



Appalachian Overthrow: A Novel of the Vampire Earth

By E.E. Knight

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When a protest against shortages is deliberately and bloodily suppressed, Ahn-Kha sets himself against the ruling Maynes family and sets out on a trail of vengeance through the Coal Country.

The people of the Coal Country now have a leader—a powerful and battle-hardened leader determined to forge them into an army that will wage guerrilla warfare against the Maynes family and their Kurian masters—and free the Appalachians from their tyranny....

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the Novels of Vampire Earth:

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

“Knight’s terrifying future world is an epic canvas on which he paints a tale of human courage, heroism, and yes, even love.”—Jay Bonansinga, *New York Times* Bestselling Coauthor of *The Walking Dead: Rise of the Governor*

“E. E. Knight is a master of his craft. His prose is controlled but interesting, and his characters are fully formed and come to life.”—Science Fiction Weekly

About the Author

E. E. Knight was born in Wisconsin, grew up in Minnesota, and now calls Chicago home, where he abides in domestic felicity with his family and assorted pets. He is the author of the Vampire Earth novels (*March in Country*, *Winter Duty*, *Fall with Honor*) and the Age of Fire novels (*Dragon Champion*, *Dragon Avenger*, *Dragon Outcast*).

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The Curtain Rises

I gave myself up for dead when the bullets ripped out the back of our fleeing four- wheel

drive. They cut through the back panel, glass, and my flesh with the ease you’d expect of steel-jacketed high-velocity rounds.

I would draw my last breath on the traditional human holiday of Halloween, having seen forty-two years. The Kentucky soil of the Ohio Basin would absorb my blood, and I would join my mate, our children, and the ancestors after a brief period of suffering.

I have been told to begin this account in medias res. Were it up to me, I would open this memoir with a brief account of my background as a Xeno, a species foreign to this earth, yet born here nevertheless, and, as I noted, the first of my family born on our new homeworld. I would name myself the son of a people lied into war and rewarded for their losses with poisoned land and broken treaties.

I’m told I came into life in the year 2031 in the normal manner for a Golden One, letting out healthy yapping cries and covered in fine, translucent hair, born in the house of my father and uncles on the banks of the Missouri River, the old state designation of Nebraska. A prophecy of the stains of my birth said I would make my mark among men in strange lands. Some account of my early years as a trader and then later as a speaker for my people would explain my ability with English, the most common tongue of the humans of my region. My rise into the Golden Ones’ councils at a young age might give you some reason to accept the facility of my senses and judgment.

My scars in the war against the Kurian Order remain for all to see, even if they are faded and camouflaged by an old Grog’s sags and wrinkles. The lies endured, the losses suffered by my people, including the murder

of my beloved and our family, would explain my affiliation with our common cause, when this extraordinary world's even more extraordinary people rose and rid us of those who treated us as livestock.

We think, though I have reason to wonder. But that takes me beyond this narrative.

I would speak briefly of my meeting David Valentine, a man I am proud to call my seshance,* who found me wounded and revived me in body and spirit. I would conclude that sketch with a mention that our endeavors are chronicled elsewhere with the usual mild omissions and exaggerations that inevitably cloud reality when a biographer is asked to weave, telling the colorful oft-told tales and disclosing the sometimes-disappointing truth.

Without those particulars of my life, how is the reader to judge the value of this reminiscence? It would be like weighing the goose by extrapolation from a single feather.

But my publisher has requested that I begin with the night of the* friend-as-important- as-family wild flight across the Ohio River and into Kentucky, on Halloween night.

There were seven of us in that big black high-riding utility vehicle that crashed through the bridge barrier, fleeing like Eliza across the Ohio with a far worse master than Simon Legree behind, though southbound rather than north. We had escaped a no-longer- secret installation of the Kurian Order called Xanadu with a pregnant woman, a patient there who had once been married to my David's friend William Post. I was rearmost, filling the back of the truck, squatting uncomfortably on some tools, tow chains, and a spare battery.

A bag of groceries hastily thrown in as provision had spilled, so there were apples rolling back and forth on the floor as we took hard turns.

Our intention was to race into the Kentucky hills and lose ourselves among the legworm ranchers there. Kentucky was a wild land, thinly held by the Kurian Overlords even then, and the legworm ranchers enjoyed a measure of independence required by the needs of their voracious herds.

A spray of bullets from the surprised sentries ended that hope, at least for me. Three bullets and a piece of what I believe was glass struck me across the abdomen and neck. Worse, the pursuit started almost instantly, suggestive of expectation on our enemy's part. I suspected I would not last much longer in the chase, so I volunteered to take the wheel and lead the pursuit away from the others.

With an approaching column of Ohio vehicles filled with soldiers, I did not mention my injuries or the inevitable outcome of the chase. It was the sort of moment that would take an entire night to say what needed to be said.

We had to act while the pursuers were still far enough away not to notice a ruse, so at a thickly covered hillside I took the wheel from my David. My David has never had much confidence behind the wheel of such machines—to this day he is an atrocious driver even if one allows for his bad eye. Though one of our party was a doctor and saw to it that my injuries would not immediately bleed me out, I would only slow them on a foot pursuit. Everyone saw the necessity of the action, and we parted with regret and brevity, though David took some convincing. Our farewells are not something I can remember without much emotion, and I will not slow this narrative with sentiments recorded elsewhere.*

Before squeezing behind the wheel, I took the precaution of putting some of the chains and locks and hitches in the forward passenger seat.

Determined to lead the Ohio forces on as merry a chase as possible so that my friends might escape safely, I pulled away. I avoided looking back at the trees where my friend of many years disappeared with his party, not unmoved by emotion or unwetted by tears.

I drove perhaps two more miles and then stopped at the other side of a tangled a crossroads ruin long enough to smash the taillights of the “Lincoln” (an odd moniker for so vast a vehicle, considering the former president’s narrow frame and thin features).

The act was harder than you might think. Despite the bullet holes, the well-preserved vintage Lincoln was a beautiful piece of machinery. It offered an almost supernaturally smooth ride, yet transmitted a good feel up to the driver for what the tires were doing; it was also responsive, quick to accelerate or break. The on-board computer system automatically worked the power to the wheels and brakes in turns, making it more difficult to roll. You can literally say of such machines: they don’t make ’em like they used to. The superb machine’s performance was buying precious extra time for the escape of my friends, and I was grateful for it.

I failed to destroy one brake light, however, and I believe that proved to be my undoing. Or perhaps there was some kind of tracking device on the vehicle. Though I drove as fast as I dared, not using the vehicle’s forward floodlights, I saw my pursuers closing, a remorseless snake of vehicles following the hare-trail

I was tearing through the overgrown Kentucky highway, grasses, shrubs,

and bits of branch clinging to my vehicle’s grille and mirrors as though fighting to keep me from further destruction of the road’s plant life.

My pursuers had large, high-clearance vehicles and, it seemed, a

better knowledge of the terrain. Twice I had hopes that I’d lost them, only to see them coming at me from my quarter via a shortcut through the hills only they knew existed.

Only one gambit remained, it seemed; the one I had planned for when I placed the chains beside me. Most humans have a tendency to fill in blanks in their education with a set of less-reliable associations born of their own experiences and prejudices. Because we are larger than even the biggest men, until recently alien to their world, hairy, big-eared and sharp-toothed

in a manner similar to the Gray Grogs, most humans will assume my intelligence and understanding operate at the more rudimentary level of my distant relations, though we are as dissimilar in our mental abilities as man is to the chimpanzee. This category error has worked to my advantage before.

I drove a few more minutes until I saw my opportunity. A downed limb partially blocked the road bordered now on either side by forest. I swerved around the heavy limb and aimed the big four-wheel at a thick trunk. Though I braced myself for the impact, I can still feel the collision in my neck when I remember that night.

In my remaining moments I wound the chains around my seat and, with some fumbling, locked and hitched them behind me. Long arms and a dexterous set of feet have their advantages.

My pursuers deployed their vehicles as well as the trees and overgrown roadside allowed, using their doors as shields and rests for their weapons.

They shouted at me to show my hands out the window. Instead, I pounded on the still- functioning horn until they fanned out to one side to approach, boots crunching the fall leaves, carbines and shotguns held to their shoulders.

Of the possibilities for my immediate future, none looked particularly promising. A straightforward execution in the form of a bullet to some quarter of my head seemed the most likely, especially when they saw my wounds. I could meet death calmly, perhaps welcome it. Ever since the loss of my beloved, I have waited for death's misted portal to open, sometimes taking chances that might hasten it, for after a soul-purging tour of the hells I've missed in this life, I'm sure my soul would be judged worthy of ascension. And there, she would be waiting. We would set teeth to ear as we had at our pairing and never be parted again. I've kept the honor of my father's name and labored for the betterment of my people and, I suspect, even made a difference in a human life or two. I'm confident that's worth something when my acts are calculated and will avoid the humiliation of a reincarnation. At least I hope so.

The pain of my wounds waxed. Our vet had been fairly certain that my vitals were untouched, but that didn't stop the throbbing, warming sensation rapidly escalating into a burn. Enough pain, and you become resigned to your fate; your one hope is that it is over with quickly. I wasn't there yet, but I feared I soon would be.

An early death would be a kindness. My beloved hates to be kept waiting. Nothing in this patch of Kentucky woods would mark my death, save for a scar the roadside tree would bear for the rest of its life. Maybe someday my David would piece it together; I could rely on him to place a small memorial.

"I told you it was riding higher," were the first words I heard through something other than an amplifying speaker.

"That's a Grog," another said.

I hit the horn again and offered blubbering noises. It was no stage performance for police-vehicle limelight. The grief over the damage to the Lincoln was very real.

The next thing I knew, the barrel of a pistol was pointed at my head from over the rearview mirror. I could follow the foresight back to a steady eye, glinting in the darkness. What looked like lieutenant bars were stitched onto his collar, gray against black. He'd crept up as silently as my David, though my blasts on the horn had helped.

More men came around the front, and powerful flashlight beams lanced into my eyes. I gave a very real whimper and a pained yip.

"Yo!" the lieutenant said. "They got him chained in the driver's seat. That's why he didn't run. Get a bomb-dog up here, now!"

"Keep those hands up," a voice ordered. I'd been trying to shield my eyes from the flashlights with my forearm.

"Yeah, Corp, it'd be just like those bastards to blow up some poor dumb Grog to try to get us," another, younger voice said.

Not just one dog came forward, but three. After the first, a good-natured yellow pot roast of a birder sniffed around beneath the car and behind my seat, pausing with interest over my wounds; other yelping hounds smelled the upholstery and started running in and out of the surrounding woods, trying to locate a trail.

They removed my chains with bolt cutters and kept their guns
on me.

The lieutenant had an aged, battered face, but kindly eyes. He looked like the sort of man you'd send into the

brush after an escapee from a sensitive institution. I wondered what sin lay in his past, that the Kurian Order did not let him rise above his original commissioned rank.

“That’s those guerillas for you,” an Ohio backing up his lieutenant said. “Take some poor dumb hurt animal and chain him behind a wheel. Fuckers. I bet they told him home and bed were just down the road. Poor dumb Grog.”

Since they seemed in no hurry to effect my ticket for the hells I’ve missed in this life, I fell out of the door and decided to vocalize. Maybe it would draw the hounds’ attention. Every minute counted. Eventually they’d backtrack, but if I could delay things here . . .

I lay on my face, hiking my butt up as though expecting a deserved kick, arms extended toward the lieutenant with the pistol.

“Me drive. Me drive good,” I gabbled. “No go wrong way. No carelessnessish!

Not see tree beside road. Only see tree on road.”

“Wow, this one’s a regular J. Edger Proofcock,” a soldier to my right said, with the youthful voice I’d heard earlier. I looked at the front of the car and let out a wailing cry of horror.

“You fix? Please you fix? Scrap, no, not scrap! Oh, oh, oh! Drive

good no!” I finished, summoning the rest of this season’s allotment of tears. I crawled for the wreck, patted the hood of the Lincoln,

threw myself against a tire under the hostile guns, weeping like bereft Niobe herself. Human culture is so rich in emotional exhibitions.

Not the Golden One way—we only howl to frighten enemies—but over a lifetime among men I’ve now learned to appreciate the benefit of a good teary purge.

“He’s worried we’ll shitcan him for wrecking that Xanadu ride,” the man with the bolt cutters said. “He doesn’t know guerillas from churchmen.”

“Whaddya say, Lieutenant? End the laments?” the man with the shotgun said, bringing it to his shoulder again.

Coming your way, beloved. Tell the children.

“Top, hold up,” the youthful-sounding one who’d expressed sympathy for the poor dumb animal said. “Let me take him. I can find a buyer in Lex. Ought to be worth a couple thou. Big healthy Grog like that.”

“Healthy? You see he’s bleeding, Frisky?” bolt cutters said.

“C’mon. Grog’s clean their teeth with grenades,” my new guardian said. “If he’s still yappin’, he’ll live, probably longer than any of us. Thirty percent for you, Lieutenant, twenty for the Top. I’ll take him to Lexington with a pass and see what I can get for him.”

“Forty percent for me,” the lieutenant said.

“And thirty for me,” the shotgun-wielding Top added.

“You’ll take ten,” the lieutenant said. “Eager to please, muscles like that. And can drive, too. Ought to be worth four or five thou if he speaks and savvies and is intact below the belt. Schmuck.” He took a breath, looking at the anxious dogs, still running back and forth sniffing for scent fifteen miles behind. “This night’s going to suck hard, and six gets you a Kewpie doll that the damn legworm ranchers will be peeing in the wells before we use them. Might as well take a bonus.”

“That’s being on the righteous side, sir,” Frisky said.

“I’ll want a receipt, Frisky. I don’t want any of my forty rolled up some whore’s ass so her pimp don’t find it. Buy him a decent labor-belt to hide those bandages.”

“Sir yes sir,” Frisky said.

Frisky went to work securing the detail’s investment in me. They didn’t have handcuffs big enough for my wrists, so they settled for leg irons.

If I’d known what was to be endured over the next few months,

I might have been tempted to rush the top sergeant. A shotgun blast, a brief caress of hot air and lead before the end of this trying world; that would be nothing compared to the evil awaiting me in the Coal Country.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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