

THE ETERNAL COURT

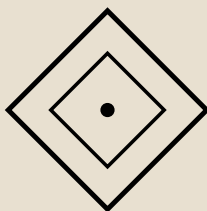
THE WORLD OF KORMOR KIRAK

BOOK ONE



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THE ETERNAL COURT
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Boof One

The World of Kormor Kirak

*The walled mountain city in 1793 — its history, its peoples, its
uneasy seat between the empires.*

KORMOR KIRAK · VIDEK · ANNO 1793

VOLUME
I

SETTING
Kormor Kirak

VOICE
World Bible

PART ONE: THE WORLD

History, Geography, and the Soul of Kormor Kirak

Where the old world and the new collide. A walled city in the mountains. A vampire queen on her throne. Two empires bleeding each other dry.

CAPITULUM

WORLD STYLE & TONE GUIDE

A Working Document for Game Masters

WHAT KIND OF WORLD IS THIS

THE GENRE: GOTHIC GASLAMP FANTASY

The Eternal Court is not alternative history. It's not steampunk fantasy where technology has replaced magic. It's a specific aesthetic we're calling Gothic Gaslamp Fantasy -- a blend of 1790s visual style with supernatural elements woven directly into the power structures of society.

What this means in practice: imagine the formal restraint of Regency-era architecture crammed against industrial smokestacks. Imagine clockwork precision engineering alongside blood rituals carved into castle stone. Imagine gas lamps illuminating street corners while vampires rule openly from throne rooms. The aesthetic jarring? Intentional. The discomfort you create in description is the point.

Konkretely, in play this looks like:

- Gas lamps casting sickly light on a wet cobblestone street
- Red Guards in polished armor that catches flame-light like drying blood
- Airships with riveted hulls cutting through mountain storms
- Necromantic runes hand-carved into flesh arranged as ritual geometry

- A formal ball in a castle that has dungeons directly beneath the dance floor
- Automatic assassins with clockwork hearts moving through midnight streets

THE 1793 TIME PERIOD: HISTORICAL RESONANCE, NOT REPRODUCTION

You're not recreating 1793. You're using what happened in 1793 as aesthetic DNA.

The French Revolution was occurring in 1793. Not explicitly -- Albion and Terrassia are not France and England. But the echoes are there. Militarized nation-states convinced of their own righteousness. Economies transformed into war machines. A century of conflict that has killed generations. Resources stretched past breaking. Young people conscripted because that's simply what happens now. Rigid hierarchies beginning to crack under the weight of ideological certainty colliding with material reality.

The Napoleonic era provides the military aesthetic: precise cavalry units, disciplined infantry formations, generals studying maps in campaign tents, the cold mathematics of logistics and casualty rates. This is how you describe the war beyond the mountains. Not fantasy battles with monsters. Organized killing. Trenches. Supply lines. Attrition.

Industrial Revolution provides the technology: steam engines, mechanical fabrication, the rhythm of factory work, the steady boom-hiss-clank of machinery running constantly. The smell of coal smoke and machine oil becomes as normal as the smell of bread. Water wheels turn. Furnaces burn. Telegraph-like communication systems (via homing pigeons) connect distant command posts.

What distinguishes this world from generic dark fantasy:

- **SUPERNATURAL GOVERNANCE IS NORMAL.** The Queen is a vampire. Everyone knows. This isn't hidden or shameful. It's simply how power is structured. Vampires rule here, and the mechanisms of their rule are as bureaucratic and mundane as any human government.
- **MAGIC AND INDUSTRY COEXIST UNEASILY, NOT HARMONIOUSLY.** Blood rituals happen in underground chambers while factories run above. These aren't integrated systems. They're tensions. The old world and new world constantly at war within the same borders.
- **THE AESTHETIC IS TIRED.** This isn't romantic gothic. It's gothic rendered exhausted. The masks at the masquerade are bone and scale. The performances are debauched and transgressive. The castle is beautiful but it's also a place where vampires feed on prisoners. Beauty here is always slightly sickening.

THE FEEL OF THE WORLD

THE WEIGHT OF A CENTURY OF WAR

Everything in this world is exhausted. A hundred years of war between two empires has drained the continent of meaning. Young soldiers don't fight for ideology. They fight because that's what young people do. Civilians don't believe in victory. They believe in survival.

This exhaustion is your constant atmospheric baseline. Even in moments of relative safety, there's a weariness underneath. People have lived their entire lives inside this conflict. They've never known peace. The thought of peace is not hope -- it's economic terror. What happens to the factories when there's no war? What happens to the armies? What happens to the entire structure of society built on perpetual conflict?

When your players move through the city, they should feel this tiredness in the NPCs around them. Merchants move through transactions with minimal energy. Soldiers move with mechanized precision. The Red Guard maintains order not with enthusiasm but with the grim professionalism of people who do this every day and will do it every day for the rest of their lives.

COEXISTENCE AND CONTRADICTION

This world doesn't have a unified aesthetic. It's layered. Multiple incompatible systems operating simultaneously:

TECHNOLOGY AND MAGIC

- Clockwork mechanisms and blood ritual
 - Steam engines and necromantic working
 - Mechanical assassins and vampire court politics
 - Telegraph pigeons and ancient ward symbols painted on doorframes
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ALBION AND TERRASSIA

- Industrial precision versus hand-crafted tradition
 - Mass production versus individual artisanship
 - Factory efficiency versus ritual slowness
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The city of Kormor Kirak embodies this most visibly. Red ochre ward symbols -- ancient things for warding evil -- are painted on doorframes next to modern signage. The marketplace has quarters that operate on completely different principles. The Albion Quarter is mechanical precision. The Terrassian Quarter is agricultural warmth. They exist side by side, creating friction simply through proximity.

UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF POWER AND RESOURCES

Albion has factories and airships and automatic assassins. It has the industrial capacity to equip tens of thousands of soldiers. It has mechanical soldiers that don't need to be fed or housed.

Kormor Kirak has hand-painted ward symbols and open-air markets and healers who work with herbs. Terrassia has sophisticated clockwork and ancient bloodlines and magic that works.

When your players encounter Albion technology in Terrassia or vice versa, it should feel alien and wrong. An Albion mechanical soldier in a Terrassian village looks like an invader from another world. A Terrassian necromancer in an Albion factory district looks like an atavism that shouldn't exist.

This unevenness creates opportunity. It creates conflict. A factory worker from Albion sees industrial progress as inevitable. A farmer from Terrassia sees it as violation. Neither side is wrong about what they're seeing.

SUPERNATURAL GOVERNANCE AS NORMAL

The Queen is a vampire. She's been alive for longer than most historians can reliably trace. She rules Kormor Kirak and portions of Terrassia through supernatural power and bureaucratic apparatus operating in tandem.

The Princess is a shapeshifter. She appears in public wearing "borrowed flesh" -- a human form chosen for political purposes. When she's alone or with people who accept her nature, she might shift to a leopard-like beast form. Both forms are equally real.

This isn't a secret. Everyone knows. The Albion court sends representatives to negotiate with a vampire queen. They do this because both sides need the peace effort more than they need the comfort of dealing with humans.

When you describe court scenes, the supernatural element should be presented matter-of-factly. Yes, the Queen can move instantaneously along the balcony. Yes, the Princess feeds on prisoners in the dungeons. Yes, there are necromantic workings happening in the castle's lower levels. These are facts of governance. They're discussed the way modern governments discuss budgets or policy -- with a mixture of resignation and bureaucratic precision.

The horror of this isn't that magic rules. It's that supernatural governance produces the same moral compromises as human governance. The Queen is still a political actor. She's still pursuing power. The supernatural element doesn't make her more evil or more noble -- it just makes her more powerful.

MORAL AMBIGUITY AND TONE

NO SIDE IS HEROIC

Albion has committed atrocities. So has Terrassia. Both empires have developed weapons designed to cause maximum suffering. Both have sacrificed generations of young people for a war they can no longer justify. Neither side claims moral superiority anymore. Both sides know they've crossed lines that once seemed uncrossable.

Your job as GM is not to make one empire sympathetic and the other evil. Your job is to make both morally compromised. When your players investigate the conspiracy, they're not discovering that one side is good and one side is evil. They're discovering that the real villain is someone they've been trusting.

The moral weight of this campaign comes from forced complicity. The players are working for someone who seems to be trying to save the peace. He's giving them information. He's helping them. He's a diplomat trying to prevent catastrophe. And then, gradually, they discover that he is the catastrophe.

THE WAR ECONOMY AS THE TRUE VILLAIN

The real antagonist in this world isn't a person. It's a system.

There are people in power on both sides who have built their entire fortunes on perpetual conflict. Peace is a threat to them. Peace means factories go silent. Peace means armies downsize. Peace means the elaborate justifications for sacrifice become meaningless.

Barron Whitehallow is a symptom of this system and one of its most dangerous collaborators. He's dying. He's desperate. He sees immortality as the only escape from the machinery that's crushing him, and that desperation drives him toward lichdom and secret leadership of the Lich Cult. The system created the conditions for his rise. Barron chooses what to do with them.

When your players uncover the conspiracy, they're not stopping war. They're not saving peace. They're preventing one specific catastrophe while the larger machinery keeps grinding. The victory is hollow. The systems that created this crisis remain intact.

TRUST AS A WEAPON

Everything in this world is encrypted with deception. Everyone is lying about something.

Barron tells the party truth in service of lies. He really did send Olivia to investigate financial irregularities -- but he sent her to a false trail that would keep her busy while his true plot continued. He really does care about Eppy and Jack -- but he's using that care to manipulate them. Every kind thing he says is also a lie.

Kiriline believes Barron can be used without consequence. Barron believes he can ascend beneath Kiriline's shadow and outgrow her control. They are both wrong about how containable the other really is.

Wooster is genuinely cooperating with the conspiracy, but he tells himself he's just managing bureaucracy. Rozito genuinely believes he's serving the Queen, but he's actually serving Barron's hidden agenda. Varga genuinely believes a cure is coming, but that cure may never materialize.

The paranoia this creates is deliberate. Your players should be questioning everything. They should be questioning each other. They should be questioning whether the mentor they've been trusting is actually the monster they've been fighting.

When they discover that Barron is the real villain, it should feel like betrayal because it IS betrayal. He's been giving them hints the whole time. He's been involved in every discovery they've made. He's been manipulating their investigation to serve his own purposes.

RUNNING THE ATMOSPHERE

DESCRIBING SPACES: LAYER AND WEAVE

Every location in this world is textured with multiple contradictions. When you describe a space, layer these contradictions:

THE CASTLE (TORONY PIROS)

Start with grandeur and formality. The throne room is theatrical. Multiple levels rise toward a vaulted ceiling. Torches burn in iron sconces in perfect symmetry. The throne itself sits elevated on a dais that requires an approach journey. Light pools in specific places, isolating the throne and the Red Guard stations while leaving other areas in shadow.

Then add the wrongness. The geometry becomes strange as you go deeper. Hallways shouldn't lead where they lead. Distances don't match external

measurements. The Queen's private chamber exists in a space that's geometrically impossible. The dungeons smell of blood and copper and something worse. Bodies hang in chains. Something feeds here at night.

The castle isn't just dangerous because of the monsters inside. It's dangerous because it's alive and hostile. The structure itself seems to absorb light. Shadows are deeper than they should be. Sound echoes in disorienting ways. The building is testing whether you're permitted to be here.

THE CITY MARKETPLACE

Build from sensory overload. Sound: constant negotiation, haggling, the shuffle of thousands of feet. Smell: spices layered with leather, woodsmoke, unwashed people, animal waste, rotting vegetables, incense. The Grand Square is at maximum sensory capacity.

Then add the cultural distinctions. The Albion Quarter smells of machine oil and fresh wood. Goods are arranged with precision. Merchants speak quickly and transactionally. The Terrassian Quarter smells of cheese and wine and cured meat. Goods bear the marks of individual makers. Conversations are longer, more philosophical.

Then add the danger. Black Market Alley is in shadow even at midday. Transactions happen in whispers. Prices are triple normal. Betrayal is expected.

UNDERGROUND SPACES (TERRA SOTTO)

Emphasize ancient wrongness. Stone is old and worn. Water seeps from walls. Passages are claustrophobic and poorly lit. Torches burn at intervals, creating more shadows than light. Something moves in deeper passages -- whether natural creatures or things less natural remains uncertain.

The Night Market is organized chaos in shadow. Merchants operate from stalls built against rough stone walls. Torches cast uneven light and deep shadows.

The crowd is dangerous -- thieves, desperation, moral compromise. Multiple dark areas allow transactions to occur unobserved.

The Pits are where organized violence becomes spectacle. Smell of blood has stained stone so thoroughly that no cleaning removes it. Sound of roaring crowds and combat echoes. Creatures are kept in deprivation, their fury maintained through careful mistreatment.

LIGHTING AND SHADOW AS MOOD

The castle absorbs light. Describe torchlight in the castle as not quite reaching the corners. Shadows seem to move independently of light sources. A candle flame in the castle flickers despite no draft. Light from windows seems to penetrate less distance than it should.

The dungeons breed darkness. Even with torches, visibility is limited. Walls weep moisture that catches light in unsettling ways. Describe darkness as something present, not just absence of light.

The marketplace is bright in daylight. Reflections off goods and fabrics create glare. At night, it becomes dangerous. Torches cast pools of light that make surrounding darkness deeper. The absence of light becomes a presence.

Gas lamps in the city streets create sickly illumination. Light that's technically present but seems to reveal less than it should. Shadows under gas lamps are different -- sharper, colder -- than shadows from fire.

SOUND DESIGN

Sound matters as much as sight. Create environments through sound:

THE CASTLE

- Bells that ring themselves (no visible mechanism)
- Footsteps echoing in impossible ways

- Doors opening and closing without visible push
- The constant drip of water from dungeon walls
- Silence that feels pregnant with presence

THE MARKETPLACE

- Constant murmur of negotiation and haggling
- Coins exchanging hands
- Goods being arranged
- Vendors calling out wares
- The specific rhythms of different quarters (precise in Albion, song-like in Terrassia)

UNDERGROUND SPACES

- Rats scurrying in darkness
- Torch smoke hissing
- Water running in hidden channels
- Footsteps echoing unnaturally
- Silence broken by irregular sounds from creatures unseen

EPPI'S PUB

- Constant, low ambient noise (conversation, crackle of fire, clink of glasses)
- Never truly quiet
- The fireplace creates a rhythm of flame sounds
- Floorboards creaking under regular customers' feet
- Music on nights when performers arrive

THE CASTLE AS CHARACTER

The castle should feel like a living thing that's actively hostile. It's not just a building. It's an entity with agency. Describe it as testing the players:

- Passages that feel like they're watching them
- Lights that extinguish as they approach
- Sounds that create a sense of presence behind them
- Shadows that move independent of light sources
- A constant awareness that they're not welcome here

The castle has been standing for centuries. It exists partially in normal space and partially elsewhere. The rules of geometry don't apply the same way. Distances don't match. Rooms are larger on the inside than outside should permit.

When the players navigate the castle, they should feel like prey in a predator's territory. The castle knows where they are. It's deciding whether to permit them to leave.

THE CITY AS ORGANISM

The city should feel overstuffed, profitable, and dangerous. Describe it as always in motion:

- Markets that shift configuration between visits
- Merchants that appear and disappear
- Black market operations that move locations
- Red Guard presence that increases or decreases unpredictably
- Rumors that spread faster than official information

The city is profitable because everyone is making money from the peace effort. Merchants, construction workers, diplomats, spies -- everyone has a financial stake in what happens. This creates instability. Money changes hands. Loyalties shift. Information is currency.

The city is dangerous because of the tension between factions. Albion consulate and Terrassian consulate exist in the same city. Criminal elements operate alongside legitimate commerce. The Red Guard maintains an appearance of control while corruption runs deep.

THE PLAYERS' EXPERIENCE

THEY START AS OUTSIDERS

The campaign opening has the party arriving as Albion delegation members in Kormor Kirak -- a city that's geographically and culturally foreign. They're in Terrassia's domain, in a city that maintains formal neutrality, in a place where Albion's industrial power is less relevant than local knowledge and political acumen.

This disorientation is intentional. They don't speak the local languages fluently. They don't understand the customs. They don't know which merchants are trustworthy or which Red Guards can be bribed. They're dependent on their mentor (Barron) and on the hospitality of NPCs who have their own agendas.

Use this foreignness to your advantage. Describe unfamiliar food and drink. Have NPCs reference local customs the players don't understand. Make the architecture feel wrong in subtle ways. The peaked roofs of Kormor Kirak are different from Albion's squared-off efficiency.

INFORMATION IS CURRENCY

In this world, secrets are the most valuable commodity. Everyone is lying about something. Everyone is hiding something. Information trades more readily than coin.

When the players investigate, they're not just following clues. They're learning who lies about what and why. They discover that Wooster is protecting financial irregularities. They discover that Rozito is performing necromancy. They discover that Barron is the architect of a conspiracy. But more importantly, they're learning how information flows through the city.

The Black Market Alley is where information is most obviously traded. But information trades everywhere -- in casual conversations at Eppy's pub, in overheard marketplace gossip, in the careful choice of what NPCs decide to tell the party.

Make information revelation gradual. Don't give players the full picture at once. Let them discover pieces of the puzzle through investigation, interrogation, and observation. Some NPCs will confirm what they suspect. Others will lie to protect themselves. Still others will tell partial truths designed to mislead.

THE HORROR IS POLITICAL AND PERSONAL

The real horror in this campaign isn't monsters. It's the discovery that power structures built on deception and atrocity are normal. It's the realization that the person they've been trusting is using them.

The financial conspiracy starts as a puzzle. Numbers don't add up. Money is being stolen. But as the party investigates, they discover that the theft is funding necromantic rituals. The necromantic rituals are preparing the ground for a lich transformation. The lich transformation is designed to allow a dying man to possess the Albion prince's body during the peace negotiations.

The horror escalates from crime (theft) to supernatural threat (necromancy) to political catastrophe (the assassination and replacement of a royal heir).

But the deepest horror is personal: the mentor they've been trusting is the one causing this. The helpful diplomat is the conspirator. The person who recruited them is using them as pawns in a game designed to serve his own immortality.

ESCALATION: FROM DIPLOMACY TO COSMIC THREAT

The campaign arc should feel like an escalation:

EARLY: DIPLOMATIC INTRIGUE

- The party is investigating financial irregularities in Barron's department
- They're supposed to be preventing disruption to the peace effort
- They're meeting with merchants and officials
- The stakes feel contained

MID: SUPERNATURAL THREAT

- Bodies start appearing in necromantic patterns
- The dead refuse to stay dead in the Hallaset Fields
- The party realizes something vast and dark is happening beneath the city
- The stakes expand from political to existential

LATE: THE REAL VILLAIN

- The party discovers that Barron is the architect of everything
- They realize the peace effort is a cover for a conspiracy
- They understand that if Barron succeeds, he won't just rule Albion -- he'll rule as an immortal lich wearing a stolen royal body

- The stakes become genuinely catastrophic

The final escalation should feel overwhelming. The party has been working for the villain the entire time. Everything they've discovered has been part of his plan. The reveal recontextualizes everything they've experienced.

THE CAMPAIGN'S CENTRAL PARADOX

The party is trying to prevent a catastrophe (Barron's possession of the Albion prince and transformation into a lich). But in doing so, they're propping up the systems that created Barron in the first place.

A successful campaign doesn't end in a just world. It ends with the conspiracy prevented, but the larger machinery of war and exploitation still grinding. The players save the peace process, but they don't cure the fundamental sickness that made Barron's immortality seem reasonable.

This is where the moral weight of the campaign lives. Not in defeating the final villain, but in the recognition that defeating the villain doesn't solve the underlying problem. The war economy still exists. The century of conflict still casts its shadow. The systems that created this situation are still in place.

Let your players feel this hollowness when they achieve their victory. They've done something important. But it's a patch on a much larger wound.

FINAL GUIDANCE

The Eternal Court is a campaign about power, deception, and the costs of endless conflict. It uses the aesthetic of 1790s history (gaslamp, industrial, Gothic) to create a world that feels both historically grounded and supernaturally strange.

As GM, your job is to:

1. **CREATE CONSISTENT SENSORY EXPERIENCE** -- layer contradictions, emphasize exhaustion, make every location textured with multiple systems in tension
2. **MAINTAIN MORAL AMBIGUITY** -- avoid heroes and villains; focus on compromised people making terrible choices
3. **TREAT THE CONSPIRACY AS GENUINE** -- Barron really is the architect; every clue the party finds is real; the betrayal is real
4. **EMPHASIZE THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY** -- a hundred years of war has broken the world; that brokenness is visible in every description
5. **MAKE TRUST THE WEAPON** -- the villain doesn't need to force the party to help him; he just needs them to believe he's on their side

This is a campaign where the GM's greatest power is the ability to make players believe in something, then reveal that belief was strategically placed deception. Run it with care. Run it with precision. Run it in a world that feels as tired and broken as the people struggling within it.

CAPITULUM

THE KNOWN WORLD

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PART ONE: THE WORLD AT WAR

THE KNOWN WORLD

The world of The Eternal Court is a place of empires and old magic where steam-driven industry collides with forces that predate human memory.

Factories belch smoke across scarred landscapes. Coded messages travel by homing pigeon between command posts. Airships thread through mountain storms, their hulls groaning under pressure, their captains desperate to avoid the worst of the weather. Mechanical men hunt the living through factory districts and occupied towns, their clockwork hearts beating in rhythms no flesh can match. And beneath it all, older powers stir in the dark places of the world, rising from graves and forgotten temples, demanding blood as payment for their resurrection.

This is a world of late-18th-century grandeur twisted through wartime exhaustion and uncanny industry. The aesthetic is one of gas lamps and gunpowder, aristocratic formality, and rigid social hierarchies beginning to crack under the weight of perpetual war. Smoke hangs in the air like a second sky. The sounds of riveting hammers and steam whistles form a constant industrial symphony.

In the capitals and manufacturing centers, the wealthy live in marble estates while workers labor eighteen-hour shifts in foundries that burn hot enough to see in the dark. This is a world of contrasts, where divine right and mechanical precision coexist uneasily, where tradition and progress wage their own war within the minds of ordinary people.

The dominant power structure is that of two empires locked in a death struggle for supremacy. For one hundred years, these powers have bled each other dry. Neither can claim victory. Neither can afford to admit defeat. The frontlines have calcified into trenches and fortifications that consume soldiers like furnaces consume coal. A young man who enlists has approximately a twenty percent chance of surviving his first day of combat. If he does survive that crucible, he faces a ten percent chance of living through each subsequent day of service. Across the span of a decade, such mathematics reduce an entire generation to ghosts.

THE ALBION EMPIRE

Albion is a nation convinced of its own divine mandate. The people of this industrial powerhouse believe with absolute certainty that they were chosen by God to rule the world. This isn't mere nationalism or typical imperial pride. This is a faith as deep as any religion, woven into the very fabric of Albion society from childhood onward. Children recite loyalty oaths with fervent devotion, words that burn into memory through repetition: "By the grace of our Divine Emperor, I serve

Albion. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In life everlasting." These aren't empty formalities. These are declarations that bind soul to state.

The capital city embodies this conviction in marble and iron. White marble government buildings rise like temples to bureaucratic order. The

Parliament House dominates the skyline, a monument to governance, and overlooks Griffin Plaza with its massive statue of a griffin wielding twin swords, a symbol of martial superiority and divine favor. Every street radiating outward from this central point is named after a victory. Every monument celebrates conquest. The city itself is a statement of power written in stone.

But the true beating heart of Albion is not the Parliament or the grand estates of noble families. The heart of Albion is the factories. They ring the capital like a second wall, vast structures of brick and steel that belch black smoke into the sky at all hours. Armament factories produce rifles and ammunition in quantities that would have seemed impossible a generation ago. Military trains move through the city constantly, carrying platoons of soldiers, supplies, ammunition, spare mechanical parts. The work never stops. The furnaces never cool.

The Counting Houses of Albion are temples of a different sort. Here, rows of uniformed accountants work comptometers with mechanical precision, processing the staggering finances of a war economy. Every coin, every resource, every human life is calculated, tracked, and allocated according to elaborate spreadsheets that would make old accountants weep at their complexity. The military-industrial capacity of Albion is staggering. Truly staggering. The nation has transformed itself into a machine for producing war, and that machine runs at maximum capacity year after year after year.

The Parliament itself has become something curious, almost contradictory to its original purpose. It contains representatives from diverse cultures and ages, united not by shared vision but by a unified martial ethos. These men and women are grim and drained by a century of conflict. Many have lost limbs or loved ones to the war. Many carry shrapnel scars that will never fully heal. Yet they convene daily to debate military appropriations, to authorize new offensives, to commit yet more resources to the endless struggle.

Within this machinery of state and war, a peculiar economic argument has taken root. There are those in power who ask, with genuine anxiety, what will happen when the war ends. Without a foreign enemy to fight, what will the factories produce? Without the constant demand for ammunition and military equipment, how will the economy sustain itself? The very thought of peace has become economically terrifying to those who have built their fortunes on perpetual conflict. This fear, more than any strategic consideration, may be the greatest obstacle to ending the war.

The architecture of Albion's cities reflects influences from the great trading cities of the old world. Dubrovnik's stone walls and strategic fortifications inform defensive structures. Nordlingen's orderly streets and guild organizations shape how districts are organized. The

European aesthetic of grand avenues and public squares has been married to modern industrial needs, creating cities that are simultaneously beautiful and utilitarian, inspiring and oppressive.

THE KINGDOM OF TERRASSIA

If Albion is an empire that believes in its own divine mandate,

Terrassia is an ancient kingdom that knows in its bones that it has a right to rule. This is a difference worth pondering. Albion's faith in its destiny is new, born of industrial success and martial confidence.

Terrassia's claim runs deeper, tangled with older traditions, supernatural bloodlines, and a relationship with magic that predates modern industrial civilization.

The Kingdom of Terrassia has not transformed itself into a war machine to the same degree as Albion. Instead, Terrassia has integrated new mechanical technologies into older ways. The clockwork engineering of

Terrassian artisans is sophisticated enough to craft prosthetic limbs that rival natural appendages in function and grace. Steam vehicles thread through Terrassian streets, but alongside ancient guild halls and temples whose stones have stood for centuries. There is tension in this coexistence, a constant strain between old world and new world that runs through the kingdom like a fault line in stone.

In the attic laboratories of noble houses and secret workshops hidden beneath marketplaces, Terrassian inventors build automatons and mechanical constructs of terrible elegance. These are not the mass-produced mechanical soldiers of Albion, stamped out by the thousands from standardized designs. Each Terrassian automaton is crafted individually, often by artists as much as engineers, with mechanisms refined across months of painstaking work. Mechanical assassins have been assembled from racks of spare parts, their joints articulated with such precision that they move like predators, like things of deadly grace.

The ruling family of Terrassia carries bloodlines that mark them as fundamentally other than ordinary humans. Queen Kiraline is a vampire who has reigned for longer than most historians can accurately trace.

Her very existence is a statement of power, a supernatural claim to rule that supersedes mere mortality. Princess Szeret, her daughter, is a shapeshifter whose true form is known only to the royal family and a handful of sworn guards. When the princess must appear in public, she does so wearing borrowed flesh, a face chosen for political purposes rather than born into. The princess at the center of the peace wedding is not fully human, and both courts know this fact with complete certainty.

This supernatural element in the ruling line creates a peculiar dynamic within Terrassian society. Magic is real here, undeniable, woven through the fabric of governance and power. Yet Terrassia has not rejected the mechanical and industrial innovations of the modern age. Instead, the kingdom walks a careful

line, maintaining traditions while adopting new technologies, mixing ritual with machinery, blood magic with steam and gears. It is an uneasy balance, and the tension never fully resolves.

THE VIDEK MOUNTAINS

Separating Albion from Terrassia is a mountain range of staggering proportion. The Videk Mountains are more than a geographical feature; they are a natural barrier that has shaped the entire course of the war, a wall between two competing visions of civilization. The range spans the horizon in both directions, disappearing into mist and cloud. The stone peaks are jagged and aggressive, shaped by ancient geological forces that still occasionally remind the world of their presence through earthquakes and sudden rockslides.

These mountains are plagued by ever-present storms. The weather patterns in the Videk range are notoriously unstable and dangerous. Clouds roll in from nowhere. Wind speeds that can snap a man's bones blow through the passes without warning. Rain comes down in sheets that reduce visibility to mere feet. Even experienced airship crews, men and women who have navigated sky combat and mechanical malfunctions, give the

Videk Mountains a wide berth if at all possible. The penalties for miscalculation are steep. Airships have been dashed against stone peaks.

Entire crews have been lost to weather alone.

On one side of the mountains stretches the industrial new world of

Albion, with its factories and cities and mechanical soldiers. On the other side lies the older kingdom of Terrassia, where magic and tradition hold their ground against the march of industrial progress.

The mountains enforce this separation absolutely. There is only one practical way across: the mountain road to Kormor Kirak, a passage that winds through

the high passes and connects the two great powers. This single route has become choked with caravan traffic over the centuries, and every merchant who travels it accepts the risk of storm and disaster as the price of commerce.

The Videk Mountains have defined the geography of war itself. They are the frontier, the barrier that has prevented Albion from simply marching an army across to crush Terrassia beneath superior industrial force.

They are the shield that has allowed Terrassia to maintain independence despite Albion's overwhelming capacity for war production. The mountains have kept this conflict localized to the areas where the two powers actually meet, creating a terrible stasis: neither side can decisively win, yet neither can afford to surrender.

THE CENTURY WAR

For one hundred years, Albion and Terrassia have waged war against each other. One hundred years of conflict. Twenty generations of young people who have never known a world without organized killing. The war has consumed countless lives, countless resources, countless hopes. The numbers are so large that they cease to have meaning. A thousand dead soldiers becomes a statistic. Ten thousand casualties becomes a line in a report. The human cost is so vast that it has become abstract.

The frontlines haven't moved in years. The trenches of Gravinia have become something like permanent settlements, with reinforced positions, supply chains, communication networks, and the terrible routines of trench warfare. Young men and women wake each morning knowing they might be dead before noon. They clean their weapons. They eat food that tastes like ash. They wait for orders. They advance when told. They die in numbers that defy comprehension. And the lines, after all the blood and suffering, remain almost exactly where they have been for the past decade.

Both sides have developed terrible weapons. Terrassia deployed asphyxiating gas that burns the lungs and blinds those who breathe it.

Albion has weapons of its own, atrocities developed in secret laboratories that researchers refuse to discuss even with their own families. Neither side claims moral superiority anymore. Both sides have crossed lines that once seemed uncrossable. Both sides have sacrificed their very souls for a war neither can win.

The soldiers themselves have forgotten what they are fighting for. Ask a veteran why the war began, and the answer will be vague. Something about sovereignty. Something about imperial rights. Something about old insults and older claims. But the reasons have worn away like river stones smoothed by constant passage. What remains is only the war itself, a self-perpetuating machine that exists for its own sake. Young people march off to die not for glory or justice or any comprehensible cause, but because that is simply what young people do now. That is the shape of their world. That is their inheritance.

The economic, social, and psychological damage wrought by a century of war is incalculable. Entire regions have been depopulated. Farmland lies fallow. Trade routes have collapsed. The educated classes have been decimated by officer casualty rates. Society has become militarized at every level. Children are trained for warfare from infancy. Women work in factories instead of pursuing other callings. The elderly counsel younger generations based entirely on military experience. Everything has been subordinated to the war machine.

Yet there is a glimmer of hope, fragile and uncertain. Both Albion and

Terrassia have recognized that victory is impossible and defeat is unthinkable. Some voices in power have begun to speak of peace, a word so foreign that it seems almost obscene in these times. The path toward peace, it has been

decided, will run through a marriage. A royal wedding between the Albion prince and Princess Szeret Veresz

will symbolize the end of the war and the beginning of a new era of peace between the empires.

This wedding will be held in a neutral location, a mountain city called

Kormor Kirak, situated in the high passes of the Videk range. It is the only place that both sides trust to host such an event, far enough from either power base to seem impartial, yet accessible by the mountain road that connects both realms. The city itself is neither fully Albion nor fully Terrassia, but something in between. It will become the stage upon which the fate of the world may be decided. It will become the place where old enemies gather in the name of peace, bringing with them their suspicions, their grievances, their secrets, and their dangerous guests.

KORMOR KIRAK: CITY OVERVIEW

Kormor Kirak rises from a remote mountain valley like a memory carved in stone. The city wears the aesthetic of old Europe, walls and buildings modeled after the fairy-tale cities of Dubrovnik and Nordlingen, all sharp peaks and defensive lines built when fortifications meant survival. Craggy mountains loom on every side, their faces sharp with ancient erosion, while cobblestone streets wind through quarters dominated by peaked-roof buildings that crowd against one another as if for warmth. Red-tiled roofs catch what little light penetrates the perpetual mountain mist, and the overall effect is one of stepping backward through time.

Torony Piros, the castle, dominates the skyline. Its spires reach toward a sky that rarely clears, a Gothic architectural excess that seems to defy the practical military logic of the walls that support it. One entire side of the plateau drops

away to a sheer cliff that plunges down into fog so thick it obscures the mountains beyond entirely. Those mountains remain perpetually cloaked, their distant peaks visible only on the rarest clear mornings, giving the city the sensation of floating in a cloud kingdom, cut off from the world below.

The city is ruled by Queen Kiraline Veresz Eroszakos of Terrassia, a woman whose title and authority rest upon the strange foundation of careful neutrality. Kormor Kirak claims to stand apart from the great powers that vie for dominion in the lands beyond the mountains, maintaining consulates for both Albion and Terrassia within its walls.

This neutrality is, of course, a performance; few cities exist that are truly above the games of nations. Kiraline opened the gates to foreigners through strategic calculation, transforming what was once a sealed mountain fortress into a crossroads where diplomats, merchants, and would-be heroes converge.

The 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. In the spaces between tradition and modernity, between the old world and the new, Kormor Kirak sustains itself.

This is what Eppy Flinder, owner of the Bastion Inn, means when she says, "You live in the new world. We live in the old." The statement carries no judgment, only the weariness of someone who has watched civilization's relentless march press against the edges of something older and stranger. In Kormor Kirak, the old world and the new collide daily, generating friction and opportunity in equal measure.

TORONY PIROS: THE CASTLE

Torony Piros straddles the city wall itself, half its bulk resting within the fortifications and half suspended over the vertical cliff that falls away to fog and distance. It is a structure that seems to defy gravity and good sense in equal measure, built as if the architect possessed some secret knowledge about how to anchor stone to air. The spires reach toward the sky with Gothic excess, and at night, light flickers behind opaque glass windows in patterns that suggest no consistent illumination source.

The interior of the castle is a landscape of contradictions. The grand ballroom, on the upper levels near the castle's heart, hosts masquerades that earn it a reputation throughout the region. These gatherings are non-traditional affairs, marked by severe court finery with Gothic flourishes and masks crafted from materials that should not be worn against human faces: animal hides scraped thin enough to see through, scales mounted in careful arrangement, fur matted with something that might be oils or might be something far worse, bones carved into mockeries of noble features. Aerial gymnasts perform on ropes and wires suspended above the dancers, their movements deliberately debauched and theatrical, the entire affair calculated to transgress against propriety with precision and grace.

Szeret, the queen's daughter, maintains a bedroom in the upper reaches of the castle, appointed with furniture that seems to have been salvaged from different eras. Near the window stands a telescope of considerable quality, positioned to observe the city below. The scope is old, its brass fittings tarnished to shades of green, and through it Szeret watches Kormor Kirak with the intensity of someone studying a game board.

Beneath this theatrical excess lies the castle's true architecture: dungeons where prisoners hang in chains, kept alive and intact as if they were assets rather than people. It is in these dungeons that the queen and her daughter

feed at night, though what precisely they feed upon is a question best left unasked by those who wish to maintain their sanity. The dungeons smell of straw and copper, and the walls weep a moisture that might be seepage from the cliff or might be something else entirely.

Kiriline's private chamber exists deeper still, beyond the dungeons, in a space that seems geometrically impossible given the castle's external dimensions. Here, the evidence of necromantic ritual is unmistakable.

Bodies are positioned in wooden trellises, arranged as if growing like vines, their angles unnatural and their preservation impossible through any mundane means. Runes are carved into the chamber's walls and floor in patterns that hurt to look at too long, each one a fragment of some vast working that stretches beyond this single room into territories of power that few mortals are equipped to understand.

An upper balcony overlooks much of the city. It is here that Kiriline receives visitors of significance, Barron among them. The balcony possesses a peculiar property: Kiriline can apparently traverse it instantaneously, appearing at different points along its length without crossing the intervening space. Whether this is genuine teleportation or something more elaborate remains unclear to those who witness it.

Torony Piros is beautiful in the way that terrifying things often are, its horror inseparable from its grace. It is full of doors that guests should not see, corridors that shift direction when observed from peripheral vision, and the constant sense that the castle contains far more space than its external dimensions should permit. Those who spend time within its walls carry away the conviction that they have witnessed only the thinnest surface of something vast and hungry.

THE ALBION CONSULATE

The Albion Consulate occupies a two-story stone building on one of

Kormor Kirak's main thoroughfares, marked by an official seal plaque that announces, to any who read such documents, that this space belongs to Albion and operates under Albion law. This technicality carries more weight than a casual visitor might assume. The Red Guards acknowledge the boundary; they do not cross the threshold without permission, and their authority ends at the consulate's door. Within these walls,

Albion's representatives maintain a sanctuary from the competing pressures of Kiraline's court and Terrassian intelligence operations.

Feeney's office occupied the ground floor of this building, a space arranged with the careful precision of a man who understood that paper and files were as much weapons as any blade. A large bulletin board covered one wall, its surface a chaos of theater plans, sketches for set designs, municipal permits, and correspondence with various construction contractors. Wooden filing cabinets lined another wall, each drawer stuffed with folders containing everything from budget allocations to lists of suppliers. An official desk of impressive size dominated the room, its surface usually clear except for whatever piece of work demanded Feeney's immediate attention.

At the rear of the consulate lay the vault, a complex arrangement of magical and mechanical locks designed to protect Albion's most sensitive assets. The vault door required two separate operations to open: first, a signet ring had to be placed face-down into a small depression, activating the magical locks; second, three combination dials had to be manipulated within a narrowly defined time window before the mechanism reset. This layered security reflected Albion's assumption that the threats to its assets in Kormor Kirak were sophisticated and patient.

The vault's contents included a considerable quantity of gold coin, currency meant to fund the construction of the Theater of Everlasting

Peace. The gold represented a massive investment in the peace effort, a physical manifestation of Albion's commitment to preventing the city from becoming a battleground. This gold is no longer there.

When the vault was discovered after the attack, its door stood open and its interior was caked with dried blood. Feeney's body hung suspended within the vault itself, wrapped in a trellis of entwined branches that appeared to have grown within the confined space, pressing against the vault's walls in a pattern of such precise geometry that it was clearly intentional. Eighty-eight ritual wounds covered Feeney's corpse, each one positioned to form part of a larger design. When viewed as a whole, the wounds traced demonic runes across his skin, a working of such malevolence that its mere presence seemed to taint the air.

The method of his death, the positioning of his remains, and the missing gold all point toward portal magic of a sophisticated and deeply necromantic nature. Something was opened in that vault, something was fed what Feeney had to offer, and something was transported away with the gold that was meant to build the theater.

THE TERRASSIAN CONSULATE

The Terrassian Consulate sits on High Street, the thoroughfare where

Kormor Kirak's most prominent buildings cluster. From street level, the consulate appears to be a standard diplomatic establishment, all bureaucratic efficiency and guarded reserve. But the building contains a secret that transforms it from mere political office into a center of cold military operations.

In the consulate's attic, accessed through carefully hidden stairs and passages known only to select personnel, lies a laboratory. Here, in dust and shadow, the Automatic Assassins are built and maintained. A man in his thirties, scarred and methodical, oversees this operation. His right arm is a masterwork of clockwork engineering, all visible gears and articulated joints, a mechanical replacement that moves with an eerie fluidity that no natural arm could match. He works surrounded by racks containing dozens of mechanical limbs and severed heads, each one a potential weapon, each one networked into systems that make individual human agency almost irrelevant.

The attic's centerpiece is a radar-like device, its painted blueprint of Kormor Kirak serving as a screen. When activated, blips of light appear across the blueprint, marking movement in the streets below. The device represents the outer edge of a much broader Terrassian intelligence operation, a web of observation and control that extends throughout the city. The spare parts arrayed throughout the attic, the detailed technical knowledge embedded in the man who tends them, and the obvious redundancy of the systems suggest that Terrassia is prepared to build many more assassins as needed, to maintain and refine their design, to expand their reach until they penetrate every significant location in Kormor Kirak.

KERESKEDO MARKET

The Kereskedo Market occupies the oldest building in Kormor Kirak, a sprawling structure that has served commercial purposes for longer than anyone alive can quite remember. The building seems to have grown organically, with each generation adding a wing or expanding a section until the market became a labyrinth of corridors, alcoves, and open-air courts that feel less like a single structure and more like a small city unto itself.

The atmosphere evokes a Silk Road caravanserai crossed with the sensory chaos of a Persian bazaar and the negotiable space of a North African souk. Vendors pack every available surface, their stalls draped in fabrics of improbable colors and patterns. They sell everything from formal dresses suitable for court functions to exotic textiles imported from distant lands, from common tools to materials whose purpose remains obscure to casual observation. The air carries the mingled scents of exotic spices, dyes, and the peculiar staleness that comes from goods stored in dim corners for seasons at a time.

Rozito Vallikozo manages the market through royal appointment, a position that grants him considerable power within Kormor Kirak's commercial sphere and makes him beholden to Kiraline in ways that everyone understands and no one acknowledges directly. Rozito is the city's resident fixer, the person who makes things happen through a combination of charm, favors owed, and carefully calibrated threat.

Within the market, his authority is absolute; outside its walls, his influence extends in subtle but unmistakable ways into every significant commercial operation in the city.

One corner of the market houses a dressmaker's shop, a cramped space where nervous models parade in formal outfits designed for particular occasions. More often than not, these occasions are associated with

Szeret; when the queen's daughter develops an interest in new fashions, word travels quickly to the dressmaker, and the real work begins. The models move through their routines with the mechanical precision of soldiers, their expressions carefully blank, aware that any comment on the garments or their fit might be misinterpreted as criticism of the designer's work or, worse, of Szeret's taste.

Rozito stands at the market's main entrance most days, dressed in an intentionally eclectic combination of foreign fabrics in clashing colors and patterns. His

appearance announces that he is of the market but somehow apart from it, a man who has moved through many lands and learned to navigate their customs. He forces smiles at merchant and customer alike, maintaining an obsequious public face that masks whatever genuine emotions might lie beneath. In Kormor Kirak, discretion about one's true thoughts is both a survival skill and an art form, and

Rozito has perfected both.

THE BASTION INN

The Bastion Inn is a two-story structure of solid stone, its exterior giving nothing away about the genuine community that thrives within its walls. It serves as the primary gathering point for Barron's expedition and for the various factions that converge in Kormor Kirak, making it functionally more important than its modest appearance might suggest.

The inn is owned by Eppy Flinder, a woman of earthy aesthetic and pointed ears that hint at non-human heritage, though she tends to deflect questions about her origins with a smile and an offer of another drink.

The ground floor contains the dining hall, a cavernous space dominated by a long bar backed by shelves of bottles and casks in various states of emptiness. Tables appropriate for dining and cards scatter across the floor in deliberate chaos, while a small dance floor occupies one corner and a musician's platform sits ready for whatever performers might arrive on any given evening. The walls are decorated with an eclectic collection of weapons, colorful rugs, and paintings depicting fantastic beasts: unicorns rendered in a style more sinister than magical, werewolves caught between human and animal form, bats rendered with anatomical precision, elves that possess the cold beauty of predators rather than the delicate prettiness of common depiction.

The ceiling is painted with a trompe l'oeil rendering of an unfamiliar night sky. The constellations depicted do not match the actual stars visible above Kormor Kirak, and a painted comet streaks across the sky in a trajectory that suggests it is falling directly toward the viewer, creating a sense of suspended vertigo that many visitors find disconcerting until they accustom themselves to it.

The inn's signature drink is Dewrder Hylifol, a honey-based concoction brewed according to a recipe taught to Eppy by her grandmother in a language that belongs to no civilization the learned scholars of Kormor

Kirak can identify. The drink is sweet to first taste, warm in the throat, and deceptively potent. A first-time drinker will experience a progression from initial joy and camaraderie, through stages of increasing intoxication, until reaching a point where the sweetness turns to nausea and the room spins with the intensity of something falling from a great height. Eppy serves it knowing this progression and seems to find genuine amusement in the process.

The Bastion Inn is where alliances form and dissolve, where secrets are traded as currency, where factions meet across tables laden with food and drink to negotiate terms that may or may not be honored come morning. It is a neutral ground in the way that few spaces in Kormor

Kirak achieve, a place where different powers maintain at least the pretense of civility. Beneath this civility runs a current of tension; everyone present understands that the Bastion's neutrality is fragile and could shatter if the correct pressure is applied with the correct force at the correct moment.

THE THEATER OF EVERLASTING PEACE

The Theater of Everlasting Peace exists as both physical structure and symbol, a concrete manifestation of the peace effort that defines

Kiraline's reign and Albion's continued investment in stability within

Kormor Kirak. When complete, the theater will stand three stories tall, arranged in the round to maximize sight lines and create an amphitheater that can accommodate several thousand spectators. The entire structure is to be constructed from wood, a choice that speaks to the aesthetics of the vision: a theater of living material, organic and warm, designed to host performances of rare scale and ambition.

The theater serves a dual purpose that few outside the innermost circles of negotiation fully understand. Its public function is obvious: it will be the venue for performances, gatherings, and cultural events that emphasize Kormor Kirak's position as a center of enlightenment and sophistication. But beneath this public identity, the theater contains a second space, a purpose that exists below the main structure in a series of chambers designed to be invisible to the general audience. This lower level is where the real work will occur, where delegates from Albion,

Terrassia, and other interested powers will negotiate the terms that determine whether war or peace governs the region beyond the mountains.

The current blueprints show modifications to the original design. The roof has been removed from the plans entirely; the theater will be open-air, with the audience exposed to the mountain weather and whatever weather the night sky chooses to provide. This change has been justified as an artistic decision, a bold statement about transparency and openness. Few pause to consider that an open-air theater provides fewer places for assassins to conceal themselves and fewer avenues for agents to move undetected through the structure.

The Theater of Everlasting Peace was approximately thirty percent complete when Feeney set it ablaze with Molotov cocktails, a calculated act of destruction that killed the structure's visible progress and left its charred skeleton visible from nearly every point in the city.

Feeney believed, based on intelligence he had gathered, that the Lich

Cult intended to exploit the theater for dark purposes once it was completed, that they would use the dual nature of the structure to perform workings of such power and malevolence that the peace effort would not merely fail but would transform into something far worse.

Whether Feeney's conviction was correct, whether he acted on genuine intelligence or paranoid misinterpretation, remains a question that divides those who knew him.

The destruction of the theater created a crisis that extends far beyond the simple matter of rebuilding a structure. The festival that is meant to conclude with the peace wedding will require a grand venue. The peace negotiations that will occur behind the theater's public functions need a secure location. Albion's investment in the gold now means the theater must be reconstructed using alternative funding sources, or the entire peace effort collapses under the weight of its own failure. And there are forces within Kormor Kirak who are actively working to ensure that the theater is not rebuilt, that the peace effort dies along with Feeney's faith in it.

THE HALLSET FIELDS

The Hallaset Fields occupy the plateau edge at Kormor Kirak's outskirts, where the land simply ends and drops away to fog and distance. The fields are the city's cemetery, though the term feels inadequate for the strange landscape that greets those who venture here.

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 the 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 plinths marks a burial site, though the term obscures the actual practice. Bodies are brought here and left, deposited on the stone platforms where carrion birds attend to the work of decomposition. This is sky burial translated to earth, the local variation of an ancient practice that acknowledges death as transformation rather than ending.

Drifting mist hangs perpetually between the reed stalks, the moisture collecting from the cliff-edge location and the constant weather that dominates this exposed plateau. 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 if it had always been present. Memorial stones are scattered throughout the fields, 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, each symbol a desperate ward against the thing that is happening in the Hallaset

Fields.

The air carries the scent of Hallaset flowers, strange blooms that grow nowhere else in Kormor Kirak, fed by something in the enriched soil that makes them unique. 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 that suggests decay and transformation, the scent of things being unmade and remade into new forms.

The Hallaset Fields are where the party first encounters the physical evidence of necromantic workings on a scale beyond the isolated horror of Feeney's death. Body parts move across the ground of their own accord, sliding through the reed grass with evident purpose. A Necrotic

Bulk, reanimated flesh from dozens of corpses sewn together through magic and violation, hunts through the fields consuming newly dead bodies and dismembering older remains to incorporate into its growing mass. The dead that are meant to rest in the Hallaset Fields increasingly refuse to rest, pulled back from decomposition into a mockery of animation by forces that emanate from somewhere deeper in the mountain valley.

The Hallaset Fields represent the breaking point, the moment when the city can no longer deny what is being done within its borders. The dead rest here, or they used to. Now they are being harvested, being transformed, being used as raw material for something vast and terrible.

As long as the Hallaset Fields remain a space where the dead refuse to stay dead, Kormor Kirak remains a city under siege by forces that few are equipped to identify or resist.

CAPITULUM

MAGIC, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

PARTS FOUR THROUGH SEVEN

PART FOUR: MAGIC AND THE SUPERNATURAL

The magic of *The Eternal Court* emerges from darkness, from the intersection of dead things and dying light. It is not the flashy elemental pyrotechnics of fantasy tradition. Here, magic feels ancient, wrong, and powerful.

Necromancy stands as the defining magical art of the campaign world. As

Barron describes it, necromancy is “abominable craft,” and his assessment carries the weight of someone who has witnessed its work firsthand. The practice involves ritualistic carving of runes into dead flesh, elaborate arrangements of corpses within wooden trellis frameworks that serve as both containers and conduits. The runes themselves belong to a demonic language, each stroke and curve carrying meaning beyond human understanding. Bodies become portals. The murder of

Feeney demonstrates this principle in devastating detail: eighty-eight wounds carved in deliberate patterns, the corpse suspended within entwined branches, transformed into a doorway through which a breach was forced into a vault believed impenetrable. The necromancer Rozito carries this art forward,

carving rune patterns into fresh corpses that form shapes suggesting figures, entities, or commands in that same profane language.

The consequences of such magic are manifested in creatures like the

Necrotic Bulk, where body parts drawn from multiple corpses writhe into a vaguely humanoid mass that attacks the living with bestial fury. These things cannot be killed because they are already dead, already violated.

They collapse only when the magic sustains them no longer, and no weapon or spell can grant them the mercy of true death. They are abominations in the truest sense: the dead forced into service, their very existence a violation of natural law.

Vampirism, by contrast, presents itself with grace and seduction before revealing its teeth. Kiraline, the primary vampire of this setting, maintains a regal form of preternatural charisma; she is serene, weightless, beautiful in the manner of things that should not exist.

When her mask slips, the truth emerges: her jaw unhinges to impossible angles, revealing rows of serrated teeth and a snaking tongue that seems to move with independent will. Her apparent immortality is functional, which is to say proven. She crosses distances instantaneously, moving between locations as though space itself bends to her will. She visits the dungeons of Torony Castle to feed upon prisoners, and she offers something to others that she calls an "eternal bond." Those who accept this offer discover, too late, that it is enslavement. The true mechanics of how vampires turn their victims, how they feed, and how the hierarchy of the undead operates remain mysteries that will unfold across the campaign, fragments of truth scattered like pieces of broken glass.

Shapeshifting manifests in Szeret, the princess of Kormor Kirak, as something violent and transformative. Her shift from woman to quadrupedal leopard-like beast is physical and brutal; she tears herself out of clothing, the transforma-

tion a violent rupture rather than a seamless transition. In her leopard form, she gains speed, strength, and perceptive faculties that far exceed human norm. Even in her human shape, however, she displays superhuman strength, suggesting that the boundaries between her forms are blurred even when she appears human.

The relationship between her shapeshifting and the vampirism that dominates her mother's nature remains an open question, one that may yield secrets as the campaign unfolds.

Jack Winbow exists as a mystery wrapped in physical evidence. He is never named directly by those around him, yet the clues accumulate. He disappears on nights of the full moon. Claw-mark scars crisscross his back, evidence of something that clawed its way into or out of his flesh. Barron speaks of an "affliction that may prove advantageous," suggesting he knows something of Jack's condition. Nero, the queen's hound, sniffs the air when Jack passes, a reaction of wariness or recognition. Eppy speaks with certainty: "I know what you are." The marks on his back suggest not a voluntary transformation but something involuntary, triggered perhaps by being clawed by another of his kind.

Lycanthropy, then; a curse as much as a gift. In Kormor Kirak, where the queen is a vampire and the princess is a shapeshifter, a man afflicted with involuntary transformation becomes something between a weapon and a liability, useful but unpredictable, frightening to those who do not understand what he is.

The Lich Cult represents an older threat, one that Kiraline claims to have crushed. A Lich is a powerful wizard who achieves a terrible resurrection; they are dead but persist with memories, skills, and agenda intact, their consciousness preserved through dark ritual while their flesh rots or transforms into something other. What most of the city does not know is that Barron Whitehallow has quietly bent key cells of the cult toward his own ascension, making

himself their secret leader even while older traditions and rival agendas persist inside the organization. Practitioners like Rozito believe they serve the Lich Cult's ambitions in the abstract. In truth, they serve Barron's rise inside a larger field still dominated by Kiraline's power. Their recent interest in the

Theater, the spectacle of the Masquerade, suggests an endgame far more ambitious than mere sabotage; something is being built, some final expression of power that will require a stage and an audience.

Ward symbols appear throughout Kormor Kirak, painted on walls and doors by hands that remain unseen or anonymous. Olivia initially mistakes them for tax identification, a mark of bureaucratic ownership. Barron corrects her understanding; these wards protect against evil spirits and entities that the locals take with absolute seriousness. The symbols appear freshly painted on memorial stones in Hallaset Fields, suggesting a recent escalation of whatever threat they guard against. Whatever the nature of the evil they protect against, the people of Kormor Kirak maintain these painted marks by hand, refreshing them with frequency and care. Desperation born of necessity.

The comet falls through the campaign as a central mystery. Eppy references it with the weight of ancient knowledge; the Bastion Inn's

Trompe l'Oeil ceiling depicts falling stars in constellations unfamiliar to any known map, and among them, a comet in descent. What was it? When did it fall through the sky? What did its impact awaken in the earth and the spirits of this place? The connection between this celestial event and the supernatural presence that haunts the region remains a central mystery, one that will likely yield revelations only through investigation and discovery.

PART FIVE: TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY

The technology that powers The Eternal Court is grounded in

late-18th-century military modernity and gaslamp industry, but its distribution is profoundly uneven. Albion leads in large-scale industrial capacity: airships, factories, military infrastructure, the machinery of empire itself.

Terrassia excels in precision engineering, the craftsmanship that produces clockwork prosthetics and automatons of remarkable sophistication. Kormor Kirak, by contrast, remains in a technological twilight; locals paint ward symbols on doors by hand and have never seen indoor plumbing. This asymmetry of technology mirrors the asymmetry of power and wealth in the campaign world.

Airships and blimps represent the pinnacle of Albion's technological achievement, though their utility remains constrained by natural forces.

Barron's blimp is equipped with a lower-deck wardroom complete with observation glass and a map table where routes can be plotted and strategic decisions made. An observation deck crowns the gondola beneath the gas bag, offering views of the terrain below and early warning of approaching threats. These vessels are remarkable still, capable of connecting the Capital to distant mountain passes, though the final legs of journeys require descent to mundane carriage travel. Videk storms present a constant threat to airship operations, a reminder that nature still maintains dominion over human ambition.

Automatic Assassins emerge as clockwork constructs of frightening efficiency. They possess clockwork eyes that whirl with cold mechanical precision and metal hands capable of gripping with inhuman force.

Hydraulic systems power their movements, giving them capabilities that blur the line between human and machine. They are armed with pneumatic cross-

bows capable of firing explosive bolts tipped with flaming gel, and they can bend metal with their hands. When one is decapitated, neck cables leak fluid like a dying creature, eyes dimming as the consciousness, such as it is, fades from the machine. They are built from racks of spare parts, interchangeable components that can be swapped and replaced, suggesting an entire infrastructure of manufacture and maintenance behind their creation.

Clockwork prosthetics represent Terrassian engineering at its finest, artistry applied to the intimate scale of the human body. Koss wears such a prosthetic on his arm; it clicks and whirs with each articulation, sophisticated enough for delicate tasks like dealing cards or manipulating a handkerchief, precise enough for the subtle finger-flicking that marks a skilled gambler. The man in the lab where some of the investigation occurs wears one as well, a visible reminder that this world's war has extracted a price in blood and limb. These prosthetics serve as constant reminders of what has been lost and what technological skill can, if only partially, restore.

Counting machines occupy high-ceilinged rooms throughout the empire, their percussion symphony of clicking keys and ringing bells marking the rhythm of bureaucratic life. Olivia carries a personal calculator, a hand-held brass cylinder resembling a pepper mill, fitted with levers and switches. It serves her as both tool and comfort object, something she can touch and manipulate when the world feels too chaotic. The tactile feedback of calculation provides a form of order when everything else feels uncertain.

Communication across distances relies upon coded messages transcribed onto arcane machines, producing paper strips of encrypted text. Homing pigeons carry these messages in chest capsules, flying in protective flocks rather than as solitary birds. Barron unlocks these capsules with his signet ring, and he orders messenger boys to chew the tape after reading; messages and messengers alike leave no trail. Information is power, and power requires discretion.

Steam vehicles begin to replace carriages, though the transition remains incomplete. Barron and Koss arrive in a self-propelled steam vehicle that marks them as modern, equipped with the latest in Albion's technological advancement. Military trains carry troops across the campaign world, though they move slowly and remain vulnerable on the rails. Traditional carriages remain the standard transport for most journeys, still the preferred method for anything requiring discretion or escape from predetermined routes.

The weaponry of the campaign world blends traditional and modern. The

Shamsir, a curved sword, remains a weapon of choice for those trained in close combat. Throwing daggers rest in pouches, waiting for quick deployment. The Spetum folds into a cane barely longer than a walking stick but extends to a six-foot polearm when deployed, perfect for those who must conceal weapons. Pneumatic crossbows fire explosive bolts tipped with flaming gel, weapons of terrible efficiency. Molotov cocktails provide portable fire, simple in construction but devastating in deployment. The mix of the ancient and the modern reflects the world itself; old powers and new technologies exist in uneasy balance.

PART SIX: CULTURE, FAITH, AND THE COST OF WAR

The Imperial Faith of Albion forms the foundation of the empire's ideology and its control. Belief in the Divine Emperor underpins everything; conviction that Albion is chosen by God, that its expansion and its wars serve a higher purpose. A loyalty oath permeates society, woven into the structure of institutions and the expectations placed upon citizens. For Olivia, this faith is the closest thing she possesses to family, identity, and purpose. Raised in state orphanages and levied into dormitory service, she has known nothing but the structure and meaning provided by the Imperial Faith. Whether this consti-

tutes genuine religion or state-engineered devotion designed to ensure compliance remains an open question, one that may trouble her conscience as the campaign unfolds.

The Old World exists in distinction from the world of technology and politics that dominates Albion's self-conception. Eppy makes this distinction clear: imperials live in the new world, a place of machinery and governance, of rational systems and documented authority. Her people, the old world inhabitants, survive in secret, hidden within the margins of the new world, maintaining ancient traditions and ancient understanding. The old world is revealed in fragments: in Eppy's pointed ears, in the ward symbols painted on doors throughout Kormor

Kirak, in the grass of Hallaset Fields that whispers with meaning to those who understand it, in the Trompe l'Oeil ceiling of the Bastion

Inn that depicts constellations and comets that no imperial astronomer recognizes. Szeret understands this distinction instinctively, responding to the old world's power with recognition. Olivia does not yet understand, but the campaign will force her toward comprehension.

The Masquerade stands as Torony Castle's signature theatrical event. It is non-traditional, debauched, and theatrical, neither pure civilization nor pure savagery. Attendees dress in severe court finery with Gothic flourishes and wear masks constructed from animal materials, blurring the boundaries between human and beast. Aerial gymnasts perform above the assembled crowd. The event occupies the strange space between a late-Regency court revel, a pagan ritual, and a nightmare staged with perfect aristocratic manners. It is the place where status is performed, where power is displayed, and where the boundaries between the civilized and the wild grow thin.

Class and station form the rigid scaffolding upon which society rests.

In Albion, hierarchy is explicit: Parliament, Lords, Ministers, uniformed civil servants, each rank distinct and understood. Olivia exists at the bottom of this structure, raised as a waif in state orphanages, levied for dormitory service. Lord Wooster calls her

"bricky to a fault," a term suggesting both durability and expendability. In Kormor Kirak, the hierarchy is equally rigid but differently organized: queen, princess, Red Guards, royal appointments, with common people occupying the bottom tier. The crowd cheers for

Szeret when she appears in public, but when she departs, their faces fall, returning to expressions of resignation and weariness.

The War's Toll defines the campaign world more profoundly than any other single fact. A generation of children has known nothing but conflict; young people march to the frontlines and either return transformed or do not return at all. The frontlines do not move; neither side advances, yet both continue to sacrifice. The economic damage is incalculable: resources diverted to military purposes, infrastructure neglected, economies strained to the breaking point. The social damage runs deeper: families fractured, communities depleted of their young people, normal human development interrupted by the necessity of survival and service. The psychological damage may be most profound of all; both sides have forgotten why they fight. The original causes, the reasons that justified the initial declaration of war, have been buried beneath years of accumulated trauma and loss. People fight now simply because fighting is what they know, what they have always done, the only context within which their lives make sense.

PART SEVEN: RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN

Running The Eternal Court requires understanding the campaign not as a traditional heroic fantasy but as a story grounded in the tension between

competing forces and the cost of choosing sides in a conflict larger than any individual. The Game Master serves as the guide through this landscape, the keeper of mysteries and the architect of choices that matter.

The core themes that should resonate through every session establish the fundamental tensions that drive the narrative. New World versus Old

World represents the master tension; Albion's technological civilization pressing against the ancient traditions and powers that predate it, neither fully capable of destroying the other. Duty versus

Desire pulls at every player character; Albion citizens feel the loyalty oath pulling them toward service and compliance, while their own desires and consciences may demand different actions. Trust and Deception operates throughout; almost no one is what they initially appear to be, and characters must constantly re-evaluate their assumptions about allies and enemies alike. The Cost of Peace remains abstract until the campaign forces its concrete reality home; achieving peace will require sacrifices that no participant wants to make. Companionship as Salvation stands in opposition to the isolation that the campaign world imposes; characters who cling only to their original allegiances will find themselves diminished, while those who forge genuine bonds with their companions discover strength. The Lie and the Truth forms the deepest theme; every character carries both, and the campaign will force them to confront where truth ends and lies begin in their own hearts.

Faction Dynamics in Kormor Kirak operate through the interaction of multiple competing interests. Albion pursues its strategic and economic interests; the war remains distant but its impact is immediate.

Terrassia maintains its own agenda, sometimes aligned with Albion, sometimes pursuing independent goals. Queen Kiraline rules from Torony

Castle with her own mysterious purposes, playing all sides as it suits her while her true endgame remains obscure. The Lich Cult operates in hidden cells,

using practitioners like Rozito to advance their agenda toward resurrection and power. The Old World locals, represented by people like Eppy, maintain ancient knowledge and old alliances, sometimes protecting the player characters and sometimes working toward purposes the characters do not understand. Neutral parties and independent operators fill the gaps, people motivated by profit, personal vendetta, or simple survival. Game Masters should track which factions benefit or suffer from player actions, allowing consequences to ripple through the social landscape. A decision that helps Albion might alienate the Old World. A choice that protects Kiraline might anger the

Lich Cult's hidden servants.

Adventure Seeds provide concrete hooks that Game Masters can deploy to move the campaign forward. The Theater Rebuild offers both social and investigative opportunities; working to restore the damaged structure brings the players into contact with diverse groups, each with their own interests in the project. The Vault Investigation deepens as players uncover the truth about Feeney's death and the necromantic ritual that enabled the breach; this path leads toward confrontation with Rozito and the Lich Cult's agents. Hallaset Fields Necromantic Activity suggests that the ward symbols are failing or being overcome; investigating what rises from the soil there puts the party in direct conflict with undead constructs and the practitioners who control them. Masquerade Intrigue uses the grand ball as a setting for social complexity; characters might attend to gather intelligence, prevent an assassination, or uncover secrets that powerful people want kept hidden. Lich Cult Infiltration creates ongoing threat; discovering the cult's presence and penetrating their organization creates a campaign-spanning adversary that cannot be simply defeated in a single encounter. Cross-Cultural Diplomacy Missions leverage the tension between Albion and Kormor Kirak; players might be tasked with

negotiating agreements, delivering messages, or uncovering the truth about violations of the supposed peace.

Mystery Box Management separates what should be explained now from what should be revealed gradually and what should remain mysterious. Game

Masters should explain the basic rules of magic early; players need to understand that necromancy exists as a threat and that vampirism is real and dangerous. The political situation should become clear through play rather than exposition; show factions working against each other, show the impact of the war, let players experience the constraints of Albion authority. Explain who is in charge and what their ostensible goals are, though the hidden agendas can remain obscure. Character secrets and faction agendas should be revealed gradually; as the campaign progresses, players learn more about Barron's past, about the nature of

Eppy's people, about what Szeret truly is beyond the princess the public sees. Keep as mystery boxes the most central secrets: the identity and goals of the Lich Cult, the true nature of the comet and what it awakened, Eppy's full heritage and powers, the mechanics of vampire hierarchy and how it might be challenged. Never explain some mysteries; leave them as open questions. What is Jack Winbow's ultimate nature? Can he be saved from his affliction or is he doomed to transformation? How many secrets does Kiraline carry in her immortal heart? The best mysteries are those that provoke discussion at the table and generate multiple possible answers.

Using the Characters as NPCs requires understanding each character's position and motivations. Barron functions best as a quest-giver and authority figure, though he carries enough mystery and moral complexity to avoid being a simple source of jobs. He provides direction and resources, but his agenda is not entirely transparent. Jack, Eppy, and

Szeret work best as allies; they accompany the party, offer their own perspectives, and develop relationships with the player characters through shared experience. They remain flawed and unpredictable, sometimes pursuing their own needs, sometimes surprising the party with hidden knowledge or unexpected loyalties. Kiraline and Rozito function as antagonists, though antagonists who must be treated as intelligent and capable. Kiraline in particular should rarely be encountered directly; her power is such that direct confrontation is suicidal, and she is sophisticated enough to work through proxies. Koss and Wooster serve as wildcard contacts, neither entirely trustworthy nor entirely hostile. They pursue their own interests and might aid the party one moment and betray them the next. Bringing these characters to life at the table means allowing them to surprise the Game Master as much as the players; let them make choices that complicate the narrative, that force players to re-evaluate what they thought they knew.

Creating Player Characters that fit within The Eternal Court requires matching character concept to the world's structure. Albion Loyalists offer the most straightforward option; characters who believe in the empire, who serve the loyalty oath with conviction or at least surface compliance. These characters experience the campaign as a journey toward doubt and re-evaluation. Terrassian Agents bring different perspectives; they serve Terrassia's interests, which may or may not align with

Albion's, creating internal party dynamics. Old World Locals, particularly if players are willing to take non-human races, offer characters who understand the hidden landscape and the ancient powers.

Characters like Eppy, with pointed ears and connection to the old world, bring knowledge that imperials lack and create the potential for teaching moments and cultural clash. Independent Operators motivated by profit, personal vendetta, or simple curiosity offer freedom from factional loyalty; they follow their own agendas, which can either unify with or divide from the party's goals.

The classes and backgrounds that map well to the setting should be interpreted through the world's aesthetic. Fighters become soldiers trained in imperial methods or wandering mercenaries. Rogues become agents and spies, people comfortable with deception and working in the shadows. Clerics take on faith in the Imperial Faith or in older traditions tied to the Old World. Rangers work as scouts and trackers, people adapted to the wild spaces between civilization. Wizards might be researchers uncovering the secrets of necromancy or practitioners of older traditions. Bards work as spies, influencers, and people who move through society with ease. The world offers room for all the core classes, though their expression should be filtered through the campaign's aesthetic and concerns. A cleric of the Imperial Faith plays very differently from a druid tied to the Old World. A wizard researching necromantic defenses pursues a different agenda than one investigating the Lich Cult's plans. The setting supports multiple character concepts and multiple playstyles, but it works best when characters are rooted in the world's factions and conflicts, when they have reasons to be in Kormor Kirak beyond simple adventure-seeking.

PART TWO: THE CITY

Kormor Kirak District by District

A walled city built in the style of Dubrovnik and Nordlingen, occupying a remote valley where craggy mountains loom over cobblestone streets.

CAPITULUM

CITY LOCATIONS GUIDE

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City Locations Guide

Playable Locations for Gamemasters

From the world of

THE ETERNAL COURT

Based on the screenplay by

JESSE ALEXANDER

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THE ALBION EMBASSY

OVERVIEW

The Albion Embassy occupies a four-story stone townhouse on Merchant's

Height, a quiet street in the better quarter of Kormor Kirak, just three blocks from the grand plaza where the neutral city's markets operate.

The building was once the mansion of a wealthy merchant family, seized by Queen Kiraline's government when the Century War made foreign representation necessary. Ambassador Barron Whitehallow has transformed it into a perfect miniature of imperial authority: the wrought-iron fence is polished monthly, the Albion standard -- gold and crimson, bearing the double eagle -- hangs from an iron bracket above the entrance, and a pair of soldiers in the distinctive red jackets and tall bearskin caps of the Imperial Guard stand watch in rotating shifts.

Walking past the Embassy is like stepping sideways through a door into the Albion Empire itself. Inside the iron fence, the cobblestones are swept clean, the flagstones gleam with beeswax, and Albion servants move with military precision. Yet the building is surrounded by the cramped, winding streets of Kormor Kirak, where vampire servants hurry past on errands and the night air carries the sound of Red Guard patrols. This contrast -- Albion's hard ceremonial formality imposed upon a vampire city perched in the mountains between two hostile kingdoms -- gives the Embassy an almost surreal quality. It is a bastion of order in a place where danger is always negotiable and peace is maintained only by fear.

THE EMBASSY EXTERIOR AND GATE

The iron fence stands eight feet tall, its wrought-iron spikes fashioned in the shape of stylized crowns and eagles. Two stone pillars flank the gates, each carved with the Imperial cipher. A bronze plaque beside the gate reads: "EMBASSY OF THE ALBION EMPIRE -- By appointment of Her

Majesty's Government." The gates themselves are heavy, painted black, and always attended. Beyond the fence, a small courtyard separates the street from the building's main entrance. The flagstones are laid in a precise geometric pattern -- no sign of the disorder that creeps across the rest of Kormor Kirak.

Two Imperial Guards stand permanent watch at the gate, rotating shifts every four hours. They wear the dress uniform of the Imperial Guard: scarlet jackets with gold trim, black trousers, tall bearskins, and highly polished boots. Each carries a saber and a rifle -- an almost ostentatious display of weapons in the neutral city. The guards are trained to be polite but unyielding. They know every face that should enter the Embassy, and they check all others. A small logbook records every visitor.

The Embassy flag -- the double eagle in gold on a crimson field -- hangs from a wrought-iron bracket above the main door. On ceremonial occasions, smaller flags are hung along the fence. The effect is meant to signal: this is Albion soil, and Albion law holds here. Everyone in

Kormor Kirak understands the message, whether they respect it or fear it.

GM Notes

The gate is the first point of contact for any PC trying to enter the Embassy officially. The guards are well-trained and professional, not corrupt -- bribes offend them. However, they can be socially maneuvered. They respect rank, military bearing, and Albion accents. A PC with a good story and Albion connections might talk their way past. The logbook is important: any visit to the Embassy is recorded, which has consequences. If Olivia Faren works from the Embassy, she has an arrangement with the guards -- they look the other way at certain hours. PCs spying on the Embassy can watch the gate, counting heads and noting who enters and exits.

Connections

The Reception Hall is directly beyond the front door. The courtyard's corners offer decent vantage points for surveillance. The street itself is busy enough to allow observers to linger without drawing the Red Guard's attention -- yet.

THE RECEPTION HALL

A grand entrance, two stories tall, with a soaring ceiling of white plaster decorated with gilded molding. A chandelier of genuine crystal

-- a luxury in Kormor Kirak -- hangs from the center. The floor is polished black marble with veins of white, creating a subtle chessboard effect. Two sweeping staircases curve upward on either side, meeting at a landing on the second floor where a long portrait of the current

Emperor hangs in a frame of carved mahogany. The portrait is formal and imposing: a man in his sixties, in full ceremonial dress, one hand resting on the pommel of a sword, his gaze direct and unyielding.

Beneath the portrait of the Emperor stand three smaller portraits: former ambassadors to neutral territories, a reminder of diplomatic tradition. The walls are painted a soft cream color, and the room is lit by the chandelier and by tall windows that overlook the street below.

The windows have heavy damask curtains that can be drawn for privacy.

The Reception Hall serves as a waiting area and as the first impression given to visitors. Visitors are received here, offered refreshment (tea or water), and either conducted further into the Embassy or politely declined. A formal desk sits to one side, attended by an Albion secretary who screens visitors and manages the appointment book. Behind the desk is a closed door marked "STAFF ONLY" that leads to the administrative corridors and kitchen.

GM Notes

This room is designed to intimidate and impress in equal measure. The Emperor's portrait watches all conversations. A PC meeting an NPC here feels the weight of formal power. The secretary -- a middle-aged woman named Missus Crane -- is capable and observant. She notes everything: who visits,

when, what mood they're in when they leave, whether they were nervous or confident. She is loyal to Ambassador Whitehallow and would report suspicious activity. However, she is also professional and can be socially engaged; she might reveal small details about the Embassy's operations if handled correctly. The secretary has a ledger of all appointments, current and past, kept in a locked drawer.

Connections

The Ambassador's Office is accessed through a door to the right of the portrait. The Diplomatic Salon is to the left. The servants' corridor and kitchens are behind the desk. The staircases lead to the second floor, where private quarters and the Cipher Room are located.

THE AMBASSADOR'S OFFICE

A large, well-appointed room on the first floor, with tall windows overlooking Merchant's Height. The desk is a substantial piece of furniture, mahogany with leather inlay, positioned to face the door --

Ambassador Whitehallow likes to know who enters before they speak to him. The walls are lined with bookshelves containing diplomatic texts, reports from other Albion embassies, and volumes of Albion law and precedent. A large-scale map of Kormor Kirak hangs on one wall, marked with colored pins indicating key locations and known sympathizers. A more detailed map of the Albion Empire's border with Terrassia is behind the desk, marked with military positions.

To one side stands a substantial drinks cabinet of dark wood, its doors carved with hunting scenes. Crystal glasses sit on a silver tray. The office smells of leather, furniture polish, and ink. Several comfortable chairs are arranged for

meetings. On the desk, papers are organized in precise stacks: diplomatic correspondence, intelligence reports (marked

”CONFIDENTIAL”), and drafts of formal letters in Albion’s careful script.

The office reflects Barron Whitehallow’s character: formal, military in its organization, yet comfortable enough to put a guest at ease. A small but genuine painting of the Albion coastline hangs above the desk -- a piece Whitehallow brought from home, a reminder of the sea he served on before becoming a diplomat.

GM Notes

This is Whitehallow’s operational base when not at the castle. He spends mornings here, reviewing reports and correspondence. The map of Kormor Kirak is updated regularly and contains sensitive information -- showing exactly what the Albion intelligence service knows and what they’re watching. The intelligence reports in the stacks are classified; PCs accessing them could gain crucial information but would be discovered if they linger. The painting is a detail that humanizes Whitehallow -- he is not a perfect political automaton. If Feeney is encountered, he maintains this office with military precision and would notice immediately if anything were disturbed. The cabinet of drinks has a hidden panel at the rear, accessible only if you know to look for the carved detail on the third shelf -- Whitehallow’s personal insurance, containing documents or items of genuine importance.

Connections

The Reception Hall is the main entrance. A side door connects to a private corridor leading to the Diplomatic Salon. A servant’s passage to the kitchens is behind the desk. The staircase to the second floor is accessed via the Reception Hall.

THE DIPLOMATIC SALON

A comfortable room of moderate size, furnished for conversation rather than formality. Three soft chairs and a low sofa are arranged around a fireplace where a fire burns on cold evenings. A side table holds a decanter of sherry, glasses, and a selection of small cakes and savorys prepared in the Embassy kitchens. The walls are painted a warm gray-green, and several smaller paintings -- pastoral views of the

Albion countryside -- hang at eye level. Two tall windows overlook a small courtyard garden. The room is carpeted, which muffles sound and creates an atmosphere of privacy.

This is where informal meetings happen. When a dignitary or contact visits, they are entertained here rather than in the formal office. The setting is deliberately unthreatening: comfortable seating, offered refreshment, the sounds of the city muted by carpet and heavy curtains.

Yet the room is also a space of subtle observation. The host has positioned themselves where they can read the guest's reactions, where the light from the windows falls on the guest's face but not the host's, where the conversation remains private from the rest of the

Embassy.

GM Notes

This room is suited for negotiation scenes, secret meetings, and information gathering. The comfort of the surroundings puts people at ease, encouraging them to speak more freely than they would in the formal office. However, the room is not truly secure -- servants move through it regularly to manage the fire and refresh refreshments. Conversations can be overheard by those who linger in adjacent corridors. Olivia Faren may use this room to conduct meetings with local contacts, presenting herself as a minor attaché rather than a

spy. The windows overlook the garden; if a PC is in the garden at the right moment, they can observe conversations happening in this room by watching figures move across the windows.

Connections

The Reception Hall connects directly. The Ambassador's Office adjoins via a side door. The service corridor passes behind one wall, allowing servants access without entering the room proper. The garden is visible through the tall windows and accessed via a door in the Reception Hall.

THE CIPHER ROOM

This locked room on the second floor is the nerve center of Albion intelligence operations in Kormor Kirak. It can be entered only with a key held by Ambassador Whitehallow, Lord Wooster, and the chief cipher clerk -- a stern, quiet woman named Miss Eleanor Venn. The room is small, barely twelve feet across, with a single window that is permanently sealed and covered with heavy curtains. A writing desk holds pens, papers, and a leather-bound code-book kept in a locked box.

Pigeonholes line one wall, each containing documents sorted by date and classification level. A small brazier in one corner allows for the burning of sensitive papers, and a log beside it records what was burned and when.

The walls are plain, the furnishings sparse. There is no comfort here, only function. The security of this space is paramount. The door is solid oak, fitted with a steel lock. There are no windows overlooking adjacent buildings. The single desk is positioned so that any person entering the room can immediately see its contents, and anyone at the desk can see the door. A journal in the locked box records the visits of everyone who has entered the Cipher Room -- the date, time, and purpose.

GM Notes

This room is nearly impossible for a PC to access without extraordinary means. It is guarded by lock, habit, and the constant awareness of those who use it. However, the information stored here is precisely what intelligence services are most interested in: encrypted messages from the Albion government, decoded intercepted communications from Terrassia, and intelligence reports on local figures and the vampire court. If PCs somehow access the Cipher Room, they could uncover major plot threads. The cipher-books use a military code that requires specialized knowledge to break; understanding them would require either the code-book itself or a skilled decoder. Miss Eleanor Venn is not a person to be underestimated. She is capable, paranoid, and does not sleep well. If the Cipher Room has been disturbed, she will know.

Connections

The second-floor corridor leads to private quarters and other rooms. It is isolated from the public areas of the Embassy, accessible only via the main staircase and carefully guarded.

THE MILITARY ATTACHÉ'S QUARTERS

A separate wing on the second floor, consisting of a small barracks for the military contingent of the Embassy -- currently six soldiers including Jack Winbow, the senior attaché. The quarters are spartan: narrow cots with military blankets, footlockers at the end of each bed, a simple table for meals, and a washroom with cold water (hot water is a luxury the soldiers consider unnecessary). The walls are whitewashed, the floors bare wood. The only decoration is a

Emperor in uniform, hung above the senior officer's cot.

A locked armory adjoins the barracks, containing rifles, sabers, and several boxes of ammunition. Jack Winbow maintains the armory himself, keeping a detailed inventory. The weapons are cleaned and maintained with religious precision. The soldiers rotate guard duty at the Embassy gate and maintain internal security. They are professional, disciplined, and not particularly sociable with the diplomatic staff. They view their posting as temporary hardship and take their responsibilities seriously.

GM Notes

This space is off-limits to civilians visiting the Embassy. Visitors who attempt to enter the barracks will be politely but firmly turned away by soldiers on watch. However, PCs with military connections, Albion accents, or good social skills might be allowed a quick visit or conversation. Jack Winbow is a solid soldier but not imaginative; he follows orders and maintains discipline. He distrusts the intelligence operatives in the Embassy, viewing them as slippery and dishonorable. He could be an ally for a PC who respects military procedure and chain of command. The soldiers are enlisted men, not commissioned officers -- they understand rank and take orders, but they also have good gossip and know the rhythms of the Embassy better than anyone. They know which servants are unreliable, which doors creak, and which officials are often absent. If a PC gains their trust, the soldiers become an excellent information source.

Connections

The barracks are accessed via a corridor on the second floor, separated from the diplomatic and administrative areas. The armory is internal to the military section.

THE KITCHENS AND SERVANTS' AREA

A large, hot, busy room on the ground floor behind the Reception Hall.

Industrial copper pots hang from hooks on the walls. A substantial iron stove dominates one end of the room, currently attended by an Albion chef -- Monsieur Pierre, a proud man in his fifties who insisted on coming to Kormor Kirak to maintain proper Albion cuisine standards.

Several local kitchen staff assist him: a mix of hired Kormor Kirakis who may or may not be reporting to the Red Guard or other interests.

Adjacent to the kitchens is a servants' hall where staff take meals and rest between tasks. Beyond that is a storage room for provisions: cured meats from Albion, cheeses wrapped in cloth, preserved fruits, flour, and other staples. Some local produce is purchased from city markets, but the core supplies are imported from home. The kitchens are clean, efficient, and the air smells of cooking food, wood smoke, and the faint staleness of being underground.

A narrow staircase leads from the kitchens to the second floor, used by servants to bring food and drink to the upper rooms. This staircase is separate from the grand stairs in the Reception Hall, allowing servants to move through the building without being seen by visitors. A basement level beneath the kitchens stores additional supplies and connects to the wine cellar.

GM Notes

The kitchens are a gathering place for information. Servants are everywhere and notice everything. Monsieur Pierre is loyal to the Albion cause but a gossip -- he grumbles about the quality of ingredients, complains about the provincial tastes of Kormor Kirakis, and shares his opinions freely with anyone who listens. He is not a security risk; he talks constantly but about trivial matters. The local staff are more complicated. At least two of them are likely informants for either the Red Guard or other factions seeking intelligence on Albion

activities. They are careful about what they say, but they listen intently. A PC posing as a cook or laborer could move through the servants' areas relatively freely, listening to conversations and observing routines. However, the actual Albion staff would eventually recognize an imposter. The basement level is colder and damper, with the smell of stone and mold.

Connections

The main Reception Hall and administrative areas are one floor above. The basement is accessed via stairs in the storage room. The private dining room of the Ambassador is on the first floor, connected to the kitchens by the servants' staircase.

THE EMBASSY GARDEN

A walled garden behind the main building, approximately forty feet square, enclosed by a ten-foot stone wall that separates it from the neighboring properties. The walls are ancient, possibly dating to the previous occupant, and are now covered with ivy and climbing roses that bloom in late spring. The garden contains a small fountain -- non-functional in the current season but filled with leaves and water

-- several stone benches, and raised beds for herbs and vegetables maintained by the servants. A gravel path winds through the garden, and the paving stones are old, uneven, and scattered with moss.

This is the only place within the Embassy walls where conversations might be conducted privately, away from the listening ears of servants or the eyes of those within the building. Yet it is not truly private.

The walls do not prevent observation from the surrounding buildings; the neighbors' windows overlook the garden. The Queen's Red Guard patrols the

streets and alleyways that run behind the Embassy. On still evenings, voices in the garden can carry.

The garden is pleasant in warmer months but grim in winter, when the plants die back and the stone becomes slick with ice. Ambassador

Whitehallow walks the garden occasionally in good weather, thinking.

Feeney uses the garden to hang laundry. Some of the servants have attempted to cultivate vegetables here, with limited success in the

Kormor Kirak climate.

GM Notes

The garden serves as a location for private conversations, meetings, and small scenes. However, every conversation conducted here should carry an undertone of danger -- observers in surrounding windows could be watching, or might watch if the conversation interests them enough. A PC and an NPC meeting in the garden have relative privacy from the Embassy staff but not from the city itself. The fountain is a landmark; many scenes might begin or end here. At night, the garden is dark, poorly lit, and could conceal someone waiting in ambush. The ivy and climbing roses provide partial cover. The stone benches are cold and uncomfortable, suitable for tense conversations rather than relaxation. If a PC is conducting surveillance on the Embassy, the garden is a vantage point accessible from the streets beyond the walls.

Connections

The garden is accessed from the main building via doors in the Diplomatic Salon and from a secondary door in the kitchens. The walls connect to the surrounding structures and alleyways, which could provide alternative access with a successful climb.

THE WINE CELLAR AND DEAD DROP

Beneath the Embassy, accessed by stairs from the kitchens or from hidden doors in the basement storage room, lies the wine cellar. It is cool, dark, and keeps the temperature steady even in warm months. Wine bottles rest on wooden racks that line the walls -- imports from Albion, as well as some local vintages selected carefully to avoid insulting Kormor

Kirak's limited wine producers. The air smells of cork, dust, and the earthy scent of stone.

At the far end of the cellar, behind a section of wine racks that can be moved, is a space used for intelligence operations -- a "dead drop" where messages, documents, or physical items can be left for pickup by agents without the parties directly meeting. The wall here is unmarked, but there is a loose stone at a specific height, behind which items can be concealed. A coded message left in a specific location indicates that something is waiting to be picked up. A small log book, hidden in a separate crevice, records drops that have been made and retrieved, written in cipher.

The cellar is not heavily guarded -- there are no locks on the wine racks themselves, and the hidden door is concealed but not impossible to discover if someone is looking for it. However, the cellar is not a regular visiting area. The Albion staff has a key, and Feeney maintains an inventory of the wines, checking the cellar regularly. Activity here would eventually be noticed.

GM Notes

The wine cellar is the physical infrastructure for espionage. If Olivia Faren or other intelligence operatives use the Embassy as a base, drops are made here. A PC discovering the hidden space and the log book could gain significant information: names (in cipher), dates of drops, and an indication of what is being communicated or transferred. The cipher might be the same one used in

the Cipher Room, or it might be a simpler field code. The log book itself is a major intelligence asset. Alternatively, a PC could use the dead drop themselves, leaving messages or evidence for others to find. The temperature of the cellar makes it a place of stillness and quiet -- conversations here are hushed, and every sound echoes. A PC hiding in the cellar could observe who enters, and from what direction, providing intelligence on the building's secret routes of access.

Connections

The main basement storage area is directly above. The kitchens are one floor up. The hidden door provides access to the wine cellar's far end; the entrance via the main stairs is through the storage room.

LORD WOOSTER'S QUARTERS

On the second floor, in a suite of rooms that open onto a corridor overlooking the Reception Hall, Lord Wooster has accumulated what can charitably be described as controlled chaos. Papers cover every available surface -- letters, official correspondence, personal notes, even sketches of Kormor Kirak's notable buildings (Wooster fancies himself an amateur artist). His sitting room contains more furniture than it can comfortably hold: wingback chairs, small tables, bookcases crammed with volumes on diplomacy, Albion history, and field guides to local plants and wildlife. A stuffed owl -- shot by Wooster himself, according to a plaque on its wooden base -- surveys the room from atop a cabinet.

The bedroom is equally overstuffed: a four-poster bed with heavy curtains, a wardrobe bursting with clothes, a dressing table littered with grooming supplies and small curios collected during his travels.

Everything in the suite suggests that Wooster is interested in everything and capable of organizing nothing. And yet, the chaos is not random -- Wooster knows where things are. He knows which stack of papers contains the correspondence with the trade minister of Terrassia, and where that half-finished sketch of Queen Kiraline's palace is tucked. He is bumbling in manner but sharper than he appears.

The quarters also serve a secondary purpose: they are an excellent listening post. Because Wooster's suite is so disorganized, people assume he is harmless and speak freely around him. Servants come and go, servicing the rooms, and Wooster overhears their conversations and gossip. Visitors meeting with Wooster often relax in his sitting room, comfortable in its cluttered, unstudied atmosphere, and speak more openly than they would in the formal office. Wooster remembers everything he hears and reports it all to Whitehallow, who understands that his apparently bumbling colleague is actually quite astute.

GM Notes

Wooster's quarters are easier to access than other sensitive areas of the Embassy. The mess makes it appear unimportant, and Wooster himself is friendly enough to allow an unexpected visitor to sit and chat for a while. A PC visiting Wooster could gather information, either by being questioned by Wooster himself (he is genuinely curious about people) or by observing the papers in his rooms. The sketches and notes reveal what Wooster has been paying attention to in Kormor Kirak. If a PC can gain Wooster's trust, he becomes a valuable information source and possibly an unwitting ally. He is not involved in the darker intelligence operations but has his ear to the ground on diplomatic matters. His apparent harmlessness is a cover; he is quite capable of defending himself if necessary and is more politically astute than his manner suggests. The mess also provides a good hiding place -- a small item concealed among Wooster's papers might remain undiscovered for weeks.

Connections

The second-floor corridor connects to other diplomatic and administrative areas. A service staircase provides discreet access to the main floors. Wooster's windows overlook Merchant's Height and the street below.

KEY NPCs

MISSUS CRANE, EMBASSY SECRETARY

A woman in her mid-fifties, sharp-eyed and efficient, with steel-gray hair worn in a strict bun. She has served the Albion diplomatic service for thirty years and takes pride in her work. She is the first person most visitors see when entering the Embassy, and she controls access to

Ambassador Whitehallow's calendar and the flow of official correspondence.

Secret

Missus Crane's daughter married a Terrassian officer before the war intensified. She has not heard from her daughter in two years and fears the worst. She has privately made inquiries through neutral channels but has told no one in the Embassy. She carries a locket with a portrait of her daughter, which she touches occasionally when she thinks no one is watching.

GM Notes

Missus Crane is loyal to the Albion cause, but her daughter's situation gives her divided loyalties. A clever PC could potentially appeal to her by offering information about her daughter or suggesting that a particular course of action might eventually lead to reunion with her family. She is not corrupt, but she can be moved by the right emotional lever. She keeps meticulous records and notices everything; any irregular activity at the Embassy will eventually reach her attention.

MONSIEUR PIERRE, CHEF

A man in his early fifties with the bearing of someone who has worked in the great kitchens of Albion's nobility. He is proud, occasionally temperamental, and deeply invested in maintaining proper culinary standards. He complains constantly about the quality of available ingredients and the "provincial tastes" of Kormor Kirak, but he does excellent work.

Secret

Monsieur Pierre has fallen into a quiet affair with one of the local kitchen staff -- Dessa, a young widow who works part-time in the Embassy kitchens. He is terrified of what would happen if the Albion staff discovered this relationship, and he has been slipping Dessa small amounts of extra provisions to help support her household.

GM Notes

Monsieur Pierre is not a security risk; his gossip is confined to culinary complaints and observations about personalities. However, his relationship with Dessa creates a potential vulnerability. If an intelligence service were to contact Dessa and pressure her, she might turn to Monsieur Pierre for help, creating a chain of compromise that could pull him into unwanted activities. He is fundamentally decent and would strongly resist anything that threatened Dessa's safety.

MISS ELEANOR VENN, CIPHER CLERK

A woman in her early forties, severe in appearance, with sharp features and pale eyes that miss nothing. She speaks rarely and in clipped, precise tones. She has worked as a cipher clerk for the military intelligence services and was transferred to the Embassy specifically to manage coded communications.

Secret

Miss Venn is no longer certain she believes in the Albion cause. She has become increasingly disillusioned by the Century War and by the cynicism she observes in the intelligence apparatus. She considers the war immoral but feels trapped by her position and oath. She would never actively sabotage Albion operations, but she is beginning to wonder if that makes her complicit.

GM Notes

Miss Venn is not corruptible in the traditional sense, but she is vulnerable to emotional or moral appeals. A PC who could convince her that a particular course of action would shorten the war or prevent bloodshed might gain her cooperation. However, she would not betray her oath lightly -- persuading her would require a compelling argument and significant effort. She is intelligent and disciplined; she would not be easily manipulated. She is also paranoid about security, for good reason. Approaching her is dangerous; she would immediately report contact to Whitehallow unless the PC had a very legitimate cover story.

FEENEY, VALET AND PERSONAL ATTENDANT TO AMBASSADOR WHITEHALLOW

A man in his sixties, lean, unremarkable in appearance, with gray hair and a measured manner of speech. He manages Ambassador Whitehallow's personal affairs, maintains his quarters, and serves as his confidant and advisor. He is supremely observant and is underestimated by nearly everyone he encounters.

Secret

Feeney was a soldier before entering service, and he has killed people in the Ambassador's service when necessary. He maintains this capacity quietly, without fanfare. He is aware of much of the Embassy's intelligence operations and is positioned to intervene if the Ambassador's safety is threatened.

GM Notes

Feeney is not an NPC to be trifled with. He appears harmless but is highly capable. He would be polite to a visitor but also observant and immediately alert to any threat or irregularity. He is an excellent source of information if a PC can gain his respect, but trust would require demonstrated competence and loyalty to Albion interests or to the Ambassador personally. He knows the rhythms of the Embassy intimately and would notice if anything were out of place.

CAMPAIGN USE

DEAD DROP DISCOVERY

The party discovers evidence of the Embassy's dead drop system, either by accessing the wine cellar or by following an agent to a pickup. They are forced to decide: do they steal the materials being passed? Do they replace them with false information? Do they alert the Embassy to the security breach? Each choice leads to different consequences. If they steal materials, Albion intelligence will know they have been compromised and will adjust operations accordingly. If they leave false information, they could set intelligence services on a wild chase or provoke open conflict. If they alert the Embassy, they might gain favor with Whitehallow but also reveal their own capabilities and interests.

THE AMBASSADOR'S PARTY

Ambassador Whitehallow hosts a formal reception at the Embassy for various dignitaries of Kormor Kirak, including members of the Red Guard and neutral city officials. The party is both a social event and a gathering for intelligence and influence. The PCs are invited (or attempt to attend) and must navigate the complicated dynamics: maintaining formal decorum while listening for secrets,

attempting to make contacts without being noticed by the Red Guard, and avoiding any incident that might create a diplomatic crisis. A murder or theft during the party could trigger major complications.

SERVANT CONSPIRACY

The party discovers that at least one servant in the Embassy kitchens is reporting to the Red Guard or to a rival faction. They must decide how to handle this: expose the servant and risk disrupting the Embassy's operations? Turn the servant into a double agent? Use the servant's contacts for their own intelligence gathering? The conspiracy deepens if they learn that the servant is acting not out of conviction but out of coercion -- the Red Guard has leverage over them (family held hostage, debt owed, etc.).

THE CIPHER ROOM INFILTRATION

The party is hired or compelled to obtain the contents of the Cipher Room -- intelligence documents, the code-books, or information about current communications. This requires them to bypass the lock, avoid detection by the staff, and escape with the materials without triggering an alarm. If they succeed, they gain access to valuable intelligence but also become a target for Albion retaliation. If they fail, they are captured and face the question of what Whitehallow does with them -- imprisonment, negotiation, or execution.

THE WOUNDED SPY

Olivia Faren (or another Albion intelligence operative) arrives at the

Embassy badly wounded, pursued by agents of another faction. She needs help and medical treatment but cannot be taken to a normal physician without revealing her identity. The party must decide whether to help her and if so, how. They might bargain with her for information in exchange for aid. They might attempt to shelter her within the Embassy, navigating the complications of that space. Or they might hand her over to her pursuers and face the consequences of that betrayal when the

Albion intelligence apparatus eventually learns of it.

KOSS'S CURIOSITIES

OVERVIEW

Koss's Curiosities occupies a narrow four-story building squeezed between a textile merchant's warehouse and a shuttered tavern in Kormor

Kirak's merchant quarter, three blocks north of the city's main plaza.

The building's facade is a riot of copper patina and dark wood, with a painted sign hanging above the street-level entrance: 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 a genius who knows exactly where everything is but would never waste time organizing for anyone else.

Inside, the shop hums with purpose. The air carries the permanent scent of machine oil, brass polish, and solder smoke. Clockwork ticking echoes from invisible mechanisms. Most visitors see a thriving business run by an eccentric Terrassian craftsman, a place where wealthy collectors acquire expensive curiosities and ordinary people marvel at mechanical toys. Few notice the second shop within the shop -- the one hidden behind locked doors and

concealed panels, where intelligence devices are assembled and espionage communications are encrypted. Devorlen Koss has spent seven years building this cover, and he's meticulous enough that both sides of his business run flawlessly. He genuinely loves the mechanical work. It's just that his loyalty to Terrassia comes first.

THE SHOP FRONT

The moment a visitor pushes through the copper-framed door, a small bell chimes -- a melodic sound, nothing threatening, perfectly charming. The front room is roughly twenty feet wide and thirty feet deep, with a ten-foot ceiling that creates an intimate, almost cave-like feeling despite the generous windows facing the street. Every vertical surface holds something interesting.

Glass display cases line the walls at eye level: delicate clockwork songbirds that sing when wound (prices 80 gold and up), intricate mechanical puzzles that take hours to solve, brass compasses with multiple needles for different purposes, finely-crafted locks and lockpicking tools (sold only to people Koss trusts), optical lenses ground to precise specifications and set in copper frames. A tall cabinet near the back displays several music boxes, each one playing a different tune, their sounds layering into an odd, haunting chord.

The counter is positioned three-quarters of the way back, a massive slab of dark wood scored by years of tool marks and small burn scars from soldering work. Behind it, shelves hold inventory: bottles of specialized oils, packs of gears in various sizes, wooden spools of brass wire, imported crystal from the northern mountains. A leather-bound ledger sits open on the counter's right side -- the shop's official accounts, perfectly legitimate and boring. To the left sits a small brass bell for summoning assistance, though Koss usually appears before customers ring it. He watches from upstairs.

The floor is wooden, worn smooth in traffic patterns. It creaks in certain spots -- a natural security system that tells Koss where his visitors are moving. A few chairs are scattered about for customers to sit and examine purchases. Near the window sits a comfortable reading chair with a small table, where customers often lose track of time turning the gears on a mechanical puzzle or watching a music box wind down.

GM Notes

The shop front is where most interactions happen. Koss is present and charming here, asking customers about their interests, suggesting items he's just acquired, remembering details about previous purchases. He uses this space to gather intelligence -- traders mention where they're traveling, nobles drop hints about their enemies, military contractors let slip supply route information. The creaking floorboards give Koss warning of anyone approaching from the back of the shop, and the positioning of mirrors on the shelves allows him to see into the workbench area without turning around.

Connections

A doorway behind the counter leads to the Workbench. A narrow staircase in the far back corner (partially hidden by a tall cabinet of music boxes) leads upstairs to the Living Quarters. A locked door beneath the counter provides access to the Back Office.

THE WORKBENCH

This space spans the right side of the building's ground floor, perhaps fifteen feet wide by twenty deep, separated from the shop front by a low wooden partition that allows customers to watch Koss work. High windows facing the side street provide excellent natural light. The entire room smells of machine oil and heated metal.

Every surface holds the tools of Koss's trade: wooden racks hold soldering irons, files, gravers, and picks. A thick bench of scarred wood runs along the back wall, its surface a palimpsest of burns, chemical stains, and deep gouges. A jeweler's loupe on a swing arm is permanently mounted at the bench's center. Wooden drawers beneath the bench -- eight of them, each labeled in Koss's precise handwriting -- hold springs, screws, gears, and jewels in organized compartments. More hanging pegs hold half-finished projects: a brass hand-crank mechanism waiting for its housing, a pocket watch missing its escapement, a mechanical lock whose tumblers need refining.

The room's most impressive feature is a lathe, mounted on a stone block in the corner to minimize vibration. It's the size of a small desk, operated by either foot pedal or hand crank, with various attachments for cutting, polishing, and shaping metal. Beside it sits a small forge with a foot-operated bellows, coal dust coating the stone around it. The forge rarely needs to reach extreme temperatures -- Koss works with precision rather than brute force.

A narrow workbench along the left wall holds finishing supplies: bottles of stain, cans of polish, small brushes. Completed works waiting for delivery sit on a higher shelf, wrapped in cloth, tagged with customer names and prices.

The air here carries a faint metallic taste. In winter, the heat from the forge keeps this room warm. In summer, it can become uncomfortably hot. Koss sometimes works here late into the evening or early morning hours, when fewer people are on the streets outside.

GM Notes

This is where Koss's genius becomes apparent to anyone paying attention. His hands move with absolute precision. He hums while working -- old songs in Terrassian, which he catches himself doing and cuts short if strangers are watching. Any craftsperson who watches him work for more than a few minutes will recognize that he's not just making curiosities; he's an artist and an

engineer of exceptional skill. The detailed organization suggests obsessive habits. Paranoid habits, even.

Perceptive visitors might notice something odd: among the half-finished projects are several pieces that don't match the shop's usual inventory. A small brass sphere with internal mechanisms visible through glass panels. A miniature humanoid figure with jointed metal limbs. A strange angular device that resembles a surveying instrument but doesn't quite match any known tool. Koss is usually vague if asked about these, claiming they're experiments or commissions he's keeping confidential.

Connections

Leads back to the Shop Front. A small door on the back wall (locked, keyhole visible) provides access to the Hidden Workshop. A narrow maintenance ladder leads up to a storage loft above the workbench, accessible only from this room.

THE DISPLAY ROOM

Up a narrow flight of stairs from the shop front, on the second floor of the building's front half, Koss maintains a more exclusive showroom.

This room is roughly square, perhaps twenty feet per side, with tall windows facing the street that are usually shuttered with wooden panels to protect the merchandise from fading.

The walls are lined with shelves of varying heights, each displaying items of particular craftsmanship or value. Here sit the expensive pieces: an orrery the size of a large globe, its brass planets suspended on delicate arms that rotate when wound, showing the actual current positions of the planets in the night sky. A music box of extraordinary complexity, with four separate cylinders and over forty small bells, capable of playing different pieces or weaving them together into a cacophonous symphony. Optical instruments -- telescopes with

lenses ground to impressive precision, each one in a wooden carrying case lined with velvet. A library of surveying equipment: theodolites, compasses with rare magnetic properties, transit instruments for measuring angles.

Several larger mechanical devices occupy pedestals in the center of the room. A working armillary sphere of brass and copper, nearly five feet tall, its rings demonstrating the positions of stars and the movements of celestial spheres. An elaborate mechanical clock face, six feet across, showing not just hours and minutes but lunar phases, days of the week, and astronomical events. A miniature city constructed entirely of brass and wood, with functioning drawbridges, rotating towers, and mechanical gates, clearly taking Koss months to construct.

The room is lit by oil lamps hanging from the ceiling (no candles here -- they're dangerous around dust and fine materials). A few velvet chairs and a low table in one corner allow buyers to sit and examine items or discuss custom commissions. A small desk holds writing materials for recording orders.

The air here is different than the shop front -- quieter, more rarified. Dust motes hang in the light from the shuttered windows. The smell of oil is fainter, almost replaced by the scent of fine wood and brass.

GM Notes

This is where Koss conducts business with serious money. Nobles, wealthy merchants, the occasional collector from Albion (as long as they're passing through as civilians). He's different here -- more formal, speaking carefully, asking probing questions about his buyers' interests and backgrounds. He remembers everything. A person who was here six months ago asking about astronomical instruments will be greeted by Koss mentioning his recent interest in star navigation.

Several of the larger pieces could actually be something other than what they appear to be. The mechanical city's internal mechanisms could include encoded

symbols. The astronomical clock could have dials that indicate something beyond celestial positions. The orrery's movements could spell out a message to someone who knows the cipher. Koss would never admit any of this, and casual examination won't reveal it, but someone studying these devices closely might notice irregularities that suggest hidden purpose.

Connections

The staircase leads down to the Shop Front. A locked door at the room's back corner provides access to a small hallway connected to the Back Office. A concealed panel behind the armillary sphere opens to reveal a peephole allowing observation of the shop front below.

THE BACK OFFICE

This small room, ten by twelve feet, is tucked behind the Display Room and above the partition separating the workbench from the shop front.

It's the most secure room on the ground floor level, with a heavy door reinforced with iron strapping and a lock requiring a key.

The room contains a desk of expensive wood, its surface nearly bare -- a few blank pages, a pen stand with two good pens, an inkwell. Beneath the desk, a set of wooden drawers holds the shop's official records: leather-bound ledgers recording sales, purchases, and expenses; correspondence with suppliers in different cities; invoices and receipts filed by date.

A second drawer, hidden behind a sliding panel in the front of the desk, contains Koss's real records. Papers in cipher and code that track his intelligence network. Letters from Terrasian military intelligence, written in obscure terminology and disguised as business correspondence about "supply difficulties" and "new inventory from associates in the south." A detailed map of Kormor Kirak with certain buildings marked in coded symbols. Sketches of

patrol routes, schedules, notes on guardsmen's routines. A small leather journal containing Koss's personal thoughts, written partly in Terrassian and partly in a private cipher.

The walls are lined with bookshelves holding reference works on engineering, metallurgy, mathematics, and practical mechanics. Several books on military history are present, though some of these have notes in the margins -- nothing that stands out obviously, but a careful reader might notice they're annotated in a way that suggests personal interest rather than academic curiosity.

A small safe is built into the wall behind a framed countryside painting. It's a masterwork of engineering -- Koss built it himself

-- with a combination lock that requires precise manipulation to open.

The room is lit by a single lamp hanging from the ceiling, which provides adequate light for reading and writing but creates shadows in the corners. The air is still and cool. No windows. The only sound is the muffled ticking of mechanisms from the workbench below.

GM Notes

This room is Koss's real center of operations for his intelligence work. He spends time here every evening, updating records and sending/receiving encoded messages that are then transmitted via rooftop heliograph to distant contacts. This is where evidence of his espionage would be found, but Koss has multiple contingencies to ensure these records are destroyed quickly if discovered.

The ledgers on the front desk are completely legitimate and would satisfy any casual inspection. The hidden drawer is difficult to find unless someone knows to look for it or makes a successful DC 18

Perception check after spending at least 10 minutes examining the desk carefully. The combination to the safe is written down nowhere -- Koss knows it by heart, and he changes it monthly.

If the party discovers this room, they've found something potentially explosive. Koss will absolutely deny everything, and he has prepared a cover story claiming the "encoded correspondence" is just a personal code system for organizing his engineering notes. The coded map might be explained away as a system for tracking which of his customers live in which districts, for delivery purposes. But a person trained in intelligence work or cryptography could expose these lies.

Connections

Leads back to the Display Room. A narrow ladder in the corner (hidden behind a hanging fabric panel) leads down to a trap door in the ceiling of the Hidden Workshop below.

THE HIDDEN WORKSHOP

Accessed only through a concealed door in the back wall of the regular

Workbench, or via the trap door ladder from the Back Office above, this space is Koss's true center of operations. The concealed door is disguised as part of the workshop's back wall -- a section of shelving that swings inward when the correct small gear is rotated on what appears to be a purely decorative brass mounting on a shelf of oil bottles.

This workshop occupies the entire back quarter of the building at ground level, but the rest of the structure and the street outside have no idea it exists. The room is perhaps twelve feet wide and twenty feet deep, with no windows. It's lit by a series of oil lamps positioned to provide bright, shadowless light over the work surface. The walls are lined with additional storage: locked

cabinets holding parts Koss wants to keep private, shelves of volatile chemicals in clearly labeled bottles, a weapons rack holding several crossbows and a collection of small blades.

The centerpiece of the room is a heavy wooden workbench, different from the one in the public workshop. This bench is lower, designed for lying on stomach to do delicate work, with a powerful oil lamp mounted on an adjustable arm overhead. Beside it stands a jeweler's loupe of extraordinary quality, mounted on a brass stand. The drawers below this bench hold materials that would be instantly identifiable as spy equipment to anyone who knew what to look for: tiny gears and springs designed for miniaturization, glass components smaller than a fingernail, specialized metals in alloys not commonly used in civilian applications.

In one corner sits a collection of small wooden boxes, each containing a completed clockwork scout -- a device roughly the size of a large beetle, with mechanical legs, internal clockwork, and (if examined closely) a small crystal lens mounted where a head would be. These devices are waiting for delivery to Terrassian intelligence contacts.

Another corner holds a collection of the components for the Man with the Clockwork Arm, though it's unclear to any observer whether Koss is building these arms for his own agents or acquiring them for some other purpose. A spare arm -- complete, detailed, elegant -- hangs from a wooden stand, its jointed fingers capable of delicate manipulation.

A narrow cot is positioned against the left wall, with a single pillow and blanket. A small shelf beside it holds a flask of water and a few books on military strategy. Koss sometimes sleeps here during periods of high activity or paranoia, preferring not to be separated from his workspace.

The air in this room is cool and carries the scent of specialized lubricants and metal. It's utterly silent when the lamps are lit and

Koss is not working -- the kind of silence that feels almost alive.

GM Notes

This is where the truth of Koss's work becomes apparent. A skilled investigator discovering this room has found smoking gun evidence of espionage. The clockwork scouts alone are incriminating -- no legitimate civilian purpose exists for such devices. The presence of military-standard equipment, the maps and codes hidden in other parts of the building, the components for the Clockwork Arms -- all of this points to systematic intelligence gathering and equipment fabrication.

Koss keeps this room locked from the hidden door side with a mechanism that requires a DC 20 Sleight of Hand check to manipulate silently (a failed check alerts him). The entrance from the ladder above is simpler but still sealed. If Koss discovers the room has been accessed without his permission, he will abandon the shop within 24 hours, leaving behind only the items he doesn't have time to remove or destroy. He will set several small fires as distractions to cover his escape and the escape of anyone helping him.

The clockwork scouts are fascinating from a technical standpoint. They could be examined closely, and someone with knowledge of magical devices might recognize that they contain a small crystal component that suggests arcane rather than purely mechanical operation. These are precision instruments, worth hundreds of gold pieces each.

Connections

Accessed via the concealed door from the Workbench, or via the trap door ladder from the Back Office above. A small tunnel hidden behind the western wall (revealed by moving a heavy cabinet) leads to the Cellar below, approximately twelve feet distant horizontally.

THE LIVING QUARTERS (UPSTAIRS)

The second and third floors of the building's front half comprise

Koss's private living space. A narrow staircase near the back of the shop front leads upward; a second set of stairs from the Display Room provides an alternate route.

The second-floor sitting room is perhaps eighteen feet square, with two tall windows overlooking the street. The furniture is comfortable but worn -- a good sofa upholstered in dark cloth, two reading chairs, a side table holding a current book and a glass of water (Koss is always reading something). Bookshelves line two walls: texts on engineering, metallurgy, mathematics, magical theory, and military history. Several volumes in Terrassian. A few fiction novels in multiple languages. Maps pinned to the walls -- not of the city, but of distant places. The southern coastline. The mountains between Terrassia and Albion. Notation has been made on these maps in light pencil: small marks and dates.

A small fireplace provides heat in winter, though Koss rarely lights it.

He prefers the cold. A small desk sits near one window, where Koss sometimes reads or writes personal correspondence. The desk's drawer holds several pages in progress -- letters to people, in Terrassian, discussing mechanical problems and news from home. These letters are never sent; they're private thoughts that happen to take written form.

The bedroom, connected by an interior door, is small and sparse. A single bed, neatly made with military precision. A wardrobe holding perhaps twelve outfits, all practical and neutral in color. A mirror hung above a small washing table. No decorations. Under the bed, a locked chest holding personal items: a journal, several letters from his mother, a small portrait of a woman (Koss would never explain who). At the very back, beneath the floorboards accessible

only to someone taking apart half the bed frame, lies an additional set of forged documents identifying him as "Delvin Kaine," a Albion citizen with a different occupation. An escape identity.

The kitchen is cramped, barely more than a closet, accessed from the sitting room. It holds a small stove, a few shelves of basic supplies, minimal cookware. Koss eats most meals at nearby taverns or brings food up to the shop. He doesn't cook. The kitchen is for tea and coffee, nothing more.

The bathroom is equally minimal: a hand pump bringing water from a cistern outside, a wooden tub for washing, a small mirror. Everything is functional. Nothing is comfortable.

A third, narrower flight of stairs leads to the rooftop.

GM Notes

Koss's living space is extremely austere. Any visitor will notice he lives like a soldier, not like a successful merchant who could afford comfort. His books reveal his obsessions and intelligence -- the marginalia is extensive, notes on military history written in the hand of someone deeply thinking about tactics and logistics.

The hidden escape documents are potentially devastating if discovered.

The identity "Delvin Kaine" could be investigated, revealing that the documents are unusually high quality and professionally forged. The journal beneath the floorboards contains personal thoughts that would confirm Koss's true loyalties and his awareness of his precarious position.

The presence of the alternate identity is interesting from a narrative perspective. Koss doesn't just have one escape plan -- he has multiple contingencies layered on top of each other. The fireplace contains a hidden compartment (requiring a DC 17 Perception check to spot) that holds a small

wooden box of gold coins (200 gold) in various Terrassian and neutral city denominations, ready for emergency travel.

Connections

The sitting room connects to the bedroom and kitchen. Stairs lead down to the shop front and Display Room, and up to the Rooftop.

THE ROOFTOP

A narrow stairs leads to a flat section of roofing, roughly twenty feet by fifteen, enclosed on three sides by low walls and on the fourth by a sloped section of the building's exterior. The roofing material is dark slate, well-maintained and relatively quiet underfoot.

Koss has equipped this space as a signal post. In one corner stands a wooden frame holding several mirrors of varying sizes, each mounted on gimbals allowing them to be angled precisely. These mirrors are used for heliograph communication -- reflected sunlight sent to distant recipients, encoded in a pattern of flashes. On a clear day, line-of-sight communication is possible to receivers posted in the mountains where Terrassian military forces maintain positions.

Opposite the mirrors, a small telescope on a tripod points toward the mountains. Ostensibly, this is for stargazing and astronomical observation -- an extension of Koss's interest in the mechanical models he builds. In reality, it's used to observe distant peaks and watch for return signals.

A small wooden shelter, barely large enough for a person to stand in, occupies one corner. Inside are several items: a journal, a mechanical cipher wheel (a device with rotating rings of letters and numbers used for encoding), a small lantern with colored glass panels (for signaling at night), and a single spyglass.

A leather case holds the mirror control mechanisms -- small devices that allow precise angle adjustments without touching the mirrors directly.

The rooftop offers excellent views of the city. From this vantage point,

Koss watches the patterns of Red Guard patrols, observes movements in surrounding buildings, and maintains awareness of who comes and goes in the neighborhood. The merchant quarter is relatively calm, but patterns are important. A particular guard who always walks a certain route might indicate a new patrol schedule. A carriage that appears every third day at dawn might be a delivery route or a surveillance pattern.

A series of small stones, seemingly randomly placed along the roof's edge, actually marks compass directions and distances -- part of a system for calculating signal angles and target bearings.

GM Notes

The rooftop is where Koss's espionage activity becomes most obvious. The heliograph system is not subtle to anyone who understands military communication. The presence of the cipher wheel is incriminating. The telescope, by itself, is innocent; combined with the mirrors and coded journal, it's part of a clearly coordinated intelligence operation.

Koss accesses the rooftop rarely and never predictably. He's extremely cautious about patterns that might be observed by the Red Guard. If he believes he's being watched, he won't visit the roof for extended periods, allowing suspicion to die down.

A careful observer stationed on a nearby roof with a spyglass could potentially see Koss conducting signal communications here. The reflected light from the heliograph system could even be noticed by people in the city streets, though most wouldn't understand what they're seeing.

If the party discovers evidence of the signal system and can decode the cipher wheel's settings, they might be able to read Koss's recent communications -- intelligence reports about Red Guard movements, supplies needed for manufacturing, confirmation of received orders from

Terrassia.

Connections

A locked hatch with a wooden ladder leads to the third-floor living quarters below. A gap between roofs provides potential access to the adjacent buildings, though crossing is treacherous (DC 15 Acrobatics check, 20 feet up with no safety).

THE CELLAR

Descended via wooden stairs from the ground floor's far back corner (which customers usually don't even notice), this space runs beneath the entire building. It's roughly fifteen feet deep at maximum depth, with a low ceiling (seven feet) that forces tall characters to duck.

The western section of the cellar serves as legitimate storage: wooden shelving holds excess inventory from the shop, bolts of material waiting to be incorporated into displays, raw brass and copper stock, crates of incoming parts from suppliers. The air is cool and slightly damp. A few oil lamps on chains provide sufficient light for the storage function.

The smell is of metal and dust.

The eastern section, hidden behind a carefully constructed false wall of stacked storage crates (removable if you know which three crates to pull), contains Koss's emergency supplies. Several large wooden boxes hold crossbow bolts, a few daggers, and one particularly well-crafted longsword wrapped in oiled cloth. Another box contains stacks of documents -- copies of everything in the

Back Office, some written in plain text for quick reference, others in coded form. A locked iron safe, smaller than the one in the Back Office, holds 500 gold pieces in mixed denominations and several small vials of a clear liquid (poison, though labeled merely as "reagent" on the small brass tags attached to their necks).

Most importantly, the eastern wall of this hidden section contains a sealed tunnel entrance. It's a wooden door disguised as part of the wall, requiring knowledge of its location to find. The tunnel beyond is narrow -- barely wide enough for a single person -- and slopes downward gradually. It extends roughly 40 feet before opening into a small chamber carved from natural stone. From there, a series of metal rungs set into the stone wall allows ascent to a grating that opens into an alley four buildings distant from Koss's Curiosities, obscured from street view by stacked crates and a drainage system that's been deliberately disused to discourage investigation.

The tunnel is Koss's primary escape route. He's walked it dozens of times and could navigate it in complete darkness. The air inside is cool and slightly musty. Water seeps through the stones in places, and the floor is slick.

GM Notes

The cellar's hidden section represents Koss's contingency planning. He's prepared to abandon the shop and disappear into the city's lower passages and side alleys within minutes if necessary. The tunnel is his insurance policy.

The contents of the emergency cache paint a picture of a person who lives with one foot always on the door. The poison is interesting -- not enough quantity to suggest plans for mass casualties, but enough to suggest someone who might choose death over capture.

The tunnel is a potential path for adventure. If the party discovers it, they might try to follow it to learn where it leads. If they're pursuing Koss and he flees this way, they face the choice of following him into a narrow, dark passage

where he has the advantage. If they attempt to blockade the exit, they might capture him -- but Koss will have already triggered a fire somewhere in the building to destroy sensitive documents, creating confusion and chaos.

The poison vials are concerning from a roleplay perspective. Koss isn't suicidal, but he is realistic about the consequences of his work being discovered. If he's cornered and captured, he will attempt to keep his secrets by whatever means necessary, including taking his own life. This is not something he's mentioned to anyone, but it's implicit in his preparations.

Connections

Stone stairs lead up to the ground floor rear corner. The hidden tunnel provides emergency escape. The tunnel can also be used by associates to contact Koss discreetly without entering the shop.

THE OBSERVATION NOOK

A bay window in the second-floor sitting room, equipped with a cushioned window seat, overlooks the street below. The cushion is soft but worn, and an indentation shows where Koss sits regularly. The window glass is clean and clear, providing an excellent view of the merchant quarter's main street, the buildings opposite, and the alley beside his shop.

This is where Koss spends significant time, apparently reading but actually watching. From here, he tracks the daily patterns of the city: which guards walk past and on what schedule, which merchants open their shops when, which buildings receive deliveries and at what times, which individuals appear multiple times and seem to have no obvious business.

He notices changes in routine. He observes people watching his shop.

A small notebook sits on the window seat cushion, currently closed, containing observations written in Koss's precise handwriting. Dates, times, descriptions

of people, notation of unusual events. It looks like the personal journal of someone obsessed with the minutiae of city life, which is partly true. It's also a record of surveillance patterns that would be immediately recognized by any trained intelligence operative as what it truly is: systematic gathering of city information for purposes of espionage.

The position is ideal for observation. The cushion is deep enough to sit comfortably for hours. The light is good during day. The angle provides view of the key approaches to the shop -- front, side alley, and the street beyond. Koss can observe without being obviously observed. Most people walking past don't look up. Those who do see only a man reading in a window, a perfectly normal sight.

GM Notes

This window seat is where Koss's paranoia is most visible. The notebook's detailed observations of random pedestrians, guards, and delivery schedules reflect someone who lives with constant awareness of potential threats. The fact that he maintains these detailed records suggests both extreme diligence and extreme anxiety.

If the party becomes aware of Koss's true nature and stakes out his shop, he will notice them eventually. His awareness of the city's patterns and rhythms means that people out of place stand out to him. A party attempting to watch his location should understand they're working against someone with home-field advantage and the habits of someone trained in noticing observers.

The notebook itself is potential evidence of criminal observation of the

Red Guard and other city officials. A prosecutor or military intelligence operative could use these records to establish that Koss has been conducting systematic surveillance.

Connections

This is a feature of the sitting room, overlooking the street from the second floor.

Key npeS

MIRIEL COSTA, Koss's ASSISTANT

ROLE: The public face of the shop when Koss is unavailable. She handles sales, repairs small items, maintains the displays.

DESCRIPTION: A woman in her mid-thirties, originally from the northern territories where craft traditions run deep. She has callused hands from years of work and bright, quick eyes. Her dark hair is usually pulled back in a practical braid. She dresses simply in work clothes, always with pockets to carry small tools.

Secret

She knows more about Koss than she lets on. She doesn't know the full truth about his espionage, but she's caught glimpses -- the locked workshop, the unusual items, his late-night tinkering sessions. She's made a quiet decision to not ask questions, and she expects him to never ask her to cross certain lines. She's loyal to him as an employer and as a friend, within limits.

GM Notes

Miriell is likeable and honest. She makes a good entry point for dialogue about Koss. She'll defend him against accusations, but only about his character. She won't defend actions she doesn't understand. If presented with clear evidence that he's engaged in espionage, her loyalty will shift toward the law, though she'll do it reluctantly. She's not stupid, and she won't help with anything violent. She's also the shop's institutional memory -- she knows where all the tools are, which suppliers can be trusted, which past customers are likely to

return. If Koss disappears suddenly, she's the only person who can keep the shop running.

ALDRIC VENN, REGULAR CUSTOMER AND COLLECTOR

ROLE: A wealthy merchant from the city's southeastern quarter who frequents the shop every few weeks, purchasing expensive items and commissioning custom work.

DESCRIPTION: A man in his fifties, with silver threading through his dark hair and the soft hands of someone who makes his wealth through trade rather than craft. He dresses expensively but not ostentatiously.

He carries himself with the confidence of someone accustomed to getting what he wants. He speaks with the accent of someone born to money.

Secret

He's more than a simple merchant. He has connections to the Albion Empire's intelligence apparatus, and he's been watching Koss for the past two years, trying to determine if the rumors of espionage are true. He's never been able to prove anything, but his suspicions run deep. He visits regularly to maintain contact and gather information. He genuinely appreciates Koss's work, which makes his surveillance complicated.

GM Notes

Aldric is dangerous in a subtle way. He's not a fighter, but he's patient and well-connected. If the party is investigating Koss, Aldric might already be investigating him too. He might approach the party, offering information in exchange for keeping him informed of their findings. Or he might present himself as a potential problem if he learns they're helping Koss. He could be an ally, an antagonist, or a complication, depending on which side the party falls on.

TORVIN "GEAR" KELBEK, SUPPLIES CONTACT

ROLE: A supplier from a smaller city to the south who brings raw materials and rare components to Koss every three to four weeks, traveling by cart.

DESCRIPTION: A large man with greying beard and the distinctive calluses of someone who works with metal. He has a cheerful demeanor that masks careful business sense. He dresses practically in heavy fabrics suited for travel.

Secret

Torvin is not what he appears. He's a Terrassian military supply officer using merchant cover to deliver materials and receive intelligence from Koss. The "supplies" are carefully coded. Certain items mean certain things. His deliveries contain everything from replacement components to message caches hidden in false bottoms. He's been working with Koss for six years.

GM Notes

Torvin is crucial to Koss's operation. If the party can convince Torvin to reveal the nature of the supply operation, they break open significant parts of Koss's intelligence network. However, Torvin is fully committed to Terrassian interests and will protect the network with his life. He'll lie, destroy evidence, and kill if necessary to preserve the operation. But he's also a professional -- if he's captured and the party can convince him that operating in Kormor Kirak is now compromised, he might agree to safe passage in exchange for testimony about the extent of Terrassian intelligence operations.

CAMPAGN USE

THE HIDDEN WORKSHOP DISCOVERY

If the party discovers the hidden workshop through exploration or lucky accident, they've stumbled onto something massive. The presence of clockwork scouts and the components for Clockwork Arms immediately indicate military intelligence activity. The question becomes: what do they do with this information? Alert the city watch (which might include

Red Guard who are partially sympathetic to Terrassia)? Confront Koss?

Steal equipment for leverage? Use the workshop themselves as a base of operations? This discovery should feel like finding a loaded weapon in the city's heart.

THE GEOGRAPH NETWORK

If the party observes Koss conducting signal communications from the rooftop and can decode his cipher wheel, they gain access to raw intelligence about Terrassian military movements and interests. The complication: the information is current and relevant. If Koss's network is compromised, Terrassian intelligence will want to eliminate the threat. The party might end up being hunted by Terrassian agents, even if they're working to stop Koss. Alternatively, the party could use the signals themselves to feed false information back to Terrassian handlers, creating a counterintelligence operation.

THE EVACUATION CHOICE

When Koss realizes his cover is blown, he doesn't fight directly.

Instead, he triggers his evacuation protocol, setting fires in the shop to destroy evidence and moving toward the cellar escape tunnel. The party must decide how to respond: pursue him through the tunnel (disadvantaged terrain), block the tunnel exit (splitting their forces), secure the shop to prevent evidence destruction (fighting the spreading fires), or something else entirely. This encounter should feel urgent and improvisational, forcing the party to make difficult tactical choices.

THE INTELLIGENCE TRADE

After capturing Koss or learning significant details about his operation, intelligence groups become interested in recruiting the party. The Terrassian military offers a deal: provide them with information about city watch capabilities and political sympathies, and they'll pardon Koss and protect the party from Albion retaliation. The city's intelligence services offer a counter-deal: work as their agents in monitoring Terrassian activity, and they'll ensure the party gets official recognition. Albion's representatives in the city also make an offer, promising gold and position in exchange for deep cover work. The party is suddenly valuable to multiple factions, but accepting any deal entangles them with powers far larger than themselves.

THE APPRENTICE'S CHOICE

Miriel confronts the party after Koss's exposure. She's angry, but she's also practical. She offers them a deal: help her move the shop's inventory and equipment to a safe location, and she'll provide everything she knows about Koss's routine, contacts, and secrets. Not as an act of betrayal, but as an act of pragmatism. Koss made his choices. She's making hers. She wants to survive and keep her career intact. This presents a moral complication -- Miriel isn't evil,

she's just trying to save herself. Does the party help her? Do they inform her that helping her violates law? Do they try to protect her from her own choices?

THE KORMOR KIRAK MARKETPLACE

OVERVIEW

The Kormor Kirak Marketplace sprawls across the heart of the city like a wound that refuses to close -- always bleeding, always restless, always full of people and voices and the smell of blood and spice. It is the central artery of commerce in the neutral city, where merchants from the

Albion Empire and the Kingdom of Terrassia meet on equal ground because

Queen Kiraline's Red Guards tolerate no violence without just cause, and wealth is the best just cause. The marketplace never sleeps. Even when the formal stalls close their shutters at dusk, the alleyways hum with deals made in darkness, information traded in whispers, and the quiet business of a city that profits from the Century War by selling to both sides.

The marketplace is chaos given shape. 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

The Grand Square is where the marketplace's heart beats loudest. At least two acres of open cobblestone, surrounded on all sides by permanent shops, guild halls, and formal stalls. The center of the square holds an ancient fountain -- a stone structure carved with horses and swords in the pre-war style, now dry for fifteen years. No one maintains it. The fountain has become the unofficial center of the marketplace: merchants use it as a landmark for meeting points ("by the old fountain's north corner"), children play in its dry basin, and 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 also grooved and worn 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 square gets sunlight in patches; buildings shadow different areas depending on the time of day. This makes it a favorite spot for cutpurses and pickpockets, who work the bright zones where sight lines are worst.

The edges of the Grand Square are lined with semi-permanent stalls: wooden frames with canvas awnings that can be taken down or set up in a matter of hours. These are rented from the Merchant Guild at set prices.

The stalls sell everything -- wool, pottery, metalwork, cloth, rope, candles, basic foodstuffs. These are the "respectable" merchants, those with enough coin to afford Guild recognition and space. The transient merchants -- the ones with less capital and more desperation

-- crowd into the alleys and side streets.

Notices are posted on several wooden boards near the fountain: guild regulations, Red Guard proclamations, notices of goods for auction, and a constantly-updated list of banned merchants (those who've cheated the

Guild or offended someone powerful). The notices are hand-written in a mixture of Albion and Terrasian script, with an interpreter or the

Guild's scribe available during business hours to translate for those who can't read.

GM Notes

The Grand Square is where most simple buying and selling happens. It's public, it's supervised, it's relatively safe -- or at least, violence is punished quickly enough that merchants and city visitors feel comfortable conducting legitimate business. However, the Square is also where the marketplace's power structure becomes visible. Money changers cluster near the Guild Hall. The wealthiest merchants occupy the best stalls. Red Guards appear most frequently here, meaning criminals either conduct business elsewhere or disguise it. Use the Grand Square for:

- Public encounters with NPCs (merchants, guards, other players)
- Simple commerce and supply purchasing
- Observing the rhythm of the market
- Hearing rumors and overhearing conversations
- Noting the presence (or conspicuous absence) of merchants who normally operate here

The Grand Square also connects to all other major areas of the marketplace. GMs can treat it as the hub; characters will naturally return here between visits to other sections.

THE ALBION QUARTER

The Albion Quarter occupies the eastern side of the marketplace, where goods arrive by the road from the Imperial territories. The stalls here are organized with military precision -- nearly identical wooden structures, goods arranged with mechanical efficiency, and 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.

What sells here is practical and mass-produced: precision tools for craftspeople (wrenches, calipers, fine-toothed saws), military surplus (uniforms with Albion insignia still stitched on, leather armor that's been used hard, helmets dented from actual impact), manufactured cloth from the mills of the northern Empire (often dyed in grays and earth tones), steel blades of all sizes, nails, screws, chain, cordage, and the occasional working gun or crossbow. The quality is generally high but the craftsmanship is uniform -- nothing unique, nothing touched by a master smith's hand. Everything is reproducible and replaceable.

The merchants here tend to be middle-class Albion nationals: former soldiers, guild members, licensed traders with official papers. They speak quickly, abbreviate their words, and make deals on handshakes and simple tallies. A few are obviously Imperial agents, gathering intelligence on who's buying what and from where. The customers are soldiers, mercenaries, builders, farmers needing tools, and anyone practical enough to want reliable goods at set prices.

Near the back of the Albion Quarter stands MASTER HARDING'S WEAPONS

STALL, a semi-permanent establishment run by a grizzled Albion craftsman who makes his own blades and repairs weapons. Harding doesn't sell mass-produced junk; he buys worn-out swords and axes and teaches his two appren-

tices to restore them. His stall always has work piled up -- customers waiting days for repairs. Harding himself is tattooed with the marks of the Albion Artificers' Guild, chain-smokes a pipe, and speaks only when he has something to say.

GM Notes

The Albion Quarter represents commercial normalcy and legitimacy. Merchants here are less likely to be criminals (though Imperial agents may be). Prices are fair by marketplace standards, goods are as described, and disputes are resolved through the Guild system rather than fists. However, it's also the duller part of the marketplace -- most dramatic encounters happen elsewhere. Use this quarter for:

- Restocking supplies on fair terms
- Meeting Albion merchants or Imperial agents
- Learning about military movements (merchants hear everything)
- Encountering soldiers spending wages
- Spotting Albion nobility incognito, shopping for practical goods

The Albion Quarter connects to the Grand Square to the west, the Money Changers' Row to the north, and narrows into alleys toward the Red Guard Watch Post.

THE TERRASSIAN QUARTER

The Terrassian Quarter sprawls across the western side of the marketplace in deliberate disorder. Stalls here are decorated with cloth, plants, handwritten signs, and personal touches. Merchants call out their wares with song-like rhythm, arguments over prices can last hours, and deals are sealed with wine

and bread rather than on paperwork. The smell is rich and agricultural -- cheese, wine, dried herbs, cured meat, the green smell of fresh produce when it's in season.

What sells here is crafted rather than manufactured: wheels of cheese of different ages and sharpness, wine in bottles and skins, cured meats (sausages, dried pork, salted fish), leather goods crafted by hand (belts, boots, saddles with tooled designs), woven textiles in bright colors (scarves, blankets, wall hangings), wooden tools and furniture, pottery, candlesticks, jewelry made from copper and silver, dried herbs in bundles, honey, and other goods from Terrassian farmlands and craftspeople. Nothing is identical to anything else. Each piece bears marks of its maker.

The merchants are farmers, craftspeople, and Terrassian nationals proud of their homeland. They're slower to deal than their Albion counterparts -- more likely to offer tea to potential buyers, more interested in haggling as conversation than as pure economics, more likely to remember customers who return. Many are women. Many speak with rural accents that merchants from the capitals mock. But the quality of their goods is undeniable, and regular customers swear by them.

Near the center of the Terrassian Quarter sits MAMA CASSIA'S STALL, run by a heavy woman in her sixties who somehow knows everyone in the marketplace and everyone's business. Mama Cassia's official stock is herbal remedies (tea for aches, salves for wounds, powders for sleep), but her real business is information and favor-trading. She extends credit to people she likes, refuses to do business with people she doesn't, and has influence over several other Terrassian merchants. She speaks slowly and carefully, with a warm accent, and her stall is always crowded with people who claim to be buying medicine but are actually gathering news.

GM Notes

The Terrassian Quarter is where the marketplace feels most human and personal. Prices are negotiable, merchants have memories, and relationships matter. The quality is high but inconsistent -- you might get a beautiful hand-made saddle or a poorly-dyed blanket, depending on the craftsman's attention that day. This quarter attracts:

- Soldiers buying gifts to send home
- Crafters looking for inspiration or supplies
- People seeking herbal remedies (legitimate and otherwise)
- Customers who value relationships over efficiency
- Refugees and displaced people from Terrassia, connecting with their countrymen

The Terrassian Quarter connects to the Grand Square to the east, the Food Vendors to the south, and opens into narrower streets toward the Black Market Alley. The atmosphere here makes it easy for characters to get distracted and spend time; use that.

THE NEUTRAL STALLS

The northern edge of the marketplace, between Albion and Terrassian territory, is where Kormor Kirak's own merchants operate. These are traders from the city itself and from independent regions beyond the war

-- mountain people, nomadic caravans, merchants whose loyalty is to profit rather than nation. The stalls here are practical but decorated, solid but creative. The smell mixes everything: spice and metal, leather and herbs, wood and stone.

What sells here is what the mountains provide and what no one else carries: furs of mountain predators (snow fox, mountain bear, the rare and expensive white wolf), minerals and gemstones in raw and worked forms (quartz, garnet, tourmaline, occasionally emerald), worked leather and hardened skins (leather water bottles, protective armor for specialized work, polished hides as decoration), preserved mountain fish and game, honey from high-altitude bees, tools designed for mountain work (climbing gear, specialized ropes, mining equipment), wool of exceptional quality, and the occasional strange goods that wander in from far-off places.

The merchants here are independent operators -- some native to Kormor Kirak, others from distant places attracted by the city's neutrality.

They're shrewd, they're cosmopolitan, and they ask few questions. They accept payment in both Albion and Terrassian currency (at whatever exchange rate they're currently claiming is fair), and they have connections to the underground economy. These merchants are less likely to report crimes to the Red Guard and more likely to handle disputes privately. Many have connections to the criminal underworld.

In the middle of the Neutral Stalls stands KORMUND'S MINERALSHOP, a permanent wooden building with a heavy door and locked window displays.

Kormund himself is a dwarf of uncertain age, taciturn and scarred. He buys raw minerals from miners and mountain folk, cuts and polishes the valuable ones himself, and sells them to jewelers, nobles, and adventurers. Kormund doesn't haggle, doesn't explain, and has locked away in a back room a collection of stones that he claims aren't for sale. He also acts as a de facto banker for adventurers and mercenaries, accepting deposits of precious items for safekeeping. Everyone trusts

Kormund because he's never betrayed anyone's trust, and the Red Guard themselves don't interfere with his business.

GM Notes

The Neutral Stalls represent autonomy and independence. Merchants here are less regulated than in the Albion or Terrassian quarters and therefore more likely to be involved in illegal goods on the side. It's also where the marketplace's cosmopolitan nature becomes most visible -- these merchants don't care who you are or who you're working for, only whether you have coin. Use this area for:

- Purchasing unusual, specialized, or high-quality items
- Meeting independent traders with no allegiance to either nation
- Discovering goods from far-off places
- Finding people willing to help with morally gray work
- Accessing secure storage or banking services
- Encountering other adventurers and wanderers

The Neutral Stalls connect to all other major areas, serving as a crossroads. Kormund's shop provides a focal point for more serious transactions.

THE FOOD VENDORS

The southern end of the marketplace is a riot of cooking smoke, sizzling meat, and shouted offers. This is where the marketplace's poor congregate and where hunger overrides politics. A dozen or more merchants have set up simple stalls and carts with food that's ready to eat: meat on wooden sticks (beef, chicken, sometimes goat, occasionally unidentifiable), bread fresh and stale, cheese in wedges and crumbles, hot drinks (spiced wine, herbal tea, a thick brown liquid that might be coffee), pastries filled with meat or fruit, dried fruits, nuts, and simple stews ladled into bowls for eating on the spot.

The quality is variable. The most popular vendors are those who keep their fires clean and their meat fresh, visible to their regulars by the crowds at their stalls. Less scrupulous vendors get away with questionable practices because customers are hungry and the food is cheap. The smell is overwhelming -- roasted meat, woodsmoke, spices, sweat, and underlying it all, the smell of urine from the alleyway where transients relieve themselves.

The Food Vendors area is the marketplace's true heart in terms of social dynamics. This is where soldiers mingle with beggars, where gossip travels fastest, where deals happen in plain sight because everyone's attention is on their meal. Money changers, information brokers, and criminals all operate here -- not from stalls of their own, but as customers and through quick conversations between purchases.

A merchant might buy a meal and in the time it takes to eat, exchange information with two other merchants and a Red Guard captain. It's the most crowded part of the marketplace in the middle of the day and the most dangerous at night, when the legitimate vendors have left and only the desperate remain.

BELLA'S SAUSAGE CART is the most famous establishment in the Food

Vendors area -- a permanent cart with a brick oven, run by a woman in her forties who has been here for twenty years. Bella's sausages are legendary. She makes them herself using a family recipe, the meat sourced from specific herds, the spices freshly ground every morning. A sausage from Bella's costs more than other vendors charge but it's worth it; soldiers returning from campaigns buy extra to prove they've been to Kormor Kirak. Bella knows everyone. She extends credit to people she likes. She's also the single most plugged-in merchant in the marketplace -- if you want to know what's happening in Kormor Kirak, buy a sausage from Bella and ask.

GM Notes

The Food Vendors area is where the marketplace becomes personal and unpredictable. Food is a basic need, so people are vulnerable here -- hungry, tired, willing to take risks for a meal. This is ideal for:

- Casual conversations and information gathering
- Encountering common people and learning what they're worried about
- Watching the city's lower classes interact with authority
- Spotting criminals conducting low-key business
- Becoming visible to Red Guards (who patrol here regularly)
- Meeting contacts in a crowded, inconspicuous setting

The area connects to the Terrassian Quarter to the north and the Auction Block to the east.

THE MONEY CHANGERS' ROW

Where the Grand Square narrows toward the northern edge of the marketplace, a formal row of small stalls operates in the open: the money changers. These are the licensed brokers who convert Albion crowns to Terrassian marks and handle other currencies. On any given day, eight to twelve stalls operate here, each staffed by a merchant and one or two guards (usually hired muscle, sometimes Red Guards on contract). Large scales sit on counters, coins are weighed and counted with deliberate slowness, exchange rates are posted on signs, and disputes about the value of coins are settled through reference to a master scale kept at the Merchant Guild Hall.

The atmosphere here is tense and focused. Money is the actual blood of the marketplace, and these stalls are where the conversion happens.

Prices aren't negotiable -- or rather, they are, but the negotiations are precise mathematical exercises rather than personal arguments. A merchant might

spend twenty minutes debating whether a coin is actually valid Albion currency or too worn to accept, but they're not going to reduce the price because you're charming.

The money changers themselves are skilled at their work and at assessing people. They can tell a traveler from a resident by how they hold their coin purse. They spot counterfeit currency on sight. They remember customers who have cheated them. They also know which banks and merchants are reliable and which are failing. If you want to know about someone's financial health or credit status, a money changer will tell you -- for a price.

VENN'S EXCHANGE is the largest and most official of the money changing operations, run by a woman in her fifties who dresses in merchant clothes of fine quality. Venn is half-Albion, half-Terrassian, and it's this neutrality that made her perfect for the job. She doesn't favor one side over the other. She's also connected to the legitimate banking system of both nations, meaning she can arrange larger transfers and provide letters of credit. Her guards are professional and genuinely dangerous, and violence at her stall is punished swiftly and permanently.

GM Notes

The Money Changers' Row is where the marketplace's economic reality becomes visible. This is where wealth is most concentrated and where armed conflict is most likely if someone tries to cheat. Use this area for:

- Currency exchange (unavoidable if you're working with multiple nations' coin)
- Determining character wealth and supplies
- Learning about larger economic patterns in the city
- Meeting merchants discussing credit and debt
- Spotting assassins or thieves who target wealthy people

- Encountering mercenaries and soldiers spending or depositing wages

The Money Changers' Row is the most formal, most official area of the marketplace. Red Guards walk these streets regularly. Crime happens here rarely and is punished publicly.

THE BLACK MARKET ALLEY

Beyond the Money Changers' Row, the marketplace transitions into a narrow alley -- technically still part of the market but separate enough to be its own world. This is where the goods that can't be sold in daylight move instead. Smuggled items from both nations, stolen merchandise, substances that blur the line between medicine and poison, documents forged or stolen, and information that would be dangerous if known openly. The stalls here are temporary -- cloth hung over rope, boxes arranged to look like sitting areas, dark corners where transactions happen out of sight.

The smell here is different: incense hiding other smells, rot from hidden corners, the metallic smell of blood from fresh meat, and underneath everything, the smell of desperation and fear. The light is poor -- the alley is narrow and the buildings block sun. Even in midday, it's dim. At night, only oil lamps in windows provide light, and lanterns aren't lit for safety reasons; people here don't want to be seen clearly.

The Black Market Alley is watched carefully. Red Guards rarely patrol here -- not because Queen Kiraline has given it up, but because she's decided the official response is to know it exists, to monitor it from a distance, and to only intervene if the crimes within threaten the city's stability. This makes it both safer (from official law) and more dangerous (from the merchants themselves, who handle their own disputes with knives and poisons instead of law). A cutpurse in the Black Market

Alley doesn't get reported to guards; they get caught and dealt with by the person they stole from.

Entering the Black Market Alley requires awareness. Characters shouldn't stumble into real danger by accident -- GMs should make it clear when they're moving from the legitimate marketplace into the black market section. Once in, characters will be watched. Merchants will assess whether they're cops, potential victims, criminals, or something else. Prices are doubled or tripled. Goods are not guaranteed.

Betrayal is possible and even expected.

GM Notes

The Black Market Alley is where the campaign's darker elements manifest. This is where:

- Stolen goods can be fenced
- Illegal substances can be purchased
- Forged documents can be obtained
- Hits can be arranged
- Secrets can be traded
- Red Guard attention is minimal but not absent

The Black Market Alley is also where the criminal underworld organizes.

This is likely where ruffians, gangster lieutenants, and other street-level criminals spend their time. It's where Rozito Vallikozo might be encountered, if his legitimate cover is failing. The alley is dangerous to law-abiding characters and characters without local connections. Use it sparingly and make the consequences clear.

THE INFORMATION BROKER'S STALL

Somewhere in the marketplace -- and its exact location changes weekly to avoid patterns -- sits a stall operated by someone in the business of buying and selling information. This isn't necessarily a single person; it might be a rotating operation run by different people or a stationary stall staffed by a person whose job is to collect secrets.

The stall presents itself as something innocuous: a fortune teller with a crystal ball, a scribe offering to record documents, a scholar selling books and maps, a messenger service offering to deliver letters. The real business happens in the gaps between those legitimate services.

The information broker sells rumors, facts, secrets, and intelligence.

Information about troop movements, merchant bankruptcies, secret relationships, smuggling routes, the names of Red Guard informants, safe houses for refugees, and anything else that someone in the city knows and someone else is willing to pay for. The broker doesn't judge the morality of the information or what the buyer intends to do with it.

They just know the price and make the exchange.

The identity of the information broker is deliberately unclear. Some people in the marketplace will swear it's a scholar from the northern universities. Others claim it's a retired Red Guard captain. A few believe it's actually run collectively by the Merchant Guild as a way to keep control over information flow. The truth doesn't matter as much as the fact that the broker is accessible, reliable, and hasn't been killed despite the dangerous work -- which suggests significant protection, whether from the Red Guard, the Guild, or the criminal underworld.

GM Notes

The Information Broker's Stall is a plot device and information hub for GMs. Use it for:

- Delivering information to characters who need it but haven't discovered it through play
- Creating jobs and quests (sell information to someone for payment, gather information for payment)
- Connecting different plot threads (the broker knows what happened in

Area X because they heard it from someone in Area Y)

- Creating complications (the character discovers the broker is working for someone they're opposed to)
- Establishing the marketplace's connected, gossipy nature

The stall can be encountered randomly or can be sought out by player characters. Pricing should vary based on the value of the information. A rumor costs a few silver. Specific knowledge of troop movements or merchant secrets costs gold. Information that could cause deaths or overturn power structures costs more than most adventurers possess.

THE RED GUARD WATCH POST

The Red Guard presence in the marketplace is unavoidable, centralized, and obvious. A raised wooden platform stands near the Money Changers'

Row, with a small stone building attached -- the Watch Post. At any given time during business hours, three to five Red Guards stand on the platform, watching the marketplace. They wear the crimson cloaks and black armor of Queen Kiraline's personal force. They carry both swords and formal symbols of authority (staves, insignia, documents).

The Watch Post is open to complaints from merchants or customers. People can approach and report crimes, disputes, or disturbances. The Red

Guards take statements, investigate if the crime is serious enough, and enforce their decisions with absolute authority. They don't negotiate, don't show bias between Albion and Terrassian interests, and don't tolerate violence in their presence.

The Red Guard captain stationed at the marketplace changes monthly; they're rotated to prevent personal relationships from developing that might compromise their judgment. This month's captain is CAPTAIN

HARROW, a severe woman in her late thirties with scars on one side of her face and a formal manner that permits no casual conversation. Harrow is respected by the merchants because she's fair and hated by criminals because she's competent. She's not cruel, but she is absolutely committed to Queen Kiraline's law.

Below Harrow are four veteran guards and a rotating roster of younger soldiers. The younger ones are learning their trade and are generally politer than Harrow. The veterans are quiet, watching, and deadly if needed. All of them are loyal to the Queen above all other considerations.

GM Notes

The Red Guard Watch Post is the mechanism by which the marketplace remains functional despite its lawlessness. The guards are:

- Not corruptible in any conventional way (though might be swayed by appeals to the Queen's interests)
- Efficient and professional
- Absolutely willing to kill if necessary
- A resource that law-abiding characters can use
- An obstacle that criminals need to work around

The Watch Post can be where characters report crimes or seek official help. It can also be where they're questioned if they're suspected of crimes. Use it to reinforce the marketplace's atmosphere: lawless but not anarchic, dangerous but not random, profit-driven but with a strict hierarchy and ultimate authority.

THE AUCTION BLOCK

A raised wooden platform with a lectern and bell occupies one edge of the marketplace. This is where the Merchant Guild conducts public auctions of goods that need to move quickly, property that's seized from delinquent debtors, permits and licenses, and the occasional more exotic sale. An auctioneer -- currently a thin man named DERRIN who has a remarkable voice and a gift for spinning narratives about products -- runs the auctions with theatrical flair.

Auctions happen twice weekly, on fixed days, and they're open to anyone with coin to bid. The goods being sold are public knowledge, posted days in advance. However, the auction is also where more private sales can happen quietly -- a successful bid on a worthless item might be cover for a larger transaction, or the real business might happen in the private room behind the platform where successful bidders complete their payments.

The Auction Block is a place of opportunity and risk. Adventurers can fence stolen goods (if they're willing to take what the market will pay), purchase equipment, bid on seized property, or contract for services (mercenary work, repairs, temporary labor). It's also a place where fortunes are sometimes lost by bidders who overestimate their wealth or the value of what they're buying.

GM Notes

The Auction Block is a useful mechanic for:

- Dispensing magical items or unique equipment in a way that puts them in competition with other bidders
- Creating spontaneous adventure hooks (purchase a sealed crate and discover something unexpected)
- Establishing the passage of time and the marketplace's rhythm
- Involving characters in commodity trading or economic gameplay
- Creating tense moments through competitive bidding

Auctions can be deterministic or randomized. A GM can plan specific items for auction or use random tables to generate goods that surprise both characters and the GM.

THE MERCHANT GUILD HALL

The largest permanent building in the marketplace is the Merchant Guild

Hall -- a two-story stone and timber structure with multiple rooms, an official seal above the door, and guards posted outside. This is where the Merchant Guild operates: handling disputes between merchants, issuing licenses and permits, maintaining the official price guides and weight standards, and settling arguments about market rules.

The Guild Hall is neutral territory. Disputes between merchants from opposing nations are settled here according to the Guild's rules, not according to national law. The penalties are economic rather than physical: fines, loss of market stalls, public bans from trading in

Kormor Kirak, or (for serious offenses) selling the merchant's bond to collectors who will hunt them across the world.

The Guild is run by MASTER THORNE, a merchant of sixty years who came up from the streets and worked his way to prominence through cunning and reliability. Thorne is respected by both Albion and Terrassian merchants because he's made money for people on both sides and shows no preference. He's also closely connected to Queen Kiraline's administration -- the Queen trusts the Guild to keep the marketplace functional, and Thorne keeps it functional. In return, he has access to the Queen's authority when he needs it.

GM Notes

The Merchant Guild Hall is:

- Where disputes are settled officially
- Where characters can gain licenses or permits to operate in the marketplace
- Where the Guild's rules can be learned and (in some cases) negotiated
- A place of formal power and serious dealings
- Where larger crimes can result in economic exile

Characters who operate in the marketplace for extended periods should interact with the Guild. They might need a merchant's license to set up a stall, might become involved in Guild disputes, might earn the

Guild's favor or enmity. The Guild can also be a source of information about the marketplace and larger economic patterns in the city.

THE ROZITO'S STALL

Somewhere in the marketplace -- and the exact location depends on the campaign moment and Rozito's current operational security -- sits a stall that belongs to ROZITO VALLIKOZO or his agents. From the outside, it appears to be a legitimate merchant operation selling exotic imports: spices,

unusual textiles, rare preserved goods, and similar high-margin items. The goods are real, they're well-made, and they can be purchased with normal currency.

The real business at Rozito's Stall is different. The stall serves as a neutral meeting ground for Rozito's underground operations. Smuggling networks, black market dealings, and the movement of goods that should never be sold openly all coordinate through or near this location.

Rozito's agents operate here: people who receive payments, make arrangements, and gather intelligence. If someone wants to contact

Rozito or his organization, this is often the first place they're directed to by those in the know.

The stall is carefully managed. Rozito himself is rarely here -- his appearance would draw too much attention from Red Guards. His agents are local merchants hired for legitimate work and who do the underground business as a side arrangement. They're discreet, professional, and have contingencies if they're arrested (they'll disappear into the

Black Market Alley or the underworld entirely rather than betray their employer).

The stall is also a trap. If the Red Guard suspects Rozito's activities are becoming too obvious, they might stage a raid. If Rozito's enemies want to strike at him, they might target the stall. If someone wants to threaten Rozito, exposing his operation is a clear message. The stall exists in a state of precarious balance between usefulness and danger.

GM Notes

Rozito's Stall exists as whatever the campaign needs it to be:

- A source of illegal goods
- A place where Rozito can be contacted

- A front organization that characters might need to investigate or infiltrate
- A point of conflict between Rozito and legitimate merchants or the

Red Guard

- A neutral ground where deals between criminals can be made
- A false lead or red herring if Rozito's actual operations are elsewhere

The stall's exact location, merchandise, and staffing should change between sessions if characters are actively investigating Rozito. This reinforces the idea that he's intelligent and careful, not static or stupid.

KEY NPC'S

BELLA

ROLE: Food Vendor, Information Hub

DESCRIPTION: A woman in her mid-forties with weathered skin, strong hands, and warm eyes that miss nothing. She wears an apron perpetually stained with meat and spices, and she's always slightly flushed from standing near the fire. She speaks in a melodic Terrassian accent.

Secret

Bella is the mother of a Red Guard captain who's stationed in a border town. This connection gives her both protection and obligation to the Crown. She gathers information not out of greed but to protect her son from situations where he might be in danger.

GM Notes

Bella is the most approachable information source in the marketplace. She doesn't charge gold; she expects favors in return. She can be a quest-giver, a source of rumors, or a contact for characters who need to understand how the marketplace really works. She's friendly but not naive; she can recognize when someone is using her and will punish disloyalty.

VENN

ROLE: Master Money Changer, Financial Authority

DESCRIPTION: A woman in her fifties with sharp features, gray-streaked dark hair pulled back in a practical style, and fingers stained with the smell of metal. She dresses in expensive but practical clothing -- silks that move well, boots with good soles. She has the bearing of someone who manages large sums and small people.

Secret

Venn has been offered the position of Minister of Trade in the Albion Empire, but she's declined. She prefers the independence and actual power of her current position. Both the Empire and the Kingdom know she's declining, and both respect her for it; she's proven she can't be bought.

GM Notes

Venn is a powerful NPC who can't be seduced, intimidated, or corrupted in conventional ways. She's useful as an obstacle, a source of economic information, or a contact who can arrange large financial transactions. She respects competence and honesty; she despises both incompetence and lies.

CAPTAIN HARRON

ROLE: Red Guard Authority, Law Enforcement

DESCRIPTION: A woman in her late thirties with a scar running from her temple to her jaw, severe features, and the physical presence of someone trained in violence. She wears the crimson cloak and black armor of the Red Guard with perfect precision. She moves economically, speaks formally, and never smiles.

Secret

Harrow lost family in the Century War and has made it her mission to prevent violence in her jurisdiction. She enforces the law not out of cruelty but out of determination to protect people from the chaos that killed her family.

GM Notes

Harrow is lawful, competent, and non-corruptible. She can't be killed easily and shouldn't be made an enemy unless the campaign is ready for serious consequences. She's also potential ally material if characters prove themselves loyal and non-disruptive.

KORMUND

ROLE: Mineralsmith, Banker, Neutral Merchant

DESCRIPTION: A dwarf in his fifties or sixties (age unclear) with intricate braids in his dark beard, calloused hands, and one clouded eye. He dresses simply in work clothes and stands with the weight and solidity of mountain stone. He speaks rarely and carries himself with absolute calm.

Secret

Kormund was a war profiteer decades ago, buying up ore and gemstones in bulk and selling them to both sides of the Century War. He made enormous wealth this way and later retired from direct participation but still profits from the war through his current business. He's never spoken of this and would kill to keep it quiet.

GM Notes

Kormund is a resource for characters who need storage, banking, or mineral-related expertise. He's not interested in violence and won't be drawn into conflicts, but he also won't protect anyone who betrays his trust. He can provide information about mining, gemstones, and the underground economy of the mountains.

DERRIN

ROLE: Auctioneer, Master of Ceremony

DESCRIPTION: A thin man in his fifties with an extraordinary speaking voice, enthusiastic gestures, and the energy of someone performing constantly. He dresses in bright but tasteful clothing with scarves and ornaments that make him visible from across the marketplace.

His smile is genuine but calculated.

Secret

Derrin is secretly running an insurance scheme for merchants -- he accepts payments from merchants and then ensures that goods seized by the Red Guard or destroyed by accidents are auctioned at prices that return the invested value plus a percentage. This is technically illegal but no one has proven it yet.

GM Notes

Derrin is useful for generating spontaneous adventure hooks through auctions, for managing time passage in the marketplace, and for creating moments of humor. He's the marketplace's face and rhythm. He's also a useful NPC for mysteries involving economic crime.

RANDOM MARKETPLACE EVENTS (D10)

Roll when characters are in the marketplace to generate spontaneous encounters and occurrences. Reroll if the result is inappropriate to the current location or storyline.

1. PICKPOCKET CAUGHT

A Red Guard catches a child attempting to steal from a merchant's stall. The merchant demands harsh punishment. The child's mother is begging for mercy. The Red Guard is unmoved. This creates a moral dilemma for characters who witness it: interfere and anger the Guard, or watch and feel complicit.

2. MERCHANT DISPUTE

Two merchants are arguing loudly over a deal gone wrong. One claims the goods were misrepresented, the other claims the buyer knew what they were getting. Voices are raised, and a crowd is forming. Red Guards are watching to see if violence will break out. Characters can get involved as witnesses, arbitrators, or innocent bystanders caught in escalation.

3. STRANGER SEEKING DIRECTION

A traveler (from far away or obviously new to the city) is lost and asking for directions. They're carrying valuable items openly and are clearly not familiar with the marketplace's danger. If characters don't help, a criminal will. If they do help, they might gain a contact or a debt-obligation.

4. BEGGARS BEING ROUTED

Red Guards are clearing beggars and homeless people from a particular area of the marketplace. They're not being gentle, but they're not being brutal either. The displacement is happening because a merchant has complained or because

the Guard wants the area clear for some official reason. The beggars are moving to crowd other areas and creating chaos.

5. GOODS DELIVERED

A large caravan has just arrived with new merchandise. Merchants are scrambling to unload and inspect goods. The marketplace is more crowded than usual, with people trying to get good positions to see new inventory or to negotiate for the best prices before goods are arranged in stalls. The chaos provides cover for crimes.

6. SOMEONE RECOGNIZES A CHARACTER

A character is recognized by someone from their past. This person might be friendly (old companion), neutral (acquaintance), or hostile (enemy).

Their presence and reaction creates complications and forces the character to deal with their history.

7. RED GUARD RECRUITMENT

Soldiers are positioned around the marketplace, recruiting for the militia or army. They're taking volunteers and offering wages. If the character might be of military interest, they're approached. If they're running from military service, this creates danger.

8. FIRE AT A STALL

A merchant's stall catches fire (accident or arson -- unclear). Red

Guards and nearby merchants are trying to put it out and prevent spread.

Goods are being damaged or saved. The merchant is distraught. This creates opportunity for characters to help, investigate the cause, or loot in the chaos.

9. AUCTION COMPLETED

An auction has just ended with a surprising result. Something valuable sold for far more or far less than it should have. The successful bidder is either celebrating or looking regretful. Merchants are already gossiping about why the price was so strange. Characters might learn about unusual trading patterns or opportunity for profit.

10. CRIMINAL CONFRONTATION

Two criminals (pickpockets, gang members, or more serious offenders) are having a confrontation in the marketplace. It's clearly hostile but not yet violent. If it escalates, everyone nearby will scatter and Red

Guards will respond. Characters can observe gang dynamics, get drawn in, or find out what's being disputed.

CAMPAIGN USE

THE FOUNTAIN POISONING

A merchant is found dead at the Grand Square fountain, and the Red Guard suspects poisoning administered through the fountain water. However, the fountain hasn't been used in fifteen years. The truth is more complex: the death is unrelated to the fountain, but someone is spreading rumors that the fountain is dangerous to suppress water-related meetings that are about to happen there. Characters can investigate the murder, uncover the conspiracy, and determine whether the fountain should be used as a public water source again (which would change the marketplace's geography and dynamics).

THE MERCHANT'S DEBT

One of the marketplace's merchants owes a large debt to a criminal organization. They're trying to hide the debt by skimming profits from their stall and redirecting goods to pay the criminals in installments.

However, they've been caught by another merchant, and there's a quiet threat: pay the debt immediately or be reported to the Red Guard (which would end their market license). Characters can become involved as arbitrators, as debt-collectors for the criminals, as investigators for the merchant, or as avengers if the debt-merchant is actually innocent and being framed.

THE GUILD CORRUPTION

Someone inside the Merchant Guild is embezzling funds, altering records to hide thefts, and possibly accepting bribes to give preferential treatment to certain merchants. Master Thorne is unaware. Characters can discover evidence, investigate the crime, and either handle it quietly (protecting the Guild's reputation) or publicly (exposing the corruption and causing marketplace upheaval). The criminal might be

Thorne's deputy, a longtime Guild employee, or even a Red Guard working with a merchant.

THE BLACK MARKET TRANSITION

A major criminal organization is attempting to take control of the Black

Market Alley, consolidating the loose collection of smugglers and thieves into a single operation. Violence is happening quietly but is escalating. Characters can become involved by being in the wrong place, by being recruited by one

side, or by trying to prevent the consolidation (which might actually destabilize the marketplace because the current loose structure is safer than a single powerful organization).

THE RED GUARD INVESTIGATION

Captain Harrow has become suspicious that someone important in the marketplace is connected to serious crimes -- possibly treason (selling military intelligence to the enemy nation). She begins quietly investigating, which means characters might be questioned, their stalls searched, or their associates examined. Characters can help with the investigation, try to protect someone they care about, or discover that

Harrow's suspicions are correct but her target is innocent and her investigation is targeting the wrong person.

EPHY'S PUB AND INN

OVERVIEW

Ephy's sits on a quiet corner of the Merchant's Quarter in Kormor

Kirak, where the bustle of the neutral city mellows into something almost peaceful. The pub is 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 the mountain winters but somehow do under Ephy's care. A weathered sign hanging above the entrance reads simply "EPHY'S" in faded gold letters, swinging slightly in the mountain wind. A thin plume of smoke rises from the chimney almost constantly -- the fireplace in the common room never truly goes cold.

Inside, Eppy's feels less like a typical tavern and more like the warm heart of someone's home, just scaled up and opened to strangers. The walls are honest stone, but softened with woven blankets and shelves holding everything from drinking glasses to bottles of dried herbs. The air tastes of woodsmoke, bread, cooking herbs, and ale. Music drifts through on some nights -- a local musician or a traveling bard finding a grateful audience. What makes Eppy's different from the other drinking establishments scattered through Kormor Kirak isn't just the quality of the food or the steadiness of the ale. It's that Eppy

Flinder, the owner and namesake, has somehow made a place where soldiers from opposite sides of the war sit at different tables and drink without the tension boiling over into blood. Albion Empire officers and

Terrasian Kingdom merchants exist in the same room, separated by a few yards and the weight of careful neutrality, but they exist there nonetheless. Eppy has a gift for making people feel like guests in her home rather than combatants in a war, and that gift is the real product being served here.

THE COMMON ROOM

When you push through the heavy oak doors into the common room, warmth hits you like a physical thing. A fireplace dominates the northern wall, large enough to stand in if you had to, its opening arched in fitted stone. The fire crackles constantly, fed by wood delivered regularly from outside the city. 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 themselves are the original grey stone of the building, but covered in worn wooden paneling up to about waist height, making the space feel enclosed and safe rather than cavernous.

The common room is furnished with a mixture of sturdy wooden tables and chairs 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 area maybe six inches higher than the main floor, three steps leading up to it -- this is where musicians set up on nights when there's live music, giving them a natural platform without forcing them to stand in the crowd.

Scattered throughout are small details that speak to Eppy's particular nature. Bowls of fresh herbs sit on several tables, fragrant sprigs of rosemary and mint that guests can smell or nibble on. A shelf near the bar holds books -- actual books, read and reread by patrons: histories of the Videk Mountains, an old herbal guide, some love stories and adventure tales. Windows on the western wall overlook the street outside, their panes thick and old, tinted slightly blue-green with age, diffusing the light into something soft and underwater-like even on clear days. The floor is dark wood, swept daily, patterned with the worn paths of regular customers moving between favorite tables.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Constant, low ambient noise: conversation, the crackle of the fire, the clink of glasses
- Smell of woodsmoke, bread baking, cooking herbs (rosemary, thyme, sage), ale, and something faintly green and living
- Temperature: warm, almost hot near the fireplace, cooler toward the windows
- The light is golden and fire-cast, changing with the flames, creating moving shadows on the stone walls
- A low hum of activity: the pub is rarely truly quiet, even during slow hours

NOTABLE FEATURES

- **The Fireplace:** A masterwork of fitted mountain stone, with a chimney system that draws smoke without filling the room. The hearthstone is slightly sunken from centuries of ash and fire. Eppy's emblem, a single leaf carved into the stone above the lintel, marks her claim on the space.
- **The Bar:** Twenty feet long, with brass rail-work worn shiny from use.

Behind it, Eppy has arranged her bottles with obvious care: common ales in front, rarer spirits and wines deeper in the rack. Some bottles are very old. Some have no labels. Some glow faintly in candlelight, suggesting alchemical content.

- **The Musician's Platform:** A performance space that lends legitimacy to the music that happens here. Eppy clearly invests in musicians and sees their role as important to the pub's mood.
- **The Shelf of Books:** A small lending library of sorts, with most books borrowed regularly by regulars. The margins of some are filled with notes and reader comments. Others are Eppy's personal collection, and these she's less likely to let leave the pub.

GM NOTES

The common room is where most pub scenes will happen. This is where player characters can hear rumors, gather information, make contacts, and recover from the cold and violence of the world outside. The mix of factions creates natural tension and opportunities: overhear a conversation between an Albion officer and a Terrasian merchant, each careful with their words. Notice a hooded figure asking quiet questions about a caravan that just passed through.

See a known criminal sitting openly at a table, clearly confident in Eppy's protection (as no violence is allowed here).

The fireplace should be described as almost a character itself -- the warmth of it, the coziness of sitting nearby, the way it drives the cold out of bones. Players will want to claim a spot near it. The first time the party visits, let them pick "their" table. It should remain their table throughout the campaign -- it's one of the small comforts that makes a home base feel like home.

Random events here are common: a bard might start playing (see RANDOM PUB EVENTS), a group of merchants might initiate a loud game of dice, a subtle argument might break out between drunk patrons that Eppy smooths over with a word and a fresh drink. The common room is alive in a way that many taverns aren't.

CONNECTIONS

- The bar is accessible from the north end of the common room
- The private dining room opens off the eastern wall
- The kitchen can be seen through a doorway in the southern wall, though direct access is discouraged by Eppy
- The stairs to the guest rooms and Eppy's quarters are in the southwestern corner
- The main entrance is on the western side

THE BAR

The bar itself is a work of craftsmanship, a long counter of dark wood that seems to have grown darker with age and staining. The surface is covered in rings from countless glasses and stains of spilled drinks that no amount of

cleaning has fully removed -- each mark a small history of the pub. Behind the bar, Eppy has created a space of surprising organization. The bottles are arranged not by type but by her own system that reveals her priorities: the most frequently used ales and wines are at arm's reach, rarer spirits are on the higher shelves, and at the very top, partially hidden in shadow, sit a dozen bottles of clearly very expensive or very unusual drinks.

The back wall of the bar is fitted with mirrors set into the wooden paneling, reflecting the fire from the common room and making the space behind the bar feel larger than it is. Dozens of glasses hang from racks above: thick, stout drinking glasses with a practiced-worn rim that comes from being held by many mouths; tall glasses for wine; proper tulip-shaped glasses for spirits that Eppy clearly respects; and a few ornate glasses that don't match anything else, the kind that suggest a long history and careful curation.

A brass footrail runs the length of the bar, polished by the boots of regulars leaning against it while they drink and talk. Eppy usually stands behind the bar during busy hours, often flanked by one or two staff members depending on the crowd. She moves with ease through the space, her hands almost never still -- pouring, mixing, wiping, talking.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Sound of glass clinking against wood and against each other as drinks are set down
- Smell of spilled ale that's been cleaned but never fully removed, sharp spirits, and wine
- The mirror reflecting candlelight and firelight, making the space glow
- The weight of the bar counter under your elbows, solid and real

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Mirror Wall: Multiple mirrors of different ages and qualities, creating a fractured reflection that somehow feels intentional rather than haphazard. You can watch Eppy work while facing the fire.
- The Glass Collection: Eppy's glasses speak to her character. She uses the right glass for the right drink. A casual comment about

"proper glassware" has made more than one warrior reconsider their prejudices.

- The Bottle Collection: Regular patrons recognize certain bottles and know that those nights, one of Eppy's special drinks is available.

The highest shelves hold treasures: a bottle of spirit from the

Albion Empire's royal distillery, a honey wine from Terrassia's southern valleys, something amber and ancient with no label that

Eppy will only serve to people she trusts.

GM NOTES

The bar is where transactions happen. Money is exchanged, deals are made quietly, information is bartered. A careful patron can often pick up on

Eppy's mood or the general mood of the city by watching what she's choosing to serve. During times of tension between the factions, she might emphasize her neutral drinks -- local brews that neither side can claim. During times of relative peace, she might proudly serve wines from both empires.

Eppy doesn't eavesdrop, exactly, but she hears everything that happens at her bar. If player characters want information, she's the best source in the pub, but she won't simply give it away. Information from

Eppy comes with the unspoken requirement that it not damage her careful neutrality.

The bar is also where Eppy dispenses minor healing and aid. A character with a wound gets a strong drink and Eppy's attention. A character with a sickness might be sent to sit by the fire while Eppy prepares something special from her stores.

CONNECTIONS

- The common room stretches south from the bar
- The kitchen is immediately behind the bar, accessible through a door
- A small back corridor behind the bar leads to storage and the cellar stairs

THE KITCHEN

Eppy's kitchen is organized chaos in the best way. It's hot from constant use, with two large stoves and a massive hearth for roasting meat and bread. Every surface is in use: a counter holds fresh vegetables in various states of preparation, another is dedicated to her remedies (bottles and jars carefully labeled in her precise hand), a large cutting board is always ready, and shelves line the walls from floor to ceiling holding pots, pans, and jars of dried goods.

The centerpiece is Eppy herself, moving through the space with practiced efficiency. Even when she's busy, she acknowledges people who enter, though she doesn't necessarily stop working. The kitchen smells like heaven and home:

bread baking, herbs fresh and dried, stock simmering in a large pot, and underneath it all, something green and alive that might be from her garden.

A large wooden table in the corner of the kitchen serves as the staff's station -- this is where food is plated for service. Beyond this, the kitchen extends back further than you'd expect from outside, suggesting the building is deeper than it appears. At the very back, there's a heavy door that leads down to the cellar.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Heat, sometimes intense near the stoves
- Sound of chopping, sizzling, the pop and crackle of fire in the hearths
- Smell of cooking food, herbs (both fresh and dried), bread, and something faintly medicinal
- The floor is slightly worn stone, regularly swept but marked with the accumulation of flour, herbs, and food scraps that no amount of cleaning fully removes
- Steam rising from pots, catching the light from the hearths

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Remedy Shelf: A specific shelf, clearly separated from the cooking stores, holds bottles and jars that are absolutely Eppy's magical work -- infusions, tinctures, salves. Each is labeled precisely. A few have warning symbols scratched into the glass.
- The Main Hearth: A large fireplace with a rotisserie and hooks for hanging pots. The flames are carefully maintained, and Eppy knows exactly how hot each section is for different cooking needs.

- The Herb Drying Racks: Bundles of herbs hang from wooden racks suspended from the ceiling: rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano, and others that might be harder to identify at a glance.

GM NOTES

The kitchen is Eppy's private domain, and while she's not hostile to visitors, she makes it clear through her behavior that she prefers to work without too many interruptions. However, a character who shows genuine interest in her work or offers to help can gain access and, more importantly, trust. Eppy has been known to prepare special remedies for her patrons, but these are never given away lightly -- they represent her effort and her knowledge.

If a player character is particularly injured or ill, Eppy might invite them back to her kitchen, keep them seated at the staff table, give them something warm to eat, and explain what she's preparing as she works.

This is a high honor and a sign of genuine care on her part.

The kitchen is where her druid nature shows most openly, though never in an explicitly magical way. The plants on the shelves shouldn't be thriving in the winter cold of Kormor Kirak, but they are. Her knowledge of herbs goes beyond what a normal herbalist should know. Food prepared in her kitchen has subtle effects beyond normal nourishment -- a stew doesn't just fill your belly, it settles your nerves. A bread she's made soothes a cough.

CONNECTIONS

- The common room lies through the doorway to the north
- The bar is immediately accessible north and west
- The cellar stairs are at the very back

- A back door leads to the stable yard

THE HERB GARDEN

Behind Eppy's pub, sheltered by the building itself and a high stone wall that must be three hundred years old, sits a garden that shouldn't exist. The garden is roughly forty feet square, its walls covered in climbing vines and creeping plants. Sunlight hits it for only part of the day, yet the plants seem lush and healthy even in the depth of winter.

Raised beds of dark soil run in neat rows, each carefully labeled in

Eppy's hand. The plants growing here include common herbs -- rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano -- but also things that have no business growing at this altitude and in this climate. There's a section dedicated to medicinal plants: something with silver-backed leaves that no one in the city can identify, small delicate flowers that smell faintly sweet and metallic, and patches of moss and fungi that grow nowhere else in Kormor

Kirak.

A stone bench sits in the corner nearest the sun, worn smooth from use.

A small fountain trickles gently in the center, water running from a small carved stone head and collecting in a pool beneath. The entire space is enclosed and private -- you can't see into it from outside, and no one can see you from the pub windows. It's as though Eppy has carved out a pocket of the natural world and kept it to herself.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Smell of living green, earth, and growing things, stronger than should be possible in a mountain city

- The sound of the fountain, soft and constant
- Cool air, even when the rest of the city is cold, and somehow more humid than the surroundings suggest
- Soft light, diffused by clouds and building shade
- The stone walls holding warmth from the day

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Greenhouse Corner: A small wooden and glass structure, barely large enough for one person to stand in, tucked against the eastern wall. It extends the growing season. Inside, more exotic plants grow in potted arrangements.
- The Planted Beds: Each bed is labeled and clearly under Eppy's specific care. The organization suggests advanced horticultural knowledge. Some beds have a faint shimmer to the air above them, something barely perceptible.
- The Stone Head Fountain: A carved stone face of indeterminate age, water trickling from its mouth. The craftsmanship is excellent but the style doesn't match any known culture. Eppy refuses to explain where it came from.

GM NOTES

This is Eppy's true sanctuary, and she doesn't bring many people here.

A character who gains her trust and respect might be invited here to help with gardening, to learn about the plants, or to recover from wounds or sickness in its peaceful setting. The presence of plants that shouldn't exist and the subtle

magical properties of the garden should hint at Eppy's deeper connection to the natural world without ever being explicitly stated.

If a character is severely wounded or magically afflicted, Eppy might take them here and leave them to rest, the garden slowly working to restore them. It takes longer than explicit magic might, but it's more stable and more permanent.

The garden might also hold secrets. There might be hidden things here

-- a locked box containing correspondence, a loose stone in the wall concealing something precious, a section of plants that are clearly being grown for purposes other than cooking or casual healing. These are things Eppy keeps private, and discovering them should be difficult and should come with consequences if Eppy finds out.

CONNECTIONS

- The garden connects to the pub via a heavy wooden door from the kitchen
- A narrow gate in the western wall opens to an alley that leads to the street
- The back door of the pub opens near the garden entrance

THE PRIVATE DINING ROOM

Off the eastern wall of the common room, accessed through a heavy wooden door, sits a room much smaller and more intimate than the main space.

This is Eppy's private dining room, used for meetings, quiet conversations, and the kind of business that requires privacy. The room is perhaps twenty feet by fifteen, with a single window overlooking the street, shuttered most of the time for privacy.

A long table dominates the space, capable of seating perhaps ten people comfortably, made of the same dark wood as the bar. The walls here are wood paneled almost entirely, and there's a smaller fireplace along one wall, currently cold but ready to be lit for guests. Candles in iron sconces provide light, their flames carefully placed to avoid casting shadows into corners. A few paintings hang on the walls, pastoral scenes that don't seem to belong to any known region -- they might be Eppy's personal work or treasures from before she came to Kormor Kirak.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Hushed quiet, insulated from the common room's noise
- Cooler than the main room, with a faint smell of old wood and candle wax
- Shadows in the corners despite the candles
- Dust motes visible in the light from the small window

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Table: The centerpiece, scarred in places but clearly valuable and old. The wood has a deep patina that suggests it's been used for important conversations for a long time.
- The Shuttered Window: Can be opened or closed, giving the room privacy or a view of the street depending on need.
- The Small Fireplace: Not often used, but available. Eppy will light it for guests who might need the warmth or the psychological comfort of fire.

GM NOTES

This is where serious business happens. Eppy rents the room out to people who need privacy, though she's choosy about her clients. She won't rent it to people she knows are planning violence or betrayal, and she has a frustrating ability to know what people are up to based on barely any information.

The party can rent this room if they need somewhere to plan or meet allies. Eppy charges a modest fee (5-10 gold coins depending on the length of use) and includes a spread of food. More importantly, this room is neutral ground in the same way the whole pub is. No violence occurs here, and Eppy's protection extends fully to anyone inside it.

Player characters might overhear conversations from people using this room if they listen carefully at the common room door. This is often how rumors spread through the pub -- not from the general crowd but from the private meetings that other patrons catch fragments of.

CONNECTIONS

- Opens directly into the common room
- The door is solid and soundproof enough for privacy but not so much that a person pressed against it couldn't hear raised voices
- Food service comes from the bar

THE GUEST ROOMS (UPSTAIRS)

The second floor of Eppy's is dedicated to guest accommodation. A narrow hallway runs the length of the building, with five guest rooms opening off it: three on the western side overlooking the street, two on the eastern side

overlooking the garden and the mountains beyond. Each room is small but genuinely comfortable, furnished with a bed, a simple wooden chair, a small table with a pitcher and washbasin, and a window with shutters.

The beds are made with clean linen sheets and proper pillows, a small luxury that many travelers don't expect. There's no elaborate decoration, but the rooms don't feel austere either. A single candle sconce hangs beside each bed, and a small mirror hangs above the washstand. The walls are whitewashed stone, and the floors are dark wood like the common room below. In winter, heat rises from the common room fireplace through the floorboards, making the guest rooms warm and comfortable.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Quiet, with only muffled sounds from below
- Cool air until the fire below reaches full strength
- Faint smell of fresh linen, wood polish, and the ever-present herb scent that permeates the whole building
- Small, personal spaces that feel managed and cared for

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Beds: Well-made, comfortable, and genuinely clean. Many guests sleep better here than they have in months.
- The Windows: Glass of the same age and tint as the common room, giving a soft, dreamlike quality to the light. The views are good

-- street view or mountain view depending on which side.

- Simple but Functional: Everything in the rooms serves a purpose.

Nothing is wasted or ostentatious.

GM NOTES

The guest rooms are where the party will likely sleep during their time in the city. Each room should feel like a safe haven, a place where they can recover and rest. Eppy keeps these rooms clean and well-maintained, and she expects guests to do the same. Rowdy behavior in the rooms results in Eppy's quiet but firm disapproval, which is somehow worse than any shouting would be.

Nightly cost is modest: 2-3 gold per room, breakfast included. This is well below market rate for Kormor Kirak, and Eppy clearly doesn't run the rooms to make money. She runs them to extend her hospitality and to ensure that her pub is truly a safe haven.

A character who needs to hide or recover in relative safety might be given a room for free or at reduced rate, Eppy's way of helping without making it obvious. A character who's been seriously wounded might wake to find Eppy has left remedies on their table while they slept.

CONNECTIONS

- The hallway connects to the stairs down to the common room
 - The stairs also lead up to the third floor where Eppy's quarters are
 - The rooms are arranged along a central hallway
-

EPPY'S QUARTERS

The third floor of Eppy's is her personal space, and very few people ever see it. The stairs from the second floor lead up to a small landing that opens into her

private quarters -- a bedroom and a sitting room with a small kitchen of its own. The space is warm and lived-in, filled with the accumulation of her life in Kormor Kirak and before.

The sitting room is lined with shelves holding books on herbalism, natural philosophy, the history of the Videk Mountains, and other subjects that suggest a life of learning and curiosity. A comfortable chair sits beside a window that overlooks the garden below, and this is clearly where Eppy spends her quiet hours. The walls are the same stone as the rest of the building, but draped with woven blankets in earth tones. The light here is soft, managed by thick curtains and skylights.

The bedroom is small and simply furnished with a quality bed, a locked chest at its foot, and a window box overflowing with winter herbs and flowers that defy the season. A mirror hangs on one wall, and a few small personal items are visible -- a brush, a comb, a small jewelry box -- the little things that mark a space as truly lived in.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Warmth, both from her personal heating source and from the care taken in the space
- Smell of herbs, books, and something faintly magical
- The sense of privacy and sanctity
- Quiet that feels deep rather than empty

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Book Collection: A serious library, with many books showing signs of repeated reading. Notes in margins, bookmarks, careful indexing.

- The Locked Chest: At the foot of the bed, clearly important and clearly secure. Contents unknown, but clearly valuable to her.
- The Window Box: Plants that should not exist thrive here through winter. The skill required to maintain this is not normal herbalism.

GM NOTES

The player characters should never voluntarily visit Eppy's quarters.

This is her private space, and violating it would be a serious breach of trust that would have lasting consequences. However, a character who is invited here -- perhaps to recover from something serious, or because

Eppy believes they need to know something important about her -- should understand that this is a profound act of trust on her part.

If a character is discovered snooping in Eppy's quarters, the consequences are severe. She will ask them to leave the pub entirely, and she will not welcome them back without a sincere apology and some kind of recompense. For most campaigns, losing access to Eppy's pub should feel like a serious setback.

The locked chest contains items related to Eppy's past and her druid abilities. These are hers alone and are not to be discovered by players without specific narrative justification.

CONNECTIONS

- Stairs lead down to the guest room hallway and the second floor
- A small back staircase leads to the kitchen

THE CELLAR

The cellar beneath Eppy's is cool and dark, lit by small barred windows near the ceiling that look out onto the stable yard. The space is divided into two sections: the first holds the supplies that keep the pub running -- barrels of ale and casks of wine, large stores of vegetables and preserved goods, sacks of flour and salt, and the accumulation of foodstuffs necessary to feed regular customers and house guests.

The second section, deeper and darker, contains Eppy's more private stores. This is where she keeps her rarer herbs, her more powerful remedies, and the ingredients for things that go beyond simple cooking.

The temperature here is cool and constant, perfect for preservation. The walls sweat slightly with moisture, and there's a faint smell of earth, herbs, and something older, something that hints at the mountain stone beneath the city.

Storage racks line the walls, everything organized with Eppy's characteristic precision. Labels in her careful hand mark contents and dates. Some jars contain things with recognizable contents: dried herbs, preserved fruits, salted meats. Others contain things less identifiable, materials that hint at alchemical or herbalist practices beyond the merely practical.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Cool, damp air, dropping noticeably from the floors above
- Sound of silence, the kind that feels deeper in enclosed spaces
- Smell of stored food, preservatives, and earth
- Darkness held back only by a few lanterns and the filtered light from the high windows
- The floor is stone, worn smooth in the center from foot traffic

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Storage Racks: Organized with military precision, every item has a place and a label.
- The Barrel Wall: Massive wooden casks, some of them old enough to have patina, arranged carefully along the western wall.
- The Private Section: A visibly different part of the cellar, reached by a narrow passageway. The contents here are clearly important to

Eppy.

GM NOTES

The cellar is not off-limits to customers, but it's not really a place they go either. A character who goes down to the cellar -- perhaps sent by Eppy to fetch something -- is moving into her working space and should feel the weight of trespassing slightly, even if they're explicitly invited.

If a party needs to hide from danger or talk privately away from the common room, Eppy might allow them to use the cellar. This is another sign of her trust. The cellar feels safe, separated from the street and the chaos above, though the darkness and the sense of depth beneath the city can feel oppressive to some.

Hidden in the cellar is at least one secret that Eppy keeps from most people. This might be a stash of money, correspondence from people she knew before the war, magical items she's created, or something else entirely. This is the GM's decision and should tie to whatever role

Eppy plays in the campaign.

CONNECTIONS

- Stairs lead up to the kitchen
 - A small door at the back leads out to the stable yard and a drainage system
-

THE STABLE YARD

Behind the pub, accessed through a heavy wooden gate from the garden or through the back door of the kitchen, lies a small courtyard dedicated to animal housing and deliveries. The space is roughly thirty feet square, flagstones worn smooth from years of cart traffic. A small stable along the eastern wall can hold four horses or six mules comfortably. A lean-to shed along the northern wall stores equipment and firewood. A large covered area in the center provides shelter for wagons and deliveries.

The yard itself is clean but functional, without pretension. A water trough sits near the stable entrance, fed by a small spring that comes down from the mountains -- water here tastes better than anywhere else in Kormor Kirak. Hooks and rings set into the walls allow for tethering animals or hanging equipment. A heavy gate in the southern wall opens to an alley that connects to the main street market.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Sound of water running, the occasional horse movement
- Smell of hay, animals, and earth
- Open air after the enclosed spaces of the pub
- Cool, with wind able to move freely through the space

- The flagstones are patterned with wear and discolored in places from years of use

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Spring: Cold, clear water that seems fresher than any other water source in the city. Local merchants will sometimes bring empty containers to fill here.
- The Stable: Well-maintained, spacious, with good hay and grain available. Eppy pays for caretaking here from a local stablehand.
- The Back Gate: A way in and out of the pub that doesn't go through the common room or the street entrance.

GM NOTES

The stable yard is functional space, not particularly atmospheric, but it serves important purposes. It's where the party can keep horses while staying at the pub. It's where deliveries arrive, providing opportunities for the GM to bring new NPCs, supplies, or information into the story. It's a way out of the pub that bypasses the common room, useful if the party needs to slip away quietly.

The back gate is important for plot purposes. It connects the pub to the rest of the city without forcing characters to move through the main entrance. This matters for stealth, for meeting allies, for escaping danger.

CONNECTIONS

- Opens to the garden through a gate
- Opens to the kitchen through a back door

- Connects to an alley that leads to the main street market

THE FIREPLACE CORNER

Not a separate room but a specific location within the common room, the fireplace corner is where the best seats are -- a few tables positioned to catch the full warmth of the massive fire, private enough to have conversations but open enough to feel part of the pub's community. This is where regulars claim their tables, and this is where the party should naturally gravitate on their first visit.

Three or four wooden chairs cluster near the fire itself, arranged in a semi-circle facing outward toward the rest of the pub. A low table sits among them, scarred from years of use but solid and well-made. It's the kind of space where someone can nurse a drink for hours without feeling like they should leave. The warmth here is intense, the kind of warmth that drives winter from your bones and makes you forget what cold feels like.

PHYSICAL DETAILS

- Heat that rises in waves, intense near the fire, comfortable a few feet back
- Sound of crackling flames, constantly changing
- Smell of woodsmoke and burning wood
- The light is warm and gold, shifting constantly with the fire
- The stone around the fire is warm to the touch

NOTABLE FEATURES

- The Prime Seating: The chairs here are the most comfortable in the pub, worn into shape by decades of users.
- The Low Table: Scratched and scarred, but perfectly functional.

Drinks and food sit here, conversations happen over it, deals are struck.

- The Heat: The defining feature, the thing that makes this spot special.
-

GM NOTES

The fireplace corner is where the party will want to sit, and Eppy will subtly help them claim it if the table is available. This becomes their table over the course of a campaign -- the place they return to between adventures, where they know the exact temperature of the fire, where they're most comfortable.

Events in the pub often revolve around this area. A musician might play for an audience clustered nearby. Someone might approach the party here with news. Conflicts that happen in the pub might begin or end at this table.

Describe the fireplace corner frequently and vividly. Make the party want to be there. Make them feel the warmth and the comfort.

CONNECTIONS

- Completely within the common room
- Close enough to the bar to call for drinks without standing
- Close enough to the kitchen door to smell food being prepared

KEY NPCs

EPPI SEJNDER

ROLE: Proprietor, Healer, Neutral Party

APPEARANCE: A woman in her late forties with grey-streaked auburn hair usually tied back in a practical braid. She has the lean, practical frame of someone who works for a living, with hands that show calluses from cooking and gardening. Her eyes are green and sharp, missing very little. She dresses in simple, quality clothes -- dark trousers, a shirt of good linen, an apron worn while working. When she leaves the pub, she adds a heavy cloak of forest green.

MANNER: Warm but not effusive. Professional. Direct. She says what she means and expects others to do the same. She has a dry sense of humor that surfaces occasionally. She listens more than she talks.

Secret

Eppi is more than a simple druid. Her connection to the mountains and their magic runs deep. She came to Kormor Kirak specifically to establish a place of true neutrality in the war, and she's invested years of magical effort into maintaining the pub's peaceful nature. The building itself might be lightly warded with magic that discourages violence and encourages calm.

GM Notes

Eppi is not a quest-giver in the traditional sense. She doesn't send the party out on adventures. But she is a source of information, comfort, and occasional help for those who've earned her trust. She can serve as a moral compass for the party, her quiet disapproval or cautious approval reflecting on their choices. Never allow her to become a crutch or a solution machine -- she helps but expects her patrons to solve their own problems.

MARCUS "STEADY HANDS" VOSS

ROLE: Head Bartender and General Manager

APPEARANCE: A stocky man in his mid-fifties with a weathered face and calloused hands. He has thick, grey-shot dark hair and a scar across his left cheekbone from an old fight. He moves behind the bar with economical grace, never wasting a motion.

MANNER: Gruff but genuinely good-natured. He has a memory for faces and drinks -- if you ordered a particular drink once, Marcus remembers.

He gives the impression of someone who's seen a lot and isn't easily shocked. He has a kind word for regulars and a cold eye for troublemakers.

Secret

Marcus is a former soldier from the Albion Empire, discharged honorably but carrying scars -- physical and otherwise -- from his service. He came to the pub looking for work and found something better: a place where his past didn't define him. He's deeply protective of Eppy and the pub's peace, and he's capable of handling trouble in ways that don't involve words.

GM Notes

Marcus is the second-most important NPC in the pub. He handles the day-to-day operations, manages staff, and mediates minor disputes. He's also a good contact for the party for practical information about the city and its underworld. He knows people and knows what's happening. But he won't betray Eppy's confidence for anything.

FENNELLY CROSS

ROLE: Cook and Kitchen Manager

APPEARANCE: A sharp-featured woman in her early forties with bright red hair worn loose. She's lean and tall, with burn scars on her forearms from years of kitchen work. She moves like she's constantly in a hurry, all quick motions and efficient steps.

MANNER: Nervous energy contained in a professional shell. She speaks quickly and directly, often trailing off mid-sentence when she gets focused on her work. She's proud of her cooking and the food that comes from her kitchen. She has patience for people who respect the food and very little patience for those who don't.

Secret

Fennelly is a refugee from the borders of the Kingdom of Terrassia, where her village was destroyed during one of the war's early campaigns. She was the village's baker and healer before that, and Eppy recognized something in her when she arrived in Kormor Kirak broken and lost. Eppy gave her a home and a purpose.

GM Notes

Fennelly is approachable but not warm. She'll talk about food and cooking gladly but doesn't have much patience for social niceties. A character who shows genuine interest in her work can earn her respect and trust. A character who's rude about the food will get a sharp response.

DAME ELGA KROSS

ROLE: Regular Patron, Retired Soldier, Information Broker

APPEARANCE: A tall, broad-shouldered woman in her mid-sixties with silver-white hair cut short and practical. She has the posture and bearing of someone who spent decades in command. She has a scarred face and only one eye, the

other covered with a patch of dark leather. She usually wears quality clothes of neutral colors, but you can see the outline of weapons beneath them.

MANNER: Formal, precise, and dangerously intelligent. She speaks little but when she speaks, people listen. She has a quiet authority that commands respect. She's not unkind, but she's not warm either.

Secret

Dame Kross was a high-ranking officer in the Albion Empire's military. She retired under unclear circumstances and came to Kormor Kirak, where she now gathers information and sometimes offers it -- for a price -- to those who can afford it. She has contacts throughout both the Empire and the Kingdom. She's not evil, but she's pragmatic to the point of amorality.

GM Notes

Dame Kross is a danger in the pub -- not because she'll cause violence (she respects Eppy's rules), but because she's a source of dark information and connections to the city's underbelly. She's useful for plot purposes but should be treated as genuinely powerful and genuinely dangerous. A party that gets on her wrong side has made a serious enemy.

MENU AND SPECIALTIES

The food at Eppy's is simple but exceptionally good, made with high-quality ingredients and herbs from Eppy's garden. Everything tastes better here than it has any right to, as though the cooking itself is infused with care and something else, something just slightly magical.

COMMON OFFERINGS

- Bread: Heavy, hearty loaves made daily, served warm with butter and herbs. The bread here is almost a meal in itself.
- Stew: The standard is a mountain stew of root vegetables and whatever meat is available, seasoned with herbs from the garden.

It's warming and nourishing in a way that goes beyond simple food.

- Meat: Usually served roasted, seasoned simply but perfectly, with roasted potatoes and vegetables.
- Fish: When available, fresh mountain trout, prepared simply or in a broth.
- Cheese: Local cheeses from herding communities outside the city, served with bread and fruit.

SPECIALTIES

HEARTHFIRE STEW

Eppy's signature dish: a thick stew of root vegetables, meat, and beans, heavily seasoned with rosemary, thyme, and other herbs from her garden. It comes in a bread bowl, edible when broken up and mixed into the stew. Those who eat it report feeling warmth spreading through them, muscle soreness easing, minor wounds beginning to close. It's expensive (8 silver coins) but genuinely restorative. A character who's been beaten or frozen can recover more quickly after eating this stew.

DEEP MOUNTAIN BREAD

A dark, dense bread made with barley and rye, studded with seeds and dried fruit. It's served warm and tastes somehow both ancient and alive. People come back for this bread alone. It pairs perfectly with any meal. It keeps for days without going stale.

STARLIGHT WINE

A pale, faintly glowing wine that comes from Eppy's personal stores.

It's rarely available and serves only a few times a year for guests

Eppy considers special. The taste is light and sweet with an undertone of herbs. Those who drink it report feeling more clear-headed and perceptive for hours afterward. It's extraordinarily expensive (20 gold coins for a single glass) and Eppy will only serve it to those she trusts or wishes to honor.

HEALER'S TEA

A hot tea of herbs from Eppy's garden, served in a simple clay cup. It tastes faintly of honey and herbs, warming and slightly sweet. Eppy serves this free to anyone who comes in looking unwell or hurt. Regular customers swear it settles upset stomachs, clears mental fog, and helps sleep come naturally.

EVENING ALES AND SPIRITS

The bar stocks local ales that vary seasonally, mountain wine that ranges from rough to surprisingly refined, and several spirits of varying origins and quality. Eppy has connections throughout the Videk region and occasionally obtains

bottles of rarer spirits. Nothing here is cheap, but nothing is poor quality either.

RANDOM PUB EVENTS (D8)

Roll on this table when you need something to happen in the pub during a session, or consult it for inspiration.

1. MUSICIAN'S NIGHT

A traveling bard or local musician arrives at the pub and, if welcomed, sets up on the platform. The music is genuinely good, and the mood of the pub lifts. Someone inevitably requests a song, and there might be dancing near the fire. This is a night for social encounters and for establishing atmosphere. A particular song might remind someone in the party of something important, or they might meet an interesting patron who approaches them during the music.

2. HEATED ARGUMENT

Two regular patrons who normally get along find themselves in a heated argument. The argument is about something trivial (whose turn it is to buy the next round, a dispute over a game of dice) but is escalating toward real anger. Eppy will intervene before violence erupts, defusing the situation with a word and fresh drinks, but for a moment the peace of the pub feels fragile. This reminds the party that Eppy's neutrality is something she actively maintains, not something that happens naturally.

3. MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

A hooded figure enters the pub, orders a drink, and sits quietly in a corner, clearly waiting for someone. They don't draw attention deliberately, but they're interesting enough that people notice them.

If approached, they're polite but vague. They might be waiting for the party, or for someone else, or for no one at all. This is a mystery hook

-- investigate further or leave it alone.

4. DELIVERY ARRIVAL

A merchant or tradesperson arrives with a delivery for the pub. The delivery is normal (flour, vegetables, ale barrels) but it provides an excuse to move characters out to the stable yard or into the kitchen.

The delivery person might have news from outside the city, or they might become a recurrent NPC if the party pays attention to them.

5. OLD FRIENDS

A regular patron who hasn't been in the pub for a while arrives, and there's genuine warmth from Eppy and the other regulars. They've been away (traveling, ill, or handling some personal matter) and they're clearly happy to be back. Eppy fuses over them, providing special food and a good seat. If the party has been in the pub long enough to be considered semi-regulars, they might be briefly acknowledged by both the returning regular and the existing regulars with the familiarity of community.

6. TENSION BETWEEN FACTIONS

An Albion officer and a Terrasian merchant both present, and tension rises between them. Words are sharp, postures stiffen, and for a moment it seems like violence might erupt. Eppy steps in firmly and quietly, reminding everyone of the pub's rules. The moment passes, but it's a stark reminder that the war is still outside the door, held at bay only by Eppy's strength and rules. The party might be called on to help mediate, or they might simply observe.

7. QUIET NIGHT

The pub is unusually quiet. The fire is the primary sound. The few patrons present are quiet and introspective, or wrapped in private conversations. This is an opportunity for intimate roleplay, for the party to have conversations with each other or with Eppy, for the establishment to become truly restful. These nights are valuable for character development and emotional beats.

8. TAVERN BRAWL

A group of rowdy off-duty soldiers or dock workers enters the pub, drink heavily, and start to become destructive. A game of dice turns into accusations of cheating, and fists are about to fly. Eppy appears, quiet and direct, and bars the door. "Not here," she says simply. If they try to ignore her, Marcus appears from behind the bar, and it becomes clear that both of them are more than capable of stopping the trouble.

The soldiers back down, knowing they're outmatched and also knowing that any violence in Eppy's will result in permanent banishment. This shows the party why the pub is truly safe -- Eppy and her staff enforce the rules absolutely.

CAMPAIGN USE

EPPTY'S AS HOME BASE

The pub functions best when it becomes the party's true home base within the larger city. This means establishing certain baseline behaviors and expectations:

- **Ownership of Space:** Let the party claim a table or a corner as their own. On repeat visits, describe the regulars acknowledging their presence, the fire reaching just the right temperature when they arrive, their favorite drinks being partially poured before they order. This creates attachment.
- **Epppy's Character:** Consistency is key. Epppy should always be warm but not intrusive, helpful but not controlling, and absolutely committed to the pub's neutrality and safety. Her consistency becomes a comfort.
- **Recovery and Downtime:** Make the pub the obvious place to spend downtime between adventures. Describe sleeping in the warm guest rooms, eating Epppy's food, recovering from wounds. Let the party enjoy these moments rather than rushing past them.
- **Personal Attention:** Epppy should occasionally show knowledge of the party's activities and whereabouts that comes from listening and caring, not from spying. "Heard you were dealing with something dangerous up in the passes. I made extra stew. Eat." This kind of attention deepens investment.

INFORMATION AND RUMORS

The pub is an ideal place for information to flow, but information should not come free. The mechanics should work like this:

- **Casual Gossip:** Anyone in the common room overhears basic information: news of trade routes, general understanding of city politics, obviously public knowledge. This flows naturally during the pub experience.
- **Bard's Tale:** The musician or a talkative regular might provide more interesting rumors -- things heard in passing, speculation, stories of strange sightings. This costs nothing but the price of a drink and creates atmosphere.
- **Marcus's Practical Information:** Marcus knows what's happening in the city in practical terms. Where to find certain goods, which areas are safe, which NPCs are trustworthy. He charges modestly (1-2 gold for significant information) or provides it free to the party if they've earned his trust.
- **Eppy's Knowledge:** Eppy knows more than she lets on, and her information is genuinely valuable. But she won't simply give it out. She trades information for information, or she provides it to people she cares about, or she hints at things trusting the party to draw conclusions. Getting direct information from Eppy means the party has impressed her.
- **Dame Kross's Intelligence:** Serious information with serious implications, of the type that shapes campaigns. She charges substantially and always wants something in return, whether coin or future favors. She knows people and connections throughout both the

Empire and Kingdom. She's dangerous but useful.

SAFETY AND COMPLICATION

The pub is safe, but this safety is not unconditional:

- **Eppy's Rules:** Violence is not permitted under any circumstances.

Violation of this rule results in immediate ejection and potential permanent banishment. This gives the party a true safe haven.

- **Complications at the Door:** While no violence happens inside, complications can arise when the party leaves. An enemy might wait outside. An ambush might come at the back gate. The pub itself is safe, but it's not isolated from the world's dangers.
- **Trust and Service:** The longer the party stays in the pub, the more

Eppy might ask of them. A party that the pub-keeper cares about might be asked to help someone, to retrieve something, to serve as witnesses. This complicates their status from customer to something like friend.

- **Underworld Attention:** As the party becomes known and successful, underworld elements might use the pub as a place to approach them, knowing violence won't happen. This brings complications into the safe space but doesn't violate it.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The pub succeeds when the party cares about the people there:

- **Regular Interactions:** Use NPCs consistently. Have them notice the party, ask about their activities, develop opinions and relationships. Over time, these become actual friendships.
- **Vulnerability:** Allow Eppy and her staff to show vulnerability occasionally. A moment when Eppy seems worried, when Marcus mentions an old

wound bothering him, when Fennelly vents about a difficult supplier. This deepens the relationship from transactional to genuine.

- **Small Kindnesses:** Have Eppy do small things for the party: prepare their favorite meal when they arrive, leave remedies in their room, provide information that saves them heartache. These aren't required but are given out of genuine care.
- **Moral Compass:** Let Eppy's quiet approval or disapproval matter to the party. A character who makes a dark choice might feel Eppy's distant courtesy the next visit. A character who makes a good choice might receive a genuine smile and a comment: "That was the right thing. I'm glad it was you who did it."

By investing in Eppy's pub and its inhabitants, you create a true home base that the party will want to return to, a place that becomes emotionally important, and a safe harbor in a world of complications and danger.

TERRA SOTTO

OVERVIEW

Beneath the orderly streets and legitimate markets of Kormor Kirak lies a second city -- a place of shadow and transaction where goods forbidden by law change hands, where the desperate and the powerful meet without witnesses, and where the Zoldakeen criminal element conducts business beyond the reach of the Red Guard. Terra Sotto is the underworld black market, a network of chambers and passages that runs beneath the official city. Its entrances are scattered and deliberately obscure -- a hidden door in a basement wine cellar, a grate that opens onto passages beneath the older quarters, a tunnel entrance concealed in the foundations of abandoned buildings. Those who know how to

find them move between the world above and the lawless world below. Those who don't are not meant to know.

The black market that operates here deals in contraband that would bring execution in the light: poisons and forbidden alchemical substances, weapons beyond those licensed by the Queen, creatures both mundane and supernatural captured and held for sale to those with money enough and morals flexible enough to own them. Here, too, are the artifacts of the old gods -- cursed objects, tainted relics, things that should not be disturbed from their rest. The market operates under its own rules, far harsher than those of the Kereskedo Market above. There is no Merchant Guild here to settle disputes, no Red Guard to enforce order. Only the strong survive, and only those with backing survive in comfort.

The atmosphere of Terra Sotto is one of danger held in careful balance. The various traders and crime lords maintain a precarious peace because the alternative -- open war in the tunnels -- would destroy everyone's interests. But this peace is thin. Betrayal is always possible. Theft is always punished. The air smells of damp stone, torch smoke, alchemical residue, and fear. The darkness here is not the peaceful darkness of night but the suffocating darkness of underground places where sunlight has never reached.

Navigating Terra Sotto requires both knowledge and protection. Those who come here alone are marked as prey. Those who come with the backing of a criminal faction or with sufficient gold to interest a protector might move more freely. The market has its own prices and its own logic. Here, money buys more than goods -- it buys the possibility of continued existence.

THE DESCENT

Not one location but many -- the hidden entrances that lead from the city proper into the black market below. Each entrance is different, each connected

to different networks of tunnels and passages, each guarded or monitored by those who control it. Some are protected by crude locks and bars. Others are guarded by humans -- enforcers of the crime lords who control the territory. Still others are marked only by knowledge: hidden doors that appear to be simple structural elements or deliberately built false walls.

The passages themselves are claustrophobic and poorly lit. Torches burn at intervals, set in iron sconces, but many passages between the major chambers exist in near-total darkness. The stone underfoot is ancient and worn slick by water in places. The air is cold and carries the smell of moisture and slow rot. Rats skitter in the darkness. Something larger moves in some of the deeper passages -- whether cave-dwelling creatures or things less natural remains uncertain.

Descending into Terra Sotto is a deliberate crossing of a threshold. The moment one steps through a hidden entrance and into the passages beyond, one has made a choice to leave the Queen's law behind. The Red Guard does not follow into these depths. No backup comes from above. In the darkness, a person is alone with whoever they've come to meet and with whatever else shares the tunnels.

GM Notes

The Descent is the gateway to all that follows. A PC's first encounter with these hidden entrances should establish the danger and illegality of what comes next. Finding a specific entrance requires either knowledge from contacts or successful investigation. Using an entrance without the proper arrangement might result in being trapped in passages or facing guards. The tunnels themselves can be used for ambushes, for getting lost, or for dramatic scenes of descent into danger.

Connections

Each entrance connects to different sections of the black market below. The Descent's various passages lead to The Night Market or to other specialized sections depending on which entry point is used.

THE NIGHT MARKET

The primary trading floor of Terra Sotto, a vast natural cavern that has been expanded and opened up by deliberate labor over many years. Torches burn from tall iron stands arranged around the space, casting uneven light and deep shadows. The walls are unfinished stone, rough and damp. The floor is packed earth, worn hard by the passage of feet over decades or centuries. There is no ceiling -- merely the vast darkness above, where bats and other flying things move in the heights.

Merchants operate here from permanent or semi-permanent stalls -- crude wooden structures built against the walls or freestanding in the center of the space. Some merchants are stationary, selling the same goods in the same locations session after session. Others rotate, moving their operations to different locations as need or danger demands. The goods on display are whatever Terra Sotto demands: alchemical components, certain poisons (wolfbane, mandrake, monkshood), weapons that would be illegal in the regulated markets above, bundles of documents, forged papers, stolen property ready to be resold. Prices are negotiated fiercely. No coin is refused if the amount is sufficient. No goods are guaranteed -- a buyer takes what they get, and complaints are addressed through violence or the intercession of crime lord intermediaries.

The crowd here is diverse and dangerous. Thieves and cutthroats rub shoulders with desperate people seeking forbidden medicines for sick relatives. Merchants from the criminal organizations operate alongside independent traders seeking survival in the only place that will have them. Customers range

from the city's underworld to visiting adventurers seeking equipment that cannot be purchased in light. The protocols of the black market are simple: no questions asked, no judgments made, no trust extended. A merchant will sell poison to someone planning assassination. The merchant will not warn the victim. The victim is not the merchant's concern.

GM Notes

The Night Market is where players encounter the black market's full range of offerings. It's a place where they can acquire equipment, poisons, or information that they cannot find elsewhere. Encounters here should emphasize the moral complexity of participating in black market transactions. The Market is also a gathering place for information about crime in the city and about the larger underworld. Overheard conversations can reveal plots, hint at larger conspiracies, or suggest adventure opportunities. The physical space -- torches and shadows and uneven terrain -- makes it suitable for ambushes, for surveillance, or for dramatic encounters.

Connections

The Night Market is the heart of Terra Sotto. Most other sections connect through it or through passages that lead from it. It is also the primary location where newcomers arrive.

THE PITS

A lower level of Terra Sotto, a section of carved stone where fighting rings have been established for both entertainment and profit. Blood has stained the stone so thoroughly that no amount of cleaning will remove it completely. The smell of that blood lingers in the air. Multiple fighting arenas exist here -- rings carved into the stone floor or bordered by crude walls of stacked rock and timber. Spectators watch from elevated positions, betting on the outcome of

fight between gladiators, mercenaries, and creatures captured and held for entertainment.

The creatures themselves are held in pens carved into the stone or built from iron cages. Some are mundane: war dogs, vicious mountain predators, animals trained for combat. Others are stranger -- creatures that seem to have come from places other than the natural world, or animals that display behavior and intelligence beyond what is normal. A few show clear signs of magical enhancement or alteration. All are maintained in conditions of careful deprivation -- fed enough to keep them alive and fierce but not comfortable. A creature that has been caged and mistreated for months or years develops a fury that makes for good entertainment.

The Pits are run by a crime lord known only as The Master, who maintains absolute authority over this section of Terra Sotto. He arranges fights, collects bets, and ensures that disputes over wagering are settled quickly and permanently. The Master is rarely seen, but his judgment is swift. Those who cheat at betting in the Pits are not arrested -- they are taken to the fighting rings and given to one of the creatures as entertainment themselves.

GM Notes

The Pits serve multiple purposes in a campaign. They are a place where characters can gather information through overheard conversations among spectators. They are a source of creatures that might be escaped or stolen. They are also a location of moral danger -- characters who participate in the betting or who watch the fights are participating in something cruel. A character might be forced into the rings themselves if they fall afoul of the Pits' authorities. The Pits are also a place where the underworld's power structure becomes visible. The strongest fighters, the most feared creatures, the highest-profile events -- these draw the city's criminal leadership.

Connections

The Pits connect to the Night Market through a series of passages. The creature pens also connect to holding areas where new animals are brought in and processed before being introduced to the rings.

THE APOTHECARY

A chamber in Terra Sotto dedicated entirely to the creation and sale of alchemical substances -- poisons, drugs, and medicines that exist outside the legal framework. A single alchemist, known only as MOSS (so named for the green growth that stains her skin and clothes), operates this space. She is ancient and sharp, her hands stained with chemical burns, her eyes clouded by exposure to fumes. She speaks little but understands everything.

The Apothecary smells of ingredients both pleasant and foul: exotic herbs, chemical compounds, the sharp tang of acids and bases. Bottles and vials line the walls, each labeled in a system known only to Moss. Copper pots and glass tubes cover wooden tables. A small furnace burns constantly, warming the space and distilling substances. Moss works continuously, creating new batches, experimenting with new compounds, refusing requests that don't interest her.

The products sold here range from poison to medicine with nothing differentiating them except intent. Wolfsbane, properly applied, can kill or heal depending on dosage and use. Certain mushroom extracts can induce sleep, madness, or death. Rare herbs imported at great cost can extend life, restore youth, or destroy the mind. Moss does not judge the purchaser's intentions. She sells to assassins and to healers. She doesn't differentiate. The money spends the same either way.

Prices are high. Moss has no interest in being approached by the poor. Gold -- real coin or equivalent value in gems or trade goods -- is the language she speaks. Those without sufficient wealth are turned away. Those with wealth but

insufficient courtesy are also turned away. Moss respects competence, honesty, and the willingness to accept that her prices are final.

GM Notes

The Apothecary is a location where characters can obtain poisons, drugs, or rare alchemical components necessary for their plans or for crafting magical items. Visiting Moss is an exercise in navigating the black market without antagonizing someone powerful enough to be genuinely dangerous. Moss herself can be an information source if approached correctly -- she hears everything that happens in Terra Sotto, from the mouths of those who come to purchase her wares. She is also completely amoral. A player character might face moral weight in dealing with someone who will happily sell lethal poisons to known murderers.

Connections

The Apothecary is a separate chamber accessed from the Night Market through a narrow passage. Few paths lead to it from other sections of Terra Sotto -- it is somewhat isolated by design, making it easier for Moss to control access.

THE VAULT OF CURIOITIES

A chamber hewn from stone and lined with shelves that contain objects of power and danger -- cursed artifacts, relics of the old gods, magical items of uncertain provenance and unstable properties, and other objects that should not exist in the hands of mortals. The air here feels heavier than elsewhere in Terra Sotto, and characters with any sensitivity to the supernatural should feel a wrongness, a pressure, a sense that they are in a place where normal rules do not apply.

The Vault is guarded not by human sentries but by wards and protections set into the stone itself. Those who touch certain objects without the proper precautions find themselves burned, paralyzed, or marked by curses. The proprietor -- a woman named KETH who is older than she should be, whose eyes are sometimes focused on things in the world and sometimes on things no one else can see -- maintains absolute control over access. She requires payment before showing patrons what is available, and she requires additional payment before items are removed from the Vault. She also requires a promise: anything purchased here, if it becomes a threat to the stability of Kormor Kirak, she will hunt down and reclaim. She enforces this promise with magic and with relentless purpose.

The Vault's inventory is not static. Items appear and disappear. Some are sold. Some are reclaimed by Keth. Some seem to move themselves, as though the objects within have their own motivations and the Vault is merely temporary shelter. The objects themselves are often labeled with warning inscriptions, in languages both modern and ancient. Many are clearly dangerous. A few are merely strange, their purpose unknown and their safety uncertain.

GM Notes

The Vault is where characters can find powerful magical items, but at a cost. The items themselves are likely to be dangerous, unstable, or cursed. Keth is not a conventional merchant -- she is a guardian of dangerous things, and she takes her role seriously. The Vault serves the campaign as a source of powerful magical items that come with complications and drawbacks. A character might acquire the very thing they need, only to discover that possessing it has consequences they didn't anticipate. Keth herself is a potential long-term NPC -- an agent of some unknown force that preserves balance or prevents the spread of uncontrolled magical corruption. She might become an ally, an antagonist, or simply a constant complication.

Connections

The Vault is accessed through a single heavy door carved from black stone, located in a quiet section of the Night Market. No other passages lead to or from it -- Keth deliberately maintains its isolation.

GILLIKOI WOODS

OVERVIEW

Beyond the city walls, past the Kereskedo Market's outer stalls and the neighborhoods of common workers, the land begins to rise toward mountains. In the valleys and on the slopes surrounding Kormor Kirak, forests grow -- ancient stands of pine and fir, twisted oaks, and stranger trees whose names have been forgotten. Gillikoi Woods is the most substantial of these forests, a place of significant size where the mountain valley's floor is covered in dense growth, where ancient trees form a canopy that dims the light even at midday, and where the oldest trees predate human settlement by centuries or millennia.

The woods are known to be dangerous. Things live in them that shouldn't be: creatures drawn by the necromantic activity that seems to have infected Kormor Kirak, things native to the deep forest that actively hunt humans, and stranger presences that have no name or clear nature. People disappear in Gillikoi Woods with regularity. The Red Guard maintains a presence on the main trail but does not patrol the deeper sections. Merchants know the routes and avoid leaving them. Locals speak of the woods with respect and fear in equal measure.

Yet the woods are also used, deliberately and regularly, by those who wish to meet without being observed by the city's various factions. A conversation between Terrassians and Albions cannot happen in the city without triggering conflict or at least suspicion. But in Gillikoi Woods, far from witnesses and Red

Guard surveillance, such meetings can occur. The woods are more neutral than the city. The danger they pose is impersonal -- the woods kill indiscriminately and do not care about Albion or Terrassian politics. This strange impartiality makes them more trustworthy than any treaty or agreement made by humans.

The woods have a quality of age and awareness. The oldest trees seem to observe those who walk among them. The spacing of the growth, while appearing random, has a quality of deliberation to it. Those who spend significant time in the woods report a sense that the forest itself is aware of them, is judging them, is perhaps deciding whether they are permitted to leave. This sensation may be imagination or psychological response to genuine danger. It may also be something more. The woods predate the city. They predate the current kingdoms. They may have their own consciousness, their own purposes, their own awareness of the humans who move through them.

THE WARDEN PATH

The only maintained trail through Gillikoi Woods, a path that is cleared and marked, making passage relatively safe compared to traveling off-trail. The path is perhaps ten to fifteen feet wide in most places, with vegetation cleared back on both sides. Stone markers at regular intervals indicate the way. The footing is stable, though muddy in seasons of rain and scattered with roots and rocks that can trip the unwary.

The Warden Path appears to be maintained by someone or something, though no one has determined who. Trees that fall across the path are eventually moved. Significant growth is cleared back. The markers are replaced when they become too weathered to be useful. Some believe the path is maintained by an old pact between the city's founders and whatever inhabits the woods. Others believe the woods themselves maintain the path, for reasons of their own.

Traveling the Warden Path is safer than leaving it, but safety is relative. Creatures that hunt the woods still approach the path, though they seem reluctant to cross the cleared boundary into the open. On the path, travelers can move with reasonable speed. Eyes watch from the darkness of the forest on both sides, but direct attack is uncommon. The real danger comes from stopping, from lingering, from sleeping on the path at night. The woods seem more aggressive after dark, as though the night gives license to things that are constrained during daylight.

The path takes several hours to walk, depending on direction and pace. It enters the woods near the eastern gate of Kormor Kirak and emerges in the foothills on the western side, in the direction of the Hallaset Fields. The elevation gain is gradual but consistent. About midway along the path, the descent begins. Travelers moving west gain the high ground as they progress, giving them vantage points of the city and the surrounding valley.

GM Notes

The Warden Path is the safe way through the woods, and parties might use it for relatively routine travel. However, the sense of being watched, the markers' mysterious maintenance, and the rules about travel at night all establish that the woods are not truly safe, merely safer. The path can be used for straight encounters or for atmospheric scenes. A party traveling the path might pass other travelers, might see signs of things moving in the woods, might hear sounds that they can't identify. They should reach the destination without incident but with a persistent sense of unease.

Connections

The Warden Path connects the eastern gate of Kormor Kirak to the western foothills and the Hallaset Fields beyond. Secondary paths and shortcuts leave the main trail at various points, leading to the deeper woods.

THE HOLLOW

A natural clearing in the forest, perhaps five hundred feet across, where the dense growth opens suddenly to reveal a roughly circular space. Tall trees ring the clearing, and the ground within is relatively clear -- grass and moss with scattered rocks, but few of the bushes and undergrowth that characterize much of the forest. A spring rises in the clearing's center, creating a small pool of clear water surrounded by smooth stones. The clearing seems to be deliberately maintained in its open state, though again, no one admits to doing the maintaining.

The Hollow is used regularly for clandestine meetings. Factions that cannot be seen together in the city meet here. Negotiations occur in the clearing under the watching eyes of the old trees. Deals are made, agreements reached, and sometimes violence occurs when agreements fall apart. The clearing has acquired a reputation as neutral ground -- a place where agreements are more likely to be honored because all parties know the Hollow itself will punish those who break their word. This belief may be superstition. It may also be earned through long experience.

The water in the spring is clean and cold, safe to drink. Those who drink from the Hollow's spring report a clarity of thought afterward, a sense of sharpness. Whether this is genuine effect or placebo remains uncertain. Many who come to the Hollow for meetings drink from the spring before conducting business.

The clearing is vulnerable at night. The ring of trees provides cover for observers and for threats. Those who meet here at night do so at increased risk. During daylight, the clearing feels relatively safe because sight lines are clear and escape routes exist in multiple directions. Visibility and light seem to matter to the creatures of the woods -- they are more aggressive in darkness than in light.

GM Notes

The Hollow is where significant meetings occur and where the political tensions of the campaign can be made visible. A party might witness a meeting here, might be hired to conduct surveillance, might meet contacts in the clearing, or might have the clearing become the site of violence when negotiations fail. The spring can serve as a focus for scenes of revelation and clarity -- a character might receive insight, have a vision, or simply feel that they are thinking clearly for the first time in the campaign. The sense of the trees watching, judging, adds an extra dimension of pressure to negotiations.

Connections

The Hollow is accessible from the Warden Path through a marked but less-maintained side path. It is also connected to the Deep Wood through narrow trails that are harder to follow.

THE DEEP WOOD

The forest beyond the Warden Path and the safer edges of Gillikoi Woods, where the growth becomes denser, where light barely penetrates the canopy, where the ground is covered in a thick layer of rotting leaves and fungus, and where the temperature seems perpetually cold and damp. The Deep Wood is where the dangerous things live. The creatures here are old and predatory. Some are natural forest predators: mountain cats, bears, wolves. Others are stranger -- things that seem to exist partly in the physical world and partly elsewhere, things that hunt with intelligence and purpose, things that leave no tracks and kill without warning.

Traveling in the Deep Wood requires strength and experience. The ground is treacherous. Roots reach out to catch feet. Sudden drops conceal themselves beneath leaf litter. Streams running unseen beneath the forest floor can

become sudden sinkholes. The darkness is disorienting. Sounds are muffled by the density of growth and the thickness of the organic matter underfoot. A party that ventures into the Deep Wood should feel acutely aware that they are far from help and that the forest is not passive terrain but an active force working against their progress.

The Deep Wood also harbors things that are not strictly alive or dead. The necromantic corruption that has infected Kormor Kirak seems to have spread to this forest. Spirits of the dead wander here. The line between living creatures and undead seems blurred. Some things encountered in the Deep Wood are clearly monsters. Others are almost but not quite human, as though whatever animates them is caught between death and life.

Yet the Deep Wood is also where the old things live -- creatures of genuine power, entities of the wildness that existed before humans came to this valley. These things are dangerous and strange, but they are not inherently hostile. A party that approaches them with respect and understanding might negotiate rather than fight. These encounters are the most valuable and the most dangerous, because the Deep Wood's oldest inhabitants can offer knowledge, power, or wards of protection at costs that are not measured in gold.

GM Notes

The Deep Wood is where encounters become genuinely dangerous and where the atmosphere of the campaign shifts into something more alien and threatening. Parties should not venture here lightly. Encounters in the Deep Wood should emphasize the forest's hostility and the sense that the party is very small and very fragile in comparison to the ancient and powerful things that live here. The Deep Wood can serve as a location for significant encounters with powerful creatures, spirits, or entities that can reshape the campaign. It is also a place where characters can encounter genuine difficulty and genuine failure -- not all parties should survive an extended stay in the Deep Wood.

Connections

The Deep Wood has no clear paths or marked ways. Navigation requires skill or magical guidance. It connects to the rest of Gillikoi Woods through difficult terrain and past active dangers.

THE CHARCOAL CIRCLE

In a section of the Deep Wood, in a place where several old trees form a natural ring, the ground is scorched black. The earth here is barren -- no grass grows, no moss covers the stone, no plants of any kind take root. The scorching appears ancient, predating current human habitation. The trees at the circle's edge are blackened as well, but they continue to live and grow, their trunks scarred but unbroken.

The Charcoal Circle is the site of old magic, of a ritual or ceremony performed so long ago that its original purpose has been lost to time. The current understanding is incomplete. Some believe the circle is a place of sacrifice. Others believe it is a place of binding, where something powerful was chained or contained. Still others believe it is a place of warding, where protective magic was set to guard the forest or the city beyond.

The ground within the circle is warm to the touch even in winter. The warmth is not extreme but constant and steady. Plants brought within the circle wilt and die, though this process is slow -- a plant left in the circle will take hours or days to perish. Animals clearly dislike the circle and refuse to enter voluntarily. The human response is more complex. Some people feel calm and safe within the circle. Others feel a creeping dread and a pressure in the air that makes breathing difficult. Still others report no particular sensation.

At night, the circle glows faintly with light that seems to come from the charred earth itself. The glow is not bright enough to cast shadows or to allow

detailed sight but is sufficient to mark the circle's presence from a distance. Those who study the light report patterns to it, as though something beneath the surface is trying to communicate or trying to be seen.

GM Notes

The Charcoal Circle is a location of power and mystery. It can serve as a focal point for ritual scenes, for revelation, or for encounters with powerful supernatural entities. The circle's properties are not fully understood, and a party investigating it can uncover pieces of the city's history or the forest's nature. The circle is also a potential destination for deeper conspiracies -- someone may be working to understand the circle's purpose, to activate it, or to break whatever protections it provides. The physical warmth and the impact on plant life make it a location where players should feel that they are somewhere fundamentally different from the normal world.

Connections

The Charcoal Circle is deep within the Deep Wood and is difficult to reach without guidance or extensive exploration. It is isolated from the more traveled sections of Gillikoi Woods and is known to only those who have spent significant time in the forest or who have been directed there deliberately.

ERDO POOLS

OVERVIEW

In the Hegy Mountains that rise above Kormor Kirak, where the elevation brings snow even in the warmer months and the air grows thin, natural hot springs emerge from the earth. Water heated by geothermal forces deep below rises through channels in the stone and emerges at multiple points along a narrow valley, creating pools and streams of warm water that flow downslope

until cooling and joining the normal water cycle. The Erdo Pools are a sanctuary in the harsh mountain environment, a place where the cold and the elevation's hardship can be temporarily escaped. For the city below, they are a destination of ritual importance and economic necessity.

The pools have been known and used for longer than the city has existed. Evidence of ancient use -- carved stones, faint inscriptions, the remains of old structures -- suggests that the pools held significance for whoever inhabited the valley before Kormor Kirak was built. The current use is more practical and commercial. The waters have genuine healing properties. Wounds heal faster when treated in the warm waters. Illnesses fade more quickly for those who bathe here. The effect is subtle but consistent. A person might heal naturally over weeks in the city; those same wounds heal in days in the Erdo Pools.

The pools have also become a place of political importance. In a city where factions maintain uneasy peace and where open cooperation is impossible, the Erdo Pools serve as a place of informal encounter. The tradition is simple: weapons are left at the entrance. Inside the pool areas, the rules of the city do not apply. Business can be discussed without immediate threat of violence. Private conversations can occur without fear of assassination. It is not perfect safety -- poison is still possible, as is subterfuge -- but it is better than the city proper. Over time, agreements made at the Erdo Pools have held more often than agreements made anywhere else in Kormor Kirak.

The waters themselves vary in temperature. Some pools are so hot that a person can bathe in them only briefly. Others are merely warm, comfortable for extended soaking. Still others are cooled by springs of mountain water and are suitable for swimming. The steam rises from the hottest pools and creates a strange landscape of mist and vapor, where sight is limited and the world feels dreamlike. Some swear they have received visions in this steam, though whether these are genuine supernatural revelations or hallucinations from heat exposure remains debated.

THE LOWER POOLS

The pools closest to the city, accessible via a trail that climbs from Kormor Kirak but remains relatively easy for those of reasonable fitness. Multiple pools of varying temperatures fill a broad basin, with natural stone borders and clear water that shows the pool floors. The Lower Pools are the most visited, hosting merchants, nobles, merchants, military officers, and common folk who seek healing or relaxation.

The pools are maintained in a semi-natural state. Small stone structures have been built around some of them to direct water flow or to create seating areas, but the development is minimal. Attendants -- local workers hired for the season or sometimes on a permanent basis -- keep the main areas clean, check the water quality for signs of contamination, and help with basic services: massage, assistance for those bathing, provision of towels and simple food. The attendants are neutral and discreet. They do not report on conversations they overhear, and they do not discuss the visitors with others. This discretion is part of what makes the pools valuable for conducting private business.

The Lower Pools are public in theory, and anyone with coin can use them. In practice, the pools are observed informally by rough social strata. Certain pools are preferred by nobles, certain pools by common workers, certain pools by merchants conducting business. This separation occurs naturally, reinforced by tradition rather than by any official rule. A person of low status can bathe in a noble's pool if they wish, but the social pressure to maintain separation is generally effective.

The water in the Lower Pools is warm and clear. Bathing in it is genuinely pleasant. For those suffering from injuries, illnesses, or the simple exhaustion of living in a city, the Lower Pools provide relief. A character spending a night or a day in the Lower Pools can recover from wounds as though receiving a week of normal rest. Characters with illnesses find symptoms reduced. The

effect is not magical healing, but it is genuine recovery accelerated by the waters' properties.

GM Notes

The Lower Pools are the most accessible and least dangerous parts of Erdo Pools. A party visiting here can rest, recover from wounds, and potentially conduct business or gather information in a safe setting. NPCs of importance often use the Lower Pools. Encounters here should have a different tone from encounters in the city -- less tension, more possibility of genuine conversation, a sense that the normal rules of Kormor Kirak do not apply in the same way. The water's healing properties can be used to advance healing without breaking the campaign's timeline, allowing parties to recover from difficult encounters while still advancing the story.

Connections

The Lower Pools are the primary access point to Erdo Pools from the city. Trails lead upslope to the Upper Pools and follow the water's flow downslope toward the city. The attendants' station is located near the largest pool, providing basic services and information about the pools' use.

THE UPPER POOLS

Higher on the mountain, accessible only to those willing to climb beyond the Lower Pools, the Upper Pools are more secluded and more exclusive. Fewer people use these pools, and those who do tend to be those seeking genuine privacy or those with sufficient wealth to prefer isolation to the social navigation of the Lower Pools.

The Upper Pools are hotter than those below, with some pools approaching temperatures that require slow and careful entry. The water's color changes with temperature and mineral content -- some pools are crystalline clear,

others show faint coloring from minerals dissolved in the water. The scenery here is more dramatic. The pools are set in a narrower valley with steep slopes on either side. In winter, snow accumulates in drifts around the pools while steam rises from the water itself, creating a landscape of contrasts.

A few simple structures exist in the Upper Pools area: shelter buildings where visitors can rest and warm themselves, storage facilities for the belongings of those bathing, and a small attendants' station. These structures are more basic than those at the Lower Pools. The Upper Pools maintain more of a wild, untamed character. Use by major political figures and crime lords is more discreet here. The absence of crowds makes the Upper Pools ideal for meetings that need to remain private. A faction representative and a rival can meet here, discuss terms, and part ways without any but a handful of attendants aware that the meeting occurred.

The healing properties of the Upper Pools are equivalent to those of the Lower Pools, but the greater heat sometimes creates complications for those with certain injuries or illnesses. The waters are more likely to produce visions or unusual states of consciousness -- whether from heat exposure or from genuine supernatural properties is unclear.

GM Notes

The Upper Pools are where significant conversations occur. Important NPCs will meet here. A party seeking privacy for conducting business or having important conversations might come here themselves. The increased danger of the climb and the greater isolation make the Upper Pools feel more consequential than the Lower Pools. Encounters here should be more significant. The potential for ambush is higher -- the pools are less traveled, and those who commit violence here are less likely to be observed. The visions reported by those who bathe here extensively can be used as plot devices, revealing secrets or hinting at larger conspiracies.

Connections

The Upper Pools are accessed via a steep trail from the Lower Pools. The Steam Caves lie further upslope, accessible from the Upper Pools area.

THE STEAM CAVES

The highest of the accessible pool areas, where the geothermal activity is most intense and the water temperature highest. Natural caverns have been carved by the hot water flowing through them over centuries. Inside these caverns, the air is thick with steam so dense that visibility extends only a few feet. The temperature approaches dangerous levels -- those inside the caves must move carefully to avoid scalding. The noise is constant: the roar of heated water, the hiss of steam, the echoes of sound in the cavern spaces.

The Steam Caves are used rarely and always with significant preparation. Those entering must acclimate to the heat gradually. Those who spend time here report disorientation, hallucinations, and altered states of consciousness. Some emerge claiming to have received visions of profound spiritual significance. Others simply emerge confused, uncertain of how much time they spent in the caves, uncertain of what they experienced.

The caves are dangerous because visibility is nearly zero and the heat is extreme. A person who loses their footing or becomes disoriented could fall into deeper pools, suffer severe burns, or simply become lost in the cavern passages. Death in the Steam Caves is not difficult to achieve accidentally. Suicide in the caves would be relatively simple to execute if someone had intent to end their life.

Yet the Steam Caves are also believed to be places of power. Those who need answers to significant questions sometimes venture into the caves seeking revelation. Those who need to undergo transformation sometimes come here.

The caves' reputation for spiritual significance comes not from any demonstrated supernatural effect but from the simple fact that the experience of the caves is so extreme that it changes people. Whether the change comes from the caves themselves or from the act of willingly entering such danger and discomfort remains unclear.

GM Notes

The Steam Caves are a location for significant personal journeys, not for casual visits or routine encounters. A character might enter the caves seeking answers or undertaking a ritual of passage. The game master can use the caves' sensory disorientation as a way to create scenes of revelation, mysticism, or personal transformation. The caves can also be a location of genuine danger -- a party member becoming lost in the caves, or becoming exposed to the extreme heat, is a real threat. The caves should be described in terms that emphasize the overwhelming sensory experience: the heat, the sound, the blinding steam, the disorientation. A scene in the Steam Caves should feel genuinely alien compared to normal encounters.

Connections

The Steam Caves are the highest point accessible to those using the Erdo Pools. They connect to the Upper Pools via a steep trail that becomes progressively more difficult. Beyond the caves lies only higher mountain wilderness, beyond the normal reach of those visiting the pools.

VISITING ERDO POOLS

THE TRADITION OF WEAPONS AT THE ENTRANCE

A long-standing custom holds that weapons are left at the entrance to Erdo Pools when a visitor enters. The custom is not absolute -- no authority forcibly disarms anyone -- but violating it is considered a serious breach of trust and decorum. Those who ignore the tradition are remembered and are often asked to leave by other patrons or by the attendants.

The tradition originated from practical concerns: weapons are slippery when wet and corrosion from the mineral-rich water damages metal over time. Leaving weapons at the entrance also prevents spontaneous violence. But the tradition has taken on symbolic significance. Arriving at the pools weaponless creates a vulnerability and a state of trust. Those who leave their weapons behind are making a statement: "I trust the place and the people here not to do me harm in the direct, physical sense."

This does not make Erdo Pools absolutely safe. Poison remains possible. Magical attack is possible. Kidnapping could occur. But the tradition does prevent the kind of open violence that characterizes the city below. Factions can encounter each other without immediate escalation to bloodshed.

GM Notes

The weapons-at-the-entrance tradition is an important part of what makes Erdo Pools different from the city below. It should affect how scenes in the pools play out. Characters who have entered the pools without their weapons are more vulnerable to certain kinds of threat and more dependent on negotiation or magical means of defense. A violation of the tradition -- someone bringing weapons into the pool areas -- signals that they intend to break the

pools' peace and is a significant event. Attackers who violate the tradition to strike at someone bathing are particularly despised and are likely to face consequences from other pool users.

THE HEALING PROPERTIES

The waters of Erdo Pools contain minerals and heat that accelerate natural healing. The effect is consistent but subtle. Characters spending a night or more in the pools heal faster than they would in normal circumstances. For game purposes:

- A character with wounds receives the benefit of a week of rest for each day spent in the Lower or Upper Pools.
- A character suffering from an illness has advantage on saving throws against disease and reduces the duration of the illness by half.
- A character recovering from a poison or toxin that deals damage over time finds that damage reduced by half.
- Permanent conditions and serious magical injuries are not healed by the pools alone, but they may be somewhat ameliorated.

The healing works only if the character actually spends time bathing in the pools. A character who visits the pools and conducts business without bathing receives no benefit. The waters must touch the injury, and the person must remain in the water for significant time. Extended soaking (multiple hours at a time, across multiple days) produces the greatest effect.

The Upper Pools provide marginally better healing than the Lower Pools. The Steam Caves do not provide healing benefits comparable to those of the pools themselves, though those who enter the caves and survive the experience often report feeling spiritually and sometimes physically renewed.

GM Notes

The healing properties should be used to manage the campaign's pacing and to allow for recovery without trivializing combat encounters. Characters who retreat to Erdo Pools for recovery are safe from most threats but also out of play for several days. This can advance the campaign timeline while giving the game master time to prepare new encounters. The pools can also be used as a periodic rest location for the party, a place where they return between adventures to recover and prepare.

ERDO POOLS RUMORS AND ENCOUNTERS

The pools are places where information flows. Neutral meeting ground allows conversations to happen that would be impossible in the city. Characters lingering in the pools can overhear:

- Whispers about a spy within one of the embassies.
- Rumors of a creature in the Deep Wood that feeds on the city's dead.
- Talk of a secret negotiation between Albion and Terrassia, mediated by Queen Kiraline.
- Discussion among merchants of a trade route change that might affect prices.
- Concern from Red Guard officers about something happening in the underground areas of the city.

Additionally:

- A character with the right skills and contacts can arrange a discreet meeting with an NPC at Erdo Pools.
- A character might stumble upon a meeting happening in the Upper Pools, overhearing important information.

- Someone poisoned or magically infected might be found in the pools, either as a victim to be rescued or as a mystery to be solved.

APPENDIX A: NPE QUICK REFERENCE BY LOCATION

THE ALBION EMBASSY

Ambassador Barron Whitehallow -- The hidden leader of the Lich Cult's current conspiracy, ostensibly working for peace while secretly planning his ascension to lichdom. Found in the Ambassador's Office during morning hours or in the Diplomatic Salon for formal meetings.

Lord Wooster -- The apparently bumbling but actually astute diplomat, stationed in his cluttered quarters on the second floor. A source of gossip and casual information.

Missus Crane -- The efficient Embassy secretary controlling access to Whitehallow's calendar. Located at the desk in the Reception Hall during business hours.

Jack Winbow -- Barron's operative, publicly posing as a stable hand while quietly protecting Olivia and watching the city's movements. Most often found near the stables, guest traffic, or wherever trouble is about to find the party.

Monsieur Pierre -- The proud Albion chef managing the kitchens. A gossip who speaks more freely with those who show interest in cuisine.

KENESKEDO MARKET

Rozito Vallikozo -- The market master appointed by Queen Kiraline. Found moving through the market or conducting business in his private office. Manages both legitimate commerce and the shadow economy.

Market Ruffians -- Petty criminals and hired muscle operating in pairs or small groups. Found throughout the market, particularly in alleys and less-visited sections.

THE BASTION INN

Eppy Flinder -- The proprietor of the inn, a woman who has lived through the Century War and remembers much. Located behind the bar or in her private room overseeing the inn's operations.

TORONY PJROS (THE CASTLE)

Queen Kiraline Veresz Eroszakos -- The vampire ruler of Kormor Kirak and supreme authority within the castle. Found in her private chambers, the throne room, or on the castle balcony overlooking the city.

Princess Szeret -- The Queen's daughter, a shapeshifter who wears borrowed faces. Maintains a bedroom in the upper castle, often observing the city through her telescope.

Red Guard Captain -- Commands the gate and main approaches. A different captain stationed at each major entrance.

Red Guard Soldiers -- Patrol throughout the castle in squads, enforce the Queen's law, and maintain order.

Castle Servants -- Numerous attendants maintaining the castle's operations, located throughout but particularly in the servants' quarters, kitchens, and administrative areas.

TERRA SOTTO (UNDERGROUND CITY)

The inhabitants of Terra Sotto are less clearly defined but include outcasts, those hiding from the Queen's law, and creatures that prefer darkness. Encounters here are unpredictable and potentially dangerous.

BJELKOJ WOODS

Forest dwellers, creatures that prefer isolation from the city proper, and those conducting business that must remain secret from authority. Specific NPCs depend on the campaign's needs.

ENDO POOLS

Attendants -- Pool workers maintaining facilities and ensuring the weapons-at-the-entrance tradition is observed. Discreet and professional, they observe all but report nothing.

MARKETPLACE AND MERCHANT QUARTER

Merchants and traders from both Albion and Terrassia, conducting business under the watchful eyes of Rozito's agents and the Red Guard. Specific NPCs emerge based on party interaction and campaign needs.

APPENDIX B: RANDOM CITY ENCOUNTERS

DAYTIME MARKET ENCOUNTERS (D8)

1. A Kereskedo Market Ruffian attempts to pickpocket a party member in the press of the crowd, only to be intercepted before the theft succeeds. This could lead to confrontation, negotiation, or pursuit depending on the party's choices.
2. A merchant selling suspicious "remedies" approaches the party, claiming to have cure-alls and protective charms. The remedies are either useless or actively harmful, but they're being sold with a smooth pitch that requires actual investigation to expose.
3. A Red Guard patrol passes through the market conducting what they claim is a routine inspection but is actually searching for specific contraband or fugitives. The guards question merchants and may question the party if they seem suspicious.
4. A fight erupts between two merchant houses over a trade dispute or debt. Chaos ensues, goods are knocked over, and the party must navigate the mess or become embroiled in the conflict.
5. A traveling performer -- acrobat, musician, or storyteller -- draws a crowd in a central market location. The performance is genuinely entertaining, but a cutpurse works the crowd, and the party may notice something amiss.
6. A city official appears to conduct a surprise inspection of market stalls, asking pointed questions about inventory, taxes, and licensing. Some merchants seem nervous, suggesting corruption or illegal activity is occurring.

7. A half-starved street child attempts to beg from the party, and in doing so, mentions that "the shadow-people are buying bodies in Terra Sotto." This is a plot hook disguised as an encounter.
8. A cloaked figure approaches the party with a proposition: intelligence about another faction or access to a location, provided they're willing to perform a small service. The offer is too good to be true, and there are hidden costs.

NIGHTTIME STREET ENCOUNTERS (D8)

1. A group of 2d4 Kereskedo Market Ruffians conducting a protection racket on a local business owner. They attempt to extort payment and may pursue the party if they intervene.
2. Two Red Guard soldiers on patrol challenge the party and demand to know their business. The guards are professional but suspicious of anyone moving through the streets after dark.
3. A figure in the shadows calls out to the party, offering to guide them to an illegal establishment or procure forbidden goods. The figure is either a con artist or a genuine criminal attempting to recruit them.
4. Screaming from a nearby building draws attention. A person is being attacked by an unknown assailant, possibly vampire spawn or a hired killer. Rescue is possible but dangerous.
5. An Automatic Assassin stalks across rooftops in the distance, its mechanical joints creaking audibly in the silence of night. The party may pursue, investigate, or hide depending on their inclinations.
6. A drunk is being robbed by a gang of ruffians in an alley. Intervention leads to combat or negotiation; ignoring the situation allows the robbery to proceed.

7. A mysterious figure drops a package near the party and vanishes into the darkness. Inside the package is something of value or importance -- a weapon, documents, or evidence of criminal activity. It's unclear if the package was meant for the party or if they've just picked up something dangerous.
8. The bells of Torony Piros ring in an unusual pattern at an unusual hour, causing the citizens of Kormor Kirak to pause and look toward the castle. The bells signal something significant has occurred, and citizens begin gathering in the streets to discuss what it might be.

TERRA GOTTO ENCOUNTERS (D8)

1. A Vampire Spawn guards a passage, perhaps wearing the face of someone the party knew. Combat or negotiation is necessary to pass, and the emotional weight of facing a former acquaintance adds depth.
2. Underground merchants operate a black market. Goods include illegal weapons, poisons, and forbidden knowledge. The merchants themselves are well-organized and protected by hired muscle.
3. A Lich Cult ritual is occurring in a hidden chamber. The party stumbles upon it accidentally or deliberately pursues it. Magical power is visible, bodies are arranged in patterns, and the purpose is clearly necromantic in nature.
4. A lost soul -- someone who fled underground to escape the law or supernatural predators -- approaches the party for help. The person has information but is also traumatized and may be unreliable.
5. Natural hazards become apparent: unstable tunnels, flooding from underground streams, or areas where the air itself seems toxic. Surviving these hazards requires skill checks and careful navigation.

6. Strange creatures native to Terra Sotto -- bioluminescent fungi, blind cave fish adapted to somehow live in air, or creatures that seem to have evolved in underground darkness -- become visible. These are not necessarily hostile but are eerie.
7. A faction hideout or base of operations is discovered. It may belong to the Lich Cult, to criminal organizations, or to other powers operating beneath the city. The discovery could be accidental or the result of careful investigation.
8. The party finds evidence of Barron's operations: ritual remains, sacrifice sites, or necromantic working stones. This discovery provides plot information but also suggests that his influence extends deep into the city's hidden places.

APPENDIX E: TRADE GOODS AND PRICES

Prices are listed in silver and gold coins, representing generic currency that works with any TTRPG system. 1 gold coin = 10 silver coins. Prices are approximate and subject to haggling, market conditions, and the merchant's assessment of the customer.

FOOD AND DRINK

- Bread (loaf): 2 silver
- Meat (cut of flesh for a meal): 5 -- 10 silver
- Ale or beer (mug): 1 silver
- Wine (cup, common): 3 silver
- Wine (cup, fine Albion vintage): 1 gold

- Meal at an inn (simple): 3 silver
 - Meal at an inn (well-prepared): 1 gold
 - Exotic spices (per measure): 1 -- 3 gold
-

LODGING

- Dormitory bed (shared room, per night): 5 silver
 - Private room at common inn (per night): 2 gold
 - Private room at fine establishment (per night): 5 gold
 - Luxury suite (per night): 15 gold or more
-

TRANSPORTATION

- Hire a cart for short distance: 5 silver
 - Hire a cart for full day's travel: 2 gold
 - Hire a carriage with driver (per hour): 5 silver
 - Hire a carriage with driver (full day): 3 gold
 - Stable horse (per night): 2 silver
 - Purchase of riding horse: 30 -- 50 gold
-

INFORMATION

- Basic rumor from tavern gossip: free to 2 silver
- Specific information about a location: 5 -- 10 silver
- Intelligence about an NPC: 1 -- 3 gold
- Access to restricted information: 5 -- 10 gold

- Maps or documentation: 2 -- 5 gold

CONTRABAND AND ILLEGAL GOODS

- Stolen goods (per item, variable): 25 -- 75% market price
- Poisons (per vial): 5 -- 20 gold
- Forged documents: 10 -- 30 gold
- Forbidden texts or grimoires: 20 -- 100 gold
- Black market weapons: 1.5 -- 2 times normal price

BRIBES

- Guard (minor): 5 -- 10 gold
- Guard (sergeant or officer): 20 -- 50 gold
- Official (low rank): 10 -- 30 gold
- Official (high rank): 50 -- 200 gold
- Red Guard (especially difficult): 100 gold or higher
- Information from paid informant (per piece): 5 -- 20 gold

CAPITULUM

SHOP INVENTORIES & UNIQUE ITEMS

COMMERCE IN KORMOR KIRAK: THE VAMPIRE'S ECONOMY

Kormor Kirak operates under a carefully maintained facade of normalcy, despite -- or perhaps because of -- the Vampire Queen Kiraline's absolute rule. The city's economy functions as a delicate balance between legitimate commerce and supernatural intrigue. Merchants have learned to thrive in this twilight world, where daylight hours belong to the living and moonlight hours to those who profit from serving both masters.

Currency circulates in the form of *Krone* (silver coins bearing Kiraline's profile) and *Groats* (copper coins of lesser value). Gold *Imperials* exist but are rarely seen in common trade -- they command significant premiums when discovered. Barter remains common among the lower classes, particularly those dealing with smugglers and black market operators like Rozito Vallikozo.

The city's merchants pay "protection tithes" to the Queen's collectors -- a system that ensures both safety from the undead and complicity in the regime. Those who profit most are those who ask no questions about why certain customers only shop at night, or why their goods disappear into warehouses that allegedly don't exist. Prices fluctuate based on demand, scarcity, and the buyer's perceived risk level. A character known to hunt vampires will pay dearly for supplies in legitimate shops -- if merchants will serve them at all.

ROSS'S CURIOSITIES

LOCATION: The Marrow District, third floor above a condemned textile warehouse

ATMOSPHERE: The shop defies external description. What appears as a three-story ruin from street level opens into a space that seems far larger than should be possible -- shelves stretch impossibly high, lit by candles that never seem to gutter or diminish. The air smells of sandalwood, old leather, and something faintly electrical. Maps of cities that don't exist cover the walls. A massive oaken counter dominates the center, behind which Devorlen Koss maintains perfect stillness.

THE PROPRIETOR: DEVORLEN KOSS

Devorlen Koss is neither young nor old, with pale skin that suggests he rarely ventures into daylight. His fingers are stained with ink, and his eyes -- mismatched, one amber and one grey -- move across customers with cold appraisal. He speaks in a whisper that somehow carries perfectly through the shop. Koss is primarily an information broker; the shop itself is secondary to his real trade: acquiring knowledge, artifacts, and secrets.

WHAT HE WANTS: Koss desires three things above all: *information about unregistered supernatural activity, journals or records from before Kyriline's ascension, and artifacts of clear occult significance.* A character bringing him such items can expect fair prices and, more importantly, access to his deeper inventory -- items not displayed on public shelves.

STANDARD INVENTORY:

- Candles of various types (2 sp to 5 gp each) -- Some are just candles; others provide unnatural light that reveals invisible creatures for 1 hour

- Inks and inks in various colors (3 cp to 8 sp per bottle) -- Most mundane; some inks glow faintly under moonlight or allow writing that only appears in darkness
- Charms and amulets (5 sp to 3 gp each) -- Protection against scrying, wards against evil eye, fertility charms, luck tokens
- Maps of Kormor Kirak (1 gp to 10 gp each) -- Common maps to rare cartographies showing hidden passages and tunnel systems
- Ritual components and dried herbs (1 sp to 2 gp per measure) -- Most have legitimate uses; Koss does not judge his customers' intentions
- Strange mechanical devices of unknown purpose (15 gp to 50 gp each) -- Gears, springs, crystalline components
- Journals and ledgers (5 sp to 4 gp each) -- Empty and bound in quality leather
- Animal pelts and bones (3 sp to 8 gp each) -- For rituals, crafting, or simple warmth
- Books (2 gp to 25 gp each) -- Histories, bestiaries, philosophical treatises, and texts in languages few can read

KOSS'S UNIQUE & SIGNATURE ITEMS:

I. THE SORROW-GLASS (18 GP)

A hand-mirror framed in tarnished silver, its surface rippling with colors that don't quite match normal glass.

This mirror reveals the truth of undead creatures: vampires appear as corpses, their glamours stripped away. However, using the Sorrow-Glass draws the notice of undead within 60 feet who are attuned to magical effects -- they feel the intrusion and may take notice. The mirror's surface slowly clouds over with accumulated "sorrow" (the imprints of what it has revealed), and after revealing

undead on seven occasions, the glass cracks and becomes useless. Koss keeps records of which mirrors are "fresh" and which are nearing their limit; he prices them accordingly (high-sorrow versions cost only 8 gp).

Story Hook: A recent customer purchased a brand new Sorrow-Glass three weeks ago. Koss hasn't seen them since. Their journal, found in their abandoned lodgings, suggests they were hunting something in the Catacombs beneath the Queen's Court.

2. BLOODBORN INK (25 GP PER VIAL)

A vial of deep crimson fluid that seems to move slightly, as if alive. The stopper is bone.

Written with Bloodborn Ink, text remains invisible until viewed by someone with blood-relation to the writer. The primary use is for secret correspondence between family members that even Koss's information network cannot easily intercept. However, the ink requires a drop of the writer's blood to activate -- and that blood signature becomes bound to the message. A skilled occultist or vampire with sensory powers might trace the message back to its source.

Three vials cost 70 gp. Koss provides bone quills with purchase. The ink dries slowly and smells faintly of copper.

Story Hook: A character might intercept a message written in Bloodborn Ink and bring it to Koss for analysis, learning that the writer is a prominent merchant's estranged daughter -- presumably dead these ten years.

3. THE PERPETUAL LEDGER (35 GP)

An ornate journal bound in soft grey leather, its pages filled with handwriting that is not yours.

This ledger records transactions in real-time -- every exchange of goods or money made within thirty feet of the ledger appears written on its pages in

precise, invisible script. Only those who hold the book and concentrate can read its entries. The Perpetual Ledger is used by wealthy merchants and crime lords to verify that their associates are not skimming profits. It also serves as a historical record that cannot be falsified (though the entries can be interpreted in different ways).

The ledger must be bound with a blood oath from its owner and initially costs 35 gp. However, Koss refuses to sell them to known enemies of the Queen -- he has his own survival to consider.

Story Hook: A crime lord's Perpetual Ledger was stolen three months ago. Koss knows this and keeps careful watch for who might bring records to him that match the ledger's "handwriting." He pays well for information about its whereabouts -- and pays even better to keep others from knowing he's looking for it.

4. NOCTURNE SPECTACLES (40 GP)

Wire-rimmed spectacles with lenses of dark violet glass. They seem to absorb light.

These spectacles allow the wearer to see perfectly in complete darkness as if it were dim light, and in dim light as if it were bright daylight. However, the wearer is *vulnerable to sunlight* while wearing them -- even brief exposure (more than one minute) causes searing pain and can burn the skin. Vampires and other nocturnal creatures often wear these; the fact that a human would purchase them raises questions.

Story Hook: Buying Nocturne Spectacles immediately attracts the attention of either the City Guard (who wonder why a human needs them) or vampire agents (who wonder if the buyer is a potential thrall or threat). Koss will warn the buyer of this -- for an additional price.

5. CLOCKWORK FAMILIAR, MARK II (120 GP)

A brass and iron mechanism roughly the size of a cat, with articulated joints and a glass lens for an eye. It ticks softly, occasionally.

This is a simple clockwork creature imbued with minor magical animation. It serves as a scout, carrying objects up to 5 pounds, and can be programmed with simple instructions ("go to location X and wait" or "deliver this letter to the address marked"). It operates for approximately 24 hours before requiring rewinding (a 10-minute process). The creature is *not* invisible and *not* silent -- a careful listener can track it by its ticking.

The Mark II version is more reliable than earlier models. Mark I versions occasionally refuse orders or move in unexpected directions. Koss sells these to merchants, researchers, and individuals with specific needs. They are *not* sold to anyone Koss suspects works for the Queen's secret police -- though the Queen herself apparently owns several.

Story Hook: A character might commission a custom Clockwork Familiar with a specific mission: perhaps carrying a love letter, or more sinisterly, carrying a bomb or a vial of poison to a specific location. This immediately implicates the character in conspiracy and assassination plots.

KERESKEDO MARKETPLACE

LOCATION: The heart of Kormor Kirak, bounded by five major streets

ATMOSPHERE: The Marketplace is controlled chaos -- a living creature of commerce that throbs with activity during daylight hours and transforms into something altogether different after dark. Stalls sell everything from fresh bread to livestock to bolts of cloth. The smell of roasted meat, spices, and humanity mingles with the scent of open gutters and horse manure. Merchants shout prices and qualities of their goods. During the day, it belongs to the

living; after sundown, the quality of goods changes, prices spike, and certain merchants appear who are invisible during daylight.

THE MARKET MASTER: YURI SZEK

Yuri is a weathered woman in her sixties with a voice that cuts through the marketplace noise. She collects the stall fees (a percentage of sales) on behalf of the Queen's collectors, maintains order with the help of three burly assistants, and serves as *de facto* information hub for the Marketplace. She knows everything: which merchants are struggling, which are thriving, which are actually fronts for criminal operations. She's careful not to share too much -- her neutrality is the only thing that keeps the Marketplace functioning.

Yuri wants *reliable stall-keepers* (she'll provide extra security and preferential placement for merchants she trusts) and *intelligence about planned disruptions* (she pays informants who warn her about riots, theft rings, or interference from the Queen's agents).

MARKETPLACE STALLS: DAILY INVENTORY

THE BREAD STALL (MAGDA'S)

- Fresh bread, daily (3 cp per loaf)
- Pastries, fruit-filled (5 cp each)
- Honey cakes (8 cp each)
- Cheese wheels (2-4 sp per pound)
- Salt-cured meats (6 sp per pound)

THE FISHMONGER (JANOS'S CATCH)

- Fresh fish, daily-caught (4 cp to 1 sp per pound, depending on rarity)

- Dried fish (2 cp per ration)
 - Smoked eel (1 sp per bundle)
 - Shellfish in season (8 cp to 3 sp, depending on availability)
 - Suspicious organs in jars that Janos claims are "medicinal" (1 sp per jar)
-

THE BUTCHER (MIKHEL'S COUNTER)

Note: This butcher is actually an informant for the City Guard -- he trades in meat and information with equal skill.

- Fresh cuts of beef, pork, lamb (5 cp to 2 sp per pound)
 - Specialty organs (liver, heart, kidney, tongue) (3 cp to 8 cp per pound)
 - Bones suitable for broth or crafting (1 cp to 5 cp per pound)
 - Rendered fat and tallow (2 cp per pound)
 - Information, purchased with discretion (prices vary; starts at 5 gp)
-

THE CLOTH MERCHANT (SAVITRIANA'S SILKS)

- Cotton cloth, plain (4 cp per yard)
 - Linen cloth (6 cp per yard)
 - Wool cloth (8 cp to 1 sp per yard)
 - Silk cloth, imported (3-5 gp per yard)
 - Thread, dyes, and notions (1 cp to 2 sp)
-

THE HERBALIST (BELA'S GREENS)

- Medicinal herbs and common compounds (3 cp to 3 sp per bundle)
- Healing poultices (2 sp each)
- Sleep aids and calming teas (5 cp to 1 sp per measure)

- Suspicious dried plants in sealed pouches (1 sp to 2 gp each) -- Purpose unclear

THE IRONMONGER (LASZLO'S HARDWARE)

- Nails, screws, bolts (1 cp per dozen)
- Tools: hammer, chisel, saw (5 sp to 2 gp each)
- Locks and keys (8 cp to 5 gp, depending on quality)
- Chains and rope (2 cp to 8 cp per foot)
- Horseshoes and basic metalwork (3 cp to 1 sp each)

THE LIVESTOCK STALLS

- Chickens (4 gp each)
- Goats (8 gp each)
- Pigs (10 gp each)
- Horses, work quality (25 gp to 50 gp each)
- Horses, saddle quality (60 gp to 100 gp each)

KERESKEDO'S UNIQUE & SIGNATURE ITEMS:

I. MIDNIGHT LANTERN (12 GP)

A brass lantern, roughly the size of a man's head, with panes of reinforced glass. Inside, a candle burns with a pale blue flame.

Sold only after dusk by a mysterious vendor who appears once per week, this lantern casts light in a 30-foot radius but *dims* rather than banishes shadows. Creatures attempting to hide in shadows can do so even in the lantern's light. Paradoxically, undead creatures find this light mildly irritating but not painful

-- unlike sunlight. Some believe this lantern was created as a compromise, allowing both the living and undead to share space without friction.

The candle within burns for one month before requiring replacement (2 gp). The vendor who sells these always wears a hooded cloak and never speaks. Payment is left in a specific location; the lanterns appear the next week.

Story Hook: The mysterious vendor is actually a neutral agent of the Queen, testing which individuals would purchase such items and marking them for future observation or recruitment.

2. CLOCKWORK SONGBIRD (15 GP)

A mechanical sparrow, no larger than a human hand, crafted in brass and steel with delicate articulated wings. It holds a small cylindrical device in its mechanical beak.

This device plays a pre-recorded message or melody when wound. The message can be recorded by someone skilled in mechanical arts (requires a craftsman's time and 5 gp payment). The songbird's flight is unpredictable but charming -- it will fly in roughly the direction its owner points and deliver its message to whoever winds the cylinder on the bottom.

Used by merchants for deliveries, lovers for secret messages, and assassins for last-moment communications. A skilled listener can sometimes glean information from the quality and mechanism of the recording itself.

Story Hook: A character receives an anonymous Clockwork Songbird that delivers a single message: their name and a specific location, with instructions to come alone at midnight.

3. THE MOURNING VEIL (8 GP)

A length of fine black cloth, intricately woven with silver threads that form patterns of roses and skulls intertwining.

This is practical funeral wear but also serves a secondary purpose: those wearing it are treated with slightly more respect and deference by the city's citizens, as if they are in mourning and thus beyond casual harassment. The veil provides +2 to Persuasion checks when the wearer is attempting to seem grief-stricken or when interacting with those who appreciate formality and respect for the dead.

However, the veil is also a marker -- regular merchants and workers recognize it as genuine mourning clothes and will assume the wearer has recently lost someone significant. This can open doors (sympathetic merchants may offer discounts) or close them (certain criminals may avoid the obviously grieving).

Story Hook: A character wearing the Mourning Veil is approached by someone claiming to have information about whoever they are supposedly mourning -- for a price. This person is either a con artist or someone genuinely involved in that person's death.

4. POISONER'S SCALES (22 GP)

A small brass scale, perfectly balanced, with weights marked in doses. The device seems designed specifically for measuring fine powders.

These scales are *technically* legal, as they have legitimate use in apothecary work. However, they are also essential for someone preparing poisons, toxins, or deadly alchemical compounds. Selling these to the wrong person could constitute conspiracy; purchasing them as someone known to have poisoned targets marks one for suspicion.

The scales are accurate to within 1/100th of a grain of weight, making them invaluable for precise mixtures. They come with a silk-lined wooden case.

Story Hook: A character purchasing Poisoner's Scales is watched by the City Guard, who are building a case against suspected poisoners. The scales themselves are not incriminating, but the purchase draws attention.

5. THE MAGISTRATE'S SEAL STAMP (40 GP)

A heavy iron seal, ornately carved with the symbol of Kormor Kirak's magistrate -- a crowned serpent. When pressed into wax or lead, it creates a perfect impression.

This is *not* an official seal, but a masterwork forgery created by a counterfeiter with exceptional skill. It will fool casual inspection but will not fool expert scrutiny. Documents sealed with this stamp appear official and authentic to those who don't know better. Using it to forge official documents is, of course, a serious crime.

The seal is sold without explanation. Purchasers understand what they are buying. Yuri Szek's assistant, who actually handles the sale, takes the buyer aside and simply asks, "Will this cause trouble in my marketplace?" If the answer is yes, the sale doesn't happen.

Story Hook: A character using forged documents sealed with this stamp might fool local authorities initially, but eventually the deception will be discovered. The counterfeiter who created it can be located through criminal networks -- but they're extremely careful about who they work for.

THE BASTION INN

LOCATION: The Merchants' Quarter, at the intersection of three major streets

Atmosphere: The Bastion Inn is part tavern, part inn, and entirely the heart of Kormor Kirak's social scene. A massive hearth dominates one wall, perpetually warm and welcoming. The air smells of pipe smoke, spiced wine, and roasting meat. Wood beams support a low ceiling covered in decades of carved initials and marks. The clientele ranges from merchants to mercenaries to the genuinely desperate -- Eppy's is neutral territory where business is transacted and enemies can negotiate without bloodshed (so long as the blood stays off the floor).

The Proprietor: Eppy Flinder (Distant relation to Devorlen, though they claim no family connection in public)

Eppy is a woman of indeterminate age with a laugh like breaking glass and eyes that miss nothing. She runs her establishment with an iron hand wrapped in velvet. No violence occurs in Eppy's, and those who attempt it find themselves escorted out by her three enormous sons -- or simply disappear. She serves everyone: legitimate merchants, criminals, vampires, and vampire hunters. Her neutrality is absolute and carefully maintained.

WHAT SHE WANTS: Eppy wants *news and gossip* (she pays for rumors that prove accurate; false information results in being cut off from her establishment), and *reliable suppliers* (she offers favorable rates to merchants who can guarantee consistent quality and timely delivery).

STANDARD INVENTORY:

- Ale, local brewery (2 cp per mug, 8 cp per pint bottle)
- Wine, red and white (1 sp to 3 sp per glass, 4 gp to 12 gp per bottle)
- Spirits: brandy, vodka, grain alcohol (2 sp to 1 gp per glass)
- Mead and honey wine (3 cp to 8 cp per mug)
- Tea, coffee, hot chocolate (1 cp to 3 cp per cup)
- Bread, cheese, and cold meats (5 cp to 2 sp per serving)
- Hot stews and meat pies (1 sp to 3 sp per bowl)
- Roasted meats (1 sp to 5 sp per portion)
- Room rentals, single night (6 sp to 2 gp, depending on room quality)
- Room rentals, weekly (3 gp to 8 gp)

EPPY'S UNIQUE & SIGNATURE ITEMS:

1. WIDOW'S CLARION (20 GP)

A small brass horn, simple and undecorated, that produces a sound like a woman's wailing cry when blown.

This item was created by a widow who lost her husband to the Queen's undead servants. When blown, it produces a sound that causes undead creatures to pause and listen for precisely six seconds. During those six seconds, they are compelled to hear and remember their living selves -- their names, faces, and loves before death. Most recoil in horror and rage; some weep.

The Widow's Clarion cannot control or compel undead, but it can disorient them momentarily. Creatures with particularly strong minds might resist the effect. The sound is loud enough to warn everyone within a half-mile that something is amiss.

Eppy obtained this from its creator, who drank herself to death in Eppy's establishment. She keeps the horn and sells it only to those she believes will use it against the Queen's interests.

Story Hook: Buying the Widow's Clarion puts the buyer on the Queen's watch list. Her agents will eventually approach the buyer, either to recruit them or to eliminate them.

2. THE LIES WE TELL (16 GP)

A handbound journal with pages of cream-colored vellum, the cover embossed with gold. It smells of leather and old secrets.

This journal is enchanted to reveal truth. Any lie written in its pages will slowly fade, becoming illegible within one lunar month. Truth written in it remains perfect and permanent. The journal is used by merchants to keep honest

ledgers, by lovers to write honest love letters, and by those with secrets they want to preserve.

The cost is steep because the journal's power is *permanent* -- once activated by the first writer, it bonds to them and will only accept lies and truths from their pen. It cannot be transferred or sold easily; the next owner will find it slowly rejecting their writing.

Eppy sells these on commission from a mysterious client who appears once per season to collect their percentage.

Story Hook: A character purchases this journal and begins keeping their secrets in it, only to realize that someone is reading it -- and that they're learning things the character never expected to discover about themselves.

3. THE DRUNK'S BARGAIN (FREE, BUT REQUIRES AGREEMENT)

This is not a physical item but a service: Eppy will listen to any secret, any confession, any terrible truth -- and she will never, ever share it. This conversation happens in a private room upstairs, with a drink of the client's choice.

The catch? Once the secret is shared with Eppy, she owns it. She will never speak it aloud, but she may decide to act on it. If she learns that someone is planning to harm innocents, she might warn those innocents. If she learns that someone is skimming profits from their employer, she might arrange for them to be discovered. If she learns about a conspiracy, she might sell that information to the highest bidder.

Eppy's honor is absolute: she will never falsely claim ownership of a secret, and she will never reveal it to save her own skin. Characters with valuable secrets can use them as leverage or confession, knowing that at least one person in Kormor Kirak will know the truth.

Eppy charges for this service based on the secret's value: a mundane affair might cost 2 gp, while knowledge of a conspiracy costs significantly more (or provides significant social credit with Eppy).

Story Hook: A character confesses a dark secret to Eppy and later discovers that knowledge of that secret is being used to manipulate them -- Eppy is never the source, but somehow others are learning what they confessed.

4. THERIAC OF KORMOR KIRAK (35 GP PER VIAL)

A dark red liquid in a crystal vial, sealed with wax. The label reads: "Composed of sixty-three ingredients, distilled thrice under the full moon, aged in oak sealed with silver clasps. Antidote to poison, ward against plague, cure for despair."

This is a powerful universal antidote that cures most mundane poisons (DC 16 Constitution save to resist the poison's initial effect; the theriac then neutralizes remaining poison). It also provides resistance to poison damage for one hour after consumption. The theriac does *not* work against magical poisons or curses, but it works against virtually everything else.

Each vial contains three doses. The theriac is expensive because it takes months to produce and requires rare ingredients. Eppy makes them herself, using a recipe she claims came from an alchemist in the Ottoman Empire.

Story Hook: A character using the theriac discovers that it leaves a trace in the bloodstream for several weeks -- anyone with knowledge of blood magic or the ability to taste it in blood can identify what the character drank and assume they were poisoned. This can either protect them (allies know to be cautious) or endanger them (enemies know they've survived an assassination attempt).

5. PASSAGE TOKENS (5 GP EACH, MAXIMUM 3 PER CUSTOMER PER SEASON)

Tokens carved from pale bone, roughly the size of a coin, engraved with Eppy's personal mark and valid for one night of shelter, no questions asked.

These tokens are accepted at a network of safe houses throughout Kormor Kirak and in several nearby villages. They are used by refugees, fugitives, and those fleeing dangerous situations. The safe houses provide a meal, a bed, and protection from the outside world for one night. No questions are asked about who the person is or why they need shelter.

Eppy issues these sparingly and carefully tracks who receives them. If someone uses these tokens for criminal purposes (harming their hosts, stealing, etc.), Eppy will remember it. More importantly, the network will remember it, and subsequent tokens will no longer be honored.

Eppy wants to ensure that her tokens are used by the genuinely desperate, not by the genuinely dangerous.

Story Hook: A character using a Passage Token encounters another fugitive at a safe house -- perhaps someone they're supposed to be hunting, or someone who has information they desperately need. The safe house rules prohibit violence, but once dawn breaks, all bets are off.

THE IRONMONGER'S FORGE

LOCATION: The industrial district near the river, marked by constant smoke and the ring of hammers

ATMOSPHERE: The forge is a cathedral to fire and metal. The smell of hot steel, coal smoke, and acrid air fills the space. The heat is intense and unrelenting. Master smith Goran stands at the central anvil, working metal with the precision of a surgeon. His apprentices move efficiently through the space,

feeding the furnace and finishing work. The walls are lined with weapons, armor, tools, and half-finished pieces. The constant sound of hammer on metal creates a rhythm that seems to beat like the forge's own heart.

THE PROPRIETOR: GORAN IRONHAND

Goran is a mountain of a man with arms scarred by decades of forge work. His left hand is a masterwork of clockwork and leather, replacing the original hand lost in an accident years ago. His right hand is his dominant hand and possesses strength that can bend steel. He speaks little, communicates much through grunt and gesture, and respects skill above all.

Goran has no patience for small talk, magical nonsense, or customers who don't know their specifications. He charges based on complexity and material quality, not based on time spent. If something can be made quickly, it is. If it requires six months of careful work, so be it.

WHAT HE WANTS: Goran wants *rare materials* (exotic metals, crystal for inlay, bone suitable for working), *commissions from reputable craftspeople*, and *challenges that push his skill* (creating something never attempted before, solving a problem through metalworking).

STANDARD INVENTORY:

- Nails, bolts, screws, common hardware (1 cp to 3 cp each)
- Chains, rope, binding materials (2 cp to 1 sp per foot)
- Common tools: hammer, saw, chisel, etc. (5 sp to 2 gp each)
- Locks and keys, various qualities (8 cp to 4 gp each)
- Horseshoes and farrier tools (3 cp to 1 sp each)
- Hinges, brackets, fasteners (3 cp to 8 cp each)
- Cookware: pots, pans, skillets, cauldrons (2 sp to 5 gp each)
- Shields, common quality (15 gp to 25 gp each)

GORAN'S UNIQUE & SIGNATURE ITEMS:

1. THE SUNBURST SWORD (180 GP)

A longsword forged from meteoric iron, its blade etched with a radiating pattern that seems to catch light from impossible angles. The hilt is wrapped in white leather. When exposed to sunlight, the blade glows faintly golden.

This is a masterwork weapon that deals an additional $1d4$ radiant damage against undead creatures. Vampires and lesser undead particularly despise this weapon, as its light-touched nature causes them visible discomfort.

Goran forged this weapon decades ago and has never quite been satisfied with it. He sells it periodically to worthy buyers, only to buy it back when that buyer no longer has use for it. The current asking price is higher than ever, suggesting Goran is less willing to part with it.

Purchasing this sword marks the buyer as a likely vampire hunter. It cannot be hidden or disguised effectively.

Story Hook: The previous owner of the Sunburst Sword disappeared three years ago under mysterious circumstances. Goran paid a significant sum to recover the blade and refuses to speak about what happened to its owner. A character purchasing it might attract attention from whoever made that previous owner disappear.

2. ARMOR OF THE BLACKENED SAINT (250 GP)

Full plate armor rendered entirely in black iron, its surface etched with religious iconography in fine detail. Despite the weight of full plate, it provides superior protection, and the wearer gains resistance to fear effects.

This armor was commissioned by a paladin who fell in service to the Queen's forces and was never paid. Goran keeps it as a memorial, selling it only to those with genuine religious conviction and a stated purpose of combating darkness.

The armor is uncomfortable to wear for extended periods (training in heavy armor is required to move silently), but it provides superior protection compared to normal plate armor, and the religious iconography grants the psychological benefit of +1 to saving throws against fear-based effects.

Story Hook: Wearing this armor marks the wearer as a religious warrior and will draw attention from both the Queen's secular authorities (who are wary of religious fervor) and from legitimate churches (who may attempt to recruit the wearer).

3. CLOCKWORK DAGGER OF ACCURACY (85 GP)

A dagger with a blade of fine steel, but the hilt contains visible gears and springs. Tiny mechanical components whir softly when the blade is drawn.

This dagger grants advantage on attack rolls within 30 feet. However, it requires winding every 12 hours, and if not wound, the gears seize and the advantage is lost until rewound. The rewinding process takes one action and is audible (anyone within 30 feet hears the mechanical whirring).

Goran created only three of these before deciding the mechanism was too temperamental for regular combat. This is the last one he will sell.

Story Hook: The other two Clockwork Daggers of Accuracy are in circulation. One is owned by an assassin working for Rozito Vallikozo; the other is owned by someone the Queen considers a serious threat. Recovering or destroying these daggers could be a longer campaign thread.

4. THE WATCHMAN'S MANACLES (40 GP PER SET)

Heavy iron shackles, perfectly forged and fitted. They are designed to hold humanoid wrists and are nearly impossible to escape without a key or magical enhancement.

These are quality manacles superior to those used by common guards. They provide no bonuses in themselves but are notable for being completely mundane -- they cannot be resisted or broken by non-magical means short of exceptional strength (DC 20 Strength check to break free).

Goran sells these to legitimate city guards, slavers, bounty hunters, and anyone else with a legitimate reason to restrain people. He refuses to sell them to those he believes will abuse them, though his definition of "abuse" is loose (he won't refuse to a slaver, but he will refuse to someone he's caught being sadistic in his presence).

Story Hook: A character arrested and shackled with these manacles discovers they contain a hidden mechanism -- when triggered from outside, they can be opened remotely. This suggests corruption in the city guard or a spy in their midst.

5. THE SORROW HAMMER (95 GP)

A warhammer forged from iron and bone, its head heavy and perfectly balanced. When swung, it seems to carry weight beyond its physical mass.

This is a masterwork warhammer that additionally reduces the target's maximum hit points by 1d4 for 24 hours (this damage reduces maximum hit points but doesn't directly damage the target). Undead and constructs are unaffected by this reduction.

The Sorrow Hammer is used primarily for breaking objects and overwhelming opponents through attrition. It is a weapon of psychological warfare.

Goran has only made a handful of these and is uncertain if they're tools or instruments of torture. He prices them high to discourage casual purchase.

Story Hook: A character wielding the Sorrow Hammer discovers that it seems to grow heavier with each use, as if absorbing the suffering of its victims. Eventually, it will be too heavy to lift unless the accumulated "sorrow" is somehow released or transferred.

BROTHER ALDRIC'S MONASTERY OF ETERNAL DIOJE

LOCATION: The northern heights, overlooking Kormor Kirak from above

ATMOSPHERE: The monastery is a fortress of faith, built into the mountainside with walls of pale stone carved from the rock itself. The interior is cool and quiet, filled with the sound of chanting from distant chambers. Candles burn perpetually in alcoves dedicated to saints and protectors. The air smells of incense, candle wax, and old stone. A library occupies three full floors. The monastery maintains its own brewery, bakery, and herbarium.

Brother Aldric is the monastery's keeper of relics and curator of protective artifacts. He is elderly but sharp, with eyes that seem to look through rather than at people. He has served the monastery for sixty years and has survived three attempts by the Queen's forces to suppress religious houses.

WHAT HE WANTS: Brother Aldric wants *relics of genuine spiritual significance, donations to continue the monastery's work, and news of other religious houses* (the monastery maintains a network of allied faithful across the region).

STANDARD INVENTORY:

- Blessed candles (5 cp each) -- Burn without diminishing, provide comfort against supernatural fear

- Holy water (2 gp per vial, 6 gp per flask) -- Damages undead on contact, provides advantage against possession
- Prayer beads and religious tokens (1 gp to 5 gp each, depending on saint and quality)
- Blessed bread and wine (3 cp to 8 cp per portion) -- Sustains both body and spirit
- Religious texts and scripture (5 sp to 3 gp each, depending on rarity)
- Incense and sacred unguents (1 sp to 2 gp per bundle)
- Protective amulets and blessed medallions (4 gp to 12 gp each)
- Herbals with medicinal properties (2 sp to 2 gp each)

BROTHER ALDRIC'S UNIQUE & SIGNATURE ITEMS:

I. THE WIDOW'S ANOINTING OIL (30 GP PER VIAL)

A small vial of clear oil that smells of rose, olive, and something distinctly otherworldly. It was blessed by a saint who died before the vampire ascendancy.

This oil, when applied to the eyelids, allows the user to see ghosts and spirits for one hour. It provides no protection against these entities, only the ability to perceive them. Some spirits are benign; others are hostile or mad with suffering.

Brother Aldric only supplies this oil to those who come to the monastery requesting it in person, and he never sells more than two vials to any individual. He carefully interviews purchasers to ensure they are seeking spiritual communion rather than supernatural exploitation.

Story Hook: A character uses this oil to see a ghost and discovers that a murdered soul is trying to communicate something important about their death -- or about something the character is about to walk into.

2. THE SEAL OF SANCTUARY (50 GP)

A wax seal imprinted with a simple cross, blessed by the monastery's high priest.

A door or space marked with this seal is considered sanctuary -- violence committed within or against those holding this seal is considered a grave sin in the eyes of the faithful. This seal carries no magical power but carries significant social and cultural weight.

Certain individuals and groups recognize and respect the Seal of Sanctuary: genuine believers, some of the Queen's noble court, and most mercenaries and criminal organizations (who maintain a code of honor about neutral spaces).

However, the seal only works if the space is actually used as sanctuary. If a character uses a sealed space for ambush or betrayal, the seal loses its power permanently and the betrayer becomes known as a user of false sanctuary -- a status that damages reputation significantly.

Brother Aldric provides these seals only to those he trusts to use them honorably.

Story Hook: A character purchases a Seal of Sanctuary and establishes a safe meeting place. Someone violates the seal's protection, breaking the code and making themselves a target for those who value honor and oaths.

3. THE TEARS OF THE MARTYR (65 GP PER VIAL)

A vial of crystal containing liquid that glows faintly with an inner light. According to Brother Aldric, these are the actual tears of a saint, collected after her martyrdom.

When a single tear from this vial is consumed, the user gains the ability to heal others through touch. For 10 minutes, the user can heal wounds through touch. After the effect ends, the user is exhausted and cannot take actions for one hour.

Only three vials remain in the monastery's collection. Brother Aldric will not create more, as he considers them sacred relics beyond reproduction.

Story Hook: Using the Tears of the Martyr marks the user as someone with access to the monastery's most precious resources. This attracts attention from both those who would protect such holiness and those who would exploit it.

4. BLESSED IRON CHAINS (20 GP PER 10 FEET)

Heavy iron chains blessed with prayers and anointed with holy water. Each link is individually blessed and marked with a tiny cross.

These chains can be used to restrain supernatural creatures (demons, devils, certain undead). They provide advantage on any check to maintain restraint against magical creatures attempting to break free. They have no special effect against mundane creatures.

Brother Aldric sells these freely to demon hunters, vampire hunters, and those engaged in genuine combat against supernatural forces.

Story Hook: A character obtaining blessed iron chains draws attention from the Queen's forces, who monitor the sale of anti-supernatural weapons. Vampire agents may attempt to acquire or destroy these chains before they can be used.

5. THE BELL OF AWAKENING (120 GP)

A bronze bell, small enough to hold in one hand, inscribed with prayers in a language Brother Aldric claims is older than Kormor Kırak itself. Its tone is impossibly clear and pure.

When rung, this bell produces a sound that pierces through magical silence and suppression. Any *Silence* spell or similar effect within 100 feet is suppressed for one round. Additionally, all creatures within 60 feet who are charmed,

dominated, or magically compelled must make a Wisdom save or break free of that compulsion for one round.

The Bell of Awakening cannot be used more than once per day without losing its magical properties for a full lunar month.

Brother Aldric has only three of these bells in existence. He guards them jealously and will only sell one if the buyer demonstrates genuine need and commitment to fighting magical domination and control. He interviews purchasers extensively and has refused many over the years.

Story Hook: Possessing the Bell of Awakening makes the bearer a target for anyone using magical control or charm effects. The Queen's forces would very much like to acquire this bell.

ROZITO VALLIKOZO'S PROCUREMENT SERVICE

LOCATION: No fixed location; business conducted through intermediaries, letters of introduction, and contacts established through Eppy's Hearth

ATMOSPHERE: Rozito never operates from a fixed location. Those who need his services must be introduced by someone he trusts (usually Eppy, sometimes the Marketplace Butcher). Meetings happen in neutral locations: quiet gardens, rooftop gardens, boats in the harbor at dawn. Rozito himself is a ghost -- a middleman, a fixer, a procurer who claims to be able to acquire anything for a price.

THE FIXER: ROZITO VALLIKOZO

Rozito is a thin man of indeterminate age and origin, with accent that shifts when he speaks and eyes that never quite focus on any single point. He dresses in fine but nondescript clothes and wears a network of small scars across his

hands that might be from work or might be from punishment. He is the ultimate information broker and middleman, connecting those who have with those who need.

Rozito's true power lies not in his inventory but in his connections. He has contacts in every criminal organization, several legitimate businesses, and at least one person in the Queen's inner circle who provides him with advance warning of official actions.

WHAT HE WANTS: Rozito wants *unusual goods* (anything that will surprise him or present a problem he's never solved before), *introductions to powerful people*, and *secrets that will create leverage*.

ROZITO'S AVAILABLE PROCUREMENTS:

Note: Rozito doesn't keep an inventory. Instead, when a client approaches him with a request, he quotes a price and a delivery timeline. He *always* delivers. His reputation depends on reliable service.

STANDARD SERVICES & PRICES:

- Acquiring illegal goods (weapons, stolen property, forbidden substances): *Cost varies, typically 150% of black market value*
- Arranging safe passage out of the city: 50-200 *gp* depending on destination and heat level
- Procuring false identities and documents: 75-300 *gp* depending on quality
- Arranging "accidents" or disappearances: 100-500 *gp* depending on target and method
- Acquiring restricted magical items: 2-5 *times the standard price*
- Gathering information on specific individuals: 25-100 *gp* depending on target's prominence

- Arranging meetings between parties who would normally never interact:
negotiable, based on danger level

ROZITO'S SIGNATURE PROCUREMENTS:

1. THE QUEEN'S OWN SPY

A procurement so dangerous that Rozito will only make this offer once, to someone he has tested extensively.

For an amount of gold equivalent to the buyer's annual income plus a significant additional amount (typically 400+ gp), Rozito will arrange for the buyer to meet and potentially recruit an actual spy working for the Queen's intelligence service -- someone whose loyalty can be bought or turned or who has already decided to defect.

This procurement comes with extreme danger. The Queen's intelligence apparatus does not take kindly to losing agents. Anyone attempting this will be marked for attention, and failure results in death or enslavement.

Story Hook: A character recruits a Queen's spy only to discover that the spy has a hidden agenda -- they were *supposed* to be recruited as part of a long-term operation to identify and eliminate threats to the Queen.

2. A SYMPATHETIC JUDGE

Rozito can arrange for a character facing trial to have that trial heard by a judge who is either bribed, blackmailed, or sympathetic to the defendant's cause.

The cost is 200-400 gp depending on the severity of the charges and the judge's risk level. The judge will find in the defendant's favor if they can present a reasonable defense. This does not guarantee acquittal, but it does guarantee a fair hearing.

However, using this service marks the defendant as someone with connections. Other judges and officials will note this, and future trials may be less favorable.

Story Hook: A character uses a sympathetic judge to escape conviction, only to later be approached by the judge with a request to return the favor -- perhaps to use that character's skills for something illegal or immoral.

3. PASSAGE TO THE UNDERGROUND KINGDOM

Rumors speak of cities and civilizations that exist beneath Kormor Kirak, in vast caverns and tunnel systems older than human civilization. Rozito claims he can arrange passage.

Cost: 350 gp plus whatever the parties underground demand once the character arrives.

Rozito provides a guide, supplies for one month, and a letter of introduction to a contact in the Underground Kingdom. He will not accompany the character and will not answer questions about what they will find. "Adventure," he says simply.

This procurement is essentially a one-way trip. Characters who return from the Underground Kingdom often come back changed, with items and knowledge that cannot be found in the surface world.

Story Hook: A character traveling to the Underground Kingdom discovers that the Queen has agents down there as well, and that Kormor Kirak's troubles are merely reflections of deeper conflicts in the darkness below.

4. RESURRECTION SERVICES

Rozito claims -- and there is no way to verify this -- that he can arrange for a dead character to be brought back to life through necromantic means.

Cost: 500+ gp, plus the character's understanding that they will owe Rozito a favor that he will collect eventually.

Characters brought back through this method are changed by the experience. They might be missing memories, have fragments of other lives bleeding through, or develop an affinity for undeath that marks them as uncomfortable around the living.

Rozito will only offer this service once per customer, and only if the customer has already proven themselves valuable through previous business.

Story Hook: A character returns from death through Rozito's services and discovers that they were actually dead for six months. Time has moved on without them, people they cared about have changed or died, and the city is different than they remember.

5. AN AUDIENCE WITH THE QUEEN

Rozito's most dangerous and most expensive procurement: arranging for a character to meet face-to-face with Vampire Queen Kíraline herself.

Cost: 600+ gp plus whatever the Queen demands.

This is not guaranteed to result in the character being alive afterward. However, Rozito provides safe passage to the meeting, guarantees the Queen will hear the character out, and arranges for a neutral location where the Queen is at least theoretically bound by honor not to execute the character without hearing them first.

What happens at that meeting is entirely up to the character's ability to negotiate.

Story Hook: A character meets the Queen and discovers that she is not the mindless tyrant they expected -- she is intelligent, has reasons for her rule, and might even be open to limited cooperation if the character can offer her something she values.

CONCLUSION: NOTES ON PROCUREMENT AND SECRETS

The economy of Kormor Kirak is sustained by a careful balance between legitimacy and shadow. Most inhabitants never engage with figures like Rozito Vallikozo or know the truth about the Marketplace Butcher's secondary trade. They shop at Kereskedo, drink at Eppy's, and pray at Brother Aldric's monastery, never fully understanding how interconnected these worlds truly are.

A character shopping at Koss's Curiosities for rare ink might not realize that the ink they're purchasing is being watched by the Queen's agents. A character obtaining a Clockwork Familiar might not understand that the clockwork devices in Kormor Kirak are part of a larger surveillance network. A character visiting the monastery for blessed water might not appreciate that Brother Aldric is part of a resistance movement slowly gathering strength.

In Kormor Kirak, every purchase is a story waiting to be told. Every merchant is a potential ally or enemy. Every unique item carries with it the weight of history, conspiracy, and the very real possibility that someone, somewhere, is watching to see what you do with it.

This is the true currency of the Eternal Court: not gold, but secrets.

PART THREE: THE CASTLE

Castle Torony Piros, Room by Room

The castle straddles the boundary between the city and the void, half protected behind the walls and half hanging over a vertical cliff.

CAPITULUM

CASTLE GUIDE

TORONY PIROS

The Red Tower

A Castle Guide for Gamemasters

From the world of

THE ETERNAL COURT

Based on the screenplay by

JESSE ALEXANDER

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INTRODUCTION

The Red Tower--Torony Piros in the old tongue--rises from the cliff face of Kormor Kirak like a wound that refuses to heal. For nearly four centuries, it has served as the seat of the Veresz dynasty, that line of noble vampires who guard the neutral city nestled between the warring powers of the Albion Empire and the Kingdom of Terrassia. Each generation of Veresz rulers has

added their own structures, expanded the fortifications, and delved deeper into the mountain itself, so that what began as a single scarlet stone tower has become a sprawling Gothic fortress--beautiful in its way, terrible in others.

Queen Kiraline Veresz Eroszakos rules from these halls, maintaining the precarious peace of Kormor Kirak through fear, diplomacy, and an iron will. The castle itself has become an extension of her power. The very stones remember the blood spilled within them. Dark magic permeates the deeper levels, infused into mortar and foundation by centuries of necromantic practice. Vines grown from impossible seeds wind through walls and chambers, responding to will and emotion rather than the simple laws of nature.

This guide is designed for Gamemasters who wish to bring Torony Piros to life for their players. The castle operates on multiple levels--both literally and metaphorically. The upper reaches that visitors see are arranged for ceremony and statecraft, all soaring arches and Gothic grandeur. But as one descends deeper into the structure, moving below ground, the architecture becomes stranger. Angles that shouldn't work according to mortal geometry. Corridors that seem to shift. Spaces that contain more than physical law would allow. This is by design. The

Queen's power grows with depth, and the castle reflects that terrible truth.

This guide moves from the exterior and ground levels (where visiting dignitaries and common folk might venture) down into the ceremonial heart of the castle and beyond. Players who remain in the upper reaches may experience a single evening of political intrigue. Those who descend further may find themselves lost in a structure that resists their escape. The deeper one goes, the more dangerous things become. The castle itself can become an adversary.

Use this guide as reference material during play, reading descriptions aloud to set the mood. Feel free to add or subtract encounters based on your campaign

needs. Torony Piros is a character in itself--let the players feel it watching them.

PART ONE: THE APPROACH AND EXTENSION

THE CLIFF ROAD

The Hallaset Fields give way to stone long before the castle becomes visible. A wide road, worn smooth by centuries of merchant caravans and military processions, begins its winding climb toward the fortress. This is the Cliff Road, a switchback path cut directly into the cliff face of

Kormor Kirak's western slope. The ascent is not steep enough to be dangerous for mounted riders, but it is relentless. As travelers climb, the city below shrinks to a patchwork of slate roofs and pale stone walls. The wind picks up as one climbs higher, carrying the scent of pine from the distant forests and something metallic--iron perhaps, or blood-memory.

Every half-mile or so, the road widens into a small courtyard where guards maintain watch stations. These are manned by the Red Guard,

Kiraline's sworn soldiers, identifiable by their crimson surcoats worn over plate armor. They are courteous to legitimate travelers but miss nothing. Those arriving by the Cliff Road are expected. Surprise arrivals tend to come from other directions, and the Guards know to watch for such things.

The road offers no shortage of drama. On one side, the cliff face rises, impossible to climb. On the other, the edge opens to a dizzying drop.

Merchants move slowly, knowing that a panicked horse could tip a cart over the side in moments. The wind can be treacherous as well, and during storms, the road becomes impassable. This is exactly as the

Veresz prefer it. The Cliff Road is a controlled approach. A bottleneck.

An invitation.

GM Notes

Use the Cliff Road as an approach montage if the players are invited guests. Let them feel the weight of the journey and the slow revelation of the castle's dominance as they climb. If they arrive in secret, the Guard posts become obstacles--can they slip past without being seen? The wider watch courts can serve as battlefields if pursuit becomes necessary. The drop off the edge is significant enough that creatures without flight or magical means falling would not survive the descent.

The road continues climbing for another three miles beyond the final guard station before reaching the Blood Gate.

THE BLOOD GATE

The castle's formal entrance is a masterwork of military architecture wrapped in dark pageantry. Two towers flank a gate house, connected by a crenellated wall that rises forty feet at its lowest point. The gate itself is wrought iron banded with dark steel, the bands inlaid with silver in the pattern of the Veresz sigil--a crowned skull impaled on a scepter, surrounded by thorns. The iron is old enough that centuries of rust have stained it red-brown. Or perhaps that is intentional.

Murder holes dot the wall above, dark square openings through which archers could rake the approach. Stones worn smooth by impact suggest these holes have been used more than once. The gate house contains a full company of

Red Guard, forty soldiers rotated in shifts to man the checkpoint continuously. Visitors state their business to a

Knight-Captain, their names recorded in a ledger kept in a small window.

Those without prior invitation are turned away politely but firmly.

Those who prove insistent discover that the Red Guard does not argue.

The gate itself hangs in its frame like a guillotine waiting to fall. It is heavy enough to require a team of men working pulleys to raise it, and its descent is swift and final. The sound of it closing echoes through the gatehouse with a resonance that seems to last longer than it should. More than one prisoner has watched that gate come down and known, with terrible certainty, that rescue from outside was not coming.

Above the gate, mounted on iron hooks, are the skulls of traitors and failed invaders. They are old enough that time and weather have rendered them nearly unrecognizable, but in certain lights and certain moods, they seem to turn slightly, watching the approach road below.

GM Notes

The Blood Gate is where most campaigns' interaction with Torony Piros begins. For invited guests at a formal function (such as the Treaty Ball), their passage is swift and ceremonial. Knights escort them through. For those with less legitimate business, the checkpoint becomes a test of social engineering, magic, or stealth. The Knights here are professional soldiers, not easily deceived, but they are not mindless automatons. A convincing lie, forged papers, or a magical deception might work. Failure results in being turned back or, for the particularly persistent, being arrested by Red Guard soldiers. The gates have trapped escaped prisoners before. They can be forced open by magic powerful enough, but doing so alerts the entire castle to an intrusion.

THE OUTER COURTYARD

Beyond the Blood Gate, the castle opens into an expansive courtyard paved with dark stone blocks. These stones are notably discolored in places--stained with something that time has not quite washed away.

Those who know castle lore recognize it as old blood, quite literally worked into the foundation. Whether it is there by ritual design or as a simple consequence of centuries of violence is a matter of speculation.

The courtyard sprawls across a full acre and serves multiple purposes.

To the north stands the stables, a massive stone structure with doors tall enough to accommodate wagons and riders. The scent of horses and hay mixes here with woodsmoke from the blacksmith's forge attached to the building's eastern end. The clang of hammer on anvil is a constant sound during daylight hours.

The carriage house occupies the eastern edge of the courtyard, a series of covered stalls for the Queen's fleet of carriages and sleighs. Some of these vehicles are works of art--a carriage of black lacquered wood trimmed with silver, another with wheels bound in iron bands hammered with runes. A few appear to never be used, covered with cloth, their purposes obscure.

To the south, partially visible beyond an archway, lies the Guard

Barracks. This is the home of the Red Guard, and the courtyard before it regularly hosts weapons drills, mounted exercises, and inspection formations. Visitors are not forbidden to cross the courtyard, but doing so means crossing through a space that is, fundamentally, military ground. Eyes follow.

The courtyard is exposed to the elements and to sight from the castle's towers. On days of ceremony, servants move through here preparing the space. On ordinary days, it is a place of practical work--the rhythmic sounds of the

smithy, the shout of drill sergeants, the murmur of stable hands. But in the deep of night, when the castle is quiet, the courtyard becomes something else. The dark stones seem to absorb light rather than reflect it, and the wind through the towers carries sounds that might be voices or might be the castle breathing.

GM Notes

The Outer Courtyard is the transitional space between the outside world and the castle proper. For invited guests arriving at the castle, they typically pass through this space on foot or in carriages, heading toward the Grand Entry Hall. For those attempting entry by other means, the courtyard becomes a problem. There is no good way to cross it unseen. The Red Guard maintains watch from multiple positions, and the open space offers no cover. A direct approach is risky. More indirect routes (the hidden Cliff Passage, magical means of entry, convincing someone inside to grant access) become attractive options. Thieves and spies who must cross the courtyard have been known to do so in the small hours before dawn, when the guard changes, or during storms when visibility is reduced.

THE CURTAIN WALL AND BATTLEMENTS

The walls that enclose Torony Piros are not merely functional defenses.

They are architectural declarations of power. Thirty feet high at their lowest point, fifty at their highest, they walk the perimeter of the castle in a continuous circuit. The walls are punctuated by towers at regular intervals, connected by covered walkways where archers and sentries maintain watch.

The stone of these walls is pale gray, quarried from the cliff face itself, but the battlements are edged with a darker stone--nearly black, shot through with

veins of red that catch the light in unsettling ways. Gargoyles perch at intervals along the walls, stone creatures carved with expressions of hunger and malice. Some are clearly decorative, their wings carved in high relief, their features stylized.

Others are more naturalistic, and it is these that give observers pause.

More than one Guard has sworn that they've seen a particular gargoyle in a different position than it occupied the day before. A few claim to have seen them move in the corner of their eye.

The walkways atop the walls are well-maintained, with good footing and waist-high walls to prevent accidental falls. During the day, Guards conduct regular patrols. At night, the patrols are less frequent and less enthusiastic. There is something about the walls after dark that makes even experienced soldiers prefer to spend their time elsewhere.

The wind is stronger here. The views are more vertiginous. And occasionally, far below in the grounds outside the castle, sentries report seeing lights or figures moving where nothing should be.

From the walls, the view in all directions is unobstructed for miles. On clear days, one can see the Kingdom of Terrassia's borderlands to the south and the Albion territories to the north. On nights when the sky is clear, the stars are visible in profusion, and the view is breathtaking.

But stargazing from the walls is not encouraged. Something about the height, the isolation, and the darkness seems to attract a certain kind of reflection. More than one sentinella has had to be relieved of duty after spending the night staring upward, having forgotten their purpose entirely.

GM Notes

The walls serve multiple functions in a campaign. They are a boundary the players cannot easily cross if they're trying to avoid the main entrances. They

offer vantage points from which to observe the castle's interior activities. And they can become a setting for chases, combat, or investigation. A character with good climbing skills might attempt to scale them, though the stone is smoother than it appears, and the gargoyles, while seeming like handholds, sometimes feel almost warm to the touch. The walls can also be an escape route if the inside of the castle becomes too dangerous, though dropping to the ground below is unpleasant in the best circumstances and fatal in others.

THE FOUR TOWERS (EXTERIOR OVERVIEW)

Each corner of Torony Piros is anchored by a tower, and each tower serves a different purpose, marked by different architecture and different histories.

THE TOWER OF THE WATCH is the tallest structure on the castle, rising a full hundred feet above the courtyard level. It is the tower most visible from the city below, and its top is crowned with a platform where signal fires burn on certain nights. The tower contains multiple levels of rooms, most of them related to observation and communication.

Long-range viewers are kept on the highest levels, along with maps and records. The tower's walls are thick and its windows small, befitting its purpose as a sentinel position. The internal stairs spiral endlessly upward, and there is something disorienting about climbing them. The steps seem to rise at a pitch steeper than the exterior dimensions of the tower would suggest. Those who have climbed to the top report that the journey takes longer than it should.

THE TOWER OF BELLS rises forty feet, shorter than the Tower of the Watch but wider at its base. Three massive bronze bells hang within its open framework--the largest is called the Death Bell, the second the

Mourning Bell, and the smallest the Feast Bell. These are used to mark formal events and to sound alarms. The bells are old, their bronze green with age, and their sound carries far across the city. Something strange about them is that they ring of their own accord sometimes. Entirely without a bell-ringer, they toll softly in the small hours before dawn, as if mourning something just beyond the edge of perception. The bells have their own tone, not quite harmonious, not quite discordant.

THE TOWER OF THORNS is strangest of the four. Its walls are covered almost entirely with vines of a dark, thorny variety. In winter, when the vines should brown and die back, they remain green and thriving. The tower itself is sealed at its base--the doorway that once led inside has been bricked up for reasons lost to time, or perhaps reasons deliberately obscured. Locals claim that the tower was sealed by Queen

Mirella three generations ago, after something happened within that drove her mad. The vines continue to grow from the sealed tower's heights, cascading down the walls like a living waterfall. On certain nights, the thorns glow faintly with bioluminescent light--a sickly green that makes viewing it produce a sense of existential dread.

THE RED TOWER is the original structure, the ancestor around which all other parts of the castle have grown. It is distinctive for its color--unlike the pale gray stone of the rest of the castle, the Red

Tower is built from stone that is genuinely red, darkened by age and mineral composition. The tower is perhaps sixty feet tall, a squat, powerful structure that looks ancient beyond reckoning. Its upper levels are sealed. No windows open onto them, and there is no internal access to those high chambers. What lies in the sealed upper portion of the Red

Tower is not a matter of casual discussion within the castle. Servants who have been employed for decades claim never to have been told. The lower levels

remain in active use--storage, dungeons, and certain ritual chambers are located here--but the upper tower remains closed, a secret that the Queen keeps to herself.

GM Notes

The four towers can serve as locations for specific encounters or as visual landmarks as the players navigate the castle. The Tower of the Watch is a good location for observation-based scenes or for encounters with castle staff. The Tower of Bells creates opportunities for creating atmosphere through sound and for encounters with whatever mechanism causes the self-ringing. The Tower of Thorns can represent a boundary the players should not cross, a visual reminder of what happened to past disobedience or transgression. The Red Tower is the castle's great mystery. Offering glimpses of it, mentioning its sealed upper levels, having NPCs refuse to discuss it--all of this builds a sense that there is something more going on than the players currently understand.

THE CLIFF PASSAGE

Not all entrances to Torony Piros are obvious, and not all of them are well-guarded. The Cliff Passage is a secret way into the castle, known only to a few--the Queen, a handful of her inner circle, and certain people who, for reasons of their own, need to move in and out of the fortress without being seen.

The passage begins in the Hallaset Fields, where an opening in the cliff face is concealed behind a natural outcropping of stone and a tangle of thorny brush that has never been cleared. The passage itself descends into darkness almost immediately. It is narrow enough that two people cannot walk abreast, and the floor is uneven, scattered with loose stone. Water drips from the ceiling, and the passage smells of earth, stone, and something organic that decays.

The passage descends for perhaps a hundred feet before opening into a wider chamber within the mountain itself. This chamber is natural, a cave that the castle has claimed and adapted for its purposes. The walls are damp and cold, and in places, they are covered with runes carved in a script older than the present kingdom. The runes do not feel like decoration. They feel like warnings, or perhaps like barriers of some kind, though whether they are meant to keep people out or to keep something in is a matter of speculation.

From this chamber, a stone staircase leads upward, hewn from the living rock. The staircase is old, its steps worn uneven by use. It spirals upward for a considerable distance before opening into one of the castle's lower levels. The passage is unmarked on any official map of the castle, and few even know it exists. Those who do know tend to be careful about using it. Passage down the stairs is possible. Passage up can be more complicated, as there is always the question of whether reaching the castle's interior means you will be allowed to leave again.

GM Notes

The Cliff Passage is an ideal way to introduce the players to the castle if they do not have legitimate entry. It bypasses the guard stations and the formality of the Blood Gate. It also means entry into the castle in a way that some people inside the castle want kept secret. This creates immediate complications. A player group that enters via the Cliff Passage might find themselves in debt to whoever showed them the way, or they might find themselves wanted for illegally entering the castle. Alternatively, the passage can be a way out if the players need to escape. But using it means going through the cave system, facing whatever dwells in the natural caverns, and hoping that no one with authority to use the passage pursues them. The passage is not a safe option, merely a hidden one.

PART TWO: GROUND LEVEL

THE GRAND ENTRY HALL

The interior of Torony Piros is revealed all at once as the great doors of the Grand Entry Hall swing inward. This is a space designed to impress, to intimidate, and to remind the visitor that they have entered the seat of power of a being far removed from ordinary mortality.

The hall is vast, with a ceiling that rises fifty feet and is painted with scenes depicting the history of the Veresz dynasty. The painting is old but meticulously maintained, and the colors remain vivid--deep blues and golds, rich reds, and blacks that seem to absorb light. The scenes move chronologically from west to east, showing the founding of the dynasty, the expansion of Torony Piros, famous victories, and diplomatic triumphs. Kiraline herself appears in several scenes, always in the place of power, sometimes flanked by advisors or guards, sometimes alone against enemies.

The floor is polished dark stone, so reflective that it mirrors the painted ceiling above. Walking across it creates the strange sensation of walking between two identical worlds, one above and one below. The effect is disorienting until the eye adjusts. Some visitors swear they have seen things in that reflection that weren't in the room itself--figures, movement, hints of places that don't exist in the space above.

Massive iron chandeliers hang from the ceiling at regular intervals, their candles always lit. The light they cast is warm but does little to reach the corners of the hall, which remain in shadow. The shadows in these corners seem deeper than they should, and on more than one occasion, servants have sworn they saw movement within them.

Portraits of Veresz matriarchs line the walls. These paintings are centuries old, the oil cracked and darkened with age. The eyes of the figures painted within them have a remarkable quality--they seem to track movement in the room. A visitor walking from the entry doors to the far end of the hall will notice that the eyes of every portrait follow their passage. It is almost certainly a trick of perspective and the artist's skill, but the effect is unsettling. No amount of reasoning changes the primal discomfort it produces.

The Grand Entry Hall functions as a nexus point connecting to virtually every other major part of the castle. Doorways lead to the Grand

Ballroom, the administrative chambers, the Throne Room, and upward toward the ceremonial levels. The hall is always staffed by at least four servants in Veresz livery, whose job is partly to maintain the space and partly to observe who comes and goes.

GM Notes

The Grand Entry Hall is the threshold between the public face of the castle and everything deeper. It sets the tone for the entire experience. For players attending a formal function, this is where they will arrive and where initial impressions will be formed. For those attempting to move through the castle covertly, the Entry Hall is a significant obstacle. It is open enough that there is no good way to cross it unobserved, and the servants maintain constant watch. The paintings and chandeliers can be used to create mood, to hint at history, and to reinforce the sense that this is a place where the normal rules of reality are slightly bent. The reflective floor can be used as a plot device if needed--perhaps magic that troubles the mirror world shows different truth, or perhaps shadows of things that haven't happened yet, or threats that exist on a different plane.

THE ARMORY AND GUARD HALL

The Guard Hall is a long chamber with a vaulted ceiling braced by iron beams. The walls are lined with weapon racks holding spears, halberds, long swords, and crossbows. The floor is polished stone worn smooth by the passage of thousands of armored feet. Training dummies of wood and straw stand in the center of the space, scarred and dented by the practice of swordwork conducted here throughout the day.

The air in the Guard Hall is thick with the scent of oil and steel, the particular smell of a place where weapons are kept sharp and in good repair. The sound of maintenance work is constant--the grinding of whetstones on blades, the creak of leather armor being conditioned, low conversation between guards. The hall is always staffed, with rotating watches of Red Guard conducting routine maintenance, training new soldiers, and ensuring that all equipment is in fighting condition.

The Armory proper is accessible from the Guard Hall through a heavy locked door, and only authorized personnel are granted entry. The Armory contains more specialized equipment--magical weapons if the castle possesses such things, ceremonial armor worn by Kiraline's honor guard, and supplies for siege conditions. The exact contents of the deeper

Armory are not common knowledge among the castle staff.

The Guard Hall connects to the Barracks via internal passages and provides a space where the Red Guard conducts much of the work of maintaining the castle's military readiness. For visitors, the Guard

Hall is not typically open to exploration, but servants pass through regularly, and a visitor with the right credentials (or the right magical deception) might move through without immediate challenge.

GM Notes

The Guard Hall is a location for potential combat encounters if things go badly for the players, but it is also a place where intelligent observation can yield useful information about the castle's defensive capabilities, the number of guards on duty, their weapons and armor, and their level of training. An NPC ally might arrange for the players to move through the Guard Hall during a meal shift when fewer guards are present. The Guard Hall is one of the few locations in the castle where the players will encounter armed, trained soldiers on a routine basis. A direct fight here is almost certainly unwinnable for a small party.

3. SERVANTS' QUARTERS AND KITCHEN COMPLEX

The vast majority of the castle is maintained by a small army of servants, and their quarters occupy a significant portion of the ground level. Long corridors lined with small, neat rooms provide housing for the castle staff. Each room is simple but clean, with a narrow bed, a small table, and a clothes chest. The halls of the servants' quarters are lit by oil lamps and smell of soap and woodsmoke.

The Kitchen Complex is adjacent to the servants' quarters and occupies a huge space with multiple hearths, long wooden tables for food preparation, and areas for storage. The kitchens hum with activity during the day as meals are prepared for hundreds of people--guards, servants, administrative staff, and visiting dignitaries. The kitchens are one of the warmest, most human spaces in the castle. The head cook is a woman named Ilyana, a severe individual in her late sixties who tolerates no incompetence and runs her domain with iron discipline.

Curiously, the kitchens prepare no food for the Queen herself. A special room attached to the royal chambers houses Kiraline's private food storage and preparation area, and only a handful of trusted servants are permitted entry. The official story is that the Queen prefers privacy.

The truth, if any of the staff know it, is not discussed.

The servants' quarters and kitchens are connected to most other parts of the castle by a network of narrow passages and stairs that allow the staff to move without disturbing guests or formal events. These passages are poorly lit and confusing to anyone unfamiliar with them, but the servants navigate them by memory and habit. A visitor who befriends a servant might gain access to these passages, which provide a largely ungarded means of moving through the castle.

GM Notes

The servants represent potential allies, sources of information, and complications. A servant who feels wronged by the castle might help the players. A servant who is loyal to the Queen might report them. The kitchen is one of the few locations in the castle where someone can obtain food and water relatively easily, and it is less heavily guarded than more public areas. The servants' passages are a useful mechanic for allowing players to move through the castle in ways that don't require fighting their way past guards. They are also a source of atmosphere--dark, confusing, sometimes the sounds of unseen things in the darkness suggest that the castle contains more than is visible in the public areas.

THE WINE CELLARS AND PANTRIES

Descending from the ground level into the wine cellars is a distinct change. The temperature drops significantly. The stone of the walls becomes older, less regularly finished. The light grows dimmer as oil lamps become less frequent. The cellars extend farther back into the cliff than the surface architecture would suggest. It is as though the castle has roots that go deeper than its visible foundations.

The wine cellars are extensively stocked. Row upon row of wooden racks hold bottles aging in the cool, dark, unchanging environment. The wines are old and valuable. Some of the bottles predate the current kingdom.

The scent down here is overwhelming--wine and old wood, the particular smell of fermentation and earth. A few of the passages are sealed with iron-bound doors, the locks ancient and sophisticated. These sealed passages lead to portions of the cellars that are not used for storage of wine.

The pantries are connected to the wine cellars and contain preserved foods in vast quantities--salted fish, dried vegetables, grain stores, and foods in sealed ceramic containers. The organization of the pantries is meticulous. A servant could tell you exactly how many stores remain for any given food type. This arrangement makes sense for a castle that could be under siege, but it also suggests that siege conditions have occurred here before, or that the Queen at least entertains the possibility seriously.

Some doors in the cellars are marked with warding runes. These doors remain locked and sealed, and servants will not speak about what lies beyond them. The cold that emanates from under the sealed doors is noticeably colder than the ambient temperature of the cellars themselves. In winter, frost forms around the door frames even in the relatively mild climate of the deep cellars.

GM Notes

The wine cellars provide a path deeper into the castle for players who wish to avoid guards. However, the deeper they go, the stranger things become. The sealed passages hint at purposes beyond food storage. If the players investigate too obviously, they risk triggering alarms or magical wards. The cellars are a location where supernatural investigation can happen with less risk of being discovered by castle staff. The sealed doors are a mystery that rewards investigation. What lies behind them is up to the GM, but the weight of mystery should hang over the sealed passages. They might contain dungeons, ritual chambers, or things the Queen prefers to keep hidden even from her own staff.

THE COURTYARD GARDEN

Within the castle walls, enclosed on all sides, is a garden that seems to belong to a different season than the rest of the world. The garden is paved with smooth flagstones arranged in patterns that vaguely suggest a circle and a star. In the center of this paved area is a fountain of white marble, carved in the shape of a swan with wings spread. The fountain runs continuously, fed by an underground spring, but the water that flows from it looks faintly red in moonlight, though in daylight it appears normal. No one seems to know the cause of this phenomenon. Tests of the water show nothing unusual.

The garden is planted with roses that have not bloomed in living memory.

The plants are brown and withered, their thorns sharp and black.

Interspersed among the roses are moonflowers--pale white blossoms that open only at night and fill the garden with a fragrance that is beautiful and terrible in equal measure. The fragrance is intoxicating in ways that are not purely pleasant. Those who spend too long in the garden at night often report dreams afterward that they cannot quite remember but which leave them melancholy for days.

Stone benches are scattered throughout the garden, worn smooth and polished by centuries of use. The benches face the fountain in some cases and the castle walls in others. These are places where the castle staff comes to sit in the rare moments when they have free time. More than one serving maid has been found weeping on these benches, unable to fully explain her sorrow.

The garden is lit at night by globes of alchemical light that glow without flame, creating an illumination that is sourceless and somehow dreamlike. These lights cast shadows that don't quite align with the objects that create them.

GM Notes

The garden is a location for quiet scenes and for atmosphere building. It is a place where players might encounter NPCs alone and vulnerable, or where they might find a moment of peace before things become dangerous again. The fountain can be a source of magic or mystery. The moonflowers can be ingredients for certain spells or potions. The melancholy that pervades the garden is an opportunity to develop character moments or to hint at the emotional darkness that underlies the castle.

THE CHAPEL OF FORGOTTEN SAINTS

The chapel was once a proper place of religious devotion, its purpose evident in the architecture and remaining decoration. But something has happened to change its purpose. The holy symbols that once dominated the walls--a sun cross, a radiant star--have been defaced by dark sigils painted or carved over them. These new sigils are not elegant or artistically rendered. They are crude, powerful, and distinctly uncomfortable to look at for long periods.

The altar remains in its place, raised on a platform at the chapel's east end, but it has been repurposed. Instead of religious implements, it now holds objects of darker significance. A circle of runes is carved into the altar stone itself, stained dark by use. The stained glass windows that once depicted saints and holy figures have been altered.

The faces have been changed, rewritten by skilled hands to show different expressions. Where saints once looked serene and transcendent, they now show hunger, or madness, or resigned acceptance of suffering.

The chapel is not actively used by castle staff. It is not forbidden to enter, but the atmosphere within is deeply uncomfortable, and most people avoid it. The few servants who have been known to go there report an overwhelming sense of being watched, even when alone. The cold is more pronounced here than

anywhere else in the castle. Candlelight seems dimmer. Shadows move in ways that don't correspond to the movement of light sources.

GM Notes

The chapel is a location for confrontation with the darker aspects of the Veresz dynasty. It suggests that there are forces within the castle that are not merely political or magical in the traditional sense, but rather genuinely inimical to human morality and wellbeing. If the players explore here, they might find evidence of what purposes the chapel serves now. Encounters here might involve spirits, divine beings reacting to the desecration, or the discovery of ritual materials that hint at ongoing dark practices. The chapel is a good location to raise the stakes and to suggest that the castle contains dangers beyond guards and locked doors.

PART THREE: FIRST FLOOR (CEREMONIAL LEVEL)

THE GRAND BALLROOM

The Grand Ballroom is the jewel of Torony Piros and the heart of its formal social functions. The ballroom is vast--two hundred feet in length, one hundred feet in width, and the ceiling rises eighty feet at its apex, a soaring vault of stone worked into impossible curves that seem to defy structural logic. How the ceiling remains standing is an engineering question that has never been satisfactorily answered. Some suggest magic is involved in its support.

The floor is polished white and black marble arranged in a geometric pattern that draws the eye toward the center and creates a subtle sense of movement even in stillness. Under the light of the chandeliers, this pattern seems almost to flow, as though the marble itself is liquid.

Dancers on this floor report that it is deceptively easy to move across, that their steps feel lighter and longer than they should be. The effect is subtle enough that it could be purely psychological, but more than one dancer has commented on it.

The chandeliers are works of art in themselves, massive constructions of crystal and wrought iron holding hundreds of candles. These chandeliers hang from chains attached to the apex of the ceiling vault, and their light is brilliant enough to illuminate every corner of the ballroom with a steady glow. The chandeliers are raised and lowered by a system of pulleys maintained by castle engineers. Raising or lowering them is a slow, deliberate process that requires multiple people to manage, making them difficult to move quickly.

The musician's gallery runs along the north wall of the ballroom at a height of thirty feet. This gallery is screened by a delicate railing of wrought iron, decorated with arabesques and flourishes. The gallery is large enough to accommodate an orchestra of forty musicians or more.

Acoustics within the ballroom are nearly perfect, with sound from the gallery reaching every corner of the room with clarity and power.

Musicians who have played in the gallery report that their instruments sound better here than anywhere else--notes are richer, harmonies are more complex, and the music seems to carry an emotional weight that it does not have elsewhere.

The ballroom itself is rimmed with alcoves and doorways. On the east wall, large doors open to the Diplomatic Reception Chamber. On the west wall, doorways lead to a series of private withdrawing rooms where guests can retire for quieter conversation. The south wall is nearly entirely windows, giving a view out over the city below. These windows are tall enough that a person could easily throw another through them, but no such occurrence has been

recorded. The north wall is where the musician's gallery overlooks the main floor.

The ballroom is configured differently depending on its purpose. For balls and formal dances, the floor is clear and the wall niches are lit and decorated with flowers. For councils or formal meetings, the floor might be arranged with chairs or tables. For ceremonies, the entire space is cleared, and the focus is directed toward the center of the floor or toward the upper balcony that overlooks the ballroom.

DURING THE TREATY BALL: The Grand Ballroom is transformed into a space of glittering danger. The chandeliers burn with brilliant light, casting everything in clarity that seems to expose every intention and hidden thought. The floor is crowded with dancers, with political delegations from both the Albion Empire and the Kingdom of Terrassia, with noble houses of Kormor Kirak, and with members of the court of the

Veresz. Music from the gallery is constant and elaborate--symphonic compositions that shift between triumphant and sorrowful, between energetic and melancholic. The diversity of styles mirrors the diversity of those present, each group attempting to assert cultural dominance through music and dance.

The air in the ballroom during the ball is thick with tension masked by courtly courtesy. Every conversation is a negotiation. Every dance is a statement. Every movement is observed and interpreted. Those who understand the language of court politics can see alliances forming and breaking, can read the subtle signals that indicate which diplomatic initiatives will succeed and which will fail. Those who do not understand this language move through the ball as through a minefield, unaware of the dangers they navigate.

The upper balcony, visible above the main floor, shows silhouettes of guards and observers. The Queen herself appears and disappears from sight, moving between her throne and various points in the ballroom.

When she is present, the entire character of the space changes. The music shifts, conversation becomes more guarded, and the dancing becomes more theatrical.

The Treaty Ball is the culmination of weeks of negotiation. Both the Albion Empire and the Kingdom of Terrassia have sent their best diplomats and their most skilled courtiers. The peace treaty being negotiated would end the Century War, and the implications of its success or failure reverberate through every interaction, every dance, every raised glass.

EMPTY: Without the crowd and the music, the ballroom becomes something else entirely. The space feels cavernous and alien. The chandeliers cast geometric shadows that seem too precise, too calculating. The reflections in the polished marble floor show the space but also seem to show glimpses of other configurations, other times, other people dancing on the same floor. Footsteps echo with a resonance that does not match the distance traveled. The space feels vast and compressed simultaneously. Those alone in the empty ballroom often report a sense of unease, a feeling of being observed, though no observers are visible.

GM Notes

The ballroom is the social center of the castle and the stage where much of the campaign's political intrigue takes place. For a campaign centered on the Treaty Ball, this space is where the action unfolds. Allow the players to move through the crowd, overhear conversations, attempt their own diplomatic maneuvers, and navigate the web of political tensions. The ballroom offers opportunities for investigation (what can be learned by observing the delegations, the guards, the Queen herself?) and for action (confrontations, revelations, moments of crisis that break the surface of courtesy).

If the campaign moves beyond the ball, the ballroom becomes a location to be navigated stealthily. The empty ballroom is a different sort of challenge--

movement across it is exposed, sound carries, and guards from the musician's gallery have an excellent vantage point. The polished floor can be slippery. The chandeliers might be a resource (pull one down onto enemies? hide in the gallery above?) or an obstacle.

The room is large enough that combat here might take on a different character than in the cramped corridors and chambers of other parts of the castle.

The perfect acoustics of the ballroom can be used as a plot point. A phrase spoken in one corner carries to another. Conversations meant to be private are overheard. Music masks other sounds. The quality of the space itself becomes a character in scenes set here.

THE UPPER BALCONY

Running along the full length of the north wall of the Grand Ballroom, at a height of thirty feet, is the Upper Balcony. This is a long, wide gallery with a railing that provides an excellent vantage point for viewing the ballroom below. During the Treaty Ball, the balcony is reserved for guards, castle officials, and the Queen's most trusted advisors. It is from the Upper Balcony that the Queen observes the proceedings, makes note of developments, and ensures that the event proceeds according to her will.

The Upper Balcony is connected to the musician's gallery by internal passages, and it also connects to a series of private chambers and corridors that honeycomb through the upper levels of the castle. This network of passages allows the Queen and her staff to move through the castle without being seen by guests or common staff.

The balcony itself is lit by additional chandeliers and wall sconces, creating an interior space that is separate from the brilliance of the ballroom below. The light here is warmer, more intimate, but it also creates a subtle boundary

between observers and observed. Those on the balcony can see everything happening below. Those below can see the balcony only as a silhouetted space, shapes moving in shadow against the palace behind them.

Windows in the outer wall of the balcony provide a view to the outside world. Seeing the city of Kormor Kirak spread out below, the mountains beyond, and the borderlands of both Albion and Terrassia creates a perspective on the political situation. The Treaty Ball is being held in a place that literally looks out over the lands that both powers claim to govern.

The balcony is also the location where, in the screenplay canon, a crucial moment of escape or revelation occurs. A teleportation portal opens here. A character is pulled from the ballroom to the balcony. The balance of the evening is disrupted from this vantage point. The balcony is a liminal space--between the public and the private, between the observed and the observing, between the public face of the castle and the hidden truths that lurk behind closed doors.

GM Notes

The Upper Balcony is a location that allows for scenes of observation and commentary. A character on the balcony can see the bigger picture of what is happening in the ballroom, can catch things that those below might miss, and can have a moment of perspective and reflection. The balcony can also be a location of danger--it is less populated than the ballroom, and confrontations here have an intimacy that balcony confrontations in the ballroom lack.

The secret passages that branch from the balcony are opportunities for escape, for stealth, and for lateral movement through the castle. A player group that gains access to the balcony essentially gains access to the upper levels of the castle through the passage network. This should come at a cost or with complications. Accessing the passages means being in an area where your presence is much less excusable. The

Queen's private areas are here. Guards are likely to be encountered.

The view from the balcony can be used to create moments of perspective and weight. A character standing here, looking out over Kormor Kirak and the borderlands, can grasp the significance of the events unfolding below. The treaty being negotiated could determine the course of history for kingdoms. The stakes are real and enormous. The ballroom below becomes smaller in perspective, but not less significant.

THE THRONE ROOM

Queen Kiraline holds court in the Throne Room, a chamber designed to manifest her power and to remind all who enter of her absolute dominion over Kormor Kirak. The throne room is not as vast as the Grand Ballroom, but it is intimidating in a different way--more focused, more directly threatening.

The throne itself is a masterwork of dark metallurgy. It is fashioned from black iron inlaid with lines and patterns of bone. The bone is real, recognizably human or near-human in origin, worked into intricate designs that are beautiful in an unsettling way. The throne sits on a dais of red stone called bloodstone, raised six feet above the floor of the chamber. The dais is accessible only by stairs, ensuring that anyone who wishes to approach the Queen must do so in full visibility, ascending in a gesture that is almost supplication.

The ceiling of the throne room is impossibly high--the outer walls of the castle are only sixty feet, but the ceiling here rises nearly eighty feet, and no external architecture accounts for this extra space. How the room is constructed to accommodate this internal dimension is a mystery. Those who study the castle's geometry find it troubling and illogical. Some suggest that the room exists partially in a space adjacent to physical reality, that the walls are not as solid as they appear.

The walls of the throne room are lined with banners of the Veresz dynasty--ancient cloth bearing the heraldry of each generation of the family. These banners are old and valuable, some dating back two hundred years or more. The embroidery is masterful, and the dyes used are richly pigmented. However, the banners have an unsettling quality. The figures embroidered into them seem to shift slightly when viewed peripherally, as though they are watching the room rather than being merely decorative elements.

The acoustics of the throne room are specifically engineered to amplify the Queen's voice while muffling the voices of those who address her.

When Kiraline speaks, her voice fills the chamber with an authority that seems almost supernatural. When a supplicant or courtier speaks, their words are quiet and easily interrupted. This ensures that any conversation in the throne room is entirely controlled by the Queen.

The floor of the throne room is polished black marble with veins of deep red that suggest blood staining. The floor is smooth and very hard, making footsteps echo sharply. Walking across this floor is walking through a space that announces your presence and your movement with every step.

GM Notes

The throne room is a location of formal audience and political confrontation. If the players have reason to approach the Queen directly, this is where that confrontation occurs. The room itself is an adversary--the height of the ceiling creates an overwhelming sense of space, the throne is designed to dominate, and the acoustics are engineered to give the Queen all the advantage in conversation.

Combat in the throne room is extremely dangerous for the players. They are entering the heart of the Queen's power. The banners might animate as animated guardian constructs. The floor might be treated with magic that hinders the players' movement while allowing the Queen and her guards

freedom. The room itself might actively oppose them through effects that are not easily explained by mundane mechanisms.

Even non-combat scenes in the throne room should carry a weight of danger. The players are in a space designed to be hostile to them, in the presence of an individual who has the power of life and death over them, in a location where power is quite literally manifested in stone and iron. The throne room should be a space where the players feel the weight of everything they have done and everything they are attempting to do.

THE SINGERS' HALL

The Singers' Hall is a long chamber, one hundred twenty feet in length, with a vaulted ceiling that rises sixty feet at its apex. The chamber is designed with acoustics in mind. A singer on the stage at one end of the hall can be heard with perfect clarity at the far end, one hundred twenty feet away. The sound quality is unmatched anywhere else in the castle or the city. Musicians from Kormor Kirak have been known to request performances in the Singers' Hall simply for the opportunity to play in its perfect acoustics.

The walls of the Singers' Hall are covered with murals depicting scenes of history. But these are not scenes of triumph or victory in the traditional sense. The murals show the history of the Century War from the Veresz perspective. In these scenes, the Veresz dynasty is shown as protector of Kormor Kirak against the encroachments of both Albion and

Terrassia. In some scenes, Kiraline is depicted standing between armies, keeping them from destroying the city. In others, she is shown negotiating with powers beyond the material world, calling down forces that maintain the balance.

The murals are frescoes, painted directly into the plaster, made to seem a permanent part of the stone. They are old, created generations ago, but the pigments are vivid. The human figures in the murals are painted with skilled attention to detail. Expressions are readable. Emotions are clear. Viewing the murals for any length of time, one comes to believe in the narrative they present--that Kiraline and the Veresz are the bulwark preventing both empires from consuming Kormor Kirak.

The stage at one end of the hall is raised eight feet above the main floor. A musician performing here has an authority position, visibly elevated above the audience. The stage is deep enough to accommodate a full orchestra, and sound from the stage projects with remarkable clarity and power due to the shape of the hall and the nature of the stone.

At the far end of the hall from the stage is a dais with a single elevated chair--the Queen's seat during performances. From this location, Kiraline can observe any performers, any events held in the hall, and can dominate the space through her position even when not herself performing or speaking.

The Singers' Hall is used for formal entertainments, for council meetings, for major announcements, and for certain ceremonies. When the hall is empty, it is profoundly quiet. The space seems to absorb sound in a way that creates an almost oppressive silence. Those who have spent time alone in the empty hall report a sense of being in a sacred space, a feeling that the hall itself is worthy of respect and reverence.

GM Notes

The Singers' Hall is a location for formal scenes, for entertainment encounters, and for investigation of the murals if the players are interested in understanding the Veresz perspective on history. The hall can host significant encounters involving performances, councils, or announcements that affect the campaign.

The murals are a propaganda piece that subtly shapes how people perceive the Veresz dynasty and the Queen's role in maintaining the city. They are extremely well-done propaganda, convincing and emotionally affecting. Players who spend time studying them might come to understand how someone could justify loyalty to Kiraline and her rule. This understanding can complicate the players' view of the castle and the political situation.

The acoustics of the hall can be used mechanically and thematically. A whispered secret from the stage can be heard at the far end. A sudden sound echoes and re-echoes until the hall is filled with noise that came from a single source. The hall amplifies truth and meaning in a way that subtly shapes how things said here are understood.

THE DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION CHAMBER

The Diplomatic Reception Chamber is where visiting ambassadors, dignities, and official guests are received before entering the more intimate spaces of the castle. The chamber is comfortable in a deliberate way--designed to put guests somewhat at ease while making clear that they are guests, not inhabitants of this place.

The chamber is a square room, sixty feet on each side, with a ceiling that rises thirty feet. This height is intentional and creates a sense of having been elevated despite not climbing at all. Soft rugs cover the floor, in shades of deep blue and gold. Comfortable chairs and settees are arranged in conversation areas. Large maps of the region hang on the walls--maps that show the Albion Empire, the Kingdom of Terrassia, the neutral city of Kormor Kirak, and the Videk Mountains that separate them.

The maps are interesting in that they consistently show Kormor Kirak as the center point of the region. The proportions are such that Kormor

Kirak appears larger and more significant than geographical accuracy would warrant. Whether this is intentional or unconscious bias in the map-maker is unclear, but the effect is present nonetheless.

One wall of the chamber is nearly entirely windows, offering a view out over the city and the borderlands. Seated in one of the chairs near these windows, a visitor can see for miles in all directions. The view is designed to remind those who view it of the significance and isolation of Kormor Kirak's position.

The chamber connects directly to the Grand Ballroom on one side and to a series of private chambers on the other. A delegation arriving for a formal visit might be received here, refreshed, brought to understand the protocols that will govern their stay, and then either moved into the ballroom for a formal event or directed to private chambers for quieter negotiations.

GM Notes

The Diplomatic Reception Chamber is a location for formal scenes of negotiation, introduction, and setting of expectations. It is a relatively safe space where violence is unlikely and where the normal rules of diplomacy apply. Scenes set here can involve careful conversation, revelation of background information, and the negotiation of terms.

The maps on the walls can be used to convey information about the political situation, to allow players to ask questions about geography and relative positions, and to ground the campaign in physical space. A player studying the maps might notice something unusual about the representation, might ask questions about what lies beyond Kormor Kirak, might begin to understand the strategic significance of their actions.

THE TRELLIS GALLERY

The Trellis Gallery is a long corridor that runs the length of one of the castle's outer walls, connecting several of the ceremonial level's major rooms. The corridor is twenty feet wide and sixty feet long, with a vaulted ceiling that rises thirty feet at its apex. But the remarkable feature of the Trellis Gallery is not the architecture--it is the living vines that cover nearly every available surface.

These vines are not a recent growth nor an invasion of the castle. They are deliberately cultivated and maintained as part of the castle's structure. The vines are dark--nearly black--and their growth is intricate and beautiful in the way that dangerous things can be beautiful. The vines form patterns along the walls and ceiling that resemble faces, reaching hands, and writhing shapes. The vines are thick enough that in places they obscure the stone of the walls almost entirely.

The vines are warm to the touch, which is disturbing for reasons that are difficult to articulate. They pulse faintly with a dark, barely visible light. This luminescence is too subtle to actually provide illumination, but it creates a glow in the darkness that is deeply unsettling. The vines seem to breathe, their growth and retreat creating a visible rhythm that might be the castle's own respiration.

The vines are alive in every sense that matters. They respond to sound.

They shift and move when approached. They seem to be aware of the presence of living things in ways that plants should not be aware. Most disturbingly, there are reports of the vines restraining people who have been in the gallery during times when Kiraline's rage or dark emotions have been particularly intense. A visitor caught in a moment of the

Queen's fury might find the vines wrapping around their limbs, holding them immobile, until her mood passes or until she commands the vines to release them.

The vines do not attack without cause. The castle staff moves through the Trellis Gallery regularly, and there are no reports of them being attacked. But there is a careful respect maintained in the gallery. One does not strike the vines. One does not damage them. One moves with quiet deference through the space, and the vines remain still and merely observe.

The vines are thought to be infused with necromantic magic, sustained by the same forces that preserve Kiraline's undead existence. They are, in a real sense, expressions of the Queen's will--extensions of her power into the stone and mortar of her castle. When she is calm, they are still. When she is troubled, they move. When she is enraged, they become weapons.

GM Notes

The Trellis Gallery is a location of atmosphere and of subtle danger. It represents the permeation of dark magic throughout the castle and the extent to which Kiraline's power extends into the physical structure itself. Scenes set in the Trellis Gallery should create a sense of unease. The vines are not overtly hostile, but their presence is unsettling. They create a sense of being in a place that is fundamentally alien, fundamentally wrong in a way that cannot be precisely defined.

The vines can become active if the players trigger Kiraline's ire. If she commands it, the vines can become restraints, attackers, and obstacles. The vines respond to emotion, not pure command, meaning that the Queen's mood governs their behavior as much as her will. A moment in which the Queen's calm composure cracks might be a moment in which the vines respond unpredictably.

The Trellis Gallery is also a location where magic might function differently than it does elsewhere in the castle. The necromantic energy infused in the vines might enhance certain types of magic and interfere with others. Healing magic might work poorly here. Necromantic magic might work better. Divination might show disturbing images. Allow the environment to influence how magic operates in this location.

PART FOUR: SECOND FLOOR (NOBLE AND GUEST QUARTERS)

THE AMBASSADOR'S SUITE

The Albion delegation occupies a sprawling set of chambers on the eastern wing of the second floor. Everything here speaks of wealth and careful diplomacy -- the furniture is matched Meridian oak, the carpets are deep blue with gold threading, and the candlesticks are stamped with the imperial sunburst. There are three distinct spaces: a sitting room with a marble fireplace and three upholstered chairs arranged for formal conversation; the ambassador's private bedchamber, appointed with a canopied bed and a writing desk that overlooks the courtyard; and adjoining quarters for the embassy staff.

But the true feature of this suite is one that guests never see. Every room has hidden peepholes carved through to observation closets built into the walls. The tiny chambers are accessed from the corridor outside, and Queen Kiraline's most trusted watchers have sat in these cramped spaces for hours, noting everything the Albion representatives do when they think no one is looking. The peepholes are expertly disguised -- they appear as slight imperfections in the wallpaper pattern, or tiny knots in the wood paneling. A guest would have to be looking for them to find them, and finding them would be a grave insult that Kiraline would not tolerate.

GM Notes

The ambassador's suite is the castle's primary intelligence-gathering post. If the party includes spies or artificers, they might discover the observation closets during a search -- but discovery means they've stumbled onto something that will complicate their relationship with the Crown. The closets themselves are narrow, dusty, and uncomfortable; sitting in one for more than an hour causes muscle cramping. Kiraline knows every word spoken in this suite. If the party tries to plan something in private, remind them that in Torony Piros, there is no such thing. The suites are connected by a servants' passage to the kitchens, allowing food and wine to be brought without passing through the public hallways. This passage is locked and guarded, but keys exist -- and keys can be stolen.

THE TERRASSIAN GUEST WING

Mirror to the Albion suite in layout but notably different in execution.

Where the Albion rooms are appointed in the imperial style -- all straight lines and perfect symmetry -- the Terrassian wing embraces their nation's aesthetic. The furniture is Feldstone pine, carved with spiraling patterns. The tapestries (these actual ones, not metaphorical) show hunting scenes and pastoral landscapes from the Terrassian heartland. The colors are warmer: rust, deep green, burnished gold.

And yet the Terrassians will notice, if they're observant, that the

Albion suite is slightly larger. The Terrassian sitting room is a foot shorter in length. The bedchamber windows are smaller, facing north and catching less light. The floors creak more noticeably here. In a hundred small ways, Kiraline has made clear which nation the castle favors, even as she claims perfect neutrality.

The accommodations are still comfortable by any standard. There are simply reminders built into every corner that the Terrassians are not quite as welcome.

GM Notes

The Terrassian delegation will not miss these slights. Their representative will mention them to the party, perhaps sourly, perhaps with grim humor. If the party includes Terrassian loyalists, this is a pressure point -- evidence of Kiraline's true leanings. If the party wants to improve relations, bringing this to the Queen's attention might change her behavior, or it might simply remind her that she's been caught being transparent, which she won't appreciate. The suites, like all guest quarters in the castle, are surrounded by the castle's extensive listening network. The Terrassians suspect as much but can do nothing about it.

THE OFFICER'S QUARTERS

A sharp departure from the guest wings. The Officer's Quarters occupy the southern portion of the second floor and are utilitarian to the point of austerity. The Red Guard's command staff -- the

Captain-at-Arms, the Sergeant-Major, and the four highest-ranking officers -- each have small private rooms barely large enough for a bed, a chest, and a desk. The walls are bare stone. No rugs. No artwork.

The common room is where the real life of these quarters happens. A long wooden table dominates the center, worn smooth by decades of elbows and card games. A fireplace takes up one entire wall, with benches arranged before it. Weapon racks hold dozens of swords and spears in perfect alignment. Maps of the castle and the surrounding territory are pinned to a cork board. The room smells of woodsmoke, leather, and steel polish. There's a pervasive chill

here -- the fires in the common room are kept low to discourage lingering. The Queen doesn't pay her officers to relax.

GM Notes

The Officer's Quarters are where the castle's military backbone lives and works. This is a good place to encounter Red Guard officers between patrols, to learn about the castle's security routines, or to pick up rumors about the guard rotation schedules. The officers are professional and loyal to Kiraline, but many are tired. The Albion-Terrassian war has been grinding on for a century, and neutral Kormor Kirak draws in soldiers from both sides seeking work. The Red Guard is staffed by mercenaries, exiles, and true believers in varying measure. A perceptive party member might notice that the officers don't actually look each other in the eye very often -- there are fractures here, old resentments. If the party can find the right officer and offer the right inducement, information can be bought. Equally, word of bribery attempts will reach Kiraline, and she will not be forgiving.

THE PORTRAIT GALLERY

A long, vaulted corridor running the length of the northern wing. The walls on both sides are lined with portraits, each in a heavy gilt frame. Every Veresz ruler going back into the deep past is represented here -- dozens of paintings spanning centuries. The oldest works are rough by modern standards, the pigments faded, the artist's skill evident but limited. But as the eye moves forward through time, the portraits grow more refined, more skilled in their rendering.

And that's when the wrongness becomes apparent.

The oldest portraits show rulers in medieval dress, wearing the crowns and regalia of their age. The next generation shows similar figures with similar features. But the faces remain consistent. And again. And again.

By the time the paintings reach the modern era, Kiraline herself appears, wearing different gowns and crowns from different periods, but unchanged. The same eyes. The same sharp cheekbones. The same thin-lipped smile.

A perceptive visitor will notice that the eyes in every painting track them as they walk. Not all at once -- it's subtle, unsettling. The eyes shift gradually, so slowly you might convince yourself it's a trick of the candlelight. Until you stop moving and realize they're still watching.

One frame near the gallery's end still hangs on the wall, but its canvas is gone. Nothing but the bare wooden backing remains. There's no nameplate, no indication of what painting once hung there.

GM Notes

The Portrait Gallery is a place to reinforce that Kiraline is not quite mortal, and that the Veresz family might be far older than the party expects. Scholars among the party might recognize that some of the clothing and crowns don't match any known historical period. The missing portrait can be a mystery -- what Veresz ruler was so shameful she was removed from history? Investigation might turn up answers in the Library of Treaties. The fact that the eyes actually do follow visitors is not a trick of perspective but low-level enchantment woven into the paintings themselves. A detect magic spell will confirm this. If a character tries to cover a painting's eyes, they might trigger wards protecting Kiraline's private spaces. The gallery is lit by candles in sconces -- a perfect place for subtle encounters, conversations in shadow, or for a character to slip away from their escort.

THE LIBRARY OF TREATIES

A serious room designed for serious work. Two stories tall, accessed by a spiral iron staircase in one corner. The walls from floor to high ceiling are lined with shelves, and the shelves are packed with books, scrolls, bound documents, and rolled parchments. There's a faint smell of old leather, aged paper, and something else -- something mineral and sharp, perhaps from the preservation treatments applied to the oldest documents.

Three heavy wooden tables are arranged in the center of the main floor, each with reading stands and chairs. Only one is ever in use. High windows let in grey mountain light but at this elevation, the light feels thin and distant. Most reading is done by candlelight and oil lamps.

The Head Librarian sits at a desk near the entrance. She -- or it -- is ancient. Her skin is the color of old parchment, stretched tight over bone. Her eyes are milky but sharp. She never seems to leave. Guards report seeing her at the desk at three in the morning, then again at dawn, as if she never sleeps. She speaks very little and then only in a dry whisper. No one is quite sure how long she's worked here. Some older servants claim she was here when they were hired twenty years ago, looking exactly as she does now.

Access to the Library is controlled. Kiraline's written permission is required. Most guests never see it. Those who do are permitted only to examine materials the librarian selects for them. The shelves in the back, behind an ornate iron gate, are off-limits. Hidden compartments exist in those shelves -- carefully constructed spaces that hold intelligence reports from spies in both the Albion Empire and the

Kingdom of Terrassia. Blackmail material on politicians, merchants, and military officers. Documentation of Kiraline's past, written in codes that only

she fully understands. These documents are lethal. Discovery of them would destroy the carefully balanced neutrality of Kormor Kirak.

GM Notes

The Library of Treaties is where the party might research the Century War, the history of the Veresz family, or the legal status of Kormor Kirak. The Head Librarian is a formidable gatekeeper. She will not be bribed, threatened, or charmed. She serves Kiraline with absolute devotion. But she will answer questions within the bounds of what she's been permitted to reveal. A clever party might request specific documents that force her to acknowledge the existence of restricted materials -- which she will neither confirm nor deny, only her slight expression shift revealing that she knows what you're asking about. The hidden compartments can be found by characters with significant investigative capability, but finding them is a violation Kiraline will eventually discover. The consequences will be severe. The spiral staircase is narrow and steep; combat in the library would be treacherous, and the Head Librarian is not defenseless. She is, after all, still here after decades of serving a vampire queen.

THE GUEST DINING HALL

A formal dining chamber designed to impress. The ceiling is high and vaulted, supported by dark wooden beams carved with heraldic designs. A massive table runs the length of the room, capable of seating forty guests along its edges. The table is set with white linen, silver place settings, and crystal glasses for every seat, ready for the next formal meal that may not occur for weeks.

The walls are paneled in dark wood, broken by tall narrow windows that look out onto the Courtyard Garden. The frames are heavily carved, and the glass is tinted slightly blue -- not enough to distort the view, but enough to give the

garden a dreamlike quality. Candelabras are mounted on the walls at regular intervals. Even in daylight, the room feels candlelit.

There's a servants' door at one end of the hall, and a musicians' gallery overlooks the room from the far wall. The floor is polished stone, worn slightly smooth by centuries of footfalls.

When meals are served here, the food is excellent. Roasted meats, fresh breads, vegetables prepared with care. Wines from the Meridian vineyards. And yet Kiraline never eats with her guests. She presides from a high chair at the head of the table, her plate before her, but she simply does not eat. If a guest is impolite enough to comment on this, she smiles and says she prefers to take her meals privately. The implication is clear enough.

GM Notes

The Guest Dining Hall is where formal occasions occur -- and where the party will gather with other NPCs for meals where conversation flows and alliances can shift. It's designed to intimidate through its size and formality; a character uncomfortable with social situations might feel lost in this vast space. The servants are Kiraline's eyes and ears. Conversations here are reported back to the Queen within the hour. If the party wants to speak in private, they must leave the dining hall. The musicians' gallery is empty during mealtimes, but sometimes late at night, music can be heard playing from it with no musician present. Szeret hears this music from her room above and wonders who plays for the empty hall. It is one of the castle's small mysteries.

PART FIVE: THIRD FLOOR (ROYAL PRIVATE LEVEL)

SZERET'S BEDROOM

The door is made of pale wood with a simple iron handle. Nothing suggests what lies beyond -- no guards, no wards, no indication that this is anything other than a servants' closet. But inside is another world entirely.

The room is circular, occupying what must be a turret or rounded section of the castle's outer wall. High ceilings allow for a large window that faces north toward the stars. A brass telescope on a wheeled stand is positioned to catch the light from that window, its eyepiece angled upward toward the night sky, ready for Szeret to use when darkness comes.

The walls are lined with shelves, packed so densely with books that spines overlap. Astronomy. Natural philosophy. History. Natural sciences. Botany. Works of poetry. Novels from distant lands that describe a world beyond these mountains -- banned in many places, carefully preserved here. Star charts are pinned to the walls between the shelves, hand-drawn or printed, some new and precise, others old and spotted with age and moisture. There are notations in the margins in a careful, feminine script.

A writing desk sits near the window with paper, ink, and a leather-bound journal. The journal is closed, locked with a small key. Near it sits a single framed portrait of a younger woman with Szeret's eyes and

Kiraline's features, worn soft at the edges.

Most striking is the warmth. A fire burns in a small brazier near the desk, kept fed with wood and coal. The room is the warmest in all of

Torony Piros. A stack of firewood sits nearby, and there's a log already split and laid at the hearth's mouth, ready to be lit. Soft cushions and thick blankets are piled on the bed. This room has been made comfortable with intention.

The walls themselves are different here -- slightly less harsh stone, almost as if the castle itself has softened in this one space.

GM Notes

This is Szeret's sanctuary, the one place in the castle where she is entirely herself. The party should understand, immediately and deeply, that this space is sacred. Szeret's character is revealed entirely through the objects in this room: her intellect, her hunger for knowledge, her yearning for the world beyond the mountains, her isolation. The telescope is not decoration -- Szeret genuinely studies the stars. The books are not dressing -- they are her companions. The fire is not excess -- it is an act of defiance against the castle's chill. If the party comes to understand Szeret and what she values, they will recognize in this room the core of who she is. If they betray her or dismiss her, they betray this room. As a GM, treat this space as the party should: with reverence, with understanding that they are privileged to enter here. The journal is off-limits to all but Szeret; if the party reads it without her permission, they are committing a violation that will have consequences. What Szeret writes in this journal is her own -- her fears, her dreams, her recordings of the night sky, perhaps her thoughts about the people who move through the castle. Opening that journal is opening a door that cannot be closed. The portrait shows a woman who was clearly loved, though Szeret never speaks of her.

KIRALJNE'S BEDCHAMBER

The door is black iron, carved with designs that shift between geometric patterns and figures that might be faces or might be clouds. No one has ever

tried to open this door uninvited. Those who have been summoned speak of it with a kind of dread.

The room exists at the intersection of physical and magical space. The walls are stone, but they live. Necromantic vines grow from them, thick as a human wrist in places, their surface rough and thorn-covered. The thorns glow with a faint red phosphorescence that provides light without any apparent source. The vines move, slowly, like the breathing of some vast creature. They retreat in places and advance in others, as if the room itself is a living organism responding to impulses that have nothing to do with normal biology.

The floor is carved with runes in patterns that defy easy understanding.

The runes are concentric circles at first, then spiraling outward into angular designs that hurt to look at directly. They're carved so deeply that the floor must be ancient stone cut down foot by foot to contain them. Some runes glow faintly, visible only in the corner of vision.

The bed dominates the center of the room: a massive four-poster frame of black iron, each post carved with faces of the dead or the damned or the merely suffering. No bed should be so large, but it is. The mattress is thick and appears to be stuffed with something darker than feathers. The covering is deep crimson, trimmed in black silk. There are no other furnishings. No chairs. No tables. Nothing to suggest comfort or rest.

The air is thick and warm, several degrees hotter than anywhere else in the castle. It smells of copper, of old blood, of flowers left too long in a tomb. Breathing becomes difficult after a few minutes; the air seems to coat the throat and lungs.

The single window is narrow and high, looking out over the castle courtyard. There is always a candle burning on the sill, a small thing but constant.

Visitors report that time feels strange here. A few minutes feels like an hour. The room seems to have weight, as if gravity pulls harder toward the bed.

GM Notes

This room is dangerous. Kiraline is most powerful here -- this is her nest, her web, her fortress. Non-creatures attempting to enter uninvited will trigger wards that cause escalating damage and discomfort. The room has a will of its own, though it is not clear if that will is Kiraline's or if the room has developed its own consciousness after centuries of her presence. The vines are not purely magical -- they are alive in some manner that defies easy classification. They do not attack, but they are aware. They track movement. They seem to recognize Kiraline and to recoil from those she does not accept. If the party enters this room, establish immediately that they are not welcome. The wards are not to be trifled with. A character who touches the vines directly might feel something -- a pulse of vitality, ancient hunger, or despair, depending on the character's moral alignment and spiritual sensitivity. The runes can be studied by a wizard or scholar, but they are written in a language older than the known kingdoms. Deciphering them fully would require immense magical knowledge and weeks of study. If a party member manages to decipher even one small portion, they learn something horrifying about what Kiraline is, what she has done, or what she plans to do. The room itself is a source of her power. Destroying or damaging the vines would weaken her, but doing so would almost certainly alert her to the attempt. As a GM, do not allow casual visits here. Make it clear that entry is death, or something worse than death.

THE QUEEN'S STUDY

A working room, and far more austere than one might expect for a queen's private space. The walls are lined with filing systems -- wooden cubbies holding rolled papers, labeled and organized in a system known only to Kiraline. A massive desk occupies the center of the room, dark wood and severely practical.

Maps cover the desk and overflow onto a table behind it. Maps of the Century War showing troop positions. Maps of Kormor Kirak and its surroundings. Maps of trade routes and supply lines. The maps are dated -- some recent, some from years past, layered atop one another.

Kiraline studies the movements of nations the way a scholar studies texts.

Correspondence is written in code. Some of it is stored in a locked cabinet behind the desk. A cipher book might unlock the correspondence's meaning, but finding one would require either

Kiraline's trust or considerable skill in breaking codes.

Intelligence reports from spies in both nations lie in neat stacks. Some are recent, dated within weeks. Others are years old but preserved, suggesting that Kiraline keeps detailed records of information over decades.

There is a small window at one corner of the study that looks out toward the Videk Mountains to the south. On a clear day, a viewer with keen sight might make out smoke or signals from distant outposts. Kiraline stands at this window often, watching the war that she does not participate in but influences from the shadows.

GM Notes

The Queen's Study is where actual governance happens. If the party enters here and Kiraline is not present, they have a chance to learn her secrets -- but the risk is enormous. The correspondence is in code and largely unreadable without the cipher. The maps can be copied but might be missed if done carelessly. The intelligence reports are a treasure trove of information about both the Albion Empire and the Kingdom of Terrassia, though without context they might be hard to interpret. A spy or information broker in the party would understand the significance of what they're seeing. The cabinet is locked with a simple mechanism but also warded magically; opening it without

disarming the ward will trigger an alarm. Knowing that the alarm has been triggered and that Kiraline knows someone entered her study adds urgency to the party's next hours. They will have to account for themselves, and the Queen will not believe innocence easily.

THE ROYAL BATH

The chamber is large and filled with steam. The air is so humid that it's difficult to breathe comfortably at first, though the body adjusts. The stone floor is laid with tiles of bloodstone -- deep red with darker veining, almost black in places. The walls are the same. The effect is of being inside something's wounds or its heart.

The bath itself is carved from a single block of stone sunk into the floor. It's large enough for several people and deep enough to submerge oneself completely. The water is hot, kept that way by underground springs that run beneath the castle. The springs tap into geothermal activity deep in the Videk Mountains. The water itself is slightly mineralized, and after a few minutes in it, the skin feels soft and the muscles relaxed.

There are no towels in sight. Instead, a low fire is kept burning in a brazier, and the bather is expected to air-dry by its heat, or to use magic, or to return to their chambers damp and uncomfortable. This is by design.

The water has properties that are whispered about but never confirmed.

The rumors say that it restores vitality. That it heals wounds. That it returns youth. That it is a secret of the Veresz family and the reason they can maintain their power. The truth is more complex: the water is simply very good for what it does, but the legends have grown around it.

GM Notes

Access to the Royal Bath is extremely restricted. Kiraline uses it. Her most trusted servants might be allowed to use it. A guest invited to bathe here would recognize it as a mark of extreme favor -- or of danger. The water itself is not magical in the sense of spellcasting, but it is touched by the same energies that keep the castle alive. A character who bathes in it will find their wounds closing faster, their energy restored, their mind clearer. The effect lasts for hours or a day depending on the severity of their condition. Multiple uses are not cumulative; the benefit diminishes if the bath is used more than once in a week. The rumor that it restores youth is false, or at least it doesn't work that way for the living. For the undead, however -- for Kiraline -- the water seems to strengthen her in ways that are not fully understood. If the party poisons the water or attempts to destroy it, they will trigger wards far more complex than those protecting the Queen's Bedchamber. The springs run deep into the mountain and are protected by magic that was old before the castle was built.

THE BONE LIBRARY

A room within a room, accessed through the Queen's Study by a hidden passage behind a panel of carved wood. The passage is narrow and feels cramped even to a human of normal height. It ends in a door that requires Kiraline's blood to open -- literally. A small wound must be made and blood smeared across the lock. The lock glows faintly red and clicks.

The Bone Library is Kiraline's private collection. The shelves are made of polished bone -- not ivory, but bone from large creatures, treated and hardened over centuries. The books are bound in leather of colors that range from pale white to deep purple-black. Some bindings appear to be made of materials that are not leather at all. Feathers, perhaps. Or skin.

The collection contains centuries of research and practice. Treatises on necromancy written in Old Meridian. Scrolls describing the process of

becoming undead, the cost and the benefit. A journal in Kiraline's own handwriting describing her transformation, written four hundred years ago. Texts on controlling the dead, on understanding the nature of death, on forcing life back into willing and unwilling corpses.

There are volumes written in languages that have no modern equivalent.

Sections of the collection seem organized by topic, but other sections follow no logic that can be easily discerned.

The room itself is heavily warded. Protective spells are woven into the very air. A character with magical sensitivity will feel them immediately: wards against intrusion, against theft, against destruction. If someone manages to enter the Bone Library and steal a book without Kiraline's knowledge, she will find out. The wards are connected to her senses. She will feel the theft and will track it. Her response will be swift and terrible.

GM Notes

The Bone Library is Kiraline's life's work. This is where her true power is documented. A party member who reads even a single volume from this collection will have access to knowledge that could be weaponized against her -- spells to disrupt her undead nature, rituals to strengthen other necromancers, secrets about her vulnerabilities. Any theft from this collection is a declaration of war. Kiraline will not forgive it. She will not negotiate. She will pursue the thief across mountains and kingdoms. The Bone Library is not meant to be accessed in a typical campaign. It is a place of ultimate danger and ultimate revelation. If the party manages to reach it, they have accomplished something truly extraordinary. If they steal from it, they have triggered Kiraline's true wrath. The hidden passage behind the panel can be found by someone searching the Queen's Study carefully, but finding it means understanding that Kiraline has secrets within her secrets. The panel itself will not open without something to pry with -- it is very deliberately not obvious.

THE NURSERY

The door is painted pale blue and decorated with a stenciled pattern of stars. It's the sort of door you might see in any noble household's family wing. It doesn't belong here, in this section of the castle reserved for Kiraline alone.

Inside is a room frozen in time. A small bed with a white frame and a mattress of feathers. Blankets embroidered with silver stars cover it. A wooden rocking chair sits near a small window that looks out toward the eastern sky. Painted wooden toys are arranged on shelves built at a child's height -- a horse on wheels, blocks with letters painted on them, a doll in a pale dress with a porcelain face.

The room smells of lavender and old wood. There is no dust, though no one has slept in this room for decades. It is kept clean with meticulous care.

A wooden chest at the foot of the bed contains more toys and small garments. Dresses that fit a child of four or five years old. Soft leather shoes. A music box that plays a simple melody when wound.

A painting hangs on one wall: a young girl with dark hair and

Kiraline's eyes, smiling. The girl is perhaps six years old in the painting. It's a skilled work, painted with obvious love.

There are no other decorations. No books. No toys that suggest a child who learned to read or study. Just the simple things of early childhood.

GM Notes

This room is not for the party. This is for Kiraline. She visits it more often than anyone suspects, and on those visits, she locks the door behind her and no one disturbs her. A party member who discovers this room has stumbled onto something the Queen would kill to keep private. This is not a room of power or secrets -- this is a room of pain. The child in the portrait was almost

certainly Szeret, or a sibling who did not survive, or something else entirely. Kiraline's past is her own, and the fact that she keeps this room, maintains it, visits it, suggests that even a vampire queen carries grief. If a party member enters this room and learns to sympathize with Kiraline through what it reveals, they will have glimpsed something true about her. If they use what they learn as leverage, they will earn a hatred that is personal and profound. The music box can be played, and the melody is haunting -- simple and childlike but tinged with melancholy. Szeret hears this melody sometimes late at night and does not know why.

PART SIX: THE TOWERS

TOWER OF THE WATCH

The tallest structure in Torony Piros, rising above all other buildings and turrets. The exterior is the same red stone as the rest of the castle, but this tower is narrower, built for function rather than grandeur. A spiral staircase begins at the base and winds upward in a tight corkscrew that requires careful footwork. The steps are stone worn smooth by centuries of boot heels. The climb is long -- roughly two hundred and forty steps to the top -- and the staircase is narrow enough that two people cannot pass side by side.

Openings in the walls at regular intervals let in air and light, but these gaps are narrow slits designed more for defense than for view. Any defender at the top of this staircase would have an excellent position against any attacker climbing it.

The top of the tower opens into a circular chamber with windows on all sides. The floor is worn stone with a large brazier in the center. This is where the signal fire burns in times of war or dire need. The fire is not currently lit --

Kormor Kirak maintains its neutrality. But the fuel is stacked nearby, ready to be used.

Three large spyglasses are mounted on stands, each angled toward different parts of the compass. These are not simple telescopes but military instruments designed to see great distances. A spyglass focused on the mountain passes to the south can see a rider approaching from a day's journey away, given clear weather. The Red Guard maintains a constant watch here, rotating through shifts. At any hour, at least one soldier is present, watching.

Below the top chamber, another level down, is the barracks room where off-duty watchers rest. It's crude -- hammocks strung between hooks, a small brazier for warmth, shelves holding food rations and water.

GM Notes

The Tower of the Watch is the castle's eyes on the world. Information about approaching armies, traders, refugees, or messengers first arrives here. If the party wants to know what's approaching from outside the castle, this is where they come. The watchers are professional soldiers who take their duty seriously. They can be bribed, but doing so requires offering them something they value more than Kiraline's wrath -- which is a high bar. The climb up the staircase is excellent for a chase scene or for isolating a character. Combat in the tower's top chamber would be constrained and dangerous; the windows are small and open to a hundred-foot fall. The spyglasses are military equipment and Kiraline's property; damaging them or stealing them would constitute an act of war. A clever party might observe the watchers' rotation and timing, learning when the tower is least-staffed. The watchers maintain a log of observations -- a thick ledger that records everything they've seen. This ledger is updated daily and is kept secured. If the party could read it, they would have weeks of information about the movements of Albion and Terrasian forces. Getting access to that log would require either the permission of the watchers themselves or a raid on the tower in the dead of night.

TOWER OF BELLS

The second-tallest structure and, according to nearly every account, the most unsettling. The tower is built of the same red stone, but it has acquired a patina over the centuries -- darker stone visible beneath the lighter, as if the tower itself is aging. There is no interior that visitors are permitted to access. The door at the base is locked and guarded by a single Red Guard who requests transfers more frequently than any other soldier in the castle.

The bells themselves hang in the open belfry at the tower's top, visible from anywhere in Kormor Kirak if you know to look up. There are seven of them, each cast from bronze of unknown origin. The metal is pale and unmarked by discoloration, as if it refuses to age. The bells are enormous -- the largest is perhaps twelve feet tall and proportionally massive.

No one has ever rung these bells intentionally. Yet on full moons, they ring. The sound is low and resonant, a single note that sustains for minutes. Not a peal or a sequence -- just one massive tone that echoes through the mountains and can be heard throughout Kormor Kirak. It happens on every full moon, without fail, and has for as long as anyone can remember.

The effect of the ringing is peculiar. Livestock becomes skittish. Dogs howl. A few people claim to hear other sounds beneath the bell-tone -- whispers, or distant screaming, or the sound of wind in an impossible place. Those who claim this are often not believed, or are treated as touched by something unwholesome.

The birds of Kormor Kirak avoid the Tower of Bells. No birds nest here.

None roost here. When the bells ring on full moons, every bird in the city falls silent.

GM Notes

The Tower of Bells is a mystery that will never be fully explained. It is meant to be eerie and inexplicable. The bells are too old and too strange to have a mundane origin. Kiraline knows what they are and why they ring, but she will not explain. She treats them with a kind of reverence, ensuring they are protected and undamaged. If a player character asks her about the bells directly, she will smile and change the subject, in a way that suggests the question itself is dangerous. The guard at the door is a soldier named Torben Koss who is increasingly desperate to transfer away from the castle. He's been assigned to guard the Tower of Bells for six months and wants nothing more than to leave. If the party approaches him with sympathy and the right incentives, he might be convinced to share what he's seen -- which is very little, as he avoids looking up at the tower. But he's heard things in the night. He's heard the guard before him screaming, though no one seems to remember there being a previous guard. The full moons are the best time to observe the phenomenon. A party resting in Kormor Kirak during a full moon will experience the ringing and its effects. Suggest that it affects them too -- they feel on edge, their dreams are disturbed, and whatever magical sensitivity they possess tingles with proximity to something ancient.

TOWER OF THORNS

A tower that is barely visible from the castle grounds because it is almost entirely overgrown. The red stone is obscured beneath a thick mat of necromantic vines identical to those that grow in Kiraline's bedchamber and throughout the castle. But here, the vines are vastly more abundant. They are thick as tree trunks at the base and grow in such density that the tower's shape is obscured. It looks less like a tower and more like a vast twisted tree rooted in castle stone.

The vines move constantly, a slow writhing that is not quite animate but not quite mechanical either. They pulse with faint red light from within, as if something luminous moves through them. Thorns the length of a dagger protrude from their surface, and the thorns too glow faintly.

There is a doorway at the base, still visible, though it's flanked by vines that could close it if they desired. The way in is narrow and requires pushing past living growth. The thorns will catch on clothing and skin. There is no way to enter this tower without the vines being aware of it.

Inside, the tower is a spiral of stone stairs leading upward. But the stairs are choked with vines. They cover every surface except the thinnest path in the center of each step. The vines here are aggressive in a way those outside are not. They reach toward movement. They try to entangle. A character moving up these stairs must be deliberate and careful. Fast movement will trigger a response -- the vines will grab, they will try to hold, they will try to drag the character backward or downward.

At the very top of the Tower of Thorns is a ritual chamber. The room is open to the sky through a roof that has collapsed or was never built.

The floor is carved with runes far more complex than those in

Kiraline's bedchamber -- runes that actually move, the stone flowing like liquid to form new patterns and then solidifying. This is where

Kiraline performs her most powerful magic. The vines here are denser still, forming a kind of nest in the center of the chamber. The magic here is so intense that a mage will feel it burning against their mind.

GM Notes

The Tower of Thorns is Kiraline's magical stronghold. She is at her most powerful here, and if the party ever entered this tower against her will, they would almost certainly die. The vines are not individually intelligent, but they

respond to Kiraline's will with absolute obedience. She can move them, direct them, and use them as weapons. The ritual chamber at the top is where she performs the magic that sustains her undead nature and that keeps Torony Piros alive. A party member who enters this tower uninvited and is not killed immediately is being allowed to live for a reason. Perhaps Kiraline wants them to see her power. Perhaps she wants them to understand what they face. Perhaps she has use for them. The vines can be damaged by fire or by certain kinds of magic, but damaging them here, in the Tower of Thorns, is attacking Kiraline herself. The magical wards here are not like those in other parts of the castle -- they are not designed to keep people out but to keep Kiraline's power in. Breaking them could have catastrophic consequences. The tower is rarely visited except by Kiraline and her most trusted servants. Most Red Guards are forbidden from entering.

THE RED TOWER

The original structure. The heart of Torony Piros and its namesake. In ancient times, before there was a castle around it, there was just this tower -- built of red stone that gives the structure its name, with no explanation of who built it or why.

The lower levels of the Red Tower are accessible. They contain artifacts and relics of the Veresz dynasty going back centuries. Display cases hold crowns and scepters, weapons and armor, documents written in the

Queen's hand. A narrow museum maintained by an elderly curator who is rarely seen. The displays change seasonally. Some artifacts are brought out from storage and displayed, then returned and others brought forward. No one is certain what determines which artifacts are shown.

The walls of the lower levels are covered in older carvings -- not runes, but pictographs. Scenes of things that are difficult to interpret. Figures that might be people or might be something else. The meaning is lost to time.

But the upper chamber is sealed. Above the third level, the stairs are blocked by a door of black iron that is covered entirely in wards. The wards are so densely layered that they actually glow -- a faint blue-white light that is visible day and night. The door has no lock that can be picked. It can only be opened by Kiraline, and she has never opened it in the presence of any of her servants.

The age of the wards is difficult to determine. They are far older than the castle, far older than the Veresz family itself. The metal of the door is not iron, though it appears to be. Weapons do not scratch it.

Magic does not affect it. It simply exists, a barrier between the known castle and whatever lies beyond.

No one knows what is behind the door. Kiraline will not speak of it. The oldest servants have theories -- relics of the people who built the tower, sources of magical power, doors to other places. Speculation in the castle kitchens suggests anything from bound spirits to the corpse of some ancient god.

What is known: Kiraline has never needed to open that door. Her power is sufficient without whatever might lie behind it. And yet she guards it obsessively. If the castle were under siege, if her rule was collapsing, the sealed chamber is the one thing she would protect above all others.

GM Notes

The Red Tower is the campaign's deepest mystery and its potential endgame. What lies behind that door is something you, the GM, must decide. It should be something that changes the nature of the world, or explains Kiraline's origin, or provides power that alters the balance of the Century War. It could be a source of immense magical power. It could be a being imprisoned or preserved. It could be a doorway to something older and larger than the

kingdoms of men. Whatever it is, it must be worthy of four hundred years of Kiraline's protection. The sealed chamber is the ultimate revelation. If the party breaches it, the campaign enters its final phase. Kiraline's reaction will be immediate and terrible. She will stop caring about neutrality, about appearances, about anything except stopping them from reaching that door. The wards on the door can be studied by wizards and mages, but they are so intricate that months of research would be required to understand even a small portion of them. A character might, through careful magical analysis, determine that the wards are not designed to keep things in, but to keep things out -- or perhaps to keep something in place, preventing it from moving. The lower levels of the Red Tower are accessible and safe. This is a good place for the party to gather information and artifact lore. The curator, if questioned, will admit that the upper chamber has always been sealed, as far as he knows. He is old, perhaps older than a normal human should be, and his memory of how long he's held the position is fuzzy. The pictographs on the walls might, with study, be partially decoded. They suggest that the Red Tower predates the kingdom, the city, and perhaps the current age entirely.

PART SEVEN: BELOW GROUND, LEVEL 1 -- UTILITY AND STORAGE

THE WINE CRYPTS

The air tastes of earth and old fermentation. Wooden racks stretch down corridors carved into bedrock, holding bottles that have never seen daylight. The stone here is cooler and more stable than the upper cellars, and moisture beads on the walls despite the dryness of the air itself -- a contradiction that makes new visitors uneasy. Lantern light catches on dust that seems to float without falling.

The oldest bottles date back four centuries. Their labels are written in hands none of the current staff can read. Some bottles are sealed not with cork but with wax pressed thick and dark, symbols pressed into the surface before it hardened. These barrels are marked separately from the wine stores, kept in a narrow alcove where the temperature drops further. The few servants who tend this section do so quickly and will not explain why certain barrels must never be opened.

At the far end of the crypts, three sealed iron doors lead to chambers not listed in any official inventory. The locks are ancient and the keys, if they exist, are held by the Queen alone.

GM Notes

The wine crypts are a good place for investigation and discovery without immediate danger. Older bottles contain records of the Veresz lineage if examined closely -- dates, names, hints at the family's true age. The sealed barrels contain no wine; this is where the Queen keeps reserves of preserved blood, separated by type and vintage. The locked doors at the far end lead to the true wine vault -- a climate-controlled chamber where she keeps bottles from the conquest of cities, the fall of kingdoms, the deaths of particular enemies she wished to remember. A successful Arcana check reveals faint preservation magic on certain bottles, suggesting their contents never spoil. One lock can be picked by a rogue (DC 15), but the Queen will know it within the hour through wards she maintains on the doors.

THE ETERN

A massive chamber opens suddenly, the ceiling lost to darkness above.

The space swallows sound in an unsettling way. Below, a body of water so clear you can see the stone floor twenty feet down -- perfectly still, perfectly silent.

The spring feeds from a carved opening high in the wall, cold water trickling down in defiance of gravity for the last ten feet before it hits the surface without a ripple.

The walls are covered in mineral deposits that glow faintly when lantern light finds them. Channels cut into the stone direct water to various levels of the castle through systems that predate the Veresz occupation.

The engineering is sound and the water is pure, but at the center of the cistern, directly below the spring inlet, the water shifts from clear to a darkness so complete it seems to absorb light.

There is no sound except the water falling. No birds nest here. No insects. The air is cold enough to see breath.

GM Notes

The cistern serves the castle's practical water needs, but the deep waters are home to something older than the city. Not hostile, necessarily, but not human. A successful Survival check reveals the water circulates in unusual patterns -- something massive moves through the cistern regularly, deep down. A character who falls in will find the water shockingly warm at depths below fifteen feet, contradicting all logic. Whatever lives here does not want to be seen, and it prefers the darkness. It may be an ancient creature bound to the castle by the original construction, or it may be something drawn to the concentration of death-magic in the levels below. The Queen never drinks from this water, though she allows the city to draw from a filtered outlet. The cistern can be mapped and explored, but characters who spend more than an hour in the chamber experience persistent cold that no fire fully dispels for days after.

THE OLD FOUNDATIONS

Older than the castle itself, rougher than the precision stonework above. The blocks are massive, cut with methods that modern masons cannot fully understand. They fit together so perfectly that a knife blade cannot find the seams. The air here is ancient in a way that makes the breath come shallow.

Carved into these stones are symbols -- not writing exactly, but intentional marks in patterns that suggest meaning. Some chambers have entire walls of these symbols, spiraling around pillars so thick it would take a dozen people holding hands to circle them. The symbols never quite repeat, but themes return. Circles within circles. Hands reaching downward. Eyes that seem to follow movement.

Several corridors have partially collapsed, the weight of centuries wearing on even this engineered stone. Some of the collapse appears deliberate -- the collapse points are too regular, the gaps left too uniform. Someone sealed sections of these foundations off, long ago, and made sure the seal would look like a natural failure.

GM Notes

The Old Foundations are a historical treasure and a warning. These stones predate human civilization in this region; they're the work of a culture that either vanished or was extinguished before the Veresz took control. The symbols contain astronomical information when decoded by someone with knowledge of ancient languages or extensive Arcana study. More troublingly, some symbols match the design language found in the Ritual Chamber on Level 3 and the Sealed Door on Level 4. This suggests either a long continuity of dark magic in this location, or that whoever built these foundations was interested in summoning and binding the same forces the Veresz now control.

The collapsed sections are not natural failures. The Queen or her predecessors deliberately sealed them. A thorough party can find one sealed passage that's partially collapsed but navigable. It leads to a smaller chamber containing the remains of stone altars and channels that once ran with liquid -- not water. The artifacts here predate any known historical period. Touching them or attempting to understand their function triggers wards; each ward can be disabled with Arcana checks (DC 17) but failure causes the character to age one year per point they failed by, the aging reversed only by a restoration spell or similar magic.

THE SERVANT TUNNELS

Narrow passages, barely wide enough for two people to pass. The walls are smooth where centuries of hands have brushed against them. These are working tunnels, not meant to impress. They connect kitchens to dining halls, bedchambers to private stairs, every major chamber of the castle to others in ways the primary architecture never reveals.

Maps exist in the Steward's office and the Head of Servants' quarters, but they're outdated and noted with question marks in several places.

Some tunnels have been sealed -- neat brick walls across the passages, no damage or collapse. Others are sealed differently: walls of black stone, smooth and warm to the touch, that have no seams and no obvious way they could have been constructed. Servants refuse to go near these sections.

In three places, the tunnel walls are covered in recent scratch marks, gouges deep enough to draw blood if you touch them. Nothing has ever been killed in these tunnels, according to records, but twice in the past year servants have emerged pale and shaking, unwilling to discuss what they'd seen or heard. Neither would walk the tunnels again.

GM Notes

The Servant Tunnels are the castle's nervous system -- they allow fast, unobserved movement through most areas. A party can use them for infiltration, but doing so feels wrong. The air in the tunnels is too still, and sound carries in unusual ways -- voices spoken five tunnels over are sometimes audible, but sounds made in the tunnel itself are swallowed. A rogue or someone with knowledge of stonework notices that while the rough brick seals are centuries old, the black stone seals are recent -- within the last ten years. Someone wanted to cut off sections of these tunnels from the rest of the network.

The scratch marks are from the night two servants encountered something that had escaped from the deeper levels during a shift in the wards. One servant survived and was quietly retired with a pension. The other was found later in the Cold Storage, drained of blood but otherwise undamaged. A successful Intelligence check reveals the gouges don't match any weapon or tool recorded in the castle's inventory. They were made by something with claws or appendages that moved with unusual articulation.

One sealed black-stone wall can be detected as a secret door with a successful Investigation check (DC 16). It leads to a junction point where three servant tunnels merge, one of which descends further than any map accounts for. The Queen's private exit from the castle -- a shortcut that bypasses the dungeons and ritual levels entirely. No party should access this without significant preparation, but discovering it can alter a campaign's endgame significantly.

THE COLD STORAGE

The temperature drops fifteen degrees in the span of five feet. Breath turns to fog immediately upon entry. The chamber is far larger than any single castle

should require for food storage -- nearly two hundred feet long and forty feet wide, the ceiling high enough to lose in shadow.

Hooks hang from the ceiling in regular intervals, sturdy iron attachment points designed for hanging weight. Drainage channels cut the floor in a grid pattern, all flowing toward a central sump that disappears into the bedrock. The stone itself is stained in ways that soap cannot remove -- dark discoloration that runs deep.

Actual supplies occupy one section: preserved meats wrapped in cloth and wax, barrels of salted fish, sealed containers of butter and cheese kept in the cold. These are rotated regularly and keep for far longer than they should. The temperature is maintained by something other than the winter air -- heat sinks into the stone and simply vanishes. Even in summer, the chamber remains frozen.

The rest of the chamber is empty except for shadow and the distant sound of water flowing through unseen channels beneath the floor.

GM Notes

The Cold Storage is the castle's secret. The official explanation -- meat and provisions storage -- is partially true. The chamber was built specifically for a different purpose: the preservation of corpses before they're processed in the Flesh Workshop. The hooks held bodies. The drainage channels carried fluids. The stains are centuries old and permanent.

Currently, the storage is used minimally for its official purpose -- the Queen and her direct servants eat elsewhere and don't require the preservation of bulk supplies. But the chamber is sometimes used again, and when it is, the entire staff knows not to ask questions. A successful Investigation check (DC 14) reveals the drainage channels all converge at the sump, which leads down to passages below the main dungeons. Someone -- or something -- regularly cleans these channels from below. The work is meticulous and recent.

The temperature maintenance is magical, a permanent effect woven into the stone by someone with extensive knowledge of transmutation. The ritual that created it is carved into the base of the eastern wall, in a language that predates even the Old Foundations. Studying it for more than a few minutes causes nosebleeds. Attempting to understand it fully requires a successful Arcana save (DC 18) or the reader suffers 3d6 psychic damage as their mind encounters concepts it cannot process.

PART EIGHT: BELOW GROUND, LEVEL 2 -- THE DUNGEONS

THE DUNGEONS

The smell hits first -- old stone, human suffering, and something metallic and sour underneath. The air is damp despite being below the water table. The corridors stretch in both directions, lined with iron-barred cells. Some cells are empty. Some hold prisoners.

Not all prisoners are visibly restrained. Some sit on the edges of stone bunks, staring at nothing. Others pace in circuits so worn the stone is grooved. A few are chained -- manacles attached to the wall, heavy enough that even the slightest movement makes them rattle. The chains are old iron, thickly encrusted with rust and other stains.

Water drips constantly. It echoes off the vaulted ceiling, creating a rhythm that sounds almost like a heartbeat. The Red Guards patrol in pairs, their armor gleaming despite the gloom, their faces carefully blank. They don't make eye contact with the prisoners and move through the dungeons with obvious discomfort.

The cells themselves are basic -- stone floor, stone bench, a bucket for waste, a single barred window that looks into the corridor. Some prisoners are political prisoners, nobles from rival families or minor nobility who committed offense against the throne. Some are criminals

-- murderers, thieves, vandals. Some were brought here on the Queen's direct order for no stated reason. There are always several cells whose occupants no one will explain.

GM Notes

The dungeons are oppressive and designed to break spirits slowly. The dampness is caused by seepage from the Cistern above; water weeps through cracks in the ceiling. A character with knowledge of medicine or biology notices the prisoners are not starving -- they're fed regularly, their water is fresh, and minor infections are treated by a dungeon physician. This is not mercy; it's maintenance. Prisoners who are too weak become useless. The Queen requires her subjects to remain functional for as long as they serve their purposes.

The cells are secure but not magically sealed. A rogue can pick locks (DC 16) but the guards will notice within minutes. A stronger approach is available: the Head Jailer has explicit orders not to restrict powerful magic users -- magically disabling locks alarms the entire dungeon, but no guards are empowered to execute prisoners without the

Queen's express order, and they will attempt capture rather than kill.

Several prisoners have been here for years. One old woman is the cell record holder -- imprisoned for twenty-seven years for a crime no one remembers. She's not insane, but she's not entirely present either.

She speaks to people who aren't there and seems surprised by visitors.

A character who spends time with her realizes she was imprisoned specifically to be forgotten. The Queen wanted her to exist in isolation, slowly deteriorating, never dying but never living either.

One prisoner is a plant -- a royal spy placed in the dungeons to monitor other prisoners and report on any escape attempts. They're fed better than other prisoners, and their cell door has a lock that never actually engages. A successful Insight check (DC 15) identifies the deception. Learning this can create complications if the party attempts escape.

THE FEEDING CHAMBER

A single room, isolated from the main dungeon corridor by a thick oak door bound with iron. The inside is... wrong. The walls are stone, but the stone is unusually warm. Not hot -- human-body temperature, as if the walls themselves are flesh. The floors are worn smooth by feet and something else, something that created channels and grooves in patterns that don't match normal walking.

Bloodstains cover every surface. The walls, the floors, even portions of the ceiling. Soap and water have been applied obsessively -- you can see the fresh scrubbing marks on the walls -- but the stains don't fully fade. Iron bleeds at certain depths into the stone. The room has been cleaned and cleaned and cleaned for centuries, and the blood is still there.

The centerpiece is a heavy wooden chair, reinforced with iron straps and bolts. Manacles are mounted to the armrests and legs. The wood is stained dark. Small channels run from beneath the chair to drains in the floor. The chair faces a mirror -- a large, ancient mirror, its frame carved from black wood with symbols worked into every inch. The mirror shows the chair clearly and the person who sits in it.

There are no windows. No decoration. No comfort. The room is lit by a single candelabra that never goes out, its candles replaced when needed but never fully consumed.

GM Notes

This is the Queen's private feeding chamber. Every vampire ruler needs a place to feed without judgment, and this is hers. Prisoners are brought here from the dungeons above. Most never return. Some do, and they're changed -- missing blood, confused about time, unable to remember the experience clearly. A few remember fragments: the Queen's voice, the sensation of hunger beyond their own, the terrible intimacy of feeding.

The chair is not merely functional -- it's a throne of a sort. The

Queen sits here and enacts the oldest right of nobility: the power to take life, to feed, to exist above law and mercy. The room is maintained obsessively because the Queen is aware of what it represents and refuses to let it become squalid. Even horror can be elegant.

The mirror is the room's true secret. It's not a simple reflective surface. It's a scrying artifact created centuries ago by a mage who served the Veresz dynasty. It allows the Queen to observe any reflective surface in the castle from this single mirror -- a way to watch for betrayal, to monitor her guards, to ensure loyalty. A character who touches the mirror sees a terrible vision: all the reflections at once, overlapping and fragmenting, showing every room in the castle, every surface that might hold a reflection. Resist the vision with a successful Wisdom save (DC 17) or be stunned for 1d4 rounds as your mind struggles to process the information.

If the party brings a prisoner here before the session, the prisoner is already gone. The chair is empty. But the candles are still burning. And the blood stains seem fresher than they were this morning.

THE OUBLIETTE

Pit cells. Heavy iron grates set into the floor, each one covering a dark shaft that drops away. The grates are locked from above with chains and padlocks that require a key held by the Head Jailer. Prisoners are lowered down by rope attached to the chains, or simply dropped if the guards are impatient.

Some pits are thirty feet deep. The bottom is dry stone, littered with bones and the remains of previous occupants. These prisoners are left to slowly starve or die of thirst. Others are deeper -- seventy feet, eighty feet, depths that echo strangely when anything falls. A few pits are so deep that the bottom is lost to darkness even when a lantern is lowered all the way down.

Occasionally, sounds come from the deepest pits. Not human sounds.

Scraping, chittering, wet noises that suggest movement in the dark.

Sometimes something scrambles upward in the dark, then retreats again.

The guards refuse to lower prisoners into the seven deepest oubliettes, claiming they're "occupied." The Queen has never contradicted them.

One pit is different -- the grate is newer, and the locks are different. They're not maintained keys; they're locked with wards, magical seals that require knowledge of arcane symbols to open. Whatever was put in this pit recently, and the Queen herself sealed it.

GM Notes

The oubliettes are designed specifically as a form of torture -- a slow descent into madness and death, or worse. Most prisoners dropped here don't survive more than two weeks. Food and water are not provided. Death comes from thirst, hunger, injury from the fall, or from whatever else might exist in the darkness.

The "occupied" pits contain something else entirely. Long ago, during the conquest of Kormor Kirak, several powerful entities were captured by the Queen and bound in these oubliettes rather than killed. They're weakened by magical wards, contained by the depth and the darkness, but they're still alive. They're still aware. The scraping sounds are them moving through their pit prisons, and the chittering is some form of communication. Whether they're demons, undead creatures, or something else is left to the GM's discretion, but they're dangerous enough that even the Queen respects the seals.

The newer pit with ward-sealed locks contains something the Queen imprisoned personally within the last year. A character with Arcana knowledge can examine the wards (DC 18) and determine that whatever is inside is either dying slowly or being kept deliberately weak. The wards are maintained by daily infusions of magical energy -- blood, most likely, poured into the pit from above.

THE JAILER'S QUARTERS

A small suite of rooms carved into the stone. The Head Jailer's domain.

Keys hang from hooks on every wall -- hundreds of them, each labeled in careful handwriting. Ledgers fill wooden shelves, records of every prisoner, their charges, their sentences, the date they arrived and the date they were released or... ceased to require housing.

A narrow cot stands in one corner, military-neat, with one blanket folded at the foot. A desk holds writing supplies and correspondence with the Queen -- letters discussing security improvements, prisoner transfers, and occasionally, what sounds like strategic advice. The

Jailer is not merely a custodian; they're a trusted advisor.

Instruments hang on one wall -- what might be used for interrogation or medical examination, depending on your perspective. Pincers, forceps, blades, a device for holding fingers in place. They're maintained meticulously, sharpened, arranged by size. A small leather journal near them contains notes in the Jailer's hand: interview notes, observations, records of what prisoners revealed under questioning.

Everything in the room is functional, cold, and perfectly organized.

There are no decorations, no personal effects, no indication that the person who lives here has any life outside these stone walls.

GM Notes

The Head Jailer is loyal to the Queen absolutely. Not through coercion or fear, but through a genuine belief that order and security require the dungeons and the work done within them. They're not a sadist -- they don't enjoy the torture, but they see it as necessary work, the kind that someone must do. They're highly competent, impossible to bribe with gold or promises, and they know the dungeons better than anyone alive.

The keys can be stolen or copied (Sleight of Hand check, DC 15), but the Jailer will notice within 12 hours when making their rounds. The ledgers contain valuable information -- the location of secret prisoners, patterns in who's released and who's not (the Queen occasionally needs someone eliminated quietly), and names of people who've been reported dead to their families but are still in the cells. This information could be used to leverage the Jailer, blackmail the Queen, or confirm suspicions about corruption.

The interrogation journal is the room's most valuable secret. It contains a record of what prisoners said when they broke -- which ones had information, which ones were actually guilty, which ones were imprisoned out of spite or politics. An entry from two months ago notes that a prisoner still listed as active revealed information about a plot against the Queen. The prisoner is not

in the main dungeons. They're not in the oubliettes. The Jailer's final entry about them says simply:

"The Queen took them personally. Unsure of disposition. Key to cell marked for removal."

THE DUNGEON GUARD POST AND ARMORY

Heavy doors of reinforced oak with multiple locks seal this chamber. The

Red Guards assigned here are the regiment's hardest -- soldiers who earned this posting as a punishment or because they volunteered, knowing that dungeon duty would mark them as different, harder, less amenable to mercy.

The guard post contains a long table where shifts are logged and orders distributed. A brazier provides heat, its coals kept burning constantly.

The walls are lined with armor stands, weapons racks, and shields. Every item is maintained to perfect condition -- no rust, no dents, no signs of wear. The guards who maintain the armory treat it like a temple.

The armory itself is extensive. Enough weapons and armor to equip two hundred soldiers. Long swords, short swords, morning stars, axes, crossbows with bolts organized by quiver. Armor in rows -- plate armor that catches the light, leather armor oiled and supple, helmets of different designs all painted the same deep red as the Queen's colors.

Below the visible weapons are locked cabinets. The guards refuse to explain what's stored inside, and the keys are held by the Head Guard, a woman named Seska who has served in the dungeons for fifteen years and who has never smiled in the presence of a prisoner.

GM Notes

The guard post is one of the most dangerous locations in the castle to attempt infiltration or theft. The guards are vigilant, trained, and willing to die defending the post. They're not cruel by nature, but they're hardened and they follow orders without question.

The locked cabinets below contain specialized weapons created for specific tasks -- weapons designed to kill undead, weapons that can harm creatures with magical defenses, weapons that the Queen uses to maintain control over her own servants. One cabinet holds devices that might be torture implements or might be something else entirely -- they're made of materials that shouldn't exist and covered in markings in the language of the Old Foundations.

The guards' shift roster is kept meticulously. A character who can access and interpret it learns the rotation, the shift changes, the times when the post is staffed by the minimum number of soldiers.

There's one 20-minute window during shift change when only three guards are present, and they're focused on briefing the incoming shift. This is the smallest opening in the castle's security.

Seska is not entirely loyal to the Queen. She's loyal to order, to discipline, to the structure of the guard. She believes that structure is necessary for civilization, and the Queen provides that structure.

But she's also aware that the work done here corrupts. She has a small bottle of poison hidden in her private quarters, which she updates every year. If the structure ever breaks, if chaos comes, she's prepared to use it on herself rather than live in a world without order. A character who learns this and appeals to her sense of duty might find her willing to disable a lock or provide information, but only if they can convince her that their actions serve the greater good of maintaining order.

PART NINE: BELOW GROUND, LEVEL 3 -- THE NECROMANTIC LEVEL

The air here is alive in wrong ways. It moves without wind. It carries tastes -- copper, ozone, something sweet and rotten. The walls themselves seem to breathe. Temperature fluctuates in patterns that make no sense, one moment freezing and the next warm enough to sweat. The light from torches and lanterns flickers differently here, as if something is consuming the illumination.

The stone is discolored in patches -- dark stains, purple veins running through the rock, spots where mineral deposits have grown in shapes that almost look deliberate. Carved runes run along every corridor, repeated in patterns that seem to convey warnings or perhaps invitations. The older runes are different from the newer ones, suggesting centuries of ritual reinforcement.

The passages here are not straight. They curve, turn, double back on themselves in layouts that shouldn't fit within the castle's dimensional structure. A character with Arcana knowledge realizes that the geometry is deliberately twisted to channel magical forces -- the corridors are designed to focus and concentrate necromantic energy.

Walking through them, you feel the pull of that energy, the way your body and your lifeforce are being drawn along specific paths.

THE RITUAL CHAMBER

A massive circular room. The ceiling is lost to darkness, but echoes suggest it's at least fifty feet high. The floor is inlaid with an intricate circle -- silver lines and obsidian blocks creating a pattern that would take weeks to map completely. The pattern is not merely decorative; it pulses faintly with light that comes from nowhere and casts no shadows.

Candelabras of black iron stand at points around the circle, each one holding dozens of candles that burn with cold, blue-white flames. The flames don't flicker. They don't move with breath or air. They simply burn, eternal and unchanged. The heat from them somehow makes the room colder.

The walls are completely covered in runes and symbols. Not scratched in

-- carved deeply, in some places cut so far into the stone that the letters are three feet tall. The symbols shimmer slightly when looked at directly. Some glow with their own light. Others seem to move when your attention is elsewhere, though you never see them shift.

The air here is heavy. It resists movement. A person walking through the chamber moves as if underwater, their steps slower, their breath harder to draw. Standing in the center of the circle, the weight of the air is almost unbearable, pressing down like a physical thing.

In the circle's center is a raised stone platform, empty except for dried bloodstains. This is where things are bound. This is where the

Queen rites undead to her will.

GM Notes

The Ritual Chamber is the heart of the Queen's power. This is where she raises the dead, binds spirits, constrains demons, and weaves the necromantic energies that keep her servants enslaved. The magic here is ancient and woven into every stone. It's not something the Queen created; she inherited it and has maintained it for centuries.

Spellcasters suffer disadvantage on spell saves in this chamber due to the overwhelming magical presence. Wizards, sorcerers, clerics, and warlocks all feel a pull when they enter -- as if their spells want to be cast, as if the magic here is hungry and calling to other magic.

After more than one hour in the chamber, spellcasters suffer one level of exhaustion as the ambient necromancy drains their vitality.

The runes on the walls are not random. They form a complete ritual sequence, recorded for posterity. A character with Arcana knowledge and time to study can decipher them (DC 20), learning the basic steps of a ritual to raise a corpse as undead, bind a spirit, or summon a minor undead entity. This knowledge is enough to perform a ritual without the

Queen's resources, but attempting it invokes her attention immediately

-- the runes are tied to her consciousness, and any use of the chamber alerts her.

The bloodstains on the platform are not only the Queen's victims. Some are from failed rituals. In at least one case, decades ago, a ritual went wrong and the blood is from the Queen herself. This is not common

-- she is nearly impossible to injure -- but it has happened. The stains remain as a record, and they're visible to anyone with magical sight or who spends significant time studying the platform.

THE FLESH WORKSHOP

The smell is the first thing. Rot, preservatives, something chemical and sharp underneath. The workshop is a chamber roughly sixty feet long and forty feet wide. The space is divided into stations, each one dedicated to a specific function.

Surgical tables dominate the space -- three of them, positioned under openings in the ceiling that allow light (magical light, coming from nowhere apparent) to shine down on the work surface. The tables are made of dark wood and metal, with channels carved into them and drains that lead down through the floor. Restraints are bolted to each table at regular intervals.

Behind the tables are preservation tanks -- enormous glass and metal containers filled with preservative fluids that range from clear to thick and amber to a sickly purple. Bodies are stored here, some whole, some dismembered. Some are clearly corpses. Others move slightly within the fluid, kept in a state between death and something else by the preservatives.

The walls are lined with tools. Surgical saws, knives of different sizes, pincers, needles and threads, devices for which purposes are unclear. All are organized carefully and maintained meticulously. A workbench holds jars of organs -- hearts in one, lungs in another, other organs in containers labeled in a careful hand.

In the corner is a furnace, its door open slightly, revealing heat within and the faint outline of ash. The entire workshop is cooler than the levels above despite the furnace's presence.

One table is currently in use. On it lies a corpse that's been split open. Internal organs are exposed. Something is being done to them -- sutured, rearranged, modified in ways that don't match human anatomy. A second corpse lies on a second table, partially assembled from multiple sources. Hands that don't match, limbs in different stages of preservation, stitched together with leather cord and magical binding.

The third table is empty, cleaned recently, but still stained with fluids that no amount of scrubbing can fully remove.

GM Notes

This is the laboratory of abomination. This is where the Necrotic Bulk and similar constructs are assembled. The work is methodical and clinical, which makes it far more horrible than it would be if approached with chaos or cruelty. Every incision is precise. Every suture is functional. The constructs created here are designed to serve, to obey, to last.

The body currently being worked on is not a natural creation. Whoever is assembling it is creating something specific -- perhaps a servant for a noble customer, perhaps something for the Queen's own use, perhaps a test for a new design. The work will be completed in approximately three days, assuming no interruption. The finished product will be something between a humanoid and something other, capable of independent action within programmed parameters but ultimately bound to the assembler's will.

The furnace is used to dispose of mistakes -- constructs that failed, pieces that couldn't be integrated, things that went wrong during assembly. The smell of burning flesh and bone occasionally rises from it, and the smell permeates the entire workshop regardless of how well it's maintained.

The preservation tanks contain dozens of corpses and parts in various states of storage. A character with Medicine knowledge realizes that some of the preservation techniques are at least a century old, and some of the bodies have been floating in their tanks for far longer. One tank contains something that's not quite recognizable as human anymore -- it's been preserved so long that it's taken on crystalline qualities, transformed into something like salt or mineral.

A secret door in the southern wall leads to a passage that connects to the Lich Cult Sanctum. This is how the cultists access the workshop and how they've been conducting their own experiments on the Queen's time and resources.

The current project on the active table, if examined closely by someone with Arcana knowledge, reveals that the work incorporates rituals written in the language of the Old Foundations. This is not the Queen's work. This is something else using her workshop. Investigation (DC 16) reveals notes in the workshop's logbook signed by someone using the pseudonym "The Architect." This person has been using the workshop for at least six months without the Queen's direct knowledge, though they have clearance and access granted by someone with authority.

THE BINDING CIRCLE

A secondary ritual space, smaller than the Ritual Chamber above. The design is similar but distinct -- this circle is designed for a specific purpose: creating vampires. The silver inlays form patterns related to transformation, corruption, parasitism. At the cardinal points of the circle are restraint points -- four heavy iron chairs, bolted to the floor, with manacles for wrists, ankles, and forehead.

The walls are lined entirely with mirrors. Every surface reflects the circle and the chairs repeatedly, creating a sense of infinite repetition. A person bound in one of the chairs can see themselves reflected infinitely, can watch their own transformation from every angle simultaneously. The mirrors are old, some showing their age in dark spots and distortions.

The floor around the circle is stained with blood in patterns that suggest numerous previous uses. The blood is centuries old and new, layered on top of each other. Some stains have crystallized, becoming dark and brittle. Others are wet enough that your boots stick slightly when you step on them.

There are three sets of ancient remains here. One sits in one of the restraint chairs, skeleton still partially bound, rotted cloth and leather binding the bones to the seat. The skeleton is human, mostly, but the spine is wrong -- curved in ways that shouldn't be possible.

The skull's jawbone has been modified, cut and regrown, forcing the mouth into a permanent open position. The skeleton has been here for centuries, perhaps longer.

THE REQUIARY

A vault sealed behind a door of black iron, locked with three separate locks that require three different keys held by three different people.

Inside, the air is dead. No breeze, no sound, as if the entire chamber exists in a state of suspended silence.

Shelves line the walls, and on the shelves are artifacts. Each one is isolated from the others, separated by at least a foot of empty space, some elevated on stone pedestals. Each one is behind a ward -- visible barriers of shimmering force, different colors and intensities.

Cursed weapons hang on racks. Swords that whisper to those who hold them, axes that want to draw blood, spears that crave war. Some are ancient. Some are recent acquisitions. All are lethal.

Bottles sit on shelves, filled with things that seem to move within glass. Some contain smoke, dark and coiling. Others contain liquid that glows. A few contain what might be souls -- vaguely humanoid shapes that press against the glass from within.

Artifacts of power are arranged carefully. A crown that controlled an empire. A ring that extended life centuries beyond the natural span.

Books bound in materials that shouldn't be readable. A staff that channels energies from places outside the world.

In the center of the vault is a container of crystal and silver, sealed with wards that crackle with visible energy. Inside is a small object, impossible to fully perceive due to the wards -- it seems to shift and change every time you look at it. This is a phylactery, the anchor point of a destroyed lich. The Queen keeps it as a trophy and as a potential tool.

The magical suppression in the reliquary is so strong that all magical effects are dampened. Spells cast here have reduced efficacy (reduce spell save DCs and attack rolls by 2). Magic items don't function properly. Even the wards on the artifacts are partially suppressed to ensure the items don't affect each other.

GM Notes

The Reliquary is the Queen's treasury of dark power. Each item is a record of something she's conquered or destroyed. Some are trophies. Some are tools she keeps for potential use. Some are things too dangerous to destroy but too dangerous to leave anywhere else. They're locked away here, neutralized by the suppression field, waiting.

The vault can be opened with the three keys, but taking anything from it will trigger wards and alert the Queen within minutes. A successful

Arcana check (DC 18) allows a character to temporarily disable the ward on a single artifact for up to one hour, during which time it can be safely removed. Attempting to steal an artifact without disabling the ward imposes disadvantage on Sleight of Hand checks and automatically triggers the ward.

The cursed weapons are not randomly cursed. Each one has a specific curse, a specific nature. Some whisper offers of power. Some demand violence. Some promise immortality. A character who touches one without protection makes a Charisma save (DC 15) or suffers disadvantage on saving throws against one specific effect related to that weapon's curse for the next 24 hours.

The phylactery is not something any party should access early in a campaign. But if they do, they learn a truth: the lich that this phylactery belonged to is not permanently destroyed. The phylactery is intact. If removed from the reliquary and the wards were somehow neutralized, the lich could be resurrected. This is likely the reason the Lich Cult is interested in accessing the castle -- they want to restore their fallen leader, or attempt to, or prevent the Queen from using the phylactery as a tool against them.

THE LICH CULT SANCTUM

Hidden behind a secret door in the Servant Tunnels, accessed from a section that's been sealed off from the rest of the network by one of the black-stone

walls. The sanctum is smaller than the other ritual spaces -- perhaps thirty feet across -- but it's been converted into a functional temple.

The ritual markings on the floor and walls are different from the

Queen's style. Where the Queen's work is precise and elegant, the

Cult's work is aggressive and angular. The symbols are sharper, more angular, arranged in ways that create visual discord. This is the work of practitioners without the Queen's centuries of refinement.

A central altar holds offerings -- candles, bundles of herbs, written notes sealed in wax, and stains that suggest blood has been spilled here. A bookshelf holds grimoires, their spines labeled in a careful hand with titles like "The Restoration of the Fallen Master" and

"Phylactery Resurrection Protocols."

Evidence of regular use is clear: the candles are relatively fresh, the offerings are recent, the dust patterns suggest someone has been here within the past week. Maps of the castle are pinned to one wall, marked with annotations and circles around specific locations. One location -- the Reliquary -- is circled in red. Another location -- a point far below the castle that doesn't correspond to any known area -- is circled in black.

A hidden safe is built into one wall, sealed with both mechanical locks and magical wards. The lock can be picked (DC 18) or the wards can be disabled with Arcana (DC 17), but opening the safe alerts the Cult immediately. Inside are documents that detail their long-term goals, including plans to either control or resurrect the lich that the Queen has imprisoned.

GM Notes

The Lich Cult has been operating within or beneath the castle for at least a year, possibly longer. Some cells may believe they act with Kiraline's tacit tolerance, while others take shelter beneath her notice without understanding

how much she actually sees. What they do not openly name is that Barron Whitehallow has become the cult's secret leader, redirecting its most useful cells toward his own ascension.

The Cult is not unified in its goals. Some members want to resurrect their original leader. Others want to create a new lich to serve them.

Still others believe they should negotiate with the Queen to use the phylactery in exchange for service. The sanctum contains evidence of these factional disagreements in the marginalia on the grimoires and in the maps that contradict each other.

The maps are the most valuable item here. One map shows a previously unknown chamber far below the castle, deeper even than the Sealed Door level. This chamber is marked with symbols that match the language of the Old Foundations. The Cult is researching this location and believes it contains knowledge or artifacts relevant to lich creation or restoration.

A character who remains hidden and observes the sanctum for several hours will see cultists arriving at different times. They're not all humans -- some appear to be minor undead, animated corpses moving with jerky precision, following their summoner's unspoken commands. This suggests the Cult has access to necromantic resources independent of the

Queen's blessing.

PART TEN: BELOW GROUND, LEVEL 4 -- THE DEEP

The air doesn't move. It has the weight of immense age. The stone here is different -- darker, almost black in places, shot through with veins of crystal and mineral that glow faintly with their own bioluminescence.

The walls are colder than the levels above, but not with the clean cold of winter. This is a penetrating cold that creeps into bones and doesn't fully leave even when you return to warmer spaces.

The passages here are not carved. They're grown. The stone seems organic in ways that stone shouldn't be, flowing around natural formations, creating chambers that follow no geometric logic. The air tastes of deep earth and extreme age and something else, something that predates human language.

The passages are not empty. Things move in the darkness beyond your light. Not constantly, but regularly. Shadows shift in ways that suggest size and intention. You are not alone down here, and whatever shares this space has never known sunlight.

THE CATACOMBS OF THE VERESZ DYNASTY

A vast necropolis, stretching into darkness in all directions. Stone sarcophagi line the walls, placed in alcoves cut specifically for each one. Some are simple boxes, roughly carved. Others are elaborate, covered in carved imagery and inscriptions. All are stone, sealed, eternal.

The oldest tombs are at the far end of the catacombs, and their inscriptions are in languages that have no modern equivalent. The symbols are similar in some ways to the language of the Old Foundations, but distinctly different -- older, perhaps, or from a different tradition entirely. To look at them too long causes a sense of temporal displacement, as if you're being watched from across vast spans of time.

Some sarcophagi are cracked. Some are shattered from within, the stone broken outward as if something forced its way out. These damaged tombs are

older than the sealed ones, suggesting that whatever was inside found the stone walls insufficient to contain them long-term.

In the center of the largest chamber is a throne, carved from a single piece of obsidian-black stone. The throne is empty, but the air around it is thick with power. This is where the Queen sits sometimes, according to rumors among the castle staff. Surrounded by the tombs of her ancestors and predecessors, she sits and contemplates time and power and the weight of centuries.

One recent tomb is notably different from the others. It was sealed only recently -- within the past ten years. The inscription is in the

Queen's own hand, written in gold leaf on obsidian: "The Second Queen,
Who Held the Throne When Succession Failed, Who Bore The Crown Alone,
Rest Now In Continuance."

GM Notes

The catacombs are a record of the Veresz dynasty's true history. The oldest sarcophagi contain individuals from before the city was built, suggesting that the family predates Kormor Kirak itself. The Queen is not the first vampire ruler; she's the continuation of a lineage that stretches back further than recorded history.

Some of the shattered sarcophagi contain the remains of individuals who were too powerful or too mad to remain bound in stone. These were not killed in traditional senses -- they were sealed away and, when they broke free, they were re-sealed or destroyed through means that the crypts don't fully reveal. The oldest shattered sarcophagi show signs of extreme damage, as if whatever was inside fought with fury and power beyond normal undead capacity.

The throne in the center chamber is the Queen's place of meditation. A character who sits in it makes a Charisma save (DC 18) or experiences a vision: a rapid montage of centuries passing, battles fought, cities conquered, rules

established, power maintained, loneliness that comes from watching empires crumble while you persist. The vision provides insight into the Queen's motivations and the cost of her immortality, but it also imposes disadvantage on all rolls for one hour as your mind struggles to process centuries of experiences in moments.

The most recent tomb is a problem. The inscription identifies the contents as "The Second Queen," suggesting that there was a previous

Queen who held the throne alone, and that this "Second Queen" was someone else. The Queen that the party knows might not be the original.

She might be a successor, chosen or forced into power by circumstance.

This opens significant plot threads about the true history of the Veresz line and whether the current Queen's power is entirely legitimate within the family structure.

THE COMET CHAMBER

The passage opens suddenly into a cavern so vast that even the darkness itself seems to expand. The ceiling is lost far above, visible only when lightning flashes through the space -- and lightning does flash, though there's no storm. The stone arcs with static energy regularly, particularly around the chamber's center.

In the center is a crater, perfectly round, thirty feet across. The impact scarring radiates outward in concentric rings, suggesting the impact occurred centuries ago, though the edges of the crater are still sharp and recent-looking. At the center of the crater is a stone that shouldn't exist. It's dark, almost black, but it's not stone exactly.

It's like glass, like crystal, like something cooled at extreme temperature into a form that shouldn't be stable. The surface is smooth and reflective.

The stone pulses with light. Not bright light -- a faint violet luminescence that comes from within the stone itself, pulsing at irregular intervals. Looking at the stone too long causes a sensation of wrongness, a feeling that something in your body is responding to the light, answering a call you don't consciously hear.

The air around the stone is different. Cold, but also vibrating, as if the space itself is excited. The stone radiates a magnetic pull -- not a physical pull, but something that draws attention and intention. A character standing near the stone feels the compulsion to touch it, to understand it, to open themselves to whatever power it contains.

The chamber floor is scattered with objects. Remains of previous visitors, perhaps, or artifacts from the impact itself. Bones in shapes that don't quite match human anatomy. Pieces of metal in designs that suggest no known metallurgical tradition. Shards of crystal that match the stone at the crater's center, though smaller, less perfect.

The walls of the chamber are covered in scorch marks. Ancient, centuries old, but still visible. Whatever crashed here burned on impact or during descent. The heat was extreme.

GM Notes

This is likely the origin of vampirism in this world. The meteor that fell here brought something -- a curse, a virus, a magical transformation -- that infected or affected the individuals nearby when it fell. Whatever the Veresz dynasty's origin, it likely connects to this stone and this impact.

The stone itself is alien. It's not magical in traditional senses that can be detected by normal magic detection spells. A successful Arcana check (DC 19) reveals that the stone operates on principles that don't match any known magical theory. It seems to respond to negative energy, to death-magic, to the fundamental forces of entropy and undeath. The

Queen likely discovered this thousands of years ago and has maintained it as the source of her power.

A character who touches the stone must make a Constitution save (DC 18).

On success, they can resist the pull. On failure, they are affected: if they're not already undead, they begin the process of transformation into undead (the specific form depends on GM discretion and campaign needs). If they're already undead, they gain a temporary increase to their undead abilities -- stronger, faster, more resistant to harm. The effect lasts until they next long rest, at which point a new save is required or the transformation becomes permanent.

Scholars who study the stone for more than a few minutes experience long-term effects. Extended exposure causes the development of vampiric characteristics even in living creatures. This is slow and subtle at first -- enhanced senses, improved vision in darkness, increased strength -- but it accelerates over time. Someone who spends a week studying the stone will likely become something other than human, though whether they become a full vampire depends on the QM's choices.

The chamber is occasionally visited by the Queen herself, to meditate near her source of power and to ensure the stone remains stable and undisturbed. She may have set wards around the chamber, invisible to casual inspection but capable of alerting her if anyone approaches the stone directly. A character attempting to touch the stone or access it in any magical way triggers these wards automatically.

THE SEALED DOOR

Deep beneath the catacombs, at the end of a passage that seems to descend forever, a door. It's massive -- twenty feet tall, ten feet wide, carved from a

single piece of stone that shouldn't exist in such a large single block. The surface is perfectly smooth, unmarked by tools, untouched by time.

The door is covered in wards. Not inscribed wards -- these are woven into the stone itself, part of its fundamental structure. The wards are visible as lines of force, glowing with cold light, arranged in patterns that overlap and reinforce each other. The oldest wards predate the

Veresz family. Some predate human civilization. The newest wards are still centuries old.

The door is warm. Not hot, but distinctly warmer than the surrounding stone. The warmth is constant and emanates from within, as if something on the other side of the door is generating heat. The warmth has a rhythm to it -- it pulses slightly, strengthens and weakens in cycles that might almost be described as breathing.

No seams are visible in the door. No locks, no hinges, no apparent way to open it. If you've never been told a door exists here, you might simply walk past the space thinking it was merely a wall. But once you see it, it's impossible to miss.

The air before the door is heavy. Standing in front of it creates a profound sense of weight and age and wrongness. Spellcasters feel the boundary of the wards as a pressure against their magic. Martial characters feel watched, assessed, evaluated by something unseen. The door doesn't welcome approach.

Inscriptions ring the base of the door, carved in the language of the

Old Foundations. The text is repeated and varied, but the core message, if translated, conveys warnings: "Here lies what came before. Here lies what shall not rise. Here lies the cost of power. Sealed by the first, maintained by the line, never to be broken while the kingdom stands."

THE UNDERGROUND RIVER

A natural cave system discovered when the castle's lower levels collapsed into natural caverns. A river cuts through the darkness, cold and fast-moving, fed by underground springs in the Videk Mountains miles distant. The water is clear and deep in most places, shallow only near the banks.

The cavern housing the river is vast. The ceiling is lost to darkness.

The walls are natural stone, riddled with caves and hollows. The sound of water echoes off every surface, creating a wall of echoes that seems to shift and move, making it difficult to determine the river's true course.

Stalagmites and stalactites create obstacles and hazards. Some are massive enough to create small islands in the river. Others are formations so delicate they seem almost fragile, though they're actually stone-hard and age-old. The cave floor is treacherous -- smooth stone worn by water, uneven, with hidden drops and unstable sections.

Small boats are moored in a hidden alcove, sealed away from casual discovery. They're serviceable but ancient, made from materials that seem to resist rot and water damage far better than normal wood.

They're rigged for someone who knows how to navigate underground waterways, though they could be managed by someone with basic seamanship and good luck.

The river winds through the caverns in a pattern that suggests thousands of years of slow erosion. Following it in either direction leads eventually to larger passages, those passages opening to even larger caves, creating a system so vast and complex that mapping it completely would take months. Traveling downstream, the river eventually emerges from the mountains at a point thirty miles distant, in the Hallaset

Fields. Traveling upstream leads back into the Videk Mountains and passages that predate human civilization, that connect to cavern systems so ancient and strange that even the Queen hasn't fully explored them.

The river itself is not entirely empty. Fish live in its depths. Some are normal enough. Others are larger than they should be, pale from generations in darkness, with eyes that don't quite work but other senses that compensate. At night, lights flicker beneath the surface -- bioluminescent organisms that have adapted to the deep caverns. Nothing here is hostile to travelers in boats, but nothing here is entirely natural either.

GM Notes

The Underground River is the castle's emergency escape route and a secret highway for anyone with knowledge of its existence. A small group in a boat could theoretically leave the castle entirely, moving through caves beneath the city, emerging miles away in countryside where the Queen's influence is weaker.

The river can be navigated with a successful Navigation check (DC 13) if you have basic knowledge of water travel. Without that knowledge, DC 17.

The journey downstream to the mountain exit takes approximately two days of continuous travel. The journey upstream toward the deepest caves takes as long as the GM requires for plot purposes but is not recommended without significant magical resources and protection against the strange things that live in the deepest caves.

The boats are not owned by the Queen, based on investigations into their construction and materials. They predate the Veresz occupation. They may have been part of the original castle infrastructure, or they may have been left by a civilization that predated the castle entirely. They're maintained, which means someone in the castle periodically checks on them. This someone is not the Queen.

The cavern system connects to passages that the GM can use for any number of purposes. There might be another undead civilization deeper in the caves. There might be entrances to the Feywild or other planes.

There might be the nests of creatures so old that they're mentioned in none of the usual bestiaries. The river is both escape route and hook for further exploration.

APPENDIX A: RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLES

EXTERIOR AND GROUND LEVEL ENCOUNTERS (ROLL D6)

1. *Two Red Guards conducting a routine border check. They demand papers and inspect packs with professional boredom. A third guard watches from the gatehouse.*
 1. A merchant's cart has overturned near the entrance. The driver curses while two workers help recover scattered goods. The guards seem uninterested in helping.
3. *Cavalry Soldiers practice formations in the courtyard. Their horses are nervous and loud. They will order civilians to move aside with sharp commands.*
4. *Servants struggling to move a heavy stone block. They claim it's for "repairs," but the block is suspiciously inscribed with old*

runes they refuse to discuss.

1. A hooded figure moves quickly between buildings. They clutch a sealed envelope. If intercepted, they claim to be delivering urgent news to the kitchens.
2. A group of Ruffians hired to do rough work. They're loading supplies into a basement entrance under minimal supervision. They're drunk and loud but will leave visitors alone unless provoked.

FIRST AND SECOND FLOOR ENCOUNTERS (ROLL D8)

1. A Lich Cult Acolyte disguised as a servant. They're moving between rooms with a key ring, observing nobles carefully. They will flee if discovered, leaving behind coded notes.
2. *Princess Szeret's Handmaiden conducting errands. She moves with purpose and knows most of the servants by name. If approached respectfully, she may offer small favors.*
1. A minor noble practicing a speech for the Queen. They rehearse alone in a side corridor, dramatic hand gestures and all. They're embarrassed to be discovered but will apologize profusely.
4. *Barron Whitehallow in conversation with another diplomat. They speak carefully about trade agreements and "mutual interests." Both men look tired and frustrated.*
5. *Three servants gossiping about some scandal. They scatter immediately if noticed but leave tantalizing hints about tensions*

between the Queen and her advisors.

- 1. A Red Guard Captain making rounds. They move methodically and note everything. They'll question unfamiliar faces but respond well to proper deference.

7. *Olivia Faren reading a book in a alcove. She watches people pass and makes mental notes. If approached, she's cordial but reveals nothing of value.*

- 1. A servant carrying fresh flowers to Szeret's chambers. They're nervous and seem worried about a wilted petal. If questioned, they mention the Princess has been ill lately.

THIRD FLOOR AND TOWERS ENCOUNTERS (ROLL D8)

1. *An Automatic Assassin maintaining its mechanisms. It moves with strange precision and doesn't acknowledge observers. It's dangerous but won't act unless triggered by a specific stimulus.*

2. *Queen Kiraline's personal guards standing watch. They're silent, professional, and completely unapproachable. They do not speak or respond to salutes.*

- 1. A scholar researching old castle records. They've found something disturbing and are frantically searching for more documentation.

They're willing to bribe for access to restricted archives.

4. *Magical phenomena -- objects move slightly of their own accord. The air smells of copper and old flowers. The effect is localized to*

one room and causes 1d4 damage if something is touched.

1. A servant collecting Queen Kiraline's personal laundry. They move silently and take their work seriously. They will attack anyone who tries to search the items.

6. *The Man with the Clockwork Arm is visiting for purposes unknown.*

He moves through the tower without explaining himself. He will not engage with intruders but will not hesitate to kill if threatened.

7. *Paintings on the walls seem to watch observers. They shift when not looked at directly. This is either magic or paranoia -- the GM can choose.*

8. *An empty chamber with fresh bloodstains on the floor. The blood is only hours old. There are no bodies, no weapons, and the Queen's guards are cleaning the space methodically.*

DUNGEON LEVEL ENCOUNTERS (ROLL D6)

1. A patrol of three Red Guards making routine checks. They're bored and predictable. They have keys to the common cells but not the isolation chambers.
2. A prisoner shouting from a cell. They claim innocence and offer information if someone will listen. What they know might actually be valuable, but they also lie frequently.
3. *The Head Failer overseeing a prisoner transfer. They're efficient and cruel but respect chains of command. They carry the master key ring and never relax their attention.*

4. *An Undead Shambler shambling through a cell corridor. It's a former prisoner kept as a work tool. It doesn't attack unless provoked but will grab anyone who blocks its path.*

5. *Two Lich Cult Acolytes conducting an "interrogation." They're extracting information about the prisoner's connections. They'll flee immediately if armed opponents appear.*

1. A prisoner being severely beaten by guards. The guards claim the prisoner is dangerous and resists. If interrupted, they'll first silence the prisoner, then deal with witnesses.

NECROMANTIC LEVEL ENCOUNTERS (ROLL D8)

1. *The Royal Alchemist working with bubbling alembics. They're creating a potion for "the Queen's personal use." They're nervous and will threaten anyone who interrupts.*

1. A ritual circle is active and humming with power. Undead shamble nearby in a pattern that suggests they're being controlled. The ritual will complete in 1d4 rounds.

3. *Shelves of preserved organs in glass containers. Each container is labeled with a name and date. Some dates go back centuries. Some containers glow faintly.*

4. *Two Vampire Spawn inspecting stored bodies. They move with careful precision and taste the air occasionally. They're checking quality.*

If discovered, they'll assume intruders are thieves or spies.

- 1. A locked door dripping with fresh blood. Behind it, something is moving and breathing heavily. The lock is magical and standard keys won't work.

6. *The corpse of a recent prisoner suspended in liquid. It's moving slightly, as if still alive. Tubes run from its body to various alchemical apparatus. The liquid tastes of copper to anyone foolish enough to sample it.*

- 1. A wall section covered in scrawled prayers and warnings written in old languages. The handwriting changes multiple times as if different people wrote the warnings. Some are more recent than others.

8. *Necrotic Bulk stirring in a stone basin. It's a mass of partially-formed corpses held together by dark magic. It's being fed fresh meat by attending Lich Cult Acolytes.*

THE DEEP ENCOUNTERS (ROLL D8)

1. *Ancient stonework from a civilization that predates current human kingdoms. The stones are carved with symbols that hurt to look at directly. The walls are warm and pulse slightly.*

- 1. A catacombs chamber with hundreds of stone coffins. Some are sealed, others hang open revealing empty interiors. The smell of old grave-dust is overpowering.

3. *An impossible geometry corridor that seems to extend farther than it should based on the castle's external dimensions. Distance becomes*

unreliable here. Characters moving through it may arrive elsewhere than expected.

1. A chamber flooded with dark water. Something large moves beneath the surface. Occasionally, pale hands emerge but never complete a full breach.
2. A collapsed section of ancient temple, partially reconstructed with newer stonework. The mixing of architectures suggests something was deliberately hidden here. Digging reveals more questions than answers.

6. *Vampire Spawn in a state of torpor, suspended in stone alcoves.*

They're ancient -- some are centuries old. A single sound will wake them.

1. A chanting heard echoing through the stone. The words are in languages nobody recognizes but cause distress anyway. The chanting has no clear source.

8. *The remains of something vast. Bones scattered across the chamber floor are easily the size of castle pillars. The creature died here ages ago. It's unclear if it's truly dead.*

APPENDIX B: CASTLE NPCS

THE HEAD JAILER

NAME: Calvin Thorne (rarely called anything but "Jailer")

ROLE: Chief administrator of the dungeon levels

DESCRIPTION: A scarred veteran of forty-three years standing six and a half feet tall. Calvin carries the weight of his position heavily -- he knows every prisoner's name and history, which makes ordering cruelty difficult but not impossible. He sees imprisonment as a necessary evil, not a pleasure.

Secret

Kalvin once tried to help a prisoner escape. The attempt failed, and the prisoner was executed for it. He's carried the guilt ever since and secretly marks some prisoners' cells to track who might deserve mercy.

GM Notes

Use Calvin as a potential ally for clever players. He can be bribed with information about other prisoners but will never betray the Queen directly. He despises genuine cruelty and might sabotage orders if they're egregiously sadistic.

THE HEAD LIBRARIAN

NAME: Eldereth (last name unknown or forgotten)

ROLE: Keeper of the castle archives

DESCRIPTION: An ancient figure whose age is genuinely unclear.

Eldereth moves slowly, speaks rarely, and seems to exist in a perpetual state of quiet disappointment with the younger generations. They move through the castle libraries like a ghost, sometimes appearing to materialize from behind shelves.

Secret

Eldereth remembers the castle before Queen Kiraline arrived. They've quietly preserved documents that contradict the official history and know that something fundamental changed after the Queen's ascension.

GM Notes

Eldereth doesn't give information willingly but can be appealed to as a neutral party. Any question about castle history might be answered with a single sentence. They're immune to most forms of coercion and will simply refuse to speak if pressured.

THE MASTER OF KITCHENS

NAME: Petra Voss

ROLE: Head cook and supplier for all castle operations

DESCRIPTION: A broad-shouldered woman with burn scars on her arms and flour perpetually in her hair. Petra feeds hundreds of people daily and manages a kitchen that produces everything from state dinners to prisoner gruel. She's seen thousands of people pass through the castle and judges none of them.

Secret

Petra provides food to prisoners in isolation -- supplementing their official rations. She also trades with black market suppliers outside the castle walls, bringing in goods the Queen's official channels won't provide.

GM Notes

Petra is the castle's practical heart. She knows about most illicit activity because she feeds everyone. Bribing her works -- she can provide poison, truth serums, or excellent meals. She's primarily motivated by keeping people alive and will do morally gray things if it serves that goal.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE WATCH

NAME: Sereth Corvindale

ROLE: Military commander of castle garrison and tower defense

DESCRIPTION: A professional soldier in her fifties with a severe demeanor and steel-gray eyes. Sereth runs the tower garrison with military precision. She reports to the Queen and takes orders without question, but she also understands protocols, precedent, and proper channels.

Secret

Sereth is quietly building a military force separate from the Red Guard -- one that answers to her rather than the Queen. She's not plotting overthrow, but she's preparing for contingencies if the Queen becomes a liability.

GM Notes

Use Sereth for military encounter information. She's honorable within her code and can be negotiated with if parties approach through proper channels. She despises the Red Guard's brutality but won't openly oppose them.

SZERET'S HANDMAIDEN

NAME: Mina Redmore

ROLE: Personal attendant to Princess Szeret

DESCRIPTION: A woman in her mid-twenties with sharp features and sharper eyes. Mina has served Szeret for five years and is genuinely loyal, though whether to the Princess as a person or to the position she represents is ambiguous. She moves through the castle with efficient grace and notices everything.

Secret

Mina knows that Princess Szeret is increasingly at odds with her mother, the Queen. She's been carefully documenting this and considering whether to inform the Queen or help the Princess instead.

GM Notes

Mina is a gateway to information about the royal family's internal tensions. She can be appealed to as someone who genuinely cares about Szeret's wellbeing. She will risk minor infractions to help if convinced it serves the Princess's interests.

THE ROYAL ALCHEMIST

NAME: Devorlen Koss (as noted in the main bestiary, but here as an NPC focus)

ROLE: Practitioner of chemical and magical transformation

DESCRIPTION: A gaunt figure with stained fingers and eyes that are either brilliant or mad -- observers cannot decide which. Devorlen works in the Necromantic Level conducting experiments that blur the line between alchemy, necromancy, and plain cruelty. He's brilliant and has clearly compromised his morality to survive in his position.

Secret

Devorlen has been secretly researching how to reverse or block vampirism. He's been providing vampires with experimental potions to test his theories. He wants to cure Queen Kiraline, not because of ethics but because he believes he'll be rewarded generously for it.

GM Notes

Devorlen is willing to sell his services to anyone with sufficient payment or leverage. He's amoral, not evil -- money, research opportunity, or protection from the Queen will motivate him equally. He has access to nearly any alchemical compound.

THE CASTELLAN

NAME: Lord Harewood

ROLE: Day-to-day administrative manager of castle operations

DESCRIPTION: A thin man in his sixties who moves between his office, the castle halls, and various functionaries in a state of perpetual exhaustion. Harewood manages schedules, supply chains, staff assignments, and logistical nightmares with bureaucratic competence.

He's been in the position for nineteen years and looks every day of it.

Secret

Harewood keeps a detailed ledger of the castle's operations that contradicts the official records. He documents everything, including executions, ritual materials, and payments to unknown parties. He hasn't betrayed the Queen yet, but he's waiting for a reason to do so.

GM Notes

Harewood provides practical information about how the castle functions. He understands procedures, knows which doors are locked, and can predict guard rotations. He can be convinced to provide access to restricted areas if convinced the Queen has lost his confidence or if sufficiently compensated.

APPENDIX INTEGRATION

C:

CAMPAIGN

FIVE SESSION TYPES

DIPLOMATIC SESSIONS

Focus on First and Second Floor locations. The castle is a stage for political intrigue where conversations matter more than combat. Red

Guard presence is visible but controlled. Encounters involve minor nobles, ambassadors, courtiers, and Princess Szeret.

SAMPLE OBJECTIVES: Negotiate with the Queen, attend a state dinner, investigate tensions between factions, gather intelligence through social channels.

COMPLICATIONS: Multiple factions working at cross-purposes, eavesdropping NPCs, social traps and tests of etiquette.

INVESTIGATION SESSIONS

Players move through multiple levels following clues. They visit the libraries, dungeons, sealed chambers, and speak with various NPCs to solve a problem or mystery.

SAMPLE OBJECTIVES: Find a missing person, verify rumors about the Queen, track unauthorized ritual activity, investigate prisoner disappearances.

COMPLICATIONS: Dead ends that force backtracking, conflicting information from unreliable sources, discovering secrets the Queen wants hidden.

HEIST SESSIONS

Stealth and cunning through servant corridors and hidden passages.

Players must avoid detection while accomplishing a specific goal -- stealing documents, freeing a prisoner, planting false evidence, accessing the Necromantic Level without permission.

SAMPLE OBJECTIVES: Infiltrate the royal chambers, steal something from the Queen's collection, plant evidence, rescue a prisoner undetected.

COMPLICATIONS: Guards on irregular schedules, magical alarms, servants moving unpredictably, Automatic Assassins that can be triggered.

DUNGEON CRAWL SESSIONS

Combat-focused exploration of below-ground levels. Enemies are numerous and varied, hazards include both physical traps and magical dangers.

SAMPLE OBJECTIVES: Survive the dungeons, collect items from the Necromantic Level, confront a specific creature, rescue people imprisoned in deep cells.

COMPLICATIONS: Overwhelming numbers, environmental hazards, undead that regenerate, magical effects that drain resources.

STEELE SESSIONS

The castle is attacked or defended. This can be the party attacking the Queen's position, defending against external forces, or navigating a rebellion. Combat occurs on multiple levels simultaneously.

SAMPLE OBJECTIVES: Overthrow or defend the Queen, sabotage the castle's defenses, escape during chaos, secure particular locations.

COMPLICATIONS: Civilian populations, multiple enemy forces with different priorities, environmental destruction, allies turning treacherous.

SCALING ENCOUNTERS BY PARTY LEVEL

LEVELS 1-3: UPPER FLOORS ONLY

Encounters should occur on the Exterior, Ground, First, and Second Floors. Avoid the Towers and anything below ground. Use Ruffians, Red Guards, and social encounters. Emphasize that the Queen is a terrifying presence not to be opposed directly.

LEVELS 4-6: FULL CASTLE ACCESS

Parties can handle deeper dungeons and basic necromancy. Encounters should include Clockwork Scouts, Gangster Lieutenants, and basic Lich

Cult members. The Third Floor and first Dungeon Level are appropriate.

LEVELS 7-9: NECROMANTIC LEVEL AVAILABLE

Parties can face Automatic Assassins, Vampire Spawn, and greater undead.

The Necromantic Level opens up. The Queen becomes a potential opponent.

LEVELS 104: THE DEEP REVEALED

Only the highest-level parties should encounter the true horrors of the Deep. These sessions deal with existential threats and ancient powers.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

1. PRISONER IN THE TOWER

A contact claims someone the party cares about is imprisoned in the dungeons. To free them, the party must navigate the castle undetected, negotiate with the Head Jailer, bribe the Castellan, or fight their way through guards.

THE ALCHEMIST'S BARGAIN

Devorlen Koss offers the party a powerful alchemical item -- but he requires an ingredient he cannot obtain. The party must steal from the Queen's private chambers or rescue a specific person from the Deep.

3. RITUAL INTERFERENCE

A Lich Cult ritual is being prepared in the Necromantic Level. The party learns about it from gossip or a spy and must decide whether to interfere, report it to the Queen, or allow it to proceed.

THE SEALED DOOR

A character discovers a sealed chamber that doesn't appear on official castle maps. Opening it requires solving a puzzle, acquiring a key from a guard, or simply breaking through the door. What's inside is the

GM's choice (see Appendix D).

THE COMET CHAMBER

A scholar or wizard tells the party about a legendary chamber where the

Queen discovered her vampirism. Finding it requires exploring the Deep and understanding astronomy. What's inside can change the party's understanding of the Queen's origin.

6. PRINCESS SZERET'S PLEA

The Princess privately asks the party for help -- either to protect her from the Queen's influence or to save her from a dark destiny she sees approaching. This pulls the party into family politics.

7. WHITEHALLOW'S DIPLOMATIC FAILURE

Barron Whitehallow approaches the party asking them to gather intelligence on the Queen's true intentions toward Albion. Is she a threat? An ally? What is she hiding?

THE BELLS IN THE TOWER

The bells ring in a pattern that means something specific to people who know. The party must decode the meaning or prevent them from ringing to stop something in progress.

CASTLE DYNAMICS: QUEEN'S STATUS

IF THE QUEEN IS AN ALLY

The castle becomes a resource and safe base. Guards are less hostile, secrets can be shared, the party gains access to restricted areas. The underlying darkness of the Necromantic Level remains, but the Queen doesn't hide it from allies. Complications come from factions opposing the Queen.

IF THE QUEEN IS NEUTRAL/UNKNOWN

The castle is a place of constant tension. The party is never entirely welcome but never directly attacked unless provoked. Information flows slowly, gaining access to restricted areas is difficult, guards are suspicious.

IF THE QUEEN IS AN ENEMY

The castle is hostile territory. Every visit is dangerous, every NPC is potentially an informant, safe areas disappear. Underground levels become battlefields. The Queen uses her full resources against the party

-- Automatic Assassins, Vampire Spawn, ritual magic.

IF THE QUEEN IS ABSENT

The castle's hierarchy collapses in interesting ways. Sereth Corvindale might take control of military operations. Factions compete for influence. The Lich Cult becomes bolder. The dungeons become less monitored. This opens opportunities for infiltration and chaos.

APPENDIX D: SECRETS AND HIDDEN AREAS

GM ONLY

MASTER LIST OF SECRET PASSAGES

The castle contains more hidden routes than obvious ones. Most were built during construction for emergency evacuation or supply movement.

GROUND LEVEL: A passage behind the kitchen's western wall connects to a servants' exit in the castle's southeast corner. It's wide enough for hand-carts and completely unknown to the guard.

FIRST FLOOR: The Portrait Gallery contains a sliding panel disguised as a frame. It leads to a narrow corridor used for moving between rooms without being seen. Lord Whitehallow knows about this passage.

SECOND FLOOR: A servant's stairwell is hidden behind a tapestry (actual cloth, not metaphorical) in the guest wing. It connects all floors and was original castle architecture.

THIRD FLOOR: The Royal Private Floor has a secret passage connecting the Queen's chambers to the tower stairs. Only the Queen and her Handmaiden know of it, though Mina has never used it.

DUNGEON LEVEL: A prisoner escape route exists behind the western cells. It was sealed centuries ago and requires careful searching to locate. It leads upward into the kitchen.

NECROMANTIC LEVEL: A passage connects directly to the underground lake beneath the castle. It's natural stone, not carved, and seems to predate the castle itself. The passage is blocked by an iron gate that hasn't been opened in living memory.

THE DEEP: All routes down are effectively one-way or lead in circles. The Deep is less a place with paths and more a place with intentions.

THE SEALED DOOR

The party will eventually discover a sealed chamber on the First or Second Floor. It's marked with old wards and hasn't been opened in decades. The GM should choose one of the following possibilities before the party reaches it.

POSSIBILITY ONE: THE QUEEN'S FAILURE

The sealed room contains the corrupted remains of Queen Kiraline's original lover -- someone she tried and failed to transform into a vampire. The body is half-vampire, half-corpse, suspended in alchemical liquid. Opening the chamber releases a creature that is neither alive nor dead and has inherited the Queen's vampirism without her control.

It attacks immediately and must be destroyed. Afterward, examining the chamber reveals journals detailing the transformation process, the

Queen's earliest attempts at dark magic, and the point where she began seeing people as subjects rather than individuals.

POSSIBILITY TWO: THE ORIGINAL ARSENAL

The sealed chamber contains weapons from an earlier age -- some magical, all lethal. They're stored in perfect condition, suggesting the Queen still checks on them occasionally. The weapons are beautiful and terrible, clearly designed for fighting supernatural threats. There are no markings indicating who made them or why the Queen sealed them away.

POSSIBILITY THREE: THE HOSTAGES

The sealed chamber contains people who are not dead but also not alive.

They're suspended in magical stasis, perfectly preserved. These are people from the Queen's past -- perhaps her family, perhaps enemies, perhaps people she loved and couldn't bear to lose. They can be awakened, but what will they remember? Will they recognize the Queen after so many years?

THE COMET CHAMBER AND VAMPIRISM'S ORIGIN

The Comet Chamber lies in the Deep, positioned so that a single small hole in the ceiling allows light from the night sky to enter. The chamber is circular and

very ancient -- its stones are from an earlier civilization that the castle was built upon.

The truth about vampirism in this world is that it originated not from dark magic but from a comet. Centuries ago, a celestial object passed near this world and left something behind -- a sickness that granted immortality, strength, and hunger. The Comet Chamber was built as a monument and later as a tomb for the first vampires.

Queen Kiraline discovered the chamber and understood what it meant. She deliberately exposed herself to the comet sickness by ritual in this chamber. She became the first voluntary vampire, which gave her more control than those who were infected accidentally. Her immortality is real, her power is genuine, and she cannot be turned mortal again by normal means -- because the sickness comes from beyond this world.

The GM can use this revelation to recontextualize the Queen. She's not a dark lord who became immortal through evil magic. She's someone who found a source of power and seized it, understanding that it would cost her humanity. This makes her more complex and more dangerous.

The Comet Chamber still contains artifacts from the first vampires and records written in languages modern scholars don't recognize. Whatever the first vampires knew, the Queen has learned it.

HIDDEN CONNECTIONS BETWEEN LEVELS

The castle was built with efficiency in mind. Three specific connections exist that bypass normal routes.

The kitchen's western passage (mentioned above) connects Ground Level directly to the Dungeon Level's western section, allowing supply delivery without guard oversight.

The servant's stairwell behind the Portrait Gallery's tapestry connects all floors but ends at the Dungeon Level's guards' quarters.

Using it to reach deeper requires passing through occupied areas.

The waterworks beneath the Dungeon connect the Necromantic Level to the Great Cistern and from there to an underground lake that feeds the castle's water supply. The connection is unmapped and partially flooded but passable for those willing to wade through dark water.

The Deep is not connected to upper levels by any normal passage. The only way down is spiral stone stairs in the castle's oldest tower, stairs that seem to descend farther than physical space should allow.

THE BLANK PORTRAIT IN THE GALLERY

In the First Floor's Portrait Gallery, one portrait is conspicuously blank -- the canvas is white, the frame is ornate, but there is no image. This portrait hangs in the position of honor usually reserved for the ruling monarch or founder.

The portrait that was removed depicted the Queen's predecessor -- a king named Aldris who ruled before Kiraline's rise to power. Aldris was depicted as strong and just, beloved by his people. The Queen had the portrait removed not because she disliked him, but because she realized he was becoming a symbol that threatened her authority.

The blank portrait remains as a reminder and a threat. It says: "Your memory can be erased. Your legacy can be forgotten. Oppose me and you, too, will become a blank canvas."

Some castle scholars and historians are aware of this symbolism. A few still remember what Aldris looked like. The Queen tolerates their knowledge, preferring that a few people remember the lesson rather than creating mystery by erasing all records.

WHAT THE BELLS IN THE TOWER SIGNAL

The Tower of Bells contains six bells in decreasing size, each with a different tone. The Queen uses them to communicate across the city of

Kormor Kirak, and the city has learned to interpret the patterns.

Three rings (high-low-high) means a formal announcement will be made by sunset.

A continuous toll for one minute means the Queen has made a final decision on a matter of state -- no further discussion.

Four rapid rings means danger or emergency in the city.

A slow, methodical toll means someone of significance has died.

Two rings, pause, two rings means the gates are closing or opening at an unusual time.

A rapid, chaotic pattern of all bells means the castle is under attack or under siege.

The bells can be rung by the Queen alone or by her direct command. They are not rung by servants or guards. If the bells ring without the Queen's knowledge, something is profoundly wrong.

THE CISTERN CREATURE

In the Great Cistern beneath the castle, something dwells in the deep water. It is not evil, but it is dangerous. The creature is ancient, possibly predating the castle itself, and seems to be some form of aquatic life that grew large and strange over centuries.

It doesn't hunt or attack. It simply exists in the deep water, occasionally surfacing to breathe. Servants who have seen it describe it as having too many eyes and skin like aged leather. Its size is genuinely unknown -- only the portions that surface have been observed, and these vary from visit to visit.

The Queen knows about it and has learned to coexist with it. She feeds it occasionally by dropping livestock into the water. In return, it doesn't interfere with the castle's water supply or attack those who use the cistern carefully.

If the party ventures into the cistern, they should not encounter the creature unless they specifically provoke it. If they do provoke it, combat should be short and devastating -- the creature is far too large and powerful for typical encounters. The better option is to observe it, respect its territory, and leave it alone.

KIRALINE'S CONTINGENCY PLAN

If the castle falls, if the Queen is forced to flee, if her position becomes untenable, she has prepared something.

Deep in the Necromantic Level, in a chamber the Castellan doesn't know about and the Alchemist has been preparing, there is a ritual circle.

The ritual will transform the Queen into something new -- not quite dead, not quite alive, but able to survive physical death.

If she dies in her human form, if the castle falls, if she has prepared the ritual properly, the transformation will occur automatically. She will be scattered across the city as something that cannot be killed, only dispersed. She will spend years or decades recovering, but she will recover.

The ritual requires sacrifice -- it demands the life force of hundreds of people. The Queen has been accumulating the necessary materials. The party may discover evidence of this contingency in the Necromantic Level or through the Alchemist, and they must decide whether to stop it, allow it, or accelerate it.

If the contingency activates, the Queen doesn't die. She transforms.

This is a worse outcome for the city than her defeat would be.

APPENDIX A: CASTLE FLOOR INDEX

EXTERIOR AND APPROACH

The Cliff Road -- A switchback path carved into the cliff face, winding upward toward the castle with guard stations at regular intervals. The Blood Gate -- The formal castle entrance, a masterwork of military architecture with murder holes and a guillotine gate.

GROUND LEVEL

The Grand Entry Hall -- The vast central chamber with a painted ceiling depicting the Veresz dynasty, polished dark stone floors, and portraits of past rulers lining the walls. The Outer Courtyard -- An expansive paved space serving as a transitional zone, containing stables, carriage house, and guard barracks. The Armory and Guard Hall -- A long chamber lined with weapon racks and training dummies, the nerve center of the castle's military preparedness. Servants' Quarters and Kitchen Complex -- Long corridors of small neat rooms and a vast kitchen complex where hundreds of castle inhabitants receive their meals. The Grand Ballroom -- An upper-level grand dancing space known for theatrical, mask-filled masquerades of questionable propriety.

CEREMONIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL

The Throne Room -- The formal seat of Queen Kiraline's power, where major decisions are announced and formal audiences are conducted. The administrative chambers -- Offices for the Castellan, advisors, and support staff managing the castle's day-to-day operations. Private and diplomatic reception rooms -- Spaces where the Queen meets with dignitaries and conducts state business.

NOBLE AND ROYAL QUARTERS

The Queen's Private Chambers -- Deep within the castle, protected by magical wards and guards, containing evidence of her necromantic practices and ritual workings. Princess Szeret's Bedroom -- Furnished with salvaged pieces from different eras, equipped with a telescope for observing the city

below. The Royal Guest Suites -- Appointed spaces for visiting dignitaries and royalty, comfortable but subtly monitored.

BELOW GROUND: FIRST LEVEL (DUNGEONS AND HOLDING CELLS)

The Dungeon Complex -- Chains hang from walls, prisoners are kept alive as assets, and the air reeks of copper and suffering. The cells are organized and maintained with grim efficiency. Interrogation chambers -- Spaces where information is extracted through methods both brutal and subtle. Wine cellars and storage -- Provisions for the castle and hidden spaces used for necromantic work.

BELOW GROUND: SECOND LEVEL (NECROMANTIC WORKING CHAMBERS)

The Chamber of Ritual -- Where bodies are positioned in wooden trellises as if growing like vines, their angles unnatural and their preservation impossible through mundane means. Rune-carved walls form patterns that hurt to look at too long. The Alchemist's Workshop -- Where magical ingredients are prepared and experimental workings are conducted. The Ritual Library -- Contains grimoires, spell components, and documentation of past necromantic workings.

BELOW GROUND: THIRD LEVEL (DEEP CHAMBERS AND CISTERN)

The Great Cistern -- An enormous underground water reservoir where something ancient and dangerous dwells. The creature within is not evil but

profoundly dangerous. The Queen feeds it periodically to maintain their coexistence. Secret passages -- Stone corridors connecting to the Cliff Passage and other hidden routes, unmarked on official maps.

BELOW GROUND: FOURTH LEVEL (THE DEEPEST MYSTERIES)

Kiraline's Contingency Chamber -- A ritual circle prepared for the Queen's ultimate transformation should the castle fall. The ritual requires the life force of hundreds and will scatter her across the city as something that cannot be killed. Other sealed and secret spaces whose exact purpose remains unknown, accessible only to the Queen and her most trusted servants.

APPENDIX B: CASTLE SECRETS AND HIDDEN FEATURES

GROUND LEVEL SECRETS

THE HIDDEN PASSAGE BEHIND THE GRAND ENTRY HALL -- A concealed door allows movement between the Entry Hall and the administrative chambers without traversing public spaces. Location: Behind the portrait of Veresz matriarchs, activated by pressing a specific carving. Finding it: DC 15 Investigation check. Consequence: Discovers the castle's servant network and back routes used by trusted staff.

THE SERVANTS' SECRET STAIRCASE -- A narrow staircase connects the Kitchen Complex to the upper floors, allowing servants to move invisibly through the castle. Location: Behind a loose stone panel in the servants' hall. Finding it:

DC 12 Investigation check. Consequence: Provides a way to bypass public corridors and avoid guard patrols.

THE TRAP IN THE GUARD HALL -- A section of floor can be depressed to trigger a iron gate, trapping intruders in a section of the hall. Location: Beneath the training dummies, subtle to notice. Finding it: DC 13 Perception check. Consequence: Activating it allows the Queen to contain invaders in a kill zone.

CEREMONIAL LEVEL SECRETS

THE QUEEN'S BALCONY TELEPORTATION -- Kiraline can traverse her balcony instantaneously, appearing at different points along its length without crossing intervening space. The mechanism is unknown. Location: The balcony overlooking the city. Finding it: Not discoverable by investigation; can only be observed in use. Consequence: Knowledge that the Queen has teleportation abilities changes tactical planning.

THE THRONE ROOM'S HIDDEN PASSAGES -- Behind throne-side panels are narrow passages allowing the Queen to leave or enter without using the main doors. Location: Behind decorative wall panels on either side of the throne. Finding it: DC 14 Investigation check. Consequence: Allows escape routes and suggests the Queen has backup plans.

DUNGEON LEVEL SECRETS

THE TORTURE CHAMBER'S SOUND DAMPENING -- The interrogation chambers are magically warded to prevent sound from carrying. Location: The walls themselves contain the enchantment. Finding it: DC 16 Arcana check to detect the ward. Consequence: Those in the chambers cannot be heard outside, and those outside cannot hear screams.

THE PRISONER TRANSPORT ROUTE -- A separate corridor connects the dungeon to a hidden exit at the castle's base, allowing prisoners to be moved without passing through public areas. Location: Behind a locked gate in the dungeon proper. Finding it: Requires either finding a key (held by senior guards) or a DC 15 Sleight of Hand check to pick the lock. Consequence: Suggests the Queen moves prisoners in and out frequently.

THE CELL WITH HIDDEN SUPPLIES -- One dungeon cell contains a loose stone revealing a hidden cache: food, water, and old implements. Location: In the cell farthest from the main entrance. Finding it: DC 14 Investigation check. Consequence: Suggests either an old escape attempt or deliberate placement of supplies for some purpose.

NECROMANTIC LEVEL SECRETS

THE RITUAL CHAMBER'S BODY PRESERVATION -- The bodies displayed in the trellis frames are preserved through a combination of necromantic magic and alchemical treatment. Location: The chamber itself. Finding it: Not hidden, but understanding the preservation requires a DC 16 Arcana or Medicine check. Consequence: Understanding this working reveals significant magical knowledge.

THE SECRET EXIT BEHIND THE RITUAL RUNES -- A passage hidden behind a false stone panel can be found if the runes are properly interpreted. Location: The eastern wall of the Ritual Chamber. Finding it: DC 17 Arcana check (requires reading and understanding ritual runes). Consequence: Provides escape route to lower levels or allows discovery of hidden chambers.

CISTERN LEVEL SECRETS

THE CREATURE'S TERRITORY MARKERS -- The creature in the cistern has marked areas with bioluminescent growths indicating which parts of the water it considers its own. Location: Various points throughout the cistern. Finding it: DC 12 Perception check. Consequence: Understanding these markers allows safe passage through parts of the water.

THE LEDGE OVERLOOKING THE DEEP -- A narrow ledge circles the cistern, accessible but treacherous, allowing observation of the deeper water. Location: About twenty feet above the main cistern water level. Finding it: Requires climbing or magic to reach. Consequence: Provides vantage point to observe what dwells in the deep.

APPENDIX C: CASTLE ENCOUNTER TABLES

EXTERIOR AND APPROACH (D6)

1. Red Guard patrol of 2 -- 3 soldiers on routine watch. They question travelers and may request identification or purpose. If the party is already known, the interaction may be friendly or hostile depending on context.
2. A supply caravan arrives, carrying provisions for the castle. Guards escort it through the blood gate. The party may hide among the supplies or observe the gate's opening and closing mechanism.
3. A messenger on horseback approaches the castle at speed. The guards allow passage immediately. The messenger's urgent arrival suggests news has reached the city -- something important is about to happen.

4. A storm rolls through the mountain passes, making the Cliff Road treacherous. Visibility drops to mere feet. Horses refuse to move forward easily. Accidents become likely. The party must navigate carefully or risk a devastating fall.
5. A group of civilian merchants arrives to conduct business at the castle markets or to pay taxes to the Queen. Their presence suggests regular commerce between the city and the fortress.
6. A single figure in dark robes approaches the castle from an unusual direction, not by the main road. The Red Guard intercepts them. If the party observes, they witness the stranger being granted entry without question -- suggesting the Queen expected this person.

GROUND AND CEREMONIAL LEVELS (D6)

1. Red Guard patrol of 4 -- 6 soldiers conducting interior watches. They are professional and alert. Avoiding them requires stealth or a convincing cover story.
2. Castle servants move through corridors delivering food, water, or supplies. They are observant but not aggressive. Speaking to them yields information about the castle's operations and routines.
3. A formal ceremony or announcement is being prepared. Servants hang banners, arrange seating, and prepare the spaces. Chaos and activity provide cover for moving through areas that might otherwise be restricted.
4. The Queen passes through the main corridors with her retinue, moving between chambers. Her presence is unmistakable and awesome. Meeting her requires either a plausible reason or quick hiding.

5. An official meeting or negotiation is occurring in one of the formal chambers. The party might overhear important information if they are close enough and careful.
6. A minor noble or visiting dignitary is being shown through the castle. The tour creates movement and provides potential cover. The dignitary might be a useful contact or a source of information.

NOBLE AND ROYAL QUARTERS (D6)

1. Vampire Spawn servants move through the corridors, performing tasks and maintaining order. They are not inherently hostile but are alert. Some may be recognized as former humans the party knew in the city.
2. The Queen's personal guards stand watch at specific locations. They are the most skilled fighters in the castle and will not be easily bypassed or deceived.
3. An intimate scene: the Queen or Princess is encountered in a vulnerable moment -- alone, unguarded, or in private space. This chance encounter creates opportunity or threat.
4. A visiting dignitary or diplomat is staying in the guest suites. They may be a valuable source of information about current events or political maneuvering.
5. Private conversation overheard: the party accidentally encounters a conversation between important figures. The information gleaned could be crucial to understanding the conspiracy.
6. Princess Szeret is observing the city through her telescope. If encountered, she is curious about the party and their presence in the castle. She may share information or seek to understand their allegiances.

BELONG BOUND LEVELS (D6)

1. A necromantic working is in progress. The party encounters ritual activity -- runes being drawn, bodies being prepared, or dark magic being worked. Combat or stealth is necessary.
2. Prisoners in the dungeon draw attention. One may call out, offering information in exchange for help. Rescue is possible but dangerous and may compromise the party's position in the castle.
3. The creature in the cistern surfaces briefly. The water roils, and something massive moves beneath. The sound echoes through the dungeon levels, causing alarm and drawing guard attention.
4. A secret passage or hidden room is discovered. Its contents hint at the Queen's activities and suggest knowledge that could expose the conspiracy.
5. The Alchemist or another trusted servant of the Queen is conducting work. They are not expecting visitors and may become hostile if discovered, or they may provide valuable information if negotiations succeed.
6. A ritual circle shows evidence of recent use. Body parts, blood, and runes still glow faintly. The party can determine that a major working is approaching or has recently concluded, tying events together.

GALLERY

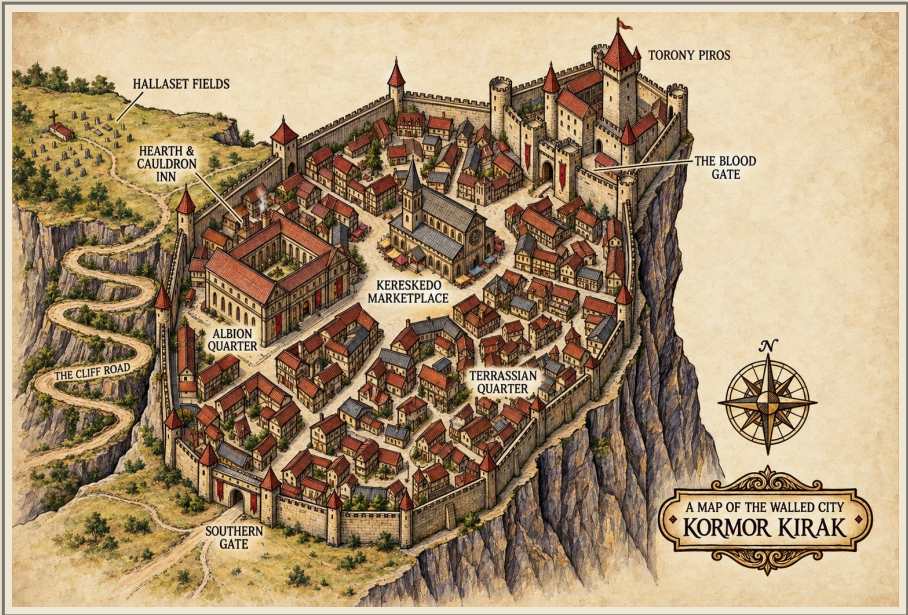
Art of The World Of Kormor Kirak



KORMOR KIRAK



The Known World



KORMOR KIRAK FROM ABOVE



KORMOR KIRAK AT NIGHT



THE ALBION EMBASSY



DEVORLEN KOSS'S CURIOSITY SHOP



KERESKEDO MARKET



THE MARKETPLACE



The Bastion Inn



Inside the Bastion Inn



HALLASET FIELDS -- THE CEMETERY



TORONY PIROS



THE CLIFF ROAD APPROACH



THE BLOOD GATE



CASTLE GROUND FLOOR



THE GRAND BALLROOM



THE THRONE ROOM



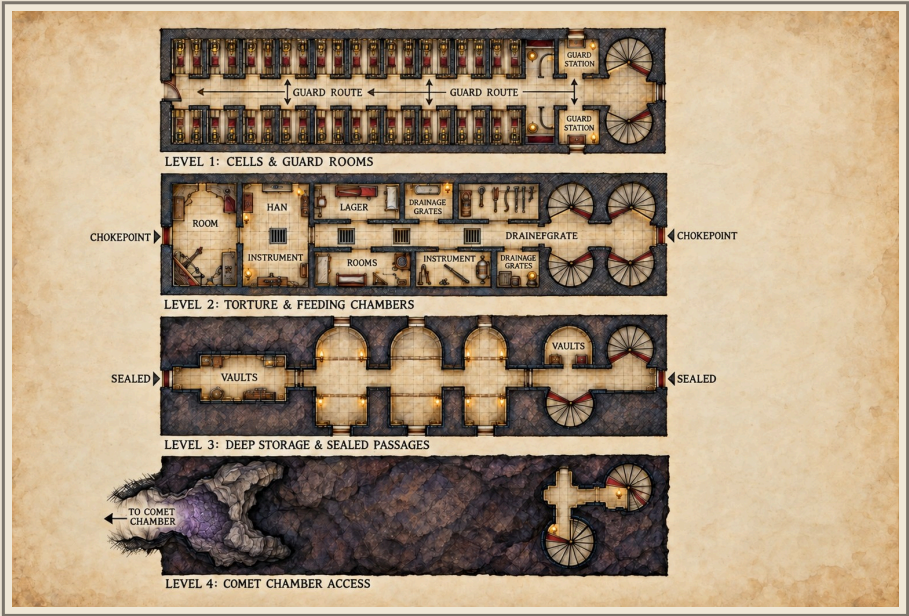
THE QUEEN'S BEDCHAMBER



SZERET'S BEDROOM



CASTLE CROSS SECTION



THE DUNGEON LEVELS



THE DUNGEONS



THE DUNGEON CELLS



THE COMET CHAMBER

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