So What Have I Been Up To?

Writing: As of April 5 I still haven't finished the rough draft of *Snapshot.* I wrote another 27,000 words on it, but I still have another ten thousand or so words to go. *All Timelines Lead To Rome* got knocked out of the Amazon contest in the first round. Oh well. First round is based entirely on the pitch and I'm not great at pitches.

The big birthday came and went. I shouldn't feel much different, but I do. It's psychological of course, but I

notice that it's taking a lot more effort to maintain or lose weight, keep muscle and regain endurance. I'm taking longer to get my bicycling endurance up where it was last year. Oh well. That didn't happen in one day. I should be able to get past it. Some additional maintenance required, but I just have to keep that in mind and do the required maintenance.

I'm still really happy with the potential of the *Snapshot* universe, but somewhat less happy about the first story I

picked to write in it. It isn't bad, but there are other ways I could have taken it that might have worked better as a first story. Oh well. There will be a lot of other stories in this world. I may end up going with another novel as first in the series.

What are the highlights of this issue? More **Snapshot**, of course. I'll also have more **Mars Looks Different.** Hopefully both will be a little more polished than the ones in the previous couple of issues, with the Snapshot excerpts a bit more polished than the Mars ones. There will hopefully be a large group of scenarios, some of them taking hopefully unique looks at World War II possibilities and a few from elsewhere in space and time. I'll do a couple of reviews on AH-related books. I'm still working on the comment section, but hopefully it'll be extra thorough this time.

I'm getting into **Flash Forward,** now that I've watched the DVD of the first ten or twelve episodes. It's an interesting concept, generally pretty well done. I'm looking forward with some trepidation to the new Doctor Who. Big shoes to fill.

FICTION SECTION

Fiction
SNAPSHOT (PART 3) – BY: DALE R. COZORT

<<<Snip. Sorry!>>>

Mars Looks Different
(Yet Another Section)

Near future earth is now in a different and more interesting solar system, with Mars, Venus and the moon terraformed and inhabited by wave of humans and other earth animals.

A Pateelian officer stopped by several hours later and Ward, Stan and Ardith went to work helping injured Pateelians. They got a better look at the town. Stan whispered, "They lost probably half their men killed or hurt bad. They may not be able to stay here."

Ward nodded. "Blood in the water."

Another officer stalked up to Ardith, stone-faced and fired off angry-sounding words. She pointed to the man she was bandaging and two others she had done crude surgery on. The officer stalked away.

"Someone's not happy with us," Stan said. "Any new reasons why?"

"No, but the old ones make them angrier as they find out how bad they're hurt. They may lose the town. My corporation can't legally help them here, but I might get them land and protection in exchange for their OldTech."

"Slick," Stan said. "And you scoop up the stone library in the bargain."

"We won't rob them. We're legitimate."

The town settled into a routine of disposing of bodies and rubble. Ardith talked the Pateelians into letting them stay in the old prison. They went back there after an exhausting day of cleanup and fed and watered their prisoners. Ardith extended her vocabulary in the captives' tongue and tried to gain their trust.

Stan and Ward trudged to the commandos' plane, fighting fatigue. Two Pateelian warriors followed them.

The plane hadn't been damaged further in the fighting. Stan climbed in and studied the engines and electronics, while Ward tried to figure out how to repair the landing gear and get the remaining napalm out. Ward walked to the cockpit. "Everything look good?"

"Mostly fried by EMP. If I figure out what the circuits do I can replace them with manual equivalents. Not an easy job, but I'm a bright guy. How is the landing gear?"

"Bad. Hopefully we can get the Pateelians to copy the broken stuff, or weld it."

"Welding isn't a great idea on landing gear."

"It only has to work twice; takeoff and landing."

"And it only has to fail once to kill us. I'll work on making the takeoff safer."

"What happens when we get to the civilized part of Venus?" Ward asked. "How do we get them to take us back to earth? Could we trust any bargain they make that gives us part of the library stones?"

"I've been thinking about that." Stan climbed out and glanced at the Pateelian warriors lounging fifty feet away. "This stuff is too valuable. No one will let us keep any of it. At best they might take us back as a finder's fee."

"Great. So we widen the technology gap instead of closing it."

"Unless we're sneaky. I don't know how much time we have, but I'll explore the library and remember what I can. If Mallory's transmitter still works we'll use it to get any crucial info back home."

Ward nodded. "That helps, but it doesn't get us back to earth and they still increase their lead."

"Yeah. If you think of anything better let me know. Try to learning the stasis women's language. They're the key to sorting out the good stuff."

"Could be. I just want to get home, find Beth and get back to my life."

"Having kids turns a guy boring. You're on Venus, dude! An inhabited Venus, just like in the old science fiction stories. There are corporate dragons to slay and damsels in distress to ravage or rescue, and a world of lost cities and civilizations to play in. And if we get tired of that, we have an entire solar system to explore and a thousand questions to answer. How far out in the solar system did the builders get with their terraforming? Did someone actually build a generation ship? If they did, what did they use to get it up to speed to get to the stars? Where did they go? How did they know there was an inhabitable planet there? Are their descendants still out there? I'm in my element and loving it. I don't care if I ever get back."

"How long do you think we have here before whoever Gregor was working for sends more planes, or the Taranians come back to pick over the carcass?"

"I wouldn't count on more than a couple of days. Less if Gregor's friends signaled on the way down or had a homing device. Of course they're not supposed to be here, so whatever they do will be covert. On the other hand, someone had to have spotted a spaceship coming down. That's an attention getter."

"So priority one: get knowledge from the library. Priority two: get the plane ready and figure out how to fly it. Priority three: help the Pateelians enough they don't slit our throats."

"Yep. And since adventure is inevitable, relax and enjoy it."

Next Chapter

The evening, and the thunderstorm went on. Katrina got up once in a while and paced restlessly around the quiet and darkening upstairs. She tried her cell phone a couple of times, with no results.

"It's not going to happen with that cell phone," Henry said. "This is low country. It floods most years, and there's nobody down here to make it worth putting in towers."

"I'll get fired if I don't call in."

"And you'll eventually get downsized or outsourced--whatever the current buzzword is--if you call in. It's just a matter of how long you dangle and how much of your life someone else controls."

"As I mentioned, not being independently wealthy I have to have a job. I don't love this one, but I don't hate it. What did you say you do for a living?"

"I didn't say. I'm not trying to be mysterious. It's complicated."

"Are we going to stay here all night?"

"Unless you can think of something better. I think we're good here until morning."

"We are trespassing."

"Yeah. But that's understandable in an emergency. As long as we don't damage anything we'll be okay."

"How long will your flashlight hold out?"

"Hey, I'm a geek. Geeks have good flashlights. We're good for two days in dim mode."

A door slammed downstairs. Katrina jumped. "I hope that's the wind."

"I don't think so." Henry got up and slid the door to the stairs open a crack. Katrina looked around him. A young woman in a patched dress that had been stylish twenty years ago stood below them, looking at the floor. Her wet hair was long and tangled, a dull dishwater yellow. Her face and bare forearms were covered with freckles, as were her bare, muddy feet.

Henry eased back. The woman took a piece of bread out of a pocket in her dress and tossed crumbs on the floor, making a small whistling sound. She sat cross-legged on the floor, and the deer mouse came over to her, eating crumbs as it came. Finally it climbed into her lap and took crumbs from her fingers. It stood upright, holding the crumbs in both hands and eating them daintily. Finally it finished and washed its face like a cat.

Henry whispered, "Should we let her know we're up here?"

Katrina shook her head. "I don't know. There's something not right about her."

"You think? In a deserted house in a thunderstorm feeding a mouse. Thing is, there have to be others around. Maybe they can help us."

Katrina shrugged. "You know the area. I don't. I think we'll scare the crap out of her. I'd wait until someone else comes."

"Which may be days." Henry opened the door. "Hello? Our car got stuck and we're looking for help.

Can you--"

The young woman took one frightened look up the stairs and jumped up. The mouse scampered back into the closet as the woman bolted for the door, making a noise that wasn't a scream but had no words. Her bare feet slipped on the dusty linoleum and she fell into a half-opened door to a closet under the stairs. She scrambled to her feet, blood streaming down her face.

Katrina pushed past Henry and raced down the stairs, yelling "Honey, we aren't going to hurt you!"

The young woman kept running, out the door, across the porch and through the overgrown yard to the field. Her bare feet splashed clay mud as she ran across the field. Katrina stopped at the edge of the porch, hesitated and decided to stay there. She yelled back, "She's too fast and too scared. We can't catch her! Better not to try."

Henry lumbered up behind her and they watched the young woman disappear into a grove of trees up the road. Blood drops traced her trail across the weathered boards of the porch."Well, that can't be good."

"No. She's hurt and we should try to help her, but I think that would just make things worse. I'm guessing our next visitors may have shotguns or torches and pitchforks."

The upstairs was noticeably darker when they walked back up.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Stan and Ward helped Mallory back into the stone library room. Ward felt light-headed from the exhaustion of the long day, but fought off sleep. The two captive women were lying on blankets on the floor, their hands and feet tied. Ardith sat between them, looking even more exhausted than Ward felt.

"Done with the questioning?" Ward asked.

"For now. They're tired and scared. I'm not getting much information."

"Have you figured out where they're from?"

Ardith shook her head. "I'm not sure." Her eyes didn't meet his, and her tone of voice was wrong. *She knows. And she doesn't want us to know*.

Stan grinned at her. "You know, back in gold rush days making really big strikes screwed with people's heads. They got to thinking about those riches, and no matter how big the strike, some of them got to thinking there wasn't enough to share. People killed friends and brothers over gold when they had enough that they could never hope to spend it all."

"Why are you saying this?" Ardith asked.

"I think you know. You know more about our lady friends than you're telling us too."

"I am not acting out of greed. I know enough about your world to wonder how wisely it would handle great power and knowledge."

Stan pursed his lips. "Well, you have a point there.

We're as human in the flawed sense as your people are. You know who the women are and what they're doing here. You don't think we do. You're wrong."

"They're from the last part of the first wave, shortly before their civilization fell. They somehow managed to preserve themselves. They're valuable beyond your imagination. You can't take them off Venus, even if you go yourself."

Stan shrugged. "We'll have to see about that. For now I'm more worried about getting my money's worth out of the library. Since you and them will be sitting within easy get-cut-in-half-by-any-explosion range, it behooves you to let me know about any booby traps."

Ardith sat silent for a couple of seconds as she parsed Stan's sentences. Finally, "Is this English you speak? The words appear to be but--" She sat and stare up at them for another couple of seconds. "I think I understand. No. The stones are not dangerous to the body."

"How about the mind?" Ward asked.

"Only in the sense that a book or a song can be dangerous."

Stan nodded. He went over and turned his light on a rock. The same kind of music they had heard the night before filled the room. He went to another stone and another, moving on quickly if nothing interesting happened immediately. He went through several dozen stones without finding anything important. He turned back to the 'planetarium' stone and turned his light on it.

"Before this is over I want to know how somebody makes a storage device that lasts two million years," Stan said. "Of course if this is a unique library, then most of these things didn't last two million years." He grinned as the 'planetarium' stone glowed. "This is a guilty pleasure, but I'm an astronomy geek. This is Voyager and Pioneer and all the other NASA probes, rolled into one. Oh, and with a time machine built in. Come on Ward! Explore it with me!"

The globes formed over their heads. Stan and Ward wandered through the two million year old alternate solar system. It had the same general shape as the solar system they knew, but with a few changes. The outer planets had the same core of moons, but some of the smaller ones were missing and a few were there that Ward didn't recognize. The outer moons of the gas giants were inhabited, with vast domed structures covering most of their surfaces. So were many of the asteroids, large and small, though smaller asteroids with a low metal or volatiles content appeared to have been ignored.

Stan wandered out into the Kuiper belt, and the system shifted with him. "They automatically compact the empty space to make the distances comprehensible. This was not easy software to write."

Ward stepped around to the other side of the sun. "There's no counter-Earth in the same orbit on then

other side of the sun, not that I expected one."

"But there is a Mars-sized Kuiper-belt object over here," Stan said. "Oops. Make that two--nope three Mars-sized objects. Actually, one of them is midway between Mars and Earth-sized. And it had a base on it. That had to be a cold, miserable existence"

He studied the orbits of the three big Kuiper belt objects. "Well, that's three planets I get to name when I get back."

"Ah, but are Kuiper Belt objects really planets?"

"If it's bigger than Mars, it's a planet," Stan said. "No doubt in my mind. Of course I think that if it's Pluto or larger and in its own orbit it's a planet. I'm old fashioned."

He turned the flashlight away from the stone. "Okay. Back to work."

They went through another dozen stones. Stan set a couple of them aside to investigate in depth later, but went on. Finally he came to a stone that projected an image of what appeared to be an over-sized spider monkey in a light blue uniform. The image filled a corner of the room. The being in the uniform seemed to look at them. It made sounds that might have been words, then paused and appeared to fall asleep. The uniform was torn and dirty and blood seeped from its sleeve. Behind it, a room full of rubble stretched as far as they could see. The being—Builder--winced and its 'speech' if that was what it was, faltered. A dull rumbling came and the image shook. The builder went on, it's speech labored but quicker, as if it was trying to get the words out while it still could. The image flickered and went away for a couple of seconds. When it came back the Builder was slumped across a short wooden bench with its eyes closed. It stirred and mumbled. The image went on as its breath became ragged and finally stopped.

Ward stared at the image, willing the Builder to sit up, to continue whatever struggle it was fighting. It didn't though. It lay motionless, with only a tiny hint of a breeze moving the fabric of its uniform sleeve.

"A voice from across a million years," Stan said. "Maybe two million. Where ever he was is undoubtedly dust by now, as is he. I suppose I should go on to the next one."

He didn't move, and they sat watching the motionless creature for several minutes until the image faded away.

Ward turned to Ardith. "You weren't sure the monkeys were descendents of the Builders. That must mean your people haven't seen anything like this."

"No, they haven't, at least that I know of."

"So the stakes just got even higher," Ward said. "Stan, my friend, I think we're a long ways out of our league here."

"I don't often say this, or even think it, but in this case you may be right."

Gregor's image popped up in front of Ron a few minutes later. "Well that's a problem."

"What's a problem?"

"You're of no use to me if you can't communicate with your government. I guess I'll have to do something about that."

"And what do you want in return?"

"If I do something it'll be for me, not for you. I'll be back in a few minutes."

The image froze, looking out at Ron with blank eyes. Ron looked away. "Are you there?" The image didn't respond. Ron got up and walked over to another corner of the room. The image stayed in place. "That's way too eerie."

Gregor's image suddenly popped up in front of him. "You should be secure now."

"From you too?"

"Of course." The man laughed. "And cows have wings."

"I think that's 'and pigs fly'."

"Maybe. In any case, you're an intelligent man. You understand the implications of being dependent."

"Yeah."

"Good. Find me my information."

The image disappeared. Ron managed to get President Baker on the phone. "My Venus buddy tells me that our communications have been penetrated to the point where the bad guys can inject sound and video seamlessly in both directions. He says he's spoofed it so that we can talk securely--well except for him listening in."

"Really? That wouldn't be easy given our security. Are you sure he isn't yanking your chain?"

"No, but given computer power thousands of times ours I wouldn't be surprised if they could do it," Ron said. "Oh. I have a way of proving it one way or the other. Tell me as exactly as you can what you said and what I said the last time we talked."

The president briefly summarized the conversation. When he finished, Ron said, "Yeah, they were spoofing part of it going both ways."

"That's disturbing. I'm not sure what we can do about it. How can I even tell our security people unless they're here in person? Whoever controls this would just edit the conversation."

"Nothing I can do about that from here. Fiber optics should be immune, but I don't know if that applies when the other side has that big of a computer power advantage."

"Is there anything we can do to catch up with them on the computer power?"

"I can't think of anything we could do in a reasonable time-frame. Have the computer people looked at the computers from the spaceship we saw disassembled?"

The president laughed wryly. "Yeah. And I learned what the term 'indistinguishable from magic' means."

"Okay, find something entirely different. I read someplace that antique computers like old Apples and Commodore 64s are a bear to break into or read messages from if you don't understand them."

"Okay, but we don't understand them either, and I'm guessing they wouldn't be much harder for them to break into than our existing computers. They'll all look like antiques to them."

"One-time pads. That's the only thing no amount of computer power can break. Have a bunch of people type random letters into a computer that's been wiped and isolated from the Internet. Make copies of the numbers for everyone you want to communicate with and never reuse them. It's cumbersome, but it's uncrackable, even with unlimited computer power."

"I'll look into that. Why not just have computers generate random numbers?"

"Because they're never really random. There's a computer program behind them and it generates numbers in a pattern another computer can detect and reproduce. Their computer power edge is still there."

"Okay. Old fashion type it in is the way we go for the important stuff. Keep thinking. You're good at finding simple tricks to make up for our weakness. Work on secure communications, or at least making it obvious when our enemies get in the loop."

"Have an obscure and unpredictable song playing in the background. Prearrange to cut it off at some point in the conversation. No way a computer can match that if we do it right.

"So Gregor is listening in, right?"

"Yep. "

"Okay. Let's put it this way. Our friends from above hit a jackpot. If we can hold out long enough we may get back into the game."

"How long?"

"Too long I'm afraid, but I don't see any other choices. Hold out and keep as much as we can together, then hope we can make the powers out there back off."

"Try to make us strong enough to hurt them, and not valuable enough for them to take the hit," Ron said.

WORLD WAR II SCENARIO

Germany Runs Out of Bombs & Bullets

*Hat tip to **Blitzkrieg Legend,** by Karl-Heinz Frieser.*

I knew that the Germans weren't prepared for a long war at the start of World War II, but if Frieser is right, going to war in September 1939 was incredibly foolish. According to Frieser, at the beginning of October 1939 the German army had stockpiles of ammunition for 14 days of combat for one-third of their divisions. They had reserve stocks for another 14 days. The airforce had bombs for 14 days combat, after which they would have run out.

I had read a few other places that the Germans almost ran out of bombs in taking down Poland, and that ammunition was in short supply, but this is the first time I've seen those shortages quantified.

Hitler and company were working on a shoestring as they rearmed. They had a little over five years to build up German military industry, train an army and airforce, build up a force of tanks, planes and artillery, and build a navy. They had to do that in the face of chronic foreign exchange shortages because the German Mark was overvalued and Germany started the rearmament process with low reserves of foreign exchange because of the depression and because of reparations for World War I that the Germans paid until the early 1930s.

Germany wasn't self-sufficient in food or most raw materials other than coal and to some extent iron, though some of that had to be imported too. As rearmament heated up, they ran into labor shortages. There was a reason Hitler wanted 'living room'. Germany was dependent on the rest of the world for raw materials, and couldn't be an independent power long term without them.

As Germany rearmed, the Nazi leadership shifted priorities in a chaotic and often irrational way that at one point assigned more steel than German's total production to the navy. In that environment, low visibility items like ammunition and spare parts didn't take the priority they should have, and it isn't surprising that ammunition was in short supply.

By the way, the Germans reacted to the ammo shortage by giving ammunition production top priority in the roughly seven and a half months between the fall of Poland and the start of the German offensive in the west. As a result they had ample stocks of ammunition for the campaign against France.

Assuming for the moment that Frieser is right about the numbers, let's see if we can plausibly spin this out into the Germans running out of ammo before the Poles ran out of country, or the Germans suffering some other kind of humiliation that ended World War II abruptly.

Full-scale fighting in Poland lasted probably about twenty days, with large-scale mopping up going on another ten, and lesser scale fighting for another three or four days. To take the airforce to ineffectiveness we need to stretch that out another two weeks. To get the German army to sputter to a stop, would take somewhere between two and four weeks.

That overstates the case a bit because there would be some ongoing production, and presumably the Germans would ration ammo and go on the defensive before they completely ran out.

Here is a possibility:

Could the Poles Have Stretched Things Out A Few Weeks? Maybe. I've already discussed some ways the Poles might have done better in previous zines, but let's look at it from the perspective of a rather modest stretching out of the campaign.

Let's look for single points of change that stretch things out. How about this: for several years ending in the summer of 1939 the Poles had been reading the German codes. They had two ways of reading the German Enigma traffic. They could break the codes on their own, but they were also getting settings from a spy inside Germany. They lost both of those ways into the code before the war. The Germans added two rotors to Enigma, keeping the Poles out for most of the duration of the fall 1939 campaign. Their spy didn't get caught. He just last access due to a routine transfer.

So, no routine transfer. The Poles are able to read the German messages leading up to World War II. They know the German deployment even better than they did historically. They know for sure the Germans are planning to attack and approximately when, though the attack was postponed a bit historically. They know the direction and initial objectives of the German attack. They may even know that the Soviets are planning a knife in the back.

What could they do with that information? That's an interesting question. Information superiority versus superiority in almost every other category of military power.

Actually, I guess there are two questions here: (1) What could they have done? And (2) What would the historic Polish leadership have done with that information?

Some key changeable factors in the speed in the Polish defeat: (1) The Germans were fully mobilized. The Poles only had a third of their army mobilized when the attack started and only had about a quarter of their army in position. A third of the Polish army never did get mobilized. (2) The Germans pulled off a strategic surprise by pushing through the Polish Corridor into East Prussia and then immediately swinging south to threaten Warsaw. The Polish reaction to that threat amplified their problems. They moved from Warsaw to a town without adequate communications and lost control of the battle, essentially self-decapitating the Polish army by September 6.

So how much would having the German codes do to solve those problems? The Poles were under intense pressure from the Allies not to mobilize, and cancelled a general mobilization on the eve of the war, though they did secretly mobilize a significant part of their army before the war started. The problem was partly that the primitive Polish transportation system meant that mobilization was a very drawn out process, taking a month or two. They probably couldn't get to full mobilization before the war started, but they might get a little closer to it. On the other hand, the main obstacle to full mobilization was political pressure from the Allies. The Poles were reasonably sure an attack was imminent. So: at best the Poles might get a little more mobilized.

How about a better reaction to the German attack? That's possible. Getting the limited Polish forces available into the most advantageous place for defense might help in the first few days of the war, giving the Poles more time to get troops mobilized and stretching things out to some extent. Keeping the Polish High Command in Warsaw where they had communication facilities longer would help a lot.

One aspect of the Polish campaign: the more rapidly the Poles seemed to be folding initially, the more rapidly they fold later. That's true for a variety of reasons. First, the French gave up on their rather feeble attempt at an offensive partly because they regarded the Poles as a lost cause after about September 6, and they feared that if they pushed strongly into the Saar, the Germans would rush through Belgium and trap the troops

involved, essentially what the Germans tried to do at the start of World War I.

Second, the rapid folding of Poland forced Stalin to invade sooner than he planned to, and before he was really prepared to, because he was afraid the Germans wouldn't give up territory they seized that was allocated to the Soviets. He may have been right about that, by the way. The Soviets had to hastily wrap up peace talks with the Japanese to settle the Nomanham mini-war, scramble to get a propaganda line together, and hastily mobilize troops, who were woefully unprepared, but good enough to push aside the disorganized remnants of the Polish army that opposed them.

Third, the rapid initial fold meant that the Germans overran sources of manpower before the Poles could mobilize them, which was part of the reason the Poles only got a third of the their army mobilized in the course of the campaign.

So, if the Poles do better initially, the Germans face at least a little more French offensive activity, though the French would have been unenthusiastic in their prosecution of the offensive. At least it would have been drawing down German ammunition stocks to some extent. Stalin might hold off another couple of weeks, and possibly have difficulty moving until after the fall rainy season, which would push things back until November. And the Poles would get at least some additional troops mobilized.

I'm not sure the continued flow of Enigma info would do all of that. It might not have much impact. There were plenty of instances of leaderships ignoring good intelligence in World War II.

Here's another option: the Poles were hoping for an early start to the fall rainy season, which turned much of sparsely roaded central Poland into a mud lake. Let's say they get just a little taste of the rainy season about three days into the campaign, just a couple of days of heavy rain. It doesn't stop the German attack for those two days, but it slows and channels it, forcing motorized vehicles toward the few and inadequate roads..

It also for the most part grounds the Luftwaffe, which was a fair weather airforce. That's important because the Luftwaffe historically almost paralyzed Polish troop movements during daytime. That meant that even foot-marching German forces could bypass and cut off Polish infantry. Give the Poles two days to extract troops who were on the verge of being cut off, to bring up reserves, and to get at least some additional troops mobilized and/or to the front, and when the skies

cleared on day five the Poles would be in considerably better shape than they were historically.

So, does that just postpone the defeat by a couple of days? Soggy fields would slow down the panzers for a day or two, but the Luftwaffe would be back in action on day five. As noted earlier, one key variable would be how early the French and Soviets started to write the Poles off.

The French have been criticized, and rightly so, for their half-hearted effort in attacking the Germans in September 1939. Part of the problem was the French army's lack of offensive drive. Part of it was the fact that the Poles were defeated so quickly. The French had promised before the war that they would close up to the German lines as soon as possible and then launch a major offensive fifteen days after start of French mobilization. That would have put the start of it at September 16th. That wasn't unreasonable given that the French had to mobilize, which meant that almost every French active division split into three divisions (Active, Series A, and Series B), and then had to incorporate reserves into the unit, draw equipment and head to the front. The key problem was that they waited too long to start mobilizing, with partial mobilization in late August and full mobilization on September 1.

The French started the closing up phase of the operation on September 7th. By September 12th the situation is Poland looked irretrievable to the allies and they postponed and later cancelled the major offensive. That made sense in the context of Poland being beyond the stage where a French offensive could do much good by that time. If the French had known how precarious the German ammunition supply was, that might have changed that decision, with interesting results.

For now, let's assume that the two-day pause translates into about three days of slower German advance due to the rain and the resulting soggy fields. That doesn't quite set the campaign back those three days from the weather alone, but by giving the Poles time to reorganize and mobilize more troops it probably adds somewhat more than that to the delay. Does it add a week? That's probably the most you could hope for. Historically, Poland's situation was weak enough to discourage friends from taking chances and encourage enemies by September 10 at the latest.

That means that delaying things a week would put France at the point where they had promised to start a major offensive with Poland still in the game. Would France do a major offensive in those circumstances? My guess that they would have maybe concentrated more forces and increased the tempo a bit, but the French army wasn't designed to make rapid pushes.

They would have probably advanced the rest of the way to the German West Wall fortifications and started a ponderous 'methodical battle against them. That would force the Germans to expend more ammunition, but probably wouldn't force them to move forces away from Poland in the short term.

If we assume that the Soviets hold off a week longer before they invade, the Poles get to organize their resistance in the east until September 24th, and the Germans get to reduce their ammo stocks by that week, leaving them to choose between spending themselves perilously close to out of ammunition with a French offensive underway or taking the pressure off the Poles when they were on the ropes. I'm guessing they would take the chance and take the Poles the rest of the way out. I'm guessing that the French offensive would fizzle after the Poles fell. So nothing much would change other than the Germans being a week closer to running out of ammunition and heaving a collective sigh of relief when the French stopped their offensive.

As I noted, that's the most likely pattern. A few things would change. The French army would probably learn a few things by being in actual combat, but it would be against second rate German divisions on the defensive, so the lessons learned probably wouldn't have much impact later in the campaign. Some French soldiers would have combat experience, which probably would help a bit.

Is there any way to actually run the Germans out of ammo? The only way I could see to do that would be for the French and the Poles to both start a general mobilization about two weeks before they did it. The late mobilization was an overreaction to the fact that in the lead-up to World War I mobilizations arguably forced the diplomats' hands and kept them from cooling down the situation.

At the start of World War II, the Germans were already mobilized before the French or Poles started full mobilization, though both had done secret partial mobilization. That early edge in mobilization made the German job much easier. Look at it this way: Historically the Poles had approximately 600,000 of a possible 2.5 million man army mobilized and in position when the Germans invaded. Now the Poles probably couldn't have armed and equipped all of those men as effective units, but they could have more than doubled the number of men armed and ready to oppose the Germans given full mobilization.

Let's say France and Poland go for full mobilization as soon as the Germans do, or at least by early August. On September 1, most of the Polish formations are armed and in place. The French are fully in place for an immediate advance into Germany. In that case, Germany either stands down or takes a mad chance that the French will stay passive and the Germans can take down a fully mobilized Polish army before they run out of ammunition.

As you've probably figured out, I've been trying to figure this out in my own mind as I write. It's one of those situations where the seemingly hopeless underdog could potentially come out okay with a little tweaking, but for the life of me I can't come up with a tweak that I consider likely to happen given the leadership of Britain and France and that still leads to the Germans running out of ammunition.

Part of the problem is that it's hard to wrap my mind around the idea of the Germans losing in the second or third month of the war, which seems to be the logical outcome of them running out of ammunition by the middle of the second month. Most likely scenario in that case: the German army uses what little ammo they have left to overthrow Hitler, and then bluffs by offering a peace that gives Poland back most of the country except for the Polish corridor and parts of Silesia. The Poles probably wouldn't go for that, but if the Germans were smart they would unilaterally cease offensive actions and start withdrawing, announcing a set of stages which would get them back to near the original border, while frantically making ammo in case the Allies decide not to buy into the offer. They could hold onto some hunks of Polish territory to exchange for a peace treaty, as well as large numbers of Polish prisoners of war to add to the pressure on Poland to accept the treaty. They might even demand the return of German colonies in exchange for full withdrawal from Poland minus the corridor.

The Nazis would probably scream "Stab in the back 2.0" and the army wouldn't be able to officially say anything until they (a) got a peace treaty, or (b) got the ammunition supply situation straightened out.

What do you think? Am I missing anything? Assuming things played out this way, what happens next? Do the Germans resign themselves to being a second rate regional power chronically short of foreign exchange, or do they continue the military buildup, though presumably at a more rational pace? Without the loot from Poland and ruthless exploitation of Polish manpower and agricultural resources, the Germans would have to cut back military spending pretty drastically, and much of what they did spend in the short term would have to be on ammunition and repairing damaged vehicles (about half of the German truck fleet was temporarily out of commission by the end of the Polish campaign.

If the Germans were able to trade parts of Poland for some of their colonies—most likely Cameroon and Togo but not Tanganyika or Southwest Africa—we would probably see some nasty stuff going on there, even with German militarists as opposed to Nazis.

Would the Nazis come back to power? Depends on how the army played it. Getting your army into a

World War when you only have enough ammo to take down a minor power like Poland and then only if you catch them before they mobilize and get perfect weather is embarrassingly bad leadership. Historically Hitler got away with it, but it was still stupid.

Germans Catch Half the BEF at Lille

Another Hat tip to **Blitzkrieg Legend,** *by Karl-Heinz Frieser*

There has been a lot of speculation about what would have happened if the Germans had taken Dunkirk before the British got most the BEF out. The halt orders have been debated endlessly. There is another possibility though. According to Frieser, there was a realistic chance that the Germans could have cut off four of the nine BEF divisions that were headed for Dunkisk (okay, not quite half, but close), along with quite a few additional French divisions in a pocket around Lille. Historically the Germans trapped roughly 35,000-40,000 French troops in the city where the French fought to the last bullet to keep pressure off the evacuation at Dunkirk.

Let's say the Germans close the trap around a big hunk of the BEF and a considerably larger part of the French army at Lille. Presumably the remainder of the BEF and a smaller contingent of French troops than were historically available still form a perimeter around Dunkirk. I suppose it's possible that the BEF might launch an attempt to break through to the trapped troops, but given the demoralization of the period, I doubt that they would risk the remaining troops in that way.

So, a little over half the BEF and a smaller contingent of French troops arrives at Dunkirk. They set up a perimeter, smaller and weaker than the historic one, and the British start withdrawing troops. The evacuation probably wouldn't have gone as well as it did historically because the perimeter would be either smaller or weaker, probably both. If the Germans can get within artillery range of the port facilities, the evacuation quickly becomes a bloody shambles. There is also going to be an irreducible minimum number of men left behind. That's inherent in having to guard a perimeter. Historically about 30,000-40,000 French soldiers and a few British troops didn't make it out.

Historically, according to Wikipedia, 338,226 Allied soldiers (198,229 British and 139,997 French), were evacuated. In this scenario a maximum of around 148,000 British soldiers would be available for evacuation. Given historic British casualty figures at Dunkirk, (around 68,000 killed wounded or prisoners—though I'm not sure how much of the campaign that covers) they should be able to get out about 80,000 troops. That would be around 40% of the historic number. Depending on how the battle around the perimeter went, that figure might be a little higher or a little lower, but you're probably talking no more than half the historic figure, with 40% as the most likely.

So what impact does that have on the rest of the war? First, it prolongs Britain's period of maximum vulnerability. The soldiers of the BEF provided a core of trained men. Once they were rearmed, the British were still vulnerable to a major German invasion, but not to something on the scale that the Germans could actually get ashore. With less than half the trained manpower in this scenario, the British remain vulnerable to German small-scale raids.

Second, the British also have more difficulty raising new divisions because they have fewer officer and non-coms to train and lead them. They would be desperate for experienced military men, and would probably have to strip experienced officers and non-coms from the colonial portion of the army, probably including the British army in Egypt. That would leave them weaker in the clashes with the Italians and the other small skirmishes like the revolt in Iraq and the early fighting against the Germans in North Africa.

Is there a chance that the British would have sued for peace? I doubt it, though the trapped British troops would put a damper on British euphoria on the evacuation.

Is there a chance that perception of British weakness

would cause a scramble to partition the British empire? At some level of British disaster at Dunkirk that could have happened. Britain in the summer of 1940 was to some extent like a fundamentally sound bank that probably couldn't survive a big enough bank run. If enough key people in enough countries decided that the British were beaten that would have become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As just one example, the French official who signed large French aircraft and aircraft engine orders over to the British might have signed them over to the US instead, or cancelled them. The Japanese and Spanish might have jumped in to grab their pieces of the empire. The US might have decided to hang onto arms instead of sending them. Why fritter them away in a lost cause when they might soon be needed to resist German advances in the Atlantic. There were plenty of people

in India who wanted the British out. There were plenty of people in Iran who would have been happy to grab British oil concessions The Turks wouldn't have minded having Mosul back. The Egyptians and Iraqis would have been happy to have the British out, though they wouldn't have anywhere close to enough power to do anything about it under normal circumstances.

At some point British enemies would be emboldened, while the commonwealth countries and the US would be forced to look to their own defenses. I don't think this scenario pushes things to that point, but when you're dealing with perceptions of power that's kind of tricky.
[

Stalin Falls Off the Tiger

Unleashing terror is like riding a tiger. It's a wild ride and it's easy to fall off and be consumed.

Stalin unleashed an essentially unlimited terror on the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s. Nobody was safe, not the most dedicated old Bolshevik, not the dedicated foreign communists of the Comintern, and not the Red Army.

That kind of terror does tend to turn on the people who unleash it, as the French Revolution attests. I think that there was a realistic chance of that happening to Stalin, though it wasn't as likely as the actual course of events.

Stalin was wary of subordinates gaining too much power, and tended to purge and execute them. Nikolai Yezhov was one of his major instruments in that process, and advanced to head the NKVD during the worst of the Great Purge. He replaced his mentor Genrikh Yagoda in September of 1936.

Yezhov led the worst of the purges, and actually went far enough that by the summer of 1938 Stalin began to realize that the purge was starting to impair the ability of the Soviet Union to continue industrialization. Stalin decided to dial back on the purges a bit, and replace Yezhov.

Yezhov had been inside the process, so when Stalin brought in Beria as Yezhov's deputy in August of 1938 and Beria started usurping Yezhov's power with Stalin's encouragement, Yezhov could see where the course of events was likely to lead. He was quite

capable of moving through the cut-throat world of Purge-era Soviet politics, and was apparently even tapping Stalin's phone at one point, but as his power was stripped away he collapsed into drunkenness and probably accelerated the process of his ouster by essentially walking away from his job, not showing up much of the time. He was eventually purged and later executed. Other than some drunken boasting about ousting Stalin, he never mounted any serious effort to protect his position against Beria and Stalin.

Human psychology is tricky. Here is a guy who knows he's almost certain to be purged and executed unless he derails Beria and Stalin. He's powerful. He's cutthroat, utterly ruthless, capable of clawing his way to the top of the NKVD, and then leading the purge of the Red Army and much of the rest of the Soviet elite. And yet he collapses.

Let's say he gets some cornered rat courage and some luck. He manages to take out Stalin and frames Beria, probably in September or October of 1938.

That's not easy given Stalin's paranoia, but Yezhov has a tough road ahead even once he carries it out. He is a candidate member of the Politburo but has no major source of power outside the NKVD and fear. He is hated by most of Soviet society, though also feared by it.

Yezhov would probably continue the purges rather than dialing them back. Fear is his major source of power, and

he would want to enhance that fear and eliminate as many rivals as possible in the short term. That means that more of the army is purged, but also that Stalin's loyalists get purged. Molotov would probably be purged early. I'm not sure about Kalinin. He might be allowed to continue his role as kind of puppet leader, at least for a while.

Yezhov would probably not take formal power, even if he was capable of it. He would probably prefer to rule from behind the scenes. Someone like Kalinin would be ideal as a front man, though his loyalty to Stalin might make that a problem.

I put together a list of full and candidate members of Politburo as of early 1934 and their fates, along with the people who were added between 1934 and 1938. I'm guessing that Kaganovich would be too closely tied to Stalin to survive.

With four full members of Politburo left, Yezhov would probably promote himself to full membership and bring in enough cronies to have a majority in the Politburo, though the real center of power would shift to the NKVD, at least in the short-term. I'm not sure what he would do with Zhdanov and Kruschev.

Yezhov probably wouldn't last long. I would give him maybe a year or a year and a half at the most. Too unstable to handle absolute power without eventually disintegrating. Call it October or November of 1939.

He would probably push the purge to unprecedented levels, purging Stalin loyalists, and probably including the NKVD itself in the purges toward the end. The military would get another round of purges to get rid of Stalin loyalists and anyone that seemed like a potential threat. That would probably include Zhukov.

How would all of this impact Soviet foreign policy? Probably not much for the rest of 1938. Even if the new regime wanted to help the Czechs in the lead-up to Munich they couldn't do much unless the Poles or Romanians were willing to let Soviet forces go through their countries, which would be if anything less likely under Yezhov.

Under Stalin, the Soviets pretty much wrote off the Spanish Republicans in late 1938 and early 1939. There is

some possibility of Yezhov making more of an effort to help, but it's more likely that the continued insanity of the Soviet purges would, if anything, cause the Spanish Republic to fall a little sooner than it did historically. The Soviets were supporting Chinese resistance to the Japanese. I doubt that much would change there, though the contagion of purges might spread to the Chinese communist party. I doubt that though. The Chinese did things their own way even at this point though, so I doubt that would make much difference.

Assuming that the Yezhov regime lasted, 1939 would get interesting. I haven't been able to find anything on his foreign policy views, but I suspect he would be cautious, or actually preoccupied by his efforts to consolidate power at home. The continued instability and purges would probably attract unwelcome attention from the Japanese sometime in 1939. Whether or not they were the aggressors in our time-line, the Japanese would push aggressively on the disputed border in Manchuria.

Something like the Nomanham battle would probably happen in the summer of 1939, though the details and location might be different. Given almost another year of full-throttle purges, the Soviets probably wouldn't do particularly well, though their overwhelming superiority in firepower would make up for poor leadership to some extent. I suspect that the Soviets would lose a lot of men and material but grind out a draw that the Yezhov regime would celebrate as a victory.

Would the Soviets go for a pact with the Germans in the Autumn of 1939? I doubt that Yezhov regime would be confident enough in its power to do something as drastic as that.

So where do we go from here? How long does the Yezhov regime last? If it falls, how does that happen? Who takes over? What role does the Soviet Union play in World War II?

I'm out of time, but I would like to get back to this one next issue.

Soviet Politburo – early 1934, with additions and subtractions through 1938

Full Members

Andreyev	Stayed in Politburo until 1952 (sounds like a non-entity)	
Voroshilov	Marshall of the Soviet Union, incompetent as a military leader, was able to stay in politics until the 1960s	

Kaganovich	In politics until 1957, but lost influence after Stalin died, part of the opposition to Kruschchev		
Kalinin	Nominal head of state, house kept surrounded by KGB during the Great Purges		
Molotov			
Kirov	Assassinated Dec1, 1934		
Kosior		Arrested May 1938	
Kuibyshev	Died Jan 25, 1935		
Ordzhonikidze	Suicides May 25, 1937		
Stalin			

Candidate Members

Mikoyan	Full Member Feb 18,1937	Remained in Soviet politics into the 1960s	
Zhdanov	Candidate Member Feb 18, 1937		
Yezhov	Candidate Member October12, 1937		
Khrushchev	Candidate Member April 29,1938		
Petrovsky??		Not sure when he left the Politburo, but may have been 1938	
Postyshev	Relieved of duties Jan 14, 1938		
Rudzutak	Expelled May 25, 1937		
Chubar??	Full Member Feb 18,1937	Relieved of duties March 22, 1939	Arrested June 1938??
Eikhe	Candidate Member Feb 18, 1937	Arrested May 3, 1938	

Britain Keeps Florida

Several years ago I looked at what might have happened if the British had been able to hold on to the American deep south at the end of the Revolutionary War. Let's try something a little more modest.

What actually happened: A very competent and aggressive Spanish commander managed to grab a strong enough position in Florida that it was awarded to Spain at the end of the war.

What might have happened: The British defeats in Florida were not preordained.. They were largely a matter of timing and who deployed their forces most effective. Let's say that the British end the war in control of Florida. This was a fight between Britain and Spain and Florida goes to Britain instead of Spain at the end of the war.

So what does Britain do with the colony? Among other things, most of the 3,500 black loyalists (African-Americans who fought on the British side in the American Revolution) who historically ended up in Nova Scotia would probably end up there, along with a few others who historically were already in Florida.

A large free black population in Florida would make the area a magnet for slaves in adjoining areas of the US south.

That would be an ongoing source of friction with the US, as would British efforts to maintain influence with the major Indian tribes in the Southeast.

Some of the tens of thousands of non-African American loyalists who historically went to various parts of Canada would undoubtedly settle in Florida too. Actually several thousand loyalist refugees fled to Florida during the American Revolution and then went to Nova Scotia or back to England when the British gave it up.

Florida would be a focus of US/British conflict in the War of 1812, of course. I doubt that the US would take it back unless the British decided that it wasn't worth the effort. I doubt that they would do that at the end of the war because they would see it as being too useful in containing the US and maintaining British influence on the major Indian tribes of the Southeast. Florida would also be a convenient dumping ground for African American populations that were accumulating in Britain itself for various reasons.

One aspect of the British control of Florida: The British colony of Florida was actually two colonies. East Florida was basically the current state. West Florida extended west along the Gulf Coast almost to New Orleans, taking in the bottom third to a half of what are now Mississippi

and Alabama. British control of that area would change the structure of US expansion in the deep south and the ability of the early US to maintain the balance between slave states and free states..

It would also change the nature of Indian wars in the area. The Choctaws would be partially in the British sphere, as would the Creeks. The Creeks would be caught in the middle during the War of 1812, with the both sides trying to get the tribe to side with them and with Creek country probably getting fought over several times during the war. That would probably abort or reshape the Red Stick war.

The large free black population in East Florida would undoubtedly be a continued irritant between the British administration in the two Florida provinces and the United States. Florida would become a refuge for runaway slaves, and the British would probably recruit slaves as porters and even soldiers in their inevitable attempts to invade Georgia and maybe South Carolina during the War of 1812. Assuming that the boundaries stayed about the same at the end of the war, the British would end up with more slaves who had been promised freedom on their hands, presumably swelling the African-American population still further.

I'm not sure what the white loyalist population would think of all of this. Presumably at least some of them would be slave-holders or ex-slave holders. There would undoubtedly be considerable friction between the two groups, and probably quite a few runaways from local slaveowners.

After the War of 1812, there would probably be a period of a kind of cold war, with the southern states and the British Florida provinces eyeing each other warily for at least the next fifty or sixty years, and to some extent longer, but with the main governments not willing to fight round three.

As noted, British control of this territory would shift the balance between Slave and Free states early on. There might still be a Mississippi and Alabama even though they would be much smaller than the historic versions. There wouldn't be a state of Florida though. Historically, Florida became a state in 1845, just a few months before Texas.

BTW: If you can believe Wikipedia, West Florida shares another distinction with Texas: it was briefly an independent country. In this case the independence lasted about 90 days in 1810. There's a challenge for another day: End up with an independent Republic of West Florida surviving as long as possible.

Ahem. Back to our current scenario. Speaking of Texas, there was talk of Britain taking over the Republic of Texas before the US annexed it. Already having a southern tier of Provinces might make that more attractive to the British. On the other hand, frostier and more threatening relations between the US and Britain might make a British Texas seem more like a threat to the US, and might make the US more anxious to annex Texas. That in turn could lead to an earlier Mexican-American war. Not sure what the consequences of that would be.

Speaking of the Mexican-American war, assuming that it happened approximately the same way as it did historically, the impact of the British owning most of the ports on the Gulf Coast would be interesting. The US would have far less capacity to generate military power in the Gulf of Mexico, and the British would have far more.

What kind of an economy would British Florida develop? I'm guessing that West Florida would develop a cotton plantation-based economy, much as the area did historically. That would cause issues if the British abolished slavery in most of the empire on schedule in 1833. They did exempt certain parts of the empire from abolition, so it's possible they might exempt West Florida. If not, they would probably have a five or ten year "apprenticeship" for slaves, that was essentially a temporary extension of slavery for slaves more than six years old.

I'm not sure where this goes from here. Cotton plantation-type slavery had to either expand or die due to its impact on the soil, and by the time of the Civil War a lot of the eastern slave state plantations were essentially breeding slaves for the newer slave states to the west, though they vehemently denied that.

There are a lot of ways to go with this. What would the impact of British abolition right across the border be on the south? How would the existence of a large population of free blacks near the border affect relations between plantation owners and slaves in the remaining slave states? How would the reduced exports of cotton to the British empire affect the US balance of payments? Would any of this affect the timing of the invention of the cotton gin?

At this point, the number of branches gets nearly impossible to follow without deciding on which way some of them go, and unfortunately I'm running out of time. No guarantees, but I would like to get back to this next issue.

Scenario Seeds – Moving the Colonies Around

French Brazil: The French made two attempts to seize parts of Brazil, with the second one lasting for quite some time and garnering quite a number of Indian Allies, who were left in the lurch when the French abandoned their efforts. What if the French had been able to hang onto a substantial part of Brazil? (Gerson?)

Dutch Brazil: The Dutch tried their hand in Brazil too, like they did in most of the Portuguese colonies. What if they had been able to carve out a chunk and hold onto it?

Dutch Angola: As you probably noticed in the article on the Kongo last issue, the Dutch were nosing around Angola and tried to take it from the Portuguese a couple of times. What if they had succeeded? Portuguese equivalents of the Boers heading inland? That could be fun.

Spanish Angola: The Spanish were also nosing around Angola. What if they had grabbed the colony and held on?

Brazilian Angola: This isn't likely because of the disease differential between Africa and South America, but I could see some kind of federation during the Napoleon years evolving into a more permanent relationship.

British Philippines: In 1762, the British seized Manila and held it until the peace treaty ending the French and Indian war (as we like to call it). Negotiators apparently didn't know that the city and the surrounding areas had surrendered, so the treaty didn't specifically address the fate of the Philippines. That meant that it fell under a general clause in the treaty that left control of areas not specifically mentioned in their original hands. At this point, Spain didn't control most of the Philippines, so control of Manila and the surrounding area meant control of the most important part, though not all of the Philippines.

The Ezo Republic survives: This isn't strictly speaking a 'moving the colonies around thing. The Ezo Republic was declared by die-hard supporters of the Tokugowa Shogunate on the northern island of Hokkaidō after they lost a brief civil war against the forces of the restored Japanese emperor in 1868. The Republic didn't last long, in spite of, or possibly partly because of its French military advisors. The rebels were hurt badly when a couple of their larger ships were destroyed in storms and when the US sold the other side a modern ironclad. France and England both recognized the Republic during its brief existence. So, two competing Japans?

Hokkaido was relatively newly and sparsely settled by the Japanese, and still had a relatively large Ainu population, so it wouldn't be a military power on the same scale as the rest of Japan. It probably wouldn't be viable in the long term without help from the outside, so possibly an informal French protectorate?

Note: I thought this was an original, but it has already been discussed on the alternatehistory.com forum. Nothing new under the sun I guess.

What I'm Currently Reading/Recently Read

Toxic Shock Syndrome – *Ken Coffman:* Not AH and not really science fiction, though someone in it is creating an army worthy of Dr. Evil using somewhat science fiction means. The main character is Glen Wilson, an improbable mixture of hard-boiled adventurer, Forest Gump, and Robin Hood. Glen usually wakes up in a strange bed at least once per novel, usually with cash missing and no idea how he got there. Sometimes he's sharing the bed with a woman or two that he doesn't remember. In this one he wakes up in bed with two and married to another one, with no memory of having consummated the marriage or of the sequence of events that led to him waking up in bed with two hookers (who had robbed him and who he then proceeds to rob). Not exactly my usual faire, but the two books in the series I've read so far I have both grabbed me in the kind of way where I finish the book inside a day.

Cryptonomicon – *Neal Stephenson* – I'm trying to broaden my range of science fiction authors outside of Alternate History and go for some of the bigger names. This is part of that process. So far I'm finding it hard to read more than a couple of pages at a time. There is enough of interest on those pages to keep me reading and hoping I figure it all out, but so far this hasn't sucked me in.

The Blitzkrieg Legend – *Karl Heinz Frieser:* Translated (sometimes poorly or in the case of some maps not at all) from

German. Some interesting tidbits in the first half, but starts repeating platitudes toward the end. Interesting views on the origins of the German Sickle Cut strategy that cut the French and British armies off in Belgium, and some good information on German weaknesses in the Polish campaign and the period leading up to the Battle of France. The Germans were very unhappy with their army's performance in Poland and did a massive retraining job in the seven-plus months between the campaigns. They still had a long ways to go outside the elite divisions that led the assault, but that massive retraining gave them a major edge over the French, who did far less training in the intervening period.

For what it is worth, the book talks about several specific cases where French Communists supposedly sabotaged French weapons in ways that would have gotten French soldiers killed. I've heard it asserted that none of those accusations ever panned out, so you might want to read that part of the book with caution.

The author mentions that a French overreaction to an invasion scare in January 1940 gave away the French war plan to German intelligence. He also mentions in passing that the Germans had cracked the French radio codes, but doesn't elaborate. He is harshly critical of French commanders at two points: (1) When Weygand took over from Gamelin and took 3 days to assess the situation before ordering essentially the same thing Gamelin had planned, and (2) Shortly after the German crossing of the Meuse, when the French 3rd DCR (heavy armored division) planned and offensive that would almost certainly have destroyed a key German bridgehead. The French dithered, postponed, and finally ended up using only a fraction of their strength. In another case, local commanders commandeered the services of the tank companies of one of the French DLMs (light armored divisions) and spread them out across the front. Supposedly the high command had to threaten them with court martial before they would release the tanks, a process that kept one of the more powerful French mobile divisions essentially immobilized for some crucial days not long after the German breakthrough.

Stalin's Keys to Victory *– Walter S..Dunn, Jr:* Gives an interesting perspective on the way the Soviets were able to recover from the losses of the last half of 1941, and launch an offensive in December 1941. Essentially the Soviets called up guys in their late thirties who had been in the army in the later stages of the Russian Civil War, gave them 3 months of refresher training, and armed them as well as possible, almost entirely by their own efforts at this stage in the war, though the penny packets of western aid undoubtedly helped. Toward the end of the German 1941 offensive Stalin was allocating individual tanks to the front from his reserve. The Soviets were able to sort of make up for their equipment losses because they had built very large and very efficient plants in the 1930s, many of them with the help of US experts on mass production from the likes of Ford. They designed weapons with a brutal logic. Soviet World War II weapons weren't designed to last much longer than they were likely to survive in battle, and if they weren't destroyed in the predicted time they were worn out anyway.

The Soviets essentially sacrificed their recycled Russian Civil War veterans in order to slow the Germans down enough to train and equip a second wave of new divisions, which provided the bulk of Soviet manpower in the Soviet winter offensive of 1941. The Soviet approach of monster factories would have been extremely vulnerable to strategic bombing if the Germans had been able to reach them, but of course they couldn't.

One interesting (if true) factoid late in the book: the German army held back around 600,000 trained men who could have gone to the front in May/June 1944 time-frame. The plotters against Hitler supposedly figured they would need those guys to fight the SS after they killed Hitler. Supposedly holding those guys back from the front made the Allied job in June/July 1944 much easier, but also made it possible for the Germans to recover from their massive losses to a greater extent than they otherwise would have been able to in the fall of 1944.

POD Member Comments

The Cover: This Intellectual Property stuff is getting out of hand. That's all I can say. Not that it would help in this case, but I'm starting to wish that we could go back to a set number of years copyright, plus one renewal. Maybe 25 years, and then one renewal at a nominal fee, maybe plus one or two more with a substantial renewable fee. Registration required for all renewals.

Robert Alley: I went back to the last issue you were in (#50—has it really been two years?) and figured I would respond to your last zine. I don't remember what I said in response in #51, if anything, so please excuse any duplications.
<<<snip>>>
Your comments to me: More Japans: You certainly chose the logical ones.

I would put Egypt near the top of the list. Maybe a more frugal leadership could keep the debt from getting too far out of hand and avoid British occupation. Do that until World War I, and then stay out of the war or exploit it to expand a bit.

Thank you for pointing me to the bit about the "Kingdom of Auracania and Patagonia". Quite a dramatic story, and historically a sad end to a one of the Indian groups that fought longest and hardest against European encroachment. I'll have to dig into the history of the Auracanians a bit more. They had adopted metal-working (actually knew how to make bronze before European settlement started), horses, etc. Up against a reasonably modern mid-to-late 1800s armies they stood little chance. The key would be to get them into a path toward making modern weapons decades before the crunch time. Rapid-fire rifles temporarily made European armies just about unbeatable by anyone who didn't have them in the 1870-1920 timeframe.

We would also need to preserve and expand the Auracanian population base in the decades leading up to the crunch time. I believe it was around half a million when the conquest started—probably not enough to build a state capable of dealing with Chile.

The Jesuit reductions definitely had potential. At their height they had a population of around 150,000. Probably not large enough to do a Japan on their own. Of course they were subject to the usual depopulation from diseases that all Indian populations were subject to. Now if Jesuits had been able to figure out a germ theory and vaccination, things could have gotten a lot more fun.

The five civilized tribes in the southeast certainly had potential. Some of them, especially the Cherokees, adapted quickly and well. The issue there, once again, was size of the population. The major tribes of the Southeast were all conglomerates of groups shattered by disease and slave raiding promoted mainly by South Carolina. Archeology of the protohistoric period in the Southeast shows that culture in the area gradually simplified. The upper levels of Indian societies and the skilled craftsmen either died of disease or no longer had a large enough base of peasants to support them. The Spanish mission settlements in Florida got hit by a series of epidemics. Some of those epidemics undoubtedly spread north to most of the southeast. The process of depopulation got a lot worse after South Carolina was settled. South Carolina was settled from Barbados, already a plantation-slavery based society, and they promoted large-scale slave raids that restructured Indian society into participants in the slave raids, either perpetuators or victims—actually both categories were victims to a certain extent. The tribes that survived were the ones hat figured out that they had to participate in the raids to buy the guns that kept them from being victims. I don't know how you stop that process. Without the Spanish settlements in Florida, the spread of disease would be slower, but then the Indians wouldn't have had time to adapt to some extent to some of the disease by the time of European settlement.

On the Nazis gaining a lodgment in North or South America. Yeah, they would need some way of getting stuff to the area in the face of a British naval superiority they weren't going to be able to beat with conventional surface ships. Putting most of the resources they put into battleships into submarines would have certainly helped in terms of naval power. I don't know if purpose-built cargo subs would have made sense as a military investment. They couldn't have built them until they broke out of the treaties restricting their weapons.

They might have built a lot of fast cargo ships with potential to be converted quickly into commerce raiders when Hitler broke out of the arms limitations. The Germans were always short on cash throughout the interwar years, so potential commerce raiders would have to pay for themselves for the most part.

The Germans might have built a fleet of passenger Flying Boats like the ones PanAm used in the Pacific, maybe building them instead of the Zeppelins. Not sure how that would help with Germans in South America.

A possibility for German economic penetration: After the big Texas oil discoveries in the early 1930s, a lot of the US oilmen in Venezuela came back to participate in the Texas oil boom. If the Germans had jumped in at the right point they might have picked up oil interests in Venezuela that were economically important. How they would defend those interests in the face of British and US naval superiority. Maybe long-range aircraft and good air to ocean torpedoes would do some of it. Developing torpedoes like the Japanese Long Lance or even conventional torpedoes that worked would probably have helped too. The Germans had almost as unreliable torpedoes as the US did at the beginning of World War II, though I believe they fixed theirs a little faster than we fixed ours.

Your comments to Cron: I can't see us doing a one-way to the moon deliberately. It might be interesting to have the astronauts from the last moon landing stranded there by some failure of the lunar lander. I wonder how NASA would have dealt with that. Maybe cobble together a series of resupply missions with whatever leftover Apollo hardware or even smaller expendables they could toss up there, and then try to get a left-over Saturn V/lander combination up there somehow. I'm not sure enough hardware existed to put something like that together or that it could have been put together fast enough to save the stranded Astronauts. Hmmm. I believe I was reading that very small amounts of water is locked up in lunar soils outside of the polar crater deposits. If that is true, maybe desperate astronauts could stumble across the fact and figure out some way of extracting it. I'm afraid that's beyond my technical expertise though.

Dale Cozort: Yes, as usual I'm commenting on my own zine. As you've probably figured out, the Kongo stuff was all real. No Alternate History at all. It didn't start out that way. I had a couple of PODs I intended to add. The problem was that they paled in comparison to the real history.

Think of it this way: An area of Africa almost unknown to most modern westerners became a thoroughly Roman Catholic society. They then proceeded to get involved in the power politics of Portugal, Spain, and Holland. They generated their own Joan of Arc type figure, their own intrigues, and their own Manzikert-like defeat, in a climactic battle that involved American Indian soldiers from Brazil. And the state survived at least in peoples' minds strongly enough that there were people who wanted to reestablish it as late as the 1960s. That's hard to top.

Did the portions of *Snapshot* and *Mars Looks Different* read a little smoother this time? I wanted to show you the unedited version for the first portion, but you shouldn't have to read rough draft for very long. The portions of both stories in POD #59 got a fair amount of editing, but they're still not in final form. The *Snapshot* portion in issue #60 is closer to final form, but not there yet. I've done most of the cutting—ended up cutting word count by around 20%, but the word choices still need work.

Anthony Docimo: Congratulations on becoming an uncle. Enjoyed your quotes.

Reality seeds: An Iranian Space Program under the Shah? I don't think it would save him. I don't know how it would do under the early Islamic Republic. Since space program sort of equal ballistic missile program, the Israelis might have taken an interest in the chaos of the early post-Revolution and the scientists involved might have lead poisoning accidents.

Amelia Earhart ditches near New Guinea: Well, the impact would depend partly on whether she survived/was rescued or not. If she died there she would probably would have faded from public consciousness to some extent, though she was a major celebrity and would have continued to have been remembered to some extent after her death. The mystery of her disappearance is part of the magnitude of her legend. An ordinary death wouldn't have generated quite the same legend. If she had lived, I'm not sure what the impact would have been. As far as I know, she didn't speak out politically in the way Lindbergh did, though her activities had a political impact in terms of inspiring women to do non-traditional things. I'm not sure if her continued life would have done more to promote that than her disappearance did.

Here is a reality seed back at you (inspired by yours): What if Buddy Holly and the musicians with him the night of his fatal crash had somehow gone far enough astray to crash into some remote river or lake unnoticed? The stars and their plane simply disappear, spawning a minor industry of conspiracy theories, fake Buddy Hollys, etc. All of that might make the legend of the guys involved even bigger than it was historically. Not an earth-shattering what-if, but kind of fun.

Early Sputnik crashes into Beijing: Not real high probability given the size of the city compared to the potential crash zones, but kind of fun to speculate about.

Interesting possible use for Dollhouse-type tech. To be honest I didn't understand all of what was going on in your Dollhouse story. I get the part about trying to recreate the mind of a female astronaut from the 1960s and validate it in a variety of simulated real world situations (and that's a cool idea), but I didn't understand the why of the situation.

Your comments to me: Yeah, I would like to see the APA grow back to the point where 30 copies were needed. If that happens and people need back issues of some of the 15 copy zines I can always scan the zines in as PDFs and then make more copies. Kind of expensive, but if someone needs them and is willing to pay I could do it. BTW: I now have most if not all of the back issues/spec copies that Jim still had. I think Alley may still have the ones from the issues where he and I worked on the distribution together.

David Freitag: I'm trying to get to everyone who was in issue #50. I think I already commented on your #50 in issue 51, but I want to go back and chat about it again. You started on issue 4 to kind of force you to write down thousand-page epics you had in your head. I went through the same thing for over thirty-five years. I did write most of one novel (a really horrible one) back when I was in my 20s, but never finished it. I have notebooks full of notes to stories I can't even remember well enough to make sense of the notes.

I started actually finishing stories around 1995, two or three years before I joined POD. I'm not sure what changed, but I actually finished a novel. When I say "finished", that's kind of a misnomer. I got to a stopping point where the first book in a series would end and a second one would start. The result was a little over 60,000 words long. It had a decent idea behind it, and a few decent scenes. I never tried to get an agent, or sell the story as a novel. I did break it down into four novellas and sent the first of them off to the pro-zines rather naively. I got mostly form rejections, but didn't give up. I wrote a series of novellas and sent them off, again with no success.

A famous writer (can't remember which one) said that you have to write a million words of crap before you write something worth reading. That's not always true and writing a million words of crap doesn't magically turn you into a writer worth reading, but I have written considerably over half of that million words now, probably close to a million if you count rewrites.

I write pretty much every day, no matter what. One published writer I talked to quoted a famous writer (again, can't remember the name) as saying "If I leave my art (writing) for a day it leaves me for three." That's about right. If I don't write for a while, it gets harder to write and slower. The quality goes down too. It comes back in not very long—a week or a little less, but it's frustrating having to work to get back to a level you've already been.

I've been fortunate so far (knock on wood) that I haven't been burglarized or had someone burn down my place of residence. Losing your computer or couch-surfing obviously makes everything, including writing, much harder.

I don't remember all of the ideas and scenarios you mention in issue #50, but I do remember being intimidated when Jim first gave me the spec issue for POD and suggested that I send something in. I read through the issue (I think it was issue 10) and didn't comment because I was afraid I would look stupid.

I do remember your effort to put together a strait for Drake to find. That stood out in my mind for some reason. I also remember and will be forever grateful for your index to the first twenty-odd issues. That was a totally irrational act of greatness if that makes any sense. In other words, it was an act of obsession and a great service to the APA.

I also remember Kasyada. Very ambitious. Very idealistic. A place where they managed to do things right for the most part—not inhumanly perfect but better than any of the major power societies have done in reality.

On backpacking and semi-independent Maya: sounds very cool. I understand your dilemma on the saving versus experiences issue. It's hard to understand the world without having been out in it. That's a problem for me as a writer. Being there gives you all the gritty little details of reality. A good storyteller who has been there can come close to getting you to understand as well as you would if you had been there, but inevitably something is lost.

I hope you find your writing voice and get the stories in your head down on paper. We would be happy to see them in POD. If you don't write, but you find something else in your life that makes you happy, I guess that's good too.

Robert Gill: AH Battlestar Galactica sounds fun in a demented way. Russian Napoleon-era death zeppelin: sounds far more dangerous to builders and crew than to the French, and especially Napoleon. It would be

interesting to think through the consequences of Napoleon being killed, or better yet captured by the Russians in the retreat from Moscow. Actually, either option could be fun to explore. Who would fill the power vacuum in France and how long would the coalition against him hold together without the common enemy.

A disease theory in the 1600s or 1700s would be kind of cool. Of course earlier smallpox vaccination would have had an even bigger impact. A smallpox epidemic shaped the American Revolution.

Napoleon's army not getting nearly wiped out by Typhus would have some interesting impacts. I'm not sure the Russians would have folded after a decisive defeat at Borodino, or even if they would have fought the battle. The Russians still had the vast Russian spaces and General Winter on their side, and Russian nationalism seemed to be trumping the class differences.

Your comments to Sidaway: Burning Dan Brown books? Not an all bad thing, though I generally think lousy books should be ignored rather than burned. On apocrypha: yeah, a lot of them were junk or forgeries and deserved to be ignored. A US version of Torchwood on Fox? Yipes. Better than a US version of Dr. Who on Fox. One of the key appeals of Dr. Who is the British-centric nature of the program. I don't think it would translate at all well.

Your comments to me: Actually, the Internet in 2011 is still sort of functioning after the snapshot. All the sites that are hosted on servers outside the US would be gone, and some of the connection that went through satellites, but it would sputter on, and I think I mention that in passing, though thinking back it's probably more ambiguous than it should be, and a couple of things I say could be interpreted as meaning that the Internet went down completely.

On the Villa stuff: My understanding is that there were individuals in the US who wouldn't have minded adding another chunk of Mexico to the United States, but it didn't rise to the level of official policy. I'll have to check out the Ringside Seat book if I do the Villa scenario. Sound fascinating, especially the characters.

Soviet Superplane: They did build some really big bombers, but the picture in the zine was probably the result of a prankster with mad Photoshop skills, a fact that I figured out shortly after I sent out the zine. Oh well. Still cool.

On the Toba Volcano: I'm guessing that it didn't wipe out Asian Homo erectus, though it probably bottlenecked the population pretty badly. As you probably heard, DNA testing on a finger bone from Siberia indicated that it was from a previously unknown (at least from a genetic point of view) human species or subspecies from around 40,000 years ago. The DNA seems to indicate that the population involved diverged from our type of humans about a million years ago (versus half a million for Neanderthals). That led some commentators to suggest that the owner of the finger was from a previously unknown migration out of Africa. That may be true, but in my opinion it's more likely that it's Asian Homo erectus. Homo erectus reached Asia quite a bit before a million years ago—probably closer to two, but genetic divergence wouldn't measure when the population reached Asia. It would measure when the Asian and African populations stopped interbreeding or interbreeding slowed to the point where genetically distinguishable populations could arise.

Were Neanderthals and Asian Homo erectus separate species? That's hard to say. Some subspecies of chimps are genetically more distinct from one another than either Neanderthals or the finger bone people were from us, at least in terms of the length of time they've been genetically distinct. It's logical that there would be continuum between animals in the same species on the one end and fully distinct species on the other, and there would be groups that don't fit neatly into the "same species/different species" dichotomy.

There could be several processes at work. If two group are geographically isolated, they will drift apart genetically from random mutations over time. How much those genetic differences translate into physical and behavioral differences depends on how similar the environmental niches of the two groups are and how important the physical and behavior differences are to fitting into that niche. There are cases where small animals like rodents are behaviorally and physically so similar that they were considered a single species until someone looked at the genetics and discovered that there were really half a dozen genetically distinct species.

On the other hand, if the ecological niche is very different, the physical appearance and behavior of two populations can be very different even though the genetics aren't very far apart. An example of that would be the huge "lion killer" chimps that developed in areas with no gorillas. An even more extreme example is the polar bear. Genetically, polar bears are very close to brown bears. As a matter of fact, one isolated population of brown bears is actually closer to polar bears genetically than it is to other brown bears, though in terms of appearance and behavior they are closer to the rest of the brown bear population. By the

way, polar bears are a very recent species, and their current habits probably originated after the last interglacial (around 130,000 years ago). Peak temperatures in the last interglacial were apparently quite a bit higher than this interglacial has been so far, and sea levels several meters higher.

Your comments to Johnson: I don't remember the Buffy quote about the library being "a good place for a Nuremburg rally", but it's a good one. Whedon's stuff has a lot of excellent one-liners.

Your comments to Cron: If Nixon had defied the Supreme Court, a lot of what happened next would have depended on the decisions of the people around him and other players in the capital. I hate to say this, but constitutional government and constitutional rights are dependent on the commitment of public officials and the public to them. A popular enough president with good enough communications skills and loyal subordinates could get away with a lot, I'm afraid. On the other end of the spectrum, if your views or lifestyle are unpopular enough it gets difficult to exercise constitutional and legal rights. Constitution is only as good as people's willingness to defend it.

Your comments on the pseudo-Kawato article. Yeah, I was tempted to play it up a bit more, but I felt bad about the situation and didn't want to go too far. I wasn't consciously imitating Hitchhiker's Guide, though I've read it and probably unconsciously modeled the explanation on the scene you mentioned.

I enjoyed the article on Capone's Wisconsin hideout. I hope someone reopens it as a restaurant. I wouldn't mind visiting there.

David Johnson: On California weather. Compared to the Midwest you generally have wonderful weather, but at least our hillsides and houses generally stay in place when it rains. I've probably already told you about the time I was in San Diego and they treated a mild thunderstorm about the same way we would treat a major snowstorm combined with a major tornado.

DeeDee and her reality show: That actually sounds like it might be fun. I generally despise reality shows, but if they choose interesting people and an interesting theme, then don't go over the top I suppose they can be okay. If she makes it onto the show I'll try to watch it, at least a time or two.

Your comments to Sidaway: I've never, so far (knock on wood) lost a computer, or a portable drive. On the other hand I'm paranoid about avoiding putting anything on the computer that I wouldn't want to have on the Internet.

The Staffordshire Hoard: That's a fascinating mystery that, unfortunately will probably never get solved. Somebody took down a large body of wealthy, powerful people armed for war and hid their stuff. Then for some reason none of them were able to get back to the stash—unless, of course this is the remnants of a larger stash and someone lived off the stash for the rest of their lives, or maybe even for a couple of generations. Maybe whoever stashed the stuff got greedy and one faction killed the other off, then didn't have enough people left to handle the problems they would run into when they tried to turn the stash into money. The stash could have also been the result of a Viking or more likely other outsiders raid, and the outsiders stashed it figuring they would be back. One nasty storm and we have a stash that no one knows about.

On the Star Trek references: Yeah, I saw Greg as playing it straight on the Romulan reference, but playing a bit with the Spock reference.

And, you're also right about diet soda in plastic bottles probably being rare. The locals would go mostly for glass returnables. I suppose tourists might bring over plastic bottles. The cost of oil would go up in 2011, which would make plastic more expensive and that might ultimately shift things away from plastics, but all of the plastic bottles in the pipeline would take a while to flow through.

On Poland: Yeah, it's tough being a minor power between two major ones who don't like each other. The geographic logic of the Polish situation is that Poland and Russia partition the Ukraine, then Russia and Germany partition Poland. Happened in the original partitions of Poland, and happened to the revived Polish Republic too. Hopefully the Poles learned their lesson, and hopefully the Ukrainians can actually hold a country together. Ukraine is currently an economic basket case, with the worst debt to GDP ratio in Europe, which is saying something.

On old cars and buses: Yeah, 345,000 miles is impressive. I doubt that my little Hyundai will make it that far, at least under current ownership. On buses as an alternative. Yeah, very time-consuming. I tried to go essentially carless for a year when I lived in Rockford and was going to the local community college. It ate up the days, and not in a pleasant way.

On Torchwood: I watched a couple of episodes of the first season and had a split verdict. One was pretty good. The other one really stunk.

On the power politics of the future: I haven't really thought it through in any kind of depth. The singularity,

if it happens, is almost by definition unknowable in terms of resulting structure. In *Snow Crash*, Stephenson visualizes a mix of anarchy and technology, with virtual worlds playing an important role. The federal government still exists, but is considered just one force among many, with little power outside of federal enclaves.

One aspect of the future: if economies are supposed to keep growing and the rest of the world is supposed to catch up, more of the world's economies are going to have to be in information, virtual world, etc, rather than in tangible goods. Either that or we'll have find either a couple of new worlds or much better ways of using our current one. The question is how to make information valuable when it can migrate so easily and when there is so much of it.

If we do collapse, it probably won't be to the pikemen level, at least not in thirty year. Maybe a hundred.. I suspect that there are enough guns and ammunition floating around that at least some of them would still be in use thirty years after a collapse, assuming the ammunition doesn't deteriorate by then. Kind of depressing in a way, isn't it?

Your comments to Gill: As noted earlier, I've caught up with *Flash Forward* and am kind of enjoying the show. We'll see how the rest of it plays out. Any news on the US version of Torchwood? That doesn't strike me as a great idea, but I may be pleasantly surprised.

Wesley Kawato: Hmmm. I've already covered your zine, because of the mixup. Not much more to say.

Mark Ford: The tank on the cover was supposedly a Soviet prototype designed to maximize tank survival in an environment where tactical nukes are getting tossed around. Given the number and quality of photoshopped weapons going around the net, I wouldn't vouch for it being real, but it was presented as real and looks cool.

Your comments to me: The Italians built what the Brits used to call a "wog-bashing" army in the 1920 and early 1930s. They should have been building a more modern army in the 1936-1940 time-frame, but spent that time wasting Italian resources in the Spanish civil war. The Italians provided a lot of the resources for the Nationalist side and got essentially nothing back for their efforts, except for prestige.

Your comments to Johnson: There are still rumors of Thylacines on the mainland of Australia. One scholarly book on Thylacines hints broadly that there were pockets of Thylacines in parts of Victoria into the mid to late 1850s. The same book claims that while Thylacines were around in Tasmania, several families

sought them out as pets, using them as watch "dogs" and in some cases walking them on-leash. Apparently Thylacines would detect someone coming to an isolated farmhouse noticeably earlier than dogs did. That being said, the genetics and behavior of the new-found Thylacines would undoubtedly puzzle scientists. There is enough surviving DNA from the Tasmanian branch of Thylacines that you could quickly establish that the new version branched off earlier than Tasmania became isolated from Australia. The fact that they tolerate people would be puzzling. Even feral, they would exhibit an ability to adapt to human activities and ability to thrive close to humans that would be puzzling. They might do better close to people because there wouldn't be the same competition from dingoes. Actually, it would be difficult for them to survive anywhere in Australia because of competition from dingoes, non-dingo feral dogs, foxes, and feral cats. By the way, apparently some individual feral cats grow to enormous size in Australia, generating reports of panthers and mountain lions. One "panther" was shot a few years ago and turned out to be genetically a house cat, though much bigger than a housecat normally would be.

Your comments to Gill: Yeah, the loss of some of those early Dr. Who episodes is sad. I almost wonder if it would be possible to recreate them. Obviously the actors/actresses are not around, but I believe the scripts are, and there are books based on the scripts. It wouldn't be quite the same, but it would be something. Every once in a while I hear about a supposedly destroyed episode showing up.

Your comments to me #58: Yeah, the signing over of French orders to the British was an underestimated turning point in World War II. The French official who did that was avoided an awkward situation. It would be interesting to find out how much the French had already paid for those planes. I know they had paid for some of the expansion of aircraft manufacturers in the US.

Churchill's special relationship with the US was a factor in British actions in the June 1940 through Pearl Harbor period. If he had trusted the US less, he might have felt compelled to go for a war that Britain could afford, which would have meant building up just enough to stop an invasion of Britain. Actually, the fact of the matter was that Britain couldn't economically sustain a war against Germany and Italy for more than about nine months. Dialing back armament production and especially arms imports from the US could have stretched that out a bit, but would be dangerous when the British weren't sure the Germans would turn east in 1941.

Your comments to Gill: I can understand the feeling that Hispanics in the US are a potential fifth column,

but my experience is that the vast majority of them want no part of being ruled by Mexico. They inter-marry, and in a lot of cases their younger kids start to lose their Spanish after a decade or so in the country. In a lot of cases their grandkids don't even learn Spanish. Of course that depends on the community. In areas with a large isolated Hispanic community or one where there is continuing large flow of new immigrants that doesn't happen.

I like your US Civil War what-if. No specific comments on it, but read and enjoyed.

Kurt Sidaway: Wow. That font size is hard to read. I hope that's not because of something I did. It probably was. If so, I'm sorry. On the library renovations: It sounds almost like you and David are competing for most incompetent bureaucracy above you in your respective libraries. No door in the dead of winter gives you a pretty good claim to the lead in that department, though David's mindless bureaucracy is giving yours a run for their money.

Steampunk museum. Okay, I'm jealous. Windycon did a steampunk theme last year and the costume were very cool. The shorts sound like fun and the Verne ripoff sounds like it had its moments.

Your comments to me: Yeah, I obviously need to rethink the ages a bit. Typos/grammar stuff: Yeah, this excerpt needs work in that department. The mouse lemur stuff: Yeah, I need to work out the chronology. There is some stuff hidden behind this that needs work too. On the world-building, I do have a very dry area on the west side of the mountains. It's not quite a dessert, but close. Good idea on the longer rivers and the deltas. I'll have to figure out a way to work that in. The French claiming all of Madagascar: Good idea. I'll work it in, though it'll just be a line or two.

Your comments to Johnson: I feel like I'm losing it. I had never heard of *Being Human* until you mentioned it. I'll have to check it out. (In the original British edition). It's strange. There is apparently a lot of good science fiction/fantasy on TV, but whenever I flip channels TV is a wasteland.

Your comments to Gill: I saw one episode of *Charlie Jade*, but it was apparently late in the series and I couldn't figure out what was going on enough to get into it. I'll have to see if I can get enough backstory to get into it.

Your comments to Cron: Yeah, the Brits shared a lot of technology with us in the early part of the alliance, and unfortunately we were slow on reciprocating toward the end. Then again, Britain's economy right after the war wouldn't have supported development of a lot of the tech.

The sudden cutoff of Lend-Lease was a massive blow to the British economy. That was a bad move on our part in the long run because it cut Britain's ability to be a player in the Cold War, though they certainly did their share. The British/US relationship from 1941 through the early Bush junior years was a bit of an anomaly as relationships between major countries go. The two countries were commercial and to some extent political rivals at times between the wars, but managed to form a durable, though not always friction-free alliance for over fifty years.