

THE ETERNAL COURT

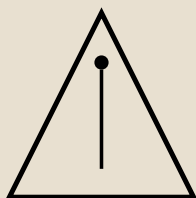
CASTLE GUIDE

WORLD BUILDING & LORE



JESSE ALEXANDER

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



Castle Guide

Torony Piros, Floor by Floor

*From the Audience Halls down to the Comet Chamber — every
door, every guard, every room that should not exist.*

KORMOR KIRAK · VIDEK · ANNO 1793

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The Red Tower

A Castle Guide for Gamemasters

From the world of

CAPITULUM

THE ETERNAL COURT

Based on the screenplay by

Jesse Alexander

System-flexible castle material

CAPITULUM

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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.

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PART ONE: THE APPROACH AND EXTERIOR

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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.

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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.

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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, CONVINING 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.

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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.

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THE FOUR TOWERS (EXTERJON OVERVJEW)

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.

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THE CLIFF PASSAGE

Not all entrances to Torony Pirois 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.

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PART TWO: GROUND LEVEL

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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.

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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 unguarded 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.

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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.

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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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

PART THREE: FIRST FLOOR (CEREMONIAL LEVEL)

CAPITULUM

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.*

CAPITULUM

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.*

CAPITULUM

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.*

CAPITULUM

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.*

CAPITULUM

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.*

CAPITULUM

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.*

CAPITULUM

**PART FOUR: SECOND
FLOOR (NOBLE AND GUEST
QUARTERS)**

CAPITULUM

THE SUITE

AMBASSADOR'S

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 STUMBLERD 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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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 WONDERES WHO PLAYS FOR THE EMPTY HALL. IT IS ONE OF THE CASTLE'S SMALL MYSTERIES.

CAPITULUM

**PART FIVE: THIRD FLOOR
(ROYAL PRIVATE LEVEL)**

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

PART SIX: THE TOWERS

CAPITULUM

TOWER OF THE WATER

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 TERRASSIAN 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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

PART SEVEN: BELOW
GROUND, LEVEL 1 --
UTILITY AND STORAGE

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

THE CISTERN

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

PART EIGHT: BELOW
GROUND, LEVEL 2 -- THE
DUNGEONS

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

THE OUBLETTE

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.

CAPITULUM

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."

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

THE REEQUARY

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 one reason the Lich Cult is interested in accessing the castle -- some cells want to restore an older master, while others seek relics their new secret leader, Barron Whitehallow, could use in his own ascension.

CAPITULUM

THE CULTE 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

Culte'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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

THE CATACOMBS OF THE VERE33 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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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."

CAPITULUM

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 down-

stream, 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 predating 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.

CAPITULUM

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.
- > 2\ 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.
- > 5\ A hooded figure moves quickly between buildings. They clutch a sealed envelope. If intercepted, they claim to be delivering urgent news to the kitchens.

6\ 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.

3\ 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.

6\ 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.

8\ 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.
- > 3\ 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.

5\ 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 Jailer 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.

6\ 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.

2\ 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.
- 5\ 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.
- 7\ 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 08)

- > 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.

2\ 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.

4\ A chamber flooded with dark water. Something large moves beneath the surface. Occasionally, pale hands emerge but never complete a full breach.

5\ 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.

7\ 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.

CAPITULUM

APPENDIX B: CASTLE NOTES

CAPITULUM

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 KALVIN 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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

THE CAPTAIN OF THE WATERS

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

APPENDIX E: CAMPAIGN INTEGRATION

CAPITULUM

FIVE SESSION TYPES

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

DUNGEON SESSIONS

CRAME

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.

CAPITULUM

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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.

CAPITULUM

SCALING ENCOUNTERS BY PARTY LEVEL

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

THE BARBARIAN

ALCHEMIST'S

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.

CAPITULUM

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).

CAPITULUM

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?

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

CASTLE DYNAMICS:
QUEEN'S STATUE

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

IS THE QUEEN NEUTRAL/UNKNOWN IS

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

APPENDIX D: SECRETS AND HIDDEN AREAS

CAPITULUM

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CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

POSSIBLITY 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.

CAPITULUM

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?

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

THE ETERNAL 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.

CAPITULUM

KIRAJINE'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.

CAPITULUM

APPENDIX A: CASTLE
FLOOR INDEX

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

BELLOW 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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

APPENDIX
SECRETS
FEATURES

B:
AND

CASTLE
HIDDEN

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

CEREMONIAL SECRETS

LEVEL

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

NECROMANTIC SECRETS

LEVEL

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

APPENDIX E: CASTLE ENCOUNTER TABLES

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

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.

CAPITULUM

BELOW GROUND 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.

CAPITULUM

CREDITS AND LEGAL

CREATED BY Jesse Alexander

BASED ON The screenplay *The Eternal Court* by Jesse Alexander

This Castle Guide is designed for use with tabletop roleplaying games and can be adapted to a wide range of systems, including Dungeons & Dragons 5E and Daggerheart.

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