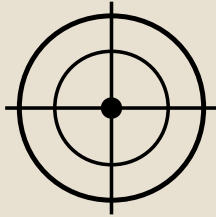

THE ETERNAL COURT
FILE · EC · BOOKTH · EDITION I · MDCCXCIII



Book Three

Behind the Curtain

*What the Queen is building, what the Comet is bringing, and the
secret architecture that holds the city together.*

KORMOR KIRAK · VIDEK · ANNO 1793

VOLUME

III

SECTION

GM Truth

VOICE

Behind the Screen

PART ONE: RUNNING THE GAME

Tools, Tables, and Your First Session

Your job is not to tell a story. Your job is to build a world where stories happen.

CAPITULUM

SESSON 3ERD BLJDE

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

You arrive in Kormor Kirak, a 1793 city held in an iron grip by the immortal Vampire Queen Kiraline, who rules from her clock-tower castle high above the gas-lit streets. The city hums with surveillance, clockwork mechanisms, and the constant dread of being noticed by the wrong people -- but resistance networks operate in shadow, and even monsters can bleed. In this campaign, you'll navigate a city of political intrigue and moral compromise, where a successful night might mean exposing corruption, saving someone from the dungeons, or simply surviving another day without drawing the Queen's attention.

TONE AND GENRE

THE ETERNAL COURT is *Gothic Gaslamp Fantasy* -- a blend of three distinct atmospheres:

GOTHIC: The campaign leans into *dread, decay, and the unnatural*. Vampirism isn't romanticized; it's predatory and horrifying. The dungeon beneath the city is a place of genuine suffering. Beauty exists in this world, but it's often twisted -- the architecture of Castle Torony Piros is breathtaking and utterly wrong. Think *Bloodborne's* clinical horror, *Ravenloft's* inescapable dread, and *Castlevania's* gothic excess.

GASLAMP: We're anchored in 1793 -- gas lamps flicker in the streets, clockwork mechanisms are cutting-edge technology, and society is rigidly stratified.

There's a veneer of civilization and order that masks deeper corruption. Think *Dishonored's* industrial world, *Penny Dreadful's* gaslit London, and the paranoid aesthetics of steampunk without the optimism.

NOT NIHILISTIC: Kormor Kirak is *dark but not hopeless*. The Queen cannot be everywhere. People resist, help each other, and sometimes win. Princess Szeret's existence in the castle suggests that even monsters can question their nature. Your characters can change things -- perhaps small things, perhaps large ones. The world is hard, but not meaningless.

MEDIA TOUCHSTONES: If your players are familiar with *Interview with the Vampire*, *Dishonored*, *Ravenloft*, *Bloodborne*, *Castlevania*, or *Penny Dreadful*, they'll have a strong intuitive sense of the tone. You might also reference *The Magicians* (moral compromise and found family), *The Poppy War* (dark consequences of power), or *Piranesi* (reality twisted by immortal will).

CONTENT WARNINGS

THE ETERNAL COURT contains mature themes. This is not a campaign where everything can be glossed over or played for laughs. Below are the specific content areas that may appear. Read this aloud to your table and ask players which, if any, they need to avoid.

VAMPIRISM AND PREDATION: The Queen feeds on humans. This is not glamorous -- it involves violence, loss, and violation. Victims may be NPCs the party encounters, knows, or has failed to save. Vampirism also appears as a form of control and transformation, stripping away agency.

POLITICAL OPPRESSION AND SURVEILLANCE: The city is ruled by an immortal dictator with centuries of power. Citizens are watched, imprisoned, and executed. The party will regularly encounter the moral weight of living under a tyranny they cannot immediately overthrow. Resistance means risk.

TORTURE AND IMPRISONMENT: Istvan the Jailer runs the dungeons beneath the city. Torture is presented as real, deliberate, and systematic -- though we don't graphically describe it at the table. NPCs may bear scars and trauma from imprisonment. Rescue missions may involve witnessing the effects of captivity.

BODY HORROR: The Necrotic Bulk and Bone Sentinels are the Queen's creations. These are bodies repurposed and transformed into something that violates the line between living and dead. They are disturbing. They are *meant* to be disturbing.

MORAL COMPROMISE: Your characters will face situations with no clean answers. Saving one person might require letting another suffer. Resisting the Queen might require becoming like her. There is no "good" option, only choices you can live with. The campaign asks: what do you sacrifice for survival? For resistance? For your principles?

DEATH AND LOSS: Character death can happen. More importantly, *permanent loss* is real in this world. People disappear into the dungeons. The Queen's agents can un-make people. Failed missions have consequences. We play to find out what happens, not to guarantee everyone survives.

INTENSITY LEVELS: These themes are present throughout the campaign, but you and your table get to decide *how dark* individual sessions become. A session might involve political intrigue (cerebral, tense) or a rescue from the dungeons (emotionally heavy). Use the safety tools below to dial intensity up or down.

ABSOLUTELY OFF-LIMITS (unless explicitly negotiated): We do not play sexual violence. We do not detail child abuse. We do not belabor graphic suffering for its own sake -- if someone is tortured, we acknowledge it happened and move to the consequences, not the play-by-play.

GAMES TOOLS

THE X-CARD: Before session one, explain the X-Card to your table. Any player can make an X gesture with their hands (or say "X-Card") at any moment if content is becoming too much. When this happens:

- The scene *immediately stops* and rewinds
- No explanation needed -- the player doesn't have to justify why
- Everyone moves forward as if that content never happened

This is not a failure on anyone's part. It's a normal, healthy part of collaborative play. Use it. Normalize it. If you're GMing, you can also call for an X-Card pause if something's going in a direction you didn't anticipate.

LINES AND VEILS: Before session zero, ask your table:

- **LINES:** What topics are completely off-limits? (e.g., "I don't want to roleplay torture, even if we don't describe it graphically")
- **VEILS:** What topics are okay but should be handled with care or fade-to-black? (e.g., "We can have violence, but don't describe wounds in detail")

Write these down. Post them at the table. Refer back to them. *This is collaborative trust-building.*

IMPLEMENTATION FOR KORMOR KIRAK: Specific applications for this setting:

- If torture is a Veil or Line for someone, we might learn NPCs were imprisoned without roleplaying the experience
- If vampirism as predation is intense, we can have vampire encounters with less visceral feeding descriptions
- If surveillance and loss of autonomy triggers someone, we skip scenes where the party is helplessly watching bad things happen

- If moral compromise causes analysis paralysis or distress, we can reframe as “your characters are competent people solving hard problems,” not “you’re bad if you don’t save everyone”
- The Lights Lower is an optional horror escalation mechanic (see The Lights Lower supplement) that heightens tension through resource sacrifice. Discuss with your table whether and how often to use it, as it can significantly intensify encounters and create a sense of inexorable creeping dread.

THE RESET CONVERSATION: After any heavy session, be willing to debrief. Ask: “Does anyone need to talk about what happened?” Sometimes people need to confirm it was just a game. Sometimes they need to discuss how a character’s trauma will affect them going forward. Honor both needs.

YOUR OWN LIMITS: As the GM, *you* get boundaries too. If running torture scenes genuinely distresses you, say so. If moral complexity around imperialism or genocide hits a nerve, name it. Your mental health matters as much as anyone’s at the table.

CHARACTER GUIDANCE

CREATION

WHO FITS THIS WORLD?

Strong character concepts for Kormor Kirak tend to fall into these broad categories:

THE OUTSIDER: You’ve arrived in Kormor Kirak recently (months, years) from elsewhere. You’re still learning how the city works, which makes you a natural point-of-view character. You have no deep ties to the old power structures,

which frees you to question them. *Why did you come here?* (Fleeing something, searching for someone, seeking opportunity, exiled?) *What have you discovered?*

THE TRAPPED LOCAL: You were born here or came here by accident and have spent enough time in the city to know its hidden passages, its gossip, its survival strategies. You have connections -- family, old friends, people who owe you favors. You also have history with the oppression. *What have you lost to the Queen's rule? Why haven't you left?*

THE INSERTED AGENT: You work for a faction with a stake in Kormor Kirak -- a rival noble house, a revolutionary cell, an academic order, a criminal syndicate. Your presence is semi-official or entirely covert. You have resources and a mission but also *complications* (your faction might not have your best interests at heart; your mission might conflict with saving a specific person). *Who sent you? What do they want? What are you willing to do?*

WHAT DOESN'T WORK: Avoid characters who are:

- Openly hostile to literally everyone (the city will crush you)
- Morally neutral to the point of "I don't care about anyone" (isolation isn't fun at a shared table)
- Trying to destroy the Queen alone (you're a party, not a lone wolf)
- With motivations entirely internal and disconnected from the city (Kormor Kirak will feel like scenery)

BACKSTORY HOOKS: When creating your character, ask yourself:

- *How did you meet another party member?* (Shared safe house, same cell, both arrested then released, mutual friend?)
- *What's one person you're trying to protect or find?* (This gives the party a concrete emotional stake)
- *What's one secret the Queen's agents would kill to know?* (Information, hidden location, sympathetic noble, rebel safe house)

- *What compromise have you already made to survive?* (Worked for the Queen once? Betrayed someone? Looked away from something horrible?)

These aren't required, but they create natural points of connection to the world and to each other.

ON REDEMPTION AND MONSTROSITY: Some players may want to play as something *other* than human -- a vampire, a construct, someone touched by the Queen's magic. This is fine. Discuss with the table: *Can you still be part of the party's mission?* A vampire character might be genuinely horrified by their own nature and actively working to undermine the Queen. A bone sentinel might have regained some autonomy. Being monstrous doesn't mean being the villain -- but it does mean wrestling with what you are.

PLAYER EXPECTATIONS

WHAT THIS CAMPAIGN REWARDS:

INVESTIGATION AND INFORMATION-GATHERING: Kormor Kirak runs on secrets and hidden knowledge. Who is the Necrotic Bulk? Where is the safe house? What does the magistrate want badly enough to negotiate? The party that digs, asks questions, observes patterns, and connects dots will uncover more about the world and gain leverage. Investigation is as valuable as combat.

SOCIAL INTRIGUE AND NEGOTIATION: The Queen cannot be assassinated through a single dramatic duel. Power in this world shifts through bargains, blackmail, revealing secrets, flipping minor nobles, and building alliances. Sometimes the "win" condition is convincing someone to help you, not defeating them. NPCs have their own agendas and can be negotiated with, threatened, bribed, or turned.

MORAL CHOICE AND ROLEPLAY: The campaign frequently presents situations without a clean "good" answer. Do you steal medicine to save an NPC, risking

your cover? Do you accept help from someone whose methods you despise? Do you sacrifice one mission to save a specific person? These choices matter -- not because the GM will punish you, but because they shape what kind of person your character becomes and what the party becomes together.

EXPLORATION OF PLACE: Kormor Kirak is a character. Learning its neighborhoods, its architecture, its history, and its hidden corners is rewarding. The city is *alive* with things to discover -- hidden shrines, secret passages, bases of operation, places where it's safe to breathe for a moment.

FOUND FAMILY AND CONNECTION: This campaign is about people banded together against impossible odds. The relationships between party members matter more than individual heroism. The game rewards you for remembering each other's struggles, for showing up for each other, for building something together in the dark.

WHAT THIS CAMPAIGN DOES NOT EMPHASIZE:

This is not a *dungeon-crawl-and-loot* game. We're not optimizing inventory, calculating the most XP-efficient encounters, or designing character builds for maximum damage output. If that's what you want, this might not be the campaign for you.

This is not *high fantasy*. We're not saving kingdoms through epic quests, gaining magical artifacts that shift the balance of power, or playing hero farmers who somehow got strong enough to fight dragons. Power in Kormor Kirak is distributed through networks and secrets, not levels and gear.

This is not *comedic*. We have moments of dark humor and gallows comedy, but we don't play the city as a joke or undercut emotional moments with quips. Your characters are trying to survive something genuinely threatening.

TABLE AGREEMENTS

ON PvP (PLAYER VERSUS PLAYER): Conflict between player characters is *allowed* but requires explicit conversation first. A character might have reasons to distrust another character, but *conflict should be roleplay-driven, not optimization-driven*, and should be resolved through scenes, not dice rolls that permanently wreck another player's character.

If two player characters are at odds, we handle it like this: the players talk outside the game about what kind of conflict is interesting to both of them. We play it out in scenes where both characters get to make meaningful choices. We don't use PvP as a shortcut to sideline someone else's character.

ON METAGAMING: Using *real-world* knowledge your character shouldn't have (e.g., "I know the third door is trapped because I've played Dishonored") is not allowed. Using *in-game* knowledge you've acquired (e.g., "My character warned everyone the magistrate is two-faced because I heard rumors last session") is always allowed and encouraged.

ON CHARACTER DEATH: Death in Kormor Kirak is possible and *meaningful*. If your character dies, we don't immediately retcon it. However:

- You can create a new character and fold them into the party quickly (refugee from the dungeons, new contact, etc.)
- Or, your character might become an NPC ally or absence that shapes the party's choices going forward
- Discuss with your GM what you want -- some players want to play again immediately, others want a session to process the loss

The point: death has weight, but it's not the end of fun.

ON UNDEATH: In a world with vampires and necromancy, undeath is a *real possibility*. Discuss: If your character dies and the Queen or another powerful

entity offers to raise them, do you want to be offered that choice? What would undeath mean to your character? Is it rescue or damnation? Agree on this *before* it becomes an issue.

ON SPOTLIGHT AND PACE: We're all here to have fun. If one player is dominating scenes, the GM will gently redirect. If your character isn't getting much screen time, *speak up*. The GM wants to know. We might adjust what missions are coming, or find ways to tie your character more directly to ongoing plots.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TABLE

Use these questions during Session Zero to calibrate tone, build connections, and flag concerns early. You don't need to ask all of them, but pick the ones that matter most.

1. TONE AND COMFORT

"On a scale of 'dark but we're safe' to 'genuinely unsettling,' where do you want this campaign to sit? Are there specific dark themes from the content warnings that genuinely distress you, versus ones that are just 'mature content' you're comfortable with?"

2. CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS

"What does your character want most in Kormor Kirak? Not the big-picture 'overthrow the Queen' -- the *specific* thing. Is it finding someone? Surviving long enough to escape? Undermining one person? Getting information? Having these concrete goals will help me build sessions that hit what matters to you."

3. PARTY CONNECTION

”How do you see your character relating to the other party members? Are you meeting them for the first time, or do you have existing history? What do you want from the group -- protection, camaraderie, a shared mission, something else?”

4. BOUNDARIES AND SAFETY TOOLS

”Let’s talk Lines and Veils now. What’s completely off-limits? What do you want handled with care? And will you all be comfortable using the X-Card? Can I normalize checking in mid-session if things get heavy?”

5. ON WINNING AND LOSING

”What does success look like for you in this campaign? Is it character growth, achieving specific goals, saving NPCs, uncovering secrets? And what would feel like failure -- something that would genuinely upset you if it happened? Let’s know what not to do.”

6. MORAL COMPLEXITY

”This campaign assumes characters will make hard choices without clear ‘good’ answers. Are you comfortable with your character having to compromise, break laws, or sacrifice things? Or do you want situations where doing the right thing is harder but ultimately possible?”

7. MYSTERY AND TRUST

”There are things you won’t know at the start -- factions’ true motives, the full extent of the Queen’s power, who you can trust. Are you okay with discovering these things over time, or do you want more transparency about what’s happening behind the scenes?”

8. PACE AND DIFFICULTY

”Do you want Kormor Kirak to feel like a place where the party can win, just not easily? Or should danger feel genuinely overwhelming sometimes? Should some missions fail? Let me know what kind of challenge curve keeps you engaged without feeling hopeless.”

9. SPOTLIGHT AND DOWNTIME

”Do you want intense mission-focused sessions, or do you want quieter roleplay time in between -- going to safe houses, reconnecting with people you care about? What pacing makes this feel alive to you?”

10. CAMPAIGN ARC

”Big picture: are you hoping this campaign builds toward a specific end state? The Queen’s defeat? Escape from the city? The party becoming something new? Or would you rather discover the ending together? No right answer -- just helps me know what you’re imagining.”

BEFORE SESSION ONE

- **CREATE CHARACTERS TOGETHER AT THE TABLE.** Yes, Session Zero itself is a session -- you’ll need 2-3 hours to introduce the world, establish these agreements, create characters, and start play.
- **EXCHANGE CONTACT INFO FOR X-CARD CONVERSATIONS.** Someone might need to text you mid-week saying ”That thing in last session is still bothering me.” Make space for that.
- **ASK ONE-ON-ONE QUESTIONS.** After the table conversation, grab each player individually and ask: ”What’s one thing you’re hoping for from this

campaign? What's one thing you're dreading?" These private conversations catch things people won't say in the group.

- **SET A REGULAR SCHEDULE.** Consistency matters when players are investing emotionally. "Every other Thursday at 8pm" is better than "whenever."
- **PREPARE A ONE-PAGE HANDOUT** with the content warnings, the Lines and Veils list, and the X-Card rules. Hand it to players before Session One. Reference it.

You're going to tell a story about people surviving something terrible together. That's worth getting right. The care you put into Session Zero becomes the foundation of everything that comes after.

Welcome to Kormor Kirak. The gas lamps are lit. The Queen's bells are ringing. And somewhere in the city, resistance stirs.

CAPITULUM

THE LIGHTS LOWER

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 THE CORE MESSAGE

”The Lights Lower, A System Agnostic Grimdark RPG Mechanic”

Not all fiends show their true shape when shrouded in shadow. And not all intents are clear when the festival lamps dim to a simmer...

At a point of great stress, fear, or foreboding, a Game Master may announce that ”The Lights Lower”, then announce by how many degrees. The Degree is set as at least the number of Player Characters in the encounter, +1 Degree for each encounter before this one today. The Game Master will then hold out an offering dish, plate, dice tray, sack, or beckoning hand.

Player Characters must sacrifice a metagame altering mechanical resource until the degree of the Lowering Lights is met, or until the PC’s unanimously agree

they are done sacrificing (or run out of fungible resources). These resources can be as follows:

- Shadowdark: Luck
- Eldritch Borg: Sanity
- Pirate Borg: Devil's Luck
- Mork Borg: Omens
- Any System: Temporary 1 Point Reduction of a Statistical Modifier.

If the degree is not met, the danger multiplies! This can come in the form of a GM's discretion and creativity, or the following table can be rolled on. If the condition is already met, a new roll can be made.

1 -- Creatures sprout wings and gain a flying speed comparable to their movement speed! 2 -- Creatures glow with unnatural light -- their attacks now count as magical damage! 3 -- Creatures gain interdimensional telepathy, and will plan their attacks around the above-table, real-world planning of players! 4 -- A presumed Ally of the Player Characters steps from out of the shadows, beside the threat, revealing their betrayal! 5 -- Creatures have set a deadly trap, prompting characters to make a moderately difficult saving roll or be immobilized for the first round of combat! 6 -- Creatures are revealed to have once been Allies of the Player Characters, either through mutation, infection, corruption, or betrayal! First attacks will be disadvantageous to the Player Characters, either in the form of harder attack rolls or lessened damage. 7 -- Creatures spark with volcanic malformities, whose incendiary attacks now set characters on fire if they don't pass an easy saving roll. 8 -- Creatures will fight to the death, no matter what, focusing their energy on killing as many Player Characters as possible! 9 -- Creatures billow with frost-borne fear tactics, whose cryo-attacks now freeze characters if they don't pass an easy saving roll. 10 -- Creatures grow in size by one size, gaining any related benefits, or a flat +1 to all applicable statistics. 11 -- Curses from dead casters fill the air,

strangling and preventing all magic for the duration of the encounter. 12 -- Broken promises litter the floor, and all psychological tests and saving throws are automatically failed. 13 -- Environment swells with disgusting refuse, all terrain becomes difficult. 14 -- Perilous pitfalls sneer with hunger, damage-dealing hazards deal an extra x2 dice of damage. 15 -- Shadows lengthen, snuffing all light sources, and plunging the encounter into total darkness. 16 -- Corrosive miasma fills the space, and all ranged attacks automatically miss. 17 -- Fires have started in two points of the space, and will spread unless snuffed out! 18 -- Environment is infected with a necrotic sickness, all healing effects are cancelled and negated. 19 -- Blinding light, evil in its saccharine glare, spills from the cracks in the environment! Treated as darkness, only, effects that negate darkness don't work. 20 -- Threats in the space are doubled, at the Game Master's discretion.

FAILSAFE REFUND: If the degree is not met, the GM offers to refund all sacrificed resources. If the players accept the refund, the lights lower fully and the danger table is rolled. If they decline the refund, they keep whatever partial protection they bought but the remaining unmet degrees still trigger danger.

EXAMPLE IN PLAY:

GM: As you bravely repel down into the castle's oubliette, The Lights Lower by 5 Degrees.

Fighter: Not again! I will contribute my last Inspiration.

Warlock: As will I.

GM: Alright, that's only 2, and you have three more to go.

Paladin: Fine, I will chip in this Inspiration I earned last session. Is there anything else I can offer?

GM: You may burn 2 from your Charisma modifier until your next rest, to squint and hunch through the gloom...

Paladin: That's a hard bargain, but what choice do we have?

GM: Finally, what will you do, Rogue?

Rogue: I have no Inspiration, and I won't be sacrificing my skills just to be ambushed in the next room! I say we stand and fight with everything we have.

GM: Would you like me to refund everything and allow the lights to lower?

Players: Yes!

GM: Okay. (Passes back resource tokens) Now, waiting at the bottom of the oubliette is the polite blacksmith from the tavern, crossbow in hand with his band of x4 Bandits! "Nothing personal," he hollers, "just business!" He fires a shot right at you, Rogue!

DESIGNER'S NOTE

The designer originally devised this mechanic to strengthen horror storytelling, but found it was becoming too much of a crutch for atmosphere. Atmosphere needs to come from oration, tension, and -- most abstractly -- vibes. As a way to spice up a crawl or a mystery, though, this mechanic creates a storytelling opportunity for sacrifice. With the failsafe refund, characters face a game theory choice: go into a more dangerous encounter weaker, or go into a mystery encounter stronger, as dictated by meta resource management.

Designed by [Designer Name] Alexander

THE LIGHTS LOWER IN KORMOR KIRAK

In the Gothic Gaslamp Fantasy city of Kormor Kirak, The Lights Lower is not merely metaphor. The city's vast network of gas lamps -- installed by order of Vampire Queen Kiraline herself over the past three centuries -- is woven into the very fabric of the metropolis. These lights are maintained by the Lamplighter's Guild, though few know that the Guild answers ultimately to the Queen's inner circle. When The Lights Lower, it is the city itself that responds.

The lowering may be the result of the Comet Chamber's influence -- that strange astronomical phenomenon that warps reality in unpredictable ways when it grows near. It might be the Lich Cult's shadow rituals seeping into the material world, their necromantic rites unraveling the boundaries between dimensions. Or perhaps it is the Queen's own will asserting dominion, her three-century-old power bleeding through the infrastructure like ink through parchment. Whatever the cause, the effect is unmistakable: the gas sconces dim, the shadows move wrong, and the rules of the world grow negotiable.

The Lights Lower manifests differently depending on where in Kormor Kirak the characters find themselves. Here are some specific narratives for different locations:

CASTLE TORONY PIROS

The massive fortress-palace of Queen Kiraline sits at the city's heart, crowned with a thousand gas sconces. When The Lights Lower there, the effect is subtle but profoundly wrong. The sconces dim to a sickly amber -- like old candlelight seen through disease-filled eyes. Shadows on the castle walls move independently of their sources, sliding across stone like liquid. In the throne room, the Queen's shadow grows larger and darker than her physical form,

sometimes seeming to gesture independently. The marble floors appear to ripple as if submerged in water that only the darkness perceives. Guards report feeling watched from directions where no one stands. The air grows cold despite the gas flames burning hotter. Those who've experienced it describe a sensation of the castle walls leaning inward, listening.

KERESKEDO MARKETPLACE

The great marketplace of Kereskedo is always loud -- merchants hawking goods, crowds haggling, musicians busking in corners. When The Lights Lower, the merchant lanterns hanging from every stall begin to gutter and sputter, despite having been freshly lit moments before. The crowds' murmurs change in tone and cadence; conversations that were previously about trade and gossip shift toward paranoia and suspicion. Merchants' voices become sharper, more aggressive. The crowd's shuffling footsteps synchronize into something almost rhythmic, unsettling in its uniformity. The smell of roasted chestnuts and exotic spices gives way to something like copper and burnt paper. Vendors report that customers' eyes seem to glow faintly in the flickering light -- though the effect vanishes if looked at directly. The marketplace maintains its crush of bodies, but the quality of the crush changes from casual market traffic to something more purposeful, more predatory.

THE DUNGEONS BENEATH CASTLE TORONY

The dungeons are lit by ancient sconces filled with alchemical torches -- flames that should never dim. When The Lights Lower in the depths, those torches extinguish one by one in sequence, as if an invisible hand is traveling through the corridors snuffing them out. The sound of keys jingling in Istvan the Jailer's office grows muffled, then stops entirely. Istvan himself -- always a chattering, corpulent presence -- falls utterly silent. Prisoners report that the darkness between torches becomes *thicker* than it should be, as if the shadows

themselves have weight and substance. Whispers echo from cells that have been empty for years. The stone walls seem to contract slightly, and the air becomes difficult to draw into the lungs. Most disturbing: the torch-fire that remains visible seems to move *downward* into pools of darkness below, as if gravity itself has redirected.

HALLASET FIELDS CEMETERY

The sprawling cemetery on Kormor Kirak's eastern edge is always melancholic, but when The Lights Lower, it becomes actively hostile to living breath. Ground fog rises from between tombstones despite clear weather, thick and choking, carrying a scent of opened earth and preservation oils. The grave markers seem to shift position when viewed peripherally -- not dramatically, but enough to make navigation unreliable. The stone angels and memorial crosses cast shadows that are far too long and too dark, and those shadows sometimes don't match the angle of the fading light. The grass beneath one's feet grows slick, though not wet. Most disturbingly, the graves themselves seem to *open* -- not fully, just cracks in the earth spreading like fissures, revealing stone sarcophagi and wooden coffins below, as if the ground is breathing. The epitaphs carved into markers blur and shift when one tries to read them.

EPPEY'S PUB

Eppy's Pub is a warm refuge, famous for its roaring hearth and Eppy's stream-of-consciousness commentary on the day's events. When The Lights Lower, the hearth dims dramatically despite never being less than fully stoked. The flames turn a sickly purple-green color. Eppy -- a man who has never fallen silent for more than thirty seconds in living memory -- stops mid-sentence. Not as if he's made a conscious decision, but as if his voice has been stolen from him. His mouth continues moving, but no sound emerges. The pub's other

patrons stop their conversations as well, turning toward the hearth with expressions of deep, inexplicable dread. The warmth from the fire becomes cold despite the flames appearing brighter. Shadows in the corners of the pub stretch impossibly long and seem to contain depths that shouldn't exist in a two-dimensional silhouette. The smell of pipe smoke and ale gives way to something like copper and lightning.

ETERNAL COURT DANGER TABLE VARIANTS

While the core d20 danger table applies universally, Kormor Kirak has its own unique dangers. Gamemasters may use this d12 table *instead of* rolling on the core table, or may roll on both tables and combine results for escalated encounters. These dangers are specific to The Eternal Court's dark setting and include threats unique to the city, the Queen, and the supernatural forces at work within her domain.

1 -- **VAMPIRE THRALLS IN THE SHADOWS:** A cadre of the Queen's thralls -- humans who have drunk the royal blood and are bound to her will -- emerge from shadows and corners where none were visible moments before. They move with unnatural grace and coordination, clearly operating under a single unified command. The thralls will attempt to restrain and capture rather than kill, clearly receiving orders from somewhere unseen.

2 -- **RED GUARD PATROL ARRIVES:** A unit of the Queen's elite guard -- the Red Guard, identifiable by their crimson uniforms and silver insignias -- rounds a corner directly into the encounter. They are armed with both conventional weapons and alchemical grenades. They are not here by accident; someone has reported the characters' activities to the crown.

3 -- **BONE SENTINELS AWAKENING:** Animated skeletons crafted by the Lich Cult stir to life around the encounter area. These are *not* natural creatures but

constructs, puppeteered by necrotic magic from a distance. They cannot be reasoned with or intimidated, and they prioritize stopping the characters above all else.

4 -- **THE QUEEN'S VOICE WHISPERS:** One randomly chosen character hears the voice of Queen Kiraline in their mind -- a presence like cold silk against their thoughts. She whispers secrets specific to that character, offers tempting bargains, or simply laughs at their predicament. The character must make a moderately difficult saving throw or become confused or paralyzed by indecision for 1d4 rounds. The Queen can see through this character's eyes for the duration of the encounter.

5 -- **CLOCKWORK MECHANISMS GO HAYWIRE:** The city's infrastructure -- whether gas pipes, hanging chains, mechanical doors, or alchemical pumps -- begins to malfunction violently. Furnaces vent scalding steam, pressure valves explode, hanging chains collapse, and gears grind loudly enough to cause pain. All terrain becomes difficult, and everyone in the area takes ongoing damage until they spend an action to disable the mechanism or flee the area.

6 -- **NECROTIC ENERGY SURGE:** The boundary between the living world and the necrotic planes tears briefly. A wave of withering energy sweeps through the area, dealing damage to all living creatures and healing all undead. After this surge, undead creatures gain advantage on all saving throws and their attacks count as magical. Any character reduced to 0 hit points by this surge becomes a temporary wraith or specter for the duration of the encounter, still under the player's control but unable to affect the material world except to warn others.

7 -- **LICH CULT RITUAL INTERFERENCE:** A coven of Lich Cult members nearby is performing a ritual, and the characters have blundered into the working space. The cultists prioritize completing their ritual over combat; they will summon creatures, cast area effects, and attempt to incapacitate rather than kill the party. If the ritual is not disrupted within 3 rounds, something emerges

-- a portal, a summoned entity, a localized temporal distortion -- that affects the entire encounter area.

8 -- **REALITY FRACTURES:** The Comet Chamber's influence becomes temporarily visible. Cracks of otherworldly light appear in the air itself, and reality becomes unstable. Characters must make difficult saving throws or suffer disorientation; prone and confused enemies gain advantage on attacks as the characters struggle with spatial orientation. Any creature killed in this fractured space leaves behind a temporary rift that deals damage to those who pass through.

9 -- **THE BETRAYER EMERGES:** An NPC the party has trusted -- a patron, a contact, an informant, or even a companion -- reveals their true allegiance to either the Queen or the Lich Cult. They attack the party directly or work against them strategically, and they have knowledge of the party's capabilities and weaknesses.

10 -- **SHADOW HUNGER MANIFESTS:** The shadows in the area become predatory and hungry, seeming to reach toward the characters with semi-tangible appendages. Characters take damage equal to how many rounds they spend in shadow or darkness. The shadows cannot be fought directly but can be scattered by sustained light sources. However, light sources in this area burn twice as fast.

11 -- **THE LAMPLIGHTERS' SECRET:** The local gas lamps, rather than providing light, begin to leak a narcotic vapor that induces visions and paranoia. All characters within the area must make Constitution saving throws or become poisoned, suffering disadvantage on all rolls and speaking aloud their innermost fears and secrets.

12 -- **TEMPORAL DISTORTION:** Time becomes unreliable. Actions take unpredictable amounts of time to complete, initiatives reset mid-combat, or rounds occur out of order. The GM determines the specific nature of the distortion,

but the end effect is that all plans become unreliable and combat becomes chaotic. Creatures native to Kormor Kirak (thralls, Red Guard, cultists) operate normally while the characters suffer disadvantage due to their confusion.

THROUGH THE LIGHTS TO THE CELESTIAL DARK

The Eternal Court campaign progresses through five distinct escalation phases, and The Lights Lower mechanic should intensify proportionally to reflect the campaign's growing darkness.

PHASE 1: SHADOW AND SUSPICION

In the earliest phase, when the characters are first learning about Kormor Kirak and the threats it contains, The Lights Lower might occur once per session, typically during critical moments or when the characters stumble upon evidence of the Queen's machinations. The base degree typically equals the number of player characters (3--4 usually). The failures feel manageable -- the darkness is disturbing but not yet catastrophic. The danger table rolls are relatively straightforward threats that the party can overcome with effort.

PHASE 2: WEB OF LIES

As the characters begin to uncover deeper conspiracies and attract the attention of various factions, The Lights Lower might occur twice per session during major encounters or when the party enters significant locations. The base degree now equals the number of player characters plus 2. Enemies that emerge are more powerful, and the mechanical penalties from the danger table become more disruptive -- status effects that last longer, terrain hazards that are harder to escape, encounters with higher stakes.

PHASE 3: THE BROKEN THRONE

By mid-campaign, when the party is actively working against the Queen's interests and the Lich Cult begins to make its presence known, The Lights Lower becomes a frequent occurrence -- possibly happening 3--4 times per session. The base degree equals the number of player characters plus the session number (Session 1 = PCs + 1, Session 12 = PCs + 12, etc.). Encounters now regularly include multiple rolled dangers, stacked effects, or the GM's creative intensification. The party begins to understand that The Lights Lower is not random but actively responding to their growth as threats.

PHASE 4: THE CRIMSON ASCENDANT

As the campaign reaches its climax with the Red Guard actively hunting the party and the Lich Cult's plans crystallizing, The Lights Lower becomes nearly constant in any encounter. The base degree equals the number of player characters multiplied by the escalation phase (Phase 4 = PCs × 4). Multiple danger table results should be rolled, combined, or used to create hybrid threats. The mechanic now represents the city itself turning against the characters -- the Queen's will made manifest through infrastructure and shadows.

PHASE 5: THE FINAL DESCENT

In the campaign's final phase, as the party confronts the Queen, the Lich Council, or whichever dark force they've chosen to oppose, The Lights Lower is effectively always in effect. The base degree equals the number of player characters × 5, making it nearly impossible to avoid sacrifice. The danger table should be heavily homebrewed by the GM at this point, creating encounters that feel uniquely tailored to the party's specific journey. The mechanic has evolved from a resource-management system into a thematic representation of the party's defiance against inevitable darkness.

WHEN TO CALL THE LIGHTS LOWER

The Lights Lower is most effective when used strategically rather than constantly. It works best at moments of genuine dramatic weight, when the party faces truly difficult choices or enters locations of significance. Here are specific triggers within The Eternal Court campaign:

OLIVIA'S JOURNAL CASES

Several of the cases from Olivia's Journal are natural triggers:

-- "*The Lamplighter's Daughter*" -- When the characters investigate the disappearance of the Lamplighter's Guild director's daughter, The Lights Lower during their confrontation with the responsible party. The case involves uncovering a deliberate culling, which merits the mechanical and narrative weight of the lowering.

-- "*Flowers for the Feast*" -- When characters discover the true purpose of the exotic flowers being cultivated by the Queen's botanists, The Lights Lower in the greenhouse or laboratory where they make their discovery. The flowers are tools of transformation, and their revelation demands escalation.

-- "*Voices in the Vaults*" -- As the party explores the ancient vaults beneath the castle, The Lights Lower to reflect the increasing unreality of the deeper levels. Each descending level may trigger a new lowering with a higher base degree.

-- "*The Red Guard's Reckoning*" -- When the party first directly confronts the Red Guard in combat (rather than fleeing or avoiding them), The Lights Lower as the Queen's elite forces make a coordinated move against the characters.

-- *"The Comet's Eye"* -- During any scene where the Comet Chamber's influence becomes visible or felt, The Lights Lower to represent reality destabilizing under its weight.

LOCATIONS PRONE TO THE LIGHTS

Certain locations in Kormor Kirak are inherently unstable and more likely to trigger the mechanic:

-- **CASTLE TORONY PIROS**, especially the throne room, the vaults, and the Comet Chamber itself

-- **THE DUNGEONS** beneath the castle, particularly the deeper levels where forgotten things are imprisoned

-- **HALLASET FIELDS CEMETERY** at night, or during any scene involving grave disturbance

-- **THE UNDERCROFT MARKETS**, a black market area where reality itself seems negotiable

-- **LICH CULT SANCTUARIES**, whether hidden temples, abandoned churches, or network hubs

-- **THE LAMPLIGHTER'S CENTRAL STATION**, where the city's gas infrastructure is controlled

STORY BEATS THAT WARRANT THE LIGHTS LOWER

Beyond specific cases and locations, these narrative moments are appropriate triggers:

1. **FIRST MAJOR BETRAYAL** -- When a trusted NPC reveals their true

allegiance or turns against the party, The Lights Lower to emphasize the magnitude of the betrayal and the character's fall from grace.

I. DISCOVERY OF THE QUEEN'S TRUE NATURE -- If the characters

encounter the Queen directly or learn definitive proof of her immortality and power, The Lights Lower to represent reality warping under the weight of the truth.

I. ACTIVATION OF A LICH CULT RITUAL -- Whenever the cultists

execute a significant working or summoning, The Lights Lower to reflect the necrotic magic tearing at the fabric of the world.

I. INVESTIGATION OF A MAJOR CRIME SCENE -- When the party examines

the site of a significant murder or supernatural event, particularly one connected to the Queen or the Lich Cult, The Lights Lower to represent the lingering supernatural residue of the violence.

I. NUMERICAL DISADVANTAGE AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS -- When the

party faces an encounter where they are clearly outmatched in numbers or power level, The Lights Lower as a mechanical representation of the difficulty and the world recognizing the threat they face.

I. CONFRONTATION WITH SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES -- Any direct combat

against vampires, liches, wraiths, or other powerful supernatural beings should trigger The Lights Lower to emphasize their otherworldly nature and power.

SAFETY NOTE

The Lights Lower intensifies the horror and grimdark elements of The Eternal Court. The mechanic emphasizes desperation, sacrifice, and the possibility of failure -- themes that can be emotionally heavy.

Before implementing The Lights Lower in your campaign, discuss it during Session Zero. Explicitly cover:

- The mechanic's purpose: to create dramatic moments of choice and sacrifice rather than to punish the party randomly
- How the failsafe refund works and that players always have the option to rewind and accept the danger rather than sacrifice resources
- Which horror tropes will appear (betrayal, body horror, corruption, loss of autonomy) and whether any are off-limits for your table
- How the mechanic will be signaled (the GM literally holding out a hand or dish, or whatever ritual you establish)
- That players can always request the GM go easier on a specific aspect if they find themselves experiencing real distress

Refer players to the Session Zero Guide included in The Eternal Court Core Book for complete safety protocols. Remember that atmosphere comes from *oration, tension, and vibes* -- the mechanic enhances those elements but does not replace them. The best use of The Lights Lower is infrequent and purposeful, creating memorable moments rather than constant pressure.

DESIGNED BY [DESIGNER NAME] ALEXANDER

For use with The Eternal Court: A Gothic Gaslamp Fantasy Supplement for Kormor Kirak, 1793

CAPITULUM

RANDOM TABLES & SENSORY DETAILS

A GM'S GUIDE TO ATMOSPHERIC ENCOUNTERS IN KORMOR KIRAK

Dice-driven tables for generating encounters, sensory details, and complications during play. Roll when characters enter new locations, when time passes between sessions, or when you need immediate inspiration for what happens next. These tables are designed to support the campaign's dark, morally complex tone -- specific enough to feel rooted in this world, atmospheric enough to set mood without overwhelming the story.

Consider pairing these atmospheric tables with The Lights Lower mechanic (see The Lights Lower supplement) during major encounters to layer mounting tension. When sensory details establish dread, The Lights Lower transforms that dread into immediate resource pressure, forcing players into active participation in their own mounting horror.

These conditions affect the entire city and its surroundings. Roll once per session or once per day of in-game time. Reroll on 8.

WEATHER TABLE (D8)

I -- OVERCAST AND COLD

Grey clouds hang low over Kormor Kirak, pressing down like a physical weight. The temperature drops enough to make breath visible, and light takes on a flat, colorless quality that makes distance difficult to judge. Red Guard patrols seem sharper, more alert in the gloom.

2 -- INTERMITTENT RAIN

Water falls in cold, spitting bursts, not quite heavy enough to constitute a storm but enough to make streets slick and miserable. The rain carries the faint mineral tang of runoff from the mountains, mixing with smoke from the city's chimneys into a smell that coats the throat.

3 -- CLEAR AND BRIGHT

Rare good weather breaks through the mountain cloud cover. Sunlight illuminates the city harshly, driving away shadow and making hidden movements across open ground more dangerous. The castle's towers gleam like bone against the blue sky.

4 -- HEAVY FOG

Fog rolls in from Hallaset Fields, thick enough that visibility drops to twenty feet or less. Sounds muffle and distort. The boundary between city and countryside blurs into grey whiteness. Those moving through the fog report feeling watched, as though something moves parallel to them in the mist.

5 -- VOLCANIC ASH FROM DISTANT MOUNTAINS

Fine grey ash falls from the high air, the result of distant volcanic activity. Everything becomes coated in a gritty layer of mineral dust. The smell is acrid and faintly sulfurous. Ash clogs breathing and reduces visibility. By nightfall, the city looks like it has aged a hundred years under the coating.

6 -- STORM APPROACHING

Distant lightning illuminates the horizon. Wind picks up with sudden violence, tearing loose shingles and dropping branches into streets. The pressure in the air is palpable, and animals become agitated. Those with sensitivity to

supernatural forces report an electrical tingle, as though something is building beneath the normal world.

7 -- ECLIPSE PHENOMENA

The daylight takes on an odd quality -- never quite right, never quite normal. If a true eclipse is approaching, this precedes it by days. Creatures become confused about the time. Red Guard increases patrols, uncertain why they feel more threatened. People speak in low voices, aware that something is wrong with the sky but unable to articulate what.

8 -- UNNATURAL FOG FROM HALLASET

Unlike normal fog, this emanates from the fields themselves and carries the faint sweet-rot smell of necromantic activity. It moves against the wind, behaving as though it has intelligence and purpose. Those breathing it too deeply report temporary disorientation and fragments of nightmares upon sleeping.

LIGHTING CONDITIONS TABLE (D6)

1 -- GAS LAMPS FAILING

Throughout the city, gas lamps flicker and dim as pressure in the system drops or lines begin to freeze in mountain cold. By evening, entire districts are darker than usual. Shadows deepen. Criminals take advantage. The Terrassian Quarter, with its older infrastructure, is hit hardest.

2 -- LAMPS BURNING BRIGHT

Pressure in the gas system is optimal. Lamps burn steady and clear, turning the city's streets into columns of light. The brightness feels almost oppressive in

the marketplace. Those conducting business in shadow find fewer places to hide.

3 -- AURORA FROM NECROMANTIC ACTIVITY

The sky over Hallaset Fields glows with an eerie green and purple light that has nothing to do with normal aurora. The glow illuminates at night, casting everything in sickly colors. Those outside after dark can see clearly without torches or lamps, a quality of illumination that feels deeply wrong.

4 -- HEAVY OVERCAST DIMNESS

Clouds are so thick that daylight is barely distinguishable from deep twilight. The city exists in perpetual half-light. Red Guard lamps are lit even at midday. Visibility is poor enough that pickpockets work freely. Movement through the streets feels like moving through a dream.

5 -- STORM LIGHT

Electrical storms illuminate the entire city in brief, brilliant flashes. In the moments between lightning strikes, darkness is nearly absolute. Sound distortion from thunder makes coordination difficult. The castle is silhouetted repeatedly against lightning-bright sky.

6 -- CLEAR NIGHT WITH FULL MOON

If a full moon rises, the entire city is bathed in silver light clear enough to read by. Shadows are sharp and distinct. Nocturnal creatures are more active. Jack's condition becomes more pronounced. Those awake report the city looks like a different place, transformed and strange.

THE QUEEN'S INFLUENCE TABLE (D6)

These effects ripple through the city as echoes of Kiraline's activities and power. Roll when characters spend significant time in Kormor Kirak or when the queen moves to consolidate power.

1 -- CITYWIDE UNEASE

A pervasive sense of dread settles over Kormor Kirak without obvious cause. People move quietly, conversations are muted, crowds disperse faster than usual. Animals are jittery. Those attuned to supernatural forces feel the weight of Kiraline's attention pressing down, as though she has noticed something happening in her city.

2 -- ANIMAL BEHAVIOR CHANGES

Dogs refuse to enter certain areas. Birds roost at unusual hours. Horses buck without provocation. In the Hallaset Fields, the normal animal population has vanished -- no birds sing, no insects buzz, only the sound of the wind through tall grass. Something has scared the natural world into silence.

3 -- MILK SOURING THROUGHOUT THE CITY

Across Kormor Kirak, dairy stored even in cold places sours within hours. The phenomenon is widespread enough that multiple merchants report it simultaneously. Some whisper it is a sign. Others believe it is something in the water supply. The truth remains unclear, but the effect is unmistakable and deeply unsettling.

4 -- MIRRORS SHOW WRONG REFLECTIONS

Those who look into mirrors see distortions -- their own faces aged or youthful beyond reality, or sometimes the face of a stranger looking back.

Some mirrors show nothing at all, reflecting the space behind the observer but not the observer themselves. Ordinary reflections return after a few hours, but the disruption creates superstitious dread.

5 -- SHARED NIGHTMARES SPREAD THROUGH POPULATION

Across the city, people wake from identical or near-identical nightmares featuring a woman with a beautiful face that unhinge at impossible angles, or a sense of being drained, or drowning in crimson darkness. The dreams are vivid enough to be mistaken for memory. Some people wake with new scar tissue on their necks though nothing bit them in waking life.

6 -- KIRALINE MOVES AGAINST HER ENEMIES

Arrests increase. Red Guard squads are mobilized. Specific locations are sealed off from civilian traffic. A sense of active threat hangs over the city. Everyone senses that the queen is doing something -- consolidating power, eliminating opposition, or preparing for something larger. The tension feels like a held breath waiting to exhale.

Roll a d6 or d8 when characters enter a new district or major location to determine which sensory details are most prominent. Use 2-3 details per scene rather than all options. Repeat visits to the same location should emphasize different details on the second or third time through.

MARKET DISTRICT SOUNDS (D8)

1 -- HAGGLING IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

Terrassian merchants argue with Albion traders about pricing, their voices rising and falling in rhythmic waves. Underneath, common speech in at least three different regional accents. The noise is almost musical in its chaos.

2 -- COINS AND COMMERCE

Endless clink of copper and silver changing hands, the metallic percussion underlaying everything. Money changers' scales create precise tones as they measure weight. The sound of coins is the marketplace's heartbeat.

3 -- SIZZLE OF COOKING FIRES

From the food vendors' section, constant sizzle and pop of meat cooking, bread crisping. The sharp sound of hot oil mixed with the deeper crackle of burning wood.

4 -- CRYING CHILDREN AND THIN VOICES

Street urchins call out to passersby. Mothers selling bread or goods call their children to stay close. The high, piercing tones of the young mixed with the lower murmur of adult negotiation.

5 -- SMITHING AND METALWORK

From the Albion Quarter, the ring of hammer on anvil, the hiss of quenching hot metal in water. The sounds are rhythmic and industrial, utterly unlike the organic chaos of other sections.

6 -- RATS AND MOVEMENT IN THE DARK

Beneath the conscious marketplace noise, the skitter of rats and larger creatures moving through shadows. Boxes shifting. The small sounds that suggest the market has another layer of activity happening unseen.

7 -- WIND THROUGH CLOTH

Thousands of bolts of fabric ripple in the mountain breeze. Banners crack and flutter. The wind carries whispered rustling that makes it difficult to hear conversations at normal distance.

8 -- BELL CHIMING FROM THE CASTLE

Distant bells ring from Torony Castle at the hour, deep and resonant enough to cut through all other noise. The sound stops conversations briefly. Everyone pauses, listening, then returns to commerce as though released from a spell.

MARKET DISTRICT SMELLS (D8)

1 -- VINEGAR AND SPICE

The sharp, nose-clearing tang of a tanner's stall mixing with cinnamon from a Terrassian spice merchant. Underneath, the almost metallic smell of dried herbs in bundles waiting to be purchased.

2 -- COPPER AND BLOOD

The faint copper scent that never quite leaves the air near the Blood Gate or the butchers' section. Mixed with sawdust meant to absorb spillage, it creates a smell simultaneously alive and dead.

3 -- LEATHER AND MACHINE OIL

From the Albion Quarter, the heavy smell of worked leather and the sharp chemical tang of machine oil used to keep precision tools functional. It smells industrial, foreign to the city's natural scents.

4 -- ROASTING MEAT AND WOODSMOKE

From the food vendors, the deeply savory smell of meat over open flame mixing with acrid woodsmoke. The smell is warm and hunger-inducing, drawing people toward the stalls even against their intentions.

5 -- HORSE AND ANIMAL WASTE

The ever-present smell of horses, mules, and the detritus of animal presence. Dung, urine, and hay mixing into a stench that newcomers find overwhelming but which longtime residents barely notice.

6 -- FLOWERS AND DECAY

Strange contradiction from Terrassian goods -- Hallaset flowers blooming in arrangement at stalls mixed with the underlying rot-smell of goods at various states of age and spoilage.

7 -- INCENSE AND PERFUME

Burning incense from merchants attempting to mask less pleasant odors, mixing with perfumes and scented oils. The combination is cloying and artificial, creating a haze of competing fragrances.

8 -- UNWASHED HUMAN AND HUNGER

The salt-smell of sweat, the organic smell of people living closely together without regular bathing. Mixed with desperation and the metallic smell of fear-sweat from those in genuine poverty.

CASTLE INTERIOR SOUNDS (D6)

1 -- ECHOES AND EMPTINESS

The vast interior spaces of Torony Castle create echoes from every sound. A single footstep reverberates for seconds. Conversations echo confusingly off stone, making it difficult to locate sound sources.

2 -- CHAINS AND RESTRAINT

From the dungeons, the faint clink of chains. Even in upper levels, those sensitive enough report hearing the distant metallic sounds of imprisonment, creating a persistent sense of constraint.

3 -- WATER DRIPPING

Throughout the castle, the endless drip of water from stone. Sometimes rhythmic, sometimes stuttering, always present. The sound is maddening to those trying to sleep, hypnotic to those in trance states.

4 -- RED GUARD BOOTS ON STONE

The precise, uniform sound of armor and boots on stone floor. The sound announces authority, creates anticipatory tension. Those hearing it approach stiffen, awaiting interaction or judgment.

5 -- TORCHES BURNING AND CRACKLING

A sound most modern people don't notice until it becomes the dominant noise. Torches burning in sconces crackle and hiss softly, an organic sound that keeps the castle from ever being truly silent.

6 -- WHISPERED CONVERSATIONS AND RUMORS

The castle staff gossip in low tones, spreading rumors, speculation, information that may be true or entirely fabricated. The whispers create a constant background murmur, suggesting secrets being shared.

CASTLE INTERIOR SMELLS (D6)

1 -- INCENSE AND PERFUME

The castle is heavily perfumed, attempting to mask less pleasant odors with floral and exotic scents. The smell is cloying and artificial, speaking of wealth and power but creating subtle discomfort.

2 -- STONE AND AGE

The deep, mineral smell of ancient stone that has absorbed centuries of dampness. The smell suggests weight, permanence, the oppressive feeling of living inside a mountain.

3 -- BURNING TORCH AND SMOKE

The acrid smoke from oil torches despite modern gas lamps in some areas. The smoke creates a layer of smell that makes the castle feel medieval, old, slightly oppressive.

4 -- BLOOD AND COPPER

Faint and undeniable, the metallic smell of blood. Where it comes from -- dungeons, the queen's feeding, old stains -- remains unclear. But the smell is present enough to register, creating subliminal dread.

5 -- FLOWERS THAT DON'T BELONG

Fresh flowers arranged in elaborate displays throughout the castle. The flowers are exotic, expensive, out of season. Their fragrance is almost cloyingly sweet, suggesting something hidden beneath.

6 -- ROT AND DECOMPOSITION

Not obvious unless you know what to seek, but present in the castle's oldest sections. Something is decaying in the walls or dungeons, creating a smell faint enough to dismiss but persistent enough to disturb.

UNDERGROUND SOUNDS (D6)

1 -- DRIPPING WATER AND ECHOES

Water falling from impossible heights, echoing in vast chambers. The sound bounces and multiplies, creating disorientation about distance and direction.

2 -- MOVEMENT IN THE DARK

The skitter of things that live underground -- rats, insects, something larger. The sounds suggest active ecosystem inhabiting darkness, creating sense that tunnels are alive with invisible motion.

3 -- DISTANT VOICES AND COMMERCE

From deeper sections, the sound of human activity, negotiation, trade. The sounds are muffled enough to be uncertain, suggesting activity hidden from the upper world.

4 -- CREATURE VOCALIZATIONS

Things that shouldn't be underground emit sounds. Growls, snarls, or something weirder. The creatures are hidden but their presence is announced through sound.

5 -- PRESSURE AND SILENCE

An oppressive quiet that feels pregnant with potential violence. The lack of sound is more disturbing than noise, creating sense of held breath.

6 -- HYDRAULIC HISS AND MECHANICAL SOUND

In sections where Terrassian technology operates, the hiss of hydraulic systems, the whirl of clockwork. The sounds suggest machines waiting, watching, ready.

UNDERGROUND SMELLS (D6)

1 -- DAMP STONE AND MINERALS

The heavy, mineral-rich smell of deep places that have never seen sunlight. The smell is cold and somehow ancient, speaking of ages past.

2 -- BLOOD AND RAW MEAT

From butchers' sections or The Pits, the smell of blood and fresh animal flesh in the process of being butchered or killed.

3 -- CHEMICALS AND ALCHEMY

From The Apothecary, the sharp tang of alchemical substances, acids, exotic components. The smell is harsh enough to burn the sinuses.

4 -- ROT AND DECAY

Things decomposing in darkness, bodies or organic matter in various states of dissolution. The smell is overwhelming in places, requiring effort to breathe through it.

5 -- INCENSE AND RITUAL

The smell of incense burning in ritual spaces, mixed with things less identifiable. The combination speaks of purposes unknown, of magic or predation or both.

6 -- UNWASHED HUMAN AND DESPERATION

The accumulated smell of humans living in underground spaces without proper facilities or hygiene. It speaks of poverty, imprisonment, loss of hope.

STREET ENCOUNTER SOUNDS AT NIGHT (D6)

1 -- FOOTSTEPS AND PURSUING THREAT

The sound of someone running or being chased. Footsteps echoing off stone create panic or tension. The sound ends, leaving uncertainty about outcome.

2 -- WHISPERED CONVERSATIONS AND DANGER

Two or more voices speaking in urgent tones too low to hear clearly. The tone suggests conspiracy, threat, or secret negotiation. The conversation ends abruptly when the party approaches.

 3 -- CREATURE VOCALIZATIONS

Snarling, hissing, or the sound of predators hunting. The sounds suggest things hunting in the city's darkness, things that shouldn't be in the streets.

4 -- BREAKING GLASS AND DESTRUCTION

The sound of commerce being violated, of theft in progress or property being destroyed. The sounds create urgency and ethical complication about whether to intervene.

5 -- SCREAMING OR CRYING

Someone in distress, pain, or terror. The sound is distant and disorienting enough that location remains unclear. Reaching the source may be complicated or impossible.

6 -- PROFOUND SILENCE

A rarity in the city, the complete absence of sound speaks of danger more than noise. The silence feels unnatural, suggesting that something is wrong enough to make predators silent.

WHAT'S THAT TASTE? (D6)

FOR FOOD AND DRINK ENCOUNTERED AT EPPY'S PUB OR THE MARKETPLACE.

1 -- BREAD WITH HERBS AND SALT

Fresh bread from Eppy's kitchen, still warm, with rosemary and sea salt baked into the crust. The taste is pure comfort, speaking of care in preparation and genuine nutrition.

2 -- STEW WITH UNCLEAR ORIGINS

At food vendor stalls, soup or stew in questionable condition. The meat source is unidentifiable, vegetables are overcooked, but the flavor is oddly savory. Eating it involves accepting uncertainty about ingredients.

3 -- MOUNTAIN HONEY SWEETNESS

Honey from Terrasian suppliers, so pure it coats the mouth with sweetness. The flavor hints at summer flowers and high meadows, creating momentary escape from the city's darkness.

4 -- WINE WITH ACRID UNDERTONE

Wine from Eppy's collection, complex and full-bodied, but with a lingering acrid undertone that suggests age, chemical breakdown, or alchemical addition. Drinking it is slightly uncomfortable but not poisonous.

5 -- MEAT THAT WAS BUTCHERED TOO LONG AGO

Cured sausage or dried meat from questionable sources, the flavor vaguely wrong, vaguely concerning. It sustains but creates lingering unease about what exactly was consumed.

6 -- WATER THAT TASTES LIKE METAL

Water from tainted sources, carrying mineral tang or actual metallic aftertaste. It quenches thirst but leaves feeling of grit on teeth and lingering concern about purity.

These tables provide narrative setups rather than simple stat-block deployments. Each result describes the encounter context, creature motivation, and immediate situation. Adjust creature numbers based on party size and level.

CITY STREETS, DAY (D8)

1 -- RED GUARD PATROL

Two to four Red Guards march the streets in loose formation, checking papers from travelers, maintaining visible authority. If the party looks suspicious or foreign, they will approach and demand credentials. Their manner is professional but edged with potential violence.

2 -- MARKET RUFFIAN PICKPOCKET GANG

Two to three market criminals attempt to relieve characters of valuables. They work in coordinated teams, one creating distraction while others cut purses or steal openly. They flee immediately if caught, disappearing into crowds or alleys. Catching them causes complications with local crime organizations.

3 -- BEGGAR SWARM AND HIDDEN THREAT

A dozen or more beggars surround the party, pleading for coin. Among them is a single gangster lieutenant or skilled thief assessing the party for targeting. The beggars scatter immediately if violence erupts, revealing that the operation was reconnaissance.

4 -- STREET PREACHER WITH GATHERING CROWD

A religious figure or someone claiming prophecy stands on a box or platform speaking to gathered citizens. The crowd includes true believers, curious onlookers, and Red Guard watching to ensure order. The message is apocalyptic, speaking of approaching darkness or divine judgment.

5 -- CAVALRY PATROL BLOCKING ROUTE

Mounted soldiers control a checkpoint on the route the party intended to travel. They demand papers, create bureaucratic delay, possibly demand "inspection fees." Their incompetence is evident but their authority is absolute. Circumventing them requires creativity rather than force.

6 -- ACCIDENT WITH OVERTURNED CARRIAGE

A merchant's carriage has overturned or broken down, spilling goods and creating traffic blockage. The merchant is in distress. Red Guard is attempting to clear the street. Those helping may gain favor or find themselves entangled in complicated situations.

7 -- STREET PERFORMANCE AND DECEPTION

A talented bard or street performer draws crowds with music or acrobatics. The performance is genuine, but the crowd it attracts includes pickpockets and beggars. The performer may have information the party needs or may be an undercover operative watching the streets.

8 -- DISTURBANCE REQUIRING INVESTIGATION

Sounds of fighting, property destruction, or threat emerge from an alley or side street. The disturbance may be gang violence, a mugging in progress, or something supernatural. The party's response determines immediate complications.

CITY STREETS, NIGHT (D8)

1 -- RED GUARD NIGHT PATROL, NERVOUS

Two to three guards moving with heightened alertness, eyes on shadows, hands near weapons. They are more likely to react with violence if startled. They may warn the party away from certain areas "for their own safety," suggesting something moves in darkness.

2 -- CRIMINAL OPERATION IN PROGRESS

Smugglers, thieves, or organized crime figures conducting business. The operation may be theft, extortion, movement of contraband, or worse. The party's discovery of the activity forces quick decisions about involvement.

3 -- PROWLING CREATURE OR SUPERNATURAL PRESENCE

Movement in shadow that may be animal or may be something worse. The creature is dangerous but not immediately aggressive. Encounter involves environmental risk and tension rather than direct combat.

4 -- DESPERATE PERSON IN CRISIS

Someone running from threat, injured and bleeding, seeking help. Aiding them creates immediate complications -- whoever or whatever chases them will pursue. Refusing aid has moral weight.

5 -- GATHERING OF STRANGERS

A group of cloaked or deliberately concealed figures meets in shadows, conducting business. The party's approach causes the gathering to disperse. What they witnessed may attract dangerous attention.

6 -- CLOCKWORK SCOUT OR MECHANICAL WATCHER

A small mechanical device observes from high ground. Its presence suggests sophisticated surveillance. Destroying it alerts its controller. Leaving it allows observation to continue.

7 -- VAMPIRE SPAWN ON NOCTURNAL HUNT

One or more undead creatures move through darkness, hunting. They may target the party, target innocent bystanders, or allow the party to pass if not interfered with. Direct confrontation is dangerous.

8 -- MULTIPLE ENCOUNTERS CONVERGING

Different parties -- Red Guard, criminals, creatures -- are moving through the same area for different purposes. The convergence creates chaos and opportunities for advantage or entanglement.

HALLASET FIELDS (D8)

1 -- UNDEAD SHAMBLER SENTRY

A single shambler or small group of shamblers animate from the soil as the party approaches. They are slow and stupid but relentless. The encounter serves as atmospheric encounter establishing necromantic presence rather than major combat.

2 -- WARD SYMBOL INVESTIGATION

Freshly painted ward symbols mark the field boundary. They are new, hastily applied, suggesting recent escalation of whatever threat they guard against. Investigation reveals the symbols were painted in fear, with urgency.

 3 -- NECROTIC BULK MOVEMENT

The party observes evidence of the bulk's passage -- torn earth, trampled grass, scattered bones. The creature is not present, but its recent activity is undeniable. The encounter establishes that something powerful hunts these fields.

4 -- HALLASET FLOWERS BEHAVING UNNATURALLY

Flowers bloom in unnatural profusion, or bloom out of season despite winter conditions. They smell sweet but wrong, and touching them creates discomfort -- faint burning sensation or nausea. The flowers are symptom of necromantic saturation.

5 -- GRASS WHISPERS AND OLD WORLD AWARENESS

Those attuned to the old world hear subtle sound from tall grass, almost like whispers. The sensation is not threatening but profound, suggesting the landscape itself is aware and communicating. The communication resists translation into words.

6 -- MOUNTAIN WOLVES, AGITATED

A pack of 4-6 wolves, unusually aggressive, emerges from tree line. If Jack is present, the wolves focus on him with specific intensity. The encounter is combat if party engages, or avoidance if party chooses retreat.

7 -- RITUAL SITE, RECENTLY USED

Evidence of necromantic ritual -- chalk marks, bone arrangements, corpse portions. The site is abandoned but recent. Investigation may reveal what ritual was performed and by whom, creating investigative threads.

8 -- CORPSE EMERGING FROM SOIL

As the party travels, earth shifts and a partially decomposed corpse emerges. The corpse is recent enough to preserve some feature identifying it as someone the party knew or knew of. The emergence is simultaneous with the party's presence -- it may have been triggered.

CASTLE UPPER FLOORS (D6)

1 -- RED GUARD SQUAD ON PATROL

A six-person squad encounters the party, demands explanation for their presence. Response depends on party credentials and prior relationship. The encounter may be smooth passage or rapid escalation.

2 -- SERVANT OR STAFF MEMBER

A castle employee encounters the party, either offers help or attempts to report intruders depending on the party's apparent legitimacy. Staff members may provide valuable information or create complications if they disappear to report.

3 -- VAMPIRE SPAWN PASSAGE

One or more undead servants move through castle corridors on nocturnal business. The spawn are not immediately hostile but may become so if the party interferes. Encounter establishes the castle's secret population.

4 -- NOBLE OR HIGH RANKING OFFICIAL

A visiting dignitary or castle official encounters the party. The interaction is political, requiring negotiation and credible explanation of presence. The

official may become useful contact or dangerous enemy depending on handling.

5 -- DOOR LOCKED OR SEALED

Access is blocked by heavy doors requiring force or keys the party doesn't possess. The locked area is clearly important. Forcing entry creates commotion and attracts attention.

6 -- CASTLE BEHAVING STRANGELY

Geometry becomes confusing. Corridors lead where they shouldn't. Distances don't match exterior measurements. The effect is subtle enough for party to second-guess their own navigation. The castle may be magically flexible or the party may simply be losing sense of direction in unfamiliar space.

CASTLE DUNGEONS AND BELOW (D8)

1 -- PRISONER ENCOUNTER

A cell holds one or more prisoners, some lucid and some mad from imprisonment. If released, prisoners may become allies or complications depending on their mental state. Prisoners know dungeon layout and may provide valuable intelligence.

2 -- GUARD OR JAILER

A single guard or small group enforces dungeon security. They are likely surprised but trained in combat. The encounter may result in combat, negotiation, or cautious passage depending on party choices.

3 -- VAMPIRE SPAWN FEEDING

One or more spawn encounter the party in dungeon shadows. The spawn are actively feeding on a prisoner or in post-feeding state. The encounter is guaranteed combat unless party retreats or hides successfully.

4 -- FRESH BLOOD STAINS

The party discovers evidence of recent feeding -- blood on stone, torn clothing, body parts. The evidence is recent enough to suggest predator is still nearby. The discovery creates tension and dread.

5 -- DECOMPOSING BODIES

Older remains, no longer feeding current needs, remain in cells or piled areas. The stench is overwhelming. Bodies may be identifiable as people the party knew. The corpses may still hold valuable items or information.

6 -- RITUAL FRAMEWORK

Evidence of necromantic ritual -- the trellis structures used for binding corpses, chalk marks, the smell of decay and ritual components. The framework is empty or abandoned but clearly functional. Its presence indicates Lich Cult activity within the castle.

7 -- CHAINED CREATURE

A supernatural creature is imprisoned and chained, creating both threat and opportunity. The creature may communicate and offer aid if freed, or may become immediate threat. Evaluating risk and benefit is complex.

8 -- THE QUEEN'S PRIVATE CHAMBER APPROACH

The party discovers passage leading to impossible depth, geometry becoming visibly wrong. The way forward is clearly dangerous and forbidden. Pursuing it risks everything but might reveal critical information.

THE MARKETPLACE (D6)

1 -- SOCIAL TENSION BETWEEN MERCHANTS

Conflict between Albion Quarter merchant and Terrassian merchant over territorial encroachment, price undercutting, or ancient grievance. The conflict is verbal and heated but not yet violent. The party's involvement influences market dynamics.

2 -- INFORMATION BROKER IN OPERATION

A figure operating from the margins of the market buys and sells information. The broker may have intelligence the party needs or may recognize party members and attempt extraction for profit. Encounter introduces information economy.

3 -- CHARITY SITUATION

A child, elderly person, or disabled individual requests aid or charity. Responding with assistance gains reputation among locals. Refusing creates moral weight. The recipient may provide information or become recurring connection.

 4 -- CRIMINAL OPPORTUNITY

A middleman offers work to capable people -- theft, protection service, smuggling. The work is morally complicated and comes with risk. Accepting creates criminal associations. Refusing may create enemies if handled poorly.

5 -- UNDERCOVER RED GUARD OR SPY

A figure apparently shopping or conducting legitimate business is actually surveillance agent watching for illegal activity or specific targets. The party's recognition of the surveillance or the spy's recognition of the party creates complications.

6 -- DISTURBANCE REQUIRING LOCAL AUTHORITY

Fighting breaks out, theft becomes obvious, or someone collapses. Red Guard responds. The party's involvement influences outcome and local reputation. Standing aside may allow crime to continue; intervening may create complications with locals or authorities.

These tables describe escalating presence of specific threats. Roll for antagonist activity when time passes or when party actions attract attention.

VARGA SIGHTINGS (D6)

The werewolf enforcer's increasing presence as she tracks or targets the party.

I -- DISTANT OBSERVATION

The party spots a figure watching from rooftop, alley corner, or market edge. The figure is clearly female, clearly alert, clearly dangerous. Upon notice, she vanishes. The message is clear: she knows where you are.

2 -- RECENT ARRIVAL CONFIRMED

The party learns through contact, rumor, or direct evidence that Varga has arrived in the city. Crime lord lieutenants confirm whispered reports. The threat that was distant has become immediate.

3 -- CONFRONTATION WITH TRANSFORMATION

Varga confronts the party directly, no longer attempting concealment. During combat or negotiation, witnesses her transformation from humanoid form to lupine predator. The transformation is brutal and rapid. She is vastly more dangerous in beast form.

4 -- PACK ATTACK AT DUSK

Varga, in hybrid or full animal form, attacks with wolf pack. She coordinates the wolves with clear intelligence, using them to flank and overwhelm. The fight is desperate combat in failing light.

5 -- PERSONAL CHALLENGE AND CONFRONTATION

Varga approaches the party directly, no witnesses, and offers direct negotiation or challenge. She is unambiguously dangerous and makes clear that her interest in the party is personal and deadly. Violence or agreement hangs in balance.

6 -- COORDINATED CRIMINAL OPERATION

Varga uses her position as enforcer to mobilize criminal resources against the party. Multiple teams of gangster lieutenants and ruffians converge. The party is caught between avoiding obvious predator and dealing with organized threat.

LICH CULT ACTIVITY (D6)

The presence and operations of the death cult become increasingly visible and threatening.

1 -- ACOLYTE DISCOVERED AMONG KNOWN CONTACTS

The party learns that someone they trusted or regularly interact with is cult member. The revelation creates questions about what information may have been passed along, what loyalty actually exists.

2 -- RITUAL SITE DISCOVERED

The party stumbles upon or investigates location of recent ritual -- Hallaset Fields, abandoned building, underground chamber. The site is fresh enough that cult practitioners are likely to return. Hiding to observe or rushing to interrupt are viable options.

3 -- ACOLYTE RECRUITMENT ATTEMPT

A cult member approaches a party member directly, offering power, protection, or purpose. The pitch is genuinely appealing to someone with appropriate motivations. Declining creates enemy. Accepting creates moral entanglement.

4 -- UNDEAD SERVANT ENCOUNTER

The party encounters undead shambler or worse, clearly serving cult purposes. Destroying it doesn't stop cult activities but does eliminate immediate threat and confirms cult's presence.

5 -- NECROMANCER PRESENCE CONFIRMED

The party witnesses evidence that a true necromancer is operating in Kormor Kirak. The evidence may be Necrotic Bulk encounter, corpse arrangements, or direct sighting. The threat escalates from theoretical to immediate.

6 -- CULT STRIKES AGAINST PARTY DIRECTLY

Acolytes or undead servants attack the party directly, attempting assassination or capture. The attack reveals that the cult is aware of party and considers them threat worthy of resource expenditure.

RED GUARD COMPLICATIONS (D6)

The city's military enforcement creates problems independent of combat.

1 -- FALSE ARREST AND DETENTION

Party members are arrested on false or exaggerated charges. They are held in detention, their belongings inventoried and taken. Release depends on paying fine, providing leverage, or causing enough disruption to warrant release.

2 -- CHECKPOINT INTENSIFICATION

Red Guard establishes or intensifies checkpoints on routes the party frequently travels. The checkpoints create delays, increase scrutiny, make concealment of items or identity more difficult.

3 -- WANTED STATUS

The party discovers they are wanted by Red Guard for crimes they may or may not have committed. Wanted posters appear in districts they frequent. Bounty is placed on their capture.

4 -- ROYAL SUMMONS

The queen or her representatives summon the party to Torony Castle. Whether this is honor, threat, or test is ambiguous. Refusing may create serious complications. Attending means entering the power structure directly.

5 -- PROTECTION RACKET OR EXTORTION

Red Guard captain offers deal -- payment in exchange for avoiding harassment, warnings before raids, or protection from other authorities. Refusal results in increased enforcement actions against party.

6 -- MILITARY CONSCRIPTION PRESSURE

The war effort increases. Red Guard begins pressuring suitable individuals to volunteer or be drafted into military service. Party members may be targeted depending on apparent capabilities and origin.

AUTOMATIC ASSASSIN EVENTS (D4)

Clockwork killers sent against the party, each more dangerous.

I -- FIRST UNIT APPEARANCE AND RETREAT

An Automatic Assassin pursues the party relentlessly. The encounter is survival-focused rather than combat-focused. The assassin pursues with mechanical inevitability until the party escapes or the assassin is disabled. It withdraws if damaged enough.

 2 -- SECOND UNIT APPEARS, UPGRADED

A new assassin arrives, clearly improved or repaired from previous encounters. It is faster, more efficient, more heavily armed. It focuses on priority target with clear capability to kill.

3 -- DUAL ASSASSINS COORDINATED ATTACK

Two assassins arrive simultaneously, coordinating attacks, covering each other's weaknesses. The party is clearly the target of significant resource. Survival requires serious damage to infrastructure or direct destruction of both units.

4 -- ASSASSIN MODIFICATIONS AND NEW THREAT

The next assassin is clearly custom-built, with modifications suggesting specific knowledge about the party's capabilities and tactics. It may be armor-resistant, magically null, or designed to counter specific party members.

What Kiraline does between sessions. Roll when time passes or when the party triggers attention from the castle. These are not encounters but consequences, ripples affecting the broader campaign landscape.

HER COURT ACTIONS (D8)

Political moves that affect the party's situation or position within the city.

I -- PUBLIC DECREE

Kiraline issues new law or restriction affecting the city. The decree may target merchants, restrict movement, establish new taxes, or control behavior. The decree influences party activities and creates opportunities for subversion or cooperation.

2 -- ASSASSINATION OR REMOVAL OF RIVAL

A political opponent of the queen disappears, dies suspiciously, or resigns from position. The event demonstrates power and creates succession complications or consolidation of authority.

3 -- SUMMONS OR TEST

The queen requests party presence at the castle for unspecified reasons. The summons is courteous but unavoidably an order. The "test" may be political, supernatural, or merely social evaluation.

4 -- ALLIANCE PROPOSAL OR DEMAND

Kiraline offers alliance to party or specific members, offering power, protection, or resources in exchange for loyalty or service. Refusing may create enemy or cost. Accepting creates moral entanglement.

5 -- DEMONSTRATION OF POWER

The queen conducts some action that makes clear her power and dominion. May involve mass feeding, resurrection of servant, or magical display. The action is visible enough to create city-wide awareness.

6 -- MASQUERADE ANNOUNCEMENT

The queen announces preparations for the Masquerade ball. Invitations are issued. Security is established. The event creates focal point for social maneuvering and potential conspiracy.

 7 -- SUPPLY OF RESOURCES TO ALLIES

The queen visibly distributes wealth, protection, or resources to her followers and supporters. Those allied with her are rewarded. Those opposed experience withdrawal of support or active hindrance.

8 -- EXPANSION OF TERRITORY OR CLAIM

The queen claims new area, expands castle holdings, or extends authority into previously neutral space. The expansion may involve building, military presence, or simple declaration of dominion.

SUPERNATURAL EVENTS (D6)

Necromantic experiments or the castle behaving strangely as Kiraline's power manifests.

I -- UNDEAD ANIMAL APPEARANCES

Necromantic corruption creates animated animal remains -- birds with wrong joints, creatures moving in impossible ways. The animals are witnesses to what is possible rather than threats in themselves.

2 -- GHOSTLY MANIFESTATION

Spirits become visible, moving through castle or city. The manifestations are not clearly hostile but undeniably supernatural. Those who recognize spirits may be able to communicate.

3 -- TEMPORAL DISTORTION

Time behaves strangely in specific locations. Minutes pass as hours, or hours as minutes. The effect is localized and temporary but creates disorientation.

4 -- MASS DREAM PHENOMENON

Large numbers of people across the city report nearly identical nightmares, visions, or supernatural experiences. The phenomenon suggests something powerful is experimenting with or affecting the sleep of an entire population.

5 -- PORTAL APPEARANCE

A gateway or tear in the fabric between worlds opens briefly. It may be near the castle, in Hallaset Fields, or in unexpected location. The portal suggests experiments or preparations for larger working.

6 -- CASTLE TRANSFORMATION

The castle's interior changes subtly. Corridors shift. New areas appear. Familiar areas are suddenly different. The transformation is real but dreamlike, creating sense that the castle itself is alive.

HER GROWING SUSPICION (D6)

Escalating attention from the queen as she becomes aware of and interested in the party.

1 -- AGENT APPROACHES FOR INFORMATION

A representative approaches, asking probing questions about party, their origins, their business in the city. The approach is polite and doesn't threaten, but the message is clear: the queen is gathering intelligence.

2 -- GENTLE REMINDER OF AUTHORITY

A small action demonstrates the queen's power and attention. Perhaps someone the party knows is briefly detained, then released. Perhaps the party's

movements are clearly tracked. The action is not hostile but establishes understanding.

3 -- SUBTLE THREAT

Kiraline sends message through intermediary that she is aware of party, aware of their activities, and watching with interest. The message is not threat but not quite friendship. Tone is genuinely uncertain.

4 -- COMPETITOR'S DISAPPEARANCE

Someone the party competes with or opposes vanishes. The disappearance may be death, may be elevation to castle position, may be something else. The message is clear: alignment with the queen is safer than opposition.

5 -- PERSONAL CONTACT FROM SZERET

The princess approaches directly, claims she has noticed the party, believes they are interesting, and wishes closer acquaintance. Her tone is flirtatious, predatory, and genuinely difficult to interpret. Her interest is flattering but potentially lethal.

6 -- DIRECT SUMMONS FOR PRIVATE AUDIENCE

The queen herself summons party for audience away from court and public view. The audience is conversation rather than spectacle. Kiraline evaluates the party directly, asking questions, making observations, deciding their ultimate fate within her domain.

APPENDIX: HOW TO USE THESE TABLES

DURING SESSION PLAY

Roll when:

- Characters enter new district or location for first time or after significant absence
- Multiple hours or days pass in-game
- Party draws attention from authority, criminals, or creatures
- You need immediate inspiration for what happens next
- Characters rest or conduct business in city during downtime

Use 2-3 results per scene rather than reading every option. The tables are tools for consistency and inspiration, not scripts that must be followed exactly.

BETWEEN SESSIONS

Roll antagonist and queen's activities tables to determine what changes in the city while the party rested. Did Varga arrive? Did cult activity escalate? What new decree affects their plans? These rolls establish consequences and create hooks for next session.

CUSTOMIZATION

Reroll 8s to exclude duplicates in a single scene. Modify results to match party composition, season, or current plot threads. Replace or add options to better fit your vision of Kormor Kirak. These tables are framework, not gospel.

ATMOSPHERE OVER COMBAT

Remember that these tables are designed to create mood, dread, and specificity. A shambler encounter in Hallaset Fields carries weight not because the creature is mechanically challenging, but because it confirms necromantic presence, because players know ward symbols are failing, because the wrongness is becoming visible. Use sensory tables to make the familiar city feel progressively more alien and dangerous.

The best use of these tables is to reinforce the central themes: that the city is under control of forces beyond moral goodness, that danger is always present, that choices have consequences rippling through social networks the party doesn't fully control, and that Kormor Kirak itself is alive with awareness and intention.

Roll wisely. Describe carefully. Let the dice guide mood without determining story.

CAPITULUM

STURTER SCENARIOS: THE BUTCHER OF KERESKEDO

“The Butcher of Kereskedo”

An Introductory Adventure for The Eternal Court Campaign Setting

Designed as both a playable first session and a template for building future scenarios from Olivia’s Field Reports

by Jesse Alexander

Based on the screenplay by Jesse Alexander

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This is a complete, ready-to-run introductory adventure for The Eternal Court campaign setting. It serves two purposes:

1. As a playable scenario that introduces players to Kormor Kirak, its key NPCs, locations, and the tone of the setting.
2. As a proof-of-concept template that shows GMs how every future Olivia’s Field Report can be deconstructed into a full adventure using the same structural approach.

The scenario is written system-agnostic in its narrative sections, with clearly marked sidebars for tabletop roleplaying games mechanical notes. GMs should adapt difficulty and stat blocks to match their table’s system and level.

SENDER BOX

CASE DESIGNATION: "The Butcher of Kereskedo"

DATE FILED: [*Set to early in the campaign timeline, shortly after Olivia's arrival in Kormor Kirak*]

CLASSIFICATION: Elevated --- Olivia's report to Barron Whitehallow omits certain details about Szeret's involvement and the full nature of what was discovered beneath the market.

SCENARIO TYPE: Murder / Supernatural Disturbance / The Queen's Influence

ESTIMATED PLAY TIME: 4-6 hours (one long session or two shorter ones)

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 3-5

PART I: THE REPORT (PLAYER-FACING)

This section is written in Olivia's voice as her official field report to Barron Whitehallow. It can be read aloud to players as a framing device, or printed and handed out as a physical prop. The report describes events that have already occurred --- the players will then "live through" a version of these events during play.

OLIVIA'S FIELD REPORT --- CASE FILE: THE BUTCHER OF KERESKEDO

To: Sir Barron Whitehallow, Foreign Minister, Albion Imperial Delegation From: Miss Olivia Faren, Aide-de-Camp, Albion Imperial Delegation Re: Incident at Kereskedo Market --- Preliminary Findings Sir, I write to inform you of a disturbance at the Kereskedo Market that I believe warrants your attention and, should you find it appropriate, a formal inquiry by the delegation. Three days prior to the date of this report, a merchant by the name of Tomas Brekk was discovered dead in his stall at the eastern

arcade of the market. Brekk dealt in preserved meats and cured provisions, a trade he had practiced for some years, and by all accounts he was well known to the regular vendors and patrons. His body was found by a neighboring stallkeeper at first light. The cause of death appeared to be a single wound to the chest, though the condition of the body suggested something beyond ordinary violence. I will spare you the details in this summary but have documented them in my field notes, which are available upon request. What compelled my investigation was the market overseer's reluctance to report the death through official channels. Rozito Vallikozo, who holds the royal appointment of market fixer, attempted to have the stall cleaned and the body removed before midday. When I arrived --- having heard of the incident from Eppy Flinder at the Bastion Inn --- Rozito was visibly agitated and insisted the matter was "a merchant's quarrel, nothing more." My investigation, conducted with the assistance of Jack Winbow and a local guide, revealed the following: First, that Tomas Brekk had recently taken delivery of several unmarked crates from a supplier outside the city walls, the contents of which were not consistent with his declared trade goods. Second, that a section of the market's lower storage vaults --- which I was told had been sealed for years --- showed signs of recent access, including fresh torch marks and disturbance of the dust on the flagstones. Third, that Brekk's wound bore markings consistent with descriptions I have read of ritualistic practices, though I confess my knowledge in such matters is limited. I was unable to gain access to the sealed vaults, as Rozito claimed the keys had been lost and the Queen's Red Guard would need to authorize entry. I have submitted a formal request through the appropriate channels. My preliminary conclusion is that Tomas Brekk was killed in connection with whatever activity is taking place in the lower vaults, and that Rozito Vallikozo either knows more than he is sharing or has been instructed to contain the situation. I do not believe this was a merchant's quarrel. I await your guidance on how to proceed. Your obedient servant, Olivia Faren

GM NOTES ON THE REPORT

The report above is Olivia's official, sanitized account. She is being honest about what she observed but cautious about what she speculates. Several details are deliberately omitted or understated:

- She does not mention that Szeret accompanied her to the market on the second day of her investigation
- She downplays her own fear and the genuine danger she was in
- She does not describe the symbols she found on Brekk's body in detail because she doesn't yet understand what they mean
- The "local guide" she references is deliberately vague --- this is a slot where a player character can be inserted into the narrative

PART 2: WHAT OLIVIA LEFT OUT (GM EYES ONLY)

This section reveals the full truth behind the report. Read this thoroughly before running the scenario. This is your complete picture.

WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

Tomas Brekk was not simply a meat merchant. For the past several months, he had been receiving deliveries of alchemical components disguised as trade goods --- bone ash, rendered fat infused with grave dust, and sealed clay jars containing organic material that defies easy identification. These supplies were being smuggled into Kormor Kirak from outside the city walls, delivered by night via a route that avoids the main gates.

Brek was storing these materials in the sealed lower vaults beneath the Kereskedo Market, which have been quietly reopened by agents of the Lich Cult. The vaults, which date back to the city's founding, connect to a network of older tunnels that predate the current market structure. The cult has been

using this space as a staging area for necromantic rituals --- small-scale workings that test the boundaries of what's possible under the Queen's nose.

Brek was killed because he got greedy. He opened one of the sealed jars, hoping to sell its contents to a private buyer, and what he found inside horrified him enough that he threatened to go to the Red Guard. The cult couldn't allow that. A cultist named Vael Morik --- who poses as a spice merchant two stalls down from Brek's --- killed him using a ritual blade that leaves necrotic scarring around the wound. The symbols carved into Brek's chest are a warning to other cult members: this is what happens when you break faith.

Rozito Vallikozo is aware that something dark is happening beneath the market. He doesn't know the full extent of it, but he knows enough to be terrified. His position as market fixer was a royal appointment from Queen Kiraline's court, and he suspects (correctly) that certain powerful figures want the lower vaults left alone. He is caught between self-preservation and his growing horror at what's been going on under his watch. He is not a cult member, but he has been looking the other way and profiting from the bribes.

WHAT OLIVIA SUSPECTS BUT CAN'T PROVE

Olivia noticed that the symbols on Brek's body resembled illustrations she saw in a reference text at the Albion Consulate --- a partial catalog of Lich Cult iconography from an earlier era. She suspects the cult is active again but has no direct evidence linking the murder to a larger organization.

She also suspects Rozito is being paid to keep quiet, based on his expensive new coat (notably finer than anything a market fixer could afford) and his evasiveness when questioned. But she has no proof of bribery.

She noticed that Szeret seemed to recognize the symbols on Brekk's body but said nothing about it. This bothered Olivia, but she chose not to press the issue in her report to Barron.

WHAT OLIVIA DOESN'T KNOW

The Queen is aware of the cult's presence beneath the market. Not because she opposes them --- but because she is using them. Kiraline has been quietly allowing the cult to operate as a test of their capabilities. She wants to understand the current state of necromantic practice in her city, and she finds it more useful to observe than to crush them immediately. The cult believes they are operating in secret. They are not.

The sealed lower vaults connect, through a collapsed but passable tunnel, to a chamber beneath Torony Piros. This connection is ancient and was sealed generations ago, but someone on the castle side has cleared enough rubble to allow passage. Whether this was done on Kiraline's orders or by someone else in the castle remains unknown.

Vael Morik, the killer, is a mid-level cult operative who genuinely believes in the Lich's eventual resurrection. He is fanatical, precise, and willing to kill again. He has already selected his next target: a Red Guard patrol leader who has been asking too many questions about deliveries to the market at odd hours.

PART 3: ENCOUNTER DESIGN BREAKDOWN (GM TOOLKIT)

This section deconstructs the journal entry into a playable adventure. It provides everything a GM needs to run the scenario at the table.

SETUP

STARTING SITUATION: The players are newcomers to Kormor Kirak, either arriving with or shortly after the Albion delegation. They may be hired guards, independent adventurers, or specialists Barron Whitehallow has recruited for security during the theater construction. On the morning the scenario begins, Eppy Flinder mentions at breakfast that something happened at the Kereskedo Market overnight --- a merchant was found dead and "the fixer is in a state about it."

Barron, still recovering from his latest bout of coughing, asks the players to look into it quietly. He doesn't want the delegation officially involved yet, but he wants to know if there's a threat to the construction project. Olivia accompanies the players as Barron's representative (and as the investigation's organizing mind).

OPENING READ-ALOUND

The morning air in Kormor Kirak carries the smell of wet stone and woodsmoke. The Bastion Inn is quiet at this hour, the common room still bearing the ghost-warmth of last night's fire. Eppy Flinder sets a pot of tea on the table without being asked and leans against the bar, arms crossed. "Something happened at the market last night. Tomas Brekk --- he sells cured meats from that stall near the eastern arcade --- found dead in his shop. Roquito's been running around like a man whose hair is on fire trying to keep it quiet. Red Guard hasn't been called yet, which tells you something." She pauses, pours herself a cup. "Might be nothing. But nothing in this city stays nothing for long."

TICKING CLOCK: Vael Morik plans to kill the Red Guard patrol leader, Captain Dara Szofi, tonight at sundown, when she makes her regular rounds through the market's eastern arcade. If the players don't uncover the cult's presence in the lower vaults or identify Morik by then, they'll arrive at the market to find a second body and a city on the edge of panic.

KEY NPCs

NPC ROLE IN SCENARIO WHAT THEY KNOW WHAT THEY WANT WHAT THEY'LL LIE ABOUT ROZITO VALLIKOZO Market Fixer / Reluctant Witness Knows the lower vaults have been accessed. Knows someone powerful wants them left alone. Has seen Morik coming and going at odd hours. Wants the whole thing to go away. Wants to keep his position and his life. Can be turned with enough pressure or a promise of protection. Will claim the vaults are sealed and inaccessible. Will deny knowing about any unusual deliveries. Will claim Brekk had gambling debts (a lie to deflect). **V AEL MORIK** The Killer / Cult Operative (posing as a spice merchant) Full knowledge of the cult's local operation. Knows the vault layout and tunnel connections. Knows where the next delivery is coming from. Wants to protect the cult's operation and complete his next kill. Will attempt to flee if exposed, fight if cornered. Everything. His entire presence in the market is a cover. He will seem helpful and concerned about the murder if approached casually, pointing suspicion toward Brekk's "debts." **EPPY FLINDER** Innkeeper / Information Broker / Ancient Blood Knows the market's social dynamics. Knows Rozito is scared of something. Knows Brekk's stall was receiving late-night deliveries. Her people predate humanity in this region. Her Trompe l'Oeil ceiling at the Bastion, with its alien constellations, is a map of a history nobody else can read. Wants to protect the Bastion Inn and its guests. Genuinely cares about the safety of the Albion delegation. Will share information if she trusts the players --- but her knowledge operates on a longer timeline than human concerns. Won't reveal the full extent of her ancestry, her connection to the old world, or what she really knows about the land under the market unless deep trust is established over multiple sessions. **CAPTAIN DARA SZOFI** Red Guard Patrol Leader / Potential Victim Knows her patrols have noted increased activity near the market at night. Has filed reports that were ignored by her superiors. Suspects corruption in the market administration. Wants to do her job properly. Frustrated by the bureaucratic stonewalling. Open to working with outsiders if they seem competent. Nothing --- she's one of the few straight shooters in

this scenario. That’s what makes her a target. **SZERET VERESZ** The Wildcard Recognizes the cult symbols. Knows the history of the Lich Cult from her mother’s accounts. Suspects her mother is aware of cult activity. Curious. Drawn to the investigation because it’s interesting and because Olivia is involved. Will help but on her own terms and timeline. Won’t reveal what she knows about her mother’s possible involvement. Will play dumb about the symbols if pressed directly. **OLIVIA FAREN** Investigator / Party Anchor Brilliant with numbers and patterns. Notices details others miss. Operates by logic and evidence. Wants to solve the case, protect the delegation, and prove her value to Barron. Nothing deliberately, but her report to Barron will omit certain details about Szeret’s involvement, reflecting her growing personal loyalty to the princess over strict professional protocol. -----

KEY LOCATIONS

LOCATION	SCENE	PURPOSE	SENSORY	DETAILS	HIDDEN	ELEMENT	THE	BAS-
TION INN	Home base / Briefing / Social hub	Warm hearth, smell of black tea and bread, creaking floorboards, morning light through thick glass windows.	Eppy’s presence is steady and grounding --- pointed ears, earthy aesthetic, a calm that suggests she’s seen far worse.	Above the common room, a Trompe l’Oeil ceiling painted with unfamiliar constellations in a language that isn’t human.	Eppy keeps a lockbox behind the bar with information she’s collected about strange happenings in the city.	The ceiling is a map of a history predating human settlement --- players who study it may find it connects to deeper mysteries in later scenarios.	KERESKEDO MARKET --- EASTERN ARCADE	Crime scene / Investigation / Social encounters
								Ancient stone arches, dense with vendor stalls, the competing smells of spices, smoked meat, leather,

and something underneath it all --- faintly chemical, faintly sweet. The crowd thins near Brekk's stall. Flies. Morik's spice stall is two stalls down. From his position, he can watch everyone who approaches Brekk's shop. He's been doing exactly that all morning. **BREKK'S STALL** Crime scene investigation The stall is half-shuttered. Inside, the meat hooks are empty. A dark stain on the flagstones has been partially scrubbed. The air smells of copper and lye. Brekk's personal effects are in a wooden chest beneath the counter. The chest contains Brekk's delivery ledger, written in a crude personal cipher. An Intelligence check (a difficult) reveals recent entries don't match his declared trade goods. One entry reads: "3 jars --- DO NOT OPEN --- from the outside man." **ROZITO'S OFFICE** Interrogation / Social pressure A cluttered room above the market's main entrance. Ledgers, contracts, foreign trade permits stacked on every surface. A new coat hangs on a hook --- clearly expensive, at odds with the worn furniture. The window overlooks the eastern arcade. A hidden drawer in his desk contains a bag of coins stamped with a mark players won't recognize --- payment from the cult. If confronted with this, Rozito breaks. **THE LOWER VAULTS** Exploration / Discovery / Potential Combat Cold. Damp. The ceiling is low and arched, older construction than the market above. Torch sconces have been recently restocked. The air smells of earth and something else --- a faint ozone-like tang that makes the hair stand up. Sounds echo strangely. The tunnels branch. The main vault chamber has been converted into a ritual workspace. A stone table at the center is stained dark. Against the far wall, a partially cleared tunnel leads deeper --- toward the castle. This passage is not meant to be explored in this scenario --- it's a hook for later. **THE EASTERN ARCADE AT SUNDOWN** Climax / Combat or Rescue The market is winding down for the day. Vendors are packing up. The light is amber and fading. Long shadows from the stone arches. Captain Szofi makes her rounds, stopping to chat with vendors. Morik watches from his stall, hand beneath the counter. If the players haven't identified Morik by this point, they witness his attempt on Szofi's life in real time. If they have identified him,

they can set a trap. -----

CLUE TRAIL

The investigation follows a web of discoveries. Players don't need to find them all or find them in order --- but each clue points toward others, and there are always at least two paths to any critical revelation.

DISCOVERY 1: THE BODY AND THE STALL

- **WHAT:** Brekk's body (if still present) or the crime scene (if removed). The necrotic scarring around the wound. His delivery ledger with the coded entries.
- **WHERE:** Brekk's stall in the eastern arcade.
- **HOW:** Basic investigation. Perception, Investigation, or Insight checks depending on what the players focus on.
- **LEADS TO:** Questions about who supplied Brekk, what was in the jars, and why Rozito is trying to cover it up.

DISCOVERY 2: ROZITO'S NERVOUSNESS

- **WHAT:** Rozito is scared, evasive, and recently wealthy. His story about Brekk's "gambling debts" doesn't hold up under pressure. He knows the lower vaults have been accessed.
- **WHERE:** Rozito's office above the market, or in the market itself if the players corner him.
- **HOW:** Social pressure, Persuasion, Intimidation, or catching him in a contradiction. Finding the cult coins in his desk is the hard proof.

- **LEADS TO:** The existence of the lower vaults and the fact that someone powerful wants them left alone. Rozito can be convinced to provide the keys (which he claimed were lost) if threatened or promised protection.

DISCOVERY 3: THE HELPFUL SPICE MERCHANT

- **WHAT:** Vael Morik approaches the players, offering help. He confirms Brekk had "trouble with some people outside the city" and suggests the murder was likely a debt collection gone wrong. He's polished, sympathetic, and completely lying.
- **WHERE:** His stall in the eastern arcade, or he approaches the players as they investigate.
- **HOW:** Players who actively observe the market may notice Morik watching them before he approaches (Perception a difficult). If they investigate his stall, the spices are real but his supplier records are fabricated.
- **LEADS TO:** A false trail if players trust him, or suspicion if they catch his inconsistencies. A Wisdom/Insight check reveals that Morik's sympathy feels performative --- his eyes don't match his words.

DISCOVERY 4: CAPTAIN SZOFI'S FRUSTRATION

- **WHAT:** The Red Guard patrol leader has been filing reports about irregular nighttime activity at the market for weeks. Her reports were "received and noted" but nothing happened. She's convinced someone in the administration is blocking her.
- **WHERE:** She can be found making rounds in the market, or at the Red Guard station near the main gate.
- **HOW:** Asking around about Red Guard presence at the market, or Eppy can point the players toward her as "the only guard worth talking to."

- **LEADS TO:** Confirmation that Rozito isn't the only one being pressured to look away. Also establishes Szofi as a person worth protecting, which creates stakes for the climax.

DISCOVERY 5: THE LOWER VAULTS

- **WHAT:** The sealed vaults beneath the market have been reopened and converted into a ritual workspace. Evidence of necromantic practice. Unmarked crates matching Brekk's delivery descriptions. A partially cleared tunnel leading deeper underground.
- **WHERE:** Below the Kereskedo Market, accessed through a locked iron door behind the western storage rooms.
- **HOW:** Getting the keys from Rozito (by persuasion, intimidation, or theft), or finding an alternate entrance through the old drainage channels (requires exploration and a Survival/Investigation check, DC 14).
- **LEADS TO:** The full picture. The cult is here, they're working in the dark, and they're connected to something larger. The tunnel toward the castle is the campaign-level hook.

THE REVEAL

The pieces come together when players connect Morik to the vaults. His stall's proximity to Brekk's wasn't coincidence --- he was the handler. If players find the ritual blade in the vaults (hidden in a hollowed-out crate, Investigation DC 12), it matches the wound pattern on Brekk's body. And if they compare Morik's handwriting (from his fabricated supplier records) to notes found in the vaults, it's a match.

ENCOUNTER BEATS

The scenario unfolds across three acts, roughly corresponding to morning, afternoon, and evening of a single day in Kormor Kirak. GMs should pace according to their table's energy and preference.

 ACT I: "A MERCHANT'S QUARREL" (MORNING)

BEAT 1: BREAKFAST AT THE BASTION

- **TYPE:** Social / Briefing
- **WHAT HAPPENS:** Eppy shares the news about Brekk. If Barron is present, he asks the players to investigate quietly. Olivia joins the party. Players can ask Eppy questions about the market, Brekk, and Rozito before heading out.

System Notes: No checks required. This is pure roleplay and information gathering. Eppy shares freely but doesn't volunteer everything --- players who ask smart questions get better answers. GM Tip: Establish the tone here. The Bastion Inn should feel safe, warm, and human. The darkness is outside. If Jack Winbow is present, observant players may notice his scarred back (visible if he stretches or reaches), that he sleeps with his window open even in winter, and that Eppy seems to know something about him that the rest of the delegation doesn't. Jack is a lycanthrope --- he disappears on full moon nights. This isn't relevant to the scenario's plot, but it's a character thread that pays off later and sharp players will start to notice the signs early.

BEAT 2: THE CRIME SCENE

- **TYPE:** Exploration / Investigation
- **WHAT HAPPENS:** Players arrive at the Kereskedo Market and investigate Brekk's stall. The body may or may not still be present depending on how quickly they moved. They encounter Rozito, who is agitated and unhelpful. They may also encounter Morik, who is helpful and watchful.

SYSTEM NOTES

GM Tip: Let the players drive the investigation. Don't rush them. If they get stuck, have Olivia notice something ("Those symbols... I've seen something like them before, in a book at the Consulate") to nudge them forward.

ACT 2: "FOLLOWING THE THREAD" (AFTERNOON)

BEAT 3: PRESSURING ROZITO

- **TYPE:** Social / Interrogation
- **WHAT HAPPENS:** Players confront Rozito, either at the market or in his office. He lies, deflects, and begs. If cornered with evidence (the expensive coat, the cult coins in his desk, the inconsistencies in his story), he cracks and reveals that someone told him to keep the vaults sealed and to not report anything unusual. He doesn't know who --- the instructions came through an intermediary. He can provide the vault keys.

SYSTEM NOTES

GM Tip: Rozito is sympathetic despite his complicity. He's a small man caught up in something too big for him. Play his fear as genuine, not theatrical. If the players threaten him too hard, he shuts down entirely and they'll need to find another way to the vaults.

BEAT 4: INTO THE VAULTS

- **TYPE:** Exploration / Discovery / Potential Combat
- **WHAT HAPPENS:** Players descend into the lower vaults. They navigate old tunnels, find the ritual workspace, discover the crates, and see the partially cleared tunnel toward the castle. If they search carefully, they find the ritual blade and the cult notes.

SYSTEM NOTES

- **POTENTIAL COMBAT:** If the GM wants to increase tension, a minor guardian can be encountered in the vaults --- perhaps an undead rat swarm or a minor necrotic trap left as an alarm system. This should be a low-stakes fight that signals danger without draining resources before the climax.

GM Tip: The vaults should feel wrong. Not just dark --- wrong. The air is too still. Sounds don't echo the way they should. The torches burn a slightly different color. Lean into the uncanny rather than the overtly horrific. The scariest thing in the vaults isn't a monster --- it's the realization that someone has been working down here, methodically, for weeks.

BEAT 5: SZERET'S VISIT (OPTIONAL)

- **TYPE:** Social / Wildcard
- **WHAT HAPPENS:** At some point during the afternoon --- perhaps as the players emerge from the vaults, or as they're connecting the pieces at the Bastion --- Szeret appears. She may have been following Olivia, or she may have her own reasons for being near the market. She recognizes the cult symbols if shown them but deflects with a mix of curiosity and studied ignorance. She offers to help, on her own terms.

System Notes: No checks needed unless players try to read her (Insight DC 18 to sense she knows more than she's saying --- Szeret is very good at this). GM Tip: Szeret's presence should be exciting and destabilizing. She brings energy, danger, and the faint smell of vampire royalty into what has been a human-scale investigation. She is not the players' friend yet --- she is interested. There's a difference. Play her as charming, a little predatory, and genuinely intrigued by Olivia and the investigation.

ACT 3: "SUNDOWN" (EVENING)

The climax depends on what the players have uncovered and what choices they make.

SCENARIO A: PLAYERS HAVE IDENTIFIED MORIK

If the players have connected Morik to the murder and the cult operation, they can set a trap.

BEAT 6A: THE TRAP

- **TYPE:** Planning /Combat
- **WHAT HAPPENS:** Players know Morik is the killer and that Captain Szofi is likely his next target. They can warn Szofi, stake out the market at sundown, and confront Morik when he makes his move. This is a planned engagement where the players have the advantage.

SYSTEM NOTES

- Morik is a dangerous opponent in close quarters. He fights with the ritual blade (which deals necrotic damage on top of piercing) and carries two vials of alchemical smoke that create heavily obscured areas.
 - If Szofi is present and warned, she fights alongside the players and is competent but not a full combatant for party-balance purposes.
-

SCENARIO B: PLAYERS HAVE NOT IDENTIFIED MORIK

If the players are still piecing things together at sundown, the scenario shifts to a rescue.

BEAT 6B: THE ATTACK

- **TYPE:** Combat /Rescue
- **WHAT HAPPENS:** As the market closes for the day, the players hear a commotion in the eastern arcade. They arrive to find Captain Szofi on the ground, wounded but alive. Morik is fleeing through the market crowd,

using the chaos to cover his escape. Players must choose: pursue Morik, or stabilize Szofi first?

SYSTEM NOTES

- **IF THEY PURSUE:** This becomes a chase scene through the market stalls, with obstacles (overturned carts, panicking vendors, narrow alleys). Escalating tension rolls.
- **IF THEY STABILIZE SZOFI FIRST:** Medicine DC 10 to stabilize, DC 14 to get her back on her feet. Morik escapes to the vaults but the players now know who they're looking for.
- **IF THEY SPLIT UP:** Both can happen simultaneously. This is the most exciting option and should be rewarded rather than punished.

BEAT 7: RESOLUTION

- **TYPE:** Aftermath / Narrative

Regardless of the specific climax, the scenario ends with the players having exposed (at minimum) the cult's presence in the lower vaults and Morik's role as the killer. What happens next depends on the outcome:

BRANCHING OUTCOMES

RESOLUTION A: BEST CASE --- MORIK CAPTURED, VAULTS EXPOSED

The players catch Morik alive and reveal the cult operation to Barron and the Red Guard. Szofi survives. The lower vaults are sealed (officially this time), and a formal investigation is launched. Barron is impressed. Olivia writes her report, omitting Szeret's involvement.

CONSEQUENCE: The cult loses a mid-level operative and a staging area. They will regroup and be more cautious going forward. The tunnel toward the castle

remains undiscovered by authorities (unless the players specifically report it), leaving a major thread dangling.

RESOLUTION B: PARTIAL SUCCESS --- MORIK ESCAPES, VAULTS EXPOSED

The players discover the vaults and save Szofi, but Morik escapes into the tunnels. The cult knows they've been found. The immediate threat is contained, but a dangerous operative is now underground and angry.

CONSEQUENCE: Morik becomes a recurring antagonist. He will resurface in a later scenario, likely with backup. The cult accelerates their timeline, making the next few weeks in Kormor Kirak more dangerous.

RESOLUTION C: FAILURE --- SZOFI DIES, INVESTIGATION STALLS

The players don't uncover enough in time. Szofi is killed. A second murder in the market causes panic. Rozito is arrested by the Red Guard as the most obvious suspect (he's not the killer, but he looks guilty). The real culprits tighten their grip on the market's underworld.

CONSEQUENCE: The players carry the weight of a preventable death. Rozito, if he survives Red Guard interrogation, may become a future ally driven by guilt and desperation. The cult grows bolder, believing themselves untouchable.

CONSEQUENCES & THREADS

IMMEDIATE

- The Kereskedo Market is destabilized. Vendors are scared. Commerce slows. Rumors spread.
- Rozito's fate depends on the players' actions. Protected? Arrested? Left to hang?

- Captain Szofi (if alive) becomes a reliable contact within the Red Guard --- one of the few the players can trust.

ONGOING

- Who cleared the tunnel from the castle side? This question will haunt the investigation going forward.
- The cult lost a node but not the network. Other operatives in the city will be harder to find now that they know someone is looking.
- Szeret's interest in the investigation (and in Olivia) deepens. She begins appearing more frequently, always on her own schedule.

CAMPAIGN HOOK

- The tunnel beneath the vaults points toward Torony Piros. This is the thread that, when pulled, unravels into the larger story of Queen Kiraline's involvement with the cult and her long game for power.
- Barron's reaction to the players' findings will be telling. He seems genuinely alarmed --- but is he alarmed because of the cult, or because of what the cult's exposure might reveal about the Queen? Players paying attention to his behavior will note that his concern seems disproportionate to a dead meat merchant.

PART 4: HANDOUTS & PROPS

Materials the GM can prepare or print for table use:

- **OLIVIA'S FIELD REPORT** (Part 1 of this document) --- hand to players as the scenario framing device, either before play begins or as a post-session wrap-up that sets up the next session
- **BREKK'S DELIVERY LEDGER** --- a prop showing the merchant's records with coded entries. Can be created as a simple handwritten page with

entries like ”3 barrels --- salt pork --- Miklo” mixed with suspicious entries like ”3 jars --- SEALED --- the outside man” and ”5 crates --- NO LABEL --- night delivery, east dock”

- **CULT SYMBOL SKETCH** --- a drawing of the symbols found on Brekk’s body and in the vaults. Should be abstract and unsettling rather than overtly occult. Think geometric, precise, wrong.
- **ROZITO’S HIDDEN COINS** --- a description or illustration of the cult payment coins, stamped with an unfamiliar mark (a jawless skull, perhaps, or a broken circle)
- **MAP OF THE KERESKEDO MARKET** --- showing the eastern arcade, Brekk’s stall, Morik’s stall, Rozito’s office, and the entrance to the lower vaults

PART 5: GM QUICK REFERENCE

Print this page and keep it behind your screen.

ONE-SENTENCE PITCH: A dead merchant in the oldest market in the city leads to a cult operating in the tunnels below --- and something worse in the tunnels below that.

TONE: Slow-burn investigation with a sharp, tense climax. Think noir in a gothic setting. The horror is in what people are willing to ignore.

ESSENTIAL NPCs

- **ROZITO VALLIKOZO** --- Nervous market fixer. Knows too much. Can be cracked.
- **Vael Morik** --- Spice merchant. Cult operative. The killer. Helpful until he’s not.
- **Eppy Flinder** --- Innkeeper. Information source. Trustworthy.
- **Captain Dara Szofi** --- Red Guard. Honest cop. Target.

- **OLIVIA FAREN** --- The brains. Player anchor. Drives the investigation forward if it stalls.
- **SZERET VERESZ** --- Wildcard. Knows more than she says. Appears on her own schedule.

ESSENTIAL LOCATIONS

- **BASTION INN** --- Safe. Home base. Briefing.
- **KERESKEDO MARKET, EASTERN ARCADE** --- Crime scene. Morik's hunting ground.
- **ROZITO'S OFFICE** --- Above the market. Where the money trail leads.
- **LOWER VAULTS** --- Below the market. Where the truth is.

THE SECRET: The Lich Cult is operating beneath the market with the Queen's quiet awareness. The tunnel connects to the castle.

THE DANGER: Vael Morik will kill again tonight if the players don't stop him.

TICKING CLOCK: Sundown. Captain Szofi's patrol route through the eastern arcade. Morik has been watching her for days.

PART 6: RUNNING MODES

Three ways to run this scenario, depending on your GM style:

RUNNING IT STRAIGHT

Use the full encounter design breakdown as written. Follow the clue trail through all three acts. Hit the beats. Let the branching outcomes play out based on player choices. This gives you a structured 4-6 hour session with clear pacing.

RUNNING IT LOOSE

Read Olivia's report, the "What Actually Happened" section, and the GM Quick Reference. Know the truth, know the NPCs, know the ticking clock. Then just react to whatever your players do. The structured beats are guardrails, not rails.

RUNNING IT AS A COLD OPEN

Skip Olivia's report entirely. Start the players in the market when Brekk's body is discovered. No briefing, no Barron, no context. They're just there, they see a dead man, and Rozito is trying to make it go away. Let them decide whether to get involved. This is harder to run but creates the most organic investigation experience.

RUNNING IT AS A ONE-SHOT

If you're not running a full Eternal Court campaign, this scenario works as a standalone adventure. Ignore the campaign hooks (the tunnel toward the castle, Kiraline's involvement, Barron's secret). Focus on the murder mystery and the cult operation. The scenario resolves cleanly with Morik's capture or escape and the vaults' exposure.

PART 7: DESIGNER'S NOTES

This section explains the structural choices behind the scenario so GMs can apply the same approach to future Olivia's Field Reports.

WHY THIS SCENARIO WORKS AS AN INTRODUCTION

This scenario introduces players to Kormor Kirak through action rather than exposition. Instead of telling players about the city's complex power dynamics,

it drops them into a situation where those dynamics are in play: the Red Guard's compromised command structure, Rozito's position as a pawn of larger forces, the Queen's invisible hand, the cult's ambition, and the fragile human presence represented by the Albion delegation.

By the end of the scenario, players have:

- Explored two major locations (the Kereskedo Market and the Bastion Inn)
- Met NPCs from multiple factions (the market, the Red Guard, the Albion delegation, the vampire aristocracy, and the cult)
- Made choices that have consequences for the ongoing campaign
- Glimpsed the deeper threat (the tunnel, the Queen's awareness) without being overwhelmed by it

HOW TO BUILD FUTURE SCENARIOS FROM FIELD REPORTS

Every Olivia's Field Report follows this pattern:

1. The surface story (what Olivia reports) gives you the hook and the player-facing framing
2. The hidden truth (what she left out and what she doesn't know) gives you the GM's full picture
3. The ticking clock (what happens if the players do nothing) creates urgency
4. The NPC web (who knows what, who wants what, who lies about what) creates social gameplay
5. The clue trail with redundancy (multiple paths to each revelation) prevents stalls
6. The branching outcomes (best, partial, failure) make player choices matter
7. The campaign thread (consequences and hooks) connects each scenario to the larger story

Apply this structure to any incident Olivia investigates and you have a playable adventure. A haunting at the theater construction site. A poisoning at a diplomatic dinner. A creature sighting in the Hallaset Fields. A political assassination attempt during a public event. Each one is a self-contained mystery that also advances the larger narrative of Kormor Kirak’s descent toward crisis.

THE VAN RICHTEN’S PRINCIPLE

Taking a page from Van Richten’s Guide to Ravenloft, the best gothic horror scenarios aren’t about the monster. They’re about the people who live in the monster’s shadow. Brekk wasn’t killed by a supernatural horror --- he was killed by a man standing two stalls away, someone he probably said good morning to every day. The cult isn’t terrifying because of necromancy. It’s terrifying because it’s operating in a market where people buy bread. And the Queen isn’t threatening because she’s a vampire. She’s threatening because she already knows everything and is choosing to watch.

Let the mundane and the monstrous share the same space. That’s where the fear lives.

APPENDIX A: RANDOM
 ENCOUNTER AND CONJUNCTION
 TABLES

These tables can be used during this scenario or in any session set in and around the Kereskedo Market.

MARKET WEATHER AND ATMOSPHERE (ROLL D6)

ROLL CONDITION GAMEPLAY EFFECT | Heavy fog rolls in from the valley
 Visibility reduced. Disadvantage on long-range Perception checks. NPCs are

harder to track through the market. Perfect cover for a pursuit or ambush. 2 Cold rain, steady and grey Market stalls under tarps. Fewer vendors, fewer witnesses. Water pools on flagstones, making footing treacherous. Sound is muffled. 3 Overcast, still air The city feels like it's holding its breath. Smoke from chimneys hangs low. Sounds carry further than expected. Conversations can be overheard at unusual distances. 4 Pale winter sunlight Crisp visibility. Shadows are sharp and long. Good for observation, bad for stealth. The castle looms clearly against the sky. 5 Unseasonable warmth The market is busier than usual. More NPCs, more noise, more chaos. Easier to get lost in the crowd. Harder to have a private conversation. 6 Wind from the mountains, bitter and sharp Vendors pack early. Tarps snap and flap. Pages blow from open books. The market empties by late afternoon, leaving the streets to the Red Guard and the desperate. -----

MARKET RANDOM ENCOUNTERS (ROLL D8)

ROLL ENCOUNTER NOTES 1 A vendor accuses a customer of theft. A crowd gathers. The accusation may be legitimate or a distraction orchestrated by someone who wants the players' attention elsewhere. Social. Can be resolved quickly or escalated. 2 A Red Guard patrol stops the players for identification. Their papers are checked. If Captain Szofi is with the patrol, she vouches for them. If not, the process takes time and draws attention. Social/Bureaucratic. Time pressure. 3 A stray dog follows the party. It's friendly but persistent. Later, it growls at a specific NPC or location, giving the players a subtle warning. Atmospheric. Potential clue delivery. 4 A group of children are playing a game that mimics a recent real event in the city (a murder, a monster sighting, a rumor about the Queen). Their game reveals details that adults wouldn't share openly. Social/Information. Requires careful listening. 5 A vendor offers the players a "special item" --- something that shouldn't be for

sale in an ordinary market. Could be a minor magical trinket, a stolen object, or something connected to the cult without the vendor's knowledge. Shopping/Investigation. Potential loot or lead. 6 The lights go out. Torches in the arcade gutter and die simultaneously for a few seconds. When they relight, something has changed --- a stall is empty that wasn't before, or a person is standing somewhere they weren't a moment ago. A faint smell of grave dirt hangs in the air. A Necrotic Bulk may be glimpsed in a dark alley before it collapses into component pieces and scuttles away. Supernatural/Atmospheric. Horror beat. Reference the Enemy Bestiary for Necrotic Bulk stats. 7 A courier delivers a sealed message to one of the players. The message is cryptic and unsigned. It may be a warning from an ally, a taunt from the cult, or a summons from Szeret. Plot hook. Customizable by the GM. 8 A mechanical clicking sound echoes from a rooftop above the arcade. Players who investigate find scuff marks and a small pool of machine oil. An Automatic Assassin --- a steampunk construct with clockwork eyes --- was observing the market. Built in the Terrasian Consulate's attic lab, it may be scouting for Devorlen Koss, or it may have escaped its handler's control. Atmospheric/Foreshadowing. Reference the Enemy Bestiary for Automatic Assassin stats if combat occurs.

THE QUEEN'S DARK ACTIVITIES (ROLL D6)

These events happen in the background and may be noticed by observant players or referenced by NPCs. They represent Kiraline's ongoing machinations affecting the city.

ROLL ACTIVITY OBSERVABLE SIGNS 1 A prominent citizen disappears overnight. The Red Guard investigates briefly, then stops. No one talks about it after a few days. Empty house. Neighbors who won't make eye contact. A

name that causes conversations to die. 2 New Red Guard officers appear, replacing ones the players recognized. The new officers are efficient, humorless, and seem to report to someone other than their stated commander. Changed patrols. Unfamiliar faces in familiar routes. Orders that contradict previous protocol. 3 A section of the city is temporarily sealed "for maintenance." No one goes in or out for a day. When it reopens, residents seem shaken but refuse to discuss what happened. Barricades. Silence. Fresh paint on walls that didn't need painting. 4 Animals in the market district behave strangely. Dogs howl at nothing. Birds avoid a specific building. Rats pour from a sewer grate and immediately scatter in one direction, away from the castle. Unease. NPCs mention it offhandedly. "Bad air from the mountains," they say. 5 An unusually lavish gift arrives for a member of the Albion delegation --- fine wine, imported food, a piece of jewelry. The gift is anonymous. It is also, on close inspection, ancient. Far older than it should be. Generosity that feels like surveillance. A reminder that someone is watching. 6 Nothing observable. But Szeret seems agitated if the players encounter her. She won't say why. If pressed, she changes the subject with more force than usual. The absence of evidence. The feeling that something happened behind closed doors.

APPENDIX B: THE BLACK INTEGRATION NOTES

VAEL MORIK --- CULT OPERATIVE

ROLE: Primary antagonist of this scenario. Mid-level Lich Cult operative posing as a spice merchant.

COMBAT BEHAVIOR: Morik fights smart, not brave. He opens with alchemical smoke to obscure the battlefield, strikes with the ritual blade for high single-target damage, and attempts to flee if outmatched. He will use the environment (market stalls, crowds, narrow alleys) to his advantage. He does not fight to the death unless cornered with no escape route.

SUGGESTED ABILITIES

- **RITUAL BLADE:** Piercing + necrotic damage. On a critical hit, the wound leaves necrotic scarring that resists magical healing for 24 hours.
- **ALCHEMICAL SMOKE (2 USES):** Creates a 15-foot radius of heavily obscured area that lasts 1 minute.
- **CULT DEVOTION:** resistance to fear effects or charmed. The cult's conditioning runs deep.
- **SLIPPERY:** Can Disengage as a bonus action.

CAPTAIN DARA SZOFI --- RED GUARD PATROL LEADER

ROLE: Ally NPC. Potential combat companion in the climax.

COMBAT BEHAVIOR: Szofi is disciplined and defensive. She uses a spear and shield, fights in formation habits (even alone), and prioritizes protecting civilians over personal glory. She follows the players' lead in combat but will not take suicidal risks.

SUGGESTED ABILITIES

- **SHIELD WALL:** Can use a reaction to impose disadvantage on an attack against an adjacent ally.
- **RED GUARD TRAINING:** Proficient in Perception and Athletics. Advantage on checks to maintain formation or hold a position.

 VAULT GUARDIAN (OPTIONAL MINOR ENCOUNTER)

ROLE: Environmental hazard in the lower vaults. A minor undead presence left as an alarm system by the cult.

OPTIONS

- A swarm of necrotic rats that attacks anything living that enters the main vault chamber
- A glyph trap on the vault door that triggers a burst of necrotic energy
- A single animated corpse (perhaps a previous victim of the cult, pre-dating Brekk) that shambles to life when the ritual table is disturbed

APPENDIX E: ADAPTING THE SCENARIO FOR DIFFERENT TABLE TYPES

FOR PLAYERS WHO LOVE INVESTIGATION

Expand Acts 1 and 2. Add more NPCs to interview (other vendors, a regular customer who noticed Brekk acting strangely, a delivery driver who can describe the "outside man"). Add physical puzzles to the vault exploration (a locked door requiring a found key, a collapsed passage that needs creative solutions). Downplay the combat climax in favor of a tense social confrontation where the players unmask Morik publicly.

FOR PLAYERS WHO LOVE COMBAT

Abbreviate the investigation. Have Olivia do the detective work in the background and brief the players on what she's found. Focus on the vault exploration as a dungeon crawl with traps and a guardian encounter. Make the

climax a full tactical fight with Morik and 2-3 cult thugs in the market at sundown, using the stalls and architecture as cover.

FOR PLAYERS WHO LOVE ROLEPLAY

Expand the social encounters. Give Rozito a more detailed backstory and make his cracking point more emotional. Have Szeret's appearance be a full scene with subtext and tension. Let the players negotiate with Szofi about jurisdiction and protocol. Make the resolution a courtroom-style scene where the players present their evidence to Barron and the Red Guard, and the political fallout plays out in conversation.

FOR MIXED GROUPS

Run it as written. The scenario is designed to offer investigation, social pressure, exploration, and combat in a natural progression that gives every player type something to engage with.

This scenario is the first entry in the Olivia's Field Reports series for The Eternal Court campaign setting.

Future entries will follow the same structural template, each presenting a new case that Olivia has investigated,

which GMs can deconstruct into playable adventures using the methods outlined in Part 7.

PART TWO: IMPRESSIONS

How They Look, How They Feel, How They Linger

When she enters a room, every person takes a knee. She moves as if weightless, aglow with charisma that does not merely attract attention but commands submission.

CAPITULUM

READ-ALoud DESCRIPTIONS

 THE ETERNAL COURT -- READ-ALoud DESCRIPTIONS

A TTRPG Supplement for GMs

A collection of short, speakable introductory descriptions for locations and characters in Kormor Kirak and the surrounding regions. Use these descriptions when players first arrive at a location or encounter a character for the first time. Each is designed to be quick (3-5 sentences maximum), sensory-first, and easy to deliver in a single breath during play.

THE BEST ROAD APPROACHES TO THE CASTLE

FIRST IMPRESSION

You leave the grey-green fields behind and the stone begins. A wide road, worn smooth by centuries of traffic, winds upward along the cliff face in switchbacks. With each turn, the city below shrinks -- the peaked roofs become a patchwork, the streets become threads. The wind picks up as you climb, carrying scents of distant pine and something metallic that might be iron or blood-memory. Every half-mile the road opens into a small courtyard where Red Guards maintain watch from stone positions, their crimson surcoats the only color in the grey landscape.

NIGHT VERSION

The road becomes a ribbon of pale stone against absolute darkness. Your elevation gives you stars, but they feel farther away than they should. The wind carries sounds from the castle above -- not clearly identifiable, but present, deliberate, and aware of your approach. Guard fires burn at the watch stations, and the guards' eyes follow you longer than seems practical as you pass.

THE BLOOD GATE

FIRST IMPRESSION

Two towers rise before you like teeth, connected by a crenellated wall that rises higher with every step. The gate itself is wrought iron, stained rust-brown by centuries or by design, bound in dark steel inlaid with silver patterns forming a crowned skull impaled on a scepter, surrounded by thorns. Above the gate hang skulls on iron hooks, old enough that time has rendered them nearly unrecognizable, though in certain lights they seem to turn slightly, watching the approach road below. The Knight-Captain at the checkpoint records your name in a leather ledger, and his courtesy cannot quite hide the calculation behind his eyes.

NIGHT VERSION

The gate becomes a guillotine silhouetted against candlelit windows deep within the castle. The iron seems to glow faintly red in the torchlight, and the skulls above become definite, present, impossible to ignore. The sound of the gate closing -- should it happen -- would echo for longer than distance should permit. You feel watched not by men but by the gate itself, by the castle's will made manifest in iron and bone.

THE GRAND BALLROOM

FIRST IMPRESSION *(During the Treaty Ball)*

The air itself seems to pause as you cross the threshold. Light -- brilliant, merciless light from massive crystal chandeliers -- falls on a floor of polished marble arranged in patterns that seem to move even in stillness. The ceiling rises eighty feet into a vault of impossible curves. Two hundred feet of length, one hundred feet of width, and it's all present at once: the musicians' gallery far above playing something simultaneously triumphant and sorrowful; delegations from both empires moving through the crowd with careful courtesy; the throne's observers on the Upper Balcony, watching everything, expressionless. The music shifts, the dancers turn, and the balance of empires turns with them.

EMPTY

The ballroom without its crowd becomes something alien. The chandeliers cast geometric shadows that seem too precise, too aware. The marble floor shows reflections that seem to show not just the present moment but glimpses of other times, other dances, other people moving across this same floor. Your footsteps echo with a resonance that doesn't match the distance traveled. The space feels vast and compressed simultaneously, and you carry a persistent sense of being observed by something that isn't made of flesh.

THE THRONE ROOM

FIRST IMPRESSION

The doors open and the space swallows sound. The ceiling rises impossibly high -- higher than the external walls of the castle have any right to contain. The throne sits on a dais of red stone, raised six feet above the floor, fashioned from black iron inlaid with human bone worked into intricate patterns. The

walls are lined with banners of the Veresz dynasty, embroidered in colors that somehow remain vivid despite centuries of age. The figures stitched into the cloth seem to shift when you're not looking directly at them. The air carries a weight of authority that is almost physical, and the acoustics are engineered so precisely that when the Queen speaks, her voice fills the chamber like a pronouncement from reality itself.

WITHOUT THE QUEEN PRESENT

The throne room becomes a tomb. The ambient quiet is profound -- even careful footsteps echo sharply on the polished black marble. The banners seem to hold their breath. The bone inlay in the throne catches what little light penetrates the space, creating patterns that hurt to look at directly. The dais seems farther away than it should be, and climbing it would feel like ascending into judgment.

GENE'S BEDROOM

FIRST IMPRESSION

The door is plain wood that could conceal anything. What it conceals is a turret room -- circular, intimate, and suffused with warmth that seems impossible in a castle of stone. A brass telescope on a wheeled stand points toward a north-facing window. The walls are lined so densely with books that spines overlap, each volume marked with careful notes and annotations. Star charts are pinned between the shelves. A small brazier burns constant fire. The room is not just warm -- it radiates intention, defiance, sanctuary. This is a place where someone lives entirely herself, and it carries the weight of that solitude and that precious privacy.

NIGHT VERSION

The telescope waits in darkness, angled toward stars only visible from this height. The books surround you like guardians. The fire in the brazier casts moving shadows that make the books seem to shift and lean toward you. A locked journal sits on the writing desk, silent and absolute. The warmth here is the last warmth in a cold castle, and you understand immediately that you're privileged to witness it.

AGNARINE'S BEDCHAMBER

FIRST IMPRESSION

The iron door is carved with patterns that shift between geometry and faces. Push it open and the temperature rises immediately. Vines grow from the walls themselves, thick as human wrists, covered in glowing thorns that provide light without source. The floor is carved with runes so deeply carved that the stone must be ancient beyond counting, the patterns spiraling outward in designs that hurt to look at directly. A massive four-poster bed dominates the center, fashioned from black iron with carved faces of suffering positioned at each corner. The air is thick and warm, carrying scents of copper and old blood and flowers left too long in a tomb. Time feels strange here. A few minutes stretches. Gravity seems to pull harder toward the bed.

NIGHT VERSION

The phosphorescence of the vines becomes the only light. The runes glow faintly, visible only in the corner of vision. The bed becomes a throne or an altar or a trap, depending on how you read the shadows. The warmth is less comfort than warning. Nothing about this space is coincidental. Nothing about it is safe.

SZERET'S BEDROOM + KIRALINE'S BEDCHAMBER COMPARISON

Consider how these two spaces -- separated by stone and will -- define the relationship between them. Szeret's room is sanctuary through defiance. Kiraline's room is dominion made manifest. The contrast should be emphasized when one is visited after the other.

THE DUNGEONS

FIRST IMPRESSION

Smell reaches you first -- old stone, human confinement, and something metallic and sour underneath. The air is damp despite being below the water table. Iron-barred cells stretch in both directions, some empty, some holding prisoners. Those who are chained wear manacles heavy enough that the slightest movement makes them rattle. Water drips constantly, echoing off the vaulted ceiling in a rhythm that sounds almost like a heartbeat. Red Guard patrols move in pairs, their armor gleaming despite the gloom, their faces carefully blank, their discomfort obvious.

DEEP IN THE DUNGEONS

The oppression deepens. You pass cells whose occupants no one will explain. The prisoners who are not starving seem deliberately maintained, fed regularly, their water fresh. The message is clear: the Queen keeps her assets intact. One old woman has occupied her cell for twenty-seven years. She speaks to people who aren't there and seems surprised by visitors. Somewhere in the darkness below, something wails at irregular intervals.

THE FEEDING CHAMBER

FIRST IMPRESSION

The door is marked by something in the air itself -- a threshold. Inside, the walls are warm, almost flesh-warm. Bloodstains cover every surface. Walls, floors, even portions of the ceiling. Soap and water have been applied obsessively, but the stains remain, worked into the stone so completely that centuries of cleaning haven't removed them. The centerpiece is a heavy wooden chair, reinforced with iron straps, with manacles mounted to the armrests and legs. A large mirror faces the chair, its frame carved from black wood with symbols worked into every inch. Channels run from beneath the chair to drains in the floor. The room is lit by a single candelabra that never goes out.

WHAT THE MIRROR SHOWS

Looking into the mirror reveals not just reflection but something more. The Queen sits here often. The chair shows the shape of her will made physical. The mirror reflects not just light but something darker -- the ability to watch every reflective surface in the castle at once. Those who touch it directly experience a sensory rupture: overlapping reflections showing every room, every surface, the entire castle at once. Most cannot process it without a moment of profound disorientation.

THE COME CHAMBER

FIRST IMPRESSION

The passage opens suddenly into a cavern so vast the darkness itself seems to expand. The ceiling is lost far above, visible only when lightning flashes

through the space -- lightning without storm, static energy that arcs regularly around the chamber's center. In the center is a crater, perfectly round, thirty feet across, with impact scarring radiating outward in concentric rings. At the crater's center is a stone that shouldn't exist -- dark, almost black, like glass cooled at extreme temperature. The surface is smooth and reflective. It pulses with faint violet luminescence, coming from within the stone itself, pulsing at irregular intervals.

THE COMPULSION

Standing near the stone creates a persistent compulsion to approach it, to understand it, to open yourself to whatever power it contains. The air vibrates. The stone radiates a pull that is not physical but something deeper, something answering a frequency you don't consciously hear. The floor is scattered with bones in shapes that don't quite match human anatomy and pieces of metal suggesting no known metallurgical tradition.

THE ALBION EMBASSY

FIRST IMPRESSION

The iron fence stands eight feet tall, its wrought-iron spikes fashioned as stylized crowns and eagles. Stone pillars flank the gates, carved with the Imperial cipher. Beyond the fence, a small courtyard separates the street from the building's main entrance, the flagstones laid in a precise geometric pattern. Two Imperial Guards stand permanent watch at the gate, scarlet jackets with gold trim, black trousers, tall bearskins, highly polished boots. Each carries a saber and a rifle. The Embassy flag -- the double eagle in gold on a crimson field -- hangs from a wrought-iron bracket above the main door. Walking past this fence is like stepping sideways through a door into the Albion Empire itself. Inside, the cobblestones are swept clean, the flagstones gleam with beeswax, and Albion servants move with military precision. Outside the fence,

Kormor Kirak continues: winding streets, vampire servants on errands, Red Guard patrols in the night air.

INTERIOR RECEPTION HALL

A grand entrance, two stories tall, with a soaring ceiling of white plaster decorated with gilded molding. A crystal chandelier -- a luxury in Kormor Kirak -- hangs from the center. The floor is polished black marble with white veins, creating a subtle chessboard effect. Two sweeping staircases curve upward on either side, meeting at a landing where a formal portrait of the current Emperor hangs in carved mahogany. The portrait is formal and imposing. Every detail announces Albion authority maintained at the edge of the world.

ROGG'S CURIOUSITY SHOP

FIRST IMPRESSION

The facade is a riot of copper patina and dark wood. A painted sign hanging above the street-level entrance shows a clockwork gear meshed with a question mark. Tall windows display rotating collections of mechanical wonders -- astrolabes, music boxes, brass orreries, intricate locks -- arranged with the careful chaos of someone who knows exactly where everything is but would never waste time organizing. Push through the copper-framed door and a small bell chimes -- melodic, charming, nothing threatening. The air carries the permanent scent of machine oil, brass polish, and solder smoke. Clockwork ticking echoes from invisible mechanisms.

THE SHOP FRONT

The front room is roughly twenty feet wide and thirty feet deep. Every vertical surface holds something interesting. Glass display cases line the walls at eye

level: delicate clockwork songbirds that sing when wound, intricate mechanical puzzles, brass compasses with multiple needles for different purposes, finely-crafted locks, optical lenses ground to precise specifications. The counter is a massive slab of dark wood scored by years of tool marks and small burn scars from soldering work. Behind it, shelves hold specialized oils, packs of gears in various sizes, wooden spools of brass wire. The floor is wooden, worn smooth in traffic patterns, and it creaks in certain spots -- natural warning that tells the proprietor where visitors move.

THE REVERSED MARKETPLACE

FIRST IMPRESSION (*Arrival*)

The marketplace sprawls before you like a wound that refuses to close -- always bleeding, always restless, always full of people and voices. Hundreds of people pack the stalls and squares on any given day: soldiers on leave spending their wages, merchants arguing with money changers, children darting between legs to pocket dropped coins, beggars singing for food, Red Guards watching from elevated positions, and criminals conducting business in plain sight while pretending to sell winter cloaks. The ground is worn smooth by centuries of footsteps, stained with wine and blood and spilled grain. The noise is constant: the bark of merchants, the clink of coins, the crack of the auctioneer's gavel, the hiss of steam from food vendors, the clatter of carts. The smell cuts through everything -- roasted meat, human sweat, leather, woodsmoke, incense, the sweet rot of spoiled food, horses, and underneath it all, the mineral smell of the Videk Mountains.

THE GRAND SQUARE

At least two acres of open cobblestone, surrounded on all sides by permanent shops, guild halls, and formal stalls. The center holds an ancient fountain -- a

stone structure carved with horses and swords in the pre-war style, dry for fifteen years. No one maintains it. The fountain has become the unofficial center of the marketplace: merchants use it as a landmark (“by the old fountain’s north corner”), children play in its dry basin, at night homeless people sleep inside its bowl. The cobblestones are uneven after centuries of wear, creating natural puddles after rain and pools of stagnant water in the heat. They’re grooved in certain directions where foot traffic is heaviest -- toward the guild hall, toward the food vendors, toward the alleyways where most people don’t ask questions.

THE ALBION QUARTER (*Eastern Side*)

Military precision dominates. Nearly identical wooden stalls, goods arranged with mechanical efficiency, price lists written clearly. Clerks work the counters with the brisk, no-nonsense manner of a supply depot. This quarter smells of machine oil, fresh-cut wood, and the peculiar metallic smell of industrial production. Conversations are shorter, more transactional. Soldiers mingle with merchants, and everything is reproducible and replaceable. Nothing touches a master smith’s hand.

THE TERRASSIAN QUARTER (*Western Side*)

Chaos that is somehow warm and inviting. Stalls decorated with cloth, plants, handwritten signs, personal touches. Merchants call out wares with song-like rhythm. Arguments over prices can last hours, sealed with wine and bread rather than paperwork. The smell is rich and agricultural -- cheese, wine, dried herbs, cured meat, the green smell of fresh produce. Every piece is unique, bearing marks of its maker. Color and personality dominate. This is where the marketplace feels most human.

EPZY'S PUB

FIRST IMPRESSION

A squat stone building with a slate roof, three stories tall, its grey exterior softened by hanging planters of herbs and flowers that shouldn't survive mountain winters. A weathered sign hanging above the entrance reads simply "EPZY'S" in faded gold letters, swinging slightly in the mountain wind. A thin plume of smoke rises from the chimney almost constantly -- the fireplace never truly goes cold. Push through the heavy oak doors and warmth hits you like a physical thing.

THE COMMON ROOM

A fireplace dominates the northern wall, large enough to stand in, its opening arched in fitted stone. The fire crackles constantly, fed by wood delivered regularly. Along the eastern wall runs a long bar of dark wood, worn smooth by decades of elbows and coins. Behind it, shelves reach almost to the ceiling, lined with bottles, glasses, and mysterious jars. The walls are original grey stone covered in worn wooden paneling up to waist height. Tables and chairs scatter throughout in various states of honest wear -- nothing matches, but everything is solid and clean. Some tables are scarred from boots propped on them over the years, others stained slightly from spilled drinks that never quite washed out. To the left of the fireplace sits a raised musician's platform, six inches higher than the main floor, three steps leading up to it. Bowls of fresh herbs sit on several tables -- fragrant sprigs of rosemary and mint. A shelf near the bar holds books: histories of the Videk Mountains, an old herbal guide, love stories and adventure tales. Windows on the western wall are thick and old, tinted slightly blue-green with age, diffusing the light into something soft and underwater-like even on clear days.

THE FIRE CORNER (*Best Seats*)

Not separate but a specific location within the common room. A few tables positioned to catch full warmth of fire, private enough for conversations but open enough to feel part of the pub's community. The warmth here is intense, the kind of warmth that drives winter from your bones and makes you forget what cold feels like. This is where regulars claim tables. This is where the party should gravitate on first visit.

SQUARES (CEMETERY)

FIELDS

(THE

FIRST IMPRESSION

The grass grows head-high, reed-like stalks fed by soil enriched across a thousand years of human decomposition. The earth itself is literally built from remains of the dead, layered and compressed until the boundary between soil and corpse becomes indistinct. A network of trails cuts through the grass, maintained through constant use and the simple fact that vegetation refuses to grow where human feet have worn the earth bare. These trails connect raised stone plinths spaced throughout the fields at irregular intervals. Each plinth marks a burial site, though the practice is more complex than the term suggests. Bodies are brought here and left, deposited on stone platforms where carrion birds attend to the work of decomposition.

THE SCENT AND THE FLOWERS

Drifting mist hangs perpetually between the reed stalks. The mist obscures sight lines and creates a landscape where distance becomes unreliable, where something fifty paces away might be invisible or might suddenly emerge from the fog as though it had always been present. Memorial stones are scattered throughout, their surfaces carved with names and dates in fading letters. Fresh ward symbols mark the newest graves, painted in red ochre that has not yet

faded to invisibility. The air carries the scent of Hallaset flowers, strange blooms that grow nowhere else in Kormor Kirak. The fragrance is perfume-like on first encounter, sweet in a way that speaks of growth and renewal, but lingering beneath the initial sweetness lies something unsettling -- an organic smell suggesting decay and transformation, the scent of things being unmade and remade into new forms.

NIGHT VERSION

The mist becomes absolute. Sight lines collapse. The wards on the newest graves glow faintly, marking graves in darkness. The flower scent becomes cloying. Something moves through the reed grass with purpose, something that was not moving this morning. The sky above is starless here, obscured by mist that should have cleared but has not.

THE CITY SCENES OF KORMOR KIRAK (GENERAL ARRIVAL)

FIRST IMPRESSION

The city rises from a remote mountain valley like a memory carved in stone. Red-tiled roofs catch what little light penetrates the perpetual mountain mist, and cobblestone streets wind through quarters dominated by peaked-roof buildings that crowd against one another as if for warmth. The castle -- Torony Piros -- dominates the skyline, its spires reaching toward a sky that rarely clears, a Gothic architectural excess that seems to defy practical military logic. Craggy mountains loom on every side, their faces sharp with ancient erosion, while the entire city wears the aesthetic of old Europe: fairy-tale walls, defensive lines built when fortifications meant survival, the sensation of stepping backward through time.

THE RED GUARD PRESENCE

Red Guards patrol the cobblestone streets in polished armor the color of drying blood, each one loyal to the queen and sworn to maintain the fiction of order that keeps tensions between the consulates from erupting into open violence. Ward symbols are painted in fading red ochre on walls and doorframes throughout the city, ancient sigils meant to ward off evil spirits. Some are old enough that the paint has become barely visible. Others are fresh, hastily applied by nervous hands after dark.

**QUEEN KIRALINE VERGES
ERDEZARDE**
FIRST APPEARANCE

The ballroom falls silent. Not from sound, but from cessation. The air itself seems to pause. She descends from the upper balcony as though the laws of movement do not quite apply to her, each guest finding themselves on bent knee before conscious thought arrives. Kiraline wears the appearance of a woman in her forties, but this is theater. The truth is older, patient, and lethal. Her wardrobe is a statement of deliberate anachronism: clothing from earlier eras, ornamental couture that predates current fashions by centuries, draped in silks from distant reaches, jewelry that catches light in ways that defy simple geometry. When she moves, there is no weight to her. The dress does not sway so much as flow, as if she walks on currents invisible to others. She crosses entire rooms by means she does not explain, and observers find sudden interest in their feet.

THE REVEAL

When she speaks, her voice carries the weight of pronouncement rather than conversation. She speaks as though language itself is something she invented.

Her speech is precise, musical, utterly devoid of accent or regional inflection. Her presence creates a boundary that everyone acknowledges without discussing. She is power itself, rendered in flesh and silk and something far older that wears both like fashionable clothing.

PRINCESS SEREN VERES

FIRST APPEARANCE

She gallops through the castle gate on horseback at night, racing through streets designed for carriages and protocol, and people cheer as she passes. They have learned not to cheer too loudly or for too long, because their faces fall after she disappears, as though her presence grants them something their normal lives cannot sustain. She is in her twenties, with a goth's aesthetic and a child's spirit, dark and menacing in appearance but cheery and delightful in manifestation. The contradiction, rather than confusing those who know her, forms the core of her appeal. She is everything she appears to be, and none of it, simultaneously.

HER PRESENCE

Her garb is carefully chosen to evoke menace and danger; her clothing speaks of shadows and forbidden things. Yet she moves through the world with an impulsiveness and joy that seems incongruous with her appearance. Her immediate attachment to those who catch her interest is intense and charged, running deeper than simple friendship. She has a clarity that sophisticated adults often lack, and she rates people and experiences by food names in a personal taxonomy that seems nonsensical until you realize it is actually quite accurate: Mushroom for earthy things, Tomato for passionate things, Lettuce for boring things, Peach for delightful things.

BARRON WSHTEHALD

FIRST APPEARANCE

He carries himself like someone who has spent decades learning to exist in spaces where his presence creates discomfort. His eyes are sharp and constantly cataloging threats. He wears his years with the ease of someone accustomed to responsibility, but those who spend time with him notice something else: scarring on his neck in patterns that suggest claws, and a persistent cough that doubles him over at unpredictable intervals. There is something military in his bearing, something that suggests he has commanded and will command again. When he speaks, people listen. Not from fear, but from the sense that he has earned the right to be heard through actions taken long ago and at significant cost.

HIS POWER

His primary weapon is a Spetum that folds into a cane, a marvel of engineering that extends to six-foot length with a central blade flanked by side prongs. In his hands it becomes something alive, an extension of will and training that moves through combat like a dance executed at lethal speed. He carries multiple weapons with the ease of someone for whom violence is a tool, not a surprise. But his real power is something harder to define: the ability to make people want to follow him, even into danger. Especially into danger.

DEBBA FAREN

FIRST APPEARANCE

She carries herself with the careful precision of someone for whom numbers matter more than words. Her eyes are sharp and slightly uncomfortable in their intensity, as though she is constantly running calculations that never quite

resolve to satisfaction. There is something in her bearing that speaks of clerical work and meticulous organization, but there is also something else: a wariness that suggests she has seen things that numbers cannot account for, and this troubles her. She is competent in ways that are immediately apparent and uncomfortable in ways that are deliberately hidden.

HER DISCOMFORT

She moves through nobility with the ease of someone who understands hierarchy, but there is always a sense that she finds the performance exhausting. She speaks with precision, never wasting words, and when she does speak, people tend to listen because the effort of gathering her thoughts into language suggests something worth hearing has been gathered.

JUER WGNBWB

FIRST APPEARANCE

He is large, rough, watchful in ways that make people instinctively careful around him. His face bears scars that speak of violence survived, his hair is deliberately unkempt, the leather of his clothing worn and honest. There is something in the set of his shoulders that suggests he is perpetually ready for violence, but there is also something underneath that readiness: a profound weariness, as though he carries something that requires constant discipline to contain. When he moves, he moves with precision that contradicts his casual presentation. There is no carelessness in him.

WHAT HE CARRIES

The scars along his back tell their own story, parallel claw-mark lines that no standard weapon could produce. There is something restless underneath his controlled presentation, something that moves with a rhythm all its own. Those

who spend time with him come to realize that his casualness is as deliberate as formal dress would be. He wears scars like other men wear medals. Internally, he is learning what it means to exist as something other than human without surrendering his humanity.

DEBORAH ROSE

FIRST APPEARANCE

He is a soldier in the way some people are born to soldiering. His uniform fits him the way skin fits bone. His eyes catalog threats the way weather vanes read wind. He rides alongside others through streets rendered temporary by steam and smoke, his clockwork arm producing a steady click-whir rhythm that becomes almost meditative if you stop resisting it. The mechanical fingers are precise, calibrated, less remarkable in their construction than in how completely he has integrated them into his identity. When asked about the arm, he offers no self-pity, no ceremony. The least remarkable element of my identity, he says, and means it.

HIS PRAGMATISM

He speaks with the clipped efficiency of someone stripped of flourish. His clothing is military, even when civilian, with subtle tells of rank and training visible in the way he wears it. There is in his bearing the quality of someone who has lived in war and trained in war and now exists in a provisional peace that feels like a performance everyone has agreed to. He carries about him the conviction that it will not last.

EPY FLENDER

FIRST APPEARANCE

She is younger than she should be, or perhaps timeless in a way that makes age irrelevant. She wears earth tones and natural fabrics, moves through the world with a freedom that suggests she has forgotten most of the petty rules that constrain others. Her ears are her most distinctive feature: uniquely shaped, sleek, pointed, elegant in a way that speaks to ancestry rather than affectation. Not entirely human. There is something in the quality of her attention that suggests she is observing not just what is present but also what has passed and what might come. When she prepares a drink, it is with intention: honey and herbal ingredients arranged in combinations that should not work but do.

HER KNOWLEDGE

She whispers to certain people with the casual intimacy of someone who has known them across multiple incarnations. She seems to recognize things about them that they themselves have not yet admitted. Her speech is warm and unhurried, with occasional lapses into older word patterns that suggest languages running beneath her modern fluency. The Bastion Inn is older than it should be, and so is Eppy, and this is connected, and she guards this secret with the kind of care that suggests it is infinitely valuable.

ROZGED BALEGRDZO

FIRST APPEARANCE

He moves through his domain like a merchant working three deceptions simultaneously. He dresses in foreign fabrics and colorful patterns that seem chosen specifically to make him memorable, to ensure that when people think of the market, they think of him. There is something in the quality of his attention that suggests he is constantly calculating, constantly assessing whether you are useful or dangerous or irrelevant. When he smiles, it is charming and entirely false. When he negotiates, his courtesy masks calculation of a high order.

WHAT HE HIDES

He calls Szeret a friend and claims to be a traditionalist, someone who respects the old ways and the structures that hold society together. When royals approach, he shifts nervously, forces smiles that do not quite reach his eyes. But there is something underneath the performance, something that moves with efficiency and precision when witnesses are limited. He loves his work because work is the only place he feels fully real. He hates the constant performance, hates the feeling of being watched by his own patron, hates the possibility that he is being slowly positioned for some larger sacrifice.

AGGODAS AND BOLDOGS (THE GATEKEEPERS)

FIRST APPEARANCE (*Aggodas*)

She is tall, lean, and quiet in a way that makes people nervous. She carries a staff topped with a knot of dried herbs that she burns during patrols, the smoke trailing behind her like a second shadow. The herbs are not ceremonial -- they are a narcotic compound that enhances her connection to the spirit world, allowing her to sense things that ordinary perception cannot detect. Her eyes are bright and penetrating, as though she is seeing into layers of reality that ordinary people cannot access.

FIRST APPEARANCE (*Boldogg*)

He is broad, loud, and perpetually amused by the suffering of others. He wears the old Gatekeeper armor, a mismatched collection of plates and chain that belongs to an era before the Red Guards existed, and he polishes it with devotion that borders on religious. When he speaks, his voice carries the weight of someone accustomed to being obeyed. He can summon minor spirits

through rituals involving blood, herbs, and chanting in a language that predates Common, and he uses them freely.

TOGETHER

They run protection rackets throughout the city with the competence of predators who have perfected the hunt. They are not aligned with any particular faction -- neither Albion nor Terrassia, neither the queen nor the conspiracy. They are an autonomous remnant of the kingdom's earliest days, and they consider themselves above the petty politics of empires. They move through the city with the easy arrogance of those who understand their power and trust in their institution's ancient prerogatives.

BARON WSHTESHALD (DEEPER IMPRESSION)

THE MENTOR FIGURE

He meets you with the bearing of someone accustomed to command, but there is warmth in the meeting, a sense that he has assessed you and found something worth his time. His authority is absolute but never overbearing. He speaks to people as though they are capable of understanding difficult things and of rising to difficult challenges. When he coughs, he does not apologize for it. He simply pauses, waits for the fit to pass, and continues. There is something in the way he carries this that suggests he is not diminished by his affliction but merely inconvenienced by it.

EZREZ VEZEZ (DEPER
 IMPREGGON)

THE WILD THING IN A CROWN

She sees you and her entire face lights with the brightness of genuine delight. She does not perform enthusiasm -- she experiences it fully and without filter. She moves with the confidence of someone who has never been told that what she wants might not be possible, or if she has been told, she has simply chosen not to listen. There is in her bearing the lightness of someone who has chosen cheerfulness as an active practice, as a deliberate response to confinement. She loves freely across boundaries that convention considers proper, and this openness is both her strength and a source of constant tension with the world around her.

ZUER WGNBOW (DEPER
 IMPREGGON)

THE MAN LEARNING TO ACCEPT HIMSELF

He dances with surprising grace, moving through a space as though he understands its geometry on an intuitive level. When someone shows him genuine acceptance -- when someone looks at what he is and does not flinch -- something in him softens, becomes almost vulnerable. He speaks about battle in terms both visceral and raw: a scrum of hacking and slashing, barely-grown kids screaming and crying, then going quiet. He has killed. He has watched children die. This weighs on him in ways that he has learned to integrate rather than overcome. He invites people to fear when fear is the appropriate response, and he treats fear not as weakness but as valid wisdom.

EPY FINDER (DEEPER IMPRESSION)

THE KEEPER OF IMPOSSIBLE KNOWLEDGE

She understands things about people that they have not yet understood about themselves. She tells Jack that she knows what he is, and she tells him this with gentleness that carries no judgment. She knows the nature of necromancy not as theory but as practical craft, learned in quiet moments from someone she loved. Her presence in the narrative is like a map of history that nobody else remembers: the Bastion Inn is older than it should be, the trompe l'oeil ceiling depicts constellations that predate both empires, and her recipes are drawn from languages that have been dead longer than human kingdoms have existed. She bridges old and new in a way that no other character can because she remembers both clearly.

GUIDELINES FOR GMS

WHEN TO USE THEM

Read these descriptions aloud when players first arrive at a location or first encounter a character. Don't read them word-for-word if it feels unnatural -- these are frameworks, not scripts. The language should feel spoken and authentic to your voice.

HOW TO DELIVER THEM

Speak slowly. Allow pauses for effect. Emphasize sensory details. Let the description hang in the air for a moment before moving into action. These moments set tone. Treat them with the weight they deserve.

ADAPTING THE TEXT

The provided language is literary but meant to be speakable. If a phrase doesn't sound natural in your voice, change it. If a sensory detail doesn't resonate with your campaign's tone, substitute. These are blueprints for first impressions, not sacred texts.

REVISITING LOCATIONS

On subsequent visits to the same location, vary your descriptions. Emphasize different sensory details. Note how the location has changed. The repetition of exact wording will flatten the experience. The location should feel familiar but never stale.

NIGHT VS. DAY

Many locations feel fundamentally different after dark. Use this variation to create a sense that Kormor Kirak is not a static place but a living city that transforms with time. A marketplace bustling in daylight becomes dangerous at night. A cemetery that is merely unsettling in mist becomes actively threatening in darkness.

CHARACTER EVOLUTION

As player relationships with characters deepen, subsequent encounters can use language that reflects changes. Szeret becomes increasingly confident. Jack becomes increasingly accepting. Kiraline becomes increasingly overt in her predatory nature. Allow the character introductions to evolve as the campaign progresses.

KORMOR KIRAK'S SENSORY SIGNATURE

SMELL

The city smells of woodsmoke, spices, blood, sweat, and the mineral scent of the Videk Mountains. Near the marketplace, these scents intensify and compound. Near Eppy's, they soften into herbs and bread and something green and living. Near the castle, they become strange -- hints of incense, aged stone, and something floral that might be perfume or might be growing things in hidden corners.

SOUND

The city is never truly quiet. Even the streets distant from the marketplace carry a constant low hum of activity. The wind through the mountains creates a perpetual sound, almost like distant voices. The Red Guard patrols create a rhythm of armor and footsteps. The castle itself sometimes seems to hum with a sound at the edge of perception.

TEMPERATURE

The city is perpetually cool, even in summer, due to the elevation and the mountain winds. But certain spaces offer warmth: Eppy's fireplace, the castle's grand ballroom during the ball, the city's streets in direct sunlight. This contrast should be emphasized in descriptions.

LIGHT

The perpetual mountain mist means light is often diffused and soft. Sunlight penetrates in patches. Night falls quickly. Torches and magical lights become essential early in the evening. This affects visibility and creates shadows. Use it to create mood.

RECURRING SENSORY ELEMENTS

- **MIST:** Present near the cemetery and around elevated locations. Creates disorientation and mystery.
- **WIND:** Constant in the mountains, carries sounds and scents, creates cold.

- **STONE:** Everywhere. Ancient, worn, marked by centuries of human presence.
 - **FIRE:** Present in Eppy's, in the castle, in torches throughout the city. Source of warmth and light.
 - **MAGIC:** Subtle but present. Not flashy, but woven into the architecture and atmosphere of the city itself.
-

THE TREATY BALL

When describing locations in the context of the Treaty Ball, emphasize the tension beneath the courtesy. The ballroom becomes a stage where every movement carries diplomatic weight. The castle becomes a place where centuries of power have gathered in one space. The city itself becomes a backdrop to an event that might determine the course of history.

NECROMANTIC CORRUPTION

As the campaign progresses and evidence of the Queen's true nature accumulates, previously visited locations can be described with new awareness. The dungeons become more sinister when you understand they are feeding grounds. The cemetery becomes more threatening when you realize the dead are being harvested. The castle becomes more alien when you understand what it truly contains.

PARTY HOMES AND SANCTUARIES

When the party establishes Eppy's as a home base, it should become a location of comfort and safety. Subsequent descriptions should emphasize warmth, community, and belonging. Contrast this against the cold, threatening, alien nature of other locations.

END OF DOCUMENT

This supplement is designed for quick reference during play. Use these descriptions to make first impressions vivid and memorable. The goal is to help players feel that they are arriving somewhere real and consequential, not visiting a location but stepping into a world that has its own weight, its own history, its own will.

The Eternal Court waits. Describe it with the weight it deserves.

PART THREE: THE CONSPIRACY

Investigations, Evidence, and the Ticking Clock

Steam-driven industry collides with forces that predate human memory.

CAPITULUM

EMERGENCY ESCALATION TRACK &

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 I: 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. Their agent within the Queen's court (location to be determined by GM) feeds intelligence.

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 Eppy's Pub 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.

EPHY FLINDER: Notes increased Red Guard visits and tightened patrols outside her pub. She begins quietly stockpiling supplies and warning regulars that trouble is coming.

DEVORLEN KOSS: Encrypted messages flow through his shop. The Lich Cult reaches out with a proposal: if the resistance softens the Queen's position, perhaps they can claim the Comet Chamber for themselves. He relays this offer to Barron Whitehallow.

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. Eppy's Pub 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.

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, they move openly to seize control of the city. But without a united leader, the city's factions resist them openly. Barron Whitehallow, freed from the immediate threat, rallies the population.

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 resistance has a clock toward collapse or success. The Lich Cult has a clock toward seizing

control. 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.

CAPITULUM

OLGVA'S JOURNAL

A Supplement for The Eternal Court TTRPG

CASE 1: THE MISSING SEWING

Olivia's Account

The request came through Tomas the Stablehand, naturally. A young seamstress named Magrit Soller hadn't been to her shop in Kereskedo Marketplace for three days. Her landlady was worried. Her friends were worried. I was skeptical -- people disappear in Kormor Kirak with regularity, and most of them are deliberate about it.

But the details nagged at me. Magrit didn't have enemies. She kept to herself, did fine work, paid her rent. The landlady reported that Magrit had been working on "something special" before she vanished -- not the usual mundane garments, but something elaborate. Silk lining. Hand-stitched panels. The kind of work that takes weeks.

I started with the obvious. Magrit's shop was empty, undisturbed. No signs of struggle. The landlady let me see her room -- neat, modest, utterly unremarkable. But on the work table sat three unfinished pieces, all elaborate cloaks. The thread work was immaculate, almost *obsessive* in its precision. And the design -- a pattern I'd seen before, months ago. On a Red Guard captain's ceremonial coat.

That's when things got complicated.

I visited Rozito Vallikozo. The man's a fixer; if someone wanted a seamstress for something off the ledgers, Rozito would know. He was cagey at first, but I have a way of making conversation persuasive. Magrit had indeed been approached -- not by him, but the job came through his network. Someone wanted three cloaks made, the design already specified, payment generous, and discretion absolute.

"Where's the seamstress?" I asked.

"Safe," Rozito said. "Paid better than she'd make in a year. Doing work for someone very important."

"Kiraline?"

He didn't answer, which was answer enough.

I had a choice then. Report it to Barron Whitehallow and risk the resistance's limited resources on a single girl? Investigate further and potentially walk into something far larger? Or let it go and sleep well for one more night?

I chose the third option. I reported a false lead to Tomas -- merchants, I said, likely transported her across the river for work elsewhere. He seemed satisfied. I have no doubt Magrit is alive, making clothes for someone in the Red Guard or worse. Some people you can't save without burning down what you've built.

That bothers me more than I'd like to admit.

THE SETUP

Magrit Soller, a talented seamstress of modest means, has vanished from her shop. The characters may be hired by her landlady, concerned friends, or representatives of the resistance seeking to understand if the disappearance connects to resistance activities. What begins as a missing person case quickly reveals patterns of coercion and forced labor within Kormor Kirak.

The truth is layered: Magrit was approached through intermediaries (Rozito) with an offer to do specialized tailoring work. The job is legitimate, if troubling -- she's being tasked with creating elaborate ceremonial garments for the Red Guard's upper command. She's been moved to a secure location (a guarded compound near the castle) and is being well-compensated, but she cannot leave. She didn't realize this when she accepted; by the time she understood the situation's true nature, she was already inside the castle's orbit.

KEY NPC S INVOLVED

MAGRIT SOLLER -- A talented seamstress, mid-30s, quiet and skilled. She didn't understand the implications of her work until it was too late. She's currently being treated well but is under guard. She's frightened, desperate to communicate with her landlady, but has been told that any contact would endanger the people she cares about.

ROZITO VALLIKOZO -- The fixer who brokered the arrangement. He genuinely doesn't see the harm; he facilitates connections, nothing more. If pressed, he'll admit he knows who hired Magrit, but revealing that information is *bad for business*, and more importantly, bad for his health.

CAPTAIN DMITRI VOSS -- A Red Guard officer who specifically requested Magrit's services. He's preparing for some ceremonial event and wants garments of exceptional quality. He's not actively cruel, but he's casual about the means used to achieve his ends.

MAGRIT'S LANDLADY -- A worried older woman named Constance Veyer. She's genuinely fond of Magrit and legitimately concerned. She's the characters' most likely initial contact.

THE GUARD DETAIL -- Two Red Guard soldiers assigned to watch Magrit. They're professional but not sadistic. They won't volunteer information, but they can be negotiated with, bribed, or evaded.

LOCATIONS

MAGRIT'S TAILOR SHOP (Kereskedo Marketplace) -- A modest storefront with living quarters upstairs. The shop is neat and organized. The three unfinished cloaks are displayed on a workstation. Thread, needles, fabric scraps. Nothing explicitly threatening, but the quality of the work is notable. Searching the space thoroughly reveals a note hidden in a sewing box: a single word in Magrit's handwriting: "trapped."

CONSTANCE'S BOARDING HOUSE -- An older building housing various working-class residents. Constance lives on the ground floor and can provide descriptions of Magrit's visitors, though her recollections are incomplete. She remembers a well-dressed man (Rozito) and money being exchanged.

ROZITO'S ESTABLISHMENT -- A seemingly legitimate business front. Comfortable, neutral ground where deals are brokered. Rozito won't be hostile unless provoked, and even then, he'll opt for evasion over confrontation. The space reveals little of direct value, but Rozito himself is a wealth of information *if* the characters can convince him to share.

THE RED GUARD COMPOUND (near Castle Torony Piros) -- A heavily fortified location where Magrit is currently being held. It's not a dungeon; she's in a comfortable workshop with guards stationed outside. Breaking her out requires either stealth, bribery, or a direct confrontation with the Red Guard.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE RESISTANCE COMPLICATION** -- If the characters are resistance-aligned, Barron Whitehallow wants to extract Magrit quietly. This creates urgency but also constraints; a frontal assault is politically untenable. Whitehallow is more interested in learning *why* the Queen's forces suddenly need ceremonial garments -- what event is being planned?
- **THE AMBITION ANGLE** -- Captain Dmitri Voss is actually competing with other officers for a promotion. Kiraline is selecting a new commander for

her personal guard, and Voss believes that appearing with perfect ceremonial dress and a fully realized vision will impress her. He doesn't know Magrit is being coerced; he paid Rozito, and Rozito handled the details. If the characters explain the situation, Voss might be appalled -- or he might not care.

- **THE LICH CULT CONNECTION** -- One of the characters' informants mentions that the Lich Cult has been recruiting heavily from Kormor Kirak's working poor. Magrit's disappearance might be unrelated, but the timing is suspicious. Perhaps Magrit was approached by cult members, or perhaps the cult is investigating the same forced-labor networks for their own purposes.
- **THE ESCALATION** -- If the characters make too much noise investigating, Lady Mireva (Kiraline's spy network) becomes aware of their interest. She assigns agents to determine whether this is a resistance operation or simple curiosity. This elevates the threat level significantly.
- **MAGRIT'S RELUCTANCE** -- When the characters finally locate Magrit, she might refuse extraction. She's been promised enough money to leave Kormor Kirak entirely. She's trapped, but she's also being treated well and can see a light at the end of the tunnel. Forcing her to come with them against her will creates moral ambiguity.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: THE NEGOTIATION -- The characters approach Rozito with an offer to buy out Magrit's contract. This costs money (significant but not prohibitive), and Rozito will broker the deal on one condition: the characters never ask him about it again, and they understand that other arrangements like this happen in Kormor Kirak regularly. Magrit is released unharmed, and the characters gain a valuable intermediary contact.

RESOLUTION 2: THE HEIST -- Using infiltration, bribery, or misdirection, the characters break Magrit out of the compound. This is more dangerous; it

requires careful planning and carries the risk of direct conflict with Red Guard soldiers. If successful, Magrit is extracted but becomes a fugitive, and the Red Guard will investigate the breach.

RESOLUTION 3: THE LEVERAGE -- The characters identify Captain Dmitri Voss's ambitions and threaten to expose his use of coerced labor to Kiraline or to other officers competing for the same promotion. Voss, wanting to distance himself from a potential scandal, arranges for Magrit's release and fires the intermediaries he used.

RESOLUTION 4: THE QUIET END -- The characters accept that Magrit cannot be saved without serious risk. They provide her with a method to contact the outside world (a message hidden in a delivered package) and information about where she can go when her contract is complete. It's not a rescue, but it's a small kindness.

RESOLUTION 5: THE CULT DISCOVERY -- During their investigation, the characters uncover evidence that members of the Lich Cult were planning to approach Magrit specifically, believing her work on ceremonial items for the Red Guard might give her access to intelligence. The characters can warn Magrit of this danger, which shifts her perspective on her situation.

CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

This case is a *microcosm* of Kormor Kirak's oppression. It reveals how the Queen's apparatus operates through intermediaries and coercion. More specifically:

- The ceremonial garments are being prepared for a significant state event -- possibly the Comet Chamber dedication or a major Red Guard ceremony related to it.
- The fact that Magrit is restricted rather than willing raises questions: Why does Kiraline need secrecy around her military preparations?

- If the Lich Cult is involved, it suggests they're actively infiltrating the Queen's networks, which is a major development.
- Rozito's casual acceptance of the arrangement reveals how normalized exploitation is in the city. Change will be slow and difficult.

CASE 2: THE CLOCKMAKER'S CONFESSION

Olivia's Account

Brother Aldric brought me a confession, which is to say he brought me a problem wearing a confession's clothing.

The clockmaker was local -- Karl Hemmer, operated a small shop near Cliff Road. According to Aldric, Karl came to the monastery three days ago in a state of considerable distress. He claimed to have been working on a commissioned piece for a decade. A clock. Not just any clock -- an astronomical clock, designed with precision that Karl insists was "beyond natural geometry." The commission came from an intermediary who paid extraordinary sums and was entirely clear that the work must be accurate to specifications that seemed, frankly, impossible.

Karl had been using his own knowledge, supplemented with texts he acquired from Devorlen Koss's curiosity shop. Texts on mathematics, on celestial mechanics, on things that don't have names in languages still spoken.

Three days ago, Karl finished the work. The moment the last component was fitted and the clock began to turn, he suffered a *clarity* -- his word, not mine. He saw, he claimed, what the clock was actually for. Not timekeeping. A *door*. A mechanism calibrated to align with something coming. Something astronomical.

Karl came to Aldric in genuine terror, believing he'd committed some profound sin. He wanted the clock destroyed. He wanted forgiveness he probably doesn't deserve and almost certainly won't get.

I listened to Aldric's account with what I hope was professional detachment and felt, for the first time in months, the kind of cold that comes from understanding *how deep this goes*.

A clock aligned with the coming comet. A clock designed by someone brilliant enough to achieve impossible precision. And now -- I had to assume -- someone would come to collect it.

"Where is Karl now?" I asked.

"Still at the monastery," Aldric said. "Praying. I don't think he's slept."

"And the clock?"

"Hidden. I took the liberty."

Good man, Aldric.

I spent the next four days doing what I do best -- asking quiet questions in the spaces between other conversations. Devorlen Koss had indeed sold astronomical texts recently. The purchaser paid cash, never asked questions, seemed to know exactly what they were looking for. Jack Winbow's smuggling network had moved several shipments of astronomical instruments through Kormor Kirak in the last six months. The Marketplace Butcher mentioned that a well-dressed woman (likely Lady Mireva) had been asking about craftspeople in the city -- specifically asking for those with "precise hands and open minds."

The Queen is building her Comet Chamber. Of course she's building precision instruments to align with it. Of course she's found someone brilliant enough to create them, whether willingly or under duress.

And Karl Hemmer, poor bastard, had just handed her a key.

I visited him at the monastery. He was gaunt, hollow-eyed, functioning on prayer and guilt. I asked him a simple question: "Did they approach you initially, or did the commission come through channels that seemed legitimate?"

"Legitimate channels," he whispered. "It seemed like a patron. A wealthy patron. They never threatened anything. They just... asked for precision. Perfect, inhuman precision. And I *achieved* it."

"Karl," I said, "that clock is now a liability. Not because you created it, but because someone will kill to obtain it. Possibly someone will kill *you*."

He looked at me with eyes that had already surrendered.

"What would you have me do?"

That's the question that keeps me awake, isn't it?

THE SETUP

A local clockmaker has commissioned a piece with extraordinary specifications that he came to believe has sinister purpose. The clock is designed with astronomical precision aligned to the comet's trajectory. The characters may become involved through Brother Aldric, through the clockmaker himself, or through their investigations into Queen's activities. The central mystery: who commissioned this work, and what is it actually for?

The truth is that the Comet Chamber project requires multiple precision instruments calibrated to the comet's position and trajectory. The Queen's occultists have designed these instruments, but their realization requires mundane craftsmanship of supernatural accuracy. Karl was identified as someone capable of achieving this precision. He wasn't coerced initially -- the commission came through what appeared to be legitimate patronage channels. Only as he approached completion did he begin to suspect the true purpose.

Now, multiple factions are aware of or suspect the clock's existence: the Queen's agents (who will want to retrieve it), the Lich Cult (who want to study it or disrupt it), and potentially the resistance (who want to understand what the Queen is building).

KEY NPCS INVOLVED

KARL HEMMER -- A masterful clockmaker in his early 50s, meticulous to the point of obsession. He's a good man who's terrified he's participated in something monstrous. He's NOT a leader and will defer to the characters, but his technical knowledge is invaluable. He's also extremely fragile psychologically; poor treatment or pressure might break him entirely.

BROTHER ALDRIC -- A monk of genuine faith and genuine compassion. He's hiding Karl as an act of mercy and principle, not as a political statement. He can provide safe harbor temporarily, but he can't protect Karl indefinitely. Aldric is a solid ally but has clear limitations.

THE MYSTERIOUS PATRON -- The person who originally commissioned the clock. They likely work for the Queen directly or for the Lich Cult. They haven't revealed their face or name; all communication was through intermediaries. They paid in advance and seemed entirely unconcerned with Karl's emotional state or reliability.

DEVORLEN KOSS -- The curiosity shop owner provided the texts Karl used. Koss is pragmatic and amoral; he sells knowledge to anyone with coin. He won't proactively help, but he can be questioned about the purchaser's identity.

Jack Winbow -- Barron's field operative moved astronomical instruments through the city under stable-hand cover. If the characters ask the right questions, he can confirm this and might provide descriptions of the buyers or delivery locations.

LADY MIREVA -- The Queen's spy network director who specifically recruited craftspeople for unknown purposes. She's a distant antagonist in this case but represents the Queen's active interest in Kormor Kirak's artisans.

LOCATIONS

KARL'S CLOCK SHOP (Cliff Road) -- A modest storefront with a workshop in the back. It's currently unoccupied, as Karl has been at the monastery. The shop contains various clocks in different states of completion, tools of supernatural precision, and numerous reference texts. Searching it reveals bills of sale, payment receipts in cash, and designs for the astronomical clock -- if the characters know what they're looking for, they can find technical specifications that confirm the comet alignment.

THE MONASTERY (exterior to the city) -- A peaceful sanctuary where Karl is currently hiding. Brother Aldric maintains the space. It's safe but cannot serve as a long-term refuge; monks maintain the monastery's neutrality carefully, and harboring a fugitive eventually becomes untenable.

DEVORLEN KOSS'S CURIOSITIES (Kereskedo Marketplace area) -- A cluttered shop filled with unusual items. Koss himself is more forthcoming than usual in a neutral setting, though he won't betray customers. He might provide general information about the texts sold ("astronomical," "mathematical," "concerning celestial bodies") without naming the purchaser.

Jack Winbow's Contact Point -- An undisclosed location known only to trusted contacts. Winbow can be reached through intermediaries or by reputation. He's pragmatic but not mercenary at heart; if the characters prove they are trying to stop real harm, he may confirm his knowledge of the instruments and provide descriptions.

THE CLOCK'S HIDDEN LOCATION -- Brother Aldric has hidden the clock in the monastery. It's a masterwork, beautiful and terrible, ticking with an

accuracy that seems almost unnatural. Being near it produces a subtle discomfort in those sensitive to such things.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE LICH CULT'S INTEREST** -- Cult agents are also looking for the clock. They want to study it, disable it, or corrupt it. If the characters are followed to the monastery, they might have to defend it against cultist infiltrators.
- **THE QUEEN'S AGENTS** -- Lady Mireva's operatives become aware of Karl's disappearance and begin canvassing the city. They're not openly hostile but are thorough. They'll eventually lead the characters' location if they're not careful.
- **KARL'S DETERIORATION** -- The more time Karl spends hiding, the more his mental state degrades. He oscillates between guilty fervor and suicidal despair. If he's mistreated or pressured, he might choose to end his life rather than continue. If he's treated with kindness, he becomes dependent on that kindness and struggles when he must be moved or separated from it.
- **THE MORAL QUESTION** -- What do the characters do with the clock? If they destroy it, they disrupt the Queen's plans but also destroy a masterwork and eliminate evidence. If they keep it, they become targets. If they try to modify it, they might accidentally trigger something.
- **THE COMET'S APPROACH** -- Time is not neutral in this case. As the comet approaches, the clock's significance increases. The Queen's urgency increases. Everyone's timeline accelerates.
- **DEVORLEN KOSS'S BETRAYAL** -- If the characters press Koss too hard or make their interest obvious, he might sell information to the highest bidder. He's amoral; the Queen's gold is as good as anyone's.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: DESTRUCTION -- The characters convince Karl or simply decide themselves that the clock must be destroyed. This satisfies their moral concerns but infuriates the Queen and eliminates their ability to understand what the clock does. Destroying it might also trigger supernatural consequences if it's truly aligned to the comet.

RESOLUTION 2: RELOCATION -- Using Jack Winbow's network or the resistance's resources, the characters arrange for Karl and the clock to be smuggled out of Kormor Kirak. This preserves both but requires significant resources and creates a loose end -- Karl will likely find his way back to his craft elsewhere, and the clock might resurface in another context.

RESOLUTION 3: INFILTRATION -- The characters study the clock, understand its mechanisms, and create a modified version that appears authentic but is subtly corrupted. They present this false clock to be collected, while keeping the real one hidden. This requires technical expertise and carries high risk of discovery.

RESOLUTION 4: LEVERAGE -- The characters use knowledge of the clock's existence to bargain with the Queen's agents or with the Lich Cult. They offer the clock in exchange for something valuable -- information, protection, resources.

RESOLUTION 5: SACRIFICE -- The characters convince Karl to turn the clock over to the Queen voluntarily, positioning him as someone who had doubts but has now seen the necessity of the Queen's plans. This protects Karl from being hunted but involves a moral compromise and might create resentment among the characters' allies.

RESOLUTION 6: THE CULT ROUTE -- The characters approach the Lich Cult and offer them the clock's location in exchange for aid against the Queen. This creates a three-way complication where the Cult, the Queen, and potentially the resistance are all pursuing the same object.

 CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

This case directly illuminates the Comet Chamber project. The clock is one of several precision instruments being constructed to align with and harness the comet's power. The case reveals:

- The Queen is actively recruiting Kormor Kirak's finest craftspeople through intermediaries and patronage.
- Supernatural precision is required for her plans -- ordinary craftsmanship won't suffice.
- The clock's alignment suggests that the comet's arrival will occur on a calculable date, and the Queen has methods to predict and prepare for it.
- The Lich Cult is aware of the project and is working to either support it, subvert it, or harness it for their own purposes.
- Characters who study the clock can gather significant intelligence about the Queen's timeline and the nature of the instrument.

CASE 3: THE VANISHING GUESTS

Olivia's Account

Eppy Flinder is a gossip, which makes her useful, and a listener, which makes her trustworthy. She's also one of my few real friends in this godforsaken city, which means I listen when she comes to me with genuine fear in her eyes.

Four guests at her pub had simply *vanished*. Not escaped, not obviously murdered, not even arrested by the Red Guard. They'd been there one evening, social, drinks in hand, making normal conversation. The next morning, their rooms upstairs were empty. No signs of disturbance. Their belongings left behind. They were gone the way people are gone when they never existed to begin with.

"They weren't Kormor Kirak," Eppy said. "You could tell immediately. They had Albion accents, wore Albion clothes. One of them -- the woman -- she said she was an ambassador's aide."

I felt something cold settle in my chest.

"Did anyone from the Red Guard come to collect them?"

"No one official," Eppy said. "But there was a woman. Well-dressed, kept to the shadows, watched them for an entire evening. She left around midnight. The next morning, I went to wake them -- they hadn't checked out -- and they were gone. All four. Like smoke."

Albion representatives vanishing in Kormor Kirak isn't necessarily a disaster. But it's definitely a *problem*. Ambassador Harken was already navigating political tightropes; this could blow them all up.

I met with Harken under the pretext of selling him intelligence (which I was; transparency in our transactions keeps the relationship valuable to both of us). I told him about the missing people without mentioning how I knew.

His reaction confirmed my fears. "Those are diplomatic observers," he said quietly. "They were meant to be temporary, eyes-and-ears for the Crown. If they're missing..." He trailed off, understanding the implications without needing them explained. If Albion Crown's observers are being disappeared by the Queen, the situation has escalated significantly.

I investigated further. The woman Eppy described matched a pattern I'd noticed before -- someone working for Lady Mireva, almost certainly. The woman had been methodical: she'd observed the targets, identified their location, and then acted with precision. The targets were removed, but not violently. No bodies, no blood, nothing at the pub to suggest foul play.

That suggested *capture*, not assassination.

I made inquiries about holding locations, about places where the Red Guard might keep foreign prisoners quietly. The Marketplace Butcher mentioned rumors of activity at the castle dungeons, but also something else: movement of prisoners to "elsewhere," somewhere in the city where the Queen keeps her more *special* guests.

That's when things got stranger.

I received a message -- no source, just a note -- with a location and a single word: "Comet."

It was Jack Winbow's handwriting.

I met him in an alley he'd specified. Jack is many things, but a hero isn't one of them. He sells information, loyalties, and services to whoever pays. So when he approached me with information about missing persons, I was immediately suspicious about his motivation.

"The Albion people," he said. "They're being held somewhere. The Queen wants something from them -- intelligence about Albion's movements, their military preparations, something. The woman you're asking about works for someone in the castle directly. Not Lady Mireva. Someone else."

"Who?"

"Don't know for certain. But there's been talk about a new office in the castle, something to do with astronomical observations. Your Albion observers knew something about Albion's military astronomy program. The Queen wanted them quiet and available."

That was enough.

I never did determine exactly where those four were being held. I passed the information to Harken, and diplomatic channels began to move in ways I'll never fully understand. The situation was eventually... *resolved*, though I suspect the resolution involved compromises neither side felt entirely good about.

But that's how it works in Kormor Kirak. You save some people. Some people you can only try to minimize the damage for. And some people you never know whether they lived or died.

THE SETUP

Four diplomatic observers from Albion have vanished from a local pub under mysterious circumstances. Their disappearance could create an international incident if not handled carefully. The characters may be approached by Ambassador Harken, by Eppy Flinder, or by other contacts concerned about the political implications. This case combines missing persons investigation with political intrigue and reveals the extent to which the Queen is willing to bend international relations toward her goals.

The truth is that the four observers were indeed removed by Lady Mireva's agents. The Queen has learned that Albion has been studying the comet's trajectory and its potential for astronomical manipulation. The observers were in Kormor Kirak to gather intelligence on the Queen's activities and to determine whether she poses a threat to Albion's interests. The Queen, rather than creating an international incident by executing them, has chosen to capture them and extract what intelligence they possess. They're being held in a secure location within or near the castle, under watch but treated well enough that they remain cooperative.

KEY NPC S INVOLVED

Eppy Flinder -- The innkeeper, a woman with sharp eyes and sharper ears. She's genuinely distressed about the disappearances and concerned about what they might mean for her inn and her city. She's a reliable witness and a good person to have on the characters' side.

AMBASSADOR HARKEN -- The Albion diplomat, formally polite but clearly stressed by the situation. He walks a careful line between protecting his agents

and avoiding actions that could trigger full conflict with Kormor Kirak. He's manipulative but not villainous; he genuinely believes he's doing what's best for Albion.

THE FOUR OBSERVERS -- Sarah Westbrook (aide, mid-20s, highly trained in observation), Thomas Mercer (military advisor, 40s, professional soldier), Helena Croft (astronomer, 30s, specifically recruited to analyze the Queen's activities), and David Lyons (junior diplomat, 20s, mostly present for training). They're competent but are now captives in a situation they didn't fully anticipate. They're not being tortured, but their situation is dire.

LADY MIREVA -- The Queen's spymaster who orchestrated the capture. She appears only peripherally in this case but represents the Queen's willingness to escalate.

THE WOMAN IN THE SHADOWS -- The agent who conducted the observation and extraction. She's professional, efficient, and entirely willing to use violence if necessary. She reports to Lady Mireva.

Jack Winbow -- Barron's operative who has intelligence on the situation. His motivation for sharing information is complex; he may want leverage against the Queen, may be protecting Olivia and the others, or may have decided the situation has become too dangerous to ignore.

LOCATIONS

EPPI'S PUB -- A popular establishment in the city where locals and travelers mix. The upstairs contains rooms for guests. The room where the four observers stayed is modest and gives little away; they were careful not to leave obvious intelligence.

THE EMBASSY -- Albion's diplomatic headquarters, a secure building where Harken coordinates with Albion Crown. The characters might visit here to meet Harken or to gather additional context.

SUSPECTED HOLDING LOCATIONS -- The castle dungeons are an obvious guess, but the Queen likely wouldn't keep diplomatic prisoners there. More likely locations include:

- A secure manor house on Cliff Road, currently commandeered for the purpose
- A tower within the castle's lower structures, used for special prisoners
- A hidden location outside the city but within the Queen's control

THE ALLEY MEETING POINT -- Where Jack Winbow delivers information to the characters. It's anonymous, easily abandoned, exactly the kind of place where compromising meetings happen.

LADY MIREVA'S OPERATIONS CENTER -- The characters might not find this location easily, but it's where the decision to capture the observers was made and where their interrogation is being directed. It exists somewhere in or near the castle.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT RISK** -- Any obvious action by the characters to rescue the observers could cause Ambassador Harken to panic. He might demand they back off, creating conflict between their desire to help and political realities. Alternatively, Harken might decide the risk is worth it and commit Albion resources, escalating the threat level dramatically.
- **JACK WINBOW'S GAME** -- Winbow might have his own agenda. He could be selling the information to the characters while simultaneously selling it to the Queen. He could be angling for a reward from Harken or setting the characters up for a trap. Determining his true motivation requires interaction and judgment.
- **THE LICH CULT'S INTEREST** -- The cult has learned about the Albion observers and their astronomical knowledge. They want access to those

observers to extract information about alternative methods of harnessing the comet. This could mean the characters have a three-way situation with the cult also pursuing the observers.

- **CAPTAIN ASHFORD'S INVOLVEMENT** -- Captain Ashford is the senior Albion military liaison in Kormor Kirak. He's more hawkish than Ambassador Harken and might advocate for rescue by force. This creates division among potential allies.
- **THE INTERROGATION TIMELINE** -- The longer the observers are held, the more information they'll divulge. The characters need to act relatively quickly, but too quick an action risks visible failure. There's urgency without total clarity about how to proceed.
- **THE OBSERVER'S KNOWLEDGE** -- One of the observers (Helena Croft, the astronomer) actually knows significant information about the comet's properties that would be invaluable to the Queen's plans. The Queen will extract this, and the observer might not survive the extraction intact.
- **THE DIPLOMATIC TRAP** -- The Queen could deliberately ensure that the observers' disappearance becomes known, baiting Albion into a response that justifies further escalation on the Queen's part. In this scenario, the whole situation is a setup.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: DIRECT NEGOTIATION -- The characters work with Ambassador Harken to approach the Queen's representatives directly. They negotiate for the observers' release in exchange for Albion's agreement to cease astronomical research or to share its findings with Kormor Kirak. This resolves the situation diplomatically but leaves the observers' fates uncertain and might require agreeing to unfavorable terms.

RESOLUTION 2: THE RESCUE -- Using intelligence gathered through investigation, the characters attempt to locate and extract the observers. This might be

a heist, a commando raid, or a complicated series of steps involving bribery and deception. Success frees the observers but creates an active conflict with the Queen's forces and has long-term diplomatic consequences.

RESOLUTION 3: THE EXCHANGE -- The characters arrange for something the Queen wants (or thinks she wants) in exchange for the observers. This might involve the astronomical clock from Case 2, information about Albion's capabilities, or something else valuable. The exchange could be legitimate or a setup for betrayal.

RESOLUTION 4: THE ESCAPE FACILITATION -- Rather than a direct rescue, the characters provide the observers with tools, disguises, and routes to escape on their own. This is slower but reduces the characters' direct involvement and relies on the observers' own competence.

RESOLUTION 5: THE CULT ALLIANCE -- The characters approach the Lich Cult with information about the observers' location, proposing a joint operation. The cult infiltrates the holding location, creates chaos, and the characters use that chaos to extract the observers. This is risky but might be the only viable path given the numbers involved.

RESOLUTION 6: THE SACRIFICE -- The characters negotiate for the release of some observers while accepting that others will remain or might have been executed. This is morally difficult but politically realistic.

RESOLUTION 7: THE FALSE INTELLIGENCE -- The characters learn what intelligence the Queen is seeking and feed her false or corrupted information through the observers. This might convince the Queen to release them early or allow the characters access to them.

 CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

This case reveals the Queen's deep interest in astronomical knowledge and her willingness to involve herself in international politics to acquire it. Specifically:

- The Queen is aware that Albion possesses knowledge about the comet that she wants. This suggests potential future conflict with Albion.
- The observers' capture confirms that the Queen's plans are reaching a critical stage; she needs specific knowledge to proceed.
- The precision with which the capture was executed shows that Lady Mireva's network is effective and dangerous.
- If the characters rescue the observers, Albion becomes invested in what happens next in Kormor Kirak, potentially shifting the balance of power.
- The observers' astronomical knowledge, if shared, could provide the characters with crucial information about the Comet Chamber's purpose and timeline.

CASE 4: THE BONE COLLECTOR

Olivia's Account

The message came to me in the form of a severed finger left in my room.

I didn't panic, which is the kind of statement that reveals how much I've changed since arriving in this city. Instead, I examined it carefully. It was small, delicate, from someone young. There was a note, written in childish letters pressed hard enough to leave indentations: "COME TO HALLSET FIELDS. COME ALONE. KNOW WHAT KIRALINE TAKES."

Hallset Fields is the cemetery to the north, a sprawling burial ground for Kormor Kirak's common dead. I've avoided it thus far, and not without reason. There's something wrong with that place -- the air tastes of copper and old

grief, and the graves are *too* numerous for a city of this size. The dead are closer together than they should be.

I went, of course. Alone, armed, and with considerable annoyance.

The woman I found at the cemetery's heart was young, probably mid-20s, wearing clothes so filthy they'd achieved a texture of their own. Her eyes were bright with an intelligence that contrasted sharply with her physical degradation.

"My name is Petra," she said. "I was taken by the Queen's people three years ago. I was eleven. I worked in the castle kitchens. There are others like me -- children, mostly, some adults. We're not fed. We're... used differently."

"Used for what?" I asked, though I suspected I knew.

"Bone," Petra said simply. "The Queen takes bones. Ribs, fingers, vertebrae, skulls. Not all at once -- she's not *that* wasteful. But over time. They take them and we keep living. Or mostly we do. Some don't. Some die from the absence, from infection, from despair."

I felt something crystallize in my chest. I'd heard rumors about bones, about the castle's strange medical practices, about what the Queen might be *building*. But rumors are just noise. This was evidence, and this was *rage*.

"There's a doctor," Petra continued. "In the castle. He performs the removals. He uses magic -- something to numb the pain, something to make the wounds close wrong, something to make sure we stay alive to donate again. He's *proud* of his work. He talks about the precision of it."

"How many?" I asked.

"Forty-three that I'm certain of. Maybe more. The Queen doesn't let us see each other, but we listen through the walls. Forty-three people being harvested like crops."

I sat down on a gravestone and contemplated just how far I was from home and how much I was willing to do to address what I'd just learned.

Petra escaped a month ago, hiding in the cemetery because it was the one place the Queen's people seemed reluctant to search thoroughly. She's been surviving on scraps, on sympathy from groundskeepers, on pure desperation. She wants her bones back -- she can feel their absence like phantom limbs, and she wants the other prisoners freed.

I investigated further and discovered that the bone removals are indeed real. The Queen is constructing something -- not yet fully clear what -- and it requires bone. Specifically, it requires *many* bones, intact and whole but separated from their original owners. The magic involved is complex and deeply unpleasant; I found references in Devorlen Koss's shop to necromantic theory involving bone as *substrate*, bone as *foundation*, bone as *vessel*.

The doctor doing the work is someone named Volkmar, a figure I've heard whispered about in the city. He's not Kormor Kirak born; he's from the east, brought to serve the Queen specifically for this purpose. He's technically brilliant and morally bankrupt in exactly the way required for this work.

My investigation led me to a dead end, which is to say, to a decision point.

I could have brought this to Barron Whitehallow. The resistance would be *very* interested in a bone-harvesting program in the castle. They'd want to shut it down, to rescue the prisoners. But shutting it down would require direct action in the castle itself, and I don't have confidence the resistance could execute that without massive casualties.

I could have approached Ambassador Harken with it, presenting it as a human rights violation that might sway Albion's diplomatic position. But Harken is pragmatic, and the bone harvesting isn't officially acknowledged. He would likely respond by doing nothing, which accomplishes exactly nothing.

I could have contacted Jack Winbow and asked him to smuggle the prisoners out. He might have done it, for a price, but the price would be steep, and the Queen would almost certainly track them down afterward.

Instead, I did what I always do when I'm confronted with something too large to move: I documented it carefully. I gathered evidence. I mapped what I could learn about the bone collection process, the prisoners' locations, the doctor's movements. And I filed it all away in the back of my mind as something to be addressed when I had more resources, or more allies, or simply more information.

Petra, though. Petra I tried to help.

I established a safe channel for her to contact me. I provided her with resources to survive more comfortably in the cemetery. And I promised her -- knowing it was a promise I might not be able to keep -- that the bone harvesting would stop. Someday.

It's a poor promise, but it's all I had to offer.

THE SETUP

The characters encounter evidence of a systematic program of bone harvesting conducted by the Queen for an unknown purpose. This might come through a direct encounter with Petra (a survivor), through investigation of missing persons, or through discovery of Volkmar's work. This case is fundamentally about injustice on a scale that forces moral reckoning: the characters will likely not be able to completely stop the program, but they can choose how much they're willing to risk to prevent new victims or rescue existing ones.

The bone harvesting is real and ongoing. The Queen's magical plans for the Comet Chamber apparently require a particular substance that can be crafted from bone, either as a material component or as something more mystical. Volkmar has been tasked with collecting a specific quantity (the current total is 43 prisoners; the Queen wants 100). The prisoners are kept alive through

magical means in a secure location within the castle's lower levels. The program is secret but not so secret that rumors don't circulate in the city's underworld.

KEY NPCs INVOLVED

PETRA -- A survivor of the bone harvesting program, mid-20s mentally but emotionally fractured. She's intelligent and observant but is also traumatized and prone to emotional volatility. She's the most reliable witness to the program's mechanics, but her reliability is compromised by her own psychological state. She wants to help free the other prisoners but is also terrified of the castle and its agents.

VOLKMAR -- The doctor conducting the bone removals. He's brilliant, meticulous, and entirely convinced that he's contributing to something magnificent. He's not sadistic in a crude way; he simply doesn't think of his subjects as fully human. He's protected by the Queen's favor and is well-armed and trained in magic.

THE QUEEN -- Kiraline appears only peripherally in this case, but it's her program, her decision, her magical needs driving the whole horrible system.

MERCY/THE PRISON GUARD -- A female Red Guard captain assigned to oversee the bone-harvesting facility. She's professional and isn't cruel, but she's thorough. Her name is Captain Mercy Falke, and she has a slight gambling problem that might be exploitable.

THE OTHER PRISONERS -- 43 living people (or 42, if one has died since Petra's escape) in various states of physical and psychological degradation. They're not unified in their desires; some have given up, some are plotting escape, some have made peace with their situation through denial.

BROTHER ALDRIC -- The monk might become aware of the bone harvesting through confessions or rumors. He would be horrified and might offer the monastery as a sanctuary for escaped prisoners, at significant risk to himself.

LOCATIONS

HALLASET FIELDS CEMETERY -- The sprawling burial ground where Petra hides and where the characters might initially encounter her. The cemetery is large and provides cover but is also watched by the Queen's agents.

THE CASTLE'S LOWER LEVELS -- The bone-harvesting facility is located in a secure section of the castle's dungeons, in an area not typically accessed by regular guards. It's heavily warded with magical protections and has limited access points.

VOLKMAR'S PRIVATE QUARTERS -- Somewhere in the castle, Volkmar maintains a personal workshop where he studies the bone material and works on preparing the collected bones for their eventual use. This space contains his research, notes, and possibly samples of the processed bone.

THE PRISON CELLS -- Separate chambers within the harvesting facility, each holding 2-4 prisoners in varying states of health. The cells are maintained with magical wards that prevent escape and allow the guards to monitor the prisoners remotely.

THE MEDICAL FACILITY -- Where Volkmar performs the bone removals. It's equipped with surgical tools, magical apparatus, and containment systems designed to keep the prisoners alive despite the procedures.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM** -- There are 43 prisoners. The characters cannot save all of them without major resources and planning. Attempts to rescue everyone will likely result in catastrophic failure. This forces uncomfortable choices about who to save first, who must be left behind, and whether partial rescue is acceptable.
- **THE MAGICAL WARDINGS** -- The harvesting facility is protected by complex magical locks and alerts. Breaking in openly triggers immediate

response from the Red Guard. Bypassing the wards requires either magical expertise or a very detailed knowledge of the system.

- **VOLKMAR'S COMPETENCE** -- Volkmar is not a pushover. He's a trained mage with defensive spells, the backing of the Queen's authority, and personal guards. Confronting him directly is extremely dangerous.
- **THE PRISONERS' CONDITION** -- Many of the prisoners are physically and psychologically broken. Even if rescued, they won't be able to move quickly or independently. Care for escaped prisoners becomes an immediate logistical problem.
- **CAPTAIN MERCY FALKE'S COMPLICATIONS** -- While Mercy isn't cruel, she's doing her job. She won't be bribed into simply opening the doors, but she might be manipulated, tricked, or blackmailed. Her gambling debts could be exploited, or her family could be threatened.
- **THE QUEEN'S ESCALATION** -- If the characters become known as threats to the bone-harvesting program, the Queen will escalate her interest in them. She might task Lady Mireva with eliminating them, or she might increase security at the facility, making future rescue attempts even more difficult.
- **PETRA'S EMOTIONAL STATE** -- Petra is not a reliable ally. She might attempt something reckless without the characters' approval, or she might break down at crucial moments. She could also become a liability if she's recognized inside the castle.
- **THE LICH CULT'S KNOWLEDGE** -- The Lich Cult is aware of the bone harvesting, at least in general terms. They might try to disrupt the program themselves to deny the Queen resources, or they might try to steal the processed bones for their own purposes.
- **THE MORAL QUESTION OF MAGIC** -- If the characters capture Volkmar, they must decide his fate. Executing him is justice but also murder. Turning him over to justice requires institutional support they might not have. He's

valuable alive (he has knowledge about the Queen's plans) but also horrifically dangerous.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: THE PARTIAL RESCUE -- The characters plan and execute a careful infiltration aimed at liberating a small group of prisoners (8-12 individuals). This requires detailed planning, magical or infiltration expertise, and careful exit strategy. Success saves some lives but leaves the majority of prisoners in the castle and likely triggers escalation in the bone-harvesting program (the Queen will intensify collection to meet her quotas).

RESOLUTION 2: THE SABOTAGE -- The characters don't rescue prisoners but instead sabotage the harvesting facility. They poison Volkmar's magical apparatus, corrupt his research, or destabilize the wardings. This disrupts the program temporarily but doesn't save any current prisoners and allows the Queen to assign a new doctor and rebuild the system.

RESOLUTION 3: THE EXPOSURE -- The characters leak information about the bone harvesting to Ambassador Harken, the resistance, and the city's population. This makes the program untenable to continue openly, but the Queen's response is unpredictable. She might intensify security and accelerate the bone collection, or she might move the program elsewhere. The political pressure doesn't immediately save anyone.

RESOLUTION 4: THE CULT ALLIANCE -- The characters approach the Lich Cult and propose a joint operation to disrupt the bone harvesting. The cult has its own reasons to oppose the Queen and might commit significant resources. However, working with the cult is morally fraught and creates long-term complications.

RESOLUTION 5: THE MAGICAL COUNTER -- The characters identify a mage powerful enough to counter Volkmar's wards or create a magical distraction. This might be the monastery's resident scholar, a member of the resistance

with occult training, or even a cultist. Magical confrontation is dangerous but bypasses the need for direct physical infiltration.

RESOLUTION 6: VOLKMAR'S RECRUITMENT -- The characters attempt to turn Volkmar against the Queen, convincing him that he's been misled about the purpose of his work or that the Queen intends to discard him after she no longer needs him. This is extremely difficult given Volkmar's psychology, but success would give them an inside agent.

RESOLUTION 7: THE LONG GAME -- The characters accept that they cannot save the current prisoners immediately but commit to gathering intelligence, building alliances, and planning a larger operation. They establish a network to document the prisoners' identities and conditions, which will be valuable for future operations.

CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

The bone harvesting directly supports the Comet Chamber project. The bones are being prepared to serve as:

- A foundation or substrate for magical working during the comet's arrival
- A conduit for the Queen's will into the magical apparatus of the Comet Chamber
- Possibly, a sacrifice to fuel the rituals required to harness the comet's power

The bone harvesting also reveals:

- The Queen is willing to commit atrocities in service of her ambitions
- She has the resources and authority to conduct this program in secret
- Volkmar represents a new class of servant in her regime: the amoral specialist who exists outside normal ethical frameworks

- The prisoners' suffering is incidental to the Queen's goals; she doesn't torture for pleasure, but she also wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice 100 lives for her agenda

CASE 5: THE MOURNING CONJUGION

Olivia's Account

A woman named Margaret Thorne came to me with a simple request: find her sister.

Margaret is respectable -- well-dressed, educated, wife of a minor official. Her sister, Catherine, had been engaged to a merchant several months prior. The engagement was formalized, a good match, a happy occasion. Catherine was preparing for the wedding when she stopped attending social functions. Within weeks, she was dead.

The death was documented. There was a body -- or something that approximated one. There was a funeral. Catherine Thorne was buried in Hallaset Fields like thousands of others. But Margaret knew something was wrong.

"Catherine's body was wrong," Margaret told me. "Too light. And the funeral director wouldn't let me... wouldn't let me look closely. And the betrothed never came. Not to the funeral, not after. He disappeared."

I'm not in the business of comforting relatives, so I didn't offer false reassurances. Instead, I asked one question: "What do you think happened to her?"

Margaret hesitated, then said something that changed the tenor of the conversation entirely: "I think the Queen took her."

What follows is not a dramatic revelation. Instead, it's a slow accumulation of unsettling details.

Catherine Thorne, I learned, was strikingly beautiful. More than that, she had a particular beauty -- pale skin, red-dark hair, a certain ethereal quality that marked her as unusual. The betrothed, a man named Harrick Solle, had been prosperous but not particularly notable. Except that his business interests included importing rare components from the eastern territories, things that didn't have obvious purpose.

Catherine and Harrick vanished within days of each other. The body at Catherine's funeral was too light, too strange, almost *artificial* in how it failed to be quite right.

I made inquiries and discovered a pattern. Over the past two years, at least seven beautiful young women -- all with similar pale coloring and red-dark hair -- had undergone rapid "illness" leading to death or disappearance. All had been of marriageable age. All had belonged to respectable families. And in every case, the circumstances had been peculiar.

I brought this to Jack Winbow and asked if he'd heard anything. He had, and what he told me was worse than simple abduction.

"They're being replaced," Jack said. "Not the women, something else. Copies. Close enough that families don't immediately realize. But wrong. The replacements don't eat properly. They're too quiet. Their skin is always cold. And they age *wrong* -- they change too quickly, as if someone put them on fast motion."

"Why?" I demanded.

"The women are being taken for the Queen's purposes. The doubles are sent back as... I don't know, misdirection? Proof that the women died naturally? Something. But there's enough wrongness that eventually someone notices, and by then it's too late."

The question of what the Queen wants with beautiful women of a particular type opens several unpleasant avenues of speculation.

Possibilities that occurred to me: Supernatural breeding program. Blood sacrifice for magic of a specific nature. Transformation into servants or lovers for the Queen. Experimentation aimed at creating some new form of being. Or perhaps simply hostages, leverage against families of influence.

I never determined which, though I have guesses.

I did determine where the replacements are being made. There's a craftsman in the city -- someone skilled in glamour and illusion and the creation of *almost-bodies*. Someone who works for the Queen and takes very seriously the task of creating convincing enough duplicates that grief-stricken families don't immediately notice they're holding something other than their daughter.

I documented the pattern. I provided Margaret with evidence that her sister was likely abducted by the Queen's forces, which was simultaneously helpful and terrible. Knowing was better than the liminal space of not-knowing, but knowing and being unable to do anything about it is perhaps worse.

I never rescued Catherine. I documented her disappearance and added her to a list of other abductions that I keep in a code that would be mostly useless if discovered, and that I update when I encounter new cases.

When this is over -- when the Queen falls, if she falls -- I will have plenty of evidence to support war crimes indictments, assuming anyone is interested in justice for the dead and the disappeared.

THE SETUP

The characters are approached by Margaret Thorne with suspicions that her sister was abducted by the Queen's forces. Investigation reveals a pattern of abductions of young women with specific physical characteristics, concurrent with the placement of disturbingly similar but not-quite-right replacements.

This case combines detective work, moral horror, and the question of how to respond to a atrocity when direct intervention is not immediately possible.

The truth is that the Queen (for reasons not fully clear in this case) is collecting young women of a particular type: pale-skinned, red-haired or dark-haired, of unmarked beauty. She's taken at least seven in the last two years and is planning to take more. To minimize investigations, she's commissioned a craftsman to create replacement bodies -- magical constructs designed to closely approximate the missing women. These replacements are imperfect; they age wrong, they don't quite move right, they're cold to the touch. But they're close enough that families mourning their daughters don't immediately realize they're holding something artificial.

The replacements gradually deteriorate over weeks or months, becoming increasingly obviously not-quite-human. The Queen is betting that by then, enough time has passed that no one will connect the deterioration to the original abduction.

KEY NPCS INVOLVED

MARGARET THORNE -- Catherine's sister, 40s, respectable and educated. She's genuinely seeking answers about what happened to Catherine, but she's also aware that those answers might be dangerous. She's willing to support the characters' investigation, though she can't actively participate in operations.

CATHERINE THORNE -- Missing, status unknown. She was beautiful, young, on the brink of marriage. Whether she's still alive is uncertain. She might be imprisoned, transformed, serving the Queen in some capacity, or dead.

HARRICK SOLLE -- Catherine's betrothed, vanished days before the wedding. Investigation might reveal that he's also been taken, or that he was deliberately part of the abduction arrangement. He might even be alive somewhere, serving the Queen's purposes.

THE REPLACEMENT -- The artificial body left in Catherine's place. It's a magical construct of considerable sophistication but is gradually becoming more obviously artificial. It can be studied and might yield information about the Queen's craftsmanship and intent.

THE CRAFTSMAN -- A master of glamour magic and magical construct creation. This person is skilled, amoral, and entirely invested in the Queen's favor. They're probably not in direct contact with the Queen but work through intermediaries. Their true identity is hidden.

THE REPLACEMENT'S COMMISSIONING LIAISON -- The person who delivered specifications for Catherine's replacement. This might be Lady Mireva herself, or it might be a subordinate. This person knows about the overall program and might provide clues about its scope and purpose.

THE OTHER MISSING WOMEN'S FAMILIES -- People who've lost daughters under similar circumstances. They might be allies or sources of information, or they might be suspects if they profited from their daughters' "deaths" (insurance, inheritance, freed marriage contracts, etc.).

LOCATIONS

MARGARET'S HOME -- A respectable house in Kormor Kirak where Margaret lives with her family. It's where the characters first encounter Margaret and where they can examine the replacement Catherine before it deteriorates further.

CATHERINE'S GRAVE -- Hallaset Fields Cemetery holds Catherine's grave, which ostensibly contains her body. If the characters exhume it, they'll find either earth and bone fragments carefully arranged to suggest a body, or an empty grave with no explanation.

THE CRAFTSMAN'S WORKSHOP -- Somewhere in the city, the craftsman maintains a space where replacements are created. This is a protected location, warded and guarded. Finding it requires serious investigation or magical

tracking. Inside are partial replacements, materials for construction, and possibly notes on the Queen's specifications.

THE ABDUCTION SITES -- The locations where each of the missing women were taken. These might be scattered across the city, or there might be a pattern. Some might be places of beauty (gardens, ballrooms, sacred sites), others might be domestic (homes, bedrooms).

THE INTERROGATION ROOMS/HOLDING CELLS -- Wherever the Queen is keeping the missing women. This might be in the castle, or it might be elsewhere. The location is heavily warded and guarded.

THE QUEEN'S PRIVATE CHAMBER -- If the missing women are being kept for the Queen's personal purposes, they might be held in or near her bedchamber, in a level of security that makes rescue extremely difficult.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE MORAL COMPROMISE** -- Even if the characters identify the replacement Catherine, they can't simply destroy it. Destroying what appears to be a dead woman's corpse, even if it's a magical construct, violates cultural norms and could outrage Margaret's family. But keeping it creates ongoing horror and might attract the Queen's attention.
- **THE CRAFTSMAN'S PROTECTION** -- The Craftsman isn't an ordinary artisan. They're magically skilled and protected by multiple layers of security and patronage. Finding them is difficult; defeating them is dangerous.
- **THE MISSING WOMEN'S FATES** -- The characters might discover that some or all of the missing women are dead, or transformed into something unrecognizable, or serving purposes so alien that rescue becomes ambiguous. Not all cases have happy endings.
- **FAMILY COMPLICATIONS** -- Some of the missing women's families might have had a hand in the abductions. Perhaps they sold their daughters to the Queen or accepted the replacements willingly in exchange for compensa-

tion. This creates moral ambiguity and potential conflict with the characters' allies.

- **THE REPLACEMENT PROGRAM'S EXPANSION** -- As the characters investigate, the Queen might accelerate the abduction and replacement process, sensing that her program is being discovered. This creates urgency but also larger numbers of replacements needing to be placed, which could create inconsistencies that help the investigation.
- **THE QUEEN'S USE OF THE CAPTIVES** -- Learning what the Queen wants with the missing women might be worse than not knowing. If they're being experimented on, bred for some purpose, transformed magically, or used as hosts for other entities, revealing this information creates horror and raises the moral stakes.
- **THE BETROTHED'S BETRAYAL** -- Harrick Solle might be revealed as complicit in Catherine's abduction. He might be a willing servant of the Queen, or a coerced one. Finding him could provide crucial information or could create conflict with Margaret if she learns her sister was betrayed by her fiancé.
- **THE LICH CULT'S INTEREST** -- The Lich Cult might be investigating the abductions for their own reasons. They might want the Craftsman's knowledge, or they might be competing with the Queen for the missing women's magical potential.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: THE RESCUE -- The characters locate where the missing women are being held and execute a rescue operation. This requires significant planning, combat or infiltration expertise, and likely involves direct conflict with the Red Guard. Success frees the women but creates long-term complications (the women's psychological state, the Queen's reaction, potential Lich Cult interference).

RESOLUTION 2: THE CRAFTSMAN'S DESTRUCTION -- The characters focus on finding and eliminating the Craftsman, destroying their workshop and their research. This doesn't directly rescue the missing women but stops the creation of new replacements and eliminates a critical part of the Queen's operation.

RESOLUTION 3: THE EXPOSURE -- The characters publicize the abductions and the replacement program, making it impossible for the Queen to continue without causing massive unrest. This might force her to move the missing women elsewhere or abandon the program, but doesn't guarantee the women's survival.

RESOLUTION 4: THE INTERROGATION -- The characters capture a member of the replacement program's support structure (the liaison, a delivery person, a guard) and extract information about the program's scope, the women's location, and the Queen's purpose for collecting them.

RESOLUTION 5: THE CULT COLLABORATION -- The characters approach the Lich Cult and propose a joint operation to disrupt the Queen's abduction program. The cult might be interested in studying the Craftsman's work or in denying resources to the Queen.

RESOLUTION 6: THE TRANSFORMATION -- The characters discover that the missing women have been intentionally transformed into something other than human. Rescue becomes complicated by the question of whether these transformed individuals can be restored or whether they've become something new.

RESOLUTION 7: THE REPLACEMENT EXPLOITATION -- The characters use the replacements as misdirection or propaganda. They make the replacements' artificial nature obvious in ways that undermine public confidence in the Queen's authority, or they use the replacements to deliver messages or gather intelligence.

RESOLUTION 8: THE MERCY -- The characters, unable to rescue the women or stop the program, focus on documenting everything and planning for future

intervention when they have more resources. They provide what aid they can to the missing women's families and commit to addressing this atrocity later.

CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

The abduction and replacement program might be connected to the Comet Chamber project in several ways:

- The missing women might be required as sacrifices during the comet ritual.
- They might be transformed into vessels or servants for the magical working.
- Their specific physical type might align with some property the comet possesses or that the Comet Chamber requires.
- The Craftsman's magical knowledge might be feeding into the Chamber's construction.
- Alternatively, the abductions might be entirely separate from the Chamber -- the Queen might simply be collecting beautiful women for her own purposes, purposes unrelated to the conspiracy but equally dark.

CASE 6: THE SONG THAT BREARS

Olivia's Account

There's a musician in Kormor Kirak whose name is Lysander. He plays the violin. He's technically gifted in a way that makes musicians weep and scholars of beauty take notes. He also came to me with a request that managed to be both simple and absolutely impossible.

"Someone is hunting me," he said. "Someone in service to the Queen. I need to disappear."

Lysander is not a criminal. He's a musician. He came to Kormor Kirak because it's a city with culture, with venues, with people who appreciate artistry. For three years, he played in concert halls and private salons. He was reasonably successful, reasonably happy.

Then the Queen attended one of his performances.

According to Lysander, Kiraline watched his entire concert without moving. When it ended, she left without comment. The next day, an official of the Queen's court approached him with a commission: compose a piece, and perform it for the Queen. Specific length, specific instrumentation, specific emotional trajectory. The Queen would pay handsomely, and Lysander's artistic reputation would be made.

He initially agreed. Why wouldn't he? It was an honor.

But as he began to compose, something strange happened. The music that came out of him felt *wrong*. It wasn't his style, his sensibility, his voice. It was something else moving through his hands. Beautiful, yes, but it wasn't *him*. The piece seemed to be writing itself through him, as if he were a conduit for something trying to reach expression.

Lysander showed me the composition. The musical notation alone made me uncomfortable -- there were passages I couldn't fully read, as if some of the notation was in a system other than standard musical theory. Parts of it seemed designed to *affect* the person listening, not just entertain but to provoke specific emotional or psychological responses.

"I realized," Lysander told me, "that she's not asking me to compose. She's asking me to be a tool for something. The Queen wants this piece played, but not because she enjoys music. She wants it played for a *purpose*. I think... I think it might be magic."

I've encountered magical music before, or at least music designed to have supernatural properties. It's a rare skill, combining musical theory with occult knowledge. The piece Lysander was creating seemed to fit that pattern.

"What happens if you refuse?" I asked.

"I don't know," Lysander said quietly. "No one refuses the Queen. Or if they do, no one hears about it afterward."

I made inquiries about the Queen's interest in music and discovered that it was recent and intense. Lady Mireva had apparently been tasking agents with finding the city's best musicians and presenting them to the Queen for evaluation. Those the Queen deemed "suitable" were given commissions. None of them had produced the works yet; all were still in the composition phase.

This suggested a timeline. The Queen wanted multiple pieces of magical music, completed by a specific date, and then presumably performed together or in sequence. The effect of multiple pieces of magical music performed in conjunction... I had no framework for understanding that, but my instinct was that it would be significant.

I asked Devorlen Koss about magical music and received a lecture on the theory that lasted an hour. The short version: music is mathematics made audible. Magic is will and power applied to pattern. Combine them, and you have a tool of considerable precision. Multiple pieces of magical music performed in harmony creates something exponentially more powerful than individual pieces. And if the music was designed to create a specific emotional or mystical state in a gathered audience, performed music from multiple talented musicians playing in careful coordination...

"That would be a working," Koss said. "A large, coordinated magical working, disguised as art performance. It would require an audience, gathered in a

specific location, with their attention fully engaged. It would be essentially undetectable.”

The Comet Chamber. A venue where the Queen hosts formal state events, where hundreds of Kormor Kirak’s nobility and officials gather. A place where watching a concert performance would be normal and expected.

I connected the pieces. The Queen is commissioning magical music from multiple talented musicians. The pieces are designed to create a cumulative effect on the audience. When the comet arrives, the Queen will hold a grand concert in the Comet Chamber, and the magical music will perform a working on everyone listening -- a working designed to align those listeners with the Queen’s will during the crucial moment when she harnesses the comet’s power.

She’s not just building a machine to harness the comet. She’s building a ceremony, with music as the binding element, with hundreds of her subjects’ minds as conduits.

I helped Lysander disappear. It was relatively simple -- Jack Winbow knows people who are good at making musicians vanish. Lysander is now somewhere in the northern territories, safe, free, unable to compose music that his hands no longer obey. He suffered a complete psychological break from the attempt to create the Queen’s work, and he may never play again.

But at least he’s alive.

The other musicians are still in Kormor Kirak, still composing, still bound by commission and threat. At least two of them are close to completion. I don’t know their names, and I can’t reach them.

I filed this away with the other pieces of the larger puzzle. The Comet Chamber working is more complex than I initially understood. It’s not just astronomical. It’s psychological, magical, and deeply personal. The Queen means to remake her subjects’ loyalty at the moment of the comet’s arrival.

The thought of it keeps me awake in ways I don't appreciate.

THE SETUP

The characters encounter a musician who has been commissioned by the Queen to create a piece of magical music. As the musician attempts to create the work, they realize it has sinister purpose and seek aid to escape the commission. Investigation reveals that the Queen has commissioned multiple such pieces from the city's talented musicians, and the pieces are meant to be performed together as part of a larger magical working during the Comet Chamber's activation.

The truth is that the Queen's plans for the Comet Chamber involve not only astronomical and mechanical elements but also a mystical working that requires her assembled courtiers and officials to be psychologically and magically aligned during the moment of the comet's arrival. The magical music serves as the vector for this alignment -- when all pieces are performed in sequence, the audience's emotions and thoughts will be synchronized, and a prepared working will harness that synchronized consciousness as a conduit for the Queen's magical will.

The musicians are being selected for both their talent and their magical sensitivity. They're being given vague specifications and a specific emotional tenor for their pieces, but not explicit instructions on what they're creating. Most are complying, either because they don't realize the music's true purpose or because they're too frightened to refuse.

KEY NPC S INVOLVED

LYSANDER -- A talented musician, 30s, originally from outside Kormor Kirak. He's intelligent and sensitive, which means he recognized something was wrong with the commission faster than a less perceptive musician might have.

He's traumatized by his attempt to compose the piece and might be reluctant to discuss it or to become involved in later operations.

THE OTHER COMMISSIONED MUSICIANS -- At least three others have been commissioned:

- **MARISSA CAIN**, a pianist known for emotionally evocative work
- **HENRIK VOLKOV**, a composer and conductor
- **SISTER THERESE**, a nun who plays the organ and is musically talented

Each has a different level of awareness about the true purpose of their work.

THE COMMISSIONING OFFICER -- The member of Lady Mireva's network who conducts the selection process and delivers the commissions. This person might be a musician themselves or simply someone with trained ears. They know the Queen's intentions and are carefully vague with the commissioned musicians about the actual purpose of the work.

DEVORLEN KOSS -- The curiosity shop owner has knowledge of magical music theory and might be consulted or investigated.

THE QUEEN'S MAGICAL ADVISOR -- Someone in service to the Queen who designed the working and specified the requirements for each piece of music. This person is deeply skilled in both music and magic, which is a rare combination.

LOCATIONS

CONCERT HALL -- Kormor Kirak has at least one respectable concert hall where performances take place. The final performance of the magical pieces is planned to occur in the Comet Chamber, but rehearsals and preliminary performances might happen elsewhere.

COMET CHAMBER -- The Queen's grand hall where the final performance and working will take place. It's heavily warded, magically prepared, and designed to serve as the focal point for the working.

MUSICIANS' HOMES/WORKSHOPS -- Private spaces where the commissioned musicians live and compose. Finding these locations requires investigation; they might be scattered across the city or clustered in specific neighborhoods known for housing artists.

DEVORLEN KOSS'S CURIOSITIES -- Where knowledge of magical music theory can be obtained.

THE COMMISSIONING OFFICER'S OFFICE -- Somewhere in or near the castle, where the officer receives musicians and delivers commissions.

LYSANDER'S CURRENT HIDING PLACE -- If the characters befriend Lysander, they might need to protect his location or help him remain hidden.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE AUDIENCE'S VULNERABILITY** -- The characters might realize that hundreds of Kormor Kirak's officials, nobles, and important citizens will be present for the concert where the working is performed. The working's success depends on the audience's presence and attention. This creates pressure to either stop the concert or try to prevent the audience from attending.
- **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BREAK** -- Some or all of the musicians might experience psychological breakdowns from attempting to compose music that isn't truly theirs. These breakdowns could manifest as violence, suicide, or catatonia. The characters might have to provide aid or restraint.
- **THE COMPETING MUSICAL WORKS** -- The Lich Cult might also be commissioning musicians to create counter-magical works designed to disrupt the Queen's working. This creates a three-way situation where the characters, the Queen, and the Cult are all investing in the city's musical talent.

- **THE UNWILLING PARTICIPATION** -- One of the musicians might be a person the characters care about or respect. Discovering that they're creating a tool for the Queen's magical will creates moral complexity.
- **THE INCOMPLETE WORK** -- If the characters succeed in preventing one or more musicians from completing their commissioned pieces, the Queen's working will be incomplete, but she might simply reschedule the concert or attempt to force the remaining musicians to complete their work in haste, potentially introducing errors.
- **THE PERFORMANCE AUDIENCE RISK** -- Any attempt to stop the concert risks the safety of the attending nobles and officials. If things go wrong, innocent (or at least unarmed) people might be caught in the crossfire.
- **THE SISTER THERESE COMPLICATION** -- If one of the musicians is a nun in Brother Aldric's order, involving the monastery in protecting her creates complications for the religious community.
- **THE MAGICAL EXPERTISE REQUIRED** -- Disrupting a coordinated magical working requires someone with significant magical knowledge. The characters might need to recruit a wizard or occultist to help them understand and interrupt the Queen's plan.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: THE CONCERT PREVENTION -- The characters prevent the concert from taking place entirely. This might involve threatening violence against the Queen, evacuating the venue, revealing the working's true nature to the assembled nobles, or other methods. Success prevents the working but might create unintended consequences if the gathered people panic.

RESOLUTION 2: THE MUSICIAN RESCUE -- The characters locate the commissioned musicians and help them escape the city before they can complete their work. This stops the musical pieces from being created but requires coordinating multiple escapes.

RESOLUTION 3: THE COUNTER-WORKING -- The characters work with a magical expert to create a counter-working, either a piece of music designed to disrupt the Queen's working or a magical barrier placed in the Comet Chamber to block the working's effect.

RESOLUTION 4: THE FALSE PERFORMANCE -- The characters convince the musicians to perform, but to subtly modify their pieces so that the working doesn't function as intended. This requires careful coordination and high risk of failure, but success seems like compliance while actually sabotaging the plan.

RESOLUTION 5: THE CULT ALLIANCE -- The characters contact the Lich Cult and propose a joint operation to disrupt the concert or take control of it. The cult might commit resources to protect their own interests against the Queen's working.

RESOLUTION 6: THE AUDIENCE CORRUPTION -- The characters warn the intended audience that attending the concert will subject them to magical influence. This might cause the nobles to boycott the event or demand increased security, complicating the Queen's plans.

RESOLUTION 7: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION -- The characters focus on the Queen's magical advisor, the person who designed the working. If they can eliminate or turn this person, the working's design might be disrupted, or the characters might gain crucial information about how to counter it.

RESOLUTION 8: THE TEMPORARY SOLUTION -- The characters accept that they can't prevent the concert but work to protect the audience from the worst effects of the working. They might create protective amulets, prepare a counter-ritual, or position allies throughout the audience to support those affected.

 CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

The magical music working reveals that the Comet Chamber project is not purely about astronomical and mechanical manipulation of the comet's power. It also involves:

- A psychological component designed to align the Queen's subjects' consciousness during the critical moment
- An aesthetic and magical component that combines beauty (music) with dark purpose (enforced alignment)
- A sophisticated understanding of how magic, art, emotion, and collective human consciousness interact
- The Queen's willingness to corrupt art and culture in service of her ambitions

The musicians themselves become victims of the conspiracy, used as tools and broken by the process. This raises the case's emotional stakes and demonstrates how widely the Queen's conspiracies reach into ordinary life.

CASE 7: THE RED JOE

Olivia's Account

The first bodies appeared in the Kornor Kirak River three days after the spring thaw. Not unusual, in a city built around water. But these bodies were wrong in specific ways that caught the attention of anyone paying attention.

They were exsanguinated. Drained. The corpses were pale to the point of translucence, and the water surrounding them held a pink tint that slowly dispersed into the river's current.

The Marketplace Butcher, who supplied much of the city's meat and who also happened to be one of my informants, noticed the pattern. He'd done blood-

work all his life and knew what drained bodies looked like. These weren't the work of anything natural.

"Something's feeding," he told me simply. "Something hungry and big."

I made quiet inquiries and learned that the bodies were from various social strata -- a dockworker, a merchant's child, a nun from the monastery. No pattern of relationship between them that I could immediately identify. But the manner of death was consistent: exsanguinated, placed in the water, left as... I wasn't sure. A message? Feeding? Casual disposal?

Magical creatures had been sighted in Kormor Kirak before. The Queen's servants included various supernatural entities. But direct attacks on the city's population were rare; the Queen preferred to maintain the illusion of control, of order, even if that order was purchased in blood and bone.

This seemed like a breach of that implicit arrangement.

I approached the Red Guard captain I'd made quiet contact with, providing intelligence in exchange for information. He was nervous, which told me the Red Guard knew about the bodies and considered them a problem.

"Something in the water," he told me. "Command is investigating. There's been discussion of restricting river access, but the Queen hasn't authorized it. She doesn't want to cause panic."

"What kind of something?" I pressed.

"Don't know. But we've sent soldiers to patrol the riverside, and we've been authorized to kill anything unusual. Nothing's been found yet. It hunts at night, leaves no tracks, and when it feeds, it's efficient. In and out. The victims are found days later, when the water brings them into populated areas."

I spent the next week on the riverside at night, watching, listening. I encountered nothing but did find additional bodies -- the creature's feeding

frequency was increasing. It had started with one victim every few days. Now it was taking two, sometimes three per night.

The pattern of the feeding locations suggested the creature was moving upriver, hunting progressively through different neighborhoods. Given the river's path, it would eventually reach the most densely populated districts.

On my seventh night of watching, I finally saw something. Not the creature itself, but its aftermath. A young girl, pulled from the water, still warm, the last moments of blood still draining from puncture wounds on her neck.

Vampire. Or something close enough to vampire to make no practical difference.

I didn't know if it was one of the Queen's servants acting without authorization, or if it was a wild creature that had somehow been drawn to the city. I didn't know if the Queen was aware and allowing it, or if it represented a genuine breach in her control.

What I did know was that the feeding was accelerating and that the body count would continue to climb.

I had choices then. Report it to Barron Whitehallow and ask the resistance to help me hunt the thing. Contact the Red Guard and push them toward more aggressive action. Attempt to hunt it myself with whatever local help I could muster. Or -- and this option was tempting -- identify the creature's pattern and wait for it to go upstream into an area I didn't have responsibility for.

I chose what felt like the right balance: I worked with the Marketplace Butcher and several other locals to create a trap system -- a way to identify where the creature would hunt next and to set up a confrontation with multiple prepared people. I brought in Brother Aldric, who had knowledge of supernatural creatures and their weaknesses. I informed Jack Winbow, who supplied silver-tipped weapons that I could distribute.

The confrontation, when it came, was brief and ugly. The creature was a female vampire, feral, intelligent enough to be dangerous but not sophisticated enough to negotiate. She'd been attracted to the city by the abundance of prey and by something else -- magic, perhaps, or the Queen's presence. She'd been feeding for weeks before the bodies started appearing.

We killed her. Not easily, not without cost. Winbow was badly wounded, and one of the Butcher's sons died from the vampire's counterattack. But we killed her, and the killings stopped.

The Queen's response was interesting. No acknowledgment, no formal investigation, no statements about security. The bodies were quietly collected, and the matter was allowed to fade from public consciousness.

But I found later that the Red Guard's patrols increased significantly. The Queen was clearly investigating what had brought the vampire to her city, and more importantly, whether it was a breach in her control or some deliberate action by a rival faction.

I never determined which it was. But I suspect the Queen suspected the Lich Cult -- that the vampire might have been sent to Kormor Kirak as a test, an incursion to see how well the Queen's security held up.

If so, the Queen's response was subtle and measured. Which is to say, she was planning something serious in return.

THE SETUP

A vampire is hunting in Kormor Kirak's rivers, feeding on citizens in increasing numbers. The characters become aware through reports of bodies, requests for aid from concerned parties, or direct encounters with victims. Investigation reveals a pattern of escalating attacks and the clear presence of a predatory supernatural creature. The characters must determine the creature's nature, its origin, and how to stop it before the body count becomes catastrophic.

The vampire is a feral but intelligent female creature, possibly brought to the city deliberately or drawn by the magical activity surrounding the Comet Chamber project. She's been feeding for weeks, but her hunting has only recently created recoverable bodies, as most of her victims disappeared into the river without being found immediately. She's intelligent enough to avoid direct confrontation with large groups, but she's driven by hunger and is becoming bold.

KEY NPCS INVOLVED

THE VAMPIRE CREATURE -- A female vampire, possibly as old as several centuries, possibly only recently turned. She's feral and driven by hunger but displays surprising cunning and strategic thinking. She speaks only rarely, communicating primarily through violence and hunger. She might be capable of negotiation if approached correctly, or she might be entirely inhuman in her orientation.

THE MARKETPLACE BUTCHER -- An informant who notices the pattern of exsanguinated bodies first. He's physically capable and willing to help with a direct solution to the problem.

BROTHER ALDRIC -- Can provide information about supernatural creatures, weaknesses, and countermeasures. He's willing to help but prefers non-lethal solutions if possible.

THE RED GUARD CAPTAIN -- The military officer in charge of security for the riverside areas. He's investigating the killings but is constrained by Queen's orders not to cause public panic. He might be convinced to aid the characters if they solve the problem without making it a public spectacle.

THE VAMPIRE'S VICTIMS -- Various people of different social strata who were attacked and might survive with aid. Some are completely drained and beyond help. Others might be saved if found in time and treated appropriately.

Jack Winbow -- Can provide weapons suitable for fighting supernatural creatures and might personally participate in a confrontation if the characters ask. He does this as a dangerous kindness, not for sport. He does this as a dangerous kindness, not for sport. He does this as a dangerous kindness, not for sport. He does this as a dangerous kindness, not for sport. He does this as a dangerous kindness, not for sport.

LADY MIREVA -- Possibly aware of the vampire's presence. She might have sent the creature deliberately or might be investigating its origin.

LOCATIONS

THE RIVERSIDE -- The river that runs through Kormor Kirak, including the specific areas where bodies have been found. The riverside is multiple locations: docks, water mills, residential areas near the water, isolated sections where the creature hunts.

THE CREATURE'S LAIR -- Somewhere in or near the river system, a location where the vampire rests during the day. Finding this location requires investigation and tracking. It might be a cave system, an abandoned building, or somewhere hidden beneath the water.

THE MARKETPLACE -- Where the Butcher works and where discussions about the bodies and the situation take place.

BROTHER ALDRIC'S MONASTERY -- Where supernatural knowledge and support can be obtained.

THE RED GUARD'S RIVERSIDE WATCH POSTS -- Temporary stations where the Red Guard monitors the river. These might be secured or might be vulnerable to the vampire's infiltration.

JACK WINBOW'S ARMORY -- Where weapons suitable for fighting the vampire can be obtained or created.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE CIVILIAN DANGER** -- Any confrontation with the vampire in populated areas risks civilian casualties. The creature might deliberately hunt in crowded areas to create confusion and escape opportunities.
- **THE VAMPIRE'S VULNERABILITY TIMELINE** -- If the vampire is a recently created creature, she might be more feral and unpredictable but also less experienced. If she's ancient, she's more intelligent and dangerous but might also have known weaknesses or vulnerabilities.
- **THE QUEEN'S AUTHORIZATION QUESTION** -- The characters might struggle with whether the vampire is under the Queen's control, deliberately released by her, allowed by her as a test, or completely independent. Different answers lead to different strategic approaches.
- **THE LICH CULT'S CONNECTION** -- The Lich Cult might be interested in the vampire for various reasons: to study her, to control her, to use her against the Queen, or to study her response to the attack. Cult agents might be watching the situation and might intervene.
- **THE CREATURE'S INTELLIGENCE** -- The vampire might prove more intelligent and capable of negotiation than expected. If she can be reasoned with, killing her becomes a moral choice rather than a clear imperative. Alternatively, she might be entirely feral, in which case negotiation is impossible.
- **THE HEALING QUESTION** -- If some of the vampire's victims survive the attack but are wounded or partially drained, they present medical challenges. Do they need to be isolated to prevent potential infection? How are they treated? Their survival might depend on the characters' medical or magical knowledge.
- **THE ESCALATION** -- If the characters take too long to address the problem, the vampire's feeding becomes more bold and more frequent. She

might attack official Red Guard patrols, hunt in daylight, or take multiple victims in a single location.

- **THE PROPHECY OR PATTERN** -- The vampire's arrival and feeding might be connected to the larger conspiracy. Some characters might suspect that the vampire's presence is related to the Comet Chamber project, the Lich Cult's activities, or some other larger force.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: THE DIRECT KILL -- The characters hunt down the vampire in her lair or corner her during a hunting expedition and kill her in direct combat. This requires planning, combat expertise, and knowledge of the vampire's weaknesses (silver, holy water, sunlight, etc.). Success ends the threat but requires overcoming a dangerous opponent.

RESOLUTION 2: THE SUNLIGHT TRAP -- The characters discover where the vampire rests during the day and either kill her then or trap her in a location where sunlight will destroy her at dawn. This is less combat-intensive than a night confrontation but requires patience and careful planning.

RESOLUTION 3: THE NEGOTIATION -- The characters approach the vampire and attempt to negotiate with her. They might offer her other sources of sustenance, demand she leave the city, or propose an arrangement that sates her hunger without requiring attacks on innocent people. Success depends on the vampire's intelligence and reasonableness.

RESOLUTION 4: THE RELOCATION -- The characters don't kill the vampire but instead drive her out of the city, forcing her to hunt elsewhere. This might involve making the river and surrounding areas less hospitable to her or creating a corridor of danger she can't cross.

RESOLUTION 5: THE CULT INVOLVEMENT -- The characters contact the Lich Cult and propose a joint operation against the vampire. The cult might help

contain or control the vampire, or might betray the characters once the immediate threat is resolved.

RESOLUTION 6: THE QUEEN'S SOLUTION -- The characters inform the Red Guard of the vampire's location and allow the Queen's military forces to handle the problem. This is politically easier but means the characters don't determine the outcome and might not trust that the Queen will actually solve the problem.

RESOLUTION 7: THE SACRIFICE -- The characters determine that the vampire can't be killed without significant risk and can't be driven away. Instead, they establish a feeding arrangement where criminals, prisoners, or others deemed acceptable by the Queen are delivered to the vampire in exchange for her not hunting the general population.

RESOLUTION 8: THE ORIGIN INVESTIGATION -- Rather than immediately addressing the vampire, the characters focus on determining her origin and purpose. If she was sent deliberately, they investigate who sent her and why. This might reveal larger conspiracies and lead to addressing the root cause rather than just the symptom.

CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

The vampire's appearance and feeding might be connected to the Comet Chamber project in several ways:

- The magical activity surrounding the Chamber might be attracting vampires or other supernatural creatures to the city.
- The Lich Cult might have deliberately sent the vampire to test the Queen's security or to create chaos.
- The vampire might be one of the Queen's servants, deliberately feeding to accumulate magical energy that will be used in the Comet Chamber working.

- The Queen's tolerance for the vampire might indicate that she's aware of its presence and finds it useful, suggesting deeper connections to her plans.

Alternatively, the vampire might be entirely independent, attracted by the concentration of magical power and prey opportunity that Kormor Kirak represents. Not everything in the conspiracy is directly connected to the Comet Chamber; some threats emerge simply because the city has become a focal point for supernatural activity.

CASE 8: THE CURATOR'S COLLECTION

Olivia's Account

Devorlen Koss came to me with something that was very nearly an apology, which in Koss's case meant a quiet conversation in his shop after hours with expensive tea.

"There's something in the collection," he said, "that shouldn't be viewed. I've been offered significant coin to describe it, show sketches of it, even sell access to it. And I'm declining those offers, which is putting me in difficult circumstances. I'm bringing this to you because you're less likely to shoot me than some of my other contacts would be."

Koss's collection is... extensive. His curiosities shop operates on multiple levels, with the public-facing business serving as cover for a deeper operation where truly dangerous items are kept and carefully controlled. Koss has spent decades curating objects of power and significance, keeping them away from those who would misuse them and from those who would become obsessed with them.

Most of his collection is relatively straightforward: rare books, alchemical apparatus, magical artifacts of historical significance. But he's also a collector

of dangerous things. Cursed objects. Items capable of causing serious harm if activated. Objects tied to historical traumas or catastrophes.

The item in question was something he'd acquired years ago, before the Queen came to power. It's a device. A mechanism. And according to Koss, it's a *focus* -- something designed to concentrate magical energy in a way that parallels and amplifies what the Queen is building in the Comet Chamber.

"It's older," Koss told me. "Much older. Centuries, at least. Possibly older than the city itself. It was created by someone very powerful, for a purpose I haven't fully determined. But the design principles... they're the same as what the Queen is implementing. The Queen is either reverse-engineering this device or is consciously replicating a design that's been known to powerful mages for generations."

I examined the device under Koss's guidance. It's beautiful in an unsettling way -- geometric precision, surfaces inlaid with materials that shimmer and shift when viewed at certain angles, and at its center, a space where something was meant to be placed. The central chamber was empty but clearly designed to hold something of significance.

"What was placed there?" I asked.

"Don't know," Koss said. "And I'm not curious enough to speculate extensively. But the historical record suggests it might have been a celestial object. A meteorite, possibly. The device is aligned to celestial mechanics in ways that suggest a deep knowledge of astronomy and astrology."

"And the Queen wants this?"

"Almost certainly," Koss said. "People have been asking about it for months. Subtle inquiries. People trying to purchase it through intermediaries. People offering bribes for its location or description. And now the inquiries are becoming less subtle. If the Queen realizes I have this device and that I'm not willing to sell it, my shop is going to become a target."

Koss wanted me to do something I'm not good at: make a decision on behalf of others.

"What's the least bad option?" I asked.

"Remove the device from my shop and hide it somewhere the Queen can't find it. This removes the immediate threat to me and prevents the Queen from acquiring it. But it also prevents anyone from studying it or understanding what it is, which means we remain ignorant about one piece of what the Queen is building."

"Or?" I prompted.

"Or allow specific trusted people to study it in place. Keep it hidden but accessible to those who might understand it better than I do. This is riskier -- more people knowing about it increases the chance the Queen learns of its location -- but it means we gain knowledge."

I made inquiries about the device's historical context and found scattered references: a pre-Queen mage named Serath, known for astronomical work. A device of his creation described vaguely in texts as a "comet-aligning apparatus." And historical records of that same device being sought by various power-hungry individuals over the centuries, none of whom successfully located it until Koss found it in a private collection decades ago.

This is significantly larger than a single case. The device implies that comet-channeling technology has been known to powerful mages for centuries. The Queen isn't inventing something new; she's reproducing something old. And that something old might have a history of catastrophic consequences.

I decided that the knowledge was too important to leave untouched. I worked with Koss to move the device to a secure location outside the city but accessible to the monastery scholars and potentially to other mages I could trust. In exchange, I promised Koss that when this is over, he wouldn't be held

responsible for having concealed the device or for the complications that might arise from its study.

It's a poor promise, but it was all I could offer.

The device now sits in a hidden location, being studied by Brother Aldric and a scholar he brought in quietly. And every day it remains accessible to multiple people is a day the Queen might discover its location. But every day it remains undestroyed is a day we gain knowledge about what the Queen is building and what consequences her plans might have.

THE SETUP

The characters learn of a historical artifact in Devorlen Koss's collection -- an ancient device designed to channel and focus celestial/comet power, created centuries ago by a powerful mage. The Queen's agents are becoming aware of the device's existence and are actively seeking it. The characters must decide whether to help Koss hide it, study it, destroy it, or use it for their own purposes. Investigation reveals that the device might be crucial to understanding both the Queen's Comet Chamber plans and their potential consequences.

The device is real, functional, and dangerous. It's designed to amplify and direct magical energy related to celestial bodies, and its presence in Kormor Kirak is a wild card that multiple factions want to control or eliminate. Koss has been protecting it for decades but is now threatened with exposure.

KEY NPC S INVOLVED

DEVORLEN KOSS -- The curiosity shop owner and collector of dangerous objects. He's been protecting this device for years and is genuinely concerned about what might happen if the Queen acquires it. He's willing to help the characters but won't take excessive risks; his primary goal is to preserve his life and business.

THE SCHOLAR INTERESTED IN THE DEVICE -- A mage or academic who might be brought in to study the device. This could be Brother Aldric, a member of the Lich Cult, an Albion researcher, or someone else entirely. Whoever studies it might become obsessed with understanding its mechanisms and uses.

THE QUEEN'S ACQUISITOR -- The agent of the Queen tasked with locating the device. This person is motivated, dangerous, and has significant resources. They might be Lady Mireva herself or one of her subordinates.

SERATH THE ANCIENT MAGE -- A historical figure who created the original device. She's dead, but her writings, journals, and the designs of her work might be accessible through research. Understanding Serath's purpose for creating the device helps reveal the Queen's likely intentions.

THE PREVIOUS OWNERS -- Koss acquired the device from someone; that person acquired it from someone else. Tracing the device's ownership history might reveal what happened to previous owners and what forces have been hunting the device for centuries.

LOCATIONS

KOSS'S CURIOSITIES -- The shop where the device is currently hidden. It's a secure location, but it's also becoming increasingly dangerous as the Queen's agents close in.

THE HIDDEN LOCATION -- Where the characters might move the device to keep it away from the Queen. This could be the monastery, a private safe house, a location in the countryside, or another secure location.

THE STUDY LOCATION -- If the characters decide to study the device, they need a place to do so safely, without interruption, and with access to resources. The monastery is a logical choice, but other options might present fewer complications.

SERATH'S ARCHIVE -- A location where the original mage's writings and designs might be stored. This might be a hidden library, a sealed tomb, a private collection, or a location known only to a few scholars.

THE QUEEN'S COLLECTION CHAMBER -- Somewhere in or near the castle where acquired artifacts are stored. If the device reaches this location, retrieving it becomes exponentially more difficult.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE ACQUISITION PRESSURE** -- The Queen's agents increase pressure on Koss, threatening his business, his safety, or his contacts. This creates urgency and forces the characters to act quickly.
- **THE STUDY TEAM'S OBSESSION** -- Whoever studies the device might become increasingly fascinated by it and resistant to letting it go or hiding it. They might want to activate it "just to see what it does," which would be catastrophic.
- **THE DEVICE'S PARTIAL ACTIVATION** -- If the device is disturbed or transported without proper care, it might partially activate, creating magical effects or attracting supernatural attention. This could expose its location to the Queen.
- **THE LICH CULT'S INTEREST** -- The Cult might learn of the device and attempt to acquire it themselves, either to study it or to prevent the Queen from having it.
- **THE PREVIOUS OWNER'S RETURN** -- Someone from the device's history might appear seeking to reclaim it. They might be an enemy or an ally, but they certainly have their own agenda.
- **SERATH'S CURSE** -- The original mage might have placed protections on the device that activate if certain conditions are met. Studying the device might trigger a curse that harms those who touch it.

- **THE RESEARCHER'S DISCOVERY** -- During study of the device, the characters' researchers might discover that the Queen's Comet Chamber project isn't new -- it's a recurring phenomenon, with previous mages attempting similar things in previous centuries, most of them failing catastrophically. This suggests the Queen's plans might end in disaster.
- **THE ACTIVATION QUESTION** -- The characters might learn that the device is designed not to prevent comet channeling but to *control* it in specific ways. Activating the device (or preventing its activation) during the comet's arrival might be the crucial variable that determines the outcome.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: THE SAFE HIDING -- The characters help Koss move the device to a hidden location far from the Queen's reach. The device is preserved but remains unstudied, which means the characters learn nothing about its true purpose.

RESOLUTION 2: THE SCHOLARLY STUDY -- The characters establish a secure location where the device can be studied without risk of discovery. Scholars examine its mechanisms, research its history, and attempt to understand both its original purpose and its implications for the Queen's plans.

RESOLUTION 3: THE DESTRUCTION -- The characters decide that the device is too dangerous to allow to exist. They destroy it, eliminating the Queen's ability to acquire it but also destroying a potentially valuable source of knowledge about comet-channeling technology.

RESOLUTION 4: THE ACQUISITION -- The characters allow the Queen to believe she's acquiring the device while actually giving her a fake or corrupted version. This satisfies her desire for the object while keeping the real device safe.

RESOLUTION 5: THE CULT INVOLVEMENT -- The characters approach the Lich Cult and offer them access to the device's study in exchange for their assistance in keeping it away from the Queen.

RESOLUTION 6: THE DEVICE'S ACTIVATION -- Against better judgment or through accident, the device is activated. The characters must deal with the magical consequences and determine whether the device's functions support or oppose the Queen's plans.

RESOLUTION 7: THE SERATH ARCHIVE -- The characters locate Serath's archive and study the original creator's notes. They learn the device's true purpose and how it can be used to prevent or enable the Queen's Comet Chamber project.

RESOLUTION 8: THE TRADE -- The characters offer the device to the Queen in exchange for something significant -- safety, information, leverage, or the release of prisoners. This betrays Koss but might preserve the characters' lives and grant them significant advantages.

CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

The device is a crucial piece of the larger conspiracy puzzle. It reveals:

- Comet-channeling technology is not new; it's been known to powerful mages for centuries
- The Queen's Comet Chamber project is not entirely original; she's reproducing or improving upon a historical design
- The device's previous attempts suggest a pattern of comet-channeling attempts, with unclear outcomes
- The device might be a key to either enabling or preventing the Queen's plans during the comet's arrival

- Understanding the device and its history might reveal why the Queen believes harnessing the comet's power is necessary and what she expects to achieve

The device represents knowledge and power that multiple factions want to control. Acquiring, studying, or destroying it might be the most important decision the characters make.

CASE 9: THE PRISONER'S PARADOX

Olivia's Account

Istvan the Jailer came to me because he had a prisoner he didn't know what to do with.

Istvan is not a good man. He's the dungeon keeper in the castle, responsible for maintaining the Queen's prisoners and extracting such information as can be extracted through suffering and deprivation. He's efficient at his work and takes a grim professional pride in his competence. But he's not a sadist; he doesn't torture for pleasure, and when he's given an impossible order, he comes to people he trusts to help navigate it.

The prisoner is a scholar named Tobias Wren, brought to the castle under unknown circumstances approximately three months ago. He's not a political prisoner or a prisoner of war. He was abducted specifically, for reasons the Queen has never articulated.

"He won't break," Istvan told me. "I've tried everything. He has no information to hide, no allegiances to betray. He's just... a scholar. He was taken from his library. He works as a scribe and archivist for the resistance."

Ah.

"The Queen knows?" I asked.

"Must know. Must be testing him."

I met with Tobias, which required pretending to be someone with authority to interrogate him. He was thin from imprisonment, but his mind was sharp. The first thing he asked was whether I was going to hurt him. When I said no, he began to talk.

According to Tobias, the Queen had very specific questions. About magical notation systems. About ancient texts describing celestial phenomena. About methods for transcribing and preserving information about astronomical events. And most specifically, about a text he'd been working on before his capture -- a historical analysis of previous comet arrivals and what happened in their wake.

"She wants the book," Tobias said. "She wants to know what I wrote about the previous comets. But I never finished it. I was brought here before completion. So I tell her the truth, that the book isn't finished, and she doesn't believe me. She thinks I'm lying, hiding the information, protecting it from her."

"What did you write?" I asked. "In the parts you finished?"

"That the last major comet arrival, nearly three hundred years ago, resulted in something extraordinary and terrible. The person who tried to harness its power succeeded. And it destroyed her. Not killed, exactly. But it unmade her. As if the power was too much for a single consciousness to contain."

I felt something click into place.

"The Queen is trying to do what she did?"

"Almost certainly," Tobias said. "Or the Queen doesn't know the history and thinks she can succeed where previous attempts failed."

I brought this to Barron Whitehallow, who became very quiet for a long moment before asking me to help with something delicate.

The plan was to get Tobias out of the castle. It had to appear that he'd escaped, because if the Queen discovered that he'd been deliberately freed, she'd know that someone in the castle was working against her. But if he escaped, his value to the resistance would be reinstated, and more importantly, his knowledge would be available to us.

Getting Tobias out required help from multiple sources. Istvan agreed to leave a specific door unlocked on a specific night. Jack Winbow arranged for a smuggling route out of the castle. Brother Aldric provided safe harbor until Tobias could be moved to the resistance's main safe house.

The escape was clean. Tobias left with minimal violence, and the castle's security protocols made it seem like he'd exploited a vulnerability rather than been deliberately released.

But now the Queen knows that someone helped him escape. She knows that there's at least one person in her castle working against her. She's investigating, tightening security, probably reassigning guards and interrogators.

And she still doesn't have Tobias's book. But now she knows that the book exists and that it contains information about the fate of the last person to attempt harnessing a comet's power.

I filed the information away with the rest. The Queen's Comet Chamber project is either going to succeed spectacularly or fail catastrophically. There seems to be no middle ground. And the Queen apparently doesn't know about the previous failure, or doesn't believe the account, or is confident she can succeed where her predecessor failed.

I spent a night reviewing everything I'd learned and realized that I've been operating on the assumption that the Queen will ultimately succeed in her

plans. But what if she doesn't? What if the Comet Chamber works exactly as designed and kills her in the process?

That's a different kind of catastrophe.

THE SETUP

The characters learn of a prisoner in the castle -- a scholar named Tobias Wrren who possesses crucial knowledge about the Comet Chamber project's true risks. The Queen has imprisoned him to extract a historical manuscript he was writing about previous comet-channeling attempts and their outcomes. The characters must decide whether to attempt a rescue, and if so, how to manage it without revealing that assistance was provided. Investigation reveals that the Queen's plans might be repeating a cycle that has ended in disaster before.

Tobias is being held in the castle's dungeons and is being interrogated regularly. He's not being tortured in the traditional sense -- the Queen is using psychological pressure, isolation, and the threat of harm to his family to coerce him. He's resistant but not indefinitely; eventually, pressure will break him or the Queen will lose patience and simply execute him.

KEY NPC S INVOLVED

TOBIAS WRREN -- A scholar, 50s, resilient but under considerable strain. He's a member of the resistance and has valuable knowledge about historical comet phenomena. He's willing to provide information and help but is also realistic about the risks and his own limitations.

ISTVAN THE JAILER -- The castle's dungeon keeper, a man with a code of conduct that doesn't involve unnecessary cruelty. He's willing to help with Tobias's escape because he's disgusted by the Queen's methods and because he respects Tobias's refusal to break under pressure.

TOBIAS'S HANDLER (THE QUEEN'S INTERROGATOR) -- The officer tasked with extracting information from Tobias. This person might be Lady Mireva directly or one of her subordinates. They're competent and won't be easily fooled by a false escape narrative.

BARRON WHITEHALLOW -- The resistance leader who wants Tobias extracted and his knowledge preserved for the resistance's use.

THE QUEEN -- Kiraline appears only peripherally in this case, but her interest in Tobias's manuscript directly relates to her understanding of the Comet Chamber project's risks.

TOBIAS'S FAMILY -- People he cares about whom the Queen might threaten or harm. Their safety is a consideration in any escape plan.

LOCATIONS

THE CASTLE DUNGEONS -- Where Tobias is imprisoned. The location is secure but has established security protocols that the characters might be able to exploit.

THE INTERROGATION CHAMBER -- Where Tobias is regularly questioned. He might be vulnerable during transfers to and from this location.

THE ESCAPE ROUTE -- The path designed to get Tobias out of the castle. This might be through sewers, through secret passages, through the kitchen, or through military routes.

THE SAFE HOUSE -- Where Tobias is hidden after escaping. This needs to be secure and not immediately connected to the characters.

THE RESISTANCE'S MAIN BASE -- Where Tobias can eventually go for long-term shelter.

TOBIAS'S LIBRARY/WORKSHOP -- The location where he was working on his manuscript before capture. The characters might visit here to understand his research.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- **THE FAMILY THREAT** -- The Queen has made credible threats against Tobias's family members. Rescuing Tobias without protecting his family is incomplete, but protecting his family requires expanding the rescue operation significantly.
- **THE MANUSCRIPT** -- Tobias's original manuscript was confiscated by the Queen when he was arrested. If the characters want to preserve his research, they need to recover the original manuscript or reconstruct it from memory.
- **THE FALSE ESCAPE NARRATIVE** -- Setting up the escape to look like Tobias exploited a security vulnerability requires careful staging. If the deception is discovered too quickly, it points to someone in the castle helping him.
- **THE INVESTIGATION AFTERMATH** -- After Tobias's escape, the Queen will investigate thoroughly. Security will be tightened. Multiple people might be interrogated or executed on suspicion of helping. This creates guilt and potential later discovery of whoever helped facilitate the escape.
- **THE INFORMANT** -- Someone in the castle might betray the escape attempt to the Queen. The characters need to identify and neutralize this risk without creating obvious instability.
- **TOBIAS'S INTERROGATION BREAKDOWN** -- Tobias is strong-willed, but he's not superhuman. If the escape is delayed or complicated, he might eventually break under pressure and reveal information he's been protecting, including information about the resistance.

- **THE GUARD ROTATION CHANGE** -- The Queen might change the guard rotation or procedures in a way that makes the planned escape impossible. The characters need flexibility to adapt to changing conditions.
- **THE MAGICAL TRACKING** -- The Queen might have placed magical wards or tracking sigils on Tobias during his imprisonment. After escape, he might be magically traceable, leading the Queen's forces directly to him.

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

RESOLUTION 1: THE DIRECT RESCUE -- The characters plan and execute a direct rescue operation, infiltrating the castle dungeons and extracting Tobias by force or clever deception. This is dangerous but fastest and ensures the characters control the outcome.

RESOLUTION 2: THE STAGED ESCAPE -- Working with Istvan and other sympathetic castle personnel, the characters create a false security breach that allows Tobias to appear to escape through his own effort. This is slower but maintains the appearance of normal procedures.

RESOLUTION 3: THE TRADE -- The characters negotiate with the Queen through intermediaries, offering her something valuable in exchange for Tobias's release. This might be information, artifacts, or a commitment to a future service.

RESOLUTION 4: THE MAGICAL COUNTER -- The characters identify any magical tracking on Tobias and neutralize it, allowing him to escape without being traced. This requires magical expertise but is less dangerous than direct rescue.

RESOLUTION 5: THE FAMILY EXTRACTION -- The characters first secure Tobias's family members, removing the Queen's leverage. This allows Tobias to escape without fear of reprisal against those he cares about but requires expanding the operation.

RESOLUTION 6: THE SUBSTITUTE -- The characters create a magical simulacrum or find another prisoner to leave in Tobias's place, buying time before the Queen discovers the deception.

RESOLUTION 7: THE CULT ASSISTANCE -- The characters contact the Lich Cult and ask for their help. The cult might have resources or inside knowledge that makes the rescue possible, but partnership with the cult has long-term complications.

RESOLUTION 8: THE DELAYED RESCUE -- The characters determine that immediate rescue is too dangerous and instead focus on documenting Tobias's situation, improving his conditions, and planning a larger operation to extract him later when the Queen's focus is elsewhere.

CONNECTIONS TO THE LARGER CONSPIRACY

Tobias's manuscript and knowledge are crucial to understanding the Comet Chamber project:

- Previous comet-channeling attempts have been made, with the most recent being approximately 300 years ago
- The last such attempt appears to have succeeded but resulted in catastrophic consequences for the person attempting it -- essentially self-destruction
- The Queen either doesn't know about this precedent, doesn't believe the account, or is confident she can succeed where her predecessor failed
- Tobias's research might contain the method for preventing the catastrophic outcome, or it might confirm that the outcome is inevitable
- The Queen's desperation to obtain Tobias's manuscript suggests she's aware the project carries serious risks and is seeking information about how to mitigate them

CASE 10: THE CONVERGENCE

Olivia's Account

I don't have an elegant way to describe this case, so I'll simply lay out what I discovered.

By month six of my time in Kormor Kirak, I had accumulated enough pieces of the larger puzzle to see a shape forming. Not a complete picture -- I'm still lacking crucial information -- but a pattern that suggested the endgame was approaching.

The bone harvesting had reached approximately 65 prisoners. Volkmar's work was accelerating, and there were whispers of expanded facilities being prepared. The Comet Chamber itself was nearing completion; the astronomical alignments were finalizing, and construction crews were being withdrawn. The magical musicians had nearly completed their compositions, and rehearsals were being scheduled for early autumn. The device in Devorlen Koss's collection had become a point of intense, focused interest; multiple factions were making inquiries and subtle threats.

All of these separate operations were converging on a single point: autumn. Approximately three months away. The comet would be at its closest approach in late autumn. The Queen was preparing for something massive.

I did what I always do when things become too large to hold in my head: I documented everything. I created a timeline:

- Month 7: Magical musicians complete compositions, rehearsals in the Comet Chamber begin
- Month 8: Bone preparation reaches completion, 100 prisoners' worth of material has been refined to the Queen's specifications

- Month 8-9: Final astronomical adjustments to the Comet Chamber apparatus
- Month 9: Convergence. The comet reaches closest approach. The Comet Chamber is fully operational. The magical music is ready. The Queen conducts a grand ceremony in the chamber, with hundreds of her nobles and officials present.

During that ceremony, several things happen simultaneously:

1. The magical music, performed in harmony, creates a unified magical working that aligns the consciousness and will of the assembled audience with the Queen's intention.
2. The Comet Chamber's astronomical apparatus, activated with the bone substrate Volkmar prepared, channels the comet's approaching power through the chamber's focal apparatus.
3. The Queen, standing at the center of the chamber, surrounded by unified consciousness and with the comet's power flowing through her, attempts to absorb and harness that power for herself.

The intended outcome is transformational. The Queen believes this will grant her power beyond anything she currently possesses -- immortality, supernatural strength, magical dominion, or some combination of those things.

The unintended outcome, based on Tobias's research and the historical precedent of 300 years ago, is catastrophic failure. The amount of power is too much. The Queen is unmade. Or she succeeds, but the working is unstable, and the released power devastates Kormor Kirak itself.

There's also a third possibility: she succeeds, and something worse emerges from her transformation. A Queen-thing that is no longer quite human, operating on motivations we don't understand, wielding power we can't control.

I've been running calculations in my head for days, trying to determine what the characters -- what *I* -- should do with this information. The obvious options all seem inadequate:

- Warn the resistance to prevent the ceremony -- they might believe me, or I might be killed as a spy delivering misinformation
- Attempt to sabotage the Comet Chamber itself -- this is possible but extremely difficult and might trigger the Queen's plans early
- Rescue the remaining prisoners to prevent the bone working -- this might stop the ceremony but the Queen would surely retaliate
- Extract Tobias's manuscript and the scholar's complete knowledge -- this might allow us to understand the consequences better, but understanding doesn't equal prevention
- Warn the assembled nobles to boycott the ceremony -- this might work, but the Queen would know there's a traitor in her court and would escalate her security and her timeline

Every option I consider has merits and limitations. And every option requires me to make decisions that affect hundreds of people, with insufficient information and minimal certainty of success.

This is the problem with investigations in a city like Kormor Kirak. You gather information. You see patterns. But you can't fully control the outcome. You can nudge events, create obstacles, provide alternatives. But you can't guarantee anything.

I've decided to prepare for multiple contingencies simultaneously. I'm working with the resistance on evacuation plans, in case the ceremony triggers a catastrophe. I'm working with Jack Winbow to identify escape routes out of the city. I'm working with Brother Aldric to prepare sanctuary locations for refugees. I'm documenting everything so that if this goes wrong, at least there's a record.

And I'm positioning myself to be in or near the Comet Chamber when the ceremony occurs. If the Queen's working succeeds, I want to understand what she's becoming. If it fails, I want to be there to navigate the chaos.

I don't have confidence in any of this. But I have commitment, and commitment in the absence of confidence is what keeps you moving forward in places like Kormor Kirak.

When this is over -- when the comet passes or falls from the sky or some other outcome manifests -- I imagine I'll have a lot more stories to tell.

Assuming I'm alive to tell them.

THE SETUP

The characters reach a point where they can see the full scope of the Queen's plans converging toward a specific date and event: a grand ceremony in the Comet Chamber, timed to the comet's closest approach. At this ceremony, the Queen intends to perform a massive magical working that will channel the comet's power into herself. The working depends on multiple factors: the astronomical alignments, the prepared bone substrate, the magical music, and a gathered audience of her closest supporters. The characters must decide how to respond to this knowledge. Do they attempt to prevent the ceremony? Do they try to sabotage elements of the working? Do they prepare for consequences? Do they attempt rescue operations before the ceremony? All options have merits and risks.

This final case is intentionally open-ended. It's not a case to be solved but a situation to be navigated. The GM should use this case as the culmination of previous investigations, bringing together the threads from earlier cases into a final challenge.

KEY NPCs INVOLVED

All major NPCs from previous cases are relevant here, as are the Queen herself, Barron Whitehallow, and any other allies or enemies the characters have accumulated.

LOCATIONS

The Comet Chamber is the central location, but other locations from previous cases are also relevant as sites for preparation, sabotage, or rescue.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- The Lich Cult has their own plans for the ceremony
- The Queen's timeline might accelerate if she becomes aware of opposition
- Multiple rescue operations (prisoners, musicians, etc.) might conflict with each other
- Sabotaging one element of the working might activate contingency plans
- The ceremony itself might occur regardless of preparation efforts

RESOLUTION OPTIONS

The resolution of this case depends entirely on the characters' choices across all previous cases and their decisions regarding the ceremony. The GM should treat this as the culmination of the supplement, allowing for multiple possible endings based on how thoroughly the characters have prepared, whom they've allied with, and what resources they've accumulated.

USING THIS SUPPLEMENT

These ten cases are designed to be played in any order and with significant flexibility. Each case:

- Provides a complete investigation scenario with investigation hooks, potential NPCs, and locations
- Includes multiple resolution paths, allowing for genuine player choice
- Connects to the larger conspiracy while remaining playable as a standalone scenario
- Demonstrates the variety of challenges in Kormor Kirak, from street-level investigations to grand conspiracies

The final case, "The Convergence," should be positioned as the culmination of the supplement, bringing together threads from previous investigations into a final challenge. However, the specific timing and implementation should depend entirely on the choices and progress of the characters.

RECOMMENDED PROGRESSION: Cases can be played in any order, but Case 10 should ideally be the final case encountered, as it synthesizes information from the others.

End of Olivia's Journal

CAPITULUM

ELUE & EWYDENE HANDOUTS

A Supplement for The Eternal Court: Gothic Gaslamp Fantasy TTRPG

INTRODUCTION: HOW TO USE THESE HANDOUTS

The handouts in this supplement are designed to be *printed, cut, and physically handed to your players* during their investigations. Rather than describing what Olivia and her companions find, you can instead place an actual document into their hands -- immersing them in the discovery process.

Each handout is written as an authentic artifact from 1793 Kormor Kirak: a letter, receipt, decree, coded message, or journal entry. The text itself appears as the characters would encounter it, complete with period-appropriate language and formatting quirks.

TO PREPARE THESE HANDOUTS:

1. Print the handout text on appropriate paper (cream or aged paper adds atmosphere).
2. Optional: Stain with tea or coffee, singe edges, crumple, or tear strategically to match the handout's "condition."
3. Use different handwriting styles or scripts if printing in-character documents.
4. Cut each handout from the page and store separately.

5. Hand to players at the moment their investigation uncovers that piece of evidence.

FOR EACH HANDOUT, a GM Note explains what information it conveys, how it connects to broader conspiracies, and what players might reasonably deduce. The cipher keys for coded messages appear in these notes, not in the handouts themselves -- preserving the puzzle for your table.

HANDOUT #1: THE INTERCEPTED LETTER

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 3 -- "The Torony Piros Visitor"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[Sealed with red wax bearing a crescent moon sigil]

Dearest Cousin,

Our mutual friend informs me that the preparations proceed on schedule. The scaffolding within the Chamber rises daily -- the workers do not comprehend what they construct, which is precisely as intended. By Autumn's End, when the comet draws near, the great work shall be complete.

The Queen has begun to show signs of her impatience. She demands weekly reports and grows suspicious of delays. I have assured her that the astronomical calculations cannot be rushed, lest we botch the alignment entirely. A miscalibration could render the whole affair worthless -- or worse, dangerous to Her Majesty herself. This gives us time, though not much.

The Albion question remains delicate. If those dogs across the Channel discover what we are truly building, they will move against us. Maintain vigilance. I have certain assets positioned to intercept any official correspondence from their Embassy, but be cautious in your own communications.

The specimen you sent has been delivered safely. It thrashes still, though the chains hold. Devorlen assures me that three more of sufficient quality can be procured before the Season closes. I shudder to think of the pain involved, but the ritual demands *sacrifice* -- both material and living.

Burn this after reading.

Your devoted servant, [*Signature illegible*]

GM NOTE:

This letter reveals three critical facts: (1) the Comet Chamber is genuinely under construction, (2) a conspiracy reaches high into Kormor Kirak's hierarchy involving the Queen, and (3) some kind of occult ritual is planned that requires human sacrifice. The cryptic reference to "specimens" and Devorlen's involvement suggests dark alchemy or necromancy.

Players may wonder who the correspondent is. Clues point toward someone close to the Queen with scientific or astronomical knowledge -- perhaps General Markos, or a court official. The mention of "weekly reports" and decision-making authority suggests someone in power.

If players show this to allies, Barron Whitehallow will recognize the crescent moon sigil as belonging to an obscure cult faction. The warning about Albion suggests the Queen fears international interference.

HANDOUT #2: THE RED GUARD DECREE

CASE CONNECTION: General Use

HANDOUT TEXT:

[*Official seal of the Red Guard, the Queen's military arm*]

PROCLAMATION OF THE RED GUARD

BY ORDER OF GENERAL MARKOS, COMMANDER OF HER MAJESTY'S FORCES

Let it be known throughout the districts of Kormor Kirak:

Effective immediately, all travel to and from the Northern Causeway is RESTRICTED. Entry requires written authorization from Red Guard headquarters. No exceptions shall be granted without explicit approval from the office of the General himself.

Furthermore, any person or persons found loitering near the construction site at Castle Torony Piros shall be subject to arrest and imprisonment for espionage. The Queen's current projects are matters of national security.

Citizens are encouraged to report suspicious activity via their District Magistrates. Rewards of 50 korma will be paid for information leading to the arrest of saboteurs or foreign agents.

A violator of these terms faces imprisonment from no less than three years.

By Her Majesty's authority,

GENERAL MARKOS

17th day of April, Year of the Crimson Comet

GM NOTE:

This decree serves multiple purposes: (1) it establishes that the Red Guard is actively protecting construction at Castle Torony Piros, making investigation of that site extremely dangerous; (2) it indicates paranoia at the top levels of

government -- someone fears sabotage or espionage; (3) it provides a mechanical barrier to players investigating the Northern Causeway without proper cover.

Players may attempt to forge authorization papers, bribe Red Guard checkpoints, or find alternate routes. This handout makes clear that direct access is being actively denied.

HANDOUT #3: LEDGER PAGE FROM DEVORLEN KOSS

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 1 -- "The Curiosity Shop"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[A page torn from a leather-bound ledger, stained with ink and unknown substances]

DEVORLEN'S ACQUISITIONS == MARCH ENTRIES

12 March -- Glass vials (amber, 2 dozen) -- acquired from Merchant Corvus --
 15 korma 14 March -- Mandrake root, fresh harvest -- [MARK: Rare specimen] -- 40 korma 18 March -- Iron chains (heavy gauge, 6 lengths) --
 Blacksmith Torven -- 60 korma 20 March -- **HUMAN HAIR, LONG, DARK** -- [source unknown, marked PRIVATE] -- 35 korma 23 March --
 Philosopher's sulfur (crystallized) -- Alchemist Willem -- 55 korma 25 March --
TWO CORPSES (QUALITY POOR, RECENTLY INTERRED) -- [grave robber, name withheld] -- 120 korma 28 March -- Lead caskets (small, 4 total) --
 Metalworker's Guild -- 80 korma 31 March -- **COMMISSION FROM CASTLE: THREE SPECIMENS, LIVE, CONDITION UNSPECIFIED** -- payment DEFERRED

[*The handwriting becomes erratic at the bottom of the page*]

Must not speak of this. The chains alone could see me hanged. But the payment -- gods, the payment is too much to refuse. By Summer's End, it will be done.

GM NOTE:

This ledger page directly implicates Devorlen Koss in grave robbing, trafficking in human remains, and acquiring materials for dark magical practice. The vague entry for "three specimens, live" suggests he is procuring living subjects for experimentation or ritual.

Players who question Devorlen about this ledger should trigger a tense scene. He will likely deny everything, claim the ledger is falsified, or attempt to buy silence. If confronted with undeniable evidence, he may admit to dealing in "medical specimens" for unnamed patrons, but will refuse to name his employer (fear of the Queen's power).

The Easter reference date system anchors this to early spring, placing the events in motion several months before the presumed campaign present day.

HANDOUT #4: CODED MESSAGE ON TAVERN WALL

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 5 -- "The Smuggler's Route"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[*Carved into the wooden beam of the Kraken's Rest tavern, below the bar*]

SEVEN BELLS MEET THE WOLF SILVER FLOWS WHERE IRON
BENDS DOCTOR'S LADDER COUNTS TO FOUR LOCK THE
DOOR WHERE STARS COME DOWN

[Beneath this, in different handwriting, a hasty scrawl:] ANSWER BY FULL MOON OR ALL IS LOST

GM NDE:

This is a simple substitution cipher used by smugglers and resistance operatives. The decryption key:

- SEVEN BELLS = 7 (north district checkpoint)
- WOLF = Jack Winbow (the Smuggler)
- SILVER FLOWS WHERE IRON BENDS = The Aqueduct (a metal-and-water junction point used for smuggling runs)
- DOCTOR'S LADDER = Istvan the Jailer (who has medical knowledge and controls access to the prison -- "ladder" to escape)
- COUNTS TO FOUR = fourth level of the prison, below the main cells, where political prisoners are held
- LOCK THE DOOR WHERE STARS COME DOWN = Castle Torony Piros (highest point in the city, closest to the sky)

Fully decoded: "On the seventh bell, meet Jack Winbow at the Aqueduct. Contact Istvan the Jailer to reach the fourth level of the prison to rescue prisoners at Castle Torony Piros. Answer by the Full Moon or all is lost."

This message reveals the existence of a rescue plan within the resistance, and that there are political prisoners being held beneath Castle Torony Piros. Players who decode it gain critical intelligence about resistance operations and may be approached for aid.

If shown to Barron Whitehallow, he will immediately recognize it as genuine resistance communication and will confirm the urgency of the Full Moon deadline.

HANDOUT #5: PRINCESS SZERET'S JOURNAL ENTRY

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 8 -- "The Heir's Concern"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[Written in small, hurried script on fine paper, water-stained and wrinkled]

Mother grows stranger each day. I find her in the high chamber at odd hours, gazing at the sky as if entranced. The physicians claim she is well, but I see the fever in her eyes.

She speaks of transformation. Of becoming eternal. Of drinking the comet's light itself.

When I asked her what this meant, she laughed -- a sound I have not heard in years -- but then her expression turned cold. She said, "You are too young to understand ambition, Szeret. You wish to rule as your mother rules -- a mortal Queen, bound by flesh and time. But I shall transcend. I shall become a *force*."

I fear she is mad. Yet no one dares voice such concerns. The Red Guard obeys her absolutely. General Markos hangs upon her every word.

Is there anyone I can trust? Anyone who might counsel her, turn her from this madness? If she proceeds with whatever ritual or magic the Comet Chamber contains, will she be my mother still?

[The entry ends abruptly, as if the writer was interrupted]

GM NOTE:

This journal entry provides Princess Szeret's perspective on the Queen's growing obsession with the Comet Chamber and suggests she may be experiencing psychological decline or magical corruption. The entry is clearly torn

from a private journal, suggesting it was either discovered during an investigation or given to the party by someone close to the Princess.

Players may use this to:

1. Sympathize with Szeret as someone trapped in a dangerous situation
2. Understand that the Queen's agenda extends beyond mere political power -- she seeks literal transcendence
3. Identify Szeret as a potential ally or informant, though she is heavily guarded

If players show this to Szeret herself, she will either confirm her fears in a private moment, or deny everything if she suspects the message might reach her mother. Her response depends on whether she has developed trust with the party.

HANDOUT #6: WANTED POSTER -- AMENDED

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 2 -- "The Investigator's Shadow"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[A Red Guard wanted poster, but the face and description have been scratched out and replaced with new text]

--WANTED: Female, age 35-40, Albion accent, dark hair--

WANTED: OLIVIA FAREN

CHARGES: ESPIONAGE, SABOTAGE, UNLAWFUL ENTRY TO CROWN PROPERTIES

REWARD: 500 KORMA -- ALIVE ONLY

[Below the official text, someone has written in charcoal:]

Also wanted by:

- The Lich Cult (for interference in their sacred work)
- Jack Winbow (for stealing from his operation)
- Lord Hadrian of Albion (for abandoning her post)
- Barron Whitehallow's faction (they claim she is a double agent)

Status: EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. Armed. Skilled in close quarters combat and subterfuge. Assumes false identities.

Last seen: Near the Market District, three days past.

GM NOTE:

This poster serves as a mechanical reality check: Olivia Faren is now a wanted person across multiple factions. It can be found posted in city districts, guard stations, or taverns. If players are traveling with Olivia or claiming to know her, this handout immediately escalates the stakes.

The scratched-out original description and hasty additions suggest the wanted poster is being constantly updated as new information arrives. The multiple factions wanting her for different reasons reveals that Olivia is not simply

hunted by the Queen -- she has made enemies and allies in nearly equal measure.

For players unfamiliar with Olivia, this poster establishes her as a central figure in the conspiracy and a magnet for conflict.

HANDOUT #7: MEDICAL NOTES FROM CASTLE TORONY PIROS

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 4 -- "The Queen's Malady"

SANCTUS TEX:

[Written in clinical script, signed by an illegible physician's mark]

SUBJECT: HER MAJESTY, QUEEN KIRALINE

DATE: 16 APRIL, YEAR OF THE CRIMSON COMET

PHYSICIAN: [NAME REDACTED]

Her Majesty presents with increasingly erratic vital signs. Pulse ranges from 40 to 140 beats within a single hour. Temperature fluctuates similarly. She reports no pain, yet her behavior suggests significant distress.

She has begun consuming blood -- initially sheep's blood, brought to her in silver vessels. Three days past, she demanded human blood. I refused to procure such materials. She became enraged, destroyed two chairs, and demanded I be removed from her presence.

A replacement physician has been assigned.

Further observations: Her Majesty appears to glow faintly in dim light. The castle servants whisper that she does not sleep. I observed her standing at the highest tower at four in the morning, perfectly still, arms outstretched toward the stars.

Her transformation, if it can be called such, is accelerating.

I have been instructed to document these changes but report nothing to anyone outside the castle walls. To do so would be treason.

May whatever gods still listen forgive me for my silence.

GM NOTE:

This medical document confirms that the Queen is undergoing a supernatural transformation linked to the Comet Chamber. The references to glowing skin, changed appetite for blood, and astronomical obsession all suggest she is becoming something other than human -- possibly a vampire, or something unique to the world of The Eternal Court.

The note about the replacement physician suggests that the previous doctor was deemed unreliable and removed. This reinforces that the Queen and her inner circle are actively suppressing information about what is happening.

If this document reaches the party, they should realize:

1. The Queen's transformation is real and progressing rapidly.
2. Time is running short -- the comet's arrival may be the final catalyst.
3. The Queen may no longer be fully rational or human by the time the climax arrives.

HANDOUT # 8: RECEIPT FROM MERCHANT CORVUS

CASE CONNECTION: General Use

HANDWRITTEN RECEIPT:

[*A torn receipt on thin paper, the ink partially faded*]

MERCHANDISE CORRECT == FINE GLASS AND INSTRUMENTS

Sold to: [name scratched out] Date: 12 April Items:

- Lens, ground crystal, 8-inch diameter, precise to 1/100th inch -- 75 korma
- Lens, ground crystal, 4-inch diameter -- 30 korma
- Brass mounting frame, adjustable -- 25 korma
- Copper wire, finest gauge, 100 yards -- 40 korma
- Unknown substance (client supplied), refined and sealed in glass -- 15 korma

TOTAL: 185 korma

DELIVERY: Castle Torony Piros, via Red Guard escort

NOTES: Client requests all work remain confidential. Threatens severe consequences for loose tongues. Payment includes 50 korma discretion fee.

GM NOTE:

This receipt suggests that sophisticated optical instruments are being constructed or assembled for use in the Comet Chamber. The lenses and frame could be part of a telescope or a more complex astronomical device. The mysterious "unknown substance" hint at alchemy or occult ingredients.

The scratched-out name on the receipt and the "discretion fee" indicate that whoever commissioned this work wanted to remain anonymous -- though the delivery to Castle Torony Piros makes the true destination obvious.

Players might track down Merchant Corvus to ask questions. He will initially deny involvement, but can be bribed or intimidated into confirming the basic details. He will refuse to name the commissioner, citing fear for his life.

HANDOUT #9: LETTER FROM THE ALBION EMBASSY

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 6 -- "The Diplomatic Crisis"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[Sealed with the official Albion Crown seal, but the seal has been broken and the letter appears to have been intercepted]

To His Excellency, Ambassador Harken

From the Office of the Lord Chancellor, Whitehall, Albion

Dated: 15 March, Year of the Crimson Comet

Dear Ambassador Harken,

Your previous dispatches regarding the unusual construction at Castle Torony Piros have not gone unnoticed by the Crown. We have become increasingly concerned about Queen Kiraline's intentions and the nature of the work being conducted behind closed doors.

It is our assessment that she may be developing weapons or magical artifacts intended to augment her military power. This directly threatens the balance established by the Treaty of Sullen Crowns.

You are hereby authorized to make discreet inquiries into the matter. Do not be overt -- a formal diplomatic challenge would be premature and could prove dangerous. However, we require intelligence.

Should the Queen be preparing for war or international aggression, we must know immediately. The Albion Navy stands ready to enforce our interests.

Keep this correspondence confidential. Destroy it after reading.

[Signed by official hand]

GM NOTE:

This intercepted letter reveals that Albion intelligence services suspect the Comet Chamber is a weapon or magical device, and that there may be military tensions between two nations. It explains why the Queen is paranoid about foreign spies and why checkpoint security is so tight.

If players show this letter to Ambassador Harken, he will first attempt to deny it, then may admit that yes, Albion is watching the situation -- but insist that he means no harm to the Queen. His position is delicate: he is a diplomat in a foreign power, with limited resources, trying to prevent a war.

This letter also suggests that destroying it was ordered but someone failed to do so, perhaps intentionally leaving it behind for Olivia or her allies to find.

HANDOUT #10: TORN PAGE FROM THE LICH CULT'S RITUAL LEDGER

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 7 -- "The Cult's Work"

SUNDOUS TEXT:

[A page torn from a bound ledger, burn-marked at the edges, written in a strange cipher overlaid with hastily scrawled notes in normal script]

[CIPHER TEXT: largely illegible, appears to be ancient]

[In the margins, in modern handwriting:]

The ritual cannot proceed without the CELESTIAL ALIGNMENT. The comet provides the necessary harmonic frequency. Without it, the spell fails and the host body dies -- I have seen this. Three failures already.

The Queen does not understand what she is truly offering herself to. She believes she will achieve transcendence and eternal rule. In truth, if the ritual succeeds, something *else* will wear her skin.

The old masters would call it possession. Ascension. The merging of divine will with mortal flesh.

But the Cult knows better. We know what feeds upon ambition.

The summoning requires a sacrifice of the bloodline. The heir -- the Princess -- must be present when the comet passes. Blood calls to blood. Without her, the gateway does not open.

[The page ends abruptly, as if torn mid-thought]

GM NOTE:

This page from a Lich Cult ledger provides critical information: (1) the ritual being performed in the Comet Chamber may not elevate the Queen to godhood but rather invite possession by an otherworldly entity; (2) Princess Szeret is essential to the ritual and in grave danger; (3) the comet's arrival is tied to an astrological/magical requirement, not just symbolic timing; (4) the Lich Cult

knows more about what is happening than the Queen does, and may be manipulating events.

This handout can inspire paranoia and investigation. Players may realize that multiple factions are vying for control of the Comet Chamber's power: the Queen, the Lich Cult, the Resistance, and Albion's intelligence services.

If players show this to a Lich Cult contact, the response will depend on the cult member's role and knowledge. Some might confirm the contents, others deny it, others attempt to recruit the party to their cause.

HANDOUT #11: TAVERN BILL AND NOTES

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 5 -- "The Smuggler's Route"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[A crumpled tavern bill, with hastily written notes on the back]

THE KRAKEN'S REST -- BILL OF FARE

Three ales -- 3 korma Bread and cheese -- 2 korma Private room (one hour) --
5 korma

TOTAL: 10 korma

PAID IN COIN -- [illegible scrawl]

[On the back, in different handwriting:]

You were followed from the docks. Red Guard, three of them. I lost them in the Market, but they know you're in the city.

Jack wants to move up the timeline. The next run is in **THREE DAYS**, not two weeks. The route through the Aqueduct is being watched, so we'll go north -- the old Catacombs beneath the Merchant's Guild.

Bring rope. Bring light. Bring courage.

If you're in, leave a chalk mark on the eastern doorpost of the Guild. Three marks for yes.

Burn this.

GM NOTE:

This tavern bill suggests a clandestine meeting occurred, likely between a resistance operative and an informant or recruit. The hastily written notes reveal time pressure -- someone is accelerating the timeline of smuggling operations or rescue attempts, likely because Red Guard scrutiny is increasing.

The reference to three days creates urgency for the players: if they want to participate in or intercept this smuggling run, they must act quickly. The Catacombs route provides an alternative investigation path that avoids the heavily guarded Aqueduct.

If players are trying to infiltrate the resistance, finding this bill could serve as their entry point. Responding with chalk marks on the Guild doorpost sets up the next scene.

HANDOUT #12: WARNING NOTE -- UNSIGNED

CASE CONNECTION: General Use

SHANDOU TEXT:

[A folded piece of cheap paper, water-damaged, written in shaky handwriting]

If you're reading this, you were meant to.

They have eyes everywhere. The Red Guard, the Cult, the Castle itself seems to watch. But there are still a few of us who remember what Kormor Kirak was before the Queen's madness.

DO NOT TRUST THE MAGISTRATE. Voron answers to the Queen now, not the law. Any evidence you bring to him will be used against you.

The smuggler is your best path, but he demands payment. 500 korma minimum. He knows routes that bypass the Guard.

One more thing -- the prisoner beneath the Castle. The one they call the Prophet. If she lives, she knows the truth about the Comet. She knows what it will do. But she is guarded by the Jailer, and he is loyal to the Queen.

I cannot help further. I have already said too much.

May you find better fortune than I.

[Unsigned, no identifying marks]

GM NOTE:

This unsigned warning serves as a plot hook and early game intel. It confirms several facts the party may have already discovered, while introducing new elements: a mysterious prisoner beneath the Castle called "the Prophet," and the revelation that Magistrate Voron has been compromised.

The mention of the Prophet creates a rescue mission hook. The warning about Jack Winbow's payment requirements suggests the party will need funds to

proceed. The paranoia expressed about surveillance and watching adds atmosphere and should make players feel hunted.

If players track the handwriting or fingerprints, they will find no leads. The note was clearly designed to be disposable. However, it may have been written by someone close to the party, or by someone who knows Olivia Faren -- potentially Barron Whitehallow, or another resistance operative.

HANDOUT #13: CIPHER NOTE FROM GENERAL MARKOS

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 9 -- "The General's Doubt"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[A small, tightly folded piece of parchment, written in tight, military script]

To the Commander of the Northern Garrison:

By order of General Markos, you are to detail five soldiers to the Comet Chamber daily for rotation. Their duty: guard the Queen and prevent any unauthorized entry.

Additionally, observe who enters and exits. Report all visitors to the General's office, not to the Red Guard hierarchy. The chain of command in this matter runs directly to me.

[In a different ink, a handwritten note added afterward:]

If the Queen completes whatever work she intends, will I still be General? Or will I be... something else?

Are we serving humanity? Or inviting our own extinction?

I am a soldier. I follow orders. But I must know: are my orders leading me toward honor, or damnation?

[*No signature, no answer*]

GM NOTE:

This note, apparently from General Markos himself, reveals doubt within the military leadership. Someone -- presumably Markos -- is questioning whether the Comet Chamber work is justified. The handwritten addition suggests internal conflict and possible disillusionment with the Queen's agenda.

If players show this to General Markos himself, his reaction will be telling. He may:

1. Deny it entirely and accuse the party of forgery
2. Confirm it and reveal he is secretly working against the Queen
3. Acknowledge it but explain his loyalty to the Crown supersedes his doubts
4. Claim the Queen showed him a vision or granted him a gift that resolved his conflict

Players investigating the military chain of command can use this note to identify sympathetic soldiers or find cracks in Red Guard loyalty. It suggests that not all of the Queen's servants are content with her current path.

HANDOUT #14: MERCHANT'S INVOICE --
ALCHEMICAL SUPPLIES

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 1 -- "The Curiosity Shop"

HANDOUT TEXT:

[*An official invoice from the Alchemist's Guild, stamped with formal seals*]

ALCHEMISTE GUILD RECEIPT

LICENSED PURVEYOR: WILLEM THE PRECISE

Invoice to: Devorlen Koss, Curiosity Merchant Date: 20 April Items Supplied:

- Sulfur of Philosophers (crystallized) -- 2 lbs -- 55 korma
- Lunar Caustic (silver nitrate) -- 1 oz -- 30 korma
- Essence of Mandrake Root (distilled) -- 1 dram -- 40 korma
- Quicksilver, highest purity -- 3 lbs -- 75 korma
- Arsenic Sublimate -- 1 lb -- 20 korma
- Tincture of Nightshade -- 2 drams -- 45 korma
- Powdered Gold Leaf -- 1 oz -- 60 korma

TOTAL: 325 korma

PAYMENT STATUS: DEFERRED -- AUTHORIZATION CODE
[REDACTED]

SEAL OF THE GUILD

GM NOTE:

This invoice documents the purchase of high-quality alchemical materials, many of which are poisonous or can be used for dark rituals. The materials align with the previous journal entry from Devorlen's ledger. The "deferred

payment” with a redacted authorization code suggests that someone powerful is underwriting these purchases and wants to remain anonymous.

Players can use this invoice as leverage against Devorlen Koss. If they confront him with evidence of these purchases, he cannot claim innocence -- the official Guild registry proves the transaction occurred. His only defense is to claim the materials were for legitimate alchemical work.

The Alchemist Willem can be tracked down. He will admit to the sale but claim that Guild rules prevent him from discussing clients or their purposes. However, he might be bribed or intimidated into revealing that the ”authorization code” came from someone at Castle Torony Piros.

HANDOUT #15: PERSONAL LETTER FROM
AMBASSADOR HARKEN TO OLIVIA FAREN

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia’s Journal Case 6 -- ”The Diplomatic Crisis”

HANDOUT TEXT:

[A sealed letter, marked ”PERSONAL -- OLIVIA FAREN ONLY”]

My Dear Olivia,

I hope this letter finds you before the Red Guard does.

I have made inquiries about you through back channels. I know why you left Albion, and I know why you have embedded yourself in Kormor Kirak. The Home Office may brand you a traitor, but I understand the burden of conscience.

The Queen is dying. Or transforming. I am not certain which. But it is clear to me that she intends to use the Comet Chamber to achieve something irrevers-

ible. Once she does -- if she succeeds -- the balance between our nations will shatter.

I cannot openly oppose her. I am a diplomat, bound by treaties and protocol. But you are not bound by such constraints.

If you can find a way to prevent the ritual, or to redirect its power, you will have saved not just Kormor Kirak, but Albion as well.

I am placing myself at risk by writing this. If it is discovered, I will be declared a traitor and my diplomatic immunity will be revoked. So I ask for caution -- on your behalf and on mine.

There is a safe house in the Scholar's District. The key is hidden beneath the fourth cobblestone from the eastern corner of the Fountain Plaza. Use it if you have nowhere else to go.

Trust carefully. The Lich Cult may approach you. They will offer knowledge and power in exchange for your cooperation. Consider their offer carefully before refusing or accepting.

Your former ally in the service of what is right,

A. Harken

GM NOTE:

This letter from Ambassador Harken serves as both character development and a mechanism for providing the party with a safe house and additional mission clarity. If the party finds this letter, they learn that:

1. Olivia Faren and Ambassador Harken have a prior relationship based on shared moral convictions.
2. Harken believes the ritual must be stopped, even if he cannot openly act against the Queen.

3. A safe house exists in the Scholar's District with supplies and protection.
4. The Lich Cult is expected to make recruitment overtures.

The letter works mechanically as a "get out of jail free" card if the party is cornered by Red Guard -- they can flee to the safe house. It also suggests that Harken is a potential ally, though a cautious one due to his diplomatic position.

If players confront Ambassador Harken about this letter, he will initially deny it, then admit its authenticity if pressed. His condition for further help will likely be that the party never publicly reveal his involvement. He cannot be seen to actively oppose the Queen, but he can work in the shadows.

HANDOUT #16: SCRAWLED NOTE -- THE PRISONER'S MESSAGE

CASE CONNECTION: Olivia's Journal Case 10 -- "The Prophet in the Dark"

SHADOWS TEXT:

[*A scrap of parchment, the edges burnt and stained with blood and unknown fluids, handwriting nearly illegible due to injury or torture*]

They bring me water once daily. They call me Prophet, though I do not claim the gift.

I simply *know*.

The comet is not a thing of science. It is a *door*.

When it passes, if the ritual is complete, the Queen will not transcend -- she will be *replaced*. The thing that wears her body will command the Red Guard, command the castle, command the city.

It does not come from above. It rises from *within* -- from the deep places, the old bones of the earth. The Cult understands this. They have been preparing for centuries.

I was captured because I tried to warn her. The Queen. Before the transformation took hold.

She listened, for a moment. Then she laughed and imprisoned me here, deciding I am mad.

Perhaps I am.

But I *know* what is coming.

[*The note ends with a single line, written in what appears to be the prisoner's own blood:*]

STOP THE RITUAL BEFORE THE AUTUMN EQUINOX

GM NOTE:

This note from the mysterious prisoner provides cosmic-scale stakes: the ritual is not personal transcendence but a summoning or a replacement. The revelation that the entity comes from "within" and "from the deep places" suggests elder magic or cosmic horror elements appropriate to Gothic Gaslamp Fantasy.

The phrase "the old bones of the earth" hints at ancient powers predating human civilization in Kormor Kirak, which can inspire further investigation into the city's history.

The autumn equinox creates a hard deadline for the campaign. If the party does not stop the ritual by then, the Queen will be replaced and the horror begins.

Finding this note should inspire the party to attempt a rescue mission to free the Prophet and gain more information directly. The prisoner is clearly alive and has knowledge the party desperately needs. However, the prison beneath

Castle Torony Piros is heavily guarded, requiring careful planning or a dramatic assault.

END OF HANDOUTS

These sixteen handouts provide the material foundation for investigations across Olivia's ten cases and general play. Print them on appropriate paper, age them as you see fit, and present them physically to your players. The tactile experience of holding evidence -- real ink on real paper -- deepens immersion and creates memorable moments of revelation.

May your players uncover the truth of the Comet Chamber before it is too late.

CAPITULUM

RUMORS TABLE

HOW TO USE THIS TABLE

This supplement provides a collection of rumors, whispers, and overheard conversations that players may encounter throughout Kormor Kirak. These rumors serve multiple purposes:

- **ATMOSPHERE & FLAVOR:** Rumors ground players in the city's Gothic atmosphere, revealing the fear, ambition, and intrigue that permeate the streets.
- **INVESTIGATION HOOKS:** Many rumors connect to cases in Olivia's Investigation Framework, providing leads that prompt further inquiry.
- **PLOT ADVANCEMENT:** Several rumors advance the main conspiracy surrounding the Comet Chamber, Queen Kiraline's ambitions, and the Lich Cult's influence.
- **MISDIRECTION:** False and partially true rumors create uncertainty, forcing players to verify information and distrust convenient answers.

ROLLING & IMPLEMENTATION: When players enter a location and interact with locals, roll d20 to determine which rumor they overhear. You may roll openly or select rumors that suit the narrative moment. Not every rumor should be presented in a single session -- space them out to maintain mystery and encourage players to revisit locations.

TRUTH VALUE: Each rumor is labeled TRUE, PARTIALLY TRUE, FALSE, or RED HERRING. Use these to track what actually happened vs. what the

city *believes* happened. This distinction is crucial for creating a gaslighting atmosphere where reality is slippery.

ADAPTATION: Feel free to modify rumors to suit your table's interests or to incorporate character backstories. Rumors work best when players have reason to care about the people mentioned.

EPY'S PUB

The warm glow of gaslight and the smell of ale and tobacco. Loose tongues, drunken philosophy, and the bitter complaints of the working poor. This is where the groundswell of discontent gathers.

D20 RUMOR

1	<p>”The Queen’s been buying up grain shipments from Albion -- paying for ’em too, not just commandeering. That’s not like Her Majesty. My cousin works the docks and swears the boxes are lead-lined. What’s she building that needs so much weight?”</p>	<p>PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen is indeed securing resources for the Comet Chamber, but not specifically grain. However, mysterious materials ARE arriving at Castle Torony Piros. Albion shipments are legitimate (the political tension is real, but not yet open conflict). The lead-lined boxes rumor is exaggerated gossip.</p>	<p>The price of bread has risen; people notice the Queen’s activity. This rumor reflects genuine anxiety about resource scarcity.</p>
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2	<p>”Istvan the Jailer hasn’t been seen in three days. His sister came by asking if anyone knew where he’d gone. They found blood on his cell block door this morning.”</p>	<p>PARTIALLY TRUE. Istvan is missing, but he hasn’t been killed -- he’s been conscripted by General Markos to oversee a secret project beneath the castle. The blood isn’t his; it’s from a prisoner. His absence will eventually prompt investigation.</p>	<p>This is an Olivia Case Hook. Istvan’s disappearance can trigger the ”Missing Persons” thread.</p>
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3	<p>”I heard the Red Guard rounded up six people from Riverside last week for nothing -- no crime, no hearing, just gone. One was a scholar. They’re building some-</p>	<p>TRUE. The Queen’s forces are quietly imprisoning scholars, laborers, and people with specific skills needed for the Comet Chamber construction. This</p>	<p>Connects to the main conspiracy. Players investigating may discover</p>
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thing, mark my words, is not officially acknowledged. forced con-
and they need labor.” scription.

4 ”They’re saying Princess Szeret refused the Queen’s dinner invitation last month. Refused it! Can you imagine? Word is the Princess wants nothing to do with the castle’s new projects.”

PARTIALLY TRUE. Szeret has grown distant from her mother, but the refusal was more subtle than folklore suggests. She’s concerned about her mother’s increasingly erratic behavior and the resources being poured into the Comet Chamber.

Character tension within the vampire aristocracy. Szeret might be an unlikely ally if approached carefully.

5 ”My mate’s daughter works as a maid in the castle kitchens. She says every night after midnight, the Queen goes down into the cellars alone, and there’s a light that ain’t gaslight -- something blue and cold. No servant’s ever seen what’s down there and lived to tell.”

FALSE. A maid DID mention unusual activity, but the ”cold blue light” is an embellishment born of fear and gossip. The Queen does visit the lower castle at odd hours, but for strategic planning, not mystical rituals.

Pure atmospheric rumor. Creates dread. Could mislead players about the Comet Chamber’s purpose.

6 ”Barron Whitehallow was spotted in the Kereskedo Marketplace last Tuesday, bold as you please. Three days later, five Red Guard soldiers went missing. Co-

PARTIALLY TRUE. Whitehallow WAS in the marketplace, and Red Guard soldiers ARE being lost, but not to the Resistance -- they’re being reassigned and conscripted to the Comet

Reflects genuine hope among the oppressed that resistance is possible.

incidence? The Resistance is moving, friends.”

Chamber project. Whitehal-
low is gathering intelligence,
not executing raids (yet).

7 ”The Lich Cult broke into Brother Aldric’s monastery last month and stole something from the crypt. The Brother won’t say what. They’re getting bolder.”

TRUE. The Cult did steal something -- a scroll fragment that may relate to undead resurrection rituals. Brother Aldric is keeping quiet because he’s afraid of repercussions against the monastery.

Connects to the Lich Cult subplot. Brother Aldric would share details with trustworthy adventurers.

8 ”General Markos has been meeting with that Albion ambassador at the docks, away from official channels. Could be trouble between our Queen and the foreign powers. Could be a deal is being made.”

RED HERRING. Markos meets with Ambassador Harken occasionally, but only to maintain the tense diplomatic equilibrium and gather intelligence. It’s routine (if covert) statecraft, not a conspiracy.

Encourages paranoia about Albion’s involvement. Actually, Albion is largely unaware of the Comet Chamber.

9 ”They say Jack Winbow the smuggler’s been seen near the castle’s north gate, loading things in the dead of night. He’s in on it -- whatever it is. The Queen’s bought him.”

PARTIALLY TRUE. Winbow IS secretly working with the Queen (he’s been threatened/bribed), but he’s been unloading materials into the castle, not loading things out. He’s complicit in resource acquisition for the Comet Chamber, though he

Jack Winbow is a complex NPC -- potentially redeemable if pressured or if the players offer him protection.

doesn't fully understand the project's scope.

10 "My grandmother used to tell stories about the last comet that came through Kormor Kirak, back in her youth. She said terrible things happened -- people went mad, the streets flooded with blood. She said it wasn't natural. She said the Queen knows this."

PARTIALLY TRUE. A comet DID appear in the region centuries ago (the timeline is vague in folklore). It's unclear what actually happened, but the Queen has researched old records obsessively. She believes the comet's power can be harnessed, not feared. This rumor reflects genuine historical dread.

Atmospheric and suggests the Queen's knowledge comes from historical study.

11 "Devorlen Koss is selling things in his shop that shouldn't exist. Clockwork spiders that move on their own. Books written in languages that make your head ache. The Watch knows but doesn't intervene. That's protection, innit?"

PARTIALLY TRUE. Koss DOES deal in unusual and occult items, and the Watch does tolerate it because he's useful to powerful people (including the Queen). However, the items are strange but explicable within the setting's magical/technological framework.

Koss is a useful information broker and supplier. His tolerance by authorities is real, though the reasons vary.

12 "A Bone Sentinel was seen wandering the Riverside slums last night. Just walking there, bold as daylight, and the Red Guard didn't stop it. That's not

TRUE. A Bone Sentinel was indeed deployed in a show of force/intimidation, though the Red Guard didn't intervene because the Queen wanted the populace to see

Demonstrates the Queen's use of fear as a control mechanism.

natural. That's the Queen sending a message." the skeleton's power and remember their place.

13 "Tomas the Stablehand heard two castle courtiers arguing in the stables -- one said the Comet Chamber would be the Queen's tomb, not her throne. He couldn't hear more before they noticed him, but whatever they meant, it sounded like treason." PARTIALLY TRUE. Two officials WERE arguing about the Comet Chamber's purpose, but the conversation was about risk (the project is dangerous and might fail catastrophically, potentially destroying the castle). "Tomb" was metaphorical, not literal treason. This spreads fear that the project might go wrong. The Queen herself has calculated these risks.

14 "Eppy Flinder herself says she's been watering down the ale ever since the prices went up. Says she's barely keeping the pub open because of what the Queen's doing to the economy. She's sympathetic to Whitehallow's cause, I reckon. Maybe more than sympathetic." PARTIALLY TRUE. The economy IS struggling, and Eppy IS affected. However, she's been careful about what she says and to whom. She provides safe harbor for dissenters but isn't an active member of the Resistance. Eppy is a useful contact for getting information about who passes through and what they talk about.

15 "A witch-woman came through last week -- had a familiar made of living shadow, and an eye that wept black tears. She asked questions about the FALSE. No such person came through recently. This is pure fabrication, born from fear and the human tendency to populate darkness with monsters. Atmospheric and shows how fear fills gaps in knowledge.

Comet Chamber and where it was being built. Nobody would tell her. The Red Guard came for her that very night. Nobody's seen her since."

16	"Lady Mireva's been sick for weeks. The court physicians say it's nothing, but I heard it from a maid who heard it from a guard that she's wasting away. Some say it's a curse from the Lich Cult. Some say the Queen did it to silence her."	PARTIALLY TRUE. Mireva IS ill, but it's from poison (not magical curse), and it's not the Queen's doing. A rival at court attempted to eliminate Mireva because of her influence over the Queen. This could become a sub-plot for investigation.	Character drama within the aristocracy. If discovered, it implicates other nobles and creates power vacuums.
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17	"The beer's tasted like copper for three weeks. Eppy says it's the water from the well -- something's wrong with it. Some folks won't drink it anymore. The ones who do complain of strange dreams and aches in their bones."	RED HERRING. The water is fine; it's the fear talking. However, if players investigate, they might discover that the Red Guard have been adding a mild sedative to certain water supplies in working-class neighborhoods to reduce unrest.	Could reveal a conspiracy within a conspiracy. Adds layers.
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18	"They're building something new at the castle, and it's tall. You can see scaffolding from the Hal-	TRUE. The Comet Chamber IS being constructed, and it's indeed built above historically significant	Connects the Comet Chamber to the cemetery and
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laset Fields. One of the gravediggers there says it's being built directly above the oldest part of the cemetery, where the ancient burials are."

ground, including very old graves. The Queen chose this location for its supposed occult properties.

necromantic themes. Players can investigate from the cemetery side.

19 "Captain Ashford got drunk here last month and said something about 'cleaning up the Queen's messes.' He mentioned the Underground and things that shouldn't exist. He's been stationed at the castle barracks ever since. Someone got to him, bought him or scared him."

PARTIALLY TRUE. Ashford IS aware of unusual activity at the castle and has been reassigned to reduce his contact with the general guard. However, he wasn't drunk-talking -- he was approached directly by agents of the Queen and offered a choice: service or silence. He chose the former.

Ashford knows things and might be approached for information (at risk).

20 "The Queen's been seen at the castle parapets at dawn, just staring eastward toward Albion. Motionless for hours. Her guards won't interrupt her. My sister's boyfriend is a palace guard and swears something's changed in Her Majesty. She's not quite... there... anymore."

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen IS often distracted and sometimes seems almost possessed by her project's momentum. She's not literally somewhere else, but her focus has narrowed to the exclusion of normal court business. This reflects the psychological toll of the Comet Chamber obsession.

Shows the Queen's character degradation. Could be an avenue for challenging her if the party discovers her vulnerability.

REVERSED MARKETPLACE

The roar of commerce, the calls of street merchants, the tension of people from different walks of life brushing shoulders. Marketplace rumors are transactional -- information traded like goods. Accuracy varies wildly.

D20 RUMOR

1 "The butcher's prices have gone mad -- he's getting supplies from somewhere else now, not the usual vendors. Someone said he's getting stock from the catacombs. Fresh meat that shouldn't be fresh." FALSE. The Marketplace Butcher has new suppliers from the rural estates, not the catacombs. His prices are high because the Queen is commandeering agricultural resources. The "fresh" meat rumor is slander from competing merchants. Shows how capitalism breeds conspiracy theories. The truth is mundane but also damning (resource hoarding).

2 "Rozito Vallikozo's been hiring people for 'discrete work.' No questions asked, good coin. Three people who took jobs with him haven't come back, and their families are quiet about it. Too quiet." PARTIALLY TRUE. Rozito IS hiring people for work that's kept deliberately vague, but it's smuggling and resource acquisition for the Comet Chamber project (via the Queen's agents). Those who disappeared didn't die -- they were reassigned and can't communicate. Rozito himself doesn't know the full scope. Rozito is an information hub and fixer. Direct confrontation would be dangerous; negotiation is better.

3 "The Red Guard's recruiting. Posters going up offering gold to anyone who'll sign up as a 'castle auxiliary.' No military experience needed. They're desperate for bodies." PARTIALLY TRUE. Recruitment is real, but "auxiliary" is a euphemism for conscripted labor. Those who sign up ARE kept at the castle and DO return home eventually, but they're Shows how the Queen is building forces for her project.

Nobody I know who joined came back to tell us how it is.”

under Watch and very careful about what they say. Recruitment is coercive (soldiers make the option clear).

4 ”A scholar from the university was looking to buy old books from the catacombs. Specific texts about astronomy and the movement of celestial bodies. He had a Queen’s warrant. Nobody knew the university was commissioning this research.”

TRUE. The Queen IS funding occult astronomical research through intermediaries. The scholar is real, the warrant is real, and this is part of understanding what the Comet Chamber is supposed to do.

Direct evidence of the Queen’s planning. Could be investigated at the university or by confronting the scholar.

5 ”Jack Winbow’s been seen arguing with General Markos near the docks -- really shouting, red-faced. Winbow looked scared. The General walked away and Jack went pale. Someone’s got leverage on the smuggler.”

TRUE. The confrontation happened. Markos is ”encouraging” Winbow’s compliance with resource smuggling through implied threats. Winbow is afraid because he knows the Red Guard can make people disappear.

Shows how the Queen consolidates her supply chain through coercion.

6 ”They say the Lich Cultists have a hideout in the catacombs -- not just the bones in the ground, but actual people in robes doing things. The Watch won’t go down there. The

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Lich Cult DOES have influence in the catacombs, but the Watch avoids the area for practical reasons (it’s dangerous, poorly mapped, and maintaining order there

Establishes the catacombs as a lawless zone.

Queen won't order them to. Conspiracy." costs more than it's worth). The Queen is aware but unconcerned because the Cult isn't directly threatening her authority.

7 "The Marketplace Butcher told my husband that metal prices have tripled. Copper, steel, brass -- all going to the castle by order of the Queen's agents. Something big's being built, and it's not just decoration." TRUE. Materials ARE being hoarded for the Comet Chamber's clockwork and mechanical systems. The prices reflect real scarcity and the Queen's buying power. Economic evidence of the Comet Chamber project.

8 "A woman came to the market asking after Devorlen Koss with very specific questions about occult apparatus. Didn't seem like a customer. Seemed like inspection. She wore an Albion fashion and had the accent." FALSE. No such woman came through. However, this rumor WILL worry Koss if the party mentions it, potentially making him jumpy or more guarded. Could be used to pressure Koss into talking by suggesting Albion is investigating him.

9 "The university's closing off a whole wing of the library. Nobody allowed in. They're saying renovations, but scholars who worked there have been..." PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen HAS requisitioned certain academic resources and texts, and the university is complying. The "closing" is real but framed as main- Shows institutional collaboration with the Queen's agenda.

encouraged... to take 'sabbaticals.'"

tenance. Some scholars were asked (not forced) to step back from certain research.

10 "I saw a Bone Sentinel being repaired in an alley behind a blacksmith's shop. Its arm was falling off, and a man in red and gold was fitting a new one made of brass and crystal. It wasn't decay -- it was construction."

TRUE. The Queen's agents DO maintain and upgrade the Bone Sentinels using both necromantic and mechanical techniques. The observed repair is real and suggests the Sentinels are being prepared for some purpose.

Shows the blending of magic and machinery in the setting.

11 "The Queen's been making pilgrimages to Hallaset Fields at night. A groundskeeper swears she stands in the oldest section and just listens. Listens to the dead, maybe. Or speaks to them."

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen HAS visited the cemetery multiple times, and she does spend time near the oldest graves. However, she's not listening to the dead -- she's studying the ground, the placement of ancient burials, and geographical features. This is practical research, not mysticism.

Suggests the cemetery is important to understanding the Queen's plan.

12 "There's a shortage of candles now. Candles. Of all things. They're going somewhere in bulk. The wax merchant says he can't keep up with demand, and

TRUE. The Comet Chamber project requires vast quantities of candles (for light during construction, for rituals, for observation of the comet's arrival). The

Reflects real scarcity and the hidden scope of the Comet Chamber.

he's not even sure who the Queen is consolidating supply through intermediaries."

13 "A child was sick with a fever that wouldn't break. The physicians couldn't help. She was taken to someone in the Underground -- a woman who knows old magic. The fever broke within a day. The mother won't say anything else, but you can bet the Queen's people know."

PARTIALLY TRUE. Color and Someone WAS healed in the atmosphere. Underground by a practitioner of folk magic. Shows the Underground as a living, complex space. However, the Queen's people don't know or care about isolated healings. This rumor reflects the reality that the Underground has its own economy and services operating outside the law.

14 "Merchants from out of town have stopped coming to Kormor Kirak. The caravans are taking other routes. Something's scared them off -- bandits, maybe, or the Queen's agents taking what they want."

PARTIALLY TRUE. Merchants ARE becoming cautious. The Queen IS requisitioning goods more aggressively, which cuts into profit margins. However, there aren't bandits attacking caravans (yet). The reduction in trade is economic -- Kormor Kirak is becoming a less attractive market. Reflects the economic stranglehold the Queen's project is creating.

15 "They say if you want something, anything, Rozito Vallikozo can get it. But the price isn't

PARTIALLY TRUE. Shows the interconnected nature of power Rozito IS an information broker and uses blackmail/leverage as currency. How-

always coin. Sometimes it's silence. Sometimes it's service. He's got leverage on half the city, and the Queen's got leverage on him. We're all caught in a web."

ever, the Queen doesn't have direct leverage on him -- rather, they work in mutual understanding. He provides services; she provides protection and opportunity.

in Kormor Kirak.

16 "The Marketplace Butcher's daughter asked me for work in the castle. I turned her down -- told her to stay away. Anyone who goes up that hill these days doesn't quite come back the same. They're drained somehow."

RED HERRING. The butcher's daughter did ask, and some people might refuse, but no one is literally "drained." The rumor reflects the eerie atmosphere and the knowledge that castle work changes people (they're exposed to strange things, they're threatened with silence, they see things the common folk don't).

Atmosphere and creates unease about what goes on at the castle.

17 "A scholar came through asking about the 'Architecture of Light' -- some old text supposedly in the cathedral archives. They were willing to pay gold for information about it. The cardinal's people shut that conversation down real quick."

PARTIALLY TRUE. Someone WAS asking about such texts (which relate to optics and light reflection -- potentially relevant to the Comet Chamber). The cathedral HAS old archives, and the clergy IS protective of them. However, the cardinal doesn't know the full purpose of the inquiry.

Suggests connections between the church and the Queen's agenda.

18 ”The Price of copper wire has gone through the roof. You can’t get it for love nor coin. It’s all being purchased through standing orders. Someone’s building something electric -- and I don’t know what that means, but it doesn’t sound natural.”

TRUE. The Comet Chamber’s design includes electrical components (the setting blends gas-lit steampunk with magical elements). Copper wire IS being hoarded. This rumor reflects real scarcity and genuine fear of unknown technology.

Confirms the technological sophistication of the Comet Chamber.

19 ”The street workers who fixed the road near Castle Torony Piros three months ago have all gotten sick. Same sickness -- weakness, nosebleeds, bad dreams. The physician says it’s coincidence, but is it? What were they exposed to?”

RED HERRING. The workers WERE exposed to something unusual -- the residual effects of construction near occult apparatus and magical energies. However, they’re not actually sick; they’re just unwell from the metaphysical disturbance. They’ll recover with time and distance.

Suggests the Comet Chamber has already begun to affect the physical world.

20 ”My uncle works on the docks. He says shipments from the north have stopped. The northern pass is blocked or dangerous. There’s talk the Queen’s people control the roads now -- taxation or tribute to use them.”

PARTIALLY TRUE. Shows the resistance movement gaining capability.

Northern shipments ARE unreliable, but not because of Queen’s control. Rather, the Resistance HAS begun disrupting supply lines to apply pressure. The Queen’s people are attempting to control the roads but haven’t fully succeeded yet.

DOCKS & ELF ROAD

Salt spray and the screams of gulls. Danger and opportunity mix at the water’s edge. Dock workers and sailors hear things from travelers and from each other. Rumors here are volatile, mixing truth with superstition and fear.

D20 RUMOR

1	<p>”They’re building a tower at the castle -- stone and metal, going higher every week. You can see it from the cliff road on clear days. It’s pointing up. Pointing at the sky. Whatever it’s for, it ain’t natural.”</p>	<p>TRUE. The Comet Chamber’s primary structure is indeed a tall tower designed to observe and potentially interact with the incoming comet. The visible construction is real and the height is deliberate.</p>	<p>Direct evidence visible from a distance. Players can observe and investigate.</p>
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2	<p>”A ship came in from the coastal trade routes saying they spotted something in the water -- something large and luminescent, moving beneath the surface. They wouldn’t dock at Kormor Kirak after that. Said the waters were wrong here.”</p>	<p>FALSE. No such creature exists. However, rumors of such things are common in maritime folklore, and this particular version may have been fabricated by the ship’s captain to avoid docking (perhaps they wanted to avoid scrutiny from the Queen’s agents, or the Captain has Albion sympathies).</p>	<p>Atmosphere and shows how fear shapes perception.</p>
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3	<p>”A prisoner transport came through yesterday with Red Guard escort, guarded like they were carrying the Queen herself. The prisoner was hooded, but you could tell from the way he moved -- cultured, angry, powerful. One of the guards let slip the name</p>	<p>FALSE. Devorlen Koss is NOT imprisoned. However, Koss might be questioned or briefly detained by the Red Guard for selling prohibited materials. This rumor is someone’s misheard conversation badly garbled.</p>	<p>Could worry Koss if he hears it, making him paranoid and potentially more helpful to the party.</p>
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'Koss' before getting shut down."

- 4 "The cliff road's becoming dangerous at night. Travelers who've used it after dark report being stalked. No bandits found, no bodies, but something's out there, and it's not human. The Red Guard won't patrol it."
- PARTIALLY TRUE. The cliff road IS becoming unsafe, but not from a supernatural creature. The Resistance has begun operating there, ambushing Red Guard patrols and requisitioning supplies. No civilians have been killed (Whitehallow is disciplined), but the appearance of a threat is real.
- Shows the Resistance becoming active and bold.

- 5 "Jack Winbow's ship came into harbor with the stern broken -- looked like it'd hit rocks or been in a collision. Winbow himself looked haggard, not like his usual confident self. He was shouting at dock workers to repair it immediately and that someone would pay. Sounded like someone already had."
- TRUE. Winbow's ship WAS damaged during a run from Albion (rough seas, not sabotage). He's stressed because he's obligated to run goods for the Queen and a delay costs him money and reputation. His behavior reflects genuine duress.
- Shows Winbow under pressure. Could be leveraged if the party approaches him correctly.

- 6 "There's an Automatic Assassin been spotted near the docks -- a mechanical thing made of brass and clockwork, moving faster
- PARTIALLY TRUE. An Automatic Assassin HAS been observed in the area, but it hasn't killed anyone. It's hunting specific targets on the
- Introduces a dangerous foe. Shows the Queen's apparatus for

than anything natural should. It killed a dockworker two weeks ago, and nobody reported it because everybody's afraid of what that means."

Queen's behalf (likely people she wants eliminated quietly). The dockworker story is an exaggeration born from fear, but a dockworker WAS found dead of mysterious causes (poisoning, not the assassin).

eliminating threats.

7 "Sailors from the north say the Queen's sent ships up the coast to... they wouldn't say to what. Some kind of expedition or salvage operation. One sailor swore he saw strange apparatus being loaded -- mirrors and lenses bigger than houses."

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen HAS sent expeditions to research the northern territories for magical or occult artifacts that might aid the Comet Chamber. The mirrors and lenses are real -- they're being collected for the Chamber's optical systems. The sailor is describing something true but doesn't understand what he's seeing.

Suggests the Queen's resource-gathering extends beyond Kormor Kirak.

8 "There's been an increase in missing persons from among the dock workers. Three in the last month, all strong, all healthy, all just... gone. The Queen's people are recruiting or conscripting. Stay away if you want to stay free."

TRUE. The Queen's agents ARE selectively recruiting dock workers for the Comet Chamber project (they need strong laborers). The "missing" are actually conscripted and quartered near the castle, but communication with their families is restricted. Their absence appears to be disappearance.

Motivates the party to investigate. Players might rescue conscripted workers.

9 "A plague ship from Albion tried to dock here. The captain said they had a passenger -- some kind of noble or official -- who needed to reach the castle urgently. The harbor master turned them away, but not before the passenger was seen leaving the ship in a small boat."

RED HERRING. No plague ship docked. However, there HAVE been discreet visits by Albion agents (perhaps even Ambassador Harken's surrogates) trying to understand what the Queen is doing. The party might discover evidence of such visits and misinterpret them as plague-related.

Encourages paranoia about Albion involvement.

10 "The Captain of the Harbor -- Captain Ashford -- he's been meeting with suspicious sorts at night. Traders who don't usually dock here, merchants with covered cargo. He's being paid to look away, or he's working with them. Either way, something's wrong with the chain of command."

PARTIALLY TRUE. Ashford HAS met with agents of the Queen and with supply smugglers, but he's enforcing her will, not circumventing it. He's part of the apparatus now. "Suspicious" is accurate from the perspective of ordinary dock workers who don't know Ashford's loyalties have shifted.

Shows the Queen's reach into official structures.

11 "There's talk of building a bridge somewhere on the coast, connecting Kormor Kirak to the smaller islands. The Queen's commissioned surveys. Whatever's on those is-

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen IS researching the islands as potential sites for secondary research stations or resource gathering. A bridge is not yet planned, but infrastructure improvements are under consideration. The is-

Suggests the Comet Chamber's influence extends beyond the city.

lands, she wants better access.”

lands may have occult significance related to the comet’s arrival.

12 ”I saw a Necrotic Bulk dragged through the docks in chains, contained in a iron cage that was glowing. It was being taken up toward the castle. The Queen’s collecting creatures now, not just soldiers.”

TRUE. The Queen IS acquiring and containing dangerous creatures for study and/or for ritual purposes. The Necrotic Bulk is real, the cage is real, and this represents an escalation in her resource gathering.

Shows the scope and strangeness of the Comet Chamber project.

13 ”A lighthouse keeper on the north point went mad last month. Started talking about ‘the light above’ and drew strange symbols all over the walls. They’ve locked him up now. The Queen’s people came and took all his notes and instruments. What was he seeing?”

PARTIALLY TRUE. The lighthouse keeper DID experience some kind of episode (exposure to residual magical effects from early Comet Chamber work, perhaps, or simply mental illness). The Queen’s people took his notes because he may have documented unusual astronomical phenomena. He’s not mad in a permanent sense but experienced a temporary disturbance.

Shows the Comet Chamber’s effects spreading across the city.

14 ”A merchant came through from the interior of the land saying the roads south of Kormor Kirak are be-

FALSE. The roads are fine. However, this rumor reflects genuine fear that celestial bodies can affect the earth

Atmosphere. Shows how the comet’s approach is

coming harder to use -- (which is true in some magical infiltrating rocks moved, new ravines systems). The merchant may the popu- opened. Like the earth it- be exaggerating normal sea- lace's con- self is changing. Could it be the comet? Is it pulling spreading fear deliberately. sciousness. on the world?"

15 "A trader from Albion said that out in their territories, they're seeing changes in the night sky -- the constellations aren't where they should be. He said it like it was a warning about something coming. He wouldn't say more before he sailed away."

PARTIALLY TRUE. An Albion trader MAY have noted astronomical anomalies (the comet IS approaching, after all). Albion IS aware of the celestial activity. However, Albion doesn't know about the Comet Chamber yet and is simply observing natural phenomena.

Shows the comet's effects are becoming obvious to multiple nations.

16 "The supply ships from Albion have been smaller. Less cargo. Less grain, less cloth, less of everything. Someone's cutting us off, or can't spare the goods. Trade between the kingdoms is dying."

PARTIALLY TRUE. Albion trade HAS decreased because of the geopolitical tension and because they're shifting resources to their own concerns (they've noticed the astronomical anomalies and are preparing). The Queen's increased demands on merchants also discourage foreign trade.

Reflects the economic pressure on the city and hints at larger forces at work.

17 "A diver went down to inspect the harbor pilings and came up babbling

FALSE. No diver found anything unusual. However, this rumor will worry anyone who

Could be used to prompt the

about 'crystalline structures' in the water, reflecting light in ways that shouldn't be possible. He was sedated by the Queen's physicians. Nobody's seen him since."

knows about the Queen's occult research. It WILL prompt paranoid investigation.

party into exploring the harbor.

18 "Jack Winbow hired a crew of rough sorts -- mercenaries or privateers, not sailors. They were loaded with weapons and supplies for a long journey. The ship sailed north, toward the restricted waters. Nobody came back."

FALSE. Winbow did hire unusual crew members, but they were sent on a supply run for the Queen (coercively), not a privateering expedition. The ship returned (though Winbow himself was not aboard for some legs). The "nobody came back" is false.

Creates drama around Winbow. Could lead to party investigation of his activities.

19 "The Ancient is awake. I've heard stories from the old-timers -- they say there's something in the deepest parts of the catacombs, something that was sleeping and shouldn't be disturbed. There's been activity down there -- movement, strange sounds. Someone's poking at something they shouldn't."

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Lich Cult IS active in the deep catacombs and may be aware of (or attempting to contact) ancient entities. The "Ancient" might exist, or it might be folklore. Either way, the catacombs are becoming more active, and there's real danger there.

Foreshadows deeper mysteries. Suggests the Lich Cult and Queen are competing for power/knowledge.

”A Resistance fighter was captured at the cliff road and brought to the castle. They said she was interrogated by someone who asked specifically about Barron Whitehallow’s location and the size of his forces. She didn’t break, or if she did, they kept her alive. She might still be imprisoned.”

PARTIALLY TRUE. A Resistance member WAS captured, but the interrogation revealed nothing (the fighter was trained to resist). She IS still imprisoned in the castle dungeons, a potential rescue mission for the party. General Markos is pressuring her, knowing Whitehallow’s location is valuable.

Olivia Case Hook: Prisoner in the Castle.

EMBASSY DISTRICT

Refined conversation, but with an edge of diplomacy. Rumors here are more carefully constructed, often weaponized. Overhearing information in the embassy district is like finding pieces of a complex puzzle.

D20 RUMOR

1	<p>”Ambassador Harken has been confined to the embassy for weeks now. No official functions, no outings. His staff is worried. Some say the Queen has forbidden him from leaving. Some say he tried to leave and was stopped.”</p>	<p>PARTIALLY TRUE. Harken HAS been restricted, but it’s a diplomatic (if tense) arrangement. The Queen has expressed displeasure with Albion’s lack of cooperation in certain matters. Harken is technically free to leave but believes staying and negotiating is safer than returning to Albion with nothing to show.</p>	<p>Shows the Queen’s pressure on foreign relations. Harken might be an ally or obstacle depending on context.</p>
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2	<p>”A delegation from Albion came and left without ceremony. No official announcement. They met with the Queen in private, and when they departed, they looked defeated. Albion must be negotiating for something the Queen won’t give.”</p>	<p>TRUE. Albion DID send a delegation seeking knowledge about the Comet Chamber or attempting to prevent the Queen from proceeding. The Queen refused them. Relations are deteriorating.</p>	<p>Suggests the Queen is acting unilaterally, not accountable to other powers.</p>
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3	<p>”The Queen sent a gift to the Albion Embassy -- a box of what they said were ‘ceremonial mirrors.’ Albion accepted them but the Ambassador seemed troubled.</p>	<p>PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen DID send mirrors (possibly enchanted or designed for the Comet Chamber’s optical systems) as a gesture (or a taunt). Albion accepted them diplomatically</p>	<p>Suggests the Queen is openly toying with Albion.</p>
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Within days, the mirrors were packed away and sealed. They're afraid of them." but is studying them carefully. They may be trying to determine if they pose a threat.

4 "An Albion scholar arrived at the embassy with crates of books and instruments. They're studying something about the sky. The Queen's people asked what they were doing, and Albion refused to say. There's a war of information happening." TRUE. Albion IS researching the astronomical anomalies and the comet's approach. They're withholding information from the Queen while attempting to gather it from her. This is genuine espionage disguised as diplomatic presence. Shows the comet is a matter of international concern.

5 "Ambassador Harken drinks alone in the embassy garden at night. A servant said he heard the Ambassador muttering to himself about 'stopping her before it's too late.' The Queen's plans frighten him, or he knows what they are." PARTIALLY TRUE. Harken IS anxious about the Queen's activities and genuinely believes the Comet Chamber could be catastrophic. He's attempting to understand the project without direct information. His muttering reflects real concern, not knowledge. Shows Albion sees the Queen as a genuine threat.

6 "The Queen attended a diplomatic dinner last month and made cryptic remarks about 'the future belonging to those PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen DID make such remarks (she's becoming more openly about her ambitions). However, it's not a threat dir- Character color. Shows the Queen's growing boldness.

who seize it' and 'celestial gifts for the worthy.' She was staring at the Albion delegation the whole time. It sounded like a threat."

ected at Albion specifically -- it's general confidence in her plans. Albion interprets it as threatening because they sense something is wrong.

7 "A courier came from Albion with sealed documents. The Queen's people demanded to know the contents, claiming they contained information about trade. Albion refused, citing diplomatic immunity. The documents were allowed through, but the Queen was furious."

TRUE. This happened. The documents contained information about the astronomical anomalies and Albion's assessment of their danger. The Queen is frustrated by Albion's independence and lack of cooperation.

Shows diplomatic tension escalating.

8 "There's a hidden room in the Albion Embassy -- I know someone who works there and swears it exists, behind the ambassador's private study. It's locked, it's guarded, and nobody official admits it exists. They're hiding something."

PARTIALLY TRUE. There IS a secure room (standard for diplomatic missions), but it's not hidden -- it's a normal secured archive for sensitive documents. Albion is indeed protecting information about the comet and their observations of Kormor Kirak.

Reflects paranoia about diplomatic secrets.

9 "General Markos has been seen meeting with

PARTIALLY TRUE. Markos HAS met with Albion

Shows the complexity of the

Albion agents away from official channels. They talk for an hour or more, then part ways. Is Markos selling out the Queen? Or is he negotiating for her?"

representatives (intelligence gathering and understanding their capabilities). He's not selling out the Queen; he's serving her by gathering information and maintaining a channel of communication. These meetings are with her knowledge, though not advertised.

Queen's intelligence apparatus.

10 "A woman arrived at the embassy claiming to have information about the Queen's projects. She was brought inside and hasn't been seen in weeks. The ambassador won't discuss her. She could be dead, imprisoned, or negotiating a defection."

RED HERRING. No such person arrived. However, Albion WISHES they had an insider in the Queen's circle. This rumor reflects their frustration and desperation.

Shows Albion's intelligence gaps.

11 "The Queen invited Ambassador Harken to view the castle's 'new architectural developments.' He went, came back pale, and said nothing about what he saw. The next day, he sent a strongly-worded diplomatic note

PARTIALLY TRUE. Such an invitation could have occurred, and Harken WOULD be shocked by the Comet Chamber's scale and strangeness. However, if it happened, Albion would immediately escalate the diplomatic crisis. This is likely rumor/exaggera-

Suggests the party might trigger diplomatic crisis by revealing the Comet Chamber.

about 'concerning developments.'"

tion, but the threat is real if it comes to pass.

12 "A locksmith was brought to the embassy and spent three days working on something in the secure room. When he left, he was paid gold -- far more than the work should have cost. The locksmith was then visited by the Red Guard. He left the city."

FALSE. No such locksmith existed. However, this rumor suggests Albion is desperate to secure something or someone. It could be a psychological operation by the Queen's agents to create paranoia within the embassy.

Shows information warfare at play.

13 "The Queen's scholars have been in contact with Albion's university -- asking about old texts, historical records. If the Queen is looking in Albion's archives for something, it must be powerful knowledge she's missing."

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen HAS instructed intermediaries to research Albion's historical records (especially anything about previous comets or celestial events). Albion is aware and is sharing minimal information while observing what the Queen is interested in.

Shows the Queen is methodically researching her project.

14 "Ambassador Harken was seen at a merchant's house in the city, not at the embassy. Late at night, no guards. He was meeting with someone the merchant wouldn't

TRUE. Harken HAS had a secret meeting with a contact in the city (possibly a spy, possibly a sympathizer). He's gathering intelligence on the Queen's plans through unofficial channels. The Queen's

Shows Harken as a more complex character. Could be approached.

name. That's not official diplomacy -- that's espionage."

agents are aware and are allowing it (partly to monitor Harken, partly because it suits the Queen to have Albion confused about her intentions).

15 "The embassy's been flying an unusual flag for the past week. It's Albion's standard, but with a change -- a symbol added to it. Diplomats from other nations have noticed. It's a signal, or a warning."

RED HERRING. No flag change occurred. However, if the party notices and mentions this, it will create diplomatic tension as the Queen investigates the "signal."

Could be used to create complications through miscommunication.

16 "Harken met with the Queen's chief physician at a neutral location and gave him a package. Medicines? Poison? Information encoded? Nobody knows, but the physician was paid heavily and asked to keep it secret."

PARTIALLY TRUE. There WAS a meeting, and Harken may have provided information about health/poisons (Albion is concerned about the Queen's mental state and is gathering data). The payment is a translation of diplomatic courtesy into merchantable form.

Shows Albion trying to understand if the Queen is stable or compromised.

17 "The Albion Embassy received a shipment of supplies from home -- more than usual, despite the trade tensions.

FALSE. The supplies are routine, perhaps slightly increased due to the embassy's extended isolation. Albion is

Reflects paranoia about Albion's intentions.

Weapons components? not preparing for war, only
 Magical apparatus? for a diplomatic crisis.
 Something for a war?"

18 "An Albion astrologer arrived at the embassy claiming to possess charts of the coming comet's trajectory. The Queen's people learned of this and demanded the charts. Albion refused. The astrologer has since disappeared."

PARTIALLY TRUE. An astrologer DID arrive (Albion is serious about understanding the comet). The Queen DID attempt to acquire the charts through diplomatic pressure. The astrologer hasn't disappeared but has been kept in protective custody at the embassy for safety.

Suggests the comet is the central issue, not just politics.

19 "General Markos received a gift from Albion -- something sealed and formal. He opened it in private and looked shocked. He showed it to no one. It's still in his quarters, locked away."

RED HERRING. Markos did receive a formal gift (diplomatic courtesy), but it's nothing extraordinary. The "shock" is projection and misreading of a simple diplomatic gesture.

Could prompt the party to investigate Markos' quarters.

20 "There's going to be a negotiation between the Queen and Albion next month -- a summit or a formal meeting to discuss the 'celestial situation.' That's the word on the diplomatic circuit. Something big is about

PARTIALLY TRUE. Discussions ARE happening (via diplomatic channels) about a possible formal meeting. If one occurs, it will be tense, and the Queen might use it to consolidate international acceptance of the Comet Cham-

Foreshadows a potential dramatic scene.

to be revealed, or some- ber or to intimidate Albion
thing big is about to hap- into non-interference.
pen.”

MONASTERY & CEMETERY

Stone and silence, the weight of history and death. Rumors here are whispered, careful, haunted by what the listeners believe lingers in these places. The living share these grounds reluctantly with what they fear is unliving.

D20 RUMOR

1	<p>”The monks have been digging in the oldest part of the cemetery -- digging up graves. Brother Aldric says it’s consecration, but gravediggers don’t consecrate. They exhume. What was in those graves that the Queen wanted removed?”</p>	<p>PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen’s agents DID have the monks exhume certain graves (those containing powerful or notable dead whose remains might have occult value). Brother Aldric framed it as consecration/relocation to prevent accusations of desecration. The exhumed remains are gone -- taken to the castle for study or ritual use.</p>	<p>Shows the Queen is preparing the ground for the Comet Chamber and gathering materials.</p>
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2	<p>”A light has been seen in the cemetery at night -- not gaslight, not a torch. A blue light, moving between the graves. It manifests once a month, always on the same night. The monks won’t discuss it.”</p>	<p>PARTIALLY TRUE. There IS unusual luminescence in the cemetery (magical residue from the Comet Chamber work and/or Lich Cult activities). The monks HAVE seen it and fear it’s a sign of the dead stirring. The monthly pattern might be coincidence or perception bias.</p>	<p>Atmosphere and suggests the undead or magic is active at the cemetery.</p>
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3	<p>”A grave was opened from the inside. The stone lid was pushed up, not dug out. A gravedigger swears it’s true, and he won’t work</p>	<p>FALSE. No such phenomenon occurred. However, the gravedigger may have misinterpreted an exhumation (the Queen’s</p>	<p>Excellent atmospheric rumor. Creates dread.</p>
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that section anymore. agents opened a grave) or
 Whatever was in that may be spreading fear de-
 grave, it wasn't content to liberately. The rumor re-
 stay buried." flects deep anxiety about
 the cemetery becoming a
 site of wrongness.

4 "Brother Aldric has been TRUE. Aldric IS aware of Aldric is a po-
 speaking about 'the city's the Comet Chamber pro- tential ally and
 sins' and 'the price of am- ject (perhaps through con- source of in-
 bition.' He's worried about fession, perhaps through formation.
 something happening, observation). He's deeply
 something that might be concerned that the Queen's
 stopped through prayer ambitions will bring dis-
 but will be if we're not aster. He's hoping prayer
 careful. He seems to know or faith might mitigate the
 something." worst outcomes, though
 he's pragmatic enough to
 help the party if they ask.

5 "The bones -- the dis- PARTIALLY TRUE. The Shows the Lich
 played bones in the monas- Lich Cult HAS been active Cult's infiltra-
 tery catacombs -- they've in the monastery cata- tion. The cata-
 been moved. New arrange- combs, using the ossuary combs are a site
 ments. Someone's been in for their own rituals. The of conflict
 there organizing them, and monks discovered evidence between Cult,
 it wasn't the monks. The of this (bones moved, sym- Church, and
 monks are frightened." bols drawn, items placed) Crown.
 and are terrified. They
 haven't reported it because
 they fear retaliation or
 skepticism.

6 "A pilgrim came to the monastery seeking refuge and collapsed upon entering the cemetery. The monks brought him inside, but he kept muttering about 'the weight of the dead' and 'voices pulling him down.' He died that night without waking. Some places aren't meant for the living anymore."

RED HERRING. The pilgrim was simply very sick (disease, poison, or magical curse). The monastery is not literally cursed, though the Queen's activities are making people vulnerable to real and perceived supernatural threats.

Atmosphere. Suggests the cemetery is becoming dangerous or spiritually corrupted.

7 "The cathedral and the monastery are not on good terms. A deacon mentioned that the cathedral's archives are being 'secured' because of 'irregularities.' The monastery's asking to borrow certain texts, and the cathedral's refusing. There's a schism forming."

PARTIALLY TRUE. The church leadership IS divided about how to respond to the Queen's activities. The cathedral is more complex or cooperative; the monastery is more independent and critical. Resources and knowledge are being restricted as factions vie for control.

Shows institutional conflict. The church is not unified.

8 "A scholar was found dead in the monastery library -- no wounds, no signs of struggle, just... dead. He'd been researching something in the oldest texts. The cause was never officially determined. The

PARTIALLY TRUE. A scholar WAS found dead (possibly from magical backlash, possible from poison, possibly from natural causes -- it's genuinely unclear). He WAS researching occult texts related to

Suggests dangerous knowledge in the monastery. Could motivate the party to investigate.

books he was reading are now kept under lock.”

celestial events and resurrection. The death is suspicious enough that the texts are now restricted.

9 ”The cemetery’s groundskeeper quit, and nobody’s replaced him. The graves aren’t being maintained. The grass is growing wild. It’s like the Queen’s abandoned the place, or she’s preserving it for something.”

PARTIALLY TRUE. The groundskeeper DID leave (spooked by the exhumations and strange activity). The Queen HAS deliberately reduced maintenance because the cemetery is being integrated into the Comet Chamber’s infrastructure. The ground itself is becoming important.

Shows the cemetery’s transition from place of rest to site of power/project.

10 ”Brother Aldric’s been making copies of certain monastery texts and hiding them. A young monk who’s sympathetic to learning mentioned it. Aldric’s preserving knowledge for someone, or against someone.”

PARTIALLY TRUE. Aldric HAS been copying and preserving texts (out of fear they might be lost or destroyed if the Queen’s agents raid the monastery, or if the Lich Cult gains influence). He’s not hiding them for a specific person but for posterity and safety. If approached, he might share them with the party.

Aldric is actively resisting in quiet ways. Could become a resource.

11 ”Bone Sentinels have been seen near the cemetery at night. The monks report

TRUE. The Queen IS using Bone Sentinels to secure the cemetery and mon-

Shows the Queen’s military control ex-

them moving through the grounds as if on patrol or inspection. They never enter the monastery itself, but they're watching. The Queen's establishing a presence there."

itor activity. This is part of controlling the ground for the Comet Chamber and preventing interference from the Resistance or other parties. The monks are frightened but not openly defiant.

tending even to sacred ground.

12 "A child was brought to the monastery very ill. The monks tended her, prayed for her. She recovered. But after she left, Brother Aldric said something strange to the other monks: 'She was touched by them. She would have been taken.' The monks wouldn't explain."

PARTIALLY TRUE. A child WAS healed at the monastery. However, the monks' cryptic comments might reflect a belief that the child was at spiritual risk (from the Comet Chamber's magic, from Lich Cult influence, from proximity to the cemetery's corruption). They may have performed protective rituals.

Suggests the monastery provides spiritual protection against unknown forces.

13 "A procession came through the cemetery at midnight -- robed figures carrying strange instruments, moving between graves in a pattern. It only lasted an hour, then they vanished. The next morning, certain graves had

TRUE. The Lich Cult HAS been conducting rituals in the cemetery, marking graves and preparing the ground for their own purposes (possibly competing with the Queen's plans, possibly attempting to harness the comet for their own ends).

Direct evidence of Lich Cult activity. Investigating the symbols could uncover their plans.

symbols marked on their stones.” The symbols are real and might be deciphered.

14 ”The monastery’s bells have changed their sound. They’re discordant now, like they’re out of tune. The monks say they aren’t, but something’s wrong with how the sound carries. It’s been like this since the Queen’s work began.” RED HERRING. The bells are fine. However, the monks’ anxiety IS real and might be causing them to misperceive sounds. Alternatively, there IS residual magical disturbance making the bells ring strangely (metaphysically, not physically). Atmosphere and suggests magic is affecting the sacred space.

15 ”The Hallaset Fields cemetery is expanding -- new graves being dug at a rate that doesn’t match the city’s death toll. Someone’s burying things there that aren’t... bodies.” PARTIALLY TRUE. The cemetery IS being prepared (exhumed graves being filled with other materials, new sections being opened). The Queen’s agents are creating space for the Comet Chamber’s infrastructure, using the graveyard as a foundation and source of materials. Shows the cemetery’s integration into the Comet Chamber project.

16 ”A group of pilgrims tried to enter the cemetery for prayer and were turned away by Red Guard. No explanation given. Sacred ground is being restricted. That’s not something a TRUE. The Queen HAS placed restrictions on cemetery access to prevent interference with her preparations and to keep witnesses away. The restriction Shows the Queen’s prioritization of her project over religious tradition.

Christian Queen should do.” will cause religious and political tension.

17 ”There are more graves than there were before. Not new deaths -- I mean graves that weren’t here last year are now marked and settled. Someone’s been doing a lot of digging in the old sections. The monastery won’t answer questions about it.”

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen’s agents (and possibly the Lich Cult) have been moving remains and creating new grave sites as part of their preparations. The monastery knows more than they’re saying but won’t discuss it.

Shows both the Queen and Cult are using the cemetery as a resource.

18 ”The Ancient is in Hallaset Fields -- an old grave deeper than any other, older than the church itself. The Queen’s people found it and they’re careful around it. Brother Aldric warned someone about ’waking what should sleep.’ That grave has a mark now -- a fresh mark, like something’s been done to it.”

PARTIALLY TRUE. There IS an ancient grave (or graves) in the cemetery’s oldest section, possibly predating the church. The Queen’s agents have discovered and marked it. The monks are concerned. Whether an ”Ancient” (a creature or entity) actually exists is unclear, but the grave’s significance is real.

Foreshadows a deeper mystery. The cemetery might be concealing something older and more dangerous than current politics.

19 ”Brother Aldric has been writing -- long letters, sealed and hidden. A young monk who respects him says they’re meant for someone important, for

PARTIALLY TRUE. Aldric IS writing (journaling his concerns, possibly compiling evidence, possibly reaching out to contacts who might oppose the

Aldric as an active agent, not just a bystander.

someone who might 'prevent what's coming.' Aldric's not just praying -- he's preparing for war."

Queen). He's not preparing for literal war but for resistance through knowledge and community. If approached by the party, he might share these writings or reach out for help.

20 "The Queen came to the monastery and prayed alone in the sanctuary for an hour. Afterward, she met with Brother Aldric in private. Nobody knows what was said, but Aldric looked devastated -- as if he'd been given terrible knowledge or a worse choice. The Queen left smiling."

PARTIALLY TRUE. The Queen DID visit (establishing control and gathering information). She and Aldric DID speak privately (she was likely applying pressure or testing his loyalty). Aldric's distress reflects the genuine moral weight of his situation: Does he resist the Queen and risk the monastery, or does he cooperate and compromise his faith?

Character development for Aldric. Shows the Queen's reach into all aspects of society, including the church.

USING RUMORS IN PLAY

INTEGRATION WITH INVESTIGATION: Rumors from the marketplace often contain actionable leads. When players express interest in investigating a rumor, allow them to pursue it through interviews, observation, and research.

CONNECTING TO OLIVIA'S CASES: Several rumors align with investigation framework cases (missing persons, unexplained deaths, institutional conflicts). Use these as entry points to longer narratives.

ESCALATING TENSION: Early rumors are vague and easy to dismiss. Later rumors (if players delay or avoid investigation) should become more direct and threatening, building pressure.

TRUTH REVEALED: When players finally discover the truth behind a rumor, adjust your presentation based on what they learn. A partially true rumor might shift in meaning once the party understands the reality.

MISDIRECTION: Let false and red herring rumors send players on wild investigations that reveal other secrets. A chase for a non-existent sea creature might lead to discovery of smuggling operations or hidden facilities.

Remember: Kormor Kirak is a city of secrets, and the people living here are both victims of and complicit in those secrets. Rumors are the language of fear, hope, and survival.

PART FOUR: ENEMIES AND HORRORS

The Bestiary of Kormor Kirak

The dead do not rest easy in Kormor Kirak. They never have.

CAPITULUM

ENEMY BESTIARY

INTRODUCTION

This bestiary provides stat blocks and descriptions for the enemies, hostile creatures, and dangerous individuals encountered throughout the

The Eternal Court campaign. Whether running a single adventure or the full campaign arc, GMs will find everything necessary to bring these threats to life at the table.

Each entry includes complete stat blocks for tabletop roleplaying games, allowing GMs maximum flexibility in which system they prefer to use. The stat blocks are mechanically equivalent even when their mechanical expression differs, ensuring that difficulty remains consistent regardless of system choice.

The bestiary encompasses a wide range of threats, from common street criminals operating in the shadows of Kormor Kirak to supernatural horrors that defy understanding. Enemies are organized from the most common encounters (street-level pickpockets and hired muscle) through increasingly powerful adversaries, culminating in the true supernatural threats that drive the campaign narrative.

GMs should feel free to adjust enemy numbers, equipment, and abilities based on party composition and desired difficulty. A group of six experienced adventurers will handle a given threat very differently than a party of four beginners. The values provided serve as guidelines rather than absolutes, and the best encounters are those tailored to your specific table.

GENEE-LEVEL THUGS

KERESKEDO MARKET RUFFIAN

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

The night markets of Kormor Kirak attract more than merchants and tourists. Pickpockets, extortionists, and hired muscle prowl the alleys between stalls, preying on distracted foreigners and locals alike. These ruffians work in pairs or small gangs, operating under the protection of figures like Rozito who control the market's shadow economy. They favor intimidation over combat but will draw blades if cornered or desperate.

GANGSTER LIEUTENANT

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

The organized criminal element in Kormor Kirak operates through lieutenants who manage territories, collect debts, and eliminate competition. These individuals are experienced fighters with access to better equipment and tactical training. A gangster lieutenant commands three to six ruffians and answers to a boss who controls an entire district of the city's underground economy. They are smarter and more dangerous than common thugs, willing to negotiate but equally prepared to kill.

MILITARY FORCES

RED GUARD

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

The Red Guards are Queen Kiraline's personal military force, distinguished by their crimson uniforms and rigid discipline. They enforce the queen's law throughout Kormor Kirak, patrol the castle grounds, and accompany the royal family on public appearances. A Red

Guard answers only to the queen and her court. They operate in pairs on patrol, squads of six for enforcement actions, and companies of twenty for military operations. Most are competent soldiers, though they are trained to fight human threats, not supernatural ones. When the Necrotic

Bulk erupted from the Hallaset Fields, two Red Guards were torn apart before they could draw their weapons.

RED GUARD CAPTAIN

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Red Guard Captains command squads and oversee key installations within Kormor Kirak. They earned their rank through loyalty to the crown and competence in combat, though their ultimate allegiance is to Queen

Kiraline rather than any abstract concept of justice. A captain carries a decorated longsword and wears a crimson cloak over polished plate armor. They are tactically capable and will coordinate their squad's movements, using flanking maneuvers and shield walls to control the battlefield.

CAVALRY SOLDIER

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Mounted cavalry soldiers patrol the roads between cities and serve as rapid response forces during wartime. In Kormor Kirak, cavalry units are stationed at the Southern Gate and escort important figures along the

Queen's Road. These soldiers are trained to fight from horseback with lance and saber, using their mount's speed and mass to devastating effect against infantry. On foot, they are competent but unremarkable fighters. Their warhorse acts independently in combat.

MECHANICAL THINGS

CLOCKWORK SCOUT

Small construct, unaligned

The Terrassian Consulate's attic laboratory holds more than Automatic Assassins. Smaller clockwork constructs serve as scouts and surveillance devices, mechanical birds or rats with glass eyes that transmit visual information back to a control station. These devices are fragile but nearly silent, scuttling through vents and across rooftops to observe targets. Koss deploys them to monitor the theater construction site, the Kereskedo Market, and the movements of key individuals throughout the city. Destroying one alerts its controller immediately.

AUTOMATIC ASSASSIN

Medium construct, unaligned

The Automatic Assassin is Terrassian engineering at its most lethal: a humanoid mechanical construct with clockwork eyes whirring behind a shrouded face, hydraulic limbs capable of bending metal with a single strike, and a pneumatic crossbow integrated into its forearm. These machines pursue their targets with relentless, mindless precision. The first one breached the Albion Consulate's reinforced door with one blow, then chased Feeny across rooftops before putting two bolts through his chest. A second unit armed with explosive glass-

tipped arrows nearly destroyed Barron's carriage before something tore it apart on the rooftops. Koss maintains spare parts in his laboratory.

There are always more.

UNDEAD SHAMBLER

UNDEAD SHAMBLER

Medium undead, neutral evil

The Hallaset Fields cemetery extends for miles, and not all of its residents rest peacefully. Necromantic energy seeping through the soil animates individual corpses into shamblers: mindless, rotting bodies that drag themselves upright and stumble toward the living. They are slow and stupid but difficult to put down, absorbing punishment that would kill a living creature. A lone shambler is a nuisance. A dozen emerging from the tall grass at dusk is a different proposition entirely. The Lich Cult uses them as sentries, tripwires, and distractions while performing more dangerous rituals nearby.

NECROTIC BULK

Large undead, chaotic evil

The Necrotic Bulk is necromancy at its most horrifying: a creature made from the discarded parts of multiple corpses, reanimated limbs writhing and entwining into a mass of dead flesh that moves with terrible purpose. When Rozito carved his runes into the dead carriage driver's chest, the thing that rose was roughly the shape of a human but composed of dozens of separate body parts, all moving independently, all reaching. It tore through two armored Red Guards before they could scream. Jack and Eppy fought it in the Hallaset Fields while Olivia ran for help, and even their combined skill barely held it at

bay. The Bulk collapsed only when Szeret killed Rozito and severed his concentration.

It cannot be permanently destroyed while necromantic energy flows through the Hallaset Fields.

LICH CULT ACOLYTE

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

The Cult of the Lich operates in the shadows of Kormor Kirak, its members embedded in the city's population as merchants, servants, and laborers. An acolyte is a low-ranking cultist who has learned basic necromantic rituals: how to carve preservation runes, how to prepare corpses for reanimation, how to maintain the dark marks that serve as portal anchors. They carry concealed ritual daggers and wear the symbol of the cult beneath their clothing. Most are desperate people who turned to the cult for power, protection, or revenge. They fight with fanaticism when cornered but prefer to flee and report to their superiors.

LICH CULT NECROMANCER

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

The necromancers of the Lich Cult are the cult's true power, practitioners who have mastered the art of carving runes into flesh and binding dead matter to their will. They operate the ritual frameworks: arranging corpses into trellis patterns that serve as portals, beacons, and power sources. Feeney's body was found suspended in one such trellis with eighty-eight ritual wounds. A necromancer can animate corpses, create Necrotic Bulks, and open temporary portals between locations anchored by prepared corpses. They are dangerous spellcasters who prefer to fight behind their undead servants.

SUPERNATURAL ADVERSARIES

VAMPIRE SPAWN

Medium undead, neutral evil

When Kiraline feeds and chooses to turn rather than simply drain, the result is a vampire spawn: a lesser creature bound to her will, retaining enough intelligence to follow orders but lacking the full power and independence of a true vampire. These creatures serve as infiltrators and enforcers within the castle, appearing human until they reveal their fangs. During the masquerade ball, prisoners were taken to the dungeons where Kiraline and Szeret fed, and some of those victims rose again as spawn. They haunt the castle corridors at night, silent and patient, waiting to be unleashed.

MOUNTAIN WOLF

Medium beast, unaligned

The Videk Mountains surrounding Kormor Kirak are home to packs of grey wolves that grow larger and more aggressive than lowland breeds. They hunt elk and mountain goats in the high passes but are drawn to the valley by the scent of livestock and, occasionally, something else. Eppy knows their patterns well from her centuries running the Bastion Inn. A wolf pack typically has 4 to 8 members led by an alpha. They avoid open ground and prefer ambush tactics, using the tall grass of the Hallaset

Fields or the treeline along the mountain roads. Wolves become especially dangerous during winter months and full moons, when Jack's presence might agitate them.

ALPHA WOLF

Large beast, unaligned

The alpha of a Videk Mountain wolf pack is noticeably larger than its subordinates, scarred from territorial fights and hunts that would kill lesser animals. An alpha coordinates the pack's movements through body language and low vocalizations, directing flanking maneuvers and choosing when to press an attack or retreat. They are cunning enough to test a target's defenses before committing and will withdraw if the fight turns against them, dragging their pack with them. An alpha will fight to the death only to protect pups or if cornered with no escape.

ENCOUNTER TABLES

STREET ENCOUNTERS: KERESKEDO MARKET AND CITY STREETS

For wandering the streets and markets of Kormor Kirak at night, GMs can roll encounters with 2d4 Ruffians looking for easy marks, a Gangster

Lieutenant with 1d4 plus 1 Ruffians running a protection racket, a Red

Guard patrol of 2 guards investigating suspicious activity, or a pickpocket attempting to steal from the party. During the day, encounters tend toward social confrontations: a merchant overcharging foreigners, a street performer blocking a crucial alley, or Rozito's agents keeping tabs on the party's movements.

HALLASET FIELDS ENCOUNTERS

The cemetery fields outside the city are the most dangerous area in the campaign. At night, parties may encounter 1d6 Undead Shamblers emerging from the tall grass, a Necrotic Bulk being assembled by a Lich Cult

Necromancer with 2 Acolyte guards, 1d4 Mountain Wolves hunting near the treeline, or signs of recent necromantic ritual with a fresh trellis framework, a body, and runes still glowing. The fields grow more dangerous as the campaign progresses: early encounters involve lone shamblers, while later sessions see organized cult activity and multiple

Bulks operating simultaneously.

CASTLE AND COURT ENCOUNTERS

Inside Torony Castle and at court events, enemies wear smiles instead of armor. Red Guard patrols of 4 to 6 soldiers secure the corridors. A Red

Guard Captain commands each entrance. Vampire Spawn haunt the lower levels after dark, disguised as servants until they reveal themselves.

Kiraline's private chambers and the dungeon are off-limits, guarded by her most loyal servants and protected by magical wards. Social encounters here are often more dangerous than combat: a courtier asking pointed questions, a masked figure at the ball who knows too much, or

Rozito attempting to guide the party into a trap.

THEATER CONSTRUCTION SITE ENCOUNTERS

The reconstruction of the Theater of Everlasting Peace is the campaign's central mission and its most frequent source of trouble.

During the day, Nero and Zaffir's construction crew may clash with the party over safety concerns or supernatural interference. At night, the site becomes a target: a Clockwork Scout observing from the scaffolding, an Automatic Assassin positioned on a neighboring rooftop with an explosive bolt, or Lich Cult Acolytes attempting to inscribe necromantic runes into the theater's

foundations. As construction progresses, the threats escalate from sabotage to outright assault.

MOUNTAIN ROAD ENCOUNTERS

Travel between the city and surrounding locations follows narrow mountain roads through the Videk range. A wolf pack of 4 to 6 Mountain

Wolves led by an Alpha may trail the party through the passes, testing for weakness. Cavalry Soldiers patrol the main roads in pairs. Bandits, using Gangster Lieutenant stats, occasionally ambush travelers at narrow crossings. In winter, avalanches and ice storms create natural hazards that force the party to seek shelter, often in caves that hold their own surprises.

SCALING DIFFICULTY

For a party of 4 to 5 characters or Tier 2 in

a single Automatic Assassin or Necrotic Bulk serves as a challenging boss encounter. A squad of 6 Red Guards with a Captain makes for a medium-difficulty fight. Street-level encounters with Ruffians and

Gangsters work as warm-up encounters or complications during investigation scenes. Vampire Spawn should be reserved for mid-to-late campaign as they represent a significant threat escalation. Queen

Kiraline herself should be encountered only as the campaign's final confrontation, and even then, the goal should be survival and escape rather than direct combat unless the party has reached high levels.

Kereskedo Market Ruffian (Humanoid) -- A street-level criminal.

Clockwork Scout (Construct) -- A mechanical spy device.

Red Guard (Humanoid) -- A competent soldier of the Queen's force.

Cavalry Soldier (Humanoid, Mounted) -- A disciplined mounted combatant.

Gangster Lieutenant (Humanoid) -- An experienced criminal leader.

Red Guard Captain (Humanoid) -- A skilled and commanding officer.

CHALLENGE 5+ (POWERFUL AND BOSS THREATS)

Automatic Assassin (Construct) -- A lethal mechanical warrior.

Lich Cult Necromancer (Humanoid / Undead) -- A practitioner of dark arts.

Necrotic Bulk (Undead) -- A terrible amalgamation of corpses.

Vampire Spawn (Undead) -- A thrall of Queen Kiraline.

Queen Kiraline Veresz Eroszakos (Undead / Vampire) -- The ultimate power in Kormor Kirak.

HUMANOID CREATURES

Kereskedo Market Ruffian -- Challenge 1/8. Street-level criminal and hired muscle.

Gangster Lieutenant -- Challenge 2. Organized crime leader.

Red Guard -- Challenge 1/2. Queen Kiraline's soldier.

Red Guard Captain -- Challenge 3. Commander of guards.

Cavalry Soldier -- Challenge 1. Mounted military combatant.

Lich Cult Necromancer -- Challenge 5+. Practitioner of necromancy.

CONSTRUCT CREATURES

Clockwork Scout -- Challenge 1/4. Mechanical spy.

Automatic Assassin -- Challenge 5+. Deadly mechanical warrior.

UNDEAD CREATURES

Vampire Spawn -- Challenge 5+. Servant of the vampire queen.

Lich Cult Acolyte -- Challenge 2. Minor practitioner of dark magic.

Undead Shambler -- Challenge 1/4. Basic animated corpse.

Necrotic Bulk -- Challenge 5+. Amalgamation of corpses animated by ritual magic.

Queen Kiraline Veresz Eroszakos -- Challenge 8+. Ancient vampire and ultimate antagonist.

BEAST CREATURES

Mountain Wolf -- Challenge 1/4. Natural predator of the mountain ranges.

Alpha Wolf -- Challenge 1/2. Leader of the wolf pack.

Warhorse (Mounted Companion) -- Variable. Ridden by cavalry soldiers.

SUPERNATURAL CREATURES

Creature in the Cistern -- Challenge Unknown. Ancient and barely understood. Coexistence rather than combat.

SUGGESTED PARTY COMPOSITION AND LEVEL RANGES

Encounters are designed for parties of 4 -- 5 characters at levels 3 -- 12, progressing through the campaign as events unfold.

Encounters are designed for parties of 4 -- 5 characters at Tiers 1 -- 4, with difficulty scaling according to the mechanical system's tier structure.

EASY/MEDIUM/HARD DIFFICULTY GUIDANCE

EASY ENCOUNTERS (Suitable for recovering from previous battles or moving the narrative forward without significant threat):

- 2d4 Kereskedo Market Ruffians
- 1 Gangster Lieutenant with 1d2 Ruffians
- 2 Red Guards on routine patrol
- 1 Clockwork Scout
- A small group (3 -- 4) of Mountain Wolves without the Alpha

MEDIUM ENCOUNTERS (Challenging but beatable for a well-prepared party):

- 1 Automatic Assassin (alone)
- 6 Red Guards without a Captain
- 1 Red Guard Captain with 2 -- 3 Red Guards
- 1 Necrotic Bulk (alone)
- 1 Vampire Spawn
- 1 Lich Cult Necromancer with 2 -- 3 Acolytes

HARD ENCOUNTERS (Require strategy, resources, or retreat):

- 2 Automatic Assassins operating together
- 1 Red Guard Captain with 6 -- 8 Red Guards in formation
- 1 Lich Cult Necromancer with 2 Necrotic Bulks
- Multiple Vampire Spawn (2 -- 3) coordinating attack
- Queen Kiraline with her personal guard (for parties at highest levels only)

COMBINING CREATURES FOR THEMED ENCOUNTERS

MILITARY PATROL (CITY STREETS, DAYTIME)

- 1 Red Guard Captain commanding 6 -- 8 Red Guards
- They are disciplined and organized, using formation tactics
- Goal: Enforce order or search for fugitives
- Difficulty: Hard for lower-level parties; Medium for those at levels 7 -- 9

UNDEAD AMBUSH (HALLASET FIELDS, NIGHTTIME)

- 1 Lich Cult Necromancer commanding 2d4 Undead Shamblers
- Possible inclusion of 1 Necrotic Bulk as a focal point of the working
- The shamblers attack in waves while the Necromancer maintains control
- Difficulty: Medium to Hard depending on shambler count

STREET CRIME (CITY MARKETS, NIGHTTIME)

- 1 Gangster Lieutenant with 2d4 Kereskedo Market Ruffians
- They attempt extortion, robbery, or assault
- They flee if outnumbered but will call for reinforcements
- Difficulty: Easy to Medium

CASTLE INFILTRATION (TORONY PIROS, ANY TIME)

- Red Guard patrols of varying sizes
- Possible inclusion of Vampire Spawn in lower levels
- The environment itself becomes part of the encounter (secret passages, traps)
- Difficulty: Variable based on location and party approach

MECHANICAL THREAT (CITY-WIDE, COORDINATED)

- Multiple Clockwork Scouts reporting to a central controller
- Possible inclusion of 1 -- 2 Automatic Assassins
- The scouts provide intelligence that enemies use for preparation
- Difficulty: Medium if scouts are dealt with; Hard if assassins engage

BOSS ENCOUNTER GUIDANCE

Boss encounters should feel significant and should push the party to their limits. The most memorable boss fights occur when:

- The environment is used tactically by both sides
- The boss has minions or allies providing complexity
- The party discovers the boss is more than they initially believed
- Retreat is an option, allowing the campaign to continue with the party diminished but alive

Queen Kiraline as a final boss should be encountered only when the party has reached sufficient power to survive her abilities. Even then, the encounter should emphasize her supernatural nature and offer escape routes. A dead party is not a successful story; a party forced to flee from overwhelming power creates narrative tension.

The Necrotic Bulk should be terrifying and unique. Each encounter with a Bulk should feel like a revelation -- players should understand that they face something genuinely supernatural and that conventional tactics may fail. Winning against a Bulk should feel like an achievement, not an expectation.

An Automatic Assassin encounter should emphasize precision and overwhelming force applied to a single target. Once the party identifies the assassin, they

become the encounter's focus. Strategic positioning, magic that disrupts mechanics, or alliances with powerful figures become necessary for survival.

APPENDICES

Timeline, Pronunciation, Factions, and Media Comps

CAPITULUM

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: EMERGENCE OF THE VERESZ

ANCIENT ERA: THE FOUNDING

The Veresz dynasty rises in power in the lands beyond the Videk Mountains. The original citadel of Torony Piros is built from red stone quarried from the cliff face itself. The city of Kormor Kirak begins to grow around the fortress as a trade settlement along the mountain pass.

THREE CENTURIES AGO: THE RED GUARD FORMATION

Queen Mirella Veresz establishes the Red Guard as the primary military and police force of Kormor Kirak. The force remains under direct command of the Queen and swears personal loyalty rather than loyalty to abstract concepts of law or order.

TWO CENTURIES AGO: THE TOWER OF THORNS

Queen Mirella seals the Tower of Thorns after events within drive her to madness. The tower remains sealed for two hundred years. The circumstances of the sealing are lost or deliberately obscured.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO: THE CENTURY WAR BEGINS

War erupts between the Albion Empire and the Kingdom of Terrassia. The Videk Mountains become the primary barrier separating the two powers. Kormor Kirak officially declares neutrality, positioning itself as a trade hub accessible to both empires.

FIFTY YEARS PAST: THE ALBION CONSULATE OPENS

The Albion Empire establishes a formal consulate in Kormor Kirak. This marks the beginning of more intensive Albion involvement in the city's politics and commerce. The consulate becomes a center of espionage and political maneuvering.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS PAST: THE TERRASSIAN CONSULATE OPENS

The Kingdom of Terrassia establishes its own consulate in response to Albion's presence. The two embassies maintain uneasy coexistence, each watching the other's activities with suspicion and precision.

FIVE YEARS PAST: THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN

Both Albion and Terrassia, exhausted by a century of conflict with no decisive advantage for either side, begin secret negotiations toward peace. Kormor Kirak becomes the primary location for these discussions. A marriage treaty is proposed: the Albion prince will marry Princess Szeret Veresz, symbolizing an end to hostilities and the beginning of a unified, peaceful era.

TWO YEARS PAST: THE THEATER OF EVERLASTING PEACE IS COMMISSIONED

Albion funds the construction of the Theater of Everlasting Peace in Kormor Kirak as a permanent symbol of the peace effort. Gold is transferred to the city.

Feeney, the consulate's financial officer, oversees the arrangement. Plans for the theater showcase Albion's commitment to lasting peace and cultural investment in the city.

ONE YEAR PAST: BARRON WHITEHALLOW BECOMES AMBASSADOR

Ambassador Barron Whitehallow arrives in Kormor Kirak to oversee Albion's diplomatic mission. He becomes a key figure in the peace negotiations and quickly gains influence with Queen Kiraline. He begins developing his true agenda in secret.

SIX MONTHS PAST: FIRST DISAPPEARANCES

The first victims of Barron's necromantic experiments disappear from Kormor Kirak. Their bodies are later found drained and arranged in ritual patterns. Official explanations blame wild animals or suggest victims fled the city for unknown reasons.

THREE MONTHS PAST: THE MURDER OF FEENEY

Feeney, the consulate's financial officer, is found dead in the Albion Consulate vault. His body is arranged in a trellis of supernatural vines and marked with eighty-eight ritual wounds. The gold meant for the theater's construction is missing. The murder becomes the campaign's opening event.

TWO MONTHS PAST: THEATER CONSTRUCTION HALTS

The Theater of Everlasting Peace construction site becomes the focus of strange occurrences. Accidents plague the workers. Foreman Nero struggles to keep the project moving. The construction timeline slips. Rumors spread of supernatural interference.

PRESENT DAY: THE ECLIPSE DEADLINE

September 5, 1793. An eclipse is scheduled to occur on this date. This is the deadline Barron has been working toward. On this date, at the precise moment of eclipse totality, he plans to perform the ritual that will allow him to achieve lichdom and possess the body of the Albion prince during the wedding ceremony. If successful, he will have ensured a supernatural threat sits upon the Albion throne and gains access to the empire's absolute power.

The campaign begins. The party is recruited. The clock is already running.

APPENDIX B: NOMINATIONS GLOSSARY

KORMOR KIRAK (KOR-mor KEE-rahk) - The neutral mountain city that serves as the setting for the campaign.

KIRALINE (KEER-ah-leen) - Queen Kiraline Veresz Eroszakos, the vampire ruler of Kormor Kirak and the castle Torony Piros.

SZERET (SEHR-et) - Princess Szeret, the Queen's daughter, a shapeshifter who wears borrowed flesh.

VERESZ (VEHR-ez) - The royal dynasty of Terrassia and Kormor Kirak. The name carries ancient weight and implies power over death itself.

EROSZAKOS (AIR-oh-ZAHK-os) - Part of the Queen's full title, indicating her lordship over Kormor Kirak.

TERRASSIA (TEHR-ah-shuh) - The ancient kingdom aligned with magic and tradition, ruled by Queen Kiraline.

TORONY PIROS (TOR-oh-nee PEER-osh) - Literally "The Red Tower" in an older tongue. The castle that dominates Kormor Kirak and serves as the seat of power.

KERESKEDO (KEHR-es-KAY-doh) - The great market of Kormor Kirak, a sprawling structure containing commerce and hidden dealings in equal measure.

HALLASET (HAH-lah-set) - The fields outside Kormor Kirak where the dead are buried and where supernatural threats gather.

ROZITO VALLIKOZO (roh-ZEE-toh vahl-ee-KOH-zoh) - The market master of Kereskedo, appointed by Queen Kiraline and responsible for the flow of commerce in the city.

AGGODAS (AH-goh-dahs) - One of Queen Kiraline's agents and a figure of mystery in the city's shadows.

BOLDOGG (BOHL-dog) - A figure encountered in the campaign whose exact allegiances remain ambiguous.

VARGA (VARGA) - A name whispered in connection with dark rituals and necromantic power.

Eppy Flinder (EP-ee THOON-der) - Owner of the Bastion Inn, a woman who has seen much and forgotten little.

GILLIKOI (GILL-i-koi) - A location of wild beauty and danger, forest lands where the rules of civilization hold less sway.

ERDO (AIR-doh) - The hot springs in the mountains above Kormor Kirak, a place of healing and hidden negotiations.

APPENDIX E: Factions and Organizations

THE ALBION EMPIRE

Summary: An industrial powerhouse convinced of its divine mandate to rule, locked in a century-long war with Terrassia and secretly manipulated by its own ambassador's dark agenda.

Key NPCs: Ambassador Barron Whitehallow (secret leader of the Lich Cult and hidden architect of its conspiracy), the Albion Prince (the eventual target of possession), Lord Wooster (diplomat and observer).

THE KINGDOM OF TERRASSIA

Summary: An ancient kingdom maintaining tradition alongside mechanical innovation, ruled by a vampire queen and allied with supernatural bloodlines.

Key NPCs: Queen Kiraline Veresz Eroszakos (vampire ruler), Princess Szeret (shapeshifter heir).

TERRASSIAN INTELLIGENCE

Summary: A sophisticated espionage operation based in the Terrassian Consulate attic, focused on mechanical assassins and surveillance networks throughout Kormor Kirak.

Key NPCs: The scarred Terrassian operative (overseer of the Automatic Assassins laboratory), Devorlen Koss (pragmatic spy and potential ally).

THE LICH CULT

Summary: A network of necromancers devoted to undeath and the consumption of life force. Operating in the Hallaset Fields and using Barron as a tool to advance their agenda.

Key NPCs: The Cult leadership (shadowy and mysterious), Necromancer acolytes stationed throughout the city.

THE GATEKEEPERS

Summary: An ancient order concerned with preventing the escape of supernatural threats from sealed places. They maintain knowledge of the Tower of Thorns and other sealed locations.

Key NPCs: Unknown, but their presence hints at greater powers operating beneath the city's surface.

THE RED GUARD

Summary: Queen Kiraline's personal military force, distinguished by crimson uniforms and absolute loyalty to the throne. They maintain order in Kormor Kirak and protect the castle.

Key NPCs: Red Guard Captains at key installations, soldiers rotating through patrols and gate duty.

THE MERCHANT GUILD

Summary: The loose confederation of traders and commercial interests that control the flow of goods through Kormor Kirak. Rozito Vallikozo acts as their representative to the Queen.

Key NPCs: Rozito Vallikozo (market master), merchant representatives from both empires.

THE COURT OF KORMOR KIRAK

Summary: Queen Kiraline's direct circle of advisors, servants, and political allies. A place of constant intrigue and careful performance.

Key NPCs: Queen Kiraline (absolute authority), Court Advisors (various positions and allegiances), servants and attendants maintaining the castle's operations.

CAPITULUM

MEDIA COMP & REFERENCE MATERIAL

A curated guide for Game Masters and players to capture the tone and atmosphere of The Eternal Court

THE GOTHIC ATMOSPHERE

Films, shows, and books that capture the dark grandeur, the castle that feels alive, the aristocratic horror, and the weight of stone and shadow.

CRIMSON PEAK (2015)

Guillermo del Toro's film presents a mansion as a character: crumbling, beautiful, terrible. Torony Piros shares that quality -- ornate Gothic architecture that conceals violation and necromantic horror beneath ballroom elegance. The aesthetic of elaborate couture worn in decay, of theatrical mystery cloaking genuine danger, maps directly to the castle's atmosphere and Kiraline's presence.

JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL

The BBC miniseries captures historical darkness grounded in specific period detail. Magic here feels wrong, unsettling, tied to genuine cost rather than spectacle. The tension between old power and new industry, between formal society and supernatural violation, defines both that story and The Eternal

Court. The ballroom scenes carry the same uncanny quality as Torony Piros' masquerades.

THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE

The original novel by Shirley Jackson treats the house itself as an antagonist -- its geometry wrong, its spaces larger than they should be, its attention turned upon the inhabitants. Torony Piros operates identically. The castle becomes a landscape hostile to those who do not belong, and players should feel watched from within its walls.

PENNY DREADFUL (TV SERIES)

Victorian London rendered gothic and supernatural, mixing period aesthetics with horror that emerges from human cruelty as much as supernatural threat. The show's investigation of corruption beneath formal society, its treatment of characters trapped by their nature, and its aesthetic of gas lamps and fog all mirror aspects of The Eternal Court's world.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE BY WILKIE COLLINS

A proto-thriller grounded in Victorian England, featuring elaborate schemes hidden beneath social propriety, atmospheric dread, and characters discovering that institutions and powerful people cannot be trusted. The sense that something is fundamentally wrong beneath the surface of respectable society defines both the novel and your campaign.

THE WAR AND ITS COST

Media that captures exhausted soldiers, war profiteering, the dehumanizing grind of perpetual conflict, and the way violence becomes normalized and mechanical.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Both the novel and the 1979 film present war not as glory but as machinery that grinds human beings into nothing. The frontlines that do not move, the constant casualties, the way soldiers forget why they fight, and the economic structure that sustains perpetual conflict all emerge directly from this story. Jack Winbow carries the trauma this novel depicts.

REGENERATION BY PAT BARKER

This novel treats the psychological cost of war as the primary subject. Soldiers damaged by violence, struggling with PTSD before that diagnosis existed, coping through discipline and denial -- the protagonist of *The Eternal Court* campaign faces characters shaped by exactly this damage. The book's focus on the lasting impact of combat, on the way trauma reshapes identity, provides the emotional foundation for Jack and Koss.

THE GREAT WAR PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTIONS

Not narrative, but visual reference. The trench systems, the apparatus of mechanized death, the apparatus of artillery and ammunition, the way landscape becomes scarred and changed by sustained warfare -- these real photographs of the Somme and Verdun provide the visual grounding for the Gravinia trenches and the frontlines of the *Eternal Court's* century of conflict.

 SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE BY KURT VONNEGUT

The novel presents war as something that cannot be made sense of, where cause and effect become unmoored. Characters move through time trying to understand violence that has no comprehensible justification. Both empires in *The Eternal Court* have reached this point -- the original causes forgotten, the war persisting for its own sake. The novel's refusal to make war meaningful except as horror maps the moral landscape of a century-long conflict.

COME AND SEE (1985)

The Soviet film follows a boy's transformation into a soldier. Its unflinching depiction of violence, its treatment of dehumanization through forced participation in atrocity, its refusal to offer catharsis or meaning -- all of this echoes through campaigns that force players to confront the genuine cost of the endless war. Difficult to watch, essential reference material.

THE POLITICAL MERRICK

Spy stories, court politics, betrayal narratives where trust is weaponized, and systems that grind individuals into machinery.

THE AMERICANS (TV SERIES)

Cold War espionage treated not as adventure but as slow-moving betrayal and paranoia. Characters embedded in false identities, maintaining lies so long they forget what truth they once held. The series explores how loyalty becomes complicated when ideological certainty collides with human relationship. Barron's position in *The Eternal Court* operates identically -- a diplomat performing loyalty while his personal debts and private doubts accumulate.

TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY BY JOHN LE CARRÉ

Spy fiction grounded in the mundane apparatus of intelligence work -- files, money trails, communication methods, the way information moves through networks of people who may or may not be trustworthy. The novel's treatment of mole-hunting, of the slow detective work required to uncover conspiracy, directly parallels the investigation at the heart of your campaign. Kiraline operates like the titular mole: hidden at the center of the system she controls.

THE HOUSE OF CARDS (BRITISH VERSION)

The original miniseries presents politics as a game of leverage, debt, and reciprocal advantage. Characters survive through manipulation, through understanding what others need and using that knowledge as currency. The Bastion Inn functions as the Commons bar of Kormor Kirak, a place where deals are made and leverage is traded.

THE DUNE SERIES BY FRANK HERBERT

Politics, court intrigue, hidden agendas, and the way prophecy can be manipulated toward predetermined ends. Kiraline's role mirrors the hidden orchestrator of events, playing factions against each other while maintaining her own agenda. The series' exploration of how information can be controlled and wielded as power, of how prophecy becomes a tool of manipulation, suggests the deeper mechanics operating beneath Kormor Kirak's surface.

GORMENGHAST BY MERVYN PEAKE

A decaying castle bound by ritual and protocol, where ceremony becomes more important than function, where the castle itself seems to contain more space than is physically possible. The protagonists move through layers of social hierarchy and hidden passages, discovering that power operates through

arcane knowledge and connection. Torony Piros and its complex political landscape share this novel's treatment of byzantine social structure and the way the institution maintains itself through opacity and tradition.

THE CITY AND ITS MARKETS

Bustling crossroads cities, neutral zones where every culture collides, places where commerce rules and money speaks louder than loyalty.

BLADE RUNNER (1982)

A neo-noir set in a layered city where multiple groups coexist in tension. The film's treatment of diverse populations, criminal underworld, the intersection of legitimate and illicit commerce, and the way power operates through networks rather than formal authority all apply to Kormor Kirak. The perpetual night, the sense of surveillance, the way individuals navigate between competing powers without falling under any single control.

PERDIDO STREET STATION BY CHINA MIÉVILLE

A sprawling fantasy city where countless cultures and species coexist, where the market is chaotic and organic, where danger operates in the margins and in the heights above the streets. Kereskedo Market shares this book's sense of overwhelming abundance, of goods and people packed together in configurations that seem to shift depending on where you stand. The city itself as a character, with its own agency and appetites.

THE SOPRANOS (TV SERIES)

Not a fantasy work, but essential for understanding how a criminal organization operates in conjunction with legitimate business. The way protection

rackets function, the way business disputes become violent, the way money moves through networks of obligation -- these mechanics perfectly describe Rozito's operation within Kereskedo Market and the way the Red Guard's authority masks actual power dynamics.

THE CHRONICLES OF AMBER BY ROGER ZELAZNY

A sprawling fantasy where the city of Amber functions as a nexus point between realities, where different powers converge and negotiate. Characters move between courts and conspiracies, dealing with entities of vastly greater power. Kormor Kirak operates identically -- a neutral city where incompatible powers maintain fragile coexistence, where every merchant and diplomat is simultaneously negotiating between empires.

THE SHADOW OF THE WIND BY CARLOS RUIZ ZAFÓN

Barcelona rendered as Gothic, atmospheric, and mysterious. The Cemetery of Forgotten Books serves as the novel's heart -- a labyrinthine space containing hidden stories and lost truths. The novel's treatment of historical layers, of secrets buried in institutions, of a city that conceals as much as it reveals, parallels the structure of Kormor Kirak and its hidden depths beneath respectable surface.

THE ELDORADA AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Steampunk aesthetics, technology-magic collision, the uncanny fusion of machine and flesh, the way advancement coexists with ancient darkness.

FRANKENSTEIN BY MARY SHELLEY

The foundational text for technology violating natural law and creating something that should not exist. The creature is both scientific achievement and abomination; the scientific breakthrough becomes moral horror. Necromancy in *The Eternal Court* operates with identical logic -- it is craft, it is power, and it is absolute violation of natural order. The novel's treatment of ambition corrupting itself provides the thematic foundation.

THE DIFFERENCE ENGINE BY WILLIAM GIBSON AND BRUCE STERLING

Steampunk alternate history grounded in Victorian aesthetics, where mechanical computation drives social control. The novel's treatment of information as power, of technology enabling surveillance and manipulation, and of how industrial advancement serves hierarchical control all apply to Albion's apparatus. The sense that machines extend human will in ways that are both enabling and dehumanizing.

METROPOLIS (1927 FILM)

Fritz Lang's vision of a vertical city divided by class, where machines serve the powerful and enslave the weak. The workers below sustaining the society above, the machinery itself a character in the narrative, the way technology reflects and enforces social hierarchy -- these themes resonate through *The Eternal Court's* stratified world.

THE GOLEM AND THE JINNI BY HELENE WECKER

Golems and mechanical constructs treated not as tools but as beings, with their own agency and suffering. The way a creature created for a purpose might develop beyond that purpose, the uncanny question of whether machines can

be alive -- these questions define the Automatic Assassins and the deeper implications of treating technology as military equipment with consciousness-like qualities.

NEUROMANCER BY WILLIAM GIBSON

Not steampunk but essential for understanding how technology can be treated as supernatural, how machines can access realities beyond the merely physical. The sense that computation and machinery can breach barriers that should be impenetrable, that technology enables violation of space and identity -- these ideas ground the intersection of clockwork and necromantic magic in your world.

THE INVESTIGATION

Detective stories, noir, procedurals where the investigator discovers institutional corruption, where following the evidence leads toward uncomfortable truths.

TRUE DETECTIVE (SEASON ONE)

Southern Gothic atmosphere, institutional corruption, the way following evidence leads toward powers too large to confront directly. The sense that the conspiracy reaches into every level of society, that official channels cannot be trusted, that justice may be impossible. The detective's journey becomes about managing knowledge that cannot be acted upon, which mirrors the position of characters investigating Kiraline and the Lich Cult.

THE WIRE

The series treats investigation not as individual heroism but as the grinding work of bureaucracy. Evidence emerges through paper trails, communication

monitoring, the slow accumulation of data. The complexity of systems, the way individual actors operate within structures larger than themselves, the way power flows through networks of obligation and incentive -- these mechanics define how investigation should function in your campaign.

THE BIG SLEEP BY RAYMOND CHANDLER

Noir investigation grounded in Los Angeles corruption and moral ambiguity. The detective follows leads that lead to more leads, discovers that seemingly unrelated crimes converge on larger conspiracies, finds that victim and villain distinctions blur. The style should inform how GMs present investigation in your campaign -- not puzzle-solving but following threads toward uncomfortable revelations.

ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE BY ROBERT M. PIRSIG

A philosophical investigation more than a mystery, but essential for understanding how rigorous inquiry leads toward larger questions about the nature of value, meaning, and quality. Olivia's journey parallels this -- beginning with precise calculation, moving toward recognition that numbers cannot capture everything that matters. The book's treatment of motorcycle maintenance as meditation translates to investigation as spiritual practice.

HOUSE M.D. (TV SERIES)

Medical investigation as procedural, where the symptoms point toward underlying disease. Each case reveals the mechanism: observe carefully, test hypotheses, treat the cause not the symptom. The show's cynicism about institutions, its treatment of authority figures as fallible, and its belief that evidence will eventually reveal truth despite resistance provide the emotional infrastructure for campaign investigation.

THE MORAL AMBIGUITY

Stories where heroes and villains are not clearly separated, where the system itself is the monster, where choosing a side means complicity in systems of violence.

AMERICAN PSYCHO BY BRET EASTON ELLIS

Satirical treatment of status-obsessed society where the protagonist is simultaneously unremarkable and monstrous. The novel's ambiguity about whether the violence is real or performance, about whether moral judgment means anything in a system that rewards psychopathy, defines a world where traditional morality fails to provide guidance. Kiriline and the aristocratic characters of your campaign operate within similar logic -- monstrous people in a system designed to enable their monstrosity.

THE SECOND FOUNDATION BY ISAAC ASIMOV

Political philosophy science fiction where the good guys and bad guys become indistinguishable, where the greater good justifies hidden manipulation of populations. Asimov explores the ethics of controlling history for ostensibly benevolent purposes, which mirrors the moral calculus Barron and his allies face -- the sacrifice of the few for the many, invisible hands on the scales of history.

HEART OF DARKNESS BY JOSEPH CONRAD

Colonial horror that treats civilization and savagery as indistinguishable, where the mission of progress becomes the justification for atrocity. The protagonist journeys toward understanding that the moral system he trusted conceals violence and that enlightenment brings not peace but the recognition of

complicity. Albion's mission of expansion and civilizing influence contains identical hypocrisies.

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA BY MIKHAIL BULGAKOV

Satirical fantasy that treats Soviet bureaucracy and demonic intrusion as equivalent phenomena, where official systems and supernatural horror operate through identical logic. The novel suggests that institutional systems and genuine darkness are aspects of the same corruption. The way multiple realities and multiple moral systems coexist in the narrative provides framework for understanding The Eternal Court's complex cosmology.

FIASCO BY STANISŁAW LEM

Science fiction exploring human contact with alien intelligence that may not be comprehensible through human moral categories. The novel questions whether understanding and negotiation are possible, whether the categories good and evil have meaning when applied to the genuinely other. Szeret, Kiraline, and the powers of the Old World operate beyond human moral frameworks, and meeting them forces reevaluation of what morality means.

MUSIC FOR THE TABLE

Ambient music, composers, albums, and playlists that could serve as background during sessions. Organized by mood and location.

CITY SCENES AND MARKET

THE MIDNIGHT ANTHEM BY ÓLAFUR ARNALDS

Sparse, delicate piano with minimal orchestral accompaniment. The composition feels both beautiful and melancholic, suitable for wandering market streets, encountering merchants, navigating social complexity. It establishes atmosphere without overwhelming dialogue or description.

GIALLO SOUNDTRACKS (GOBLIN, CLAUDIO SIMONETTI)

Italian progressive rock and synth, particularly from 1970s horror films. The music is unsettling and atmospheric without being overtly scary, providing the soundtrack for mysterious encounters in crowded spaces. Kereskedo Market, diplomatic conversations, and tense negotiations benefit from this aesthetic.

JANÁČEK: STRING QUARTETS

Eastern European classical music with discordant elements and restless energy. The compositions suggest tension and cultural collision without overwhelming the scene. Suitable for city exploration, particularly moments where different factions encounter each other.

CASTLE EXPLORATION AND ATMOSPHERE

THE SICKNESS OF CONSCIENCE BY TRENT REZNOR AND ATTICUS ROSS

Minimal, unsettling compositions built on sustained tones and careful sound design. The music creates atmosphere of dread and investigation without feeling melodramatic. Perfect for exploring Torony Piros, descending into deeper chambers, discovering secrets.

DISINTEGRATION BY COIL

Industrial ambient noise and unconventional instrumentation creating genuinely disturbing atmosphere. The album should play during moments of necromantic discovery, when players begin to understand the scope of violation, when the castle becomes more clearly a character and antagonist.

HAUSCHKA: THE PREPARED PIANO

Piano treated with objects and techniques to create alien but beautiful sound. The compositions maintain melody while creating uncanny quality, suitable for scenes in the castle's ballroom, during masquerades, when beauty becomes unsettling.

COMBAT AND TENSION

THE PRODIGY: THE FAT OF THE LAND

Industrial electronic music with driving rhythm and aggressive energy. Suitable for combat sequences, confrontations with Automatic Assassins, and scenes of immediate physical danger. The production is relentless and exhausting in exactly the right way.

MASSIVE ATTACK: MEZZANINE

Trip-hop with dramatic strings, thick bass, and atmospheric weight. Each track carries a sense of impending violence and moral weight. Suitable for climactic confrontations, moments of moral choice that carry consequences, and encounters with powerful antagonists like Kiraline.

ONEOHTRIX POINT NEVER: REPLICA

Glitchy electronic compositions built on fragmented samples and digital decay. The album's aesthetic of corrupted data and reality breakdown suits combat with creatures of necromancy, fights against Automatic Assassins, and moments where the campaign's supernatural elements become unmistakable.

INVESTIGATION AND NOIR

BLADE RUNNER SOUNDTRACK BY VANGELIS

Synthesizer-based composition that defines cybernoir atmosphere. The album is essential listening for understanding how investigation can feel dark and uncertain while remaining contemplative. Suitable for evidence gathering, following leads, and approaching revelations.

THE HUNGER BY DAVID BOWIE AND BRIAN ENO

Collaborative album with theatrical aesthetic and unsettling orchestration. The compositions suggest decadence concealing emptiness, beauty masking corruption -- perfect for moments of investigation that lead toward recognizing the moral corruption beneath elegant surfaces.

ERASURE: THE NEON SKYLINE (AMBIENT REMIXES)

Electronica reduced to essential elements, clean and minimal. Suitable for montages of investigation, moments of evidence gathering and document review, and scenes where characters piece together information.

 HORROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL

THE EXORCIST SOUNDTRACK BY MIKE OLDFIELD AND OTHERS

Haunting, distorted classical music and unsettling ambient composition. The album established the aesthetic for depicting violation and presence of something fundamentally wrong. Suitable for moments of genuine horror, when players recognize the supernatural threat, when ward symbols fail.

LIGETI: ATMOSPÈRES

Orchestral composition that sounds like nothing else, unsettling and beautiful simultaneously. Each moment feels poised on the edge of revelation. Suitable for moments of deep dread, when exploring spaces that contain more than they should, when facing entities beyond comprehension.

 AKIRA SOUNDTRACK BY SHOJI YAMASHIRO AND GEINOH YAMASHIROGUMI

Japanese experimental composition for the anime film. The soundtrack balances electronic and acoustic, creating a sense of civilization in collapse and power beyond control. Suitable for confrontation with large-scale threats, for moments when the conspiracy reveals its true scope.

COMPOSING YOUR PAGES

Structure your table's music by session rhythm. Begin with ambiance as players arrive, transitioning to city music as they navigate Kormor Kirak. During investigation, alternate between noir compositions and moments of quiet contemplation. As tension builds, introduce more aggressive or unsettling material. Let silence remain a tool -- moments without music amplify dialogue

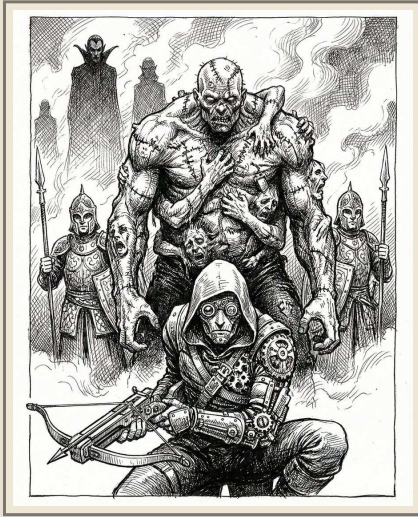
and allow players to settle into scenes. Lower volume during conversations; raise it during combat and action sequences.

Consider creating a playlist for each major location: one for the Bastion Inn, one for Torony Piros, one for Kereskedo Market, one for the Hallaset Fields. Repeat themes create familiarity; players will eventually experience the music as shorthand for location and tone.

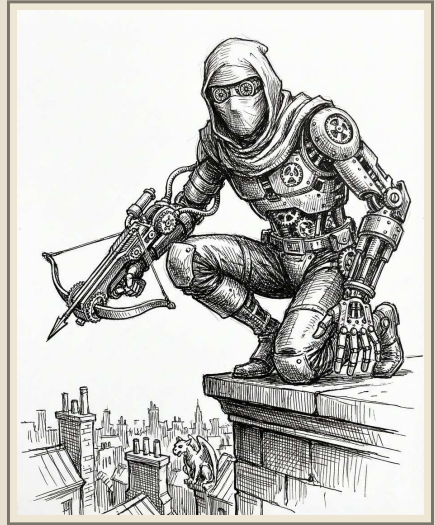
These recommendations provide touchstones for understanding The Eternal Court's aesthetic and thematic content. Use them to ground your preparation, to build shared understanding with your players about tone and setting, and to establish the mood at your table. The best reference is the one that resonates with you and your group -- use what speaks to your vision of the campaign, and discard what does not.

GALLERY

Art of Behind The Curtain

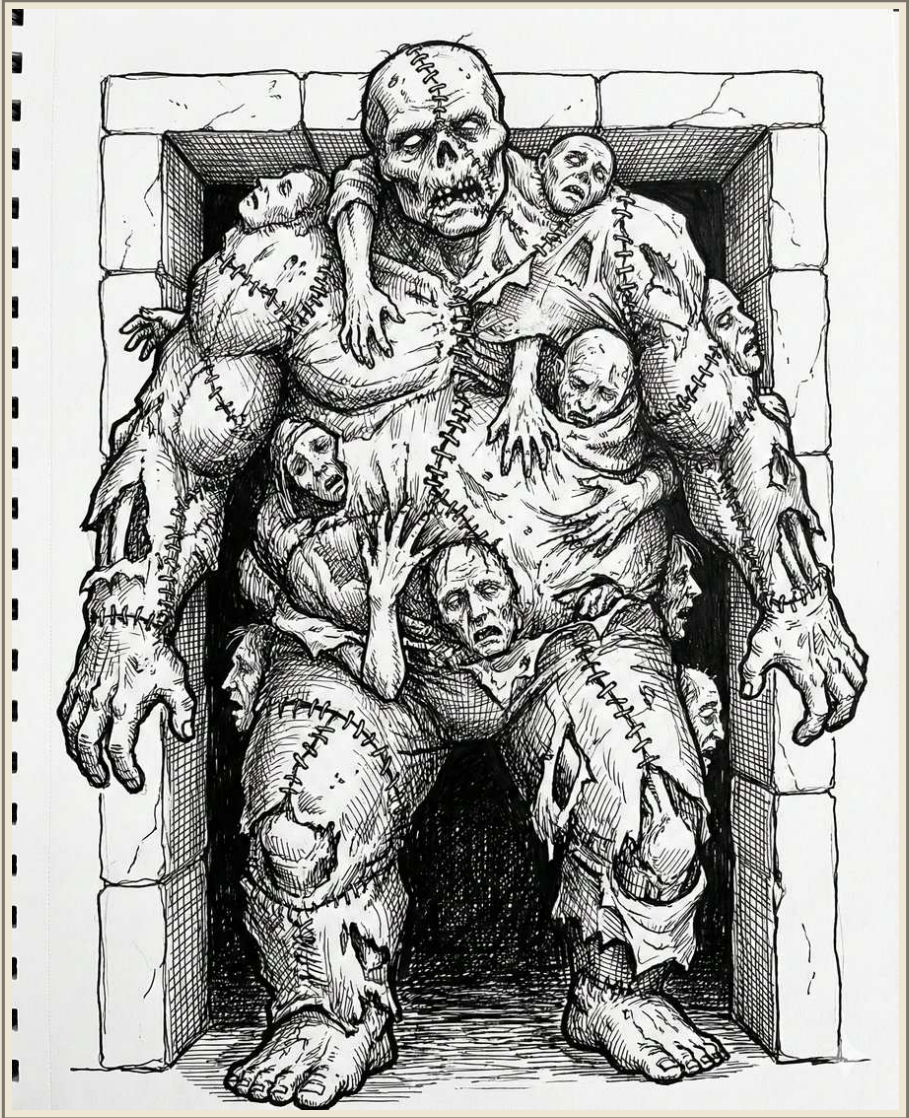


ENEMIES AND HORRORS



THE AUTOMATIC ASSASSIN

Steampunk constructs with clockwork eyes and pneumatic crossbows. Relentless. Mechanical.



THE NECROTIC BULK

Discarded body parts from multiple corpses, writhing and entwining into a sickening humanoid mass.



RED GUARD CAPTAIN



RED GUARD SOLDIER

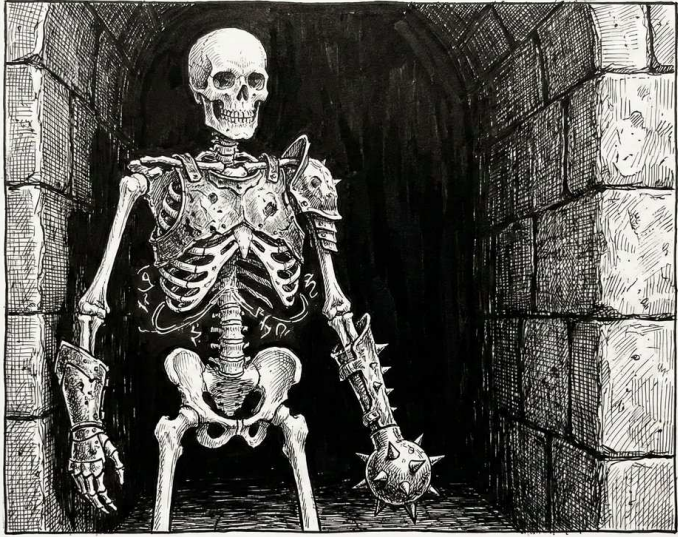


LICH CULT NECROMANCER

Hidden practitioners of the abominable craft.



LICH CULTIST



BONE SENTINEL



THE ANCIENT -- SEALED DOOR GUARDIAN



UNDEAD SHAMBLER



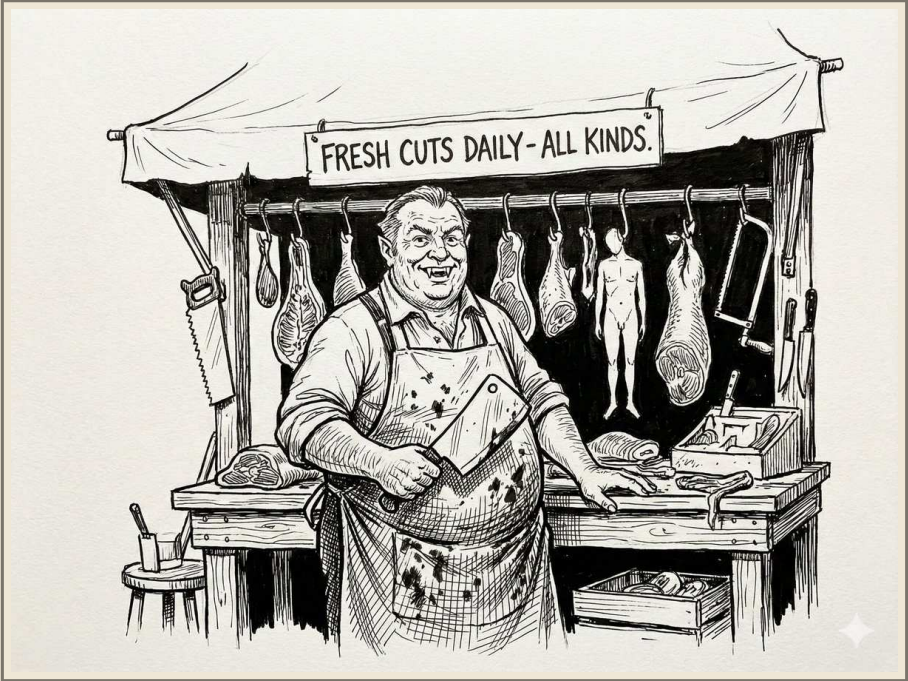
VAMPIRE SPAWN



VAMPIRE THRALL



MOUNTAIN WOLF



THE MARKETPLACE BUTCHER

EC · BOOK THREE · EDITION 01 · MDCCXCIII
FILED · EC · BOOKTH · FORMAT · A5 · STATUS · ACTIVE