

Journey Planet 5

# JOURNEY PLANET ISSUE 5 - JANUARY 2010

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Editors: James Bacon, Claire Brialey and Chris Garcia

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**Comments? [Journeyplanet@gmail.com](mailto:Journeyplanet@gmail.com)**

# OUR READERS WRITE

LETTERS, EDITED BY CLAIRE BRIALEY

*Well, a few of our readers write. Others have blogged, and quite a few more have made enthusiastic noises in person, and we're grateful to all of you. And, of course, eager to hear more from more of you next time around, and this time we're hoping to make that a bit easier to achieve.*

*Judging by a few of the comments we did receive, I should explain that the distribution of issue 4 was... prolonged. Wherever possible we'd like this to be a fanzine distributed on paper (although my co-editors are very happy to make it more widely available via efanazines.com too), but Chris finished putting the issue together at the very end of August on his way to the Worldcon – and, while preparing a version that would work better for printing on A5 paper here in the UK, then suffered a computer crash. So we had a PDF ready to go on efanazines, and went ahead; by the time we had both the UK master (to which Chris made a few changes and had to leave a few things out) and the wherewithal to get it printed and distributed, several months had passed.*

*I'm the part of the editorial collective that usually delays the production of another issue, but this time we were also waiting on the final article we wanted for this one – and I'm delighted that we did wait, since it's one of my personal favourites – and it also gave us the opportunity to wait for and thus include here some additional responses following our paper distribution in the UK and a very little of the rest of Europe. The electronic version of the fanzine may have been widely read on account of being widely available, but – perhaps because the Worldcon also somewhat got in the way of people keeping up with fanzines – we received only one letter of comment from that means of distribution. Which seemed rather a shame when the issue had been primarily about science fiction which is, after all, why we're all here.*

*We do particularly commend those readers who responded to the UK paper copies given that one of the things that got left out appeared to be, um, our contact details...*

## Philip Turner

I was interested to encounter Claire's proposition that SF fandom is full of people who don't like SF any more but do like the company of similar people, who are likely to share the extra-SF interests of the former SF fan. It suggests that SF is a stage on a road to enlightenment and a necessary screening interest, which can be dropped like a hot brick in a 'Post-SF' fandom period once it has served its purpose.

I tend to get my new reading material from *Postscript* and *Bibliophile*, and their respective SF sections tend to be rather uninviting, consisting mainly of partworks: volume 4 of *The Chronicles of Zarg* sequence and like that. Also, back in the '60s and '70s, I bought SF mags, and SF, crime, war and humour paperbacks, by the ton. Now, I buy a bit of crime but most of the rest is non-fiction; I'm obviously a person of reading extremes, whose breadth

of reading matter will balance out over a reading career. Like a former SF fan, I've moved on from SF to non-fiction. (I could never take Cordwainer Smith seriously when I came across his stories in SF mags. And I never got to *Blue Mars*. The first of the series was so tediously awful that I said, "No more Kim Stanley Robinson," as I returned the book to my dad's collection.) But if I ever want to read some SF, I have hundreds of novels from the Fifties to the Seventies, which I can revisit to find out how they look to someone who has been writing himself for 35 years. Eric Frank Russell still Rulz!

The piece on Venus in JP 4 was good and I was reminded, by the final picture, of the events at Romiley Observatory during the 2004 transit. My mother had been looking forward to it for years but expecting the ghods to grot on Romiley by making it rain. But that didn't happen and yours truly ended up holding a pair of binoculars in one hand to project a Sun + Venus image onto a piece of white card for the benefit of spectators, while taking a couple of photos (when I thought of it toward the end of the transit) with a midget pen camera for posterity and the Romiley Literary Circle website.

How curiously *avant garde* to have an almost illegible table of contents – what very modern designers to have black text on a very dark picture! Something else curious is the lack of an address for the publishers, which suggests that the mag goes out only to people who know where to find at least one of the perpetrators if they want to comment on the ish. Afterthought: unless the address is printed on black on a black area at the top of the cover picture???

– 14 November 2009

10 Carlton Avenue, Romiley, Stockport SK6 4EG, UK

*Claire: Philip wasn't the only respondent to comment on our attempt to keep our contents and contributors a mystery. As a longstanding Hitchhikers fan I could attempt to claim that it was all homage to the Disaster Area stuntship, but in fact all three of us are learning things as a result of working together on JP. Chris is learning about fanzine layout for black & white paper copies as compared to the wonders of PDFs on the interweb; I'm learning that most of the other things I think are important about fanzine production aren't particularly significant for my co-editors or apparently most of our readers; and James... well, I'm not quite sure about the totality of what James is learning but if it's anything meaningful I'm sure he'll write a fanzine article or two about it soon. It's probably also true to say that we've all learnt that we'd really like to collaborate again with someone as good as Pete Young...*

**JOURNEYPLANET@GMAIL.COM**

## Steve Jeffery

It was an interesting and surprising sercon move for *Journey Planet* to theme a whole issue around Orwell and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the book, and 1984 the year, and one that worked well. It's hard to pick particular highlights from that issue. James's Orwellian London and the history of the Penguin covers worked extremely well, and the articles by Les Hurst and Tony Keen tempt me to file this issue with my collection of *Foundations* for handy references. The only trouble on that score is that the shelf isn't tall enough, so I'll have to be content with slipping a file card into the collection saying: "Orwell/1984: see *Journey Planet* 3". I was also much taken by some of the splendid

graphics in that issue, including the rather surreal and slightly scary 'Under Watchful Eyes' transport poster and the "Google Earth is Watching You" graffiti.

Chris's piece prompted me to wonder what I was doing in 1984 and whether it was personally significant. It was, I now realise, when my own life turned significantly. In late 1983 a long and rather intense relationship broke up and in December I returned from a two-week business trip to Copenhagen to an empty bedsit, which

I was then asked to vacate at short notice. So 1984 found me looking for somewhere to stay, and after dossing on borrowed floors for a few weeks I found a room in a flat in Ealing Common. Which was where, sometime later, I met Vikki.

As Emma King points out, her  $2+2=5$  trick turns on a nasty division by zero. Which, as any fule kno, either completely stops a computer program in its tracks, or yields infinity. Strange thing, infinity. I mean, where will it all end? Or what species of infinity is it? Both Profs Ian Stewart (in his wonderfully mind-bending *Cabinet of Mathematical Curiosities*) and Marcus de Soutoy have tried to persuade me that there are not one, but a (possibly infinite) hierarchy of infinities; but at this point, like the computer, my brain overloads and stops with an 'illegal instruction' error.

And so to *Journey Planet* 4, the science fiction issue. Not the last issue to mention or discuss the topic of science fiction, I hope. Like Claire, I believe sf and a love of books is why we're in fandom in the first place, and colours much of what we do in the community. To explicitly ignore it or separate it from fanzine (or other) fandom, almost as a statement of principle, strikes me as weird as some of the manifestos floating about on what should or shouldn't be allowed in science fiction. I thought we were supposed to be the broad-minded writers and readers, and took pride in that. Otherwise the tone of some of *Ansible's* 'How Others See Us' squibs rings horribly hollow.

I was reading Cheryl Morgan's article when the November 2009 *Locus* arrived; there's an interesting

parallel between Cheryl's thoughts on genre and LitFic and Gary K Wolfe's review in *Locus* of James Patrick Kelley and John Kessel's refreshingly eclectic anthology *The Secret History of Science Fiction*. Wolfe approvingly quotes Kessel on the genre/mainstream divide: "Who has the most work to do in tearing down these irrational barriers? ... I know a hell of a lot more about Herman Melville and Virginia Woolf than the average literary intellectual knows about China Miéville or Gene Wolfe."

That was also brought home last night, listening the panellists on Radio 4's 'A Good Read' discussing Elizabeth Knox's *The Vintner's Luck*, and at least two of them being phased by not having Knox explicitly spell out for them whether Xas is actually a real angel, or a projection of



Sobran's longing or confusion. If so, they're going to miss whole strata of something like John Crowley's *The Translator*. I can't imagine a well-read genre reader having the same problem with holding two or more possible interpretations of a book in her head at the same time (quantum reading, anyone?). Indeed, it seems a necessary pre-requisite for any serious reading in the late twentieth and twenty-first century, and for any appreciation of poetry even before Eliot rewrote all the rules in *The Waste Land*.

Cheryl also neatly sums up my misgivings about fiction that deliberately eschews any imaginative or ambiguous content in a striving for absolute mimetic realism, in her comparison with this being akin to painting that aspires to the realism of photography: an exercise in technique that you might admire for its skill and virtuosity but find it hard to be moved by. For the same reason, I've never seen the point of soap operas; but in this, as with so much else of popular 'culture', I appear to be grossly out of step with the majority.

In the responses to *Journey Planet* 3 several people mention that Orwell's nightmare has come horribly close to being true of today's society. In fact I'd suggest that's equally true of large parts of Huxley's *Brave New World*. And, as I discovered as a non-driver in the US a few years ago, of a dystopic Ray Bradbury short story, 'The Pedestrian'. Apparently, in Texas, it is considered a suspicious and subversive act to walk a hundred yards to the local mall to buy groceries when you could drive there like normal people.

Oh, and I do take issue with James's disparaging comments about 'ineptness' of the Clarke Award and its judges compared to the Hugo. They are different beasts, and deliberately so. If you want to compare the Hugos with anything, compare them with the BSFA Awards, which are also popular vote awards. Given that, the disparity between the BSFA and Hugo winners and even nominations and shortlists for each year would be more instructive. To run the Clarke in the same way, and to be independent of publishers submitting, would require the

judges to buy and read a copy of every book published in the year of eligibility, which is frankly unworkable – unless it becomes an award judged only by a minority of extremely wealthy readers and critics.

– 14 November 2009

44 White Way, Kidlington, Oxfordshire OX5 2XA, UK

*Claire: I mentioned at the beginning that the electronic version of JP 4 elicited only one letter of comment, perhaps because its e-publication rather got lost amidst activities at or announcements at the Worldcon. But in fact that letter came from someone who'd not only been at the Worldcon but also working hard to make it a success – and having some fun while he was at it. It would, in fact, be a rare fanzine that didn't receive a letter from:*

**Lloyd Penney**

I'm a science fiction fan, too. There's an awful lot of people willing to debate that, because there are so many interests encompassed within SF fandom as we know it that not everyone might recognize your interests as fannish, in their humble opinion. I'd rather be inclusive than exclusive, but of course not everyone share that opinion either. I'm still a reader, not much of a watcher, and quite busy in fannish activities, so I hope that still qualifies me. In many ways a fan isn't necessarily a fan of science fiction, but a fan of fandom itself. As might Damon Knight, a fan is someone (including myself) that I might point to and say, "That person is a fan." Our mileage might vary.

Why do I read science fiction? Because it explores events that can't happen, involving people who can't possibly be, in places that can't exist, and when you throw them all together, you can still say what if... It is one of the ultimate exercises of the imagination, not only in its creation, but in its consumption. It takes you away from a relatively dull reality, and into a fascinating and exciting fantasy. Fandom can do that too: immerse you in a fantasy or, better yet, a fantastic reality. I think that's what we all want.

Peter Sagal should know that older Canadian fans remember *The Starlost*, mostly because it was a co-production of the CTV and CBS television networks, it showed on local television here for years, and most of the props for the show were created by a local fan: Phill Stephens, an early Dorsai Irregular. Phill left us a long time ago.

Books are the vehicle in which all our fantastic voyages start. Part of my own SF experience is the hunt through the book stores: new, but preferably used, with that musty smell to the books, and the hunt, never really knowing what you might find. Also, I've spent enough time in libraries that there is a feeling of security in a room full of books. One whole wall of our living room is solid books, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

Fandoms spring up from books, movies and television series, but only if the universe described within

is interesting enough, imaginative enough, and three-dimensional enough. The *Star Trek*, Harry Potter and *Lord of the Rings* universes have caught our imaginations like few others. I know people who would happily overthrow their realities if they could, and live in the Federation, or at Hogwarts, or in Middle-Earth. Part of the attraction is how easily you could insert yourself into that universe, through assuming a character, or dressing like one.

– 31 August 2009

1706-24 Eva Road, Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

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**“It is my great honor to introduce Microsoft's new Chief Software Architect, Mr Linus Torvalds.”  
– William H Gates, June 2007**

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*Claire: When I say that I'm a science fiction fan, I mean that I enjoy science fiction as a genre and that I feel that I'm a member of the community of science fiction fandom. (Personally I don't think I'm looking for or finding a fantasy in that community, and I wouldn't want to go so far as to adopt my own 'fantastic reality'. But I'd be interested to know if either of those ideas that Lloyd suggests resonate with other readers.)*

*Obviously enough, plenty of other people fit that broad dual description of an SF fan too, but many more would only lay claim to the first part; some of them don't know that fandom exists, but evidently some do and want no part of it. Over the past couple of dozen years I've come across a few people who might presume to assert that other people – maybe sometimes including me – aren't really fans in the properly-belonging-to-fandom sense, but in my experience it's much more a thing that people want to exclude themselves from, albeit perhaps while labouring under a false impression of what it's about.*

*In the context I was writing last time, of course, I was wanting to underline the point about enjoying the genre; over time I have also come across a few people who count themselves as fans (within fandom) but are no longer or possibly have never been fans of the genre itself. But the last thing I'd want to do is to give the impression that I think SF fandom is – or should be – excluding, unwelcoming, or full of people who don't actually have any regard for SF; so this time round I want to emphasise that in both of these cases I really am talking about small minorities. Which also isn't to attempt to assert that some of the rest of you won't have had different experiences...*

**David Redd**

“Half-six?” Chris asks, pointing out that USA/UK vocabulary differences are compounded by how things are stated. “The half-six problem” should enter the language as shorthand for unexpected mutual incomprehensions, like the blurry feeling I used to get from reading certain USA writers and realising that while they knew what was going on I didn't.

I see Emma J King read *The Chrysalids* at about twelve; I'd say ten to twelve was the ideal age for reading the old SF classics, because at that age you're impervious to clunking prose but still alive to wonder. That very book was a favourite of mine when I was eleven, mainly because there were magical visions of otherness in it – only much later did my grown-up self realise how very subversive Wyndham's thoughts were.

And thinking about prose, what a brilliant idea to include some actual written SF in the shape of *Gardens of the Sun*. Terrific opening line. The rest of the first paragraph shows (a) how standard English grammar can't cope with lists, and (b) good prose can have a power in depth which visuals alone can't match. By including the extract – without comment – you've made us realise that we need written SF.

– 19 November 2009

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*Claire: David claimed his letter was just random comments ("a few examples of what was grabbing my interest") and therefore also kindly sent us some stamps as a further response. Another slightly self-deprecating response – in multi-coloured ink, although that was by necessity rather than design – claimed that most if not all of his comments were likely to be "in the SOSO category, i.e. Statements of Screeching Obvious", with which I also beg to differ:*

### Steve Sneyd

There are commercially published dictionaries of US English/Brit English. The British cultural cringe means, though, that US terminology gets here at a rate of knots, even when idiotically culturally inappropriate. I find I can manage with Cassell's excellent *Dictionary of Slang*, since this covers US such as well, for translation purposes.

Which segues to *Dukes of Hazzard*, where I'd confirm Pamela Boal's comment re: its popularity here. The nubile cousin (Daisy Mae?) was very popular with male viewers in her sawn-off shorts, the crazed car-driving was fun, Boss Hogg was an ideal 'man you love to hate' (proto-J R Ewing?) and I suspect deep down we liked to feel briefly superior – America might rule the western world, but here was 'evidence' its vast hinterland was a swamp of rural idiocy...

Perhaps the lessening of conversations about SF books has a parallel with the rarity nowadays of conversations about TV: with so many channels, there are no longer enough shared experiences of the same viewing, and ditto with so many SF (and SF-marketed-as-mainstream) books, the shared experience is rarer than when far fewer. As for deterrents to reading SF, the monsteritude lengthwise inevitably reduces the number read – as well as puzzling us with the paradox of the way books get longer as folk get time-poorer. (Is the long-haul flight readership now what marketers aim for as their gold

standard customer?)

An unfairly neglected SF writer springs to mind in particular: John Lymington, a 'cosy disaster' writer. I preferred him to Wyndham, since I thought his characters more interesting/believable and his catastrophes more quirkily gripping. He must have sold well, as even now his books turn up fairly readily, but I never met anyone else who admits to having any of his many SF novels, all with homely English settings.

On the fascinating *Fahrenheit 451* revisiting, I'd never seen the film, but read the book way back and ditto could recall almost nothing of it, even when reminded by Claire's account. In fact I realised that, aside from blurry recall of some episodes of *The Martian Chronicles*, of all the Bradbury I read I remember only vague moods and atmospheres. Hopefully a case of "the shadow of lost knowledge prevents many illusions" (who said that?).

– November 2009

4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, UK

*Claire: Since Steve was the one who mentioned segues, I'll just point the way:*

### Pamela Boal

Chris, again I must tell you that you are misinformed on British reaction to American TV sitcoms. Not only was *The Beverly Hillbillies* understood but it was also popular; that was the original Buddy Ebsen cast, although I'm not so sure about the remakes with the new cast.

I love your memory hooks, though. I can tell you a story from beginning to end but am quite likely to forget its title and even its author. Now, if I had as many dashing young men in my life as you have gorgeous females to prompt my memory! The one I've had for fifty-three years is no longer dashing and has a memory as bad as my own, but at least we still share common interests.

I also particularly liked Emma J King's article on what, in a way, could be called the history of understanding Venus. One of my books for children was written way back when Venus was still a watery planet. Needless to say I have never sought to publish it, as I just can't bring myself to rewrite and reshape the parts describing Venus and its people. Science can destroy a good plot!

One article I would like to have seen in that issue would have covered those SF predictions that took a little longer to become reality. I think John Brunner's 'The Telepathist' was written in the Fifties or early Sixties. He wrote of a group of artists who used the vibrations of their music to create moving images, an integrated art form. That was an extrapolation of the then work on different substances each vibrating to their own wavelength. It was at least thirty years before we got the dancing coke cans. Come to think of it, maybe a good thing. Though disintegrating gallstones is a welcome

development. Also, in the Seventies Fred Hoyle – an astronomer who wrote SF – was publishing his modern thinking and findings on Panspermia, originally postulated by the ancient Greeks. On the news yesterday the space probe designed to catch, land on and analyse a comet is on the final leg of its journey. The purpose of that mission? To find the materials that might be responsible for kick-starting life on earth; in other words, Panspermia.

In the other articles I detected a common welcome thread: an acceptance of different strokes for different folks. A level of tolerance. A couple of months back I wrote a poem which I offer here as a

dedication to the folks of *Journey Planet* who do seem to hear as well as listen.

– 15 November 2009

4 Westfield Way, Wantage, Oxfordshire OX12 7EW, UK

### Viewpoint by Pamela Boal

An elephant looks huge to me,  
So too the red mite sees the bee.  
While there they pray for blessed rain,  
Rain here gives fear of floods again.  
The warthog has an ugly face,  
But still perpetuates his race.  
The gardener will kill the weeds;  
The botanist will save the seeds.  
“This painting’s poor!” – “I think it’s grand.  
It all depends on where you stand.”  
I’ll try to hear your point of view,  
And would expect the same from you.

*Claire: And there’s possibly no better sentiment with which to both close this letter column and move on to the rest of our alternate history issue.*

*“If your two parents hadn’t bonded just when they did – possibly to the second, possibly to the nanosecond – you wouldn’t be here. And if their parents hadn’t bonded in a precisely timely manner, you wouldn’t be here either. And if their parents hadn’t done likewise, and their parents before them, and so on, obviously and indefinitely, you wouldn’t be here.”*

– Bill Bryson, *The Stuff of Life*, A Short History of Nearly Everything

*I could be writing this from my airship. Or my steam-powered rocket, or a space platform orbiting Mars, or a near-*



*lightspeed intergalactic dreadnaught. Or, on reflection, from my bunker, or the last outpost of civilisation, or my makeshift hovel in the ruins of this once-great city.*

*In the course of the article that followed I would doubtless reflect on recent events – the technological revolution, the journey into space, the arrival of the aliens, the general election, the riots or the climatic changes – in a way that would enable your own imagination to fill in the gaps between your own present, or perhaps what you’ve always understood to be your past, and the reality from which I’m writing.*

*I might also reflect on how it could all have been different, and*

*suddenly everything would twist and you’d realise that I was in fact writing about your own history or plausible near-future or even, if I were a master of messing with your head, that I was writing from an alternate timeline about another while representing your reality as an impossible fiction.*

*Because we can let ourselves believe that it could all happen. Because it nearly did, or it still could, or because it’s a story that seems so right it surely should be happening that way even if we don’t want it to. For better or for worse, we’re here and now instead. But we can still contemplate a parallel timeline in which things did work out differently. Maybe we like to wonder what happens if the timelines could touch. Maybe we just like to let the new history play out from its turning point; or to take that as a given – to be glimpsed rather than painstakingly related – and fast forward to the future that could ensue. It could be you.*

*From there on in, there are roads not taken. The closer we get to our own time – either as a turning point or a whole story – the more interesting we might expect to find it, and perhaps the less other people might consider it to be weird speculative fiction. We could argue about that again. We could argue about quite a few things in this issue; indeed, the editors could argue among themselves about some of it, but rather than indulging in collective or mutual censorship we will leave it for you to comment instead.*

*There are many stories in the alternate city. And our contributors to this issue have so eloquently told, explored or analysed so many of them that they need no further explanation from me. Now read on...*

*Meanwhile, we will wait to find out whether this is a version of the world in which you do send us letters. To be quite sure we’re doing what we can this time to help with that, here’s where you can send them:*

- By email to: [journeyplanet@gmail.com](mailto:journeyplanet@gmail.com)
- By post in Europe (c/o James) to: 55 Cromwell Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 2JZ, UK
- By post in North America (c/o Chris) to: 962 West Weddell Drive, Apt. #15, Sunnyvale, CA 94089, USA
- By post from anywhere else in the world to whichever of

# IMPOSSIBLE, POSSIBLE, PLAUSIBLE

BY JON COURTENAY GRIMWOOD

With Stalin being friendly, Zinoviev on leave and the Politburo hedging their bets, Trotsky has to be careful. It's October 1923 and the scheming, rivalry and machinations to take over from the dying Lenin are at their height. Trotsky is favourite; although he has his enemies, Zinoviev among them.

Trotsky's mistake is to go duck shooting.

Having got his feet wet while wearing felt boots, he catches a cold, develops a temperature and spends the rest of the autumn and winter ill in bed. Thus, he misses essential meetings, fails to foil plots and begins to lose his influence. As he said later, "One can foresee a revolution or a war, but it is impossible to foresee the consequences of an autumn shooting-trip for wild ducks."

Would anyone write the novel where Trotsky decides to forego the day's wildfowling, calls Stalin's bluff when he calls Trotsky the best man for the job, outschemes Zinoviev and Soviet Russia is an entirely different beast?

Possibly, but it sounds like literary fiction to me.

Much counter-factual genre fiction concentrates on exact turning points. Lee wins the battle of Gettysburg. Britain surrenders to Nazi Germany following the Blitz. The Duke of Medina-Sidonia's Armada is victorious. (As Phillip II of Spain said, after the winds drove his war fleet onto the rocks, "I sent it to fight the English, not God...")

More interesting are those novels that look at the alternate worlds such turning points create. And they succeed or not, for me at least, on how skilfully the turning point is chosen and how plausible the writer makes the world created.

So, why don't I worship Zoroaster?

If the Persians had won at Thermopylae in 480 BC, sunk the fleet of the City States at Salamis, and not been defeated at Plataea, I wouldn't be writing this in English with Winchester cathedral behind me. And the date for Thermopylae wouldn't have BC after it.

The Hellenistic world was John the Baptist to the Roman Empire. Without Constantine and the empire, Christianity would be a footnote in early Zoroastrian studies. I write in English, with its Latin borrowings, using a Western mindset, and drawing on Judeo-Christian ideas because: although the Persians *won* at Thermopylae, they lost the cultural war. (And 130 years later, Alexander of Macaedon rubbed salt in the wounds by conquering their empire and spreading Greek culture from modern day Turkey to India.)

Greek culture influenced Roman culture. Roman culture embraced Christianity. Rome's empire having spread itself across Europe ensured Christianity did the same; along with Roman law, Romano-Greek myth and Latin as Europe's universal language for several centuries. Never mind being responsible for Disney cartoons about Hercules, that Latinised remnant of a Greek borrowing from a Middle Eastern Neolithic shamanistic culture.

Why this fascination with alternate worlds? What

makes writers and readers, and some academics, obsessed with realities that literally run counter to fact?

For me, it's a chance to look at this world, by looking at where we are, as opposed to where we are not, or where we could have been. The interest is not the turning point, but what it births afterwards, sometimes centuries afterwards. We take a hypothetical branching point, where futures are close enough to have a recognisable common ancestor, and consign our reality to the line of historical extinction.

History is how we find ourselves where we are. All our millions of individual histories go to make up that greater history. It's peopled by ghosts and contains what we've learnt, not learnt and simply forgotten.

At its worst, written history is what cultures want to have happened, not what did. *Rashomon*, on a vast scale. The difference is always between what the victors claim and what the losers say, with the latter often being lost. What really happened is often hard to know to an absolute degree – if only because the records on which we rely are coloured by the original scribe's subjectivity, the demands of propaganda, and the scribe's own political sensitivity and sense of self-preservation. And that's before the culturally-constructed sensitivities of the modern historian kicks in.



In *Pashazade*, the first of the Arabesk novels, when Raf has to invent a reason for being in America he falls back on near truth:

Reluctant to lie outright, Raf retreated into something close to the truth. "To be honest," he said, "most of my time went on a doctorate."



Behind bars, with limited web access and no on-campus visits.

“Finance?” Hamzah asked, looking suddenly interested.

“History,” said Raf, “alternate timelines. It’s very big in the US right now.” That at least was true. “It’s a way of understanding what happened by looking at what didn’t but quite easily might have done... You know, say America had actually joined the Third Balkan War...”

“They stayed neutral. So did we.”

“Not the 1966-75,” said Raf. “The *Third* Balkan, 1914-15. Say Woodrow Wilson didn’t cut a deal between Berlin and London but sent in troops on Britain’s side. London might have been victorious. The Kaiser might have been fatally weakened...”

“The Kaiser was always going to win,” Hamzah said flatly. “History is what God writes.”

Raf sighed. “Just imagine,” he said. “The Prussian empire breaks up in 1923, just as the Austro-Hungarians almost did in 1927. Might the Ottomans have fallen? What would have happened to Egypt’s Khedive?”

“*The Khedive...*” Hamzah knew better than to accuse a bey of treason. Especially not one who was about to marry his daughter. And no doubt, all this *what if* was merely some sophisticated game played by people without real jobs. But it sounded like treason to him.

Besides, Hamzah knew what *had* happened. Every schoolboy across North Africa knew that Islam had trampled colonialism into the ground. On Sulva plain, the English king’s own servants from Sandringham had been killed to the last man. The slaughter at Gallipoli broke the warmongers’ spirit.

Fatally weakened, the British were driven from Egypt by General Saad Zaghoul. Having stolen Libya in 1911, Italy was forced to give it back six years later, and the French relinquished Tunis.

Fifteen years of smoldering unrest followed. Nationalists, fundamentalists, Bolsheviks... but money from the Arabian oil fields bought them all off in the end. Mosques were built, hospitals erected and schools set up to educate the children of the poor. His grandfather had been one of them...

This is my attempt to tie his world to our world,

by having him explain us as a world that might have been but never was.

As humans we make the world around us coherent. We make ourselves coherent as individuals. We make our pasts coherent. If we can’t manage this on a first pass, we downplay the flaws, rewrite reality, amend the wikipedia that is our consciousness. And so make facts what we would like them to be, beginning with present conclusions and finding past proof to fit.

Memories are what make us. (Leaving aside that our memories are usually the artificial constructs mentioned above; edited and rewritten and remembered from earlier versions). They’re what we use for our human, very personal *what ifs*. What if I hadn’t said that? What if I had? What if we hadn’t gone to bed? What if we had? What if X hadn’t dumped me for saying that, *and* going to bed with Y...? What if we’d never gone out at all?

Mostly these are distinguishable from daydreams, although sometimes the boundaries blur. The daydream versions divide into the unlikely, the possible and the plausible. My own would run... What I grew wings and flew? (Unlikely.) What if I won the lottery? (Possible.) What if I won the Arthur C Clarke Award? (Plausible.)

History, for me, is our greatest memory. The desire to daydream, and ask soft or hard *what ifs*, is just as strong. And, again for me, these gradations apply to alternate histories and the worlds they serve. I like the demanding end of that spectrum. There’s a great line from Geoffrey Hawthorn in *Plausible Worlds* (1991, Cambridge University Press), which goes: “In being freed to talk about one or more of a multiplicity of worlds, we are free to say far too much about what there is not...”

With infinite possibilities, and a multiverse of places for these to happen, sentient oceans and gas-swimming whales are as likely as Arthur Dent of *Hitchhikers* fame being rescued from certain death by the *Heart of Gold*, at the odds, according to the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation’s infinite improbability drive, of 2 to the power of the Islington phone number where he met Tricia McMillan, who happens to be aboard the spaceship at that very moment. (Apologies to non *Hitchhikers* fans.)

The problem with creating impossible worlds is that anything goes, literally. Somewhere in the multiverse will be a world where what the author wants happens, no matter how absurd it seems to us.

Possible worlds are rarer but still common enough. Imagine Boabdil, king of Grenada, thrashes Ferdinand and Isabella at the battle of Landjaron in 1491. The Spanish alliance is fragile, the forces of Aragon and Castile overstretched. The Moors are better organised. Defeat of their Catholic Majesties rolls back the Reconquista...

Mudejar Spain embraced (with varying fondness) Muslims, Jews and Christians. It was Isabella and Ferdinand who issued the 1492 Alhambra Decree, forcing Jews to convert or leave Spain. (If they left, they were forbidden to take gold or silver with them.) Ten years later the Moors were told the same. Those who converted were banished anyway by the Catholic Majesties’ great-great-grandson.

Europe without the Inquisition would have been very different.

So, a possible world, but a plausible one? The Moors had been in retreat for centuries. Grenada was their only remaining Spanish kingdom. It already paid tribute to Aragon. Boabdil (actually Muhammad XII) was not a natural commander. When he cried to see what he was losing, his mother supposedly snapped, “Weep like a woman for what you could not defend as a man.”

---

**“We must rise up, take arms, and destroy the British who hold freedom over our head as if dangling a toy just out of reach of a child. We must kill the bastards!”**

**– Mahatma Gandhi, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1918**

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While impossible worlds are fun and possible worlds relatively easy, I try to concentrate on creating plausible worlds in the backgrounds of my novels. (At least, I do nowadays. Whether or not they succeed is another question.)

In the early books my alternate histories existed only to frame events. They hadn’t become characters in themselves. The world in *neoAddix*, my first novel, is strictly possible.

The nobility, or those fragments still left after the Second Franco-Prussian War, didn’t need to work. With the re-establishment of the Third Empire, they’d been given honorary diplomatic status. Subject not to the Code Napoleon but only to the Code Imperial.

Within the Empire they paid no taxes, moved freely without police permits and could only be subject to surveillance by the Third Section with written permission of the Prince Imperial himself. Clare didn’t qualify by birth. Nor did Claude, despite his money. She’d never even met someone who did.

The nobility lived behind locked doors.

As for the Institute Bonaparte, she’d never heard of it. If asked, Clare would have said it didn’t exist...

The Institute was real enough.

Its name a clue to the ambiguous status it enjoyed. Founded by Napoleon III shortly after he became emperor of the French in 1853, it had been funded by Napoleon III in his capacity as a private individual. Hence its title was Institute Bonaparte, rather than Institute Napoleon or Institute Imperial.

Its job, to investigate one of the emperor’s private passions – metaphysics and the occult, particularly

the life of Comte de Saint-Germain, described a century earlier in a letter Voltaire wrote to Frederick the Great as, “That man who knows everything and never dies.”

According to her reader, all of the Institute’s own records were destroyed in 1871 in the great fire that consumed the Hotel de Ville, and no further mention of the Institute was made in any public records.

Playing a hunch, Clare told her reader to search for the Third Section. There was nothing, not even a mention of its status as part of the diplomatic corps. If the Third Section didn’t exist, and Clare knew it did, then why shouldn’t the Institute also exist, if she wasn’t aware of it?

Only when the same idea is reworked, deepened and made into something else for *Pashazade* does this world with its post Franco-Prussian Europe become, in my opinion, plausible instead of merely possible. At the moment I’m writing three novels set in fifteenth century Venice: a city that was once Byzantine, and that had only just begun to look West rather than East. Obviously enough, I want this world to be as plausible as the alternative Ottoman empire of Ashraf Bey.

(Hard enough, when writing six hundred years after the novels are set, and doing so from the perspective of a post-Freudian, democratic, lapsed Judeo-Christian liberal mind set. If novelists make basic mistakes with physical fact – potatoes in Dark Age Wessex, the Rialto Bridge before it was built – the psychological blindness we bring to past cultures is far more severe, and far harder to spot.)

I know Constantinople fell to Mehmet II in 1453; that Tamerlane, the self-proclaimed descendant of Genghis Khan, died in 1405, on the edge of invading China. A weakened Ottoman empire might not have defeated Byzantium. Without the fall of Byzantium, the Renaissance might not have happened in Europe. Then again, it might. There are a dozen *what ifs* and each adds further complication to the mix. The trick is to give the reader enough history to be convincing and not so much that the author’s obsession or research begin to show. My main area of interest is what if Venice hadn’t remained a self-perpetuating republican oligarchy...?

We live life forwards but understand it backwards. The joy of being a novelist is to write fictional lives forward while already knowing them backwards, in many cases. In others, in writing them forwards while learning about them at the same time. And then editing cause and effect, thrown stones and spreading ripples, retrospectively. Only once have I tried to reverse the flow. In *Stamping Butterflies* the future changes the past as surely as the past has been changing the future. The point of change contains no spoilers:

*I can still save you.*

“How?” said Tris, knowing it was to the Chuang Tzu that the strange voice had been speaking.

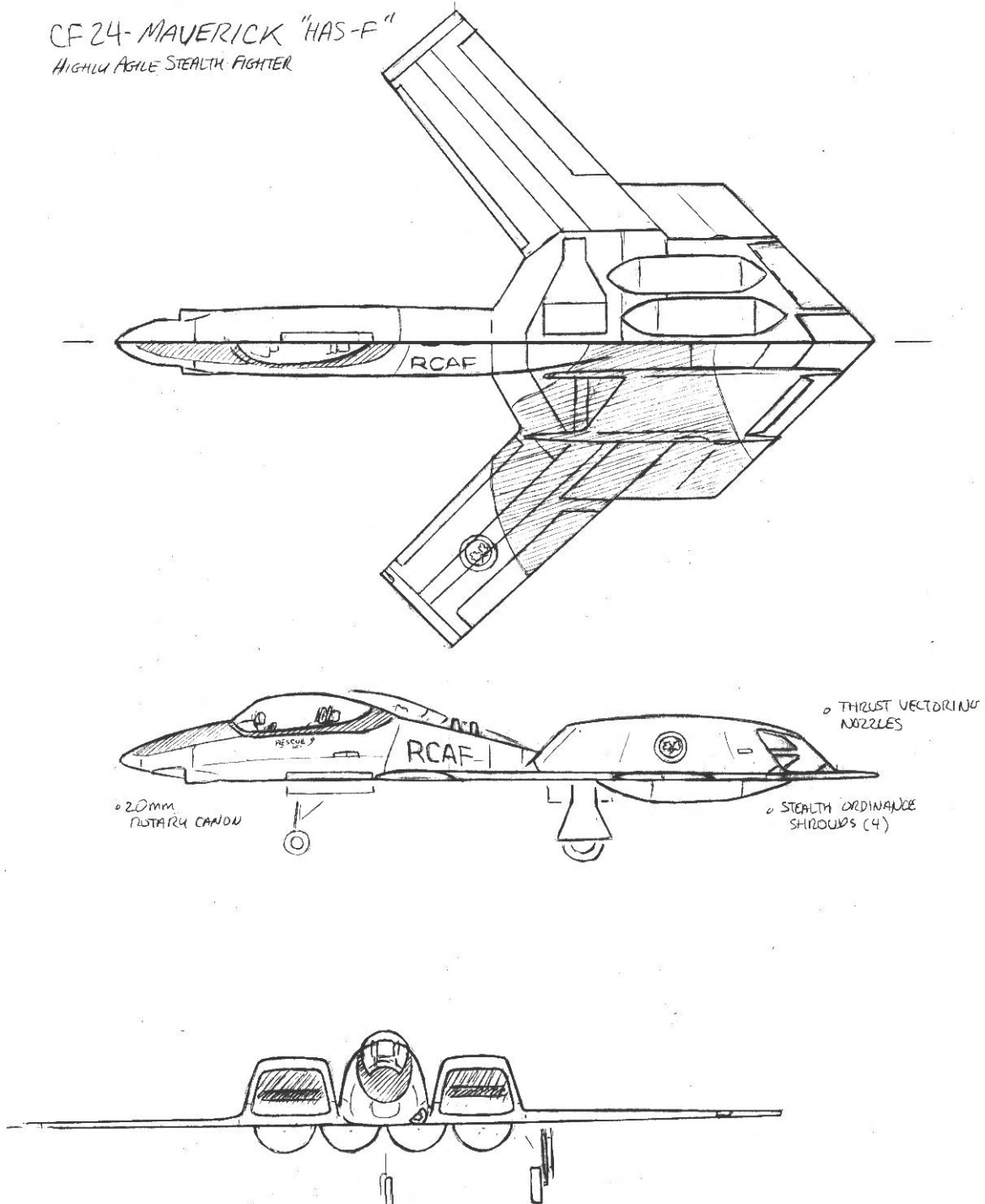
*I can loop time back to when you were young. Or we can let your flame pass to the next candle...* The Library sounded regretful, as if things really hadn't been meant to end like this.

“Save us,” Tris said.

The Chuang Tzu said nothing.

We stand on the shoulders of giants when we change history. It is important, to paraphrase Geoffrey Hawthorne, that we don't spit on their heads...

– Jon Courtenay Grimwood



# MISSIVES FROM POSSIBLE FUTURES # 1: ALTERNATE HISTORY SEARCH RESULTS

BY JOHN SCALZI

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## Scenario #1

Event: ADOLF HITLER is KILLED by MUGGING ATTEMPT ON THE STEPS OF THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS VIENNA

As a result: World War I proceeds; Weimar Republic proceeds; World War II delayed until 1948; US drops atomic bomb on Berlin in 1952; Neil Armstrong first man on the moon, 1972

## Scenario #2

Event: ADOLF HITLER is KILLED by OPIUM JUNKIE LOOKING FOR MONEY

As a result: World War I proceeds; Weimar Republic proceeds; World War II averted; Germany and Britain form economic union, declare war on France in 1958; Malcolm Evans first man on the moon, 1975

## Scenario #3

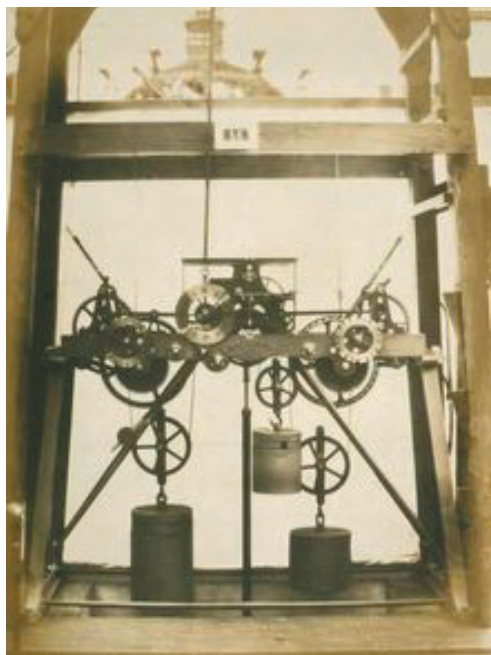
Event: ADOLF HITLER is KILLED by RUNAWAY HORSE-DRAWN WAGON FILLED WITH BRATWURST, THE FOURTH SUCH FATALITY IN VIENNA IN SIX DAYS

As a result: Vienna passes tough horse-drawn vehicle laws, prompting the quick acceptance of automobiles; Austria becomes automotive industrial powerhouse; World War I proceeds, Germany and allies win thanks to technological advances; '30s worldwide depression averted; Willy Brandt first man on the moon, 1958

## Scenario #4

Event: ADOLF HITLER is KILLED by MULTIPLE KNIFE WOUNDS BY JEALOUS GAY LOVER WHO THINKS HIS BOYFRIEND IS CHEATING ON HIM WITH HITLER, WHO IN FACT IS TOTALLY INNOCENT AND HASN'T HAD SEX OF ANY SORT IN MONTHS, MUCH LESS GAY VIENNESE SEX

As a result: The trial of Felix von Weingartner, director of the Vienna Opera and the closeted, murdering gay lover in question, shocks and delights Viennese society; Hitler's watercolors, formerly unsellable, become a hot commodity on the auction circuit before the novelty wears off. Hitler's sister awarded a settlement; World War I proceeds, Germany and allies win; '30s depression not averted; virulent flu wipes out 38% of European population; US becomes world power; John Glenn first man on the moon, 1956



### Scenario #5

Event: ADOLF HITLER is KILLED by SUFFOCATION WHEN INEXPLICABLY ENCASED IN AN ENORMOUS BLOCK OF UNFLAVORED GELATIN

As a result: Hitler only a random test subject for Gelatin Encasing Weapon, developed by the Russian aristocracy from technology pulled out of the spaceship that caused the Tunguska Event of June 30, 1908; the GEW subsequently used to assassinate enemies of Tsar Nicholas II, and then world leaders; World War I begins when Archduke Franz Ferdinand is spontaneously encased in gelatin while riding in a 1911 Graf und Stift Rois De Blougne tourer in Sarajevo and Young Bosnia opportunistically claims credit; World War I subsequently ends in 1915 when entire German divisions are gelatinized; Russia becomes sole super power. Vladimir Putin first man on the moon, 1988

### Scenario #6

Event: ADOLF HITLER is KILLED by BULLET WOUND IN CROSSFIRE BETWEEN TIME-TRAVELING ANTI-NAZIS SENT BACK TO KILL HIM AND TIME-TRAVELING NAZIS SENT BACK TO PREVENT HIS ASSASSINATION

As a result: Causality loop annihilates time and space surrounding Vienna, knocking everyone in the city back to 1529 and the eve of the First Turkish Siege; as the twentieth century Viennese use their historical knowledge to help the sixteenth century Viennese, time-traveling pro-Viennese forces appear and fight a pitched battle with time-traveling pro-Ottoman forces, pushing everyone back to 955 and the Battle of Lechfeld; when the time-traveling pro-Magyar forces show up, they are slaughtered by everyone else which is tired of all this time-traveling crap, thereby ending the causality loop. Vienna becomes world power; Henry Jasomirgott first man on the moon, 1155

### Scenario #7

Event: ADOLF HITLER is KILLED by MARATHON FORNICATION BY SIX VIENNESE PROSTITUTES

As a result: Prostitutes arrested and revealed as libidinous time-travelers from a very sexy future who teach the Viennese their futuristic ways of astro-pleasure; Janine Lindemulder first woman on the moon, 1996

### Scenario #8

Event: ADOLF HITLER is KILLED by VAPORIZATION WHEN METEOR HITS HIM SQUARE ON THE HEAD

As a result: No noticeable historical changes arise from event at all. However, as the meteor is a precursor to a massive asteroid cruising toward Earth, human history had only 22 hours, 16 minutes to develop from that point before being obliterated. Humanity wiped out along with Hitler and 93% of all species; society of rats rises and falls; society of frogs rises and falls; society of pillbugs rises and falls; society of squid rises and sticks; Gluugsnertgluug first squid on the moon, 2,973,004,412

– John Scalzi

*This story can also be found on the Subterranean Press Website:*

*<http://www.subterraneanpress.com/index.php/magazine/winter2007/fiction-missives-from-possible-futures-1-alternate-history-search-results-by-john-scalzi/>*



# THE AMAZING WORLD OF JOHN BAXTER

## BY JAMES BACON

I have an interest in both alternate history fiction and a variety of historical aspects of the Second World War, and I seem to focus on specific areas: Irish involvement, the Luftwaffe, secret and advanced weaponry. So it is no surprise that soon after I found the internet, I found an area of interest known as Luft '46.

This is a broad term. It is used by many people, but I think I am happy with the following definition from the Urban Dictionary ([urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com)):

**Luft '46:** In aviation, "Luft '46" refers to military aircraft that were under development in Nazi Germany, but failed to enter service (at least in large numbers) before the end of World War 2. This includes projects that were cancelled during the war, and occasionally real postwar aircraft derived from German research, such as the MiG-15. Most "Luft '46" aircraft are of advanced design, usually having swept wings and jet/rocket engines. Despite being associated with the Nazi Luftwaffe, Luft '46 fandom does not worship Nazism or Adolph Hitler, but rather aviation as well as speculative fiction.

Comics, games and websites have exploited the idea of Luft '46 very well. I have played a number of games that utilise the idea of Luft '46.

Secret Weapons over Normandy is a flight simulator that allows the player to use flying aircraft that never saw such operational duties, hence the secret weapons aspect to the game. So the likes of the Dornier Do 335 Pfeil push-pull fighter aircraft, and the Curtiss Wright XP 55 Ascender, and the Gloster Meteor, a plane that never saw service against other jet aircraft in the Second World War, are suddenly available – before they really were.

IL-2 Sturmovik is similar, although less gamey and more simulator, also allowing users to play with aircraft with jet engines, or rocket boosters. The Mig-9 and Yak-9, the Soviets' first post-war jets, make an appearance – looking distinctly like German designs – as well as weapons that were just P-numbers on a drawing board.

One of my favourite, if odd and totally confusing, comics is *Luftwaffe 1946* by Ted Nomura and Ben Dunn, published by Antarctic Comics. This is part of the 'Families of Altered Wars' series, which feature over 100 comics.

One great pleasure in this series is the beautiful aircraft artwork, and the research and visualisations of aircraft that never saw the sky. Here, Göring died in 1918 and Eisenhower in 1944; the Nazis found a UFO, and generally the war is continuing. One of its failings is that it jumps around, giving vignettes that are continued later; as soon as we know a character and a situation, there is a disjuncting jump that unsettles. To be honest, with any other comic, it would be consigned to the 'leave on shelf' category; but I love the artwork and research that goes into these books.

In the last fifteen years I have found many publications which are factually and historically based and which have brought these draughtboard projects to a wider audience.

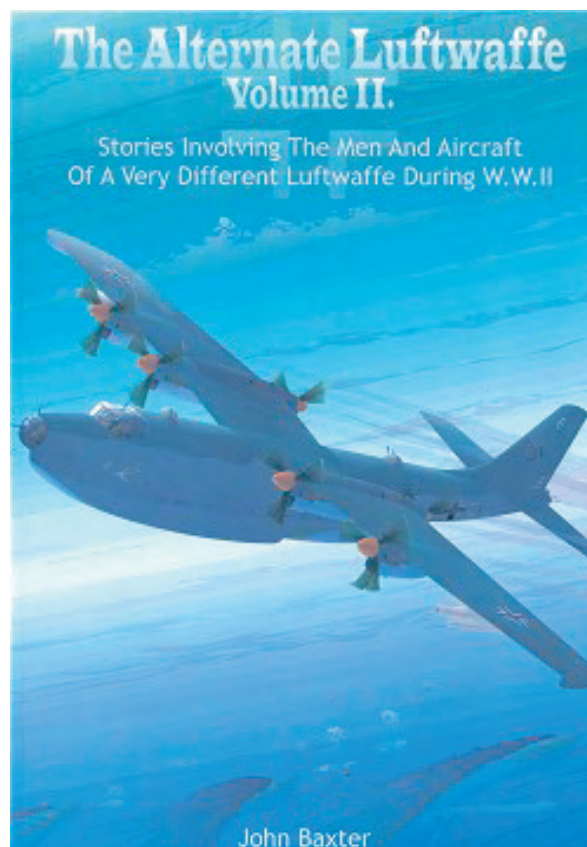
Twelve years ago, I found and bought *Luftwaffe Secret Projects: Fighters*. Published by Midland (UK), it was the first of three books on Luftwaffe planes that were never made, and I really got stuck into how these planes would have been. They have done a further twelve books, looking at the UK, USSR and USA in different eras; advances in computer-generated artwork and artwork in general allows the reader to see beautiful renditions of aircraft that never flew, imagining a squadron of TSR-2s or the Saunders-Roe SR.53, propelled by both jets and rocket.

This brought me to author David Myhra, who has published ten books on specific Luftwaffe X-Planes, is an expert on the Horten Brothers (who built flying wing aircraft), and more recently has appeared on programmes for The History Channel ('Hitler's Plan to Atom Bomb New York') and for National Geographic ('Uncovering the Stealth Secrets of the Ho 229').

Online, there are a number of relevant communities. Some focus on just getting the information up online about these weapons. (Does anyone worry about who owns the copyright to Nazi secret weapons, and how did the Allies overcome those laws?) Many artists are famous in their own right, just for the aircraft profiles

and design work on imaginary aircraft, with my favourite being Ronnie Olsthoorn; his version of the Junkers Ju EF100, a 100-seat passenger plane, is one of my favourite images.

Some sites feature physical models, built by model



makers, that again are from this sub-genre of military weapons. These are very interesting, as there are many scratch builds and individual interpretations of how planes should have looked and been painted.

The commercial opportunity has not been missed, and one can find dozens of 'resin' kits of planes from this imagined era; even the big boys of modelling, Revell, did a series of Luftwaffe '46 models. The 04191 Focke Wulf TL-Jäger Flitzer looks out of this world; and the box image for the Ar.E-555 Long Distance Jet Bomber has a flight of them flying above Manhattan Island, the distinctive '40s New York skyline evocative in the background. I just wish I was skilful enough to make these models.

Yet one person, for me, to date has really been able to capture the whole concept brilliantly, and that is John Baxter. An Australian, I only know him from the internet and the times I have made a purchase from him. I came across a book entitled *The Alternate Luftwaffe* online, on the website [www.Luft46.com](http://www.Luft46.com), and I really wanted it. Unfortunately, at the time, this collection of fiction stories with accompanying artwork and historical reference was not available. I had to make do instead with two purchases, *The Alternate Luftwaffe Vol II* and the *Tragerflotten Data Book*.

The first, a book of some 125 pages, contains 23 stories: a selection of alternate history tales, and not all are the 'winning Luftwaffe' either. With the stories, though, there is an aspect that just really appeals to me: real research, not lip service to science and technological possibilities. There are 22 colour images; some are computer-generated while others are photos of models that people have made. These visuals all have very significant relevance to the stories that are being told. Then there are a ton of line drawings, in black and white, and a selection of five maps.

Baxter has a very clever methodology, similar to the way in which new aircraft were actually treated when they were available; he has a whole 'squadron' of these new aircraft in action that never came to exist. He also uses considerable latitude by involving the Axis allies, and so we see Hungarian, Turkish, Finnish and Romanian airmen in fighters that they never had.

The data book accompanies *Tragerflotten: The Kriegsmarine's Carrier Fleets and their Aircraft in World War II*. In John Baxter's own words:

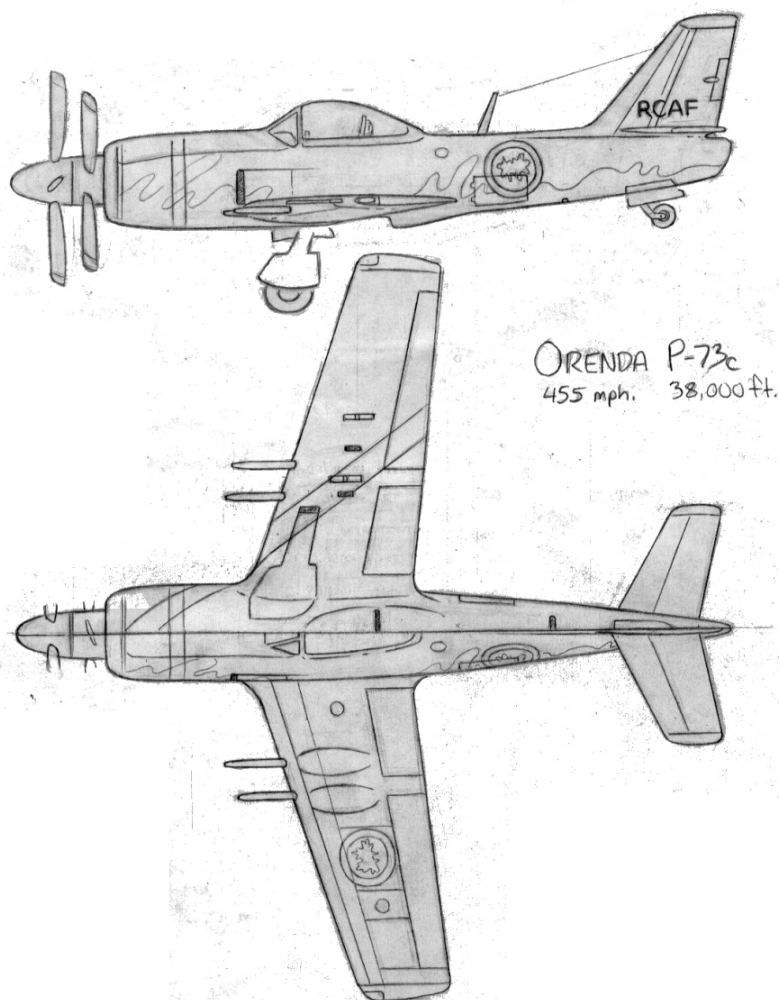
"I'm pleased to announce that the *Tragerflotten Data Book* is now available. There are 120 pages of text, 8 pages of colour with 32 colour profiles, 80 B&W

illustrations, full carrier descriptions of each of the 12 classes and short histories on all 33 carriers. The 'Carrier Air Groups' chapter alone is 17 pages of aircraft types, promulgation dates and full codes of all 20 Kriegsmarine Geschwader, especially for modellers. Plus much more. This has been my most challenging book to date and is also the best production."

Baxter's attention to detail is phenomenal. In this data book, he has created a huge variety of aircraft carriers and classes and, like a real history book looking on the technical aspects of the vessels and planes of a force, he goes into some of the building and history of each class of vessel. The aircraft are also lovingly crafted in words and artwork, with real care to the whole 'what if' there really was a Kriegsmarine aircraft carrier fleet. The level of detail would be desirable in some actual books.

It is the mix of artistic and technical expertise mixed with a whole world that is totally imagined that excels here. Yes, we have project drafts, and some were followed through by the US, UK and USSR, so we can see what would have been; but that does not compare to the fully rounded experience that John Baxter offers readers, modellers, and those like me who just have an interest in the area.

– James Bacon



# THE CELLULOID DREAM: THE LONG STRANGE TRIP OF SPINRAD'S CLASSIC, THE IRON DREAM

BY JAY CRADAN AND CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA

When Norman Spinrad and Lars von Trier came to blows at the Venice Film Festival in September 1999, Martin Landau had to step between them, took a fist to the face, and came back with a bloody nose. The moment, captured by a half-dozen different international media outlets, remains a popular video on YouTube – especially the versions with von Trier screaming terribly unkind Danish words at the top of his lungs. Von Trier, whose career has never fully recovered, blames the entire situation on Mr Spinrad who, in turn, blames von Trier for what he calls “the bastardization” of the script he himself wrote.

The story dates back to 1982, and the night Christopher Walken and Robert Loggia walked away from the Shrine Auditorium with Best Supporting Actor and Best Actor Oscars respectively; *Bug Jack Barron* had been up for seven Oscars in total, including Best Adapted Screenplay for Mr Spinrad himself. Walken's Jack Barron and Loggia's Benedict Howard were not what Spinrad had in mind, but after seeing a set of dailies from early in the shoot he was won over by their performances. The film had made a major splash, especially for director Milos Forman, who passed up *Ragtime* to direct it. *Bug Jack Barron's* success led to a slew of more controversial science fiction films throughout the early 1980s. Who would have thought that David Lynch's version of *Crash* would do better box office than the second *Star Wars* film?

At the Governor's Ball following the Oscars, Spinrad had a conversation with Robert Evans, the recently re-hired head of production at Paramount, legendary swordsman and perfectionist. His slate was full of dusty clunkers, as he referred to them, that his predecessor had green-lit, including *Fatal Attraction* and *Terms of Endearment*. Ever the schmoozer, Evans brought up how much he'd enjoyed the script for *Bug Jack Barron*. Spinrad mentioned that he'd been working on another screenplay, this time for his 1972 novel *The Iron Dream*. Evans, pretending to have read the work, said that he thought it would make an excellent addition to the Paramount release plate. Spinrad said he'd need at least 18 months to complete the script due to his other writing obligations. Evans said that it wouldn't be a problem and that they should meet to sign contracts the following week. Spinrad agreed.

This led to one of the strangest tales in the history of Hollywood.

The majority of *The Iron Dream* is a supposed science fiction novel written by Adolf Hitler. The story goes that he had left Germany after “dabbling in racial politics” and came to the US to work as an illustrator. Hitler then became a science fiction author, indeed a fan favorite. The novel within *The Iron Dream* is called *Lord of the Swastika* and deals with the rise of Feric Jaggar and his movement to restore purity to the planet and the universe. The book was somewhat controversial (it could not be sold in

Germany because of the swastika on the cover), although the added section of supposed commentary on the book is somewhat brilliant.

The first sign of trouble was getting that sit-down with Bob Evans. Spinrad called dozens of times over the following weeks and could never get a solid time. The two actually set three different dates for talking, only for Evans to be dragged away by some other, more pressing business, including the battle to get LeVar Burton signed to play the lead in the box-office flop, *Beverly Hills Cop*. It was nearly October before Evans and Spinrad sat down and talked specifics, and it was after the holidays before Spinrad even saw a solid contract. The deal was officially signed on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1983, at which point Spinrad was about two-thirds done with the first draft and estimated a May 1984 completion.

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**“I want to thank Rogers Brackett for all his help when I was just starting and, of course, Lee Strasberg. I learned so much from Elia Kazan, and without him I don't think I'd have this statue right now.”**  
**– James Dean, accepting the Academy Award for Best Director for his work on Lenny, 1974**

---

A bout of writer's block, coupled with work on a pair of novels, kept him away from the script for a long period, leading to delays that would keep Evans from seeing the first draft until October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1984. Evans sat on it, apparently working on keeping his job while many members of the Paramount board of directors were trying to find ways to get rid of him. He read it over the Thanksgiving holiday and sent Spinrad a simple note the following week: *Norman: this is glorious. Who do you see directing it?*

Spinrad had a number of thoughts, but one name stuck out. Mr Spinrad had attended Cannes and had seen the film *The Element of Crime*, directed by Lars von Trier. Spinrad was struck by his stylized approach; the tradition of Danish film had been completely shattered and Spinrad saw von Trier as a major force in the future of film.

Spinrad made the recommendation to Evans of using von Trier at a lunch in Aspen in February 1985. Evans called to get a copy of the film sent to him, but was completely ignored by von Trier's representation on the direct orders of the man himself. “I am not interested in any Hollywood offers, especially from that imbecile Evans,” von Trier wrote to his agents.

Von Trier was a fan of the work of Norman Spinrad, however. While preparing his film *Epidemic*, Spinrad wrote and met with von Trier several times, and



some say Spinrad gave notes on the script at least twice. Both von Trier and Spinrad deny this, though the legend persists.

Evans's hold on production at Paramount was strengthened by a series of hits from 1985 through 1987, including three Best Picture winners in a row. Marilyn Monroe had come out of a thirteen-year retirement to make *Peggy Sue Got Married*, which earned her her second Oscar. Evans used this new-found respect from his board to green-light and release a huge number of films, but seemed to lose interest in *The Iron Dream*. Spinrad was also less than enthused, perhaps because the project had languished for so long. It wasn't until August 1988 that a second draft was completed, and not until June 1989 that Evans and Spinrad met with other executives to discuss casting and assigning a director. Spinrad again brought up von Trier's name; since *Epidemic* had been such a major art-house hit in the US, some consideration was paid to this. Von Trier was still not responding to Hollywood offers, and so other names were bandied about. George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Harvey Lemmings, and Tim Burton all had sit-downs with Spinrad and Evans. Burton was seen as the one who would most be able to give the film a distinct vision, but his availability was limited; in the end, it was offered to French director Luc Besson, fresh off completing his film *Nikita*. The world was clamoring for more from Besson, and Evans was always ready to latch onto a rising star.

Spinrad had appreciated Besson's work *Subway*, and was happy that Besson himself had said that he would shoot the script word-for-word, seeing absolutely no need for a rewrite. Evans put a 45 million dollar budget on the picture, 2.7 million of which had already been used to complete the script and secure Besson. The battle for casting had only just begun. There were five names that had been pushed for from the outset: Christopher Walken, Rutger Hauer, Sting, Bruce Willis and Nicholas Rowe, best known for having played the title character in *Young Sherlock Holmes*. Each of them were asked to read for the main part, along with David Bowie, Christopher Lambert and several more English actors. Spinrad was involved peripherally with the casting although, as he would later note, "They didn't care much for my opinions."

In early 1992, despite the fact that it was one of the better-known films in pre-production, the film was officially announced with Besson as director. Lambert, a favorite of Besson's, was announced as being in "advanced discussions" to play lead character Feric Jaggat. Evans had been convinced after watching Besson point at a spot and Lambert completely understand and incorporate that spot in his movements. That sort of understanding between an actor and a director was exactly what Evans had hoped for.

Several things happened in the spring of 1992. Besson set about working on storyboards and assembling his team while Spinrad did another pass. It was around this time that the idea was floated to have John Milius take a pass at the script. Evans sent the script to him for notes

in March 1992, though Milius says it was much later. Evans didn't mention this to Spinrad, but Milius took it upon himself to contact Spinrad in the summer of 1992. They agreed to meet for lunch and Milius brought his notes on Spinrad's script.

This did not go over well.

Spinrad enjoyed the lunch, allowing Milius to pick up the tab since he would bill it to Paramount. Spinrad actually drove to Evans's office and barged in, delivering a tirade that is still talked about by traumatized production assistants and interns. Evans explained that this is the way things are done, but Spinrad would not hear of it. Evans called security and had Spinrad escorted off the lot.

Spinrad considered various forms of lawsuit over the following year, but there was little movement. The contract that Evans had offered to Spinrad guaranteed that Spinrad's participation was required with several aspects of the film. This held up production as Spinrad would not return any calls from the studio. This led to conflicts with Luc Besson, who walked off the film officially on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994. Spinrad then went to the media rags, starting with *Entertainment Weekly*, blaming all the problems on Evans. Evans was having a hard time at Paramount and the board was noticing the increased budgets were making a serious dent into the balance sheet.

This was where Marilyn Monroe came into the picture.

Evans had been the biggest push behind Marilyn's return after her near-fatal overdose in 1962. He cast her in *The Detective* alongside Frank Sinatra in 1966, the film that cemented her comeback and earned her an Oscar nomination. Monroe became a Paramount favorite, with Evans using his influence to get her cast in nearly two dozen films between 1966 and 1974, when she announced her first retirement. She worked in the theatre, taught alongside Lee Strasberg, and worked on making the Palm Springs International Film Festival into the premiere film festival in North America. Under her leadership, the PSIFF grew into the major international point of debut for independent film.

Evans, along with Francis Ford Coppola, brought Monroe back into film and she found she had missed it a great deal. Evans got her into dozens of films, including ten in 1989 alone. Marilyn had starred in a few films in Europe, including *Nouvelle Vague* by Jean-Luc Godard. While in France, she attended the Rotterdam Film Festival, where Lars von Trier was introduced to her. Monroe brought several von Trier and company productions to Palm Springs. It was through a personal invitation from Monroe that Thomas Vinterberg and von Trier flew to Palm Springs to introduce the Dogme 95 movement, and that was where Monroe agreed to star as the matriarch in Vinterberg's *Festen*.

Evans was getting extreme heat in early 1997. The board, dealing with massive losses in the WB television network, needed to cut losses and one of the first things that they saw on the books that was doing nothing was

*The Iron Dream*. Evans, now without a director, needed someone the board would believe in. Von Trier was very much in the limelight; he was still in California for the last day of the Palm Springs Film Festival when Evans made the drive out to meet with him. His calls had been ignored by von Trier, so Evans spent the entire drive attempting to get through. It was then that he called Marilyn Monroe.

This was a giant gamble. Monroe had not been at the 1997 festival up to that point because she was suffering through her first bout of lung cancer. She had lost a lot of weight going through her stint of chemo, though she was regaining weight so she could play what would turn out to be her final role; she had lost all her hair, and about 30 pounds. Despite the fact that she'd looked thin in her last appearance at the Oscars, only a few people in the business were aware – Evans among them. Evans called Monroe, asking if she was strong enough to get to the theatre and get him a sit-down with von Trier. Von Trier, also aware of Marilyn's illness, took her call.

Here there are many different versions. Von Trier's story is that she never told him about Evans and that she'd like to meet him at a restaurant and talk about what would be one of her final projects. Monroe's version, as she told the crew for the DVD commentary of *The Iron Dream*, was that she called von Trier and he agreed to meet with her and Evans for a brief discussion. Evans's version was that Monroe basically had to beg von Trier to meet with him at his hotel room. What is known is that Monroe, von Trier, Vinterberg, Jean-Marc Barr and Evans met in the Coffee Bean. This fits none of the stories put forward by any of the participants. They sat in the coffee shop for nearly two hours, with Marilyn signing autographs and chatting with her fans while the others discussed what it would take to get von Trier to direct *The Iron Dream*.

Von Trier made four requirements clear: at least five million dollars, the right to cast as he saw fit, the right to shoot it in Europe, and final cut. Evans heard these demands and started to trade off. Von Trier said it'd take him five million more to give up casting rights and to shoot it in the US, and ten million to give up the final cut. Evans saw this as a major accomplishment for himself; if he could get this project in front of the lens he'd be able to win back much of the confidence from the board.

In the end, they hammered out an agreement: von Trier would have 15 million for directing *The Iron Dream*, and he'd also have final cut. This was a rarity for Evans, who insisted on final cut himself. Evans returned to the lot and called a massive meeting where he announced that von

Trier had been signed. *The Iron Dream* would be the main priority and the picture would have a 100 million dollar budget. This was a traditional Hollywood theory: spend a lot of money on one big film to save a studio bleeding green. Evans got a huge amount of press for the ploy, most saying that this was the boldest step of his bold career.

There were a few problems. Lambert left the lead role, but was immediately replaced by Jim Carrey, who had been involved with Marilyn since they both appeared in *Peggy Sue Got Married*. Evans pushed for Carrey after Marilyn asked him to repay the favor of getting von Trier. Von Trier, rather unexpectedly, wholeheartedly endorsed the casting choice; he claimed that Carrey's comedic abilities and extreme expressions would allow him to fully embody the character he had changed from Feric Jaggar to Aeric Haggar (thus giving the initials AH, just like Adolf Hitler).

Spinrad and von Trier worked together very well. Von Trier brought another set of notes for changes to Spinrad, who did a quick rewrite without question. Von Trier then took a pass at the script himself, including the changes that Spinrad had made and adding many of his own. He gave his script to Evans, who claimed that it was much improved, but needed to be shortened as the script indicated a film that would run about three and a half hours long. Von Trier said that would be fine and he'd cut portions in the editing. Evans was dubious, since he did not have final cut, but he needed to get the production shooting as soon as possible. The shoot started on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

Or so it seemed.

Von Trier had been shooting several pieces of film with Eric Begosian playing the role of the academic Homer Whipple. He flew Begosian in to Copenhagen to shoot with a small crew he had put together. He claimed that this was a part of shooting for *The Idiots*, his Dogme film. The afterword to the second edition of *Lord of the Swastika* was supposedly written by Homer Whipple, but Spinrad had not written this into the script, explaining that it would be difficult for the audience to grasp the concept. Nonetheless von Trier had filmed nearly three hours of footage of Begosian examining the various aspects of the story.

No one but von Trier, his skeleton crew, and Begosian knew what was going on. Von Trier had sent Begosian a copy of *The Iron Dream* and had him break it down. It was not the total analysis that Spinrad had written in the book, but it was Begosian's actual analysis of the text that von Trier had shot. This would lead to many of the problems that would plague the film's premiere.



The official shoot went very well. Von Trier and Spinrad worked together on the set; having the writer on the set is hardly standard, but they got along well. Von Trier also enjoyed Carrey's performance, along with Christopher Walken, Stellan Skaarsgard, Jean-Marc Barr, and Paprika Steen. Marilyn Monroe also showed up in a ten-second cameo as a favor to von Trier. At Palm Springs in 1998, Monroe made her last appearance at the film festival and gave an interview to *New York Times* film critic John Scalzi where she discussed the film and the day she spent on set:

"Lars and Norman were working in tandem. It was amazing to see two such intelligent and visionary men working so closely and creating such a united vision. Jim was able to give an amazing performance due to the guidance he was receiving from them. I wish I could have spent some more time working on that set, but other commitments dragged me away."

Marilyn would go to shoot her scenes for *There's Something About Mary*, which included her final topless scene, that following week. She would receive an Oscar nomination for her role, which was seen as one of the all-time great shock comedy performances ever.

The shoot for *The Iron Dream* wrapped on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1998, with Spinrad leaving the US and heading to Paris where shooting was about to begin on a new *Star Trek* film he had scripted. Von Trier returned to Denmark where he would be editing the film. Evans was not happy with this concept, since it meant that he couldn't keep an eye on von Trier, but there was little need to fight it. Von Trier actually did very little of the editing himself, instead passing it off to an American living in Copenhagen, Steve Sprinkles. Von Trier sent many rushes to Hollywood for notes, conveniently not including any of the Homer Whipple footage. Sprinkles made his final cut on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1998. Von Trier then took the footage and inserted the Begosian footage throughout the film. He shipped off Sprinkles's version to the brass in Hollywood, who raved about it. Von Trier had several prints made, paying out of his own pocket, and arranged for Paramount to pay to have the prints for the US market struck in Denmark. Evans put his foot down at first, until he discovered that even including shipping costs of two thousand prints, it would still be nearly twenty-five percent cheaper to have them done in Denmark.

Von Trier's print was completely unauthorized, though Evans likely would have caught the treachery if he hadn't been fired on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1998. The film was set for its world premiere at the Palm Springs Film Festival and would then be released a week later in theatres around the world. The entire scenario was already set, and even with Evans gone, there was no way to put the film back in its bottle.

Von Trier actually arranged it so that the final versions of the film would arrive in California on the day of the screening at Palm Springs. There would be no time for examining the prints. The first time Paramount execs would see the version that would hit the theatres a week

later was on the big screen at Palm Springs. Von Trier had told Marilyn about his plans, and she had agreed to show up and sit in the front row. The day before, she called von Trier and told him that she was far too weak to attend the screening and asked him to bring a print to her house and screen it for her personally. Von Trier, who had traveled with a copy as his checked baggage, brought it over and showed it to Marilyn, Jim Carrey, Chris Walken, Martin Landau, and Arnold Schwarzenegger and his wife, Maria. The screening went amazingly well. Marilyn, who had been on high levels of pain medication, managed to remain awake for the entire viewing. She told von Trier that this was a masterpiece that would kill his entire career. "With what they've paid me, I can afford to never work again," von Trier said.

The others at the screening all agreed that Carrey had done a remarkable job, and that the film, as a whole, was very good, though far from what would make millions in the US. It was expected to be a major event film for Europe and Japan – although with the subject matter it would not be able to be marketed in Germany, and more than likely not even be shown there – but the US was where this was aimed.

The official premiere was a success for all but three people in the theatre. Jeffrey Katzenburg, Paramount's new Head of Production, was appalled at the excesses that von Trier had gone to. Evans was furious that he'd been lied to and that it was billed as 'Robert Evans presents'. Norman Spinrad was most furious of all. Even while they had worked together so closely, von Trier had never mentioned Begosian's work or that he'd cut so many portions that Spinrad had specifically included because he saw them as being essential to the plot. Spinrad left immediately as the credits began to roll and began making furious calls to every exec at Paramount demanding that the film be pulled from distribution. These calls all went unanswered, due to the fact that they'd already spent nearly twenty million dollars promoting the release. There was no way they were walking away from that investment.

The film opened, despite Spinrad gaining an injunction. Paramount had that overturned, and the film shockingly grossed 47.4 million dollars on the first weekend and a remarkable 46.6 on the second. The film received generally positive reviews, although some, like Daniel Kimmel, pointed to a somewhat pretentious tone and some of the unevenness in the flow of the story. Scalzi named the film the best of the year. The *Boston Globe* and *San Jose Mercury News* both did the same. Roger Ebert held it up as "the prototype for the future of science fiction film". Gene Siskel was not nearly as impressed.

By the end of its theatrical run, it had grossed nearly 360 million dollars internationally. Von Trier had brought it in under budget; even with the large advertising budget, it only cost about 115 million, though part of that may have had to do with von Trier putting in eight million from his own pocket to maintain secrecy.

Of course, lawsuits followed. Paramount had made

a profit, so no legal action was possible there. Spinrad sued Paramount and won a settlement of nearly five million dollars. Von Trier was sued by Spinrad, but the case was dropped quietly when a judge noted that this case was “an extreme longshot” in his opinion.

The film received nine Oscar nominations, and won four. Jim Carrey won both the Golden Globe and Oscar for Best Actor. Spinrad was nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay, though lost to Dave Meltzer and, coincidentally, John Milius, for the screenplay for *The Loose Cannon: The Brian Pillman Story*, based on Meltzer’s book. Sprinkles and Von Trier shared Best Editing, and Art Direction and Costumes also walked home with statues. Neither von Trier nor Spinrad attended the ceremony.

Nor did Marilyn Monroe.

Marilyn had made her last appearance at the Hollywood premiere of *There’s Something About Mary*. She then settled into her home, where she spent her days between her screening room and the guest cottage she had converted into a *de facto* oncology department, complete with two full-time oncologists and three full-time nurses. Monroe wrote hundreds of letters to friends and fans, including a very famous letter to the fanzine *Plokta* after she had discovered an article where she was mentioned. Her condition worsened, though she made it through 1999 into 2000. She slipped into a coma and passed away on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2000, with Jim Carrey, Robert Evans and several other friends at her side.

Von Trier and Spinrad came into contact at the Venice Film Festival; Spinrad was apparently in a foul mood after his *Star Trek* film had bombed so terribly with Jeremy Sisto as Captain Kirk. The two crossed paths and Spinrad went to punch von Trier when Martin Landau got in the way. The two were dragged apart and have never seen each other since. Spinrad remains in Paris; von Trier has had extreme trouble getting funding for further films due to his behavior with the editing of *The Iron Dream*, but has managed to make three somewhat successful films in Denmark and a television series that is well-regarded.

*The Iron Dream* was listed as the third greatest science fiction film of all time in a 2005 poll of film critics and science fiction authors, behind only *Star Wars* and *Crash*. It continues to be a favorite of college film courses and has managed to create a new generation of filmmakers as dozens of films have referenced von Trier’s masterpiece. While it is certainly a significant achievement in cinema, it is also the perfect example of how Hollywood is one part factory, one part laboratory, one part think-tank, and one part schoolyard where bullies can be tricked in the final reel.



# TURNING POINTS IN HISTORY: A MEDIEVALIST'S THOUGHTS

BY EDWARD JAMES

I am teaching on a first level module at the moment called 'Rome to Renaissance'. It's a good catch-all title in which one could introduce the five hundred students to the medieval world any way one chooses. But a more accurate title would be 'Ten Days That Shook the Medieval World', or, perhaps, 'Ten Medieval Turning Points'. Not all of our ten episodes took place in one day (it took the Goths three days to sack Rome), but most of them did. And not all of the episodes are 'turning points' – we were not thinking of 'turning points' when we chose them – but most are. And thinking about this question made me realise some of the historical problems of choosing 'genuine' historical turning points.

By 'genuine turning point', I mean an event which, if it turned out differently, would almost certainly have meant that world history developed in a different way. And while it is easy enough to extrapolate 'for want of a nail' situations in fiction, where a battle was lost because someone's horse lost its shoe at a crucial point, in historical terms this would not produce a 'genuine turning point': such minor events happen beyond the range of our historical knowledge. But there are genuine turning points. A thorough-going Marxist might argue that no single event or no single historical personage can change the ineluctable process of social and economic development, and in the long term that may well be true. But in the short term, it might have mattered a good deal to most individual Americans, north and south, if the battle of Gettysburg had been won by the other side, at least if that changed the outcome of the war. I would therefore regard the battle of Gettysburg as a 'genuine turning point', even if that theory could not in practice be tested without a time machine (as various SF writers have suggested in the case of Gettysburg).

The crucial clause, though, is "at least if that changed the outcome of the war". How many other turning points would have to be traversed between Gettysburg and a cessation of hostilities? History cannot work with simple formulae of the kind 'If X happens, then Y will follow', above all if X and Y are separated by months or years. Hari Seldon, the psychohistorian, might have managed the mathematics; but even Seldon's plan foundered on the Mule.

The events that I have been talking about with my students over the past few weeks have included the Sack of Rome by the Goths in August 410 and the baptism of Clovis, king of the Franks, in 496 (or 507), and, coming up in the next two weeks, the battle of Tours (or Poitiers) in 732 (or 733) and the coronation of Charlemagne on Christmas Day 800 (or, as contemporaries regarded it, New Year's Day 801 – the first day of a new century).

Of all these events, probably the most famous in any discussion of turning points is the battle which took place on the road between Poitiers and Tours between the Christian forces of Charles Martel, the Frankish leader, and the Arab and Moorish forces of Abd ar-

Rahman. It occasioned a famous paragraph from Edward Gibbon, perhaps the first piece of alternate history or counterfactual speculation in English historiography:

A victorious line of march had been prolonged above a thousand miles from the rock of Gibraltar to the banks of the Loire; the repetition of an equal space would have carried the Saracens to the confines of Poland and the Highlands of Scotland; the Rhine is not more impassable than the Nile or Euphrates, and the Arabian fleet might have sailed without a naval combat into the mouth of the Thames. Perhaps the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumcised people the sanctity and truth of the revelation of Mahomet.

(*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 52)

One can imagine Gibbon writing those lines with a grin on his face: he had no love for Christianity, and hated Oxford...

"But is it true?" is what the historian has to ask. Could the Arabs have conquered France and then moved on to England? The Frankish forces were strong, and even those of Æthelbald of Mercia, most powerful king in England, were pretty formidable. A more pertinent question, however, is: *would* the Arabs have moved on to conquer France, let alone carried on to England, if they had won the battle of Tours? There is little or no indication that they wanted to. The surviving evidence is slender, and little of it comes from the Arab side, but it looks as if successive Arab military commanders were far too worried about instability within newly conquered Spain (antagonism between the Arab and North African elements in the army) to allow themselves much freedom of action in France. A big action against France in 737, only four or five years after Tours, had to be called off even before the Arab army had crossed the Pyrenees because of the need to crush a Moorish revolt. By the time the Arabs had brought stability to Spain, the power of Charles Martel and his son Pippin had increased to the extent that they were a threat to the Arabs rather than the other way around. Charles attacked the only foothold that the Arabs had in Gaul, the coastal strip between the Rhône and the Pyrenees, and the Arabs were soon driven south of the Pyrenees. Under Charles's grandson, Charlemagne, the Christian reconquest of Spain began.

If the Battle of Tours was a turning point at all, it was arguably a turning point in the history of southern Gaul. The independent duke of Aquitaine, Eudes or Odo, had called in Charles Martel to help him against the Arabs, and from then on the south of France was doomed as a set of states independent from the Franks of northern Gaul. The second of the three northern invasions of southern France (the sixth century, the eighth century and the

thirteenth century) was launched soon after Charles's crushing defeat of the Arabs at Tours.

What about the other 'turning points' – the Sack of Rome, the baptism of Clovis, and the coronation of Charlemagne – to which I am introducing students this semester? What they all have in common (and have in common with a large number of other historical events) is that historians cannot agree on their significance.

The Sack of Rome certainly did not achieve much on the face of it. Alaric led his Goths into the city – the first barbarians to take Rome for eight hundred years – and led them out again almost immediately. They took a great deal of booty (including, some say, the treasure which Titus had brought out of Jerusalem, the treasure which features in *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and many other pieces

of modern 'secret history'). They even took as booty the sister of the Emperor. But the event had no direct political resonance. The Goths soon left Italy, ultimately to set up the kingdom which the Arabs conquered in 711. Rome continued to exist, and still exists, as a significant ecclesiastical capital; Rome had ceased to be a significant political capital long before 410.

If we are to believe the Christian accounts of the Sack of Rome which were written later in the fifth century, the Sack was a non-event. For Orosius, writing less than a decade later, it was almost as if the Goths had come for a three-day festival and picnic. More fires are started by accident in Rome, he said, than the Goths managed to start. But, some historians would argue, this is all special pleading, designed to counter the widespread claims that the gods had sent the Goths into Rome as a punishment for (a very few years before) closing the pagan temples and abandoning the traditional religion. One of the few pagan accounts of the period (by Zosimus), breaks off before the Sack of Rome; another one, by Olympiodorus, is largely lost and only survives in quotations in other works. Perhaps those pagan historians told a much more dramatic story of death and destruction. Perhaps there was evidence in those lost sources of the event as something which, if not significant in world history, was at least significant in local history. Rome was once the largest city in the Mediterranean world; to what extent did the refugees from the Goths (some of whom we meet in the contemporary letters of St Augustine and St Jerome, writing from North Africa and Bethlehem respectively) contribute to the depopulation of Rome? The Sack of Rome may have been relatively harmless: but it followed nearly two years' worth of sieges, with the accompanying



starvation and plague.

The answer may be that the Sack of Rome was not a significant event in political or military terms. It was a short-term response to Alaric's main political problem: how should I apply pressure to that idiot Emperor Honorius in order to force him to give me some land on which to settle my troops? But that is only part of the problem. Perhaps in psychological terms the Sack of Rome was very significant. Rome's vulnerability was revealed; the ineffectiveness of imperial power was plain to see. Augustine of Hippo, in his classic *City of God*, which he began writing as his own response to the Sack of Rome, was able calmly to imagine that the Roman Empire would end and be replaced by other empires or kingdoms. That thought seems to have been literally unthinkable beforehand, and such ideas, if disseminated widely,

may have contributed to the belief of many Romans in subsequent decades that they were better off supporting barbarian regimes than trying to sustain the Roman Empire.

I have no space to deal in any detail with the baptism of Clovis or the coronation of Charlemagne. These were events which lasted for an hour or so. Were they turning points? One of them at least still has the power to move. When the Pope was invited to celebrate the 1,500th anniversary celebrations of Clovis's baptism in 1996, there were demonstrations in the streets of Paris. The right in France thought of the baptism of a Catholic king of the Franks as the foundation of the kingdom of France, unique in Europe because of that close alliance between state and Catholicism. The left refused to think they were citizens of a nation founded by a German-speaking Catholic; they shouted, "Vercingétorix, pas Clovis."

The trouble with turning points, as far as the academic historian is concerned, is that they often reveal fault lines in the interpretation of the past. Significant events normally breed dramatically variant views of history; there can be no agreement about counterfactuals because there is no agreement about significance. None of this should matter to the writer of fictional alternate history, however. Alaric's decision not to besiege Rome, Clovis's decision to become an Arian Christian rather than a Catholic one, and the deaths of Charles Martel and his immediate family on the battlefield of Tours could all conjure up fascinating scenarios, in which the modern world was quite different from that in which we live.

– Edward James

# HARPER'S FERRY

BY BARBARA JOHNSON-HADDAD

October 18, 1859

The second day of the siege began in smoke and fire. Folks around me were shouting and carrying on. They blamed Governor Geary for not solving the problem in '56 when he called in federal troops to stop the Kansas-Missouri war. Most forgot that it was Shannon, his predecessor, who hadn't hunted down that murderous cur John Brown after the first massacre.

For his part, John Brown didn't run for the frontier and obscurity as many expected. Instead he brought his fanatics east, into Virginia. After a spree of burnings, thefts and killings, they seized hostages and retreated into the fire-engine house of the federal arsenal, here at Harper's Ferry. Two solid days of rabble-rousing followed, as Brown preached the poison of revolt out through the barred windows, urging our black slaves to rise up in revolt. We hooted down his words with jeers and scorn, but I saw fear in many a man's eye at the thought of another slave uprising.

Negotiations between Brown's fanatics and the federal marines went slow. After a cavalry officer, Jeb Stuart, went in to demand Brown's surrender, there were rumors of killed hostages and of mutiny among Brown's men. But everyone was frankly surprised when Brown refused surrender and marines charged the armory. After storming the engine house, they had the raiders in hand within three minutes, led by a lieutenant colonel, Robert E Lee. I was glad, since I knew Lee was a Virginian and from a good family. It was good that a local boy was at hand to finish the matter.

The rest of us citizens who'd helped maintain the siege slapped each other on the back for running the curs to ground. True, there were slave owners who shouldn't own a mule, but friendly pressure from neighbors could usually keep them in line. To judge by their faces, many of Brown's followers had thoughts along this line and were suffering a change of heart, as well. I believed that most of the lads were simply misled by John's fire 'n' brimstone preaching. Being emotional lads, they'd simply lost hold of their common sense. They were from Kansas, after all.

The trouble happened as the raiders were being marched to the jail in Charles Town, with John Brown and his surviving men acting meek as lambs. Some of the men around me wanted to hang the lot of them at once without benefit of trial. The most strident of the lot was dressed as a gentleman and sounded like he came from South Carolina. He was awful het up. He kept going on and on about how this was some kind of turning point in history. He especially ranted on how ol' John would be used as a martyr for the abolitionists if we let him live to reach trial.

He had the appearance and speech of an educated man, but was trying to incite a lynching. He should have known these free-soil Kansas ruffians couldn't just be strung up. Virginia followed the rule of law. He seemed

overwrought. Maybe he had kin who died in the raid. It would explain why he was so dead certain that the Kansas raiders needed killing.

Brown's lads were being led off the arsenal grounds when the stranger yelled, "I do what I do to preserve the South!" As we gaped over this foolishness, he pulled out a big fancy revolver from his inner suitcoat pocket and began firing.

Bullets poured from that weapon like you wouldn't believe! They struck the raiders and half a dozen marines before anyone could react. Indeed, it might have turned ugly if Colonel Lee hadn't acted. Funny how that went. The fellow had Lee dead in his sights but turned the revolver aside, and had an astonished look on his face when Lee shot him dead. Lee made sure he was dead and then barked out commands, restoring order inside of ten minutes, as doctors came to care for the wounded.

Raiders were laying dead all around him, but John Brown had survived yet again. He stood there with blood staining his beard red, calling down the Lord's wrath and vengeance upon us all. Lee marshaled his marines back into ranks, then had both the injured and the dead placed on stretchers. The Colonel looked over at the crowd of us milling around until he recognized someone. "Edmund Ruffin! You're a responsible fellow. You make sure the dead are cared for and their families notified. Have some of those civilians help you!" Lee then quick-marched Brown's men off to the safety of jail, before another would-be assassin made a similar move.

Ruffin assigned men to carry the dead off for proper disposal and took an exaggerated care with the dead stranger's body himself. When he took the weapon in hand, a lot of us crowded close to watch as he examined it.

I gawked with the rest. I'd been wrong. The stranger's weapon wasn't a revolver. There was no chambered cylinder for cartridges. It had a small metal cartridge box, half full of tiny cartridges that slid into the pistol's grip, which explained the exaggerated length of the grip. Ruffin saw me and waved me over. "Tyler! Do you know who might have made a gun like this?"

"I don't know, Neddy," I admitted, after turning the piece over in my hands a few times. Then I suggested: "Maybe he built it himself. Look here," I pointed out. "He was prideful enough to have engraved his name, Mauser, into the metal."

"Perhaps you're right." Ruffin looked down at the pistol, a speculative expression growing on his features. As the last dead man was carried away and the crowd began to thin, Ruffin stroked his chin and asked, "Could you use this as a model and duplicate it?" After I shrugged and admitted as to it being possible, he smiled down at the wicked thing and mused, "Two men armed with these could have put down Brown's entire raid."

I nodded, since I'd thought the same thing myself. Ruffin took me aside and told me quietly, "Colonel Lee

is a good army man, but he's a better Virginian to have left this weapon on the field of battle. With trouble brewing betwixt the South and those abolitionist-loving Republicans, having more of these to hand can't fail to help our cause. Take this off with you, Tyler, and see if you can be fruitful and make it multiply."

"I'll do my best, Neddy." True to my given word, I took Mauser's pistol back to my rifle shop. I cleared off a long table and lit three lamps. Then, with a glass magnifying lens held in a clamp, a stack of foolscap paper to make detailed notes and sketches, I went to work, using a scrap of sprung steel to turn the incredibly tiny screws.

It was a good thing I made sketches of the entire procedure, or I would have lost my way among the myriad of parts I ended up with. To reassure myself, I put the pistol back together while the memory was fresh in my mind and disassembled it again once I knew the trick of it.

Mauser's pistol was of a truly cunning design. In addition to being a raving madman, Mauser had an incredible genius for machining parts. It was a fully repeating pistol! The idea of the thing captured my thoughts like a bear trap. Although I could never have originated such a thing, with the finished result of Mauser's genius before me, I knew I could copy it.

In the days following the siege at Harper's Ferry, friends dropped in to watch as I retooled my shop to make copies. They told me that Brown would survive his bullet wounds so he could be properly hanged after the trial next month. There was lots of talk, complaining over the mischief his raiders had done and speculating over why Brown came to Virginia, instead of retreating to the frontier. We never reached a decision and decided Brown was just a madman who'd finally run out of luck.

At the beginning of November, two weeks after

the siege with Brown's trial beginning, Edmund Ruffin came by to see my progress. He called out a greeting from my open shop door and entered, scowling as he looked around. After prowling around the benches, tables and prodding my tools, he asked, "Have you heard that Lowes found one of John Brown's hidden arsenals?"

"I'm sorry, Neddy, I have not," I answered, laying aside my pliers. With a gesture around, I told him, "I haven't been out of this place since it all began. What arsenal?"

My words gentled Ruffin's frown. He told me, "There were nine hundred pikes! Bowie knives affixed to stout iron staves. Brown meant to arm slaves with those weapons. He intended rebellion and the midnight assassinations of our local officials!" He shook his head in anger. "My friends and I are distributing bundles of these bedamned pikes among our Southern governors as a warning to be alert for abolitionists using similar tactics."

"What good did they think would be served by such rebellion?" I asked, feeling incredulous.

"No good! Nothing good at all," Edmund growled. He glowered more, but he did let me change the subject as I showed him how my work was proceeding. My efforts certainly did bring a smile to his face. The monies Neddy gave me lightened my own mood, since it let me buy tools to make the pistol copies. It also ensured that Neddy would get the first working copies I made. With each new day I marveled at the precise fit that the pistol needed to work properly. It was an officer's weapon, not a weapon for the uneducated or overly emotional to use. The small caliber of the weapon's bore caused much of my trouble, but I couldn't see how to modify the whole pistol to bring it up to .44 standards, so had to put up with the limitations of its size.





The first six copies were ready a week later. My work lacked the smoothly polished perfection of the original, but in making six pistols at a time, I sacrificed the original's exquisite craftsmanship for speed. However, each of the six fired properly. It was a wonder how quickly they could be reloaded and fired once you had the trick of it.

Ruffin was delighted at my message of their readiness. He showed up at my shop with four friends that very evening. I greeted them kindly, offered whiskey and coffee, then showed them all how the pistols worked. The demonstration had all of Neddy's friends hotly intent to invest me with the funds to craft more and expand my own rifle works to accommodate them. In the excitement, I winked at Neddy and his laughter made my dogs bark. He sat there as proud as a mother hen for thinking the idea up in the first place, with his own new pistols in a case beside his chair.

Later that evening, after the others left and he stayed behind, Ruffin examined each of the six copies in private with me. Neddy grinned and told me, "I know more than fifty men who will want a repeating pistol of your design once they hear of this, Tyler. You'll be rich from this! You've done better than I hoped and I'll brag on your work heavily in future. Good job." Carrying the box as though it held gold coins, not pistols, Neddy left my shop after a last whiskey, while I made plans to increase my yield.

The orders were welcome since they kept me in funds, but hand-turning those tiny screws was hard on my vision. I found the best time to make them was in the bright early morning sun, but there was only so much of that available. I had to find some other way to form them.

I put the word around and within the week a young man named Landry came to see me. He was starting a metal foundry down-river from me and wanted my business. What was more important was his willingness to make dies to my specification. I showed him each of the tiny parts I needed cast of good steel, stressing that the copies had to be perfect, with no left-over flash. Landry agreed the drafted screws were the hardest part of the job, followed by the need for the pistol to use small metal cartridges. It was he who named the pistols 'Tyler's Terrors', a conceit that made me laugh.

What with helping him make molds of everything possible, a week passed before I looked up to note that Thanksgiving was about to pass me by all unknowing. Thankfully my brother, Henry, looked after me and made sure I spent the day in prayer at our church and then brought me over to his home for dinner with his family. There were several jokes made at my expense, chiding my industry. Henry's wife Theona took me to task for growing too thin. Had it been left to her cooking, they could have rolled me out the door that night. With regret I escaped the warmth of family and found my steps turn back to the shop. Even as part of me wanted to sleep early for one night, I lit the lamps and work captured my attention again.

The dies were finished within the week and the

first load of parts came to me with news that John Brown had been hanged. I had a drink in Mauser's memory and with these new parts I completed another sixty repeating pistols by Christmas. A day of rest and reflection at church gave my neighbors a chance to question me about the new weapon. After the services I held forth in great detail and invited everyone who was interested to come by my shop the next day.

A crowd of men and boys showed up, starting just after dawn. I spent the day showing this dozen or that how the 'terrors' worked and picked up near to ninety new orders by the day's end. The most astonishing was from Walter Stone, my barber, who wanted four of the weapons just for his own use, saying "bother" to the cost!

As the new year of 1860 began, I heard political rumblings that worried me. The clumsy accord that President Buchanan had forged among the states was fraying with the upcoming presidential election. It sounded like the no-slavery branch of the Republican party had ascendancy amongst their fellows. News reports and editorials stressed how the Republicans were pressing the Congress to lessen the states' right to legislate. Their intent was to tell our state legislators how they would be permitted to make laws, so they could push their own party platform on unwilling states.

Northern newspapers hectored their readers, trying to build up moral outrage against the Southern states solely due to our practice of slavery. Those same hypocrites failed to mention the New England custom of indenturing immigrants to servitude for ten or twenty years, or that New England merchants were the ones who brought slavery south in the first place. Local editorials, plus the voices of neighbors and travelers, worried at the thought that secession might be our only solution. With Harper's Ferry being only a week's travel upstream of the Federal capital on the Potomac, secessionist rumors gained more credence thereby.

So I was more relieved than bothered when a delegation of eight other gunsmiths sought me out that first week of January. Of the lot, Hall was a close friend. I also knew Warren, Stephens and Ketteridge to some extent and recognized the rest by sight. I invited them in, offered hospitality, then waited to hear their petition.

After the formalities, Charles Ketteridge spoke to the heart of the matter. "We've come to you privately, Tyler, in hopes that we can resolve a problem we're all struck with. All of our personal industry goes for naught, what with your new pistol."

"Remember," Hall chided me gently, "that some of us took damage to our property from Brown's raid, so this isn't just a complaint over sour grapes."

I nodded. Brown's raiders had half burnt down Hall's Rifle Works, just before the siege. "I must commend you for the rapid repairs you did on your shop. You received excellent returns from your carpenters," I said somewhat weakly, shaking his hand. He smiled at me, forgivingly.

One of the others, Jackson, added a rougher, "Ay-yuh. Your repeating pistol sales are cutting all our businesses to the bone. We're like to starve if you keep the secret to yourself!"

Having thought on this very subject long and hard on a number of dark nights, I already knew how to treat with them. I listened politely to their complaints and nodded a lot. I apologized for being less than neighborly and up-front with my knowledge. This shut off their protests, as honest humility is wont to do. Then I said, "I'll gladly share the secret of the



pistol's manufacture. Thus, you can each make them for your own custom, so that we may all profit. But before I give you copies of my plans, you must all swear to sell these pistols only to loyal sons of the South and not to abolitionists. I'm sure that you will see the why of it."

I'm glad to say they took but a moment to understand my demand, then all made a heart-felt oath in front of me and God. As we spoke of details thereafter, I also asked for the profit of one sold 'terror' in twenty as my fee for the plans. The fee would set me for life, but more reassuring was my knowledge that the trick of the repeater's construction would not be lost if something happened to me.

The delegation left in great good humor, plans in hand. Some were surprised that I had so many copies of the schematics at home, but no one complained. I heard many thanks spoken to Hall for coming with them, ascribing my willingness to share the plans on our friendship.

As spring blossomed and gave way to summer, my own custom did not dry up. It increased and kept thriving. I took on two apprentices in February, then a third in March and trained them to make the simpler elements for the 'terror'. It increased my production by a factor of five and gave one lad enough funds to marry.

But this was true for every gunsmith I heard from, whether or not they made 'terrors'. The demand for rifles kept growing. Every man from here to the Carolinas wanted rifles for himself and each son. While I gained new orders for rifles, it was requests for the repeater that filled my daily roster. Young Landry told me in May that 'terror' owners were seeking him out to make cartridges for the weapon: thousands upon thousands of them. He had, in turn, expanded his foundry and was running two shifts of workers, one shift simply to make new cartridges.

Even with my work so increased, I met with my fellow gunsmiths in June and then in August. I thanked

them for the fees they paid me, but our main purpose was to induct new smiths into the repeater-making craft. Hall suggested and we adopted the practice of calling it the 'Repeaters Guild'. Each new man needed to be vouched for by someone in the guild who'd known him at least five years. Yet even with this precaution, a story reached me of Ketteridge shooting one man dead, chance-met as the traitor fled north with plans for the 'terror' in a breast pocket.

Looking back, now that the century turns, it was when autumn turned the leaves to fire and flame that war became unavoidable. Lincoln won the vote for president over Douglas, Bell and Breckinridge in the '60 election. South Carolina seceded in protest a month later. Lincoln and his Republicans made demands that resulted in five other states – Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Florida – also seceding from the union.

In February of '61, I heard that the New Congress in Montgomery, forming the new Confederate States of America, voted in Georgia's Alexander Hamilton Stephens as president, with Jefferson Davis as his vice president. Rumor reached me that Stephens's tie to the repeater industry had helped his star rise above Davis's. In the month that followed, news reports carried the headlines that Lincoln, heeding the advice of his Secretary of State, William Henry Seward, allowed the evacuation of Fort Sumter rather than have it overrun. Speculation in print was this was possibly due to Seward's past friendship with Stephens.

By March, I expanded into another shop and hired another apprentice, Sean O'Malley. Sean was an Irish lad who said that soldiers in the Federalist New England states were taking all the men from new-docked ships of immigrants, mainly the Irish, and forcing them directly into army service. Sean had escaped and ran south for safety, until he ended up in my employ. A hard worker, he was

soon the foreman at my second shop and his industry was an example to all who worked with him.

As the Brothers' War began, officers in our new army came by my shop to purchase repeaters. They invariably complained about my price, so my reply was, "It's a fair price. There's a lot of delicate parts in my repeater."

They would counter, "But are you certain it's a proper weapon for a gentleman?"

So I would laugh and ask, "And cannons are? Come now, friend, do you think the Federalist army abolitionists will go back to using naught but sabers on your say-so?"

They would chuckle ruefully, seeing the effectiveness of my argument. Then, when they saw a 'terror' fire, their thinking turned about and they paid my fee. Some were officers who had left West Point and told me there were reports that the Federalists had a man named Gatling building them a ten-barrel gun for their own use in war, so repeating handguns were a mildly bitter pill that had to be swallowed.

Threat of a Northern blockade brought Breckenridge, one of Stephens's diplomats, to my shop for a week in late March, arguing with me for days until I reluctantly supplied him with a set of plans for the repeater, so that he could use them to secure diplomatic aid overseas. He told me later that most European nations played coy to him, with only France and England supporting us in force, but that was enough. English ships broke the Northern blockade on our Atlantic ports. Of course, this made economic sense since most of our shipping was destined for the English port of Bristol. France's support also came from self-interest, since they wanted New World colonies again. Sent by their emperor, Napoleon III, they landed an invasion force into Mexico to put their man, Maximilian, on the throne. Repeaters of their own helped make their dreams of renewed empire a reality.

The blockade's failure added to the glad tidings I heard when repeaters were used successfully to help defend Forts Clark and Hatteras later in '61 from high overwhelming Northern assaults. The repeater's rapid rate of fire and ability to wound a multitude in the press of battle caused fear to fill our Northern opponents. The common enemy soldiers in file saw they must face repeater fire, lost heart, broke and ran.

A new Federalist tactic reached my ears after their decisive loss at Bull Run. A troop of Northies took great losses as they attacked a Southern picket line the night after the battle. The few survivors admitted their orders were to capture or steal a working repeater and deliver it back to the North, so their side could duplicate the weapon.

It was perhaps due to this Northern intent to steal, copy and use our own weapons against Southern forces that finally impelled our generals to attempt winning a decisive victory, rather than fight in dignified resistance as they had from the start. This resulted in the burning of Washington in November of '61. That forced a Northern regrouping and their army never recovered from the loss. The Federalists fell back and established

their national capital in Philadelphia, while our Southern army razed Washington back down to the marshlands it was first built upon.

The slogan 'Washington was first and foremost a Virginian' was chiseled into the stone of many a ruin before our troops withdrew.

The North licked its wounds, and might have gained some popular support for their share of the war, but Lincoln proposed a Federalist tax on a man's income to support the war. Even the most ardent abolitionist newspaper raged against this unjust tax on income and threatened another war of Revolution.

The furor died down after two months and their Congress refused to pass such a tax, but by then a new scandal struck as Lincoln suspended *habeus corpus* in the wake of the Maryland Massacre. This caused such an outcry that even his own party called for Lincoln's impeachment! As Maryland's legislators called an emergency session, a news report quoted Lincoln's aides, saying the deaths of his two young sons from the influenza left him unable to muster the vigor needed to prevent Maryland's secession as it became part of the Confederate States of America.

Possibly related to this, at the end of '61, rather than support a side in the Brothers' War, Texas seceded and announced an intent to exist as a sovereign republic. This led many of the western territories to follow suit, establishing their own separate republics all through 1862.

As the Northern forces rebuilt, they were hemmed in by rebellions against their Federalist restrictions. A financial panic caused the ruin of more than twelve thousand Northern businesses as real estate prices slumped and Federalist currency ceased being honored in the rebel territories. This hamstrung the building of new railroads beyond Chicago. For almost a year, President Lincoln divided his army and sent it out against all dissident states and territories, with uneven results. It was also 1862 when England took away the easy Northern army fodder by sending their Irish immigrants, instead, to our port of Norfolk.

This is the cause cited for Lincoln's final decision to sue for peace with President Davis and the Confederate States of America in May 1863.

Now though, with the New Year and new century of 1900 approaching, I am glad the convulsions of war have ceased and that the CSA has its acceptance as a nation of the world. But victory at what cost? Our cotton goes to English mills. Our repeaters – both pistols and a newer rifle I devised of similar design – are sold to our allies. The English use them to conquer Africa and to keep their colonies subdued. The French use them in bloody war with their European neighbors and defeat their enemies in South America.

Even with a declared 'peace' our industry is shunned by the Federalist States of America, our northern neighbor. They despise us for breaking 'their' union and claim the Brothers' War ruined their hopes to span the entire continent in a vast united nation and not the

fragmented disarray of principalities that exist here now. That all Europe and the rest of the world lives thus does nothing to stay their enmity. I fear relations between our two lands shall never be cordial.

Sadly, the FSA's industry outstrips the CSA's own, even though great strides are made in our modernization. Norfolk, Atlanta and all port towns up and down the Mississippi River are factory towns now, filled with the numberless immigrants that England still dumps on the Norfolk docks.

Of all the nations on our home continent, only the Republic of Texas trades with us freely, with other lands imposing unjust tariffs on our goods. In the main, England and Europe are our best markets. Even so, it increases the cost for goods imported across the Atlantic and is paid for with back-breaking toil by the lower classes.

The saddest irony is that the flood of new immigrants willing to work for next to naught destroyed our peculiar institution that first decade. Even though slavery – the 'cause' for the Brothers' War – is legal here, it has fallen out of fashion these last thirty years. Most slave owners gave manumission to their slaves, since immigrants would do the work at less cost.

Many freed slaves left to live in other nations, but those who stayed embraced the literacy forbidden them until then, and their children are better educated than most of my contemporaries. I wonder what teachers from

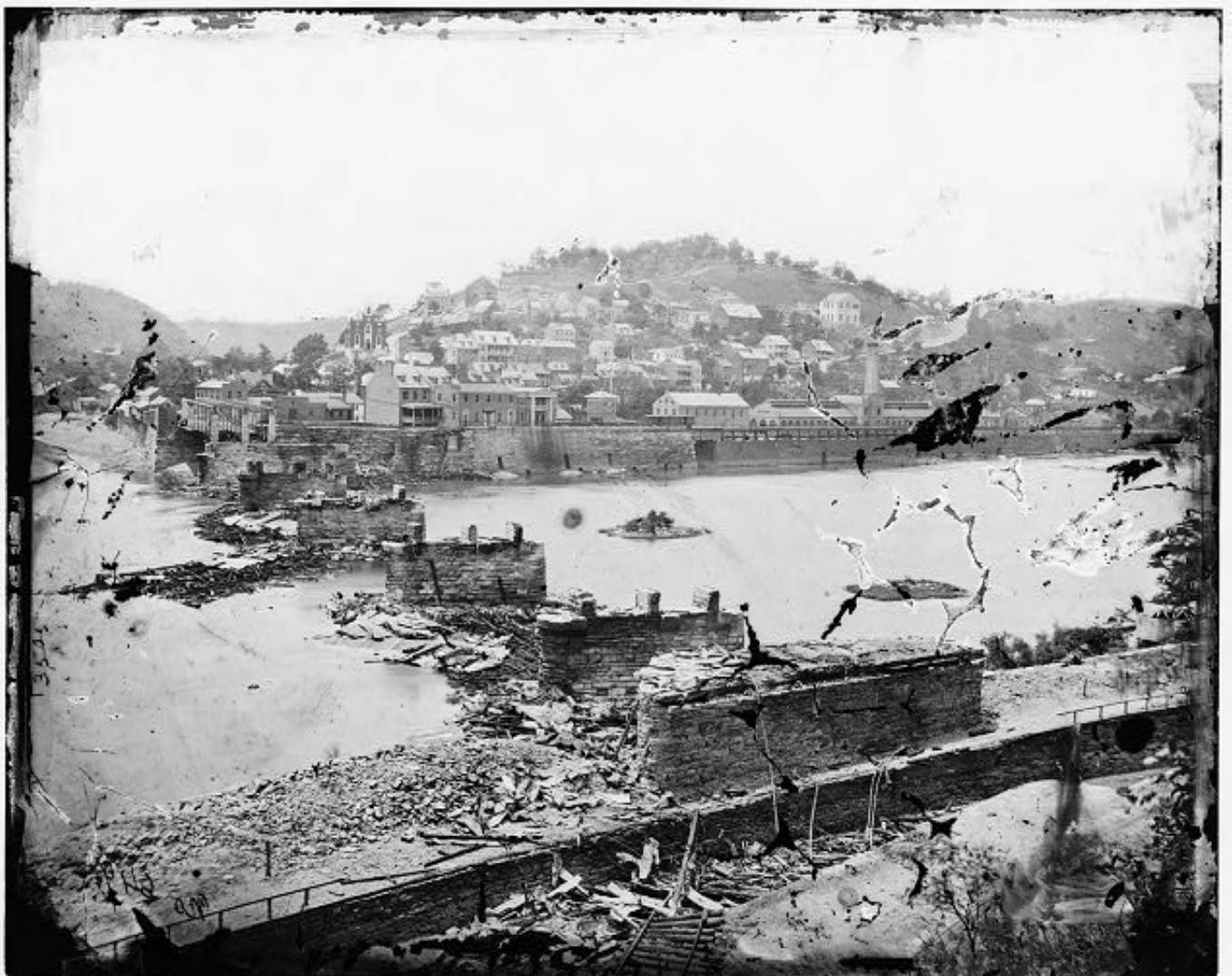
this once-chattel class will teach their pupils in the years to come. Save in the Carolinas, plantations have no slaves and even Carolina slaves are rare, kept more for the status they bring than for doing any actual work. Trophy slaves. No, the immigrants do the real back-breaking labor.

In better circumstances than many of my fellows, I speculate upon many such things while working to aid the governor. Edmund Ruffin was elected as Virginia's governor after two campaigns and has held onto this honor for three terms now.

He placed me on his staff to keep him apprised of inventions being discovered in foreign climes. My duty has me read all major newspapers, so Neddy can at all times appear to be the man of science he fancies himself. By fire and lamplight I read of innovations springing up in foreign climes: German internal combustion, French electricity, Welsh telephonics. My greatest fear is that the CSA will become a backwater, useful only for its fertile fields and cheap labor.

It may be odd, but I keep recalling that madman, Mr Mauser, wanting to "preserve the South". Arguably, his repeater helped us win the Brothers' War. But as the new century turns to 1900, I look about at my Confederate States and wonder if there could have been another way.

– Barbara Johnson-Haddad



# WESTWARD BOUND!

BY STEVE GREEN ESQ



Francisco in 1906 might have regretted their decision to take part in that particular cultural expedition.

I noted with considerable interest the lead article in the current edition of *Waxen Skins*, an 'amateur journal' co-edited by Mr Mark Plummer and Miss Claire Brialey (it appears Croydon society has now sunk to the point wherein unmarried individuals can engage in journalistic collaboration with no fear of disapprobation). I was shocked to learn many in the Americas currently refer to the focus of our shared literary fascination as 'sci-rom', a phrase which prompted such a coughing fit I had to rip off my cravat for fear of relapsing into unconsciousness.

At that very moment, the claxon announced we were now close enough to our destination to perceive the distant coast of New York with the aid of an enhanced monocle, perhaps even the Statue of Britannia which greets all approaching that port. I began to pack my trunk, my anticipation of the week ahead elevated with a short drag upon my opium pipe. It was going to be a fascinating trip.

*[We are privileged to present a second extract from this year's TransOceanic Friendship Fund report. In the initial memoir, Mr Green described his dash by horseless carriage to Birmingham Skyport, whereupon he boarded an Imperial Airlines flight for the Colonies.]*

– Steve Green

Although many have expounded the view that travel broadens the mind, I knew the limits of my own patience well enough that the first three days of my journey were passed alone in my private suite, eased into the embrace of Morpheus with occasional doses of the cocaine supplied by my club's private chemist. After all, there is only so much open water one can gaze upon without yearning for even the fleeting stimulus of one of Mr Charles Stross's latest penny dreadfuls.

Come the final morning, however, I set my mind to preparing for my arrival on the island of Manhattan. At least I need not worry about my entrance into the Americas; as the proud possessor of a British passport, I was guaranteed a standard of civility, might I even say subservience, denied those relying upon documentation issued by such lesser nations as New Germany, Texas and the Belgian Confederation.

Furthermore, the fact that I was representing the beating heart of the British Empire at only the second-ever World Scientific Romance Festival outside the United Kingdom brought with it both a heightened public profile and a great responsibility towards those fellow literati who had sponsored my voyage. TOFF had yet to be created on the first occasion the Festival had visited the shores of the New World, though any ambassador to San



**Next issue:  
Peter Weston's  
"Brum Group Memories"**

# A BRIEF GUIDE TO OTHER HISTORIES

BY PAUL MCAULEY

My platoon had been in the American Bund sheaf for two weeks before it suffered its first major incident. It was gruesome and it robbed us of our innocence, but it was only the beginning of something stranger and deeper.

We'd come through the Turing gate at Brookhaven with the rest of the Third Brigade, First Armor Division, second battalion, as part of the ongoing operation to bring peace and reconciliation to that particular version of America's history. Seventeen PFCs and Spec 4s, and me, their commanding officer. We were all kids. I was the oldest, and I'd just turned twenty-four. Most of us hadn't been through the mirror before, and it put the zap on our heads. This was America, but it wasn't our version of America. New York, but not our version of New York. There were buildings I recognised from my visits to the city back in the Real. The Chrysler Building. The Empire State. St Patrick's Cathedral. Yellow taxis jostled on the streets, manholes vented plumes of steam, and Central Park was right where it should have been, although it had been stripped of trees by people desperate for firewood in the last days of the war, and there was a refugee camp sprawled across Sheep Meadow. But although the Statue of Liberty stood out in the Hudson, she was holding up a sword instead of a torch. The sword was a hundred feet long, and forged out of stainless steel that shone like cold flame. The skyline was different, too. Lower. Instead of glass and steel skyscrapers, brutal chunks of marble and white stone hunched like giant toads: monumental railroad stations, government buildings, and palaces. Some were burnt out or shattered by bombs. The rest were holed by artillery shells and pockmarked by small-arms fire.

We'd been given orientation lectures and issued with copies of a pamphlet that explained that the different versions of history accessed by the Turing gates were every bit as real and valid as our own history. That their people were real people, American citizens just like us. Even so, driving around a city where familiar buildings mixed with alien intruders, half the traffic was military, and pedestrians were dressed in drab antique styles, was like inhabiting a dream. Or like taking the lead role in a movie when you had no idea of the script or plot.

The American Bund sheaf shared most of our history, but it had taken a different turn in the 1930s, when a bunch of generals and tycoons who didn't like where their country seemed to be heading under the New Deal had assassinated Franklin D Roosevelt and installed a military government. One of the generals turned out to be more ruthless than the rest. After the coup, he'd seized power by a ruthless programme of murder and arrest, made himself President-for-Life, and established a tyranny that had lasted for more than thirty years. Towards the end of his rule, he'd become insane. He'd styled himself the Dear Leader, ordered the construction of hundreds of grandiose monuments to himself, put millions in prison or in work camps, massacred millions more. He'd been about to go to war against Europe when, in 1972, scientists in

our version of history had opened a Turing gate onto his version of history. The Central Intelligence Group had sent through agents who'd made contact with rebels and supplied them with weapons and intel. As soon as civil war kicked off, two divisions drove through the mirror, quickly took control of the Eastern seaboard, captured the Dear Leader as he tried to flee to Argentina, and pushed over what turned out to be a regime hollowed by corruption and self-interest.

When my platoon and the rest of the Third Brigade came through the mirror a year later, deadenders who refused to accept that the war was over were waging a guerrilla campaign up and down the country. They used car bombs and land mines, improvised explosive devices from fertiliser, fuel oil, and scrap metal, and detonated them when convoys drove past. They fired mortars into our bases. They shot at us with sniper rifles or rocket-propelled grenades from vantage points in buildings, or took potshots at us and melted into panicked crowds. As in any insurrection, it was almost impossible to tell the good guys from the bad guys, and that was why one of my men ended up killing three innocent civilians.

We'd had been ordered to set up a traffic control point on the West Side, ten blocks south of the green zone. Two APCs backed by a Martindale light tank, razor-wire coiled across the street, the men waving vehicles forward one by one, doing stop-and-checks. The traffic was bunched up and jumpy, simmering in hundred-degree heat so humid you could have wrung water out of the air. And we were all jumpy, too. At any moment, someone could pop a trunk and find weapons or a primed car bomb, or some screwed-up munchkin could decide to take a shot at us just for the hell of it. So when a taxi lurched forward after it was directed to an inspection point, accelerating crazily, scattering men, Bobby Sturges, behind the .50 caliber machine gun on top of one of the APCs, made a split-second decision and put two hundred rounds into the taxi in less than a minute. Punching holes in the hood, exploding the tyres, shattering the windshield, shredding the driver and his two passengers, a man and his seventy-year-old mother. Sudden silence as the taxi rolled to a stop, engine dead, blood leaking from its door sills, blood and human meat spattered all over the interior.

That evening, Tommy McAfee said, "If these fucking munchkins learned to drive, this shit wouldn't happen."

Munchkins – that's what we called the locals. New York City – the American Bund sheaf's version of New York City – was Oz. The green zone in Oz, built up around a palace that before the revolution had been owned by one of the Dear Leader's sons, was the Emerald City.

Like many of the men, Tommy McAfee had trouble accepting that the people on this side of the mirror were as real as the people back home, couldn't believe that Americans could have brought themselves so low. He treated them with rough contempt, made endless jokes about them. He had a quick, sharp wit, knew how to time a



When I'd told him that he wouldn't get any blame when I wrote up the incident, that I accepted full responsibility because it had happened under my command, he'd given me a haunted look and said, "Doesn't make it right, Lieutenant. They're Americans, like us. Americans shouldn't be killing Americans."

"I agree. But some of them are trying to kill us, which is why you did the right thing."

"Maybe it was the right thing to do," Bobby Sturges said, "but that doesn't make it right."

punchline and cap someone else's joke with a zinger of his own, was gaining a solid reputation as the platoon's joker. So when he made his quip, he was surprised and upset when Ernie Wright told him to can it, and the rest of the men either made murmurs of agreement or looked away.

They were all lounging around by the side of the entrance that curved down to the underground garage where the Dear Leader's eldest son had once stored his limousines, sports cars and motorcycles, where we now parked our APCs and Jeeps. We ate and slept in what had been servants' quarters nearby, and had set up a barbeque pit outside. Folding chairs. A basketball hoop. A table-tennis set liberated from somewhere in the palace. Tommy McAfee was sitting on a case of oil cans, a rangy kid with rusty hair cropped short, a tattoo of a boxing leprechaun on his right bicep, looking at Ernie Wright and saying, "Jesus. You'd think I was the one shot that fucking taxi to death."

Ernie Wright was the biggest man in the platoon, but he could move quickly. He stepped up to Tommy McAfee and grabbed the front of his fatigues and pulled him to his feet in a single fluid motion, and asked him, their faces inches apart, "Any more smart remarks about what went down?"

"I can't think of any."

Wright set McAfee down and patted him on the shoulder, but that wasn't the end of it. Later on that evening they got into a fistfight. It was supposedly over who should have the last steak, but it was really about McAfee trying to regain some face after Wright had shamed him. McAfee could box, but Wright was stronger and heavier, and after some sparring he knocked McAfee on his ass with a solid punch. McAfee got up and came back at Wright and was knocked down again, and this time he stayed down. Sprawled flat on his back on floodlit concrete under the basketball hoop, breathing hard, his nose and mouth bloody, one eye swelling shut. After a while he got up and went to the ice-chest and washed his face with a handful of ice chips.

I didn't think much of it at the time. We'd all been on edge after the shooting, and the fistfight seemed to have dissipated much of the tension. And besides, I was more concerned about Bobby Sturges. He was a gentle kid, barely eighteen, sick to his soul over what he'd done.

I put in a request to pull him off the line for a few days R&R, but it was kicked back immediately. There was sand in the gears of the mission. We couldn't spare any men. I took him off the .50 cal, but he had to ride out with us on patrol the next day, and the day after that.

We manned checkpoints. We escorted convoys of supplies to hospitals and aid stations. We escorted a convoy of construction material to a power station that had been badly damaged during the war – jackhammers were pounding all over the city, cranes were swinging to and fro, and scaffolding was springing up like kudzu as the munchkins patched and repaired and rebuilt, as if tearing down one movie set and erecting another in its place. I noticed that Ernie Wright did his best to keep behind Tommy McAfee during foot patrols, and guessed what he was thinking. Tommy McAfee might want to even things out after his beating, we were all carrying guns, and it wasn't unknown for a soldier with a beef to put a round or two into their rival's back in the middle of a firefight. But Tommy McAfee seemed to have forgotten the incident, and although the deadenders were staging hit-and-run raids in Texas and parts of the Midwest, and Washington, D.C. was paralysed by a spate of car bombings, New York was pretty quiet. It was August, hot and sunny. I remember one day we were parked up near a playground, and Ted Brahma and Leroy Moss started handing out candy bars and cans of soft drink to the kids. Two men in flak jackets and helmets, M-16s slung over their shoulders, up to their waists in a crowd of happy children. Another time, Todd Cooper was checking IDs at a control point and a man started shaking his hand and wouldn't let go. This old man in a dusty suit and battered fedora, pumping Todd Cooper's hand and thanking him for being there, tears rolling down his cheeks.

Then a supply convoy running the expressway from Brookhaven into New York City was hit by a massive improvised explosive device buried at the side of the highway. Five died instantly, six were badly wounded. That night, my platoon took part in a raid on an apartment building in Brooklyn. According to an informer, the deadenders who had planted the IED were storing weapons and explosives there.

It kicked off at two in the morning. A psy-ops vehicle blasted out a message telling everyone to leave their doors open and wait with their hands on their heads

for questioning. Two Cherokee helicopters beat above the building's flat roof, lighting up the front with searchlights. A squad of explosives specialists hit the basement first, and then everyone else went in.

My platoon had been assigned the top two floors. I was determined to do things by the book. I told the men to knock first and break down doors only if they had to, to keep their fingers off their triggers and treat everyone with respect. Even so, it was a pretty brutal business. We'd storm in, grab the man of the house and throw him down, pacify the rest of the family, and interrogate the man in front of them, ask him if he owned a weapon or had any insurgent propaganda, if he was involved in insurgent activity in any way. Then we'd rip up the place, pulling out drawers and tossing the contents, ripping through closets, looking for anything that could be used as a weapon. The people were mostly passive, but we'd been told to expect trouble and we had no idea what we might find or if the situation might suddenly turn ugly. Despite my orders, there was quite a bit of roughhousing and horseplay to relieve the tension, shouts and screams, the smash of glass and crockery. A frat house party with half the participants armed to the teeth, and the possibility of sudden death hanging in the air.

I was going from apartment to apartment, trying to curb excesses, when Ted Brahma came up and told me that something weird was going down. Smiling his gentle stoned smile, saying, "You have to see this, Lieutenant. It'll blow your mind. Truly."

I followed him downstairs to a single-room apartment with bookshelves along one wall, posters above the couch, books in piles on the floor. It was very hot. A standard lamp had been knocked over and threw huge shadows everywhere. Searchlights pried through blinds at the window. The whippy flutter of the helicopters matched my racing heartbeat. Todd Cooper and Tommy McAfee stood behind a man kneeling on the bare boards with his wrists plasticuffed. Ernie Wright stood in front of him, studying an ID card.

"Tell me what you think, Lieutenant," Tommy his mother had moved out when he was three; he didn't remember much about it.

"I think there was a cherry tree in the front yard," he said.

Ernie smiled. "It was still there, last time I looked. Same tree, different lives."

"Two different trees, really," Ernest said. He told Ernie how he'd won a scholarship and come to New York to teach and study literature; Ernie told him a little bit about his so-called career in the army, fighting in a sheaf wrecked by nuclear war, and now policing the streets of New York.

"I never really knew my mom," he said. "And my dad was a mean drunk who beat me 'til I got big enough to beat him. But you had a real family. You have a college degree, all those books..."

"If you knew what it was like, growing up here, under the thumb of the Dear Leader and his psychopathic

sons and his secret police, you might not think it was so great," Ernest said. He'd been tense and nervous all through their conversation, growing more and more resentful about the intrusion. "Look, it was nice to talk to you. Strange, but nice. But I have to go to work tomorrow."

"Me too. Out on the streets. Hey, I was just wondering," Ernie said with ponderous casualness, "about your mother. Is she still alive?"

That was why he'd come there, of course. It wasn't anything to do with Ernest, who was at best a brother he'd never known. No, Ernie Wright was chasing the ghost of his long-dead mother.

He looked for a long time at a snapshot Ernest reluctantly gave him, asked if she was still living in their home town. Maybe he could look her up some time, he said, and grew agitated after Ernest said that he didn't think that this was a good idea. Ernie blustered, said that he barely remembered his mother, all he wanted was to see how she had turned out, what was the harm? Sharp words were exchanged. Ernie started to paw through papers on the table Ernest used as a desk, drew his pistol when Ernest asked him to stop. Ernest panicked, threw coffee in Ernie's face, and the pistol went off. The shot barely missed Ernest. There was a struggle, another shot. That one hit Ernie in the thigh, nicking his femoral artery. There was a lot of blood. Ernest went to the apartment next door, which had a phone, and called an ambulance, but it took two hours to arrive because there were road blocks everywhere. Despite the best efforts of Ernest and his neighbours Ernie Wright bled to death on Ernest Wright's old Persian carpet.

Ernest Wright told me all this in a bleak interrogation room in Camp X-Ray, the holding facility for suspects in bombings or shootings, people caught trafficking weapons and explosives, curfew violators, and anyone else who had gotten into some kind of trouble with the occupying army. He'd been arrested on suspicion of murder by the local police, but they'd handed him over to us after they had discovered that the dead man in his apartment was a soldier. My commanding officer had advised me not to visit him, but it had happened on my watch and I felt responsible. I wanted to know what had happened so that I could figure out what I had done wrong. Also, I had read the transcript of Ernest Wright's interrogations, I had talked with the local police who had handled the case, and I was convinced that he was innocent.

When I told him this, he thanked me for my concern, and for my offer to give supporting testimony should his case come to trial. He told me the story while smoking several of the cigarettes I had brought, and at the end lit a fresh one and said, "There's a writer who described time as a garden of forking paths. Whenever someone makes a decision, it doesn't matter how small, it splits time into two. So there's this time, here and now, and another time where you decided not to help me."

I told him that I was familiar with the concept. By



this time, I had read *A Brief Guide to Other Histories* several times from cover to cover, trying to find something that would help me understand what had happened.

“An infinite series of paths, some divergent, some convergent, some running in parallel,” Ernest Wright said. “Until a year ago, I thought it was just a story. A philosophical conceit. But then your people made themselves known when the revolution started. You sent troops through their Turing gates and helped defeat the Dear Leader. You told us that their agents had been visiting our history secretly before that, helping set up the revolution. You told us that you wanted to help us build a better America. But what you’re really doing is shaping us in your image.”

“We really do want to help you.”

“Your path is only one of an infinite number of paths. And no one path can claim to be better or more privileged than any other. All are equal.”

“Except we have the Turing gates,” I said.

“Which gives your history the ability to interfere with other histories, other Americas. But it doesn’t give your history moral superiority. You brought us freedom. Democracy. Fine. We’re grateful for it, but we’re not beholden. We have the right to make from that freedom what we will, whether you approve of it or not. If we’re forced to become nothing more than a pale imitation of your version of America, what kind of freedom is that?”

I told him that he sounded a little like the deadenders, and he shook his head. He was thinner than I remembered, but because his head had been shaved and he had lost his mustache it seemed to me that he looked a lot more like Ernie Wright now. Or my memory of Ernie.

“The deadenders believe that they can restore the Bund if they can push you back through the mirror. We want to restore democracy, but on our own terms. It’s like your friend. He didn’t really understand that we were two completely different people. Strangers. My mother was not his mother,” Ernest Wright said. “And this is not your history.”

That was in 1974. I was twenty-four, back then. So innocent, so foolishly hopeful. Now, just turned thirty, I’m a published writer with five short stories and a novel under my belt. I’ve already used parts of this story in the novel, although in my version Ernie Wright doesn’t end up bleeding out on the floor of Ernest Wright’s apartment, shot by his own pistol. Instead, he finds out where Ernest Wright’s parents are living and goes AWOL and hitches back to the American Bund’s version of his home town. He spends a day watching Ernest Wright’s mother, trying and failing to get up the courage to talk to her, finally realising that he has nothing to say to her because she isn’t in any way like his mother, that nothing in Ernest Wright’s life could explain what had gone wrong in his own. Although this version worked well enough within the frame of the novel, although it was true to Ernie Wright’s need to understand and reach a reconciliation with his own history, although it clarified real events and gave them a neat ending, it was a contrivance. I was never satisfied

with it, and felt guilty, too, at the way I’d trivialised Ernest Wright, used him as a bit player, a ghostly reflection whose only function was to give Ernie Wright the information he needed to make his pilgrimage. This is as close to the truth as I can make it, and there’s no neat ending, no bittersweet resolution.

Ernest Wright was released back to the local authorities after two months in Camp X-Ray. He didn’t make bail, and was stabbed to death in a prison riot before his case came to trial. Todd Cooper was killed in a firefight a couple of months later, and Ted Brahma was badly wounded. The same day, Bobby Sturges injected his foot with a Syrette of morphine and shot off his big toe, a million-dollar wound that was his ticket back to the Real. I wrote it up as an accident; the kid had never gotten over shooting up that car. Then Leroy Moss was killed when a rocket-propelled grenade hit his APC. I was sitting next to him and spent two months in hospital while doctors worked to save my leg and shrapnel, some of it bone fragments from Leroy Moss, surfaced in different parts of my body. Some of it is still in there.

Tommy McAfee reupped, served another year, and survived without a scratch. After my novel was published, he phoned me late one night. He was drunk, and wanted to talk about old times. He told me that he had a bunch of stories I could help him make into a book as good as mine. I listened to him ramble on for a while, letting him vent whatever it was my novel had stirred up, making the right kind of noises, and when he finally hung up I realised that he’d hit on something useful, and started making notes for this story.

We are what we do, and what’s done to us: if *A Brief Guide to Other Histories* was right about one thing it’s this. And because what happens to us in war is more intense than ordinary life, it marks us more deeply, changes us more profoundly. Every soldier who comes back from war is haunted by the ghosts of the comrades who didn’t make it, the people he killed or saw killed. By the things he did, and the things he should have done. And most of all by the innocent kid he once was, before the contingencies and experiences of war took that innocence away. I have summoned up my ghosts here, and tried to lay them to rest. But it seems to me now that all of us who passed through the mirror into different histories have become like ghosts, lost in the infinite possibilities of our stories, ceaselessly searching for an ideal we can never reach.

– Paul McAuley

*This short story, which shares the same multiverse as the novel Cowboy Angels and was first published in Postscripts #15, is available on Paul’s website ([www.omegacom.demon.co.uk](http://www.omegacom.demon.co.uk)) under creative commons licence, with a number of other stories.*

# UNDER THE JACKBOOT - TRAITOR OR TERRORIST

BY JAMES BACON

I read books for pleasure and enjoyment, to pass the time and to be excited: sometimes to smile, or sometimes to be saddened and annoyed. Alternate history books do that for me. Of course they do one other thing for sure: they make me think. Mostly I put myself in the protagonist's position, or try to imagine myself in their place or by their side. Sometimes they even make me pose a question to myself, and I shall now pose that to you.

The real question is not so much the question itself, but if you possess the honesty of heart to answer the question to yourself: what would it be like to be under the yoke of an invading power, crushing your culture and your beliefs with relentless brutality and omnipotence, using coercion, bribery and violence in various measures, with no opportunity, chance or hope or escape or mercy?

Would you have the teenager's urge to rebel, like Frank Tate<sup>1</sup>? Would you really be a rebel? Is that your nature, to rebel? Did you have a beer bottle-top as your badge on your blazer or was it a prefect badge? Did you devise ways of causing trouble in class, or did you just hope you got the grades? Do you even now fight to be you or be what people want you to be? Did you join the team and wear the kit, all numbers on your back showing your commitment to the group, to be accepted by the respected, even if it wasn't really what you wanted to do?

Do you conform, do you do as you are told and accept it and go about life in an orderly fashion? Did you get into trouble? Have you talked your way out of trouble? Have you defied or defiled authority? Would you use your intelligence to escape capture, and guile to get what you need while on the run, like James Armstrong<sup>2</sup>?

Would you be seduced by the uniform – smart and black, an armoured vest, a weapon, silver insignia on

black shoulder boards? Would you slip into it easily, just doing a job that requires you wear the fine dark material that fits so well, yet causes the odd itch, like Xavier March<sup>3</sup>?

With the promise of jobs, and less crime, and the neatness and order and sense of structure all more enticing than nasty chaotic anarchy, a person in authority could convince themselves that they need to co-operate; it's not coercion, loyalty to those in charge. Or would you see through that and be prepared for the consequences of questioning what you are loyal to, like Douglas Archer<sup>4</sup>? That is the alternative, isn't it, or some worse evil like the islamification of your world; democracy is so hard anyhow, and isn't it nice when someone else makes your decisions for you?

Would you seethe and boil and curse, determined even against everyone that was left to live your life as best you can; and keep fighting against the horror, when your only friend is your dog and you know all you love is gone, like Eugene

Nathaniel Hoke<sup>5</sup>?

Would you care about the 'pikies' that live on the off-ramp or in the dead end next to the park, and their rubbish and strange nomadic ways and speech and thievery and general threatening nature that create a discomfort for you? Would their removal, with their junk and filth and fly-tipped waste, be a relief really, their sudden departure almost unnoticed? Or would you know that those were your people, a people you deny and who you cannot admit to being part of, with your heritage and history betrayed, like Heinrich Gimpel<sup>6</sup>?

Would you welcome safe streets where perverts could not attack your children and they would be safe and sound and straight and neat and tidy and uniformed and upright and busy in the evenings, learning useful things, like marching and civics and the ethics of cleansing ethnics?

Would you care if the wrong type of person is being searched? Does it bother you, since you are the right type of person, who passes by unmolested?

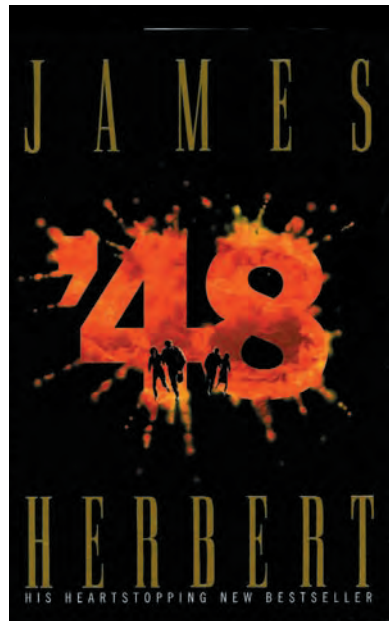
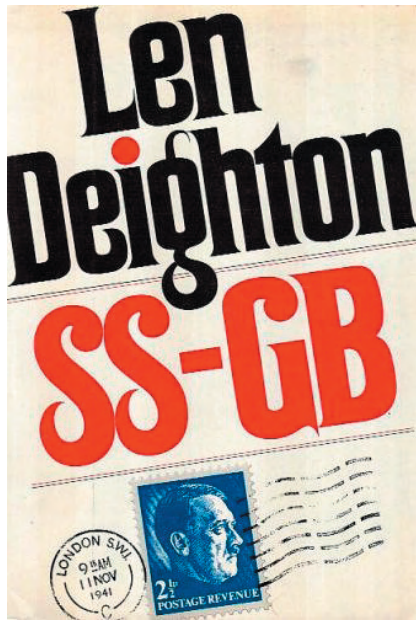
Would you actually face violence? Do you even know how to fight? Could you face your fear and an enemy without pissing yourself? Would you faint at blood, or ignore its warmth dripping from a garrotted throat?

Do you wonder what the fine line between terrorist and freedom fighter might actually be, and whether you could cross that line for the good of a cause? Could you risk your family and friends for a cause that most people felt futile? Would you collaborate, for the sake of your family and all that is dear to you, like Nick Penny<sup>7</sup>?

Could you endure pain that will only end in death, while keeping morals and ideas clear and purposeful? How would you be in an occupied country? Would you take an



MINISTRY OF SPACE © Warren Ellis & Chris Weston 2000



easy life or would you be a blaggard and fight? Could you keep a clear mind, while things go horribly astray, and rely on your wits and sharp intuition like Lucy Kahn<sup>8</sup>?

How do you really feel about your flag: is it your flag, your country, your nation? Are you proud of it, or does it represent something that is no longer you? Would you like a flag that is for you, especially for you – and you could wear it on a lapel pin, on your car bumper, on an arm band?

Would you spin on your heel and retort to a taunt about your area? Would you face down a racist remark made in jest by a superior? Would you?

Do you care what would happen to your neighbours? If so, name them and their jobs – and not just next door; do you speak with them at all, or just go inside and think about your own life and not worry about anyone else? Would you miss them if they were happy to move away, somewhere their own kind would welcome them, and would you be assured that they didn't really get on well with you anyhow and they would be much happier with their own?

Are you foolish enough to feel that the pen is mightier than the sword, or rather the dagger and the sub-machine gun? Do you believe that printers cannot be smashed, fingers snapped, pens stabbed, red ink like blood spilling over white parchment, blouse or shirt? Words worked so well before, didn't they? Don't they? Or maybe not. Would you smile at a piece of paper being waved aloft as an indication of peace in our time?

Do you laugh when a person tells a Nigger/Queer/Kike/Mick joke? Do you laugh but hate yourself? Do you show disgust, or ignore it? Or do you point a finger and say, "Don't use that fucking word in front of me," and stand your ground and look into an eye that could be full of fear or fight, and be ready for either while you fight to hold your nerve and maintain clear speech rather than hitting out and escaping through your own violence?

Or would you cross over to violence when it is needed, to physically strike down another person, ready to fight like Niklaus Adolf Chase<sup>9</sup>?

Would you fight, or would you just rationalise what's best for you? Would you be a traitor to yourself? Who would you betray?

Would you just hope that all the wrongs you commit, agree to and are perpetrated, are done so in the name of progress and that's all ok, like Air Commodore John Dashwood<sup>10</sup>?

I like to think that I enjoy these works of fiction because I treasure what freedoms I have and the liberty that I feel everyone is entitled to. I recognise the continual erosion of these freedoms – although that seems much more acute in the UK, where postcodes, ID and bank accounts count for everything; in Ireland the list of things which are actually acceptable as ID is hilarious. But then that's Ireland for you; you could easily disappear off the radar there, whereas here the government and any number of other organisations could probably find out what you ate if they tried. But would you, if you could?  
– James Bacon

#### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> *Against the Day*, Michael Cronin; Oxford, 1999

<sup>2</sup> *The Leader*, Guy Walters; Headline, 2003

<sup>3</sup> *Fatherland*, Robert Harris; Hutchinson, 1992

<sup>4</sup> *SS-GB*, Len Deighton; Jonathon Cape, 1978

<sup>5</sup> *'48*, James Herbert; HarperCollins, 1996

<sup>6</sup> *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, Harry Turtledove; New American Library, 2003

<sup>7</sup> *Collaborator*, Murray Davies; Macmillan, 2004

<sup>8</sup> *Farthing*, Jo Walton; Tor, 2006

<sup>9</sup> *Children's War*, J N Stroyer; Pocket Books, 2001

<sup>10</sup> *Ministry of Space*, Warren Ellis and Chris Weston; Image Comics, 2001

# THE GRASSHOPPER LIES HEAVY CONSIDERED AS A WORK OF HISTORY BY PROF H TURTELTAUBE, MEIJI UNIVERSITY, SAN FRANCISCO

To review a novel such as *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* as an historical work would appear at first to be a perverse choice. However, the book in question contains the elements of both a novel and a history book. If we are honest the popularity, and the notoriety, of the work derive much more strongly from its portrayal of an 'alternate' history.

It is by now common knowledge, even amongst those prevented from reading the book itself, that it portrays a world where the Axis powers were defeated in the Second World War. Initially it is the fascination with this hypothetical world that attracts many readers, but as we are drawn further into it the characters themselves become equally fascinating because they are true inhabitants of this strange world, whose thoughts and opinions are shaped by it and are, to us, both shocking and intriguing.

This is the mark of a good novel but it is also the mark of excellent history. Everyone sees the world around them through the prism of their own understanding of the history around them. Since the world of the book is so different to our own this is much more easily seen in its characters, to the point where I recommend it to my history students in order to sharpen their skills in reading beyond the surface of a text. I hope that at least a few will take away the lesson that accounts of our own country's past would look very different when written by a native Indian and a railroad tycoon. Neither would be true accounts, yet both would be. Both would be history yet both would also be fiction.

*The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* contains all these contradictions, yet because of its unique nature it does so as a kind of pure and unadulterated example of 'history in a laboratory test tube': something that contains all the properties of history without being history itself.

It is not a history of our world yet it derives from our world. It holds up a distorted mirror of true history, but in the process it holds up a remarkably clear mirror to our own internal thoughts about our history. It shows clearly only that which we project upon it.

This is something which Western philosophies find completely foreign, or did so until the advent of Freud and Jung. It is also a factor which has brought the book a greatly unexpected popularity in Asia, even in the Japanese home islands.

It is often rumoured that it was written with the aid of the *I-Ching*, an oracle in the form of a book which returns apparently random, meaningless and confusing phrases which nevertheless seem to provide unnaturally deep and revealing insights to its users. This quality of the book seems to have found an echo across the Pacific, while in the Atlantic states and Festung Europa itself similar enthusiasm is devoted to the book's suppression and denial.

So let us avoid both the extremes of bland, and judge the work on whether it provides a believable history of its world and whether what we see in it provides us

with greater insight into our own private feelings about our own history.

The first recognisable turning point comes when President Roosevelt is not assassinated in Miami but instead re-elected in 1936. He prepares America for war and is succeeded by Tugwell in 1940 instead of the isolationist Bricker. Tugwell anticipates the Pearl Harbor attack and removes the US fleet in advance which is then able to defeat Japan.

The second turning point comes when the Nazis are unable to take Malta. Because of this Churchill is not removed from office and the British army can still obtain sufficient supplies to allow it to defeat Rommel. It then turns north through Egypt and Turkey to link up with the Russians and defeat the Nazi advance at a little-known town called Stalingrad.

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**“After unsuccessfully attempting to reintroduce the original, the Coca-Cola Company is now permanently retiring the original formula and is naming New Coke as simply Coke for all times!”**  
**– Coke President Donald Keough, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1986**

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Surprisingly both these events are quite believable to the professional historian. The lay reader, at least in North America, may enjoy them as some kind of wish fulfilment which ignores the vast difference in military professionalism which divided the US and British forces from their Axis opponents, but in practice individual battles may turn on many chance occurrences. Only when we look at the larger picture do we see how the economic and social forces that really shape history would truly have come into play.

In the Pacific the miraculously spared American fleet would have had to engage the Imperial Navy in one or more great carrier battles. It would have had to confront them in a style of warfare which results in enormous devastation for the loser. The Samurai culture of Japan has traditionally trained its warriors for many years to deliver the perfect sword stroke at the moment it is needed. Its pilots were trained to exactly this pitch; at the point where their weapons technology had brought the spirit of their Katana swords into the most modern seaborne fighter in the world – the incomparable Zero – the odds would have been with them in every encounter.

During the medieval period the similar dominance of the training of the mounted knights and the superior technology of their armour was only ended by the growing economic wealth of the peasant classes, allowing the masses of them to appear on the battlefield wielding the pike and the longbow in huge numbers.

It is impossible for any historian to believe that a

democracy could provide the ships and the trained naval aircrew in the numbers and with the skill necessary to defeat the Imperial navy.

During the war the one place in the world that showed such capability was in Albert Speer's factories and the training camps for Goebbels' airmen and Rommel's tank crews. While Malta and the British Middle East might resist for one battle the weight of the Nazis' war industries, particularly their submarines, would be bound to tell sooner or later.

The real change that *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* postulates is that the British in its world are able to competently, efficiently and sometimes ruthlessly apply the resources of its Empire to do to the Nazis what was historically done to Britain.

To a great extent this is made believable to the reader by the viciousness of the actual historical British resistance to the final invasion of the British Isles. The rumours of weapons to set the sea aflame, which turned out to be true after all, and the terrorist campaign waged by its commandos wherever they could be landed. Even the historian must give it some credence when he remembers the circumstances of how that Empire came about, and how single-mindedly it was preserved, in places like South Africa and India.

For this change at least I think we can give some historical approval as it just shows the advances of efficiency and the growth of practicality over humanitarian idealism that comes with an industrialised society and industrialised warfare. It just shows it taking root in England rather than in Germany.

The war in Europe is shown ending with the trial of Adolf Hitler, which takes place after his descent into syphilitic madness. It is probably this scene more than any other which has outraged Berlin, even though the medical facts it reveals are close to a reality which is now widely known. One wonders if the British portrayed in the book are denying what they themselves are becoming, by denying the effect of that same historical process on their enemies and instead placing the blame on a single man's descent into madness.

In fact we know the madness and death of Hitler did not mark the end of that process, but was the prelude to the even greater Nazi extermination which was to take place in Africa.

In the book's description of the post-war years America seems to fare badly, even after its industry is revived by the war and expanded even further by the rebuilding of Japan and China. Even those who were able to suspend their disbelief in the economic revival portrayed under Roosevelt and Tugwell may find themselves unable to take their credulity this far. True history shows only one system able to grow at this pace: the Nazi system that demonstrates that the uncritical determination which can send rocket ships to the planets is inexorably linked to horrors like the African holocaust.

At least in the book post-conflict America is portrayed as a civilizing influence throughout the world,



even if it is ultimately supplanted by the more practical and focused British Empire under an aging Churchill.

Thus, as the book closes, we see its history coming closer to our own; the fictional philanthropical America has become the surrogate for the Japanese Empire. America freed from the chains of the depression has become vibrant and outward-looking, in the same way that Japan was freed from dependence on its own meagre natural resources, and internally focused culture, by the growth of its Empire, from Mongolia, China and eastern India to the edges of the Rocky Mountains.

The reform of Japanese society in the cultural changes of the '50s and '60s, culminating in the overthrow of the war cabinet, is reflected in the charitable and international outlook of the America portrayed in the book. Unfortunately the optimism shown in the development of this 'Camelot'-like vision of America gradually disappears as the reactionary realpolitik of the reborn British Empire grinds them down.

Finally the book's fictional history and our own seem to arrive at the same point. Can the more humanitarian culture of the fictional America and the real Japan survive the challenge of the more efficient society of the fictional British Empire and the real Nazi Empire?

The book seems to say no; but its end is not the nuclear war which we all now dread being initiated by Nazi Europe, but a less destructive conquest which leaves open the possibility of reformation of the conqueror.

Our conclusion is that the history of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is flawed, that it portrays a history which is unlikely to the point of impossibility. We have made a judgement of its truth and rejected it. Does this, however, end the debate?

An acquaintance of mine is a collector of historical objects. Amongst his possessions is a pair of Zippo cigarette lighters. He likes to challenge people he meets to tell the difference between the two. This is always impossible, yet one was in Franklin D Roosevelt's pocket when he was assassinated. The other is a totally



The creation of the book has some interesting stories associated with it. Apparently it is the author's wife who swears that every detail was created using the *I-Ching*, often known as 'The Oracle', while the author denies it. Many readers will, by now, have heard the rumour of someone visiting the author and his wife and insisting on asking the *I-Ching* why it had written the book. Its answer was apparently 'Chung Fu' (Inner Truth). Which can be interpreted as below:

**"Chung Fu / Inner Truth**

☰ above **SUN THE GENTLE, WIND**

☱ below **TUI THE JOYOUS, LAKE**

The wind blows over the lake and stirs the surface of the water. Thus visible effects of the invisible manifest themselves."

The rumour insists that the Oracle is telling us that Germany and Japan lost the war. This goes beyond an alternate history, told as an entertainment, into the realm of madness, superstition and myth. Yet some people believe it and some people who do not believe it seem to draw strength from it.

I would argue that *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is not believable as history, but that does not mean that it may not become part of history. Amongst its devotees two theories have arisen that challenge the very core of any historian. One is that its world is actually out there somewhere and represents the true path of history, while ours is the mis-shapen branch of the same tree. I would dismiss this out of hand except that it has no small following in our Physics department.

Another variant of this theory wonders if two different worlds exist then how many others might also. Are we being told that all the conquests of the Reich amount to no more than one grain of sand on a beach?

The second theory is that our history remains the factual one, but is still not the correct one: our mis-shapen branch must be bent back to its proper position.

This, like everything about the book, is a contradiction. History refutes its possibility and it in return refutes history. It is admittedly a work of fiction, but claims to contain great truth. It is claimed that it was written by the Oracle; its acknowledged author denies it but uses the Oracle to question it. I personally do not believe in the Oracle, but only this book and the *I-Ching* contain such a mixture of truth in fiction and fiction in truth. Like the *I-Ching*, there is no answer in this book unless you ask it a question, and then the answer changes with the question.

Likewise it does not stand up as a history but you may learn a lot from it about history, past and perhaps future.

– imagined by Martin Easterbrook

unremarkable product of the same production line. Once you know which has the weight of its history behind it, and examine the documents which prove that it is real, it is impossible to regard it in the same way. It still differs in no way from its twin, but just to hold it is breathtaking.

Our world has its history well documented and authenticated, both in ink and blood. The world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* should appear as the cheap copy. Yet for many people this is not so. Its story is the magical one.

Presumably in its world the 'famous' Zippo lighter exists, but is completely unremarkable because nothing happened on that day that it was in Roosevelt's pocket. If we could cross over into that world it would be, to us, one of the most valuable antiques in the world because it was there on the day that world was born. There our history would be 'wrong'; yet, if we could spread our story there, it would turn that everyday item into an almost miraculous talisman. What then would be the 'real' history of that lighter?

As historians we may often prove an historical text 'false', but that does not prevent it from being history. Every nation and every tribe has a history that defines it but which is mostly false. Nevertheless the false histories they believe in influence almost their every action. We would not be doing our job properly if we did not try to explain how their false pasts and their true ones merge to create more history as their story continues. Indeed the true and the false intermingle to create more truth and more falsehood as history continues.

# THE RESEARCH TRIANGLE SF SOCIETY DISCUSSES THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE

BY WARREN BUFF

Rich ordered a whiskey as Andy showed up to the meeting. This month we were getting together to discuss Philip K Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, the winner of the 1963 Hugo Award for Best Novel. Our attendance was rather light compared to last month's discussion of Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, but that wouldn't deter us.

I was making a comment to Andy about the NASFiC: "Yes, we're Southerners, but we're not all racists and rednecks."

Glennis sat down with the group, and cut in: "Wow, we're already discussing the book?" We took it as a cue, not bothering to correct her. Dick's portrayal of the South in Nazi America is characteristically unfavorable, though not a point of focus. We didn't linger on it for all that long, though.

"I really like the way Dick drops little details all over the landscape, like having FDR assassinated – that was a real attempt, though it failed in our reality," Andy said.

I took this as an opportunity to point out one of my favorite details. "Yeah, and I really liked how it mentioned Herbert von Karajan coming to direct the New York Phil. I wonder if it was supposed to be a punishment for him, since in real life he was a Nazi – but not much of one. He married a Jewish woman in '43." I sipped my beer, hoping for a bit of authority in the gesture.

"Yeah, well, at least Bob Hope made it out alive," Glennis remarked. "Though I didn't get what was going on with Canada."

"What was up with that, actually?" Andy asked. "Why would the Nazis and Japanese divide up the US, but leave Canada alone?" The waitress brought him his fourth Diet Coke of the night, then went back to get his fifth.

"Maybe they figured they could just ignore them, since they stayed neutral," Rich chimed in.

"No way. Canada was still part of the Empire back then. I mean, there was a lot of talk of members of the British royal family going there for safety. Canadian ships were involved in the Normandy landings. I somehow doubt Canada would have been neutral, even in an alternate history."

"Maybe it was just too much effort to conquer," Glennis suggested.

"Even then, you'd have

the Japanese taking British Columbia, and the Nazis taking the Maritime Provinces, at the very least," Andy said. "But I guess they could have left the middle neutral, like they did with the US."

"It would be a lot of work to hunt down the few resistance fighters you'd get in that big a space," I said. "Anyways, what was up with the novelist? Did anyone else get the impression he was kind of a Heinlein figure for that reality?"

"No, not really," Glennis replied. "Was it just the Colorado thing that put you down that track?"

"Not just that. There were other details, and it just felt like Heinlein to me."

"But this guy had kids. That doesn't work."

"Well, ok, yeah, he's not one-to-one Heinlein. And maybe I'm full of it."

Rich cut in, "You said it, not me." We all had a good laugh at my expense. "So, seriously, what was with that ending?"

"It doesn't exactly wrap anything up, does it? It's kinda typical of Dick to do that, I guess," Andy offered.

"Well, sure, we don't know what happens to all of the characters," I chimed in, "but I felt like it closed off the ideas they were addressing. They had their moment of realization, that they were in an alternate history story, and that psychological disjunction seemed to be what Dick was working towards. Sure, the businessman had shifted universes earlier, but that didn't so much call his own world into question the way the ending did."

"OK," said Rich, "but what's the significance? It's got so little to do with the rest of the story."

"That's really kind of typical of Phil Dick," Andy replied. "It doesn't always make that much sense, even."

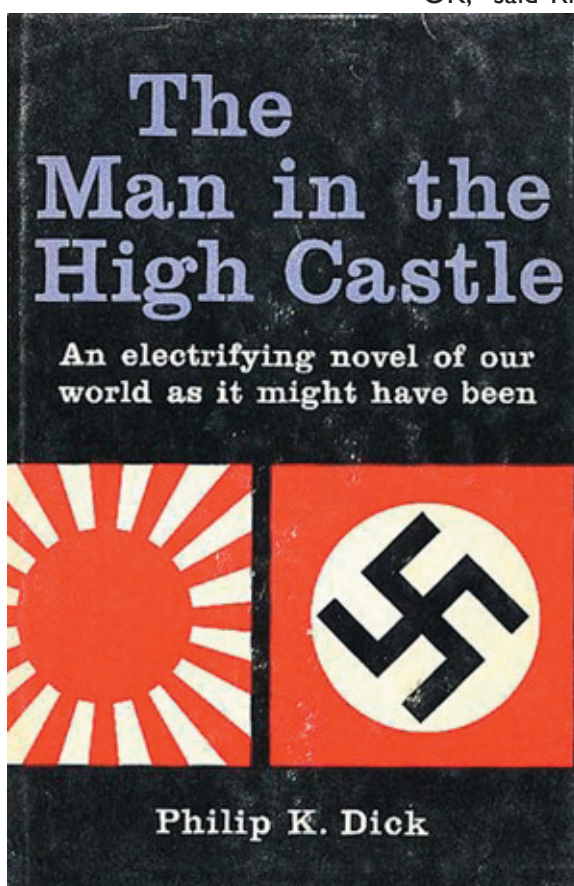
Glennis offered, "He said he wrote it while consulting the *I Ching*, and that he left off there because the oracle didn't have anything else to say."

"That's ridiculous," I said. "I wouldn't give that any more credibility than Coleridge's claim that *Kubla Khan* came to him in an opium dream. The story of the creation has too much to do with the meaning of the work."

"Well, why don't we consult the oracle about it?" Andy asked.

"It seems as appropriate as anything else we could try," Rich added.

I shrugged and took



another drink of my beer. Glennis produced some coins, and we counted off the results: "Eight, seven, eight, seven, eight, nine."

"Water over Mountain," Andy observed. "Number thirty-nine, Obstruction."

"That nine implies a change, though," Glennis asserted. "Water over Flame: number sixty-three, After Completion."

So we consulted the oracle. Rich read aloud, "Obstruction. The southwest furthers. The northeast does not further. It furthers one to see the great man. Perseverance brings good fortune."

"That's oddly appropriate," I said.

"Well, yeah, all the action's in the South-West," Andy remarked, "and I suppose you could say that things were furthered by going to see Abendsen."

"And we've definitely got some obstruction when we try to make sense of the ending," Glennis joked. We shared a good laugh.

Rich moved on to the other hexagram. "After Completion. Success in small matters. Perseverance

further. At the beginning good fortune, at the end disorder."

"Disorder," Andy mused. "Maybe that's the impending nuclear war."

"Then I guess the whole story could be small matters, compared to that," Glennis said.

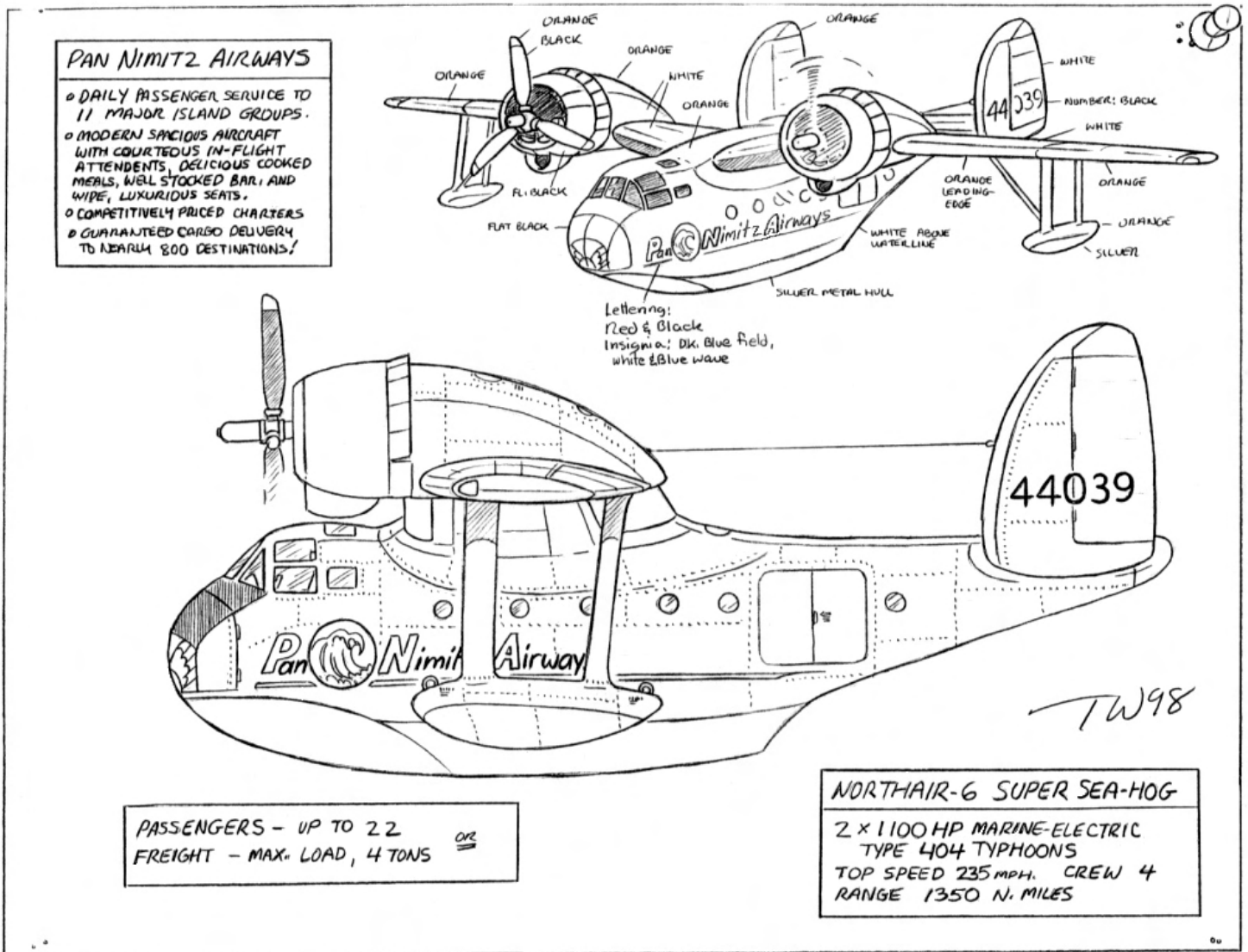
"Or maybe it could be the original art business," Rich offered.

"Or the trip to see Abendsen, or anything, really," I said. "I don't think the oracle has that much to do with the meaning of the book. It feels like it's just a plot device to me."

"But if Dick really wrote the book consulting it," Andy pondered, "wouldn't it make sense to use it to understand him?"

"Even if the oracle provides useful information," I said, doubtfully, "is it helping us to understand the book, or Dick himself, or our world, or the oracle itself?" My beer was empty.

"Yes."





# A DEFENSE OF ALTERNATE HISTORY

BY MIKE PERSCHON

Nearly every person who reaches adulthood will have likely engaged in the self-reflexive activity of asking the question, “What if?” The question arises from a polemic of nightmare and fantasy (Rosenfeld, p.11), of regret or nostalgia, for a past more terrible or wonderful than the present. The literary genre of alternate history plays with the same question on a larger scale, asking the ‘what if?’ question to major events in history, and extrapolating possible alternate historical outcomes. The practice of writing alternate history is not a new one, dating back to antiquity with Greek historian Herodotus’s speculation concerning the “possible consequences of the Persians defeating the Greeks at Marathon in the year 490 BCE, while the Roman historian Livy wondered how the Roman empire would have fared against the armies of Alexander the Great” (p.5). Despite this antiquated tradition, it is a genre which has received little attention from academic scholarship (p.12). Alternate history, even in its more respectable form of historical counterfactual, has been dismissed as “an idle parlor game” (E H Carr, in Hellekson, *Alternate History*, p.16) and has been “attacked by historians because [it is] untrue” (p.16). The genre is not without its defenders, although its advocacy is supported by the disciplines of new historicism, social psychology and literary theory rather than traditional historicism. Lubomir Dolezel states that the alternate history is a “useful cognitive strategy” given that “the acquisition of knowledge about the past ... is such a complicated task that no available avenue should be left unexplored. If the consideration of counterfactual, possible courses of history can enhance our understanding of actual history, we have no right to ignore this strategy” (p.800).

Orson Scott Card’s *Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus* is how a ‘useful cognitive strategy’ can result in an ‘enhanced understanding’ of the actual discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Initially, the ‘what if?’ question takes the form of speculating what would have happened had Europe not discovered and colonized America, but becomes more complex as the story unfolds. In this paper, Card’s *Pastwatch* will serve the dual role of case study as well as providing an ongoing dialogue with the genre’s major features. In honor of alternate history’s connection to possible world theory, the ‘real’ statements of actual academics and traditional history of Columbus’s voyages will be woven along with the fictional conversation of Card’s characters and the ‘alternate history’ of *Pastwatch*.

Despite the precedent of a general lack of academic interest, alternate history has garnered a good deal of attention recently as a popular phenomenon. Gavriel Rosenfeld cites the decentralization of political ideology in the West, the emergence of postmodernism, recent scientific trends such as chaos theory and evolutionary biology, the advent of cyberspace and virtual reality, the “speculative sensibility” of pop culture (where narratives do not simply mirror reality, but “explore alternatives to

it”) and the impact of the entertainment revolution on the popular presentation of history as contributing factors to this popularity (pp.8-10). Rosenfeld’s ‘contributing factors’ share a relativistic outlook which threatens the traditional historic academic enterprise. While empirical thought relegated alternate history to “the field of imaginative literature” (p.5), postmodern epistemologies can threaten to make *all* history alternate, seeing traditional historical narratives as “a form of fiction or, at the very least, a narrative which has neither more nor less a claim to authoritative status than any other competing narrative.” (Wain, p.360). As Ryan observes, “Since there are no limits to the human imagination ... one may then be tempted to conclude that there is no such thing as an impossible world” (p.31). Likewise, one might be tempted to say that since “historical representation is dependent in practice on the representability of events, and not on their reality as such” (p.3) then all histories could be considered alternate histories. As Mary Gentle observes, we do not recover the past, but represent it using “a collection of fallible memories, inconvenient documents, disconcerting new facts, and solemn cultural bedtime stories” (Turtledove, Stirling, Gentle & Williams, p.233). Considering the likely potential for a “confused and fuzzy” discussion of the limits of fictional histories, it is the task of the academic to “demarcate the limits – and limitations – of historical representation” (Ryan, p.6), or in our case of *alternate* historical representation.

Karen Hellekson’s article, ‘Toward a Taxonomy of the Alternate History Genre’, proves very helpful in this regard. In it she provides “alternative histories, alternate universes, allohistories ... uchronias” and “parahistory” (p.249) as a list of the synonyms for alternate history, but rejects alternative histories, since “the term ‘alternative history’ has another meaning among historians: histories that approach their subject from a nonstandard position” (p.249). To this list we can add Marie-Laure Ryan’s “hypotheticals” or “counterfactuals” (p.19) and Dolozel’s “counterfactual history” (p.800). I will use the term alternate history simply given its common usage to identify the genre in the popular fiction market. But what identifies a work as an alternate history as opposed to a counterfactual or hypothetical?

Ryan states that if we assume that possible worlds (of which alternate history is a sub-category) are “constructs of the mind, we can classify them according to the mental processes to which they owe their existence” (p.19). The mental process which predicates alternate history then would be the ‘hypothetical’, a type of possible world resulting from the ‘what if?’ question. While this helps to discern what makes a possible world an alternate history, it leaves the defining features which separate an alternate history from an *alternative* history too vague. The ‘hypothetical’ classification could catalog Josephine Tey’s intertextual narrative of Richard III in *The Daughter of Time* as alternate history.

Likewise, someone might wish to include Robert Howard's *Conan* series as alternate history, given that it takes place in a prehistoric Europe, or the entire *Star Trek* canon given that the 'alternate' future of earth hinges on the "moment of the break" where the warp drive is developed. In those cases, though, the secondary world of the narrative is "made familiar through the author's use of historical cultures from Earth to lend a degree of reality for the reader, a sense of understanding, and a sense of place" (Stypczynski, p.453). Alternate histories do not employ history merely as a backdrop to narrative events, nor to create a heightened sense of verisimilitude in a pure work of fantasy, but rather the narratives of alternate history "revolve around the basic premise that some event *in the past* did not occur as we know it did, and thus the present has changed" (Hellekson, 'Taxonomy', p. 248, italics mine). Dolozel states that "An ineradicable relationship exists between the historical Napoleon and all fictional Napoleons, between the actual London and all the fictional settings called London" (p.788). This is the problem in considering certain *Star Trek* episodes alternate histories, since the event that catalyzes space travel happens in the earth's speculated future, not its past. It could even be said, as is the case with *Pastwatch*, that the present time which has been changed need not be a mirror of the author's present time. The story may take place in the far future, so long as the focus of the story is linked to a past that is different from primary reality.

Based upon this link to the past, Hellekson provides a narrower taxonomical scope for the classification of alternate history. She classifies alternate histories "according to the nature of the historical inquiry, not according to the nature of the story told" (p.250), and states that alternate history can be systematically categorized within four models of history inquiry: the eschatological, which is "concerned with final events or an ultimate destiny" (*Alternate History*, p.97); its opposite, the genetic or cause and effect; entropic, wherein the alternate history is never given "permanence"; and the teleological, which "focuses on design or purpose" ('Taxonomy', p.250). While any of these models may be the focus of an alternate history, "the genetic model lies at the heart of every alternate history because the alternate history relies on cause and effect" (p.251). For that reason, this paper will focus upon the genetic model, both because it is the most prevalent form of alternate history, and also because it is the main approach taken in the case study of *Pastwatch*.

Hellekson's classification system is based upon the 'moment of the break' or divergence which causes the alternate history, answering questions such as "When do the great figures of history make the decisions that set them on the path of greatness?" (Card, p.58). She argues that counterfactuals are practically useful to the study of history because they "foreground the notion of cause and effect that is so

important to historians when they construct a narrative" (*Alternate History*, p.16). It is primarily the 'moment of the break' or "point of divergence ... some variable in the historical record [which] would have changed the overall course of historical events" (Rosenfeld, p.4) which stands as the "one property" by which the fictional universe of alternate history differs from "our own system of reality" (Ryan, p.33) and therefore from other historical and speculative fiction.

For example, an alternate history does not postulate that the historians 'might have got it wrong', as is the case in *The Daughter of Time*. Alternate histories create a secondary ontology wherein a single occurrence changes the entire course of that secondary world's history. To say that Richard III did not murder his nephews is simply an alternative perspective on a set of accepted historical facts. A narrative wherein Richard rescues those self-same victims from the Tower of London and achieves victory at the Battle of Bosworth Field would be an example of alternate history. It should also be noted that the moment of the break, while it may be benign or mundane, generally affects a major historical event, since "exceptional events are more salient, and are thereby more available and more likely to be mentally mutated" (Roese & Olson, p.61). For a work to be classified as an alternate history, it must contain a clearly established moment of break which transforms a readily recognizable historical event, thereby setting off a chain of cause and effect which results in a



different version of present reality.

This idea of cause and effect is expressed in *Pastwatch* through the character of Tagiri, an African woman whose work utilizes a technology enabling people to observe the past. In *Pastwatch*, the protagonists are all historians living in a distant future following “a century of war and plague, of drought and flood and famine” (p.2) in which a technology is achieved whereby people are able to see into the past. At first, the technology allows only for the viewing of “great sweeping changes” (p.2), but with refinement allows for closer observation of individual historical figures. The historians involved in this endeavor are referred to as Pastwatch. Tagiri, unlike other historians sees the world “not as a potential future awaiting her manipulation” but as “an irrevocable set of results, and all that could be found was the irrevocable causes that led to the present moment” (p.20). This idea of time as a linear continuum, or as “time’s arrow ... is the metaphor implied in most historical writings” (Hellekson, *Alternate History*, p.36), as in the case of *Metahistory*, where Hayden White describes history as a narrative “sequence of events” which raises speculative questions similar to the ‘what if?’ of the alternate history (pp.6-7).

Hellekson suggests that the ‘moment of the break’ as the defining feature of alternate history can be expressed in three categories. The first, called nexus stories, involve time travel, occur at the moment of the break, and focus on “a crucial point in history, such as a battle or assassination” (*Taxonomy*, pp.250-1). Initially, *Pastwatch* could be classified as an example of a nexus story. Early on the reader is informed of the narrative’s outcome: “Though Tagiri did not put her own body back in time, it is still true to say that she was the one who stranded Christopher Columbus on the island of Hispaniola and changed the face of history forever ... she found a way to reach back and sabotage the European conquest of America” (p.15). Ultimately, *Pastwatch* develops the technology to physically send humans into the past and thereby not only effect change, but direct it as well.

However, the novel takes a twist and thereby becomes an example of Hellekson’s second category, the true alternate history, which takes place “years after a change in the nexus event, resulting in a radically changed world” (*Taxonomy*, p.253). A domino series of causes and effects produce narratives set in “worlds dramatically discontinuous with reality” (p.254). The discontinuity with reality could occur in a world grounded in primary physics, as is the case in *Pastwatch*. The novel’s reality is a future version of our own, not a parallel universe, although there is a narrative twist to this. The ‘actual’ history of Columbus’s discovery of the New World in 1492 is in fact an alternate history, the result of another *Pastwatch*’s intervention. While the physical reality is identical to the readers’, it remains that the characters have been living in an altered reality many years beyond the nexus point, and as such classifies *Pastwatch* as both nexus story and true alternate history. In certain cases the discontinuity can be

more severe, including “different physical laws” (Hellekson, *Taxonomy*, p.250), as is the case in Philip José Farmer’s alternate history of Columbus, ‘Sail On! Sail On!’ which ends with the *Santa Maria* and her sister ships sailing off the edge of a flat earth.

Finally, Hellekson identifies the parallel worlds story, based in quantum physics, which “implies that there was no break – that all events that could have occurred have occurred” (pp.251-252) but “simultaneously” on timeline(s) parallel to primary history (p.254). *Pastwatch* is definitely not a parallel worlds story, as is evidenced by how the present is affected by so radically changing the past; that line of causality simply ceases to exist in a blink of an eye. When evidence is discovered of the *Pastwatch* project’s intervention, the question is asked: “Had there once been a different history?” to which the answer is, “No, two different histories, both of them obliterated by interventions in the past” (p.397). The obliterated history does not somehow exist on a parallel stream of time, underscoring one of the book’s more poignant themes. In the conversation concerning the choice which will result in this negation of hundreds of years of history, the conclusion about the outcome of the decision is decidedly bleak:

“...anything in their history that the introduction of that machine in our history caused not to happen is utterly and irrevocably lost. We can’t go back into our past and view it because it didn’t happen.”  
“But it did happen, because their machine exists.”  
No, they said again. Causality can be recursive, but time cannot. Anything that the introduction of their machine caused not to happen, did not in fact happen in time. There is no moment in time in which those events exist. (p.216)

The message of *Pastwatch* is clear in its assessment of the seriousness of such historical counterfactual contemplation. What individuals do, the actions historically taken, contain depth of meaning, a concept of the alternate history which will be explored in depth shortly.

Like the self-reflexive exercise an individual might engage in, the goals and benefits of alternate history are as rich and complex as the primary histories they are based upon or, put very simply, “Alternate history has many uses” (Stirling, p.149). There are five broad uses I have identified. The first to be examined is that alternate history allows for a virtual redeeming of historical acts deemed terrible or disastrous. M Elizabeth Ginway argues that the alternate history utilized in Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro and Carla Christina Pereira’s works serves to “redress the omissions of the official history of Brazil, specifically its lack of reference to women and racial minorities” (p.291). In *Pastwatch*, issues of gender and race are dealt with throughout the narrative, seen most clearly in Columbus’s inner struggle in response to one of the time-travellers’ challenge to him:

"I will know when you love Christ more than gold," said Diko. She pointed to the villagers. "It will be when you look at these and see, not slaves, not servants, not strangers, not enemies, but brothers and sisters, your equals in the eyes of God." (p.338)

Las Casas speculated upon what the outcome might have been had the indigenous peoples been allowed to convert to Christianity (p.11), and repeatedly denounces the Spanish colonists as false Christians. In *Pastwatch*, the actual injustices observed by Las Casas find hypothetical solutions. The transformation of the Columbus of history, a conquering Spaniard, to the Columbus of this alternate history, a benevolent proselytizer who asks himself "who were the Christians ... the baptized Spaniards, or the unbaptized Indians?" (p.356) is the redemption spoken of in the book's title.

Secondly, alternate history forms a unique discourse on the academic study of actual history. Stypczynski sees value in alternate history as "a form of comparison and contrasting through which a fuller understanding of history can be reached" (p.463). This goes beyond the obvious possibility that a reader of an alternate history may be inspired to do research into the actual history the counterfactual is based upon. The alternate history collection *Worlds That Weren't* features short essays following each story detailing actual historical details, while Card provides an annotated bibliography of his sources at the end of *Pastwatch*. However, the alternate history can also achieve this end intertextually. From the simple statement that "History is not prelude" (p.15) which evokes Stephen Jay Gould's idea of Time's Arrow to the observation which supports his idea of Time's Cycle (pp.10-16), which supposes history as "a chaotic system" wherein "details ... shift endlessly, but the overall shape remains constant" (p.40), *Pastwatch* refers to the challenges of traditional historical discourse repeatedly. Even the critique of the alternate history genre by traditional historicism is addressed in an argument between a superior *Pastwatch* officer and an idealistic subordinate, who is told that "*Pastwatch* watches the past ... we don't speculate on what might have been ... there's no way to test it, and it would have no value even if you got it right" (p.126). In agreement with Hellekson, for whom the genre is "a critique of the metaphors we use to discuss history" ('Taxonomy', p.255), the subordinate replies to the accusation that he has not "caught the vision of what *Pastwatch* is all about" with a very new historicist response, "I haven't ... I want to change the vision" (p.151).

Thirdly, as S M Stirling notes in the essay, 'Why Then, There' alternate histories have the ability to "revive literary worlds that time has rendered otherwise inaccessible to us" (p.149). Farmer's short story would again be an example, perhaps being indicative of tales of voyagers and adventurers who were said to have sailed off the edge of a flat earth. It could be stated, as Stirling

observes, that such conclusions or speculations are "still available to us through historical fiction", but he also notes that this approach "is sadly limiting in some respects; the 'end' of the larger story is fixed and we know how it comes out" (p.151). By contrast, alternate history provides insight to a mindset where "horizons are infinite and nothing is fixed in stone ... In other words, a world larger and better suited to the classic adventure story than ours" (p.151). Stirling's hope for a return to "the gorgeous, multicolored, infinite-possibility world that opened up with the great voyages of discovery of the sixteenth century" (p.150) is achieved in *Pastwatch* once the trio of time travelers have arrived in the past. At this point the narrative shifts from science fiction to a modern form of the travel-adventure story of the sort popularized in the colonial era, albeit one with modern North American values. The three characters all experience Robinson Crusoe-like encounters, but none of the Taino are given the name Friday, nor set to be servants.

Fourthly, alternate histories can amplify the causal inferences of historical events (Roese & Olson, p.36). Dolozel stresses that "the precariousness of certain historical situations comes to the fore only if counterfactual outcomes are considered" (p.801), given shape in a discussion in *Pastwatch* where Tagiri's focus on slavery as the worst possible evil is challenged by a teammate who studied the progression of human sacrifice to slavery in the ancient world (p.92). Later on, the possibility is explored of a united Meso-American nation, possessing the technology of iron and advanced seafaring ship construction, who might have eventually crossed the Atlantic to conquer Europe – but, instead of enslaving it as the Spaniards did, using captives for human sacrifice (p.167). The question is not given a simple answer, but maintains and even in some ways strengthens the moral and ethical complexity, given that the reader is forced to some degree to ponder the same issues the fictional characters do.

Rosenfeld produces a fifth possibility for alternate history to act as commentary upon the contemporary reality (p.11). When linked to Hellekson's observation that "alternate history as a genre speculates about such topics as the nature of time and linearity ... and the role of individuals in the history-making process" ('Taxonomy', p.254), this idea demonstrates that despite its sweeping historical scope and global or national concerns, alternate history is ultimately also about the individual people involved. In *Pastwatch*, Tagiri's quest to save the Tainos from extermination and slavery is transformed from a broad, sweeping, generalized speculation to considerations more personal and self-reflexive:

"What if some stranger from a faraway place came and stole my son from me and made a slave of him, and I never saw him again? What if a conquering army from a place unheard of came and murdered my husband and raped my daughter? And what if, in some other place, happy people watched us as it



happened, and did nothing to help us, for fear it might endanger their own happiness? What would I think of them? What kind of people would they be?" (p.51)

This fifth use for alternate history is also the one which the previous four functions serve to support. In and of themselves, they are arguably merely mental gymnastics. They are, perhaps examples of Dolozel's "useful cognitive strategy" (p.800), but each begs the question for whom, and to what purpose? It must be readily admitted that "all counterfactuals are necessarily false, insofar as their antecedents refer to some state of affairs that was not so" (Roese & Olson, p.3). No one has suggested that the consequent of an alternate history's mutated reality is that it has actually become so in our physical world. No one would suggest that speculating about Columbus being shipwrecked among the Taino, marrying a black woman from a fictional future and leading a Meso-American armada back to Spain near the end of his life will make it so. We cannot actually travel back in time. Further, while postmodern approaches to history have claimed that history is "a form of fiction or, at the very least, a narrative which has neither more nor less a claim to authoritative status than any other competing narrative" (Wain, p.360), the idea that alternate history has as much claim to empirical truth or even historical truth insofar as that is understood by traditional historicists seems misguided, and misses the opportunity to explore one of the more prolific benefits of alternate history.

If the consequence sought by alternate history is not to make a truth statement about the past but rather the present, then the assessment of what makes the statement true or false changes. The polemic of alternate and real history becomes secondary. Alternate histories should not be evaluated according to the rules of logic or traditional historicism, but rather should be considered in a social-psychological framework (Roese & Olson, p.4). As Rosenfeld observes, "Biases, fears, wishes, the desire to avoid guilt, the quest for vindication" are all driving forces in the creation of speculative accounts of history (p.12). He suggests that "the genre's appeal may ultimately be rooted in deeper human urges", exploring the past "less for its own sake than to utilize it instrumentally to comment upon the state of the contemporary world" (p.11).

Therefore, the fifth purpose of alternate history is the social-psychological benefit of underscoring the importance of the individual in history, wherein the objective truth value of counterfactual propositions are largely ignored, "in favor of examining their perceived plausibility and meaningfulness to the individual" (Roese & Olson, p.6). As Hellekson puts it:

"...readers of the alternate history come away with their own lives sharpened and enriched by the realization that history is something possible for an individual to shape. The psychological effects of reading the alternate history are important; it could have happened otherwise, save for a personal choice. The personal thus becomes the universal, and individuals find themselves making a difference in the context of historical movement" ('Taxonomy', p.255).

Once again, *Pastwatch* serves us well as a case study. When Tagiri is told, "You can't change the past, but you've changed the present, and these people are no longer forgotten", she responds, "It isn't enough" (p.35). This challenge is issued to the modern reader; in light of reading not only the alternate history of *Pastwatch* but also Las Casas's *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* with its grotesque catalogue of the horrors inflicted by the Spaniards upon the indigenous peoples of the New

World. The question which Tagiri asks is, does it suffice to know the mistakes of the past in all their trivial detail, or should such information be brought to bear upon current situations wherein similar atrocities are being committed? Should the emotional reaction to the dehumanization of Latin American peoples color the way in which one views the existing events in the Sudan?

Another question *Pastwatch* asks of the present reader, with Card relating to Las Casas once again, concerns the relationship between church and state; what would the effect of the Christian religion have been upon the lifestyle of the Taino people had issues of power, economy and state not been involved? If the faith had spread but not the colonial culture, what might the religion of the Taino have evolved into? These questions are especially pertinent to modern readers living in the Western world at a time when religious rhetoric is being used within the political arena to justify aggressive foreign policies. Card makes his point in an understated but compelling fashion, having Segovia comment to Cristoforo that the Spanish are “forgetting to be Spanish”, and Cristoforo replies:

“...the Taino are also forgetting to be Taino ... they’re becoming something new, something that has hardly been seen in the world before.”  
“And what is that?” demanded Segovia.  
“I’m not sure,” said Cristoforo. “Christians, I think.”  
(p.378)

The alternate history’s ability to make commentary on current situations and to challenge readers to see themselves as active agents in the current construction of history is arguably its greatest strength. In the case of actual history, such as Las Casas’s account, the reader might deem the atrocities committed against the Latin American peoples as something which has happened in the past, which we can do nothing about. There is a sense of escapism where one can excuse themselves of blame or responsibility. Alternate history reminds the reader that a different outcome might have been arrived at if a different decision were made at different points in history.

When this fifth function is brought to bear upon the first four functions of the alternate history, they become tools toward clarifying the fifth. The first, to redress past wrongs, can become an opportunity to identify and engage current actions of injustice, such as ongoing racism or gender inequality. The second could call the traditional historicist to account for more than cataloguing trivia, but to create social commentary based upon the knowledge of the past. The third, to regain lost literary perspectives, could serve to help readers to normalize elements of the past which may have become excessively valorized or vilified; being able to understand the actions of a person as being a product of their time is helpful in the current context of critically reading propaganda or advertising that marginalizes certain groups. And fourth, if alternate history can help to bring gravity to the outcome of historical decisions, it can by

association do the same for discerning possible outcomes for current ones.

So to summarize, alternate history is a genre of historical fiction and a sub-genre of science fiction which posits a point of divergence in the past which changes the outcome of what we would refer to as primary history. The types of alternate histories can be identified by their temporal relationship to this divergence. The divergence and its outcomes have a number of functions, the primary of which is social-psychological in function which acts as a means for modern readers to meditate upon primary history in a way which causes the reader to reflect upon their own place in the act of history making, and perhaps challenge them to act upon that knowledge in their contemporary world. While it might be stated that this advocates a return to the “dissemination of literary knowledge for the express purpose of enhancing the moral sensibilities of the nation’s readers” (Womack, p.594), the complex and sometimes ambiguous stance of alternate history resists such appropriation. While Card’s *Pastwatch* deals with Christian morality and posits a utopian outcome to the time traveler’s decisions, alternate history, as was stated at the outset, can deal in both nightmares and fantasies, and as such, allows readers to explore the complex chronicles of histories that might have been, never were, and yet may be.

– Mike Perschon

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# GHOST ISSUES

BY JOE NOLAN

“Ghost issues!” That’s what the Governor-General said as he pushed them across the table to me. He was right. “These do not exist in the Philatelic world we know,” he had said. Again he was right. “Put them in your safe as curios. Look at them from time to time. But remember they are probably unsaleable: no provable or believable provenance,” he said. Again he was right. “There is also a security sensitive element to those items. I would hope you agree with the necessity not to distract from the coming celebrations by allowing the press to become aware of their existence.” Again he was right. I did agree; after all I was a loyal subject of her Majesty the Queen. I also wanted the coming celebrations to be unmarred in any way. Dublin was the second capital city of the Commonwealth of English-speaking nations, and intended not to be outdone by anywhere, even London, in celebrating the Jubilee.

I put my folio case on the dust-covered office tabletop, went into the tiny kitchen space and pulled the towel from the handrail. Here, too, everything was choked with dust. I sighed and used the towel to wipe clear the chair and the desk tabletop in the shop. I sat down and opened the folio case. From it I took out the items the Governor-General had returned to me, and laid them on the table. The strange newspaper, *The Irish Press*, headquarters at Burgh Quay. Definitely not the

central Dublin I knew. I also briefly opened the small pocket album: a miniature, by Rapkin of London – a name I did recognise, but not one of any series of their issues that I was familiar with. As a dealer in Philatelics and collectibles with a decent international reputation, I thought I knew them all – from America, England and the continent – but not this one. No! By God! Not this dammed thing! Equally strange and unsettling were the labels it contained. ‘Labels’ because they were not the recognised issues of any postal authority I was aware of, at home or abroad. Next, I picked up the two envelopes, in their strange see-through wrapping material. This was not the standard semi-opaque paper tissue wrapper known internationally to all stamp collectors, young and old, and all stamp dealers. No sir! This clear rubber-like material had a tendency to stick to fingers; and it gave one an odd feeling in the tummy.

It was a very different feeling to the one I had experienced the first time I looked at these, in very different circumstances, and on a very different kind of day, exactly one week ago. The day of the – what had it actually been? Explosion? Earthquake? Meteor strike? As far as I was concerned, the jury was still out on that one, despite what the radio and papers said. Dunsink Observatory

confirmed the meteor strike, as did Armagh, and later a score of Commonwealth astronomical sites across the world. “A core fragment,” they said of Galactic Catalogue item no. H5796: the dead comet Gallieri, with a thousand-year orbital period. I knew where that yarn came from. It was there on the front page of that impostor newspaper on my desk, that ‘Irish Press’, dateline 27th April in the year of our Lord 2002, exactly one week ago. The day of the explosion or whatever it was. Today, 4th May, was exactly one week ahead of the Golden Jubilee celebrations for Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II.

The headline read: “Irish Sea Alert for Comet Gallieri”. I, like many others, had never ever heard of a comet, dead or otherwise, called ‘Gallieri’. This was a concerted effort on the part of the Commonwealth authorities to divert speculation away from the bomb

theories, which explained the destruction of the Amiens Street railway overhead bridge and the North Star Hotel as being due to actions by Jewish activists trying to force America and the Commonwealth into pressurising the Turkish Empire into granting a Jewish homeland in Palestine. In all this I was sure I detected the fine Italian hand of his Excellency, the Earl of Cork and Orrery, KB, KCVO, Knight Commander of the Order of St Patrick, Governor-General of Ireland, etc. etc. etc., prize-winning international

philatelist, and one of my best customers. Sharp, he was too; naturally! There had been a couple of bomb outrages in New York and Washington. Now Dublin. It had to be explained... Hence the comet fragment story. Perhaps there was a comet, once, called Gallieri. The Governor-General had the clout to find out very quickly, as well as the wit to use any plausible story available.

The story now in use he had, I was sure, got from me. Inadvertently, of course, and as I sat at my desk, ignoring the hammering and banging as Royal Engineers strove to rebuild the wrecked railway bridge across Amiens Street from the railway station. I remembered how that story came to me. I recalled the sudden electrifying surge of nameless pressure that made all my hair stiffen and stand. I remembered how I had stood up gasping in alarm. I recalled the tingle of heat on dry skin; and the rolling boom of the explosion, and the rumble of collapsing masonry. Glass shelving in the shop cracked and collapsed. The plate glass front window shattered and collapsed outward on to the street. I was thrown forward across my business table amid a cloud of falling ceiling plaster and dust. There I lay for perhaps a minute, before the returning pressure front blasted the door of the shop

open and inwards, and flung the poor victim inside and face down amid the rubble on the shop floor. I remember how I struggled up and went to him. Alas, I was too late to do any good. As I got to him I could see that he was in the throes of a massive heart attack. He died in my arms.

Although I was trembling from shock, my Territorial Army training stood me in good stead. I did not realise at the time that I had brushed aside whatever the poor chap had been carrying, but I laid him out neatly and put a handkerchief over his face, and went out to see what use I might be. The first person I encountered was big Tom O'Mahony, the beat policeman, and one of Dublin Metropolitan's finest. His helmet was gone and his head was bleeding, I dashed back into the shop for my first aid case, and clapped a field dressing over his deep gash and wound a crepe bandage over it. Then we began to check up on the other casualties. There were many. The Amiens Street-Talbot Street junction is a busy one. A number of people were dead and we left them, collecting those injured who could walk into one area and identifying those who could not walk. Then the emergency services began to arrive, and things became a blur until the area was cleared.

When it was, an unknown doctor insisted on checking me over and ordered me home to rest. Before I did so, I returned to my shop to see what I could salvage. I cleared the contents of the small safe into my folio case, and then repacked it with the most important stock I could find; the rest was not of great importance and the insurance would take care of it. Then I noticed the brown paper bag; I realised the dead man had been carrying it. I dumped its contents on my shop table. The contents were those on it now, the items the Governor-General had returned to me earlier in the day in his office in Dublin Castle. Strange items they were and are, indeed. That lead story in the paper, the strange "Irish Sea Alert". There was another alert mentioned on that front page: "Border Alert". Some unnamed Garda Superintendent in Dundalk was quoted as saying that the Garda were taking seriously the threat by 'Northern Loyalists' to bomb towns in the 'Republic' if the all-party talks went ahead without addressing 'decommissioning', and the 'loyalists' would react furiously if they thought the 'union' was in danger. The cross border traffic was being carefully watched. What border? The dominion of Ireland had no internal border. Garda? Some kind of police force was clearly implied but we had only two forces in this land: the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Dublin Metropolitan Police. There was no such thing as Garda, that I knew.

The small stamp album had its equally strange contents. The labels were beautifully produced, and perfectly perforated. The production standards involved were of the highest quality, and told me of rigorous quality control in manufacture; but the designs, though quite beautiful, were 'out of this world'. They apparently were sterling, for the pound sign was clear, but the designs were like nothing I knew. One label, in the vertical format, had the picture of St Patrick's Bell at five pounds face value.

On the two pound label was depicted a Tara Brooch; and at one pound, the Ardagh Chalice. All items the originals of which I had seen often enough in our local museums. Beyond those was another set of labels, 'seahorses', but with overprint in four lines, dated to 1922. "Rialtas Sealade Na Heireann"; for the high values, two and sixpence, five shillings and ten shillings. That, and the Eire superscription on the first set of labels, gave me a queer feeling between my shoulders. This aura was strengthened by the other items. The two envelopes paralleled philatelic items I knew well. I put hundreds of them through my hands yearly. However, again there was that unnerving difference. They masqueraded as first day of issue covers, but like none others that I knew. The first had the well-known five ring Olympic symbol, the text "Athens 2000": a label purporting to show the Olympic torch, with a wave symbol tied to the letter 'P' of 'Post' and a bar two line of rubber stamp reading "La Chead Eisiunta". The label was cancelled by a single ring strike reading "Baile Atha Cliath" surrounding "10 Il 2000", topped by a five-rayed asterisk.

The second cover's labels showed horse racing at five well-known locations like Fairyhouse and the Curragh, for 12th March 1996. It bore no resemblance whatever to our own general issue, commemorating the Irish bloodstock industry, of only a few years ago. The last item was the paper bag itself in which the items had been carried by the poor victim. One face of the bag had an elaborate printed design. The top line read, "Stamp 2002"; below was the "Irish National Stamp Exhibition" and "80 years of Irish Stamps". Centrepiece of the printed display was an outline map of Ireland, surrounded by an arch on pillars; the arch carried the word "Eire" and at the front, in two square boxes, were the numeral 1, and between the boxes the word "pingin". Clearly this bag was issued to promote an International Philatelic Exhibition. I had been to quite a few: New York, Geneva, London. With the Golden Jubilee celebrations out of the way one was planned for Dublin in October coming. I was one of the planning committee for that. The idea that some group, somewhere else, had just been running an Irish one and the poor dead chap had been attending it on the day of his death made me shiver. I felt as if someone was walking over my grave!

It was that esoteric feeling that had caused me to go to the local police station, where the inspector knew of my persona grata entree to Dublin Castle and used the police telephone to allow me, after difficulty and delay, to speak directly to the Governor-General. His Excellency realised that I would never interrupt his engagement diary without a compelling reason. On my assurance that I had items related to the disaster which he must see personally immediately, he then requested the inspector to provide transport at once to get me to the Castle. My entry there was swift; only one policeman on the gates at the Cork Hill entrance. One of the junior personal assistants was waiting with him to escort me to the presence. The bag and its contents were carefully examined and pondered upon for all of five minutes.



“Yes,” he said, “I see what you mean. Most unusual these; need evaluation. Have to go to forensics and other specialists for that. Could be most important in our understanding of what happened at Amiens Street. Thank you for bringing them. Must go now, again thanks,” and he shook my hand. As he turned to go he said over his shoulder, “Young Larcomb will take care of you,” and then he was gone.

Young Larcomb not only organised my trip home but provided a much-needed meal and a further medical check-up before he ensconced me in one of the Castle’s fleet of Lanchester staff cars, to bring me home in something approaching Corps Diplomatique state. He was back at mid-morning today, with a request note to come to the Castle at around 3.00 PM. This time, with the immediate crisis over, all was once again pomp and circumstance at the entry point. The castle, like Dublin itself, was geared up for the Jubilee celebrations. A sergeant and two constables in parade uniform were flanked by Irish Guardsmen in bearskins and dress uniform. The DMP sergeant waved us down and said, “Apologies, gentlemen, there will be a small delay.” He waved to the courtyard, where a regimental sergeant major was putting a squad through its paces. Once they square-bashed away from the gate, we were waved through to a smart police salute, and presentation of arms by the Irish Guards. The small crowd of watchers would be wondering just who we were. I had to smile because I was receiving attention to which I was unaccustomed.

Young Larcomb ushered me into the private office after a minimum delay. The Earl rose at once and escorted me to a chair beside a side table. On it were these items. He wasted no time but began to talk at once. “These envelopes,” he said, “are of a paper whose weave is somewhat similar to the product of Clondalkin Paper Mills, but is far from an exact match. The labels are printed by the finest banknote techniques, fully as good as London’s. The paper bag is quite unidentifiable – one of the millions in everyday use in any European country – tells us nothing whatever of use. The album could be by Rapkin of London; yet once again the paper is not an exact match, but comes close. It has one unique feature, a rare trace element; it is faintly radioactive. The isotopes unclear, exactly. Caused a bit of a stir at the Institute of Advanced Studies, so they have retained a few of the blank pages from the tail end for detailed study. The clear covering the envelopes were in caused a bit of aahing and oohing also, and a chunk of that is also being scrutinised. The newspaper thing is the most useful piece of them all. It gave us a cover story we badly needed because the army and police forensic teams have found nothing to indicate any type of bomb we know of. The paper contains elements linking it to timber from the Baltic Regions; not Canada which we mainly use today.

“The heart attack victim, we have whatever personal papers he was carrying. Came from Belfast. Lived at an address we have no record of, a place called Ladybrook. There was a stream of that name, the estate is called Glenside. Blood group O, attendance card for

the Royal Victoria Hospital not of their recent issues, and a health board card for an Eastern Health and Social Services Board. No such board exists. No one is offering me any explanations as to what all these items imply. It’s as if they come from some other world, some other time continuum. I’m darned if I know what to make of it all! We’ve buried him decently, naturally, appears to have been a Catholic. The papers I have sealed, of course; perhaps next century enough will be known to explain it all. These here really tell us nothing, so you’d better take them away. We’re both enough of philatelists to know the category into which they fall.” He looked at his pocket watch: “Let’s go to the canteen for coffee and a cigar.”

When I reached the courtyard again the Lanchester staff car was waiting off to one side. However, before we could proceed to it, we had to wait because our way was blocked by a fifty-man squad of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. The RSM was facing us, gazing up to the Castle roof. His arms were upraised to the sky. His voice was conversational: “Dear Lord, how have I offended you? What did I do wrong that I should be chastised in this way, that I should have to work with such hang-dog incompetents? Give me patience, Lord, I pray; and help me through this period of trial.” He looked at young Larcomb and I, waggled his greying imperial moustache, and winked. He snapped us an impeccable salute and wheeled, his boot heels coming together in an echoing crack. In ringing tones he said, “Squad, this is still not near good enough. When we mount the guard here on Jubilee Day, the Duke of Norfolk in person will be watching. I will not – I repeat *not* – have the Royal Dublin Fusiliers appear in any way inferior to the Royal Hibernian Guard. They may equal us, perhaps, but they will not be superior to us. I won’t tolerate that; I’ll have your guts for garters, so I will, I swear it!” Then laying his head back, he bawled, “Haa-ten-shun! Shoulder haaarrums! Right about face! Forward march!”

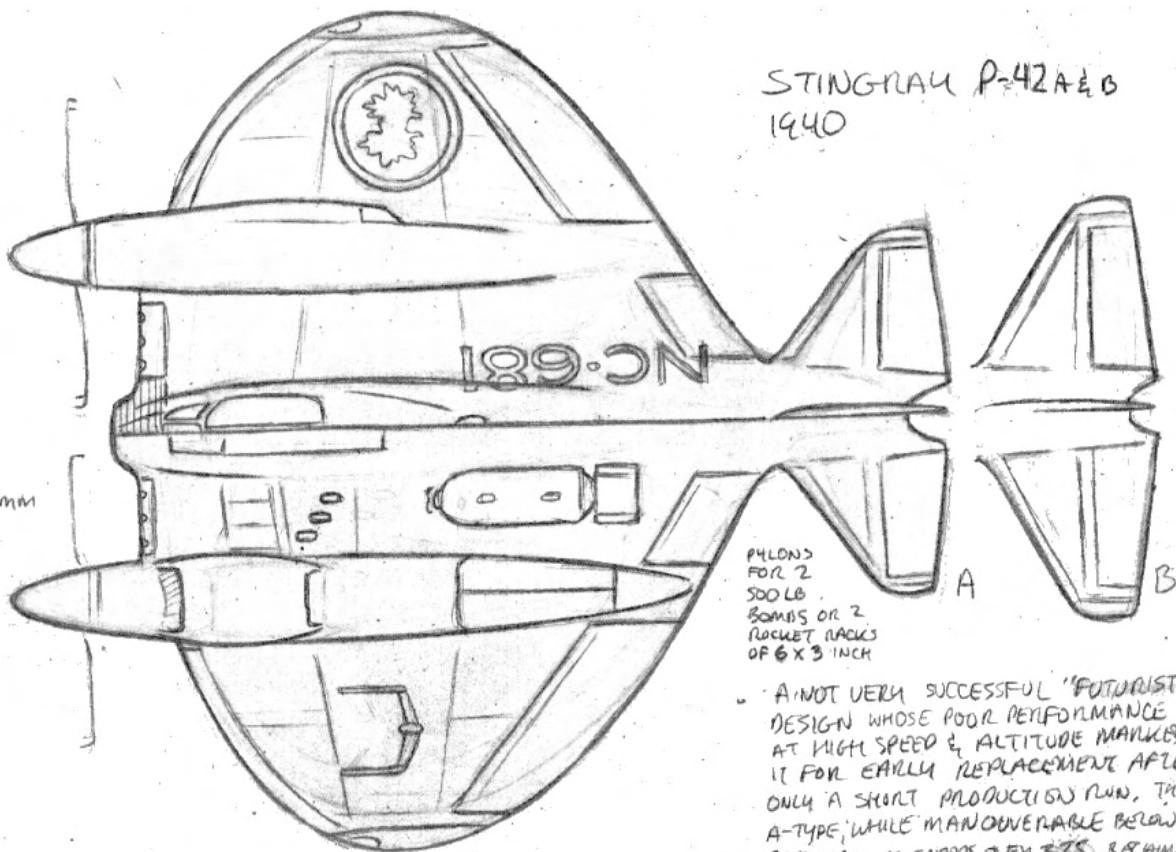
The Lanchester dropped me back here at the shop, perhaps half an hour ago. There’s work to be done. I have to be back in business very soon. I have mail order customers to serve with the first day covers of issue for the Golden Jubilee in a few days’ time. The interior decorators will be here in the morning. The glass window and door are restored. The shelving won’t take too long to replace, because the bracketing is there and intact. I will pick these things up and put them in the safe. Out of sight they won’t bemuse me as they do every time I look at them. The Governor-General was right. They are ghost issues. Ghosts from God alone knows where. Unsaleable. However, I do know that, wherever they came from, they will always make me feel as though someone was walking on my grave.

– Joe Nolan

*‘Ghost Issue’ is an internationally known term referring to labels of unknown origin.*

*Stamps are issued by recognised postal authorities.*

STINGRAY P-42A & B  
1940

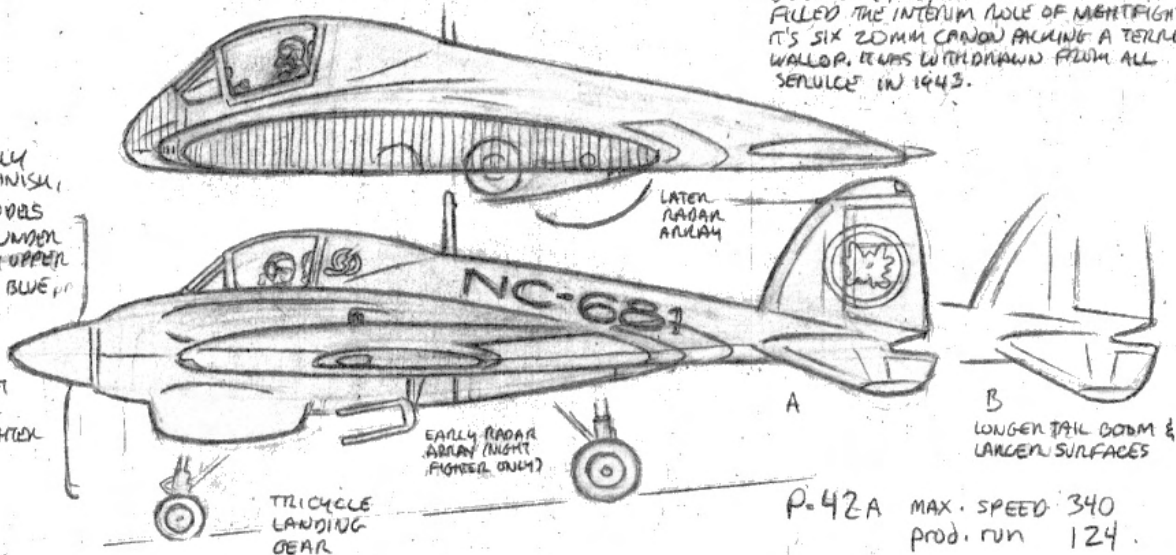


6 X 20MM  
CANON

PYLONS  
FOR 2  
500 LB.  
BOMBS OR 2  
ROCKET RACKS  
OF 6 X 3 INCH

A NOT VERY SUCCESSFUL "FUTURISTIC" DESIGN WHOSE POOR PERFORMANCE AT HIGH SPEED & ALTITUDE MARKED IT FOR EARLY REPLACEMENT AFTER ONLY A SHORT PRODUCTION RUN. THE A-TYPE, WHILE MANOEUVRABLE BELOW 300 MPH, AT SPEEDS OVER 500 BECAME UNSTABLE. THE VARIATED B-TYPE WITH ITS LONGER TAIL BOOM, SOLVED THE HI-SPEED STABILITY PROBLEMS, BUT ONLY AT THE EXPENSE OF ITS OPERABLE ABILITY. ALTHOUGH SURPASSED IN PERFORMANCE BY OTHER TYPES, THE P-42 SUCCESSFULLY FILLED THE INTERIM ROLE OF NIGHT FIGHTER, ITS SIX 20MM CANON MAKING A TERRIFIC WALLOP. IT WAS WITHDRAWN FROM ALL SERVICE IN 1943.

ORIGINALLY SILVER FINISH,  
LATER MODELS  
LT GREY UNDER  
& DK GREY UPPER  
SURFACES, BLUE  
GREEN OR  
YELLOW  
SPINNERES.  
PAINTED FLAT  
BLACK FOR  
NIGHT FIGHTER  
ROLE.



LATER  
RADAR  
ARRAY

EARLY RADAR  
ARRAY (NIGHT  
FIGHTER ONLY)

TRICYCLE  
LANDING  
GEAR

P-42A	MAX. SPEED	340
	prod. run	124
P-42B	MAX. SPEED	350
	prod. run	45

# THE LIMERICK SOVIET

BY JAMES BACON

The second decade of the twentieth century was a time of revolution and rebellion. In Dublin in 1916 there was the Easter Rising: an open rebellion, using military tactics against the imperial powers that dictated rule in Ireland. In 1917, Russia had its first revolution; in 1918 German sailors – who knew they were defeated, yet whose superiors planned one final naval battle against the British – mutinied, for ‘Bread and Peace’, and this led to a national revolution and eventually the Weimer Republic. As part of the German revolution, the Free State of Bavaria declared a soviet, with Munich as its capital, and existed as such for a month in 1919. In Italy there were the two red years – the Biennio Rosso – of 1919 and 1920; and Hungary established itself as the first communist nation state in Europe for a number of months in 1919.

Meanwhile, in Ireland, the rebellion that had been crushed in 1916 proved to be a huge turning point. It was an event that lasted a week and was mainly fought in Dublin; it was not at all supported by the majority, and even some Dubliners were angered and annoyed by the disruption and destruction, yet this turned into a key moment in Irish history.

True to form, the British occupying forces contrived to deal with the situation to their own detriment. Around 1,700 men and women took part in the rising in Dublin, with a number of small actions throughout the country. The British army suffered 124 killed in action (KIA) and 370 wounded men. Between the Dublin Metropolitan Police and Royal Irish Constabulary, 16 men were KIA and 29 wounded. There were over 300 Irish people killed and over 2,000 casualties, but it was and is unclear how many of these were civilians or rebels and who caused which.

It came out that a boy, two journalists, a Sinn Fein politician, and the writer and pacifist Francis Sheehy-Skeffington were all summarily executed during the rebellion, it seemed for no reason at all. After the rebels surrendered, the rebellion ringleaders were executed amongst others, following courts martial; in total fifteen men were put before the firing squad. This included the Marxist James Connolly, who was mortally wounded and only expected to last a couple of days; even so, he was taken by ambulance to Kilmainham gaol, stretchered into the courtyard used for the executions, and tied to a chair since he had not the strength to stand or sit upright. There were nearly 3,500 arrests, with about 1,500 of those interned in the UK, and martial law was established for a period. This all caused huge uproar.

The rebellion had not been the turning point in itself; British reaction had turned the nation's stomach, and soon after a different

rebellion, not such a military and straightforward battle, was to take place. The War of Independence began in 1919, in January. This was a guerrilla war between the IRA and the British Government.

Robert Byrne was a telephonist in the Limerick GPO. An activist in the Clerks' Association, he had been sacked from the Post Office for attending the funeral of a volunteer from Limerick, and was subsequently arrested and imprisoned. He caused mayhem in prison, first becoming the leader of the Republicans and going on a campaign of disobedience and disruption, which soon escalated.

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**“Despite obvious warnings, my government failed to defend the people of this great country; and as such, effective immediately, I am resigning as President of the United States of America.”**  
**– Al Gore, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2001**

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Byrne went on hunger strike, and after three weeks he was transferred from prison to the hospital wards in the workhouse in Limerick. The Trades Council in Limerick had been very vocal about the mistreatment and brutality meted out to prisoners during this time; Byrne had himself been a delegate to the Trades Council. On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1919, the IRA botched an attempt to break Byrne free. Byrne was later to die of his injuries, and a constable was also mortally wounded. The British Government took action.

This led to military occupation of the City of Limerick, with the city put under martial law and the creation of a special military area, which only people issued with military passes could travel through. This effectively divided a large working-class area from Limerick City,



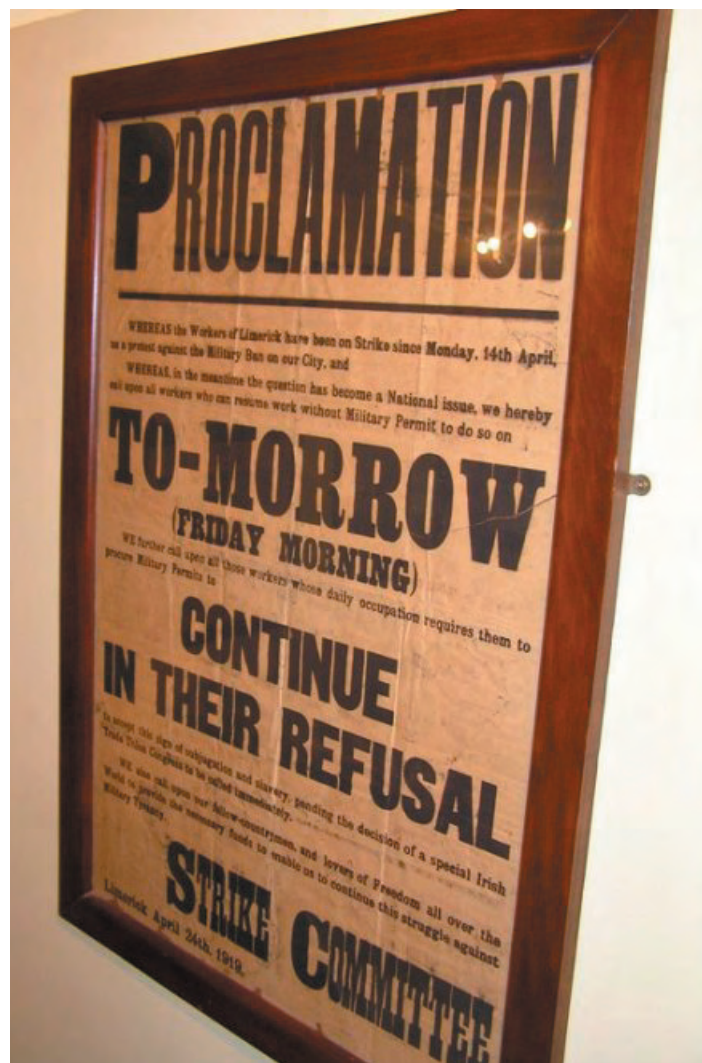
**A Tank Deployed in Limerick**

as well as two major employers, Walkers Distillery and Cleeve's Dairy. Thousands would have to go through a process of gaining a letter of approval from a RIC sergeant and then be issued, upon presentation of this letter, with a military permit to pass. This was all done under the guise of the defence of the realm.

On Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> April, the day before the military action was to be enforced, the Limerick Trades Council called a General Strike in protest. Liam Cahill – a journalist who worked for twenty years with the national broadcaster, RTE, and went on to work in publicity – has written the definitive work on this subject, in *Forgotten Revolution: Limerick Soviet 1919, a Threat to British Power in Ireland*. His book is available online, for free, in which he explains:

“By Monday evening, fourteen thousand Limerick workers had joined the strike. . . . Within twenty-four hours, the Strike Committee became the effective governing body of Ireland's fourth largest city for the duration of the strike. The Strike Committee – or the Soviet as it became known – regulated the price and distribution of food, published its own newspaper and printed its own currency. It was the first workers' Soviet in Britain or Ireland and it brought the Irish Labour movement to the brink of a revolutionary confrontation with British power in Ireland.”

Everything shut down, even the public houses. Food was key, with strict controls and local patrols enforcing this; much local farmer support was garnered and food sent to the city. During the first week, the British – becoming aware that, so far, some 38,000

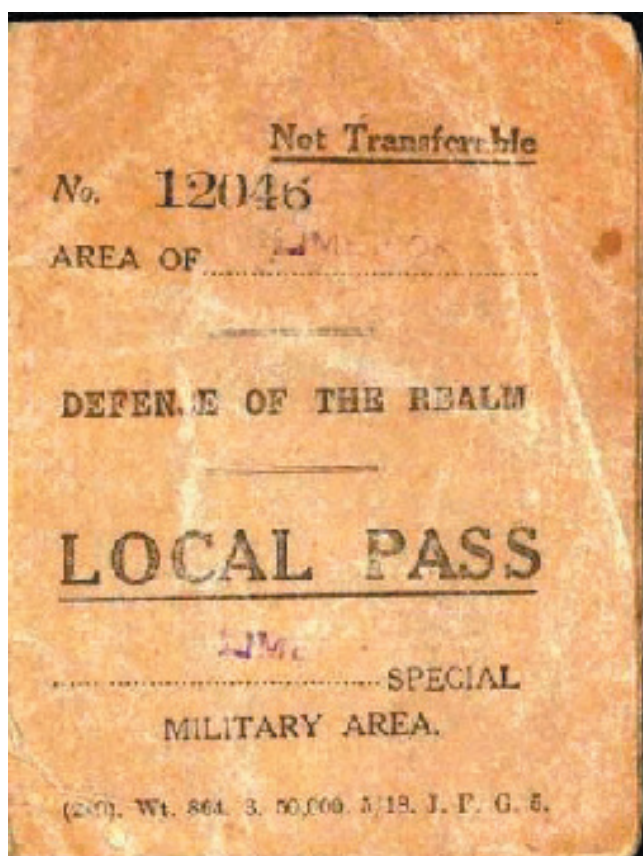


people in Limerick were being fed, and there had been no internal sedition – sought a compromise and suggested that employers could issue travel permits; this was, of course, rejected by the Trades Council. There were some confrontations between Government forces and civilians, as they tried to pass certain points; a trainload of people got through without passes, despite British officers locking the train.

It must be noted that, although there were socialists in the IRA and Sinn Fein and workers had a huge part in the 1916 rising, this was a distinctly Labour move against the British. Support in Belfast, the centre of Irish industry, had been non-existent; many trades unions such as the National Union of Railwaymen had their head offices in Britain, and this was seen as a very political strike for which no support was forthcoming. Really only in Dublin was there any support. A national strike was desired by some but was not forthcoming; others saw the strike as an emotional reaction to a situation. On 27<sup>th</sup> April, after intervention by the Sinn Fein Lord Mayor and the local Catholic Bishop, the Trades Council brought the strike to an end and so ended Ireland's only Soviet.

What if, eh?  
– James Bacon

Liam Cahill's book is available for free at <http://www.limericksoviet.com/>



# SOUNDS OF ALTERNATE HISTORY: STROKE OF FATE

BY CHRISTOPHER J GARCIA

If I am thinking of the phrase Old-Timey, I am thinking about radio drama. Sadly, with very few exceptions, in the US this is a dead medium, save for those of us who know how to find BBC productions. I love audio drama, and am one of those who seeks it out. One of the things that help us Radio Heads is this device called the Internetting.

On the internet, there are a number of sites which specialize in preserving and presenting the olden radio programs. There are a great many, one of which is called Old Time Radio. On that site, I came across a series from the National Broadcasting Company in 1953. It was exciting because this series was complete, a rarity even among television series of the 1950s.

The series was called *Stroke of Fate*.

While alternate history as a subject has been around since the days of Molière, it wasn't until the 1970s that it took off as a major push. In the 1950s, there

were a few stories every year that showed up in the pulps or whatnot, but it wasn't a major thing. *Stroke of Fate* was ahead of its time, portraying a single piece of alternate history based around a single departure point, the *Stroke of Fate* of the title, presenting a series of vignettes and a brief historical explanation of what actually happened and why it might have gone the way that they portray in the scenes. It's a simple and very effective technique to present such wonderfully researched materials.

And the stuff was also highly entertaining.

The first one wasn't a great start, sadly. It was the story of what would have happened if Robert E Lee had decided to lead the Northern Armies instead of the Confederacy. He'd been asked and had turned it down, later leading the Confederate Armies, though not particularly successfully. The guys who did the voices weren't bad, but it's a story we've heard so many times. I wasn't much in the mood for it.

The second bit was so much better. That episode was what would have happened if Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex, had succeeded in one of his plots against Queen

Elizabeth. It's well-acted, well-written, and even better presented. This is also well-trodden territory, but the intrigue and force of performance makes it feel quite fresh. Well, as fresh as something that was made 55 years ago can be.

The next episode was one of the best of the bunch. What if the Aaron Burr-Alexander Hamilton duel had gone the other way, with Burr ending up taking a dirt nap. This one went the furthest of all of them as far as taking the stroke of fate in a completely different direction. This one told of Hamilton becoming slightly mad with power and, after the Louisiana Purchase, running wild and making deals with the Brits to take over. It was awesome! Hamilton was basically made out to be an egomaniacal madman with delusions of grandeur... something I can completely relate to. The acting was good, the script was great and the distance they ran with it made it one of the most enjoyable of all the episodes.

Back to the computer and the radio program from the age prior to computers.

The next two episodes were both kinda disappointing. The first was Marie Antoinette. It was really dull and it didn't feel at all entertaining. The second was about what would have happened if Abe Lincoln had gotten his foreign service gig back in the 1850s, instead of going into state and then national politics. This had some nice elements. He broke off his wedding to Mary Todd, found himself a South American wife and there was some political doings; really, they could have turned Lincoln into the same kind of nutter that Hamilton became, but they let him remain a hero. I thought they did not reach very far at all.

The next two were my favorites for the series. The first was what if Benedict Arnold had succeeded in betraying West Point to the hated British. This has been done often as well, but here it was lovely and the performances were fantastic. They portrayed Arnold's wife as a major reason that Bennie was doing it all. I'd say she was kinda a Lady Macbeth. I loved this one and listened to it twice.

The second consecutive

**Another of  
the "MAGIC 28"  
on NBC Radio**



**STROKE OF FATE**  
*The story of What Might Have  
Happened if Fate turned the  
other way.*

**9:30**  
**WSYR dial 570**

stroke of genius from *Stroke of Fate* was Julius Caesar. This one had dramatic tension in every direction. The stroke of fate was what if Caesar had divorced Calpurnia and married Cleopatra. The piece looks at all the political, social and religious figures and replays much of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, though with a Shyamalanian twist that keeps you guessing. The writers here were working with known material and making you wonder how they were going to make the changes. It worked wonderfully and the acting was exceptional.

The episode following this was something of a let-down since it was yet another Hitler twist. At that point, less than ten years after the end of WWII, there hadn't been a lot of WWII-the-other-way pieces done, but this one didn't age well. I did enjoy the *Stroke of Fate*, which was what if France and Britain had resisted the Nazis' entry into the Rhineland. It was a pretty good take on the subject, but it wasn't nearly as good as the two previous episodes. I imagine this was the highest rated of the episodes, Hitler being a giant draw, but it was a little too pat for me. Also, I'm so tired now of every portrayal of Hitler being a screeching nut.

The next episode was more interesting since it was on a topic I knew almost nothing about: the Battle of Quebec. It was about the battle between the French and the British and I was wondering who actually won. I sorta thought that this was the moment when Great Britain took over the whole of Canada, which made sense, but the story was about how the French command was incompetent and it made me think that the French were the ones who were going to get their asses handed to them. I think I was wrong. You see, while the drama was good, the overall clarity of the script was tough to get. The voice acting was so very good, I would actually recommend this one to anyone who is thinking of doing voice work for a living; it's really solid in showing the ways a voice can give strong body to a character.

The next episode is an interesting one from this point in history because you have to remember what it was like back in the days of a serious Cold War. The story was what would have happened if the US had not purchased the Alaskan Territory, then known as Russian America. Seward's Folly was what they called the purchase of Alaska, because William Seward was the guy who put it together and a lot of folks said that there was no reason for America to buy it because there was nothing worth anything in all of Alaska. All the gold that had been found in Alaska was of low quality. The *Stroke* was what if high-quality gold had been discovered forty years before it actually was. Good point, but the show didn't go very far. It would have been much better if they had taken it up to what was the present, the 1950s, and how it would have affected the current situation with the Russians. Sadly, they did not. Someone needs to redo this series with a modern twist, and the Alaska deal would be my starting point for an episode set during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

After that episode was one that I was most impressed with as far as the theory went, although not

completely sold on as performance. It was what would have happened if Alexander the Great had lived past 32. The story was pretty much a *Julius Caesar*-like melodrama, but it was interesting. Alexander went on to found an Alexandria in place of London and his friends conspired against him. It was strange.

After that came what was easily the most entertaining of the bunch. The episode featured the concept of Americans taking on the Brits in full-fledged submarine warfare in the Revolutionary War. It featured Benjamin Franklin, the most fannish of all eighteenth-century figures, making a note to the inventor of the submarine which made it feasible. The device had been invented and they even did a try-out, but it went seriously wrong because they tried to drill through a copper plate with a wood drill. The episode was a lot of fun and ended up with the submarine being an atomic bomb kind of weapon that led to détente. History sorta took a backseat to awesome fun!

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**“And the Brooklyn Dodgers have won their third straight World Series behind the arm of ‘Papa’ Fidel Castro!”  
– Joe Buck, October 17<sup>th</sup> 1962**

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The final episode of the series was what if the Norman Invasion had never happened. It was a decent episode, a little over-dramatic, especially in the political talk of the last days of Edward the Confessor. Basically, it twisted the order of things with William the Bastard getting his ass handed to him first, then the Norwegians attacking and Harold managing to kick them back at Stamford Bridge. It didn't feature much battle portrayal, but it did some good explanation of what could have happened had it gone the other way.

The thing about all of these is that it was working with the American Association of Historians; this is a good, though seldom creative, group that is always trying to make people interested in history. I'm an interested party to that sort of thing. If this series had continued, I really think it would have set forward the movement of alternate history and led to a greater overall interest in history, which could have led to a greater abundance of more serious-minded adults who would not have taken to the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll lifestyle, possibly completely avoiding the entire hippie movement. The Golden Age that was the 1950s in America may have continued into the 1970s.

So basically, since the jerks of America couldn't be bothered to listen to an awesome history program on the radio, we got stuck with Hippies.

– Christopher J Garcia

# IT REALLY WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE THIS

BY NIALL HARRISON

## I. Worlds

The press conference is held on Friday, August 17, 1984, in the Public Affairs Office of the Lyndon B Johnson space centre in Houston. There are five NASA personnel present: Joe Muldoon, Ares Program Manager (and second man on the moon); Rick Llewellyn, head of public affairs; and the three individuals who, it has just been announced, will go on to walk on the surface of Mars. We see the event through the eyes of Natalie York:

She envied Phil Stone, with his neat, crew-cut good looks and his hint of a Midwestern twang – the stereotypical astronaut hero – for the grace with which he fielded the dumbest, most repetitive questions. And the press had already taken Ralph Gershon to their hearts for his infectious grins – *the glamorous, hell-raising bachelor spaceman* – and for his wisecracking, and the hint of danger, of ambiguity about him. Even if he did make Rick Llewellyn visibly nervous every time he opened his mouth. And even if there was, as far as York was concerned, an undertow of racism about the patronizing affection with which Gershon was treated.

And that left York: in her own view, the least equipped to handle the media pressure, but the one on whom most interest was focused. And all for the wrong reasons. (p.434)

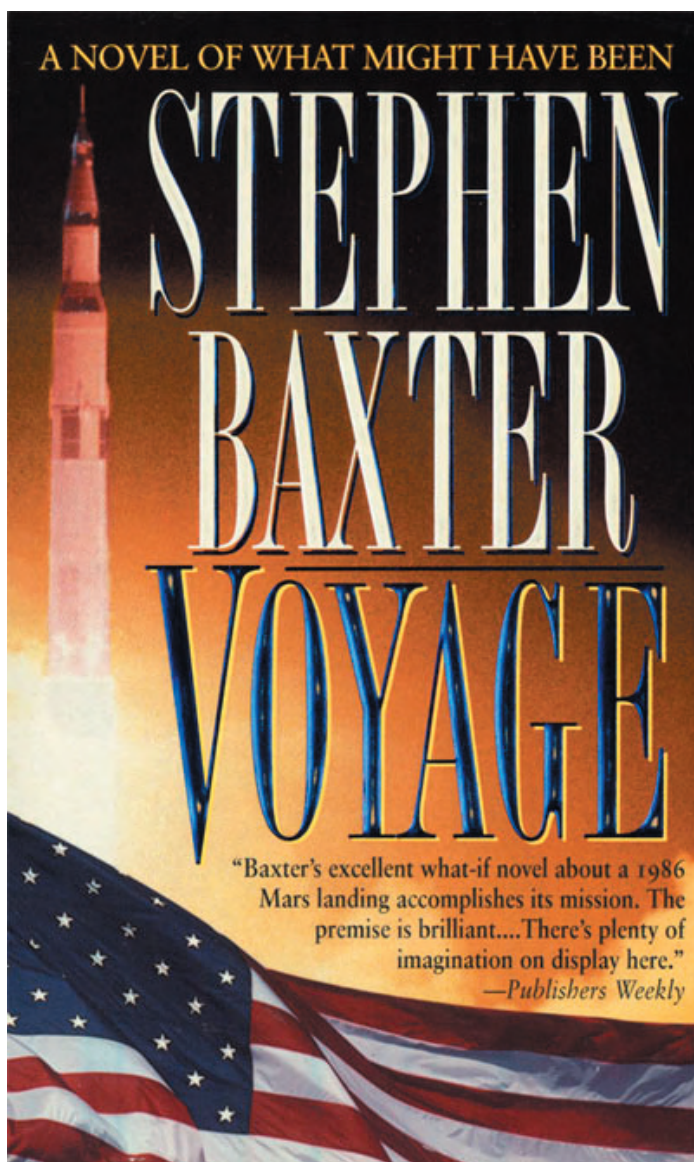
The wrong reasons being, of course, the attention to femininity that marks out commentary on the achievements of every exceptional woman. The focus should be on York's role as mission specialist, on the geological expertise that has made her absolutely the best candidate for the job. Instead, well, you know the sort of thing: "We asked beautician Marcia Forbes what advice she would give American's premier space-woman" (p.435). It's a reminder that the battles we've watched York fight over the preceding four-hundred-and-some pages, to become one of the very few examples of either a woman or a scientist to have penetrated NASA's macho test-pilot culture, remain to be fought and won in culture at large; and it's more necessary than you might at first assume, because for long stretches Stephen Baxter's *Voyage* partakes of NASA's staggering insularity as much as it critiques it.

This can seem to be a flaw. Reviewing *Voyage* for *Locus*, for instance, when the novel was first released, Gary K Wolfe wrote that, "*Voyage* isn't really an alternate history tale ... [Baxter] pointedly avoids allowing a fully-fledged alternate history to develop. ...he wants to change only just enough to make his point about how a Mars mission might have come about" (*Soundings*, p.385; or *Locus* 430, November 1996). In one sense this is entirely true, but in

another sense I think it neglects one of the novel's crucial arguments.

The book's nominal *jonbar* point – frankly identified by Baxter in an Author's Note – is November 22, 1963, when John F Kennedy survives an attempt on his life, albeit crippled. His influence over the public sphere in the wake of the shooting is, as Wolfe suggests, extremely limited. However, when Apollo makes it to the Moon, Kennedy sets America a new challenge: "to continue the building of our great ships, and to fly them onward to Mars" (p.15). On such a matter Kennedy's voice still has weight, and as a result the timeline of *Voyage* begins to bend away from ours, and towards one in which a Mars programme is approved. But the timeline of *Voyage* is the timeline of NASA, not the timeline of the world at large.

That is to say, *Voyage* treats NASA as a world unto itself and is, within those terms, rigorously extrapolative. To my mind, the novel doesn't *avoid* a "fully-fledged alternate history" so much as assert that a Mars programme, locked within NASA, would not be sufficient for such a timeline to arise. *Voyage* won the Sidewise Award for alternate history; I'd like to think it was for this reason, for its use of alterity to reinforce NASA's pathological insularity, to



make the distance between NASA and the 'real world' that much more obvious.

Certainly it can be disorientating to be held apart from the rest of America, from the America we largely know. Watergate comes and goes, distantly, almost irrelevantly. The astronauts live in purpose-built communities outside Houston which in the late Seventies are artificial, archaic: "The American dream, vintage 1962," as the newly-enrolled York puts it. (She is our guide.) The first blushings of detente do intrude, but only because they directly threaten NASA's *raison d'être*, rendering the need for the space programme less sharp and less immediate; and the effect is not reciprocal. A key test mission eclipses the *Dallas* episode 'A House Divided' ("Who shot JR?") in the ratings, but that's about as far as it goes.

The causes and effects of this isolation are played out through various NASA personnel. In the same press conference, a journalist asks about *Apollo-N*, an ill-fated nuclear rocket test that serves as this timeline's *Challenger* disaster. "What is it with you people?" he asks. "How can you pretend that everything's upbeat, that nothing bad ever happens?" Muldoon's response is, it seems, bland: learn from our mistakes, make sure it was not in vain, can't afford to brood. The reporter is baffled; York, as befits her role, can see both points of view:

"All around JSC I saw *Apollo-N* car lots and shopping plazas. There's even an *Apollo-N* memorial park, for God's sake. Don't you think a public reaction like that, spontaneous and visible, deserves something more from you people than 'learning what went wrong'?..."

*Hell* yes, York thought. Some around JSC thought the malls and so forth were tacky, somehow undignified. York didn't; as the reporter was implying, such things were symbols erected by the people out there as they responded to the human tragedy. Sure, it was car lots and malls: what the hell else where they supposed to do?

But she'd also gotten to know the pilots' viewpoint well enough to understand it. They'd accepted the deaths, put *Apollo-N* behind them, and moved on. ... It was difficult for an outsider to accept, but that was the culture. (p.436)

York's problem is that as a creature of two worlds, she belongs to neither. To her scientific colleagues she becomes a sell-out, bending to NASA's will; and to much of the NASA establishment she is a strange figure, to be mistrusted. Even Phil Stone, the most sympathetic of the old astronaut corps, finds her intensity troubling. York has to work twice as hard, be twice as good, as any of her rivals, to be selected for *Ares*. And it leaves her without a place to call home.

## 2. Maps

A little context, and some thoughts on the shape of the book.

Published in 1996, *Voyage* appeared towards the end of a long decade of Mars *sf*, part of a cluster of books that includes Ian McDonald's *Desolation Road* (1988), Paul McAuley's *Red Dust* (1993), Kim Stanley Robinson's magisterial trilogy (1993-1996), *White Mars* by Brian Aldiss and Roger Penrose, and *Rainbow Mars* by Larry Niven (both 1999). And for all that its characters are only on Mars for a tiny sliver of the novel's five-hundred-plus pages, I do think *Voyage* is a true member of this club. Mars in this book may at first appear to be only a destination, but it is also an idea; or a territory for competing ideas. More than usually, for Baxter – even more than the other two novels in his so-called 'NASA trilogy': *Titan* (1997) and *Moonseed* (1998) – some of those ideas are profoundly American. For some NASA old hands, for instance, Mars represents manifest destiny in all its archaic, first-*sf* glory:

In the end, those hardheaded engineers who had stubbornly insisted that the moon would be just like Arizona – and had designed the LM's landing gear that way – had turned out to be right. *That's what I've gotta bear in mind*, he thought. *Mars will be just like Arizona, too.*

To Seger, that was a magical thought, as if Earth and Moon and Mars were somehow unified, physically bridged, as they were bridged by the exploits of Americans. (pp.79-80)

But over the course of the novel this stance is discredited, primarily by field trip simulations run by Natalie York for other astronauts. The lesson York teaches is a precise refusal of Burt Seger's viewpoint, and not a welcome one for most of her students: Mars is a distinct place, its own place, with a depth of history and diversity of landscape that must be respected. So its imaginative importance is somewhat different for York. "Mars is like a dusty mirror," she tells two of her reluctant students. An alternate history for our planet. "Every time we look into it, we learn something about the Earth" (p.349).

So another way to view *Voyage* is as a negotiation between these points of view. It's always clear that, by the end of the book, we will have reached Mars. There are mission profile diagrams where the maps in an epic fantasy would be, and sections set aboard the *Ares* on its way to Mars are dotted among the main, chronological narrative that runs from 1969 up to the mission launch in 1985. The questions that give shape to the novel, then, are *how* and *why* we will go there. Both are important, and in both cases, the answers are the result of competition between Seger's viewpoint, and York's: between the political logic and the scientific logic for space exploration.

Not that Seger and York are the only viewpoint characters. The novel has at least a dozen, in fact, plus



a smattering of presidential memos, speeches, scientific abstracts and other found documents; *Voyage* is something of a sprawling beast, though its journalistic style does succeed in capturing some sense of spaceflight as a collective enterprise. In addition to Seger (the initial Mars programme manager), York, and the other members of the Ares crew (although we spend less time with either Stone or Gershon than with York; a not-insignificant omission in the case of Gershon, who we can gather faced comparable barriers), important characters include Muldoon, who becomes instrumental to the management of the Mars programme; old-time astronaut Chuck Jones, exemplar of the paleolithic attitudes York faces; NASA administrator Fred Michaels, a savvy operator who builds a political coalition around the idea of a manned Mars shot; Gregory Dana, a physicist and Nazi work camp survivor, and his son Jim Dana, an astronaut; and aerospace contractor J K Lee, who ends up winning the bid to build the Mars Excursion Module, the Mars lander. It's not an accident that York is the only woman; *Voyage* never ventures further outside NASA than Lee's company, which could in any case be considered part of an extended family.

Again and again the political and the scientific clash. Science is, in fact, forced into the arena of politics to achieve its goals. As Baxter puts it in the novel's afterword, 'Lost Mars':

Thus, in 1969, there was *no* internal logic which proceeded from Apollo to Mars. This key point was evidently misunderstood by many within NASA in this period. Technically, Apollo was an end in itself, a system designed to place two men on the Moon for



three days, and it achieved precisely that; its political goals were similarly well defined – to beat the Soviets into space – and had been achieved. With the completion of Apollo, there was no inertia to be carried forward to future goals – and, in 1969, no perceived threat to drive the necessary political reaction behind a new program.

Still, NASA had explored the technical feasibility of a Mars mission in as many as sixty study contracts between 1961 and 1968. But the visionaries were dealt a severe blow when the pictures of Mars returned by the early Mariners showed a bleak lunarlike cratered landscape. There were still compelling scientific reasons to go to Mars, but the opportunity for human expansion was clearly limited. NASA suffered deferments and cancellations as a result. (p.507)

New logic has to be found. A list of recommendations for post-Apollo space-flight is drawn up and presented to Nixon. Fred Michaels (who, like Muldoon, is a creation of some convenience on Baxter's part, the man NASA needs to get this job done) sets about campaigning for the right decision – that is, a decision for Mars.

Josephson was mildly shocked at how quickly the scientific and exploratory aspects of spaceflight were discarded as factors in shaping the new program. Nobody with any clout cared about going to Mars, or anywhere else, for the *science*. And nobody argued – he was more surprised to observe – on the basis of the benefits of space spin-offs. After all, if you wanted the spin-offs, why go into space at all? Why not turn the R&D money and NASA's fabled management skills directly to other, more worthy, programs?

Those were hard questions to answer. So Michaels, bluntly, avoided them.

In public, Michaels played up space as an adventure – something a nation like the US ought to be able to afford, damn it. Astronauts from the heroic days, such as Joe Muldoon, were wheeled out to serve as living reminders of good moments gone by. After Michaels' skillful PR hoopla, Mars came to seem a little more acceptable. There was a snowball effect, and some support for the option started to appear on the Hill.

And slowly, the opinion polls showed public opposition to a Mars option dropping. (p.94)

The costs of this approach are a major focus of the novel, particularly in its second half. By 1981, Muldoon can only conclude that the Mars programme has "warped" NASA. But if it warps NASA, it warps science even more.

The first mission plans are drawn up by Werner von Braun and his team of German engineers, now working for NASA. They are, in a sense, built on a sound technical solution to the problem of interplanetary travel; they assume the successful development of the NERVA (Nuclear Engine for Rocket Vehicle Application) system being worked on by, among others, York's boyfriend Mike Conlig, which will provide massively greater thrust than contemporary chemical rockets. But for Gregory Dana, there is an intolerable crudity to this approach: "Von Braun's designs have always looked the same," he complains to his son. "For thirty years! Immense, overpowered machines! Leaping to the stars, by the most direct route possible! ... It's not *elegant*" (p.59).

The embrace of NERVA is inevitable, however. The political logic – the symbolic and economic value of the project – dominates the scientific, beyond the point where the project is justifiable, and eventually culminates in the tragic *Apollo-N* mission. The same issues stalk the development of the Mars Excursion Module (MEM), the decision about the design of which comes down to a competition between the need to provide employment for an aerospace industry grown fat on Apollo, and the pragmatism of proven technology, with as little innovation as possible. Ultimately, scientific beauty – the elegance that Dana seeks – wins in both cases, with a gravity-assist trajectory and an Apollo-derived MEM; but crucially, it is only after the political has failed.

*Voyage* beautifully balances these tensions for almost all of its length. But re-reading the novel for this article, this time around I got the sense that as *Ares* nears its goal the balance becomes unsustainable. Like Apollo before it, *Ares* will leave a vacuum in its wake: no obvious sustainable future for space exploration. The narrative consequence of this, I think, is a sense that the novel *has* to end where it does; that, were *Voyage's* timeline to be spooled beyond the 1986 Mars landing, the story would change quite dramatically, the technological, social and economic tensions focused on *Ares* whiplashing out through American society in a manner that would demand broader examination. NASA has put its all into *Ares*, all eggs in one glorious, absurd basket; and *Voyage* has, too.

### 3. Dreams

There is, of course, another tension buried in Natalie York's assessment of Mars as a "dusty mirror": that between science and romance, or humanity. Its purest expression comes when she walks on Mars, when Stone asks her:

*Natalie, tell them how it feels.*

The oldest question in the world, the most difficult to answer – and, maybe, the most important, she thought.

The one question the Apollo astronauts could

never answer. (p.501)

The question science fiction, surely, must try to answer: the question about what it means to be aware of the depth and breadth of the universe we live in.

Other works, elsewhere in Baxter's oeuvre, answer the question stunningly well – think of the rabbit-hole to the deep future in *Time* (1999), for example. Here, Gregory Dana takes a stab at it:

To most people, he reflected, the complex world of human society was the entire universe, somehow disengaged from the physical underpinning of things. Most people never formed any sense of *perspective*: the understanding that the whole of their lives was contained in a thin slice of air coating a small, spinning ball of rock, that their awareness was confined to a thin flashbulb slice of geological time, that they inhabited a universe which had emerged from, and was inexorably descending into conditions unimaginably different from those with which they were familiar. (p.183)

To most of *Voyage's* cast, the complex world of NASA is the entire universe, and it is – contrary to expectations – a hard place to achieve this sort of perspective. They are, as York puts it, "terrific at the technology", but "stunningly bad" at dealing with the needs of people (particularly anyone who falls outside its cultural norms, as we've seen), "unable even to recognize that those needs existed" (p.437). And so she struggles to maintain her own perspective throughout the novel, to be the one who can answer the question. She is not always successful. On her first attempt to articulate the feelings that spaceflight evokes, for a broadcast to a waiting Earth, she finds herself "waffling", reduced to a laundry-list of technical detail: "Okay, Houston. This is our TOI maneuver: TOI, for Transfer Orbit Injection. Right now, the big engines on our main booster stage, the MS-II, are firing to push us out of Earth orbit. The MS-II is just a version of the second stage of the old Saturn V..." But it's not what she'd meant to say: "She'd wanted to say something personal. To say how it felt, to see the Earth fall away. She'd always criticized earlier generations of astronauts for their lack of eloquence," she thinks. "Maybe it wasn't so easy after all" (p.76).

Her colleagues lean on the iconography of SF, on second-hand images that self-consciously embed *Voyage* within the SF genre. Muldoon, on the Moon, glosses the alien-ness of the place as "a kind of science-fiction feeling, something he'd never experienced on Earth" (p.15); Gershon, *en route* to Mars, is conscious of an accompanying "fleet of ghostly ships, huge silver forms, from the pages of Clarke and Heinlein and Asimov and Bradbury and Burroughs..." (p.213). It's York who searches for the words to make this experience fresh. But the realities of NASA are too mundane, the distance between the scientific and human realities too great – and the deadening compromises that have to be made to get *Ares*

off the ground too obvious.

The last sentence of Baxter's Author's Note, at the start of the novel, appears innocuous: "It really would have been like this." Not all alternate history aspires to this standard, but much does: the idea that, given a set of starting premises, the resultant world is unfolded as logically and thoroughly as possible. And it would be difficult to argue that Baxter has not done his homework. *Voyage* is saturated with all the kinds of language that create the day-to-day reality of NASA – the technical detail, the macho posturing, the avoidant process language – and scrupulous in demonstrating the conditions that shape its plot, even to the point of suggesting, as I've noted, that those conditions will hold good only just long enough for Natalie York to take her first steps. Beyond the last page of the novel, all bets are off, but while reading I can believe that this is how it would have been.

More than that, however, while reading I feel the implicit question weighing ever-heavier on my mind. Two-thirds of the way through the novel, on the eve of resignation, Fred Michaels broods that something has been lost, that "all that visionary stuff" has fallen by the wayside in his attempts to keep the Mars programme on track. His colleague's rejoinder could be directed at the reader:

"But could it be any other way, Fred? It was the same with Apollo. Once spaceflight becomes the religion of the empire, it becomes immensely powerful; but it can't stir us to dream in the same old way. And all of us involved – NASA, the White House, the DoD – just figure out ways in which the space program can serve our own interests. It's the way things are." (p.307)

The question that becomes impossible to ignore is whether it *should* have been like this. The costs mount remorselessly. Mission after mission is sacrificed on the altar of Ares. There are no *Apollo* flights after 13; the *Mariner* probes go ahead, but there's no *Viking*, and nothing at all to Venus or the other planets, at a scientific cost that is astonishing to consider. (York thinks: "Sure, humans were on the way to Mars. But humanity knew nothing of the rest of the Solar System it hadn't known in 1957: the moons of Jupiter and Saturn remained points of light in the sky, the disks and rings of the giant worlds a telescopic blur", p.317.) There are the environmental costs of developing NERVA. There is no Shuttle, no *mature* space programme at all, a loss symbolised most poignantly for me – particularly in light of J J Abram's zombieified incarnation of *Star Trek* – by one of Baxter's sf grace notes:

"...Here's something for you, Ralph; I know you're a sci-fi buff. Gene Roddenberry has said he's scrapping the treatment he'd prepared for a new *Star Trek* series. It was going to be like the first, with the huge space cruiser *Enterprise* with massive phaser banks, bigger and more powerful than anything they're likely to encounter. But he's changed his mind;

he's been inspired by you guys, apparently. Now, Roddenberry says he's aiming for something called *Star Trek: Explorer*, about a small, pioneering band of humans and aliens in their fragile craft, going much farther than anyone has gone before ... How about that, guys. Science fact changing the face of science fiction. It says here." (p.158)

In the timeline of *Voyage*, there is no Jean-Luc Picard, no grown-up Federation; we are stuck, it seems, with Kirk and his ilk.

Perhaps most of all, there is the human cost of the Mars programme; not just the lives lost in *Apollo-N*, but lives ruined by the obsessive commitment that the timetable requires. J K Lee is the novel's most heartbreaking iteration of this particular theme. He puts together a winning bid for the MEM contract thanks to smarts, competence and flexibility: he is living the Heinleinian dream, and the initial months of the project hum along, "an exciting, invigorating time" (p.334). But the work takes him to the point of collapse, and his wife to the point of attempting suicide: "It's destructive testing," she thinks, "that's all. Destructive testing" (p.375). Others are also burned out, used up.

And all of this for... what? For the "central, banal" question of astronaut existence: *what does it feel like?*

I am not a space enthusiast; not in the sense of being aware of the technical and logistical history that so many sf fans seem to have internalised. Perhaps it is too easy, in the light of cinema in particular and science fiction in general, to be blinded to the wonders of the space travel we have achieved. But *Voyage* burns with its desire to make us see again, and makes me crave sight. It is *Ares*: its exhaustive technical detail and sprawling cast are designed to get Natalie York to a position from which she can see, speak clearly, and tell us how it feels.

So Natalie York, in the end, finds the words; and finds that while she may be stuck between two worlds on Earth, she is native to a third.

*By God, she thought, we're here. We came for all the wrong reasons, and by all the wrong methods, but we're here, and that's all that matters. And we've found soil, and sunlight, and air, and water.*

She said: "I'm home."

The wrong reasons, again. But it really would have been like this.

Is that enough?

Could it ever be otherwise?

– Niall Harrison

*All quotes from Voyage are from the US first edition, Harper Prism (New York), January 1997: ISBN 0-06-10525802.*

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TRANSATLANTIQUE

AVEC "L'ARDÈCHE"