



Baltic Gambit: A Novel of the Vampire Earth

By E.E. Knight

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David Valentine is chosen to be head of security for the Army of Kentucky representatives—and Alessa ignores his order to stay behind. Now, thrust into a lethal intrigue that threatens the entire peace process, she learns that the Kurian agent may be the least of her concerns.

For the Lifeweavers themselves are about to reveal something that will devastate the Resistance to its very core.

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Baltic Gambit: A Novel of the Vampire Earth By E.E. Knight Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #818621 in Books
- Published on: 2015-04-07
- Released on: 2015-04-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.75" h x .86" w x 4.20" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 320 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the Novels of The Vampire Earth

“I wouldn’t miss a book of his Vampire Earth series. They’re great.”—Charlaine Harris

“These quick, engrossing reads about post alien invasion and enslavement Earth continue to entertain me. [*Baltic Gambit*] is a very strong installment.”—BoingBoing.net

“Gritty realism, Lovecraftian villains, and boffo action scenes.”—S.M. Stirling, National Bestselling Author of *The Given Sacrifice*

About the Author

E.E. Knight is the bestselling author of the Novels of The Vampire Earth (*Appalachian Overthrow*, *March in Country*, *Winter Duty*) and the Age of Fire series (*Dragon Fate*, *Dragon Rule*, *Dragon Strike*).

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The Hub, April, the fifty-sixth year of the Kurian Order: A new military nerve center is growing in the sleepy old resort town of French Lick, Indiana. The roads have been cleared, the rail line up to Indianapolis reopened, and even the tiny airport has a new wind sock, camouflage hangars, and a generator.

It’s a well-chosen spot. Beneath the layers of dirt and rust, the town is something of a gem in a tarnished setting.

French Lick in its Gilded Age heyday saw multiple trains daily from Chicago bringing city folk to its two huge resort hotels in the woods of Southern Indiana. It once was the seat of smoky back rooms where political prospects were reviewed and selected by the parties, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the last of the breed, chosen in this corner of Indiana in one of the conference rooms of the older of the two vast hotels.

The popularity of the resort waned during the interstate age, but the second gilded age of the late twentieth century saw the two big old hotels restored to their former glory, especially the cavernous, cream-colored West Baden Springs resort with its huge indoor rotunda. The natural beauty of the Hoosier National Forest had not changed.

French Lick had a role to play in the chaos of 2022. During the last days of the United States government in its brief move to Indianapolis, the Kurian Order and its new adherents maintained a headquarters there, briefly, for the fighting that broke up what was left of U.S. civil authority. After that, the Grog armies moved on west to St. Louis, and the Kurian Order returned to the East to make use of the long-established institutions of government and education near the Atlantic Coast. With no more tourists, French Lick quieted again, save for a small training headquarters eventually established by the Northwest Ordnance, the premier Kurian Zone of the old Rust Belt stretching west from Pittsburgh and Cleveland, through Michigan and Indiana, to the borders of Chicago and the huge patch of still-productive farmland in Central Illinois.

With a thriving new freehold in Kentucky and its attached nub at Evansville threatening the Ordnance, the vast Southern corporate state known as the Georgia Control, and potentially the patchwork of Kurian ganglia on the East Coast, something had to be done.

A third try is inevitable.

“I’ve heard we Cats have nine lives,” Alessa Duvalier said, waiting for the dusk to deepen. “I’ve never known one to get past the first.”

The freckled redhead was talking to herself, as people who spend the better parts of their waking hours outside and alone often do.

It was a way to handle the fear, to vent it like a waiting steam engine releasing pressure. In this particular time and place, any emotion was dangerous, and fear was probably the worst of all. The Reapers would pick up on it as easily as the soldiers would see her setting off Roman candles on the hillside.

She’d learned over the years to cauterize her emotions on the job. No matter what she saw, heard, or guessed was going on around her, she couldn’t let it in.

The problem was, it had to go somewhere. Emotion was a funny thing. You could suppress one, but the pressure built up anyway and came out as another, say with hatred converting itself to an inappropriate laugh, or anxiety to a nervous tic. You could get rid of a little by talking it out with yourself, but only a little.

With her, the excess always seemed to pour into her stomach. She had a bad gut, undoubtedly ulcerous, but in her line of work chances were that she wouldn’t live to suffer from it in middle age and beyond.

Opening and shutting her hands and flexing her thighs and calves in her belly-down position in a patch of liverwort beneath a thick stand of mountain laurel, she ignored her sour stomach and the occasional vile-tasting burp and contemplated the aging opulence of the resort beneath. Someone had put some serious money into this patch of hilly, heavily wooded nowhere. A local goat rancher had told her that it was the waters—they were once reputed to have healing potential and to be something of a cure-all.

She’d tried it. There were several out-of-the way natural springs in the hills. Apart from a silky tang like Epsom salts, she didn’t see what was so special about the water, other than it had made her void her bowels three times in the subsequent twenty-four hours. Her gut felt about the same as it always did, sour with a little stab now and then, as though it was afraid she’d forget about it.

So, the poopy water caused a pair of behemoth hotels to be built. You couldn’t fault the setting, a nice stretch of flatter land for golf courses and tennis courts surrounded by higher, but hardly mountainous, hills. It made for pleasant hiking. She sometimes wished she’d lived in an era when the big challenge of your day was a tennis game. Screw the Kurian propaganda spouted by the churches; any culture that can solve so many problems that you have time for the frivolous work of improving your backswing or whatever it is called is admirable.

Naturally cautious, she was ready to bag the idea of stealing into the hotel. Usually, she’d look at a place this big and dance a little jig—the larger the location, the easier it was to find a weak spot to penetrate. This hotel, however, had multiple rings of security—outer patrols with dogs on horseback, ATV, and foot, then an inner ring on the grounds checking both the outer patrols and a final layer at the entrances. All the lower-floor windows were bricked up with heavy-duty glass blocks. Vehicles were being searched at the main gate at the highway and there were temporary (by the look of the fencing) dog runs between the entrances just in case someone decided to try a climb to the roof or an upper floor.

Short of parachuting in or finding an unguarded secret entrance, she didn’t see how she could do it.

Five grueling days ago Evansville's defense and security staff had received a tip through a chain of family relations, it seemed, that something big was up at French Lick.

Hitching a ride with one of the Evansville militia who owned a motorcycle and a sidecar, she and a Wolf named Clay hurried over a mix of defunct roads and smugglers' trails into South-Central Indiana to check out the story. Southern Command's forces at Fort Seng, just across the river from Evansville, went on the alert as she left, and were making preparations for moving a mechanized strike team.

That was the advantage of an independent brigade with an aggressive officer in command. Colonel Lambert got Fort Seng up and moving fast.

After mapping a route and leaving the Wolf with his pack radio back at a base camp on the other side of the old Hoosier National Forest, she penetrated the "base" to see what she could through her old pair of mini-binoculars from the hills.

Something was definitely up. It was at the bigger of the two mammoth resort hotels, a round white thing built around what she guessed was some kind of spectacular dome.

Intelligence did not have a lot of information on French Lick. The round white resort was a recuperative hotel for wounded who needed longer recoveries or adjustments to artificial limbs and so on. The one a little south on the road was allegedly a retirement home for military personnel, run by the New Universal Church. Like most institutions devoted to the elderly, it was a fiction, with the majority of the aged given a few weeks to settle in and relax, with a series of snapshots taken to send to the relatives back home before a death from a food-poisoning incident or a flu outbreak would be regretfully announced—just enough messy detail to let others delude themselves into thinking that the pensioner hadn't had a last dance in the arms of a Reaper.

She'd learned a few things observing the hotel. She got a sense of its rhythms, where people would be, doing what, and when.

At night the huge rotunda of the hotel was lighted up like a Christmas party. Massive amounts of food were brought in, for two hundred people or more. The old hotel hadn't seen that many rooms occupied in eighty years. From what she'd been able to observe, it wasn't the usual Quisling high command work-hard-and-sneak-in-some-play conference, either. The only women she'd seen brought in were in uniform or had the look of professionals and a spouse or two in riding clothes for the hotel barn to the northeast. Back when she was scouting Texas or Kansas or Tennessee, with this many high-ranking Quislings they would have been bringing in sexual entertainment by the busload.

There was a time when her path inside would have been to pose as one of the hookers. She doubted she could turn the trick, so to speak, these days. Too many miles in too much weather without enough food. She wasn't a sleek, youthful Cat anymore; now she was more like a rangy, bug-bitten feral. A man would have to be very, very desperate to risk his job security and his life over an aging specimen such as her. She'd always played down her looks, but now that they'd faded like dried flower petals, she missed them, just a bit.

But what youth and beauty couldn't achieve, age and experience could. The latter were more reliable anyway, and they didn't make her feel like a trollop. Might as well chance getting a little closer.

She wiggled another fifty or sixty feet down the slope just to the northwest of the hotel and paused where she could make out an Ordnance Army sign stenciled in white at the parking lot:

ord af 3rd training battalion vs-lsh

She had a better vantage on the parking lot now. Yes, something big must be going on inside. There were mobile communication trucks with strange little antennae that reminded her of the rack on a charcoal grill or xylophones.

There were all sorts of vehicles here parked in the lot or on the grass, even command cars and escort vehicles with markings she didn't recognize. The Ordnance and the Georgia Control were here in force, the pierced crescent of the Moondaggers, but there were a couple of other symbols—a Roman-looking eagle and something that resembled the twisted serpents and staff of the old caduceus, and a pyramid with an eye atop it not that different from the one that appeared on old U.S. currency. She committed them to memory; she could always pick them out of one of the intelligence ledgers later.

The lights inside the hotel flickered and she heard a throaty roar as an up-on-blocks trailer serving as an emergency generator kicked on. They probably had a salvaged generator from a diesel train or two ready to go for just such a contingency.

"HMMMMMMMM," she said to herself. Indiana's more-promise-than-lick rural electricity must have choked. She reached into one of the capacious pockets of the mottled old duster she wore in the field and extracted a piece of dried meat.

Ruminating, you might call it. She tore off a hunk and chewed vigorously. One had to have a good set of teeth and strong jaws to handle Kentucky jerky. There might be a little beef or pork in there for flavor, but it was undoubtedly legworm flesh, as sure as Spam came in a can with its own opener.

A couple of soldiers in Ordnance uniform trotted out to the generator trailer and climbed inside. She traced the wire running to the hotel's green-painted substation, artfully hidden by shrubbery.

She reached for her sword hilt before knowing why. Peripheral vision had triggered nerve synapses—

Almost seven feet of walking, robed death came out of the hotel's rear entrance and headed for the generator trailer. Even at this distance, it was unmistakable. The Reaper paused and slowly surveyed the western hills overlooking the hotel. Duvalier dropped into her usual koan that reduced mental activity to the point where, hopefully, the Reaper wouldn't sense her mental and emotional activity—lifesign, she'd learned to call it, but God knows what the Kurians thought of it as. She always pictured a dark beach, only the stars above glittering in the milk-warm air, and her sitting on the sand. It was half memory, half fantasy with her ever since she'd spent the night on a beach like that while visiting the Texas coast. All she'd done was mentally edit out all the garbage that the tide had thrown up to litter the beach. Her mental camera concentrated on her toes, then her whole body, and back and back it pulled across the beach, reducing the image of her until she was lost in the gentle surf.

The koan also had the practical effect of relaxing her, so if she had to she could go into action loose, with sure and steady hands.

A Reaper meant a Kurian. With these woods and hills, it had to be nearby. Probably in the hotel—nothing else in the area matched its level of security.

If a Kurian were here overseeing his generals, it was just possible that there would be other Kurians in attendance. Was the alliance already settled, and this conference was just to hammer out the details? Or were they still determining who would do what in joint action against Kentucky in the future? If it were the latter, there might be a party of Kurians keeping an eye, or whatever sensory node the Kurians used to keep from getting consumed by their cousins, on their generals. They'd also want to make sure rival rulers weren't offering deals to the Quislings that might put them at a disadvantage.

That was their weakness. Time would tell if it was fatal. If the Kurians had shown any ability to work together, they would have subjugated humanity as easily as humans controlled life and death in a chicken coop.

That might explain all the security. Even air had some difficulty getting in, judging from the guards on the roof near the rust-streaked, multi-ton HVAC units.

Security might keep her out, or if it didn't keep her out, find her once she made it inside the hotel.

She thought about calling in the cavalry. A single Reaper was a factoid. Intriguing, and further confirmation that something major was in the works here, but she wanted evidence before making a case that the disheveled elegance of the French Lick resort was worth the fight. Maybe they were only deciding on a new communications network or, given the problems with the electricity, establishing a new national grid for the Eastern Kurian Zones. Shooting it up would bring a world of hurt down on the assault force. They'd be lucky to make it back across the Ohio even if they scattered into small parties.

No, she couldn't ask men to die on a hunch.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Erna Taylor:

The reason? Because this *Baltic Gambit: A Novel of the Vampire Earth* is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap this but latter it will zap you with the secret the idea inside. Reading this book adjacent to it was fantastic author who else write the book in such incredible way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any more or you going to regret it. This excellent book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book get such as help improving your ability and your critical thinking method. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I ended up you I will go to the e-book store hurriedly.

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