

THE ETERNAL COURT

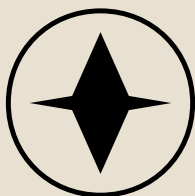
WORLD STYLE & TONE

WORLD BUILDING & LORE



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



Style & Tone

How the World Speaks

*The narrator's voice, the in-world cadence, the words and gestures
forbidden — for any hand that writes for this city.*

KORMOR KIRAK · VIDEK · ANNO 1793

FORMAT	AUDIENCE	VOICE
<i>Guide · A5</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Constitution</i>

The Genre: Gothic Gaslamp Fantasy

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

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

Konkretely, in play this looks like:

- Gas lamps casting sickly light on a wet cobblestone street
 - Red Guards in polished armor that catches flame-light like drying blood
 - Airships with riveted hulls cutting through mountain storms
 - Necromantic runes hand-carved into flesh arranged as ritual geometry
 - A formal ball in a castle that has dungeons directly beneath the dance floor
 - Automatic assassins with clockwork hearts moving through midnight streets
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The 1793 Time Period: Historical Resonance, Not Reproduction

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

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

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

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

What distinguishes this world from generic dark fantasy:

- **SUPERNATURAL GOVERNANCE IS NORMAL.** The Queen is a vampire. Everyone knows. This isn't hidden or shameful. It's simply how power is structured. Vampires rule here, and the mechanisms of their rule are as bureaucratic and mundane as any human government.

- **MAGIC AND INDUSTRY COEXIST UNEASILY, NOT HARMONIOUSLY.** Blood rituals happen in underground chambers while factories run above. These aren't integrated systems. They're tensions. The old world and new world constantly at war within the same borders.

- **THE AESTHETIC IS TIRED.** This isn't romantic gothic. It's gothic rendered exhausted. The masks at the masquerade are bone and scale. The performances are debauched and transgressive. The castle is beautiful but it's also a place where vampires feed on prisoners. Beauty here is always slightly sickening.

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THE FEEL OF THE WORLD

The Weight of a Century of War

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

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

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

Coexistence and Contradiction

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

Technology and Magic

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

- Industrial precision versus hand-crafted tradition
- Mass production versus individual artisanship
- Factory efficiency versus ritual slowness

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

Uneven Distribution of Power and Resources

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

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

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

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

Supernatural Governance as Normal

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

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

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

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

The horror of this isn't that magic rules. It's that supernatural governance produces the same moral compromises as human governance. The Queen is still

a political actor. She's still pursuing power. The supernatural element doesn't make her more evil or more noble -- it just makes her more powerful.

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MORAL AMBIGUITY AND TONE

No Side is Heroic

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

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

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

The War Economy as the True Villain

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

There are people in power on both sides who have built their entire fortunes on perpetual conflict. Peace is a threat to them. Peace means factories go silent.

Peace means armies downsize. Peace means the elaborate justifications for sacrifice become meaningless.

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

When your players uncover the conspiracy, they're not stopping war. They're not saving peace in any final sense. They're interrupting a catastrophe engineered by Kiraline at the level of sovereign power and corrupted from within by Barron's rise inside the Lich Cult. Any victory should feel real, costly, and incomplete. The systems that created this crisis remain intact.

Trust as a Weapon

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

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

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

Wooster is genuinely cooperating with the conspiracy, but he tells himself he's just managing bureaucracy. Rozito genuinely believes he's serving the Queen,

but he's actually serving Barron's hidden agenda. Varga genuinely believes a cure is coming, but that cure may never materialize.

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

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

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RUNNING ATMOSPHERE

THE

Describing Spaces: Layer and Weave

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

The Castle (Torony Piros)

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

Then add the wrongness. The geometry becomes strange as you go deeper. Hallways shouldn't lead where they lead. Distances don't match external measurements. The Queen's private chamber exists in a space that's geometrically impossible. The dungeons smell of blood and copper and something worse. Bodies hang in chains. Something feeds here at night.

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

The City Marketplace

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

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

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

Underground Spaces (Terra Sotto)

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

The Night Market is organized chaos in shadow. Merchants operate from stalls built against rough stone walls. Torches cast uneven light and deep shadows. The crowd is dangerous -- thieves, desperation, moral compromise. Multiple dark areas allow transactions to occur unobserved.

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

Lighting and Shadow as Mood

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

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

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

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

Sound Design

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

The Castle

- Bells that ring themselves (no visible mechanism)
- Footsteps echoing in impossible ways
- Doors opening and closing without visible push
- The constant drip of water from dungeon walls
- Silence that feels pregnant with presence

The Marketplace

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

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

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

The Castle as Character

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

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

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

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

The City as Organism

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

- Markets that shift configuration between visits
- Merchants that appear and disappear
- Black market operations that move locations
- Red Guard presence that increases or decreases unpredictably

- Rumors that spread faster than official information

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

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

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THE EXPERIENCE

PLAYERS'

They Start as Outsiders

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

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

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

Information is Currency

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

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

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

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

The Horror is Political and Personal

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

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

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

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

Escalation: From Diplomacy to Cosmic Threat

The campaign arc should feel like an escalation:

Early: Diplomatic Intrigue

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

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

- The party discovers that Barron is the architect of everything
- They realize the peace effort is a cover for a conspiracy

- They understand that if Barron succeeds, he won't just rule Albion -- he'll rule as an immortal lich wearing a stolen royal body
- The stakes become genuinely catastrophic

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

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THE CAMPAIGN'S CENTRAL PARADOX

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

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

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

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

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FINAL GUIDANCE

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

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

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

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