. The countries descend into warfare as Albion attempts to contain the threat and fails.

The campaign becomes *one of desperate resistance against overwhelming odds*. Players must accept that they have failed the city and now fight for personal survival or the distant hope of finding some weakness in the Queen's new form.

The Point of No Return

Once the Queen absorbs the comet's power, the timeline cannot be reset. She is literally unstoppable through conventional means. Only the most extreme methods -- uncovering an ancient curse that binds her, discovering that her immortality is a paradox that can be exploited, or assembling artifacts of power equal to her own -- can contest her rule.

Phase 5b: The Queen's Collapse (Days 29+) == If Players Succeed

Visible Signs

The Comet Chamber, sabotaged by the players, begins to malfunction during the ritual. The Queen's attunement falters. Instead of absorbing the comet's power, the chamber *explodes inward*, creating a spatial rupture. Reality tears.

The tower collapses, taking the east wing of Castle Torony Piros with it. The Queen is thrown into the rupture and vanishes -- to where, no one knows. Is she dead? Displaced in space? The answer remains unclear, leaving room for future campaigns.

In the chaos, the Red Guard fractures. General Markos, without the Queen's binding will, begins to revert to his human form -- the half-vampirism is agony as it unwinds. He disappears into the catacombs, neither fully alive nor undead.

The Necrotic Bulk, sensing the Queen's fall, becomes directionless. It collapses, its necrotic essence dissipating.

The Lich Cult overplays its hand. With the Queen gone, splinter cells move openly to seize control of the city. Barron's hidden influence over the cult becomes harder to contain, opportunists break ranks, and the city's factions resist them openly.

The Aftermath

POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY: Kormor Kirak is a power vacuum. Multiple factions have claims on authority: the resistance, the Lich Cult, Albion's interests, Princess Szeret (if she survived and is accepted as legitimate), remaining nobility.

REFUGEES RETURN: Those who fled begin to cautiously return. Reconstruction begins, but the city is traumatized.

ALBION'S RESPONSE: Depending on how much official aid was given and what deals were made, Albion may claim protective oversight or withdraw entirely.

UNRESOLVED THREATS: The Lich Cult is weakened but not destroyed. Remnants of the Queen's court hide in the catacombs. Rogue sorcerers attempt to access the ruins of the Comet Chamber.

THE FINAL CAMPAIGN: Clearing the remaining threats, establishing new governance, and discovering what became of the Queen becomes the focus of future play.

Using the Escalation Track as a Living Backdrop

The escalation track is *not* meant to be followed rigidly. Use it as a river -- the general current is toward Phase 5, but players create eddies.

TIME AS A RESOURCE: Make clear to players that time is not infinite. Every week of inactivity advances the track. Describe visible changes each session: the tower grows taller, more refugees flee, Red Guard patrols increase. This creates urgency without railroading.

NPC AGENCY: NPCs act according to their own goals and fears. Barron Whitehallow will not wait passively. If the players don't ally with him by Phase 2, he makes increasingly desperate moves. If they actively oppose him, he becomes an adversary. Devorlen Koss, Jack Winbow, and others have their own timelines.

BRANCH POINTS ARE MEANINGFUL: When players act decisively -- a sabotage, an assassination, a rescue, a secret alliance -- the track shifts. Reset phases, skip ahead, or create lateral complications. Make it clear that their actions matter.

INTENSIFYING TENSION WITH THE LIGHTS LOWER: As the escalation track advances, consider increasing the frequency of The Lights Lower mechanic (see

The Lights Lower supplement). In Phase 1, use it sparingly -- perhaps once or twice across the entire phase. By Phase 4 and 5, it should accompany most major encounters, creating a mounting sense of horror and inevitability that mirrors the Queen's rising power and the city's collapse into darkness.

HIDDEN INFORMATION: Players should not know the full escalation track. Reveal it through NPCs, intelligence, and observation. "The tower is larger." "There are Vampire Thralls in the streets." "Refugees are fleeing." Let them deduce the timeline themselves.

Faction Clocks: Track each faction's progress separately. Barron's public network has a clock toward collapse or success. The Lich Cult has a clock toward open seizure or internal fracture. Albion has a clock toward intervention. When multiple clocks are near completion, the city becomes a powder keg.

CONSEQUENCES BEYOND COMBAT: Escalation happens whether or not players engage directly. Cities burn, people die, political power shifts. Combat may be only one tool the players use. Negotiation, sabotage, recruitment, and espionage may be equally or more important.

MULTIPLE ENDINGS: The track toward Phase 5a (Ascension) is only one possibility. With clever play, earlier intervention, or alliances, players can reach Phase 5b (Collapse) or create entirely new outcomes. A player-led alliance between the resistance and the Lich Cult against the Queen is a valid path, even if it trades one tyranny for another.

Summary: The Queen's Clock

Kormor Kirak is not static. The Queen is *moving*. The comet is *approaching*. The city is *transforming*. Players exist within this motion. They can redirect it, delay

it, or accelerate it, but they cannot stop time itself. The question is not whether the Queen will act, but whether the players will act first.

The escalation track ensures that the world breathes, that NPCs pursue their goals, and that consequence is always present. The city is the true antagonist -- not the Queen herself, but the inexorable machinery of her ambition.

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