

Dale Cozort's

Alternate History Newsletter

Volume 14: Number 1 --- February 2011

What Is This?

For the last fourteen years I've participated in an alternate history APA (Amateur Press Association) called Point of Divergence (POD). POD is a cross between a snail-mail forum and a writers' workshop for people who are seriously into alternate history. We share stories, ideas, facts and reviews on alternate history. This is a subset (about 50%) of the zine I did for POD in February 2011. I stripped out most of the fiction, but there are a few snippets and excerpts of fiction in here. This is one of several dozen alternate history newsletters that I'll eventually make available in e-book formats, so if you like this one, watch for more. All of the material in this is of course copyrighted.

Who Am I?

I'm Dale Cozort, novelist, alternate history buff, and computer guy. I'm married, with two grown daughters. My first novel, *Exchange* is available in trade paperback and a variety of e-books formats. I also have a book-length compilation of American Indian-related alternate history essays called *American Indian Victories* out in trade paperback. If you like what you see here, feel free to stop by Amazon.com or Smashwords and do a search on my name. You can also stop by my website, www.DaleCozort.com, or my blog at <http://dalecoz.livejournal.com>.

So What Have I Been Up To?

Not as much to report this issue as there was last issue. I've still been spending an inordinate amount of time promoting *Exchange*. Other than that, I've spent most of my writing time editing *All Timelines Lead To Rome*. It's much improved, and almost ready for publication in my opinion. I entered it in the Amazon contest (ABNA) for 2011. ABNA is a cattle call, with 5000 entries in General Fiction and up to 5000 in young adult. Most of the entries get cut quickly, with the number in each category dropping to 1000 on the first cut, based only a pitch, then to 250 based on average scores from two Amazon vine reviewers.

The overwhelmingly likely outcome of entry is getting cut in the first two rounds. All but about 5% of the entries do. I got knocked out first round last time with *All Timelines*, which was probably merciful because it was nowhere close to ready. This time I made it through the first cut. The next one will be in late March.

Early last year, Kurt Sidaway did a very thorough and helpful job of serving as another pair of eyes on *All Timelines*. I was busy with other projects and didn't get back to look over his edits until late January of this year. I finally did get to them just before I submitted the manuscript to ABNA, and they

were very helpful. I didn't quite get to all of them before they closed ABNA, but I think I got most of the plot holes he pointed to plugged. Very much appreciated. Thanks Kurt.

I'm still setting ambitious goals for myself. My goal for the next month is to get *Snapshot* both completed and ready for publication by March 11. There is a reason for that deadline. I'm attending a writing conference featuring one of the better known literary agents that weekend. I don't know if I would have a chance to pitch it in person, but if the opportunity arises I would like to be ready.

Of the novels I could get ready by then, I think *Snapshot* has the most breakout potential, though I have an enormous amount to do to get it ready for publication.

Last minute note: As of right before I printed this off, I finished nearly all the edits for *Snapshot*. I still have to blend in a rewritten beginning and wind it up, hopefully in around 5000 words.

With all of the emphasis on novel-writing, I'm afraid I haven't done a lot with alternate history scenarios this time around. The bulk of this issue will be excerpts from *Snapshot* and *There Will Always Be An England*.

A Perspective: I've been writing fiction since middle school. I got serious about it and started finishing a substantial proportion of the stories I started about fifteen years ago. Raymond Chandler used to claim that a writer had to get a million words of crap out of their system before they got to the good stuff. I recently did an incomplete survey of what I've written so far, and come up with 757,302 words of fiction written as of today. That doesn't count rewrites or words written and then cut. If I included words written, and then edited out I'm probably very close to the million words. Here is a summary of my fiction writing so far:

Novels:

4 written

4 more than half written

6 fragments (All but one from very early)

Shorter fiction

19 finished

24 unfinished

Most of the fragments and unfinished stories are from my early years of writing, though I still start an occasional short story that bogs down. I hope to finish three out of the four unfinished novels and at least a couple of the novel fragments.

FICTION SECTION

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE AN ENGLAND (PT2)

This is the second installment of my 2010 NaNoWrite novel. It isn't quite a rough draft. I did a quick edit pass to tighten and get rid of the worst typos. I reduced the word count by a little under 6.5%. My usual rule of thumb is that my rough drafts need two line edit passes that reduce word count by roughly 20% before they're tight enough. So this section has a ways to go. It's hopefully not awful though, and I'm anxious to get preliminary feedback.

For those of you just joining us, in the last installment I ISOTted post-D-Day World War II Great Britain into the stone age, actually into the last interglacial, around 120,000 years ago. You probably think you know where that goes and you're probably wrong. Enjoy.

The rain died down to a drizzle, and the sun poked through the overcast, etching short, sharp shadows on the ground around them. Angry clouds towered to the west, moving in quickly.

"Another storm coming in." Lloyd picked up a rock and chucked it in the general direction of the hyaena. "Maybe worse than the one we were just in."

The radio man said, "What did you do? Fubar us into darkest Africa?"

"Unless someone moved Africa west of France, this isn't Africa," Lloyd said.

"It sure as hell isn't England," the copilot said. He pointed ahead of them. Two hippos waddled out of the river and strolled toward them, a miniature what do you call a baby hippo? racing to keep up with the parents.

"Maybe this is a zoo. Some kind of country estate," Lloyd said. He didn't believe that. Too big. No place on the map big enough with no town and no roads. Nobody rich enough to own that much territory in the middle of a highly populated country in twentieth century Europe.

The hyaenas (five more of them came out of the woods) didn't seem afraid of the humans. They did react to the hippos, staring greedily, then retreating as the hippos stared in their direction. The hippos wandered toward the plane, raising their heads and sniffing the air. They seemed to decide that the plane was not edible or threatening, and wandered away.

"So where are we and how did we get here?" the copilot asked.

Lloyd shrugged. "You had as good a view as I did. We went over Caen and headed west to northwest. We flew half an hour. Look at the map. What's there? Southern England." He got out his map and traced their route with his finger. "Which puts us right here." He pointed to Mendelsham airbase. "And if we missed it, we should have seen Stowmarket here, and other towns here and here and here." He stabbed at the map with his finger. "And if we somehow missed all of that, when we headed back to the coast we should have seen roads here and here. And when we got to the coast we should have seen a town here, a harbor here."

The copilot pointed to the plane. "What do we do with the bodies? Bury them or leave them be for now?"

"I say leave them in the plane for now," Lloyd said. "We don't know where we are. We won't know where to come back for them."

"You just showed us where we are," the copilot said. "You pointed to the map and everything."

"But there's no airbase, no towns, no ships in the channel, no planes flying over the channel."

As he said that, a plane droned in from over the channel. It flew lazily overhead, low enough that Lloyd could see the swastikas on its wings. Ju-52. He reached instinctively for his pistol, then pulled his hand away, conscious of the futility of that gesture. Dozens of parachutes bloomed above them.

"What in the world?" Lloyd wasn't sure who said that, but he felt the same sentiments though much more emphatically. He pulled himself together. "Okay. I don't know where we are or what's going on, but we're US airmen. We're now in survival, escape and evasion."

The copilot took his eyes off the paratroopers with a visible effort and they hustled to salvage what they could from the downed plane. That wasn't much--emergency rations, their pistols and those of their dead comrades, and a few extra boxes of ammunition, along with their canteens and wet weather gear.

"We need to get inland, away from the plane," the copilot said. None of them moved toward the woods. The dark, towering forest seemed far more of a threat than the Germans drifting gently down the sky, none of them directly overhead. Lloyd spotted a ship—a merchantman of some kind--on the horizon in the channel, barely visible through the light rain.

Wind caught the paratroopers and drove them to the east, scattering their neat formation. "I hope they get a couple of lightning bolts," Lloyd said. "Nobody sane drops paratroops in this kind of weather."

"Nobody said our buddy Adolph was sane,"

The paratroopers were close enough that Lloyd could see them spilling air from their chutes, steering away from the ocean. They floated low enough that the forests obscured the rest of their landing. Lloyd figured that most of them made it down on land though.

Lloyd tried to make sense of their situation. If that was Caen, this is impossible. Was it really Caen? He thought back, trying to remember anything that didn't fit with the town they had flown over being Caen. He couldn't think of anything as he reluctantly followed the copilot into the forest in the opposite direction from the paratroopers.

Chapter Three

Roy Fleming was stone cold sober and his stomach churned as the frigate jounced across the English channel. He studied his companions, evaluating them. Expendables for the most part, but with a scattering of more soldierly types. He didn't know names yet and his pounding head and protesting stomach kept him from approaching the others.

The rank animal smell from below the deck didn't help with the stomach though he would normally have taken it in stride. A horse whinnied from down there.

A tall, broad shouldered man strolled over to him and said, "We're getting awful close to Jerry-land. I suppose they don't have artillery on the coast over here."

"Supposedly there aren't any Germans over there except the ones we're trying to catch," Roy said. He turned away to discourage further conversation, but the man persisted.

"Just when you think you've got a handle on this war the Nazis yank it off."

Roy shrugged. "If the Nazis really did this. I'm not sure they did. If they can take an entire island like Britain and move it to wherever we are, they should be able to do a whole lot of other things."

"Maybe they did. Maybe they put us into ape man times and they put New York into dinosaur times, or are they the same thing?"

"No. They aren't, or weren't. No caveman ever saw a dinosaur. At least that's what they told me in school."

"A lot of things they tell you in school don't turn out to be true."

The freighter lurched, as did Roy's stomach. The persistent conversationalist said, "You're looking green, my friend."

"You'll want to move back if you don't want something nasty on your shoes."

The tall guy finally moved away, and Roy turned back to his dark thoughts. The freighter headed northeast, away from Normandy and toward what should be Calais. The channel gaped wider than it should have, and he could only see a faint outline of land at the horizon. An officer walked up, Lieutenant Gilbert according to his insignia and name patch. The group came to attention.

Gilbert said, "We'll be offloading into small boats in half an hour. Get your gear and be ready for anything. We're chasing a couple of hundred Nazis. Some of them have guns. These are tough old boys. Combat veterans we cornered in North Africa."

Roy had heard the speech before so he mostly tuned it out. He did catch a few phrases. "...at least a hundred hostages, most of them women...we're to track them and pin them in place so paratroopers can drop in and do the rescue...they're calling the natives Neanderthals... not sure they really are, but it's close enough for government work."

When the officer finally finished, Roy got his gear together. He checked and cleaned his M1 carbine, trying to keep his mind off his churning stomach.

They were closer to shore now, and Roy spotted what looked like wreckage of several small boats. He thought about the rough channel waters, rougher than their equivalents back home and he wondered if anyone survived a trip in the small craft.

Black dots moved on the wreckage. As they sailed closer to shore the dots resolved into people of a sort. They were burly, muscular looking men, dressed in animal skins. They had heavy brow ridges, but other than that there was little of the ape about them. They stood upright, carrying spears and

sharpened stones. They were white-skinned, many of them with blond or red hair down to their shoulders. Their faces were frankly ugly, with large noses dominating their faces. The women among them were almost as muscular as the men and to Roy's eye no more appealing. A scattering of children worked along the adults, and couple of women carried infants

Someone in the group apparently spotted the freighter. The men waved their spears in either greeting or menace. Studying their faces, Roy guessed at menace.

Offloading the men and horses into the smaller boats was an effort in the rough seas, and Roy lost track of the group around the boats. When he settled in for the final stage of the landing, Roy scrutinized the guys who were going inland with him. He counted a little over fifty. There were horses for each man and some spares, plus pack animals.

The conversationalist ambled over again. "Ape men. I never figured I'd see the likes of that."
"Neanderthals."

"Yeah. What you said. We should probably blow them back into whatever time they came from."

"That probably wouldn't be a good idea."

"What are they going to do, throw rocks at us?"

"Yeah, from a countryside they know and we don't. We could kill them, but we're here to hunt Germans. No need to get sidetracked. Besides, they might tell us where old Adolph's boys got to."

The other soldier shrugged. "If they can talk. And if we can understand them. That'll be a problem."

They landed on a beach half a mile from the Neanderthals and brought the horses ashore, along with a dozen hunting dogs.

The Neanderthals shuffled down the beach toward them, obviously wary. They lined up about thirty yards from the landing area, yelling and keeping their spears in position. They eyed the horses, and especially the dogs nervously.

Lieutenant Gilbert said, "Form a skirmish line, but do not fire unless you hear my order." He walked over to Roy. "You supposedly know how to handle this kind of situation. Handle it."

"Why am I supposed to know how to handle this?"

"South America. Back when you were a kid."

"You know about that?"

"Yep."

I wonder how much they know about that year. Roy decided not to pursue that. "Anybody got an old watch they don't care about?"

Nobody responded. Finally the lieutenant handed Roy a cheap, battered timepiece. Roy strolled past the line of soldiers and sat down on a boulder, sideways to the Neanderthals. He put his rifle beside him, within reach but hopefully not threatening. He lit a match and held it, peering over the flame at the Neanderthals, but not staring at them. They looked scared, but tried not to show it. He let the match burn almost to his fingers, then flicked it onto the ground and scuffed it out with his shoe. He took a harmonica out of his pocket and played a note, alert to their reactions. He played a couple more notes, then went into a tune. The Neanderthals stopped talking and stood looking at him. He kept playing, but didn't get much reaction. *These aren't people, at least not the same way we are. They're more different than the Japanese or the Germans or the Indians I met in South America.*

Roy sat and played another song on the harmonica, trying to figure out some way of communicating with the men. Finally he sat the watch on a stone a little further out toward the Neanderthals. Then he backed his way to the line of soldiers.

Roy pointed to the watch and made a come-here motion with his hand. The Neanderthals chattered or talked (he wasn't sure which) among themselves. Finally one of them sidled to the stone and picked up the watch. They examined it, passing it back and forth while keeping a wary eye on the soldiers. Finally, one of them put a loop of animal hide with the canine tooth of some large predator on the stone.

After the Neanderthal hurried back to the others, Roy strolled out and picked up the loop. When he got back to the line of soldiers he examined it. "Big cat of some kind. Probably a lion. They gave us the good stuff. Hopefully I just said, 'Hi. We're scary magicians but we're friendly and willing to trade.' Then again I could be saying 'You're uglier than your mother and she looks like something I scraped off my boot.' They would probably be throwing those spears by now if I said that though."

He continued the gift-giving process for a couple more rounds, leaving a couple of tins of spam that the Neanderthals obviously had no idea what to do with, but were fascinated by. Finally he used the key to partly open a can and left it on the stone. The Neanderthals passed it around, sniffing at it. Finally one gingerly wiped his fingers across the exposed meat and licked a little of the grease off of his fingers. When he didn't die, the others followed suit.

The spam broke down the tension. The Neanderthals relaxed and smiled, showing formidable looking teeth, though they still kept their sharpened stones and spears handy.

Roy improvised a few gestures that they seemed to understand, and asked, or at least thought he asked, if the soldiers could examine the boats. That took three more cans of spam, but the Neanderthals finally moved aside and let the soldiers through.

The boats were stripped of every piece of metal, including nails. The metal lay in piles further up the beach. The Neanderthals deployed subtly but definitely between those piles and the soldiers.

A man's body lay on the beach. He was naked, with his clothes in a pile nearby. From the clothes it looked as though the dead guy was a civilian, probably a hostage.

The Neanderthals didn't react when a medic examined the body. "Gunshot wound. Been dead a couple of days at a guess. Looks like somebody gave the Nazis too much trouble or tried to run away."

Roy noticed a shallow trench and some heavy rocks near the body. Roy said, "Looks like they were going to bury him."

"The Nazis or the Neander-whatevers?" the medic asked.

"The Neanderthals. The Germans left before the last rain." Roy waved his hand, taking in the beach. "No boot prints, and the tide hasn't gone this high."

Roy finally managed to get enough communication going to ask if the Neanderthals had seen the German soldiers and their hostages. The Neanderthal who had tried the Spam first pointed inland. By that time they had exchanged names and the words for a few common objects. Roy tried to pronounce the Neanderthal's name, but it consisted mainly of clicks and deep rumbles, and his attempts to say it provoked fits of laughter among the Neanderthals, laughter that the Neanderthal himself didn't join. Roy pointed to his mouth and shook his head. "Bad!" He mentally labeled the Neanderthal "Joe" and added a last name out of the Tarzan series. "Joe Mangini."

"Joe" picked up English words fast, almost scary fast, though his pronunciation was atrocious. He seemed fascinated by the horses and dogs, especially after a soldier petted one of the dogs. His attention shifted to the horses when a group of soldiers swung up on them. The Neanderthals froze and stared at the mounted soldiers.

The talkative guy, Walker according to his name-patch, sauntered over. "Horses seem to be a hit with the locals. By the way, I'm corporal Walker. Call me Jesse." The guy held out his hand, then tried to crush Roy's hand in the handshake. Roy refrained from turning the handshake into a test of strength. "Roy Fleming. I've been a sergeant a couple of times. Right now I'm a buck private again."

"Lot of people like that in this crew." Jesse jerked his head toward the Neanderthals. "Those old boys stack on the muscle. I could probably take most of them in a boxing ring, but if they got those big hands of theirs on a guy and it was no-holds-barred wrestling, I don't think there is a man alive who could hold his own."

Joe Mangini was watching the two of them. He tentatively held out his hand and said his name. Jesse shook his hand. Roy noticed that he didn't try to put the squeeze on the Neanderthal's hand. He would lose on that one. Like shaking hands with King Kong.

A couple of guys lit cigarettes, which seemed to fascinate the Neanderthals even more than the dogs and horses. One of the soldiers offered 'Joe' a smoke, which he accepted before Roy could intervene. After the first puff, the Neanderthal coughed his lungs out, doubled over and looking like he

was about to lose the spam he had eaten. The Neanderthals jumped back into potential enemy mode, but Roy managed to convince them with gestures and his limited stock of words that the soldier wasn't trying to poison 'Joe.'

When the Neanderthal recovered enough to talk, he crushed out the cigarette and gestured to the pile of scrap metal and nails. Roy called the lieutenant over. "Mind if they keep the nails and scrap from the boats?"

"Sure. We're not going to carry that crap around."

"We'll want to ask for something in return. From what I've seen of backcountry Indians, that metal is a treasure to them. These guys strike me as 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' types. Make it something small so they think they're getting a deal, but big enough that they don't think we're idiots."

"What do they have that we want?"

"A guide and a translator. We can't go through this meeting and getting their confidence junk every time we meet a new group of these guys. We need someone along that speaks the language. I'm trying to learn enough of their talk that whoever we bring can't tell the next tribe over to get together with his and slit our throats without me knowing about it, but I'm nowhere near that yet, and I'm keeping part of what I know close to my chest. It's not good to let the other side know how much you know."

"And they're the other side?"

"Everybody is the other side, except maybe family and the people you grew up with, and sometimes even they're the other side."

"You live in dark place, and you're the one who makes it dark."

Roy shrugged. "Maybe I do."

They camped a few hundred yards down the beach from the Neanderthals that night and put guards out. So far they had seen no land animals larger than insects, but Roy suspected that was due to the animals having learned to fear man, rather than a lack of animals. A couple of times he thought he spotted bulky moving shapes in the forest, but couldn't identify them, even with his field glasses.

It was a clear night, dry and a little chilly. Roy bedded down in his bedroll and looked up at the stars. The constellations looked vaguely familiar, but distorted. The sky was dark and deep, full of stars. To the west, in the direction of Britain, the sky glowed faintly.

"Looks like something is burning over there."

Roy didn't respond. He recognized it as the normal faint sky glow from a Britain still under blackout, but with an inescapable minimum of light permeating from human activities.

"A lot of stars." He recognized Jesse's voice from a nearby bedroll. "I'm a city boy. I've never seen it this dark."

"I have a time or two. In the hills east of where I grew up you can roam for days and not see a soul or any sign men have ever been there."

"That's unusual in the twentieth century."

"Not really. No roads up there. The land isn't good for much except for straggly little trees that aren't even worth cutting down, that and briars. If anybody owns it they aren't there much."

"Good hunting country?"

"If you know what you're doing. If you don't you'll break your neck. There are caves and sinkholes up there. Springs come out of the hillside and creeks go into the hill and vanish."

"You a hunter?"

"Mostly bow hunting."

"Like an Indian."

"Yep. Just like an Indian." Roy turned quietly wished that the guy would shut up. On the other hand, that left him alone with his thoughts, something he had avoided in the rush to get ready for this expedition. The reality of the situation pushed its way into his consciousness. *You're alone. You're trapped. You'll never get back.* He wished for a bottle of whiskey but the brass had carefully checked his stuff for that. They had almost not let him bring his bow, but he managed to at least salvage that.

"Ride horses much?"

Roy focused back on Jesse's voice in time to catch that question and the silence that followed it. He thought about pretending to be asleep, but finally said, "Yeah. Wouldn't make much sense to be here if I didn't."

"There are no roads here, of course," Jesse said. "That's why the horses make sense. Fastest way to travel if you don't have a car."

Roy shook his head in the darkness. *He's spooked and trying to get unspooked. Talking does it for him. I prefer silence and the bottle. I'm not as annoying.* "It's going to be a long day. I'm shutting it down for the night."

That didn't shut the guy up, but a few more hints finally did. That left Roy to stare up at the stars. As he tried to find a comfortable position he finally put his finger on something that had been nagging at the back of his mind for the past several days. It's not real. It can't be. Or maybe it is but my brain isn't accepting it. He felt numb all over, as though he was feeling the world through a glove around his body. It wasn't a rubbery feeling, more like a thin cloth. That's in my head. My brain isn't accepting this. And if I'm not accepting it with my imagination and my reading and my adventures, how are the others managing? He mentally reran the day, examining his memories of the other men in the expedition. Almost all of them were quieter than he remembered from groups of soldiers he had been in other places. Could be the people they chose. Outsiders because they drink too much or don't talk enough, or they talk too much and annoy everyone around them.

Roy tried to rationalize the feeling away, but it didn't leave. *I wonder what Joe Mangini is thinking.* Does he have that same feeling, like the bottom of his world has been ripped away and he's floating on a little piece of it? A little bubble of reality that is going to pop and leave him falling into a pit? Does he have enough imagination to be worried about us or are we just another unexplainable thing in a world he doesn't understand and doesn't question? Is he worried about what we're going to do to his world? His way of life? If he isn't, he should be. That little stack of scrap metal will change everything for him. It'll make him rich. It'll ignite wars. *We shouldn't let them have it, but we would have to kill them to get it away from them.*

His thoughts merged smoothly into dreams of falling and of struggling to breathe in a world filled with a kind of pink cotton that pushed in on him from every direction, not crushing him, not heavy, but everywhere. Then his dreams took him back to his mom's kitchen, where a shiny yellow and white wood cooking stove yielded the aroma of eggs cooking. He could almost taste the wood-smoked goodness of eggs cooked on that stove, but then he looked down and saw that he was sinking into the floor, its surface warping like a deflating balloon. He jerked and woke himself up. The strange stars of this night sky stared down at him and he felt totally and wrenchingly alone.

Billy Chandler stood at attention as the captain in charge of the base's supply operation paced back and forth in front of the gathered supply personnel. The captain was going on at length about the importance of their jobs and of properly accounting for every piece of equipment and every drop of gasoline, "Especially in this period of crisis."

Thunder rumbled outside of the big crude-looking corrugated metal shed that doubled as a warehouse, dining hall, and now a meeting room. Rain mixed with hail splattered down on the metal roof above them, almost, but not quite drowning out the captain. "The tidal wave put most of the British ports out of commission for a period of time that is classified. Again, I want to emphasize that the troops at the front are depending on us to keep the planes ready to go. They're fighting a desperate battle against the Jerries. Your job is to make sure they have the support of the US Army Air Corp. The planes have to fly. For the next few weeks we'll use our hard work and our smarts to fill in gaps in the flow of supplies. It all counts. It all adds up. Every can of spam. Every rocket. Every drop of gasoline. Every part that can be salvaged to keep planes flying."

The gravel field outside was a mess from the continuing thunderstorms, and Billy hadn't heard a plane taking off or flying overhead for most of a day. World War II air operations were for the most part a thing of fair weather, especially when the planes were operating from improvised fields like this one.

The Captain droned on, and Billy scanned the assembled men for his quarry. Sergeant Roland Grimm stood a little apart from the other soldiers. He wasn't a tall man, probably only an inch or two above five and a half feet tall in his boots. He exuded a toughness though. A dark, pockmarked face, with a couple of visible scars, one less than an inch from his right eye, was topped by thick, soot black hair. He looked to have a bit of Indian blood, real Indian, not the play Indians from back at Yamasee Crossing.

Grimm glanced over at Billy, apparently noticing his stare. Billy nodded almost imperceptibly and moved his eyes forward. He took a final glance at Sergeant Roland Grimm, air force supply sergeant, and if Billy's information was correct, major black marketer. The man looked the part, though his uniform was neat and exactly regulation and his attention stance was unwavering and apparently attentive. His shoulders were broad, and his biceps bulged under the sleeves of his uniform shirt. His upper body seemed too big for his legs, almost as if someone had sawed off about six inches of leg off of what was originally a much taller man.

Billy mulled the idea of a tidal wave. That was real. He had almost been caught in it. But why a tidal wave in Britain? Tidal waves usually come from earthquakes. He thought back to the moments before the wave hit. Nothing he remembered gave even the slightest indication of an earthquake. The BBC went off the air. He tried to remember how long it had been between the radio going off and the coming of the tidal wave, but couldn't narrow it down beyond 'maybe five or ten minutes.'

After the meeting, Billy splashed his way through the rain to a Quonset hut he shared with several other enlisted men. A tall red-headed guy slouched down on a nearby bunk and said, "That was waste of perfectly good poker-playing time."

Billy sat on his bunk and listened to the rain pounding down. A generator ran somewhere nearby, giving power for the bare incandescent bulbs that provided light to the crowded bunk room. Billy stared enviously at the guys who gathered around to join in the poker game. *I can't. I wouldn't stop and I wouldn't throw the games, and I would get noticed.* That last part brought him up short. He glanced at his watch, holding it up close to the dim bulb. Way overdue for a certain phone call.

He made his excuses and waded back out into the deluge to the nearest phone, talked his way through the guy at the desk and dialed the operator. When he gave the number, the voice at the other end of the line said, "That's a British number. All of the circuits to Britain are down from the tidal wave. Try again later."

"How much later?"

"We don't know. It could be a week or two."

He was supposed to get additional instructions on arrival. With that no longer an option, Billy thought over his options. Just do my cover job. Keep my eyes open for Sergeant Grimm to make his moves.

Sergeant Grimm strutted by, almost as if conjured up by the thought. He glanced at Billy. "You smoke, kid?" He had a deep voice, almost incongruously so, and a breezy, casual manner.

"Nope."

Grimm took out a pack of camels and lit one. "Filthy habit." He blew a smoke ring. "Where you from?"

"Yamasee Crossing."

"Little town somewhere in the heartland. From the accent I'm guessing somewhere not quite southern but close. Northern Missouri or southern Illinois."

"Northern Missouri. I don't know if you'd call that south."

"So now you're out seeing the world."

"More like getting shipped around like a tin can and sitting at a desk all over the world. Different places. Same view."

"You get a lot better view back here than they do up at the front." Grimm took another drag of his Camel and exhaled two perfect Os. "The thing about small town is that it doesn't get you ready for the big city. People are good or bad. Friends or enemies. Right or wrong. You go to the big city and things don't work like that anymore. There are people you can do business with and people you can't. There are people who can get you things you want or need, and there are people who can't. Army is the big city. It takes guys from farms and small towns and it uses them until they figure crap out. Small town doesn't make a guy stupid though. You catch on. It just takes a while. You're in a good spot here; out of range of artillery, out from under mom and dad. You're in a good spot to kick up your heels and figure who you really are."

"Maybe."

"Like women?"

"Who doesn't?"

"Other women, mostly. Some guys. If you get to wanting something in the women department let me know. I know people who know people. New people from the states, especially the small town guys, they take a while to figure out that knowing people is how things get done in the big city, and this," he waved his arm to take in the airbase. "This is the big city."

"I've been around a bit."

"Not enough to get the corn fed off of you yet, but that'll come. Got a girlfriend back home? Write back and forth every couple of days? If you do, remember that she's there and you're here. Lots of things you can't do through the mail. Let me know." Roland Grimm walked on, out into the storm.

SNAPSHOT (PART 7)

This is a section from about halfway through my work in process novel. If you haven't read the first six sections, you're going to be a little lost. Hopefully, you'll also be a little intrigued and want to find out what is going on. That's my goal anyway.

I use a massive amount of handwavium to come up with a world that resembles the Australian Outback, but with an ecology composed almost entirely of lemurs in a huge variety of shapes and sizes. The setup allows a few strays, like dog-sized dinosaurs who mimic human speech like parrots, and a Neanderthal woman who was adopted into a human family as an infant. Toss in a murder mystery, a pastor who may or may not be involved in the murder, a unique kind of Black Separatist and a family of con artists, and hopefully we have a novel.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The clouds swooped in at what seemed an unnaturally quick pace. The pastor said, "We'll have a night of it out here in the rain. That won't be fun. Keep an eye open for shelter while I track. It doesn't rain often here, but when it does it means business."

Pastor Julius led them on a quick search along Kelly Dunne's trail away from the water hole. "She was moving fast, trying to put distance between her and Butcher's Hole. And here she got tricky. A patch of bare rocks she could have gotten off of anywhere." He bent down and studied the tracks more closely. "But she didn't really get on the rocks. She hobbled back on her own tracks and then--" He studied the trail and went off at an angle. "Oh, she was good. But I'm better."

He kept going, stopping frequently to puzzle out the trail. "Nobody else could have followed her, but I think she knew I'd be able to. She's pushing me hard, but not as hard as she could."

Greg watched the lightning in the west. "Let's just hope those clouds don't catch us before we find anything she left."

The trail got less difficult as they left the vicinity of the vandalized reservoir. Amelia said, "She wasted all this effort, didn't she? Nobody was there when she came and nobody followed her."

"No sign of them if they did."

"Why wasn't the dinosaur with her?"

"She must have shooed it away so nobody could trail it instead of trailing her."

Almost an hour later, long after the clouds covered the sinking sun, Amelia spotted a notebook crammed into a crevasse in the canyon wall, sheltered by a rock overhang. The cover and most of three pages were missing, chewed by some animal.

Raindrops splattered on the remaining pages as Amelia grabbed the notebook and shielded it with her body. The rain started in earnest as they scrambled for shelter. Greg spotted a tattered piece of paper hanging from a scrubby tree and added it to the collection. The rock overhang was the best shelter in sight, and they huddled under it as the thunderstorm swept in.

The rain stopped around two in the morning. Enough rain blew under the overhang to leave them wet and cold but not soaked. Amelia took the notebook out of her shirt and examined it with her flashlight. She swore. "I kept it dry but there's only half a page left with writing on it."

She read from the last page. "They blew out the wall of the waterhole. Unless it rains or the good guys find me that was my last chance. These are probably my last words. If you find this, I didn't make it. I don't think the bastards who are chasing me are good enough to find it, but just in case, here is a message for you. You may have killed me, but you signed your death warrant. I fought for my life with all I had. I'll face death without flinching. You'll die whimpering."

Amelia looked up. "Okay, but who was it?" She read on. "Pastor, you'll find this if anyone does. I want you to understand this: I let you trail me. I am better than you. I don't know for sure who is after me. Shots from a plane, shots from a distance, and a blown reservoir. I have a theory. Find out what Reuben Haigh was doing the years he was off snapshot. I started to. I didn't get far and nasty near-accidents started happening. Ermaline, you can keep going on your own. You're the heart and the soul of the operation. I'm just the face. Granddad, I beat you to whatever comes next. Sorry I wasn't stronger. I know it's hard to bury a granddaughter. I love you and I hope the pastor is right about what comes next, though I doubt that either of us will end up in the good place."

"I think she did," Pastor Julius said. "It'll take a real merciful God for old Lyle to make it, but I'm still working on it."

"What are you talking about?" Amelia asked. "He's wonderful."

"He can be. He can also be an old goat. Is there anything else?"

"Just this: 'Somebody besides me needs to die. Track them down. Kill them. I love you granddad. I love you Ermaline. I love you JoAnne.'"

Amelia handed the notebook and flashlight to Greg. "Can you read your page?"

Greg tried. "It's wet and the ink's smeared. Maybe in the morning."

Amelia turned to the pastor. "You really didn't have anything to do with this?"

"No. I didn't."

"Because if you did I'm out. Get me out and I won't say anything. Tell them I got bored and tired of not having the Internet."

"Believe me," Pastor Julius said. "I would have been happy if I found her alive. But I didn't. Life goes on without her. Why would I poke around up here if I killed her?"

"To destroy evidence? But then why bring us? Okay. You didn't kill her."

Greg made himself as comfortable as he could in the wet sand. He dug down a few inches and found dry, warm sand. He snuggled in and his exhausted body pushed him toward sleep. Amelia squeezed between him and the rocks and rested her head on his chest. She fell asleep in less than a minute.

Greg fought his exhaustion. He said, "We should sleep in shifts."

The pastor laughed. "You couldn't keep your eyes open ten minutes if you propped them open with toothpicks."

"Sounds dangerous."

"Huh?"

"Toothpicks by your eyes. Speaking of dangerous, we got shot at yesterday."

"Shot at or in the general direction of?"

"In the general direction I guess."

"Unless it was a 'mighty hunters' from 53 or 2011, they weren't actually shooting at you or they would have at least come close. How did that happen?"

"Lyle said you needed your bus back, so we headed back and ended up meeting John Calvin Lewis and his little army."

"How did you end up over there?"

"Followed a map Lyle gave us."

"Lyle?"

"Ermaline actually."

"There is a difference."

Greg dozed off briefly, then started when he heard a faraway gunshot. "Mighty hunters, huh?"

"Maybe one of my cryptozoologists. I don't like having to bring them up here and I especially don't like them shooting animals they don't need for food."

"So don't."

"I need the money. Wind Lady Baptist Church can't afford a full-time pastor. For that matter, the town needs the money. The restaurants, stores and the hotel; tourism keeps them alive between Sugar Check weekends."

"But they only welcome people of color on Thursdays," Greg said. "No wonder John Calvin is twitchy."

"John Calvin was twitchy when he got here, not long after Lyle did. He's managed to stay out of trouble though. People give him kind of a grudging respect, and the old-timers leave him and his friends alone—not afraid of them, but knowing they would bother back if someone bothered them. Old John wouldn't shoot you unless he figured you're looking for trouble, and then he would try to head the trouble off."

Greg closed his eyes. When he opened them again the sky had filled with stars. He tried to remember what they had been talking about. "John Calvin; those young men of his have military training."

The pastor flexed his knee. "I'm going to have one stiff knee in the morning. Yep. They would have military training. John Calvin was in the army. He's a complicated man, old John Calvin is. Humankind is capable of genius and stupidity, kindness and hatred, insight and blind spots. John Calvin Lewis wraps all of those things up all by his own self."

"How did he end up running one of Lyle's ranches?"

"I've never figured that out. If you find out, let me know."

"There is a lot about Lyle I don't understand."

"I've known him over twenty years and there's a lot about him I don't understand. What are you thinking about in particular?"

"He acts like an old redneck, but then he comes out with something that doesn't fit at all. What's with all the books and the word-processor?"

"There's a side to him only a few people get shown. If he's shown you that side he likes you."

Greg studied the sky. "No big dipper. I guess there wouldn't be, this being the southern hemisphere."

"No Southern Cross either," the pastor said. "This is the night sky nine million years ago—sort of. I don't know if you've thought of this, but here Madagascar stretches over five thousand miles north to south. The stars and the seasons should change as much as they do between Alaska and Panama. They

don't. They change as much as they would between north and south Madagascar. Now ask yourself, how can that happen?"

"How can any of this happen?"

"And yet people go on with their lives as though there was nothing else out there, nothing beyond man. One of the big science fiction writers said 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from God'. I don't believe that. My God isn't just power, he's justice and compassion."

"He actually said 'indistinguishable from magic.' I've never quite figured out if your god exists," Greg said. "What does Lyle think about God and tourists?"

"He never talks about it, and I can't read him."

"I can't read him either. Does he buy me as Greg Dunne?"

"Of course not."

"What?"

"He isn't stupid. He buys the possibility of you being Greg Dunne. He's trying to figure out for sure. Even if he decides you are Greg he'll also have to decide whether or not to trust you. There is more depth to old Lyle Dunne than you could possibly imagine."

"Information I could have used going into this."

"Information you would have had except that the way you came into this didn't exactly make me trust you."

"And now you do?"

A dog howled in the distance and Greg saw the pastor sit up, his bulk barely visible in the dim light. "No, but there is no way to back out now."

"I've been trying to figure you out, pastor. You don't act rich. You don't act like you want to be rich. Yet you come up with money to fly us here. You set us up to con old Lyle. It doesn't fit."

"Because you're putting the pieces in the wrong puzzle."

"Maybe. I can't figure out any other puzzle these pieces would fit into. Where did you dig up 'Heather'?"

"She'll be okay."

"She's a selfish bitch and a time-bomb who'll go off if she doesn't get around more people."

"Of course she's selfish. Goes with the profession. She'll settle down."

"Don't count on it. You're used to not being in crowds. Someone comes from a big city and it's like going from a restaurant with a menu full of choices to one that only serves overcooked hotdogs. City people don't get used to country life, even if they're trying to get away from the city."

"They bring the city with them and try to impose it on people," Pastor Julius said. "Or they have a city person idea of what county life should be and try to make the country fit it."

Greg shrugged, then realized the pastor couldn't see the gesture. "Probably. The point is, she won't get better. She'll keep screwing up. She already looks like she tried to seduce Lyle. She's already picked a fight with the Haigh woman. She already mouthed off where Ermaline may have heard her."

"If Ermaline heard something she understood it. She's every bit as smart as we are. Oh well. We make our plans and the guy upstairs makes his. And then we see what happens."

Chapter Twenty-Five

Greg woke just before dawn. The predawn light revealed a transformed landscape. A creek ran through the canyon. The dry grass looked greener, though the moisture rapidly evaporated from the parched sand.

The pastor was already awake. He groaned and flexed his knee back and forth. "The tracks are gone. We guessed wrong unless there is something in your page."

Greg pulled it out and tried to read. "The rain smeared it. I can make out words, but not sentences."

"Might want to figure it out. We have visitors."

"Who?"

The pastor pointed to two figures standing on the ridge near Butcher's Hole. "Lyle and Ermaline."

Greg squinted. "You can tell from here?"

"Yep. Skinny rancher. Muscle-bound Neanderthal woman." The pastor stood up and waved. He winced. "I should have babied my knee yesterday."

Lyle and Ermaline scrambled up the trail to the overhang. Lyle said, "I wondered when you'd get around to back trailing her. Too bad the rain came before you got further."

"We found some things. Somebody shot at her from the ground and from an airplane. They also broke the wall at my waterhole."

"So it was murder," Lyle's expression didn't change, but his body tensed. "I thought so. She would have made it."

The pastor nodded. "She fought hard for her life; should have won." He handed Lyle the notebook. "There was more but animals got at it."

Lyle read the page, with Ermaline at his shoulder. "Looks like we have a job to do. I'll meet you at the farm." He stalked away, cold anger visible in every step.

Greg started to follow them, but the pastor said, "Nope. Not now. He'll need alone time. What you saw walking away was as close to the wrath of the Lord as I hope I see in this lifetime. And I hope I never get that close in the next one."

They watched the sun rise and ate an unsatisfying breakfast of cereal bars. As they finished, Amelia said, "The rest of the pages would be nice to have."

"So would French toast and real sausage," Greg said.

"The pages are probably shredded in a nest somewhere," the pastor said. "We could find them and piece them together."

"How do we find the nest?"

"Did I tell you I can track a mouse over bare rock?"

"Three or four times," Amelia said.

"I can also find a mouse nest." He strolled to a scrubby tree and flashed a light into a hollow. "Oops. Someone's home." A mouse lemur poked its head out and hissed. "I hate to evict the little girl, but we need to look." The pastor scratched the tree trunk and hissed. The lemur rushed out of the nest with a baby in its mouth and two others clinging to its back. "It's not afraid of me, but it's afraid of chameleons, which is why the scratch and hiss. Let's see what mommy lemur has here."

The pages were shredded and mixed with shredded leaves. The pastor poked through the nest and shook his head. "It's too chewed up."

He started to put it back, but Amelia stopped him. "I can piece it together."

"You can't. The biggest piece is half an inch wide, and there aren't many that big."

"I have a trick or two." Amelia stashed the nest in her backpack. "Poor homeless mommy lemur. Can I take her home?"

"No!" Greg and the pastor said at the same time.

They spent the bulk of the morning hiking back to the bus. As they headed back to the cryptozoologist camp, the pastor said, "Even if there were moon bear lemurs around they wouldn't find them. Too many people, most of them city folk. And I would have found golden moons if they were here."

"So they're extinct?" Amelias asked. "That would be sad."

"It would be. That's the way it works though. Big, fierce animals are first to go. Rats and cockroaches hang on unless you melt things down to bedrock. If moon lemurs are still around they'd be deep in the Amaharana Cavelands. I won't take this lot up there because someone would wander off

and get killed. This bunch will have fun and get pictures of regular bear lemurs, which are impressive enough, especially up here where they haven't been hunted much."

"Should we tell the sheriff what we found?" Amelia asked.

"I'll let old Lyle make that call. Up here the law doesn't always take a hand when justice gets meted out."

"What about the 'vengeance is mine, says the Lord' thing?" Greg asked.

"I don't imagine old Lyle is thinking along those lines, and it wouldn't do a bit of good to remind him."

Greg thought about the Lyle's angry stride. "No, I don't imagine."

The safari bus struggled on through the rocks and hills. There was little evidence it had rained the previous night. The bus splashed through a couple of puddles, but their trail was mostly dry.

"Either you're as good an actor as you are a tracker, or you didn't kill Kelly Dunne," Greg said. "So who did? Reuben Haigh is the obvious suspect, but you don't have the resources to find us and bring us in. That means someone is backing you. Are you sure they didn't kill her?"

"You dearly want to know who else is in on this, don't you? Sorry. We stick with you knowing me and that's it."

"But are you sure you can trust your partners?"

"You don't even know there is anyone else. Don't underestimate this backwoods pastor. I didn't kill her. I didn't have it done, and I hope the guy upstairs rains his wrath down on whoever did it."

A gunshot rang out ahead of them. The pastor picked up his rifle with one hand and scanned the horizon. They crested a hill and Greg spotted Reuben Haigh's pickup truck in the distance. Another gunshot sounded. It didn't sound as though it hit nearby, but Pastor Julius hit the horn. "I don't want to get perforated by accidental-on-purpose gunshots." He drove up to the truck.

Reuben Haigh came out of the nearby woods. "Hi pastor. Hi, 2011 folks."

"You know their names?"

"Maybe. What are you doing up here, pastor?"

"Backtracking Kelly Dunne. Heard shots."

"Bear lemur got curious. I shot in the air. Find anything interesting on the back trail?"

"A thing or two. The good Lord brings every hidden thing to light in his own time."

"I'm not one to put a lot of stock in your line of work, pastor. I figure some things stay hidden because somebody real smart decides they will." Reuben glanced over at Greg and Amelia. "The pastor tell you that bullshit about tracking a mouse across bare rock?"

Greg put on a mock puzzled expression. "Why no. Pastor, you've been holding out on us. Are you really that good of a tracker?"

"Yes, I really am that good."

"Good luck tracking anything after that rain," Reuben said.

"Sometime you read a trail in the sand. Sometimes you read a trail in the mind. I'm good at those trails too."

Chapter Twenty-Six

As they pulled into the cryptozoologist camp, Greg said, "I forgot to give Lyle the last page of the notebook."

"Hang onto it. We'll look at it when we have time."

Most of the cryptozoologists were hanging around the camp talking. Several young men clustered around Heather. Most of them dispersed when they saw Greg.

'Steve' sauntered over and said, "These guys couldn't find a quarter in a gum ball machine or a crooked politician in Chicago. I wouldn't mind having some of their equipment though. Nice stuff like thermal motion-detecting game cameras, and night-scope video cameras."

"I would dearly love to have some of that stuff," the pastor said. "But it would take the challenge out of the game."

"So, are you really into this mystery animal thing, pastor, or are you just clipping the sheep?"

"There are a lot of mysteries out here," Pastor Julius said. "A person could find remarkable things within walking distance if they knew how to look."

"I can vouch for one of the mysteries," Greg said. "I've heard the Wind Lady."

"Have you seen her?" Steve asked.

"No."

"How about you, pastor?"

"I've tracked her. I've never seen her though. Just shadows and movement in the distance."

"You don't even have fuzzy pictures?"

"I've recorded her songs."

The pastor strolled into the camp and quickly dominated it. He chatted, backslapped, flattered, and listened sympathetically. Greg and Amelia stayed at the fringes.

Amelia asked Steve, "What are you doing with this bunch?"

"Research. Killing time too. I'm supposed to meet someone for a business deal. They're late, probably deliberately."

"What kind of research?" Greg asked.

Steve laughed. "The kind where you go to exotic places and write it off on your taxes."

The pastor took on the informal role as host and organizer to the cryptozoologists. As the afternoon wore on he turned the near anarchy of the camp into a reasonably efficient group of teams scouting the surrounding woods and placing game cameras. In the evening he got out a guitar and a harmonica and organized a pseudo-karaoke session.

Greg and Amelia hung around the edge of the group, chatting with Steve until he wandered off. Heather ignored them until the pastor whispered something to her, then she strolled over. "I'm supposed to play loving wife again. I'm not sure why. These people aren't staying. Oh well. He wants loving wife. He gets loving wife." She gave Greg a lingering kiss on the lips. "There. Loving wife." She hugged Amelia. "And loving mother."

"Gee, thanks for the thoughtfulness, mommy."

A couple of guys did an ear-hurting version of an old Beatles song. Feral dogs or dog lemurs howled in the distance. The attempt at a song ended. A few seconds later, they heard a high-pitched, obviously non-human voice saying, "She loves me yeah yeah yeah."

The pastor put his guitar down. "Excuse me. Got to talk to something."

The group broke up as the pastor walked over to the 'Dunnes'. "There's a dinosaur out there. Either one of them should have come in. Why didn't it?"

"It did a better job on the song than those guys," Heather said.

The pastor yelled. "Fido! Come here Fido."

"It's probably the other one," Amelia said.

"I'm not going to yell for Fluffy. I feel silly enough yelling for Fido."

Steve wandered over as the pastor said that. "Dinosaurs named Fido and Fluffy. Somebody has a weird sense of humor."

"That would be Lyle."

"Weird sky you have over here."

"Nine million years old. The planets aren't much different. Minor changes with the moons and asteroids. Different comets. We've seen a few."

The pastor flexed his knee. "I'm ready to give it up for the night. In another thirty-odd years we'll be able to predict sunspots and comets and fireballs, plus the incoming weather. I just hope we don't get a Carrington event."

"It's predictable because we're in a computer simulation," Steve said.

"If we are, it makes no practical difference. My knee still hurts. My eyes still keep wanting to close, and I still wonder who you are and why you're here."

Steve said, "I'm here to find myself, and hopefully talk sense into my hard head."

They drove to the farm the next morning. Fido paced them as they pulled in. Lyle greeted Amelia and the pastor enthusiastically, but gave Greg a cold nod. He ignored Heather. He said, "I need to chat with you, pastor."

They walked off, talking quietly. Greg said. "Not feeling the love here."

"One day he offers me his bed. The next day he doesn't seem to see me," Heather said.

"I'm sure it wasn't the first time," Greg said. "And probably not the last."

"Thanks."

The pastor limped over as Lyle headed out to the fields. "Lyle asked me to take you to Wind Lady. Sugar Check weekend is coming and the hotels will fill up."

"He doesn't seem happy with us," Greg said.

"Heather and you? There's a reason for that. Hop in and I'll tell you about it on the way." He steered his bus down the driveway and on to the dirt ruts that passed as a road to Wind Lady. "He's not thrilled with Heather because she got drunk and came onto him the night she ended up in his bed."

"Talk about professional," Greg said. "We know which profession you're in. I thought doing rich old guys was for bottom feeders."

"I don't remember it. I was in the chair and then I was in the bed, with my clothes on." Heather shook her head. "I don't remember anything else. And no, I don't do old guys."

Amelia said, "You're such a slut. I can't believe you came on to an eighty-year old, drunk or sober. That's disgusting. Professionals know when to keep their pants on, even when they're drunk."

"I don't need lectures from a twelve—"

"Sixteen year old. And maybe you do."

"He's not your typical eighty year old," Heather said. "I have no idea what happened."

"And you have no idea what you said to him while you were drunk," Pastor Julius said. "You could have blown us out of the water."

"I'm twitchy. The quiet is getting to me."

"Get untwitchy or go home. We can write you out. A sick parent, an emergency at work-- whatever it takes." The pastor slowed the bus as a herd of Sifakas bounded past. "I should send you home. The problem is that if you go away in a stink that stink sits on your husband. Here's the deal. Fix the stink."

"How am I going to do that?"

"I don't know. You're the con artist." The pastor turned to Greg. "He likes you enough not to sleep with your wife, so you've made an impression. He says the DNA will be back in three or four days."

"So we're headed to the airport, right?" Amelia asked.

"No."

"When that DNA sample comes back we'll be dangling at the end of a rope. Why no?"

"It's handled. I wouldn't have started this if it wasn't."

"How can it be handled?"

"Don't worry about it."

Greg said, "He'll be suspicious of everybody now that he knows Kelly was murdered. And the possibility of us being involved has to have occurred to him."

"It has," the pastor said. "He doesn't think you're involved, but he isn't sure about Heather. The drunken pass didn't impress him much."

"Why did he have all of those Young Adult series books," Amelia asked. "And why did he push so hard to get me to read them?"

"I know, but it's a secret," the pastor said.

"It sounded like he's read a lot of them recently."

"Honey, he didn't just read them, he wrote most of them."

"You're talking about Lyle Dunne, right? Rancher, farmer?"

"And author. Don't spread that around. He doesn't think writing goes with his image." The pastor turned onto a slightly more traveled road, still unpaved. "Don't think of Lyle as just a redneck. He is that, but he's also a very smart man, the smartest man around here other than maybe John Calvin Lewis."

"John Calvin Lewis, huh?" Greg stared at the pastor. "What does he do that makes him so smart?"

"Just took dry land the government figured couldn't be used as farmland and made it flower. He's kept peace with the rednecks around him and made most of them respect him even if they don't like him."

"The sheriff thinks he's doing something underhanded or getting ready to. What is he up to?"

"Old John thinks every black child is born with an island of genius, something that kid can do better than almost anyone else in the world. It's just a matter of someone figuring it out and feeding it."

"So he's trying to build a black Eureka," Amelia said.

"I have no idea what a Eureka is," the pastor said. "But he wants to build a society of black people who defy every racial slur that has ever been said against a black man. He wants them smart, disciplined, hard-working, and good fathers."

"How is that working out for him?" Greg asked.

"That you'd have to ask him," Pastor Julius said. "I believe he's right about every black kid having some kind of genius. Every white kid has one too. I'm not from your black and white world, so I just see people where you see black people and white people."

"We were getting there in 2011," Greg said. "The hungry time right after the snapshot didn't help, but we'll get there."

"I hope so. That's one part of you people, both 53s and 2011s, I can't understand. Of course I grew up in a little group; you wouldn't even call it tribe, in 1518 and all of you are so different from what I knew that the differences between you seem small."

"If the gap's that huge, how did you cross it?" Greg asked.

"My bit of genius is figuring out people, how they think. And what is your area of genius?"

"Greg Dunne was an intelligence analyst, so he'd be good at pulling facts together and making them mean something."

"That's Greg Dunne. What about the guy sitting next to me?"

"The guy sitting next to you is Greg Dunne. It says so on my passport."

"I wonder what the DNA will really show."

"That would be interesting. And you're not telling us how you'll take care of the DNA?"

"It's handled. That's all you need to know."

ALTERNATE HISTORY SNIPPETS

Some brief Alternate History thoughts, most of them initially posted on AlternateHistory.com

The US Develops Skipbombing before Pearl Harbor

Historically US airforce bombers were very close to useless against enemy shipping in the early months of the Pacific War. Their doctrine was designed for strategic bombing, and it didn't translate well to attacking enemy ships.

By 1943, various parts of the airforce developed more effective tactics, coming in low and skipping bombs off the water into enemy ships. General Kenny, the guy arguably behind the development of skip-bombing, had actually experimented with the technique in the 1920s, but the strategic bombing orientation of the airforce apparently kept the technique from going beyond experiments. The British and Australians experimented with the technique early in the war, with some success, but the US had lagged behind.

So, what if sometime in late 1940, with Japan becoming more belligerent and the US trying to figure out how to defend the Philippines, General Kenny manages to convince the right people that using bombers in skip-bombing raids is a key to holding off the Japanese. A group of B17 pilots are trained in the tactics. Maybe their planes are modified so that they have more forward-facing 50 cal to suppress anti-aircraft fire from the ships. The group is then sent to the Philippines as part of the buildup of the US airpower there.

So, what happens then? Historically, much of the B17 force in the Philippines got caught on the ground the day after Pearl Harbor. That might still happen, though given a different mission that's not a given. The planes involved would undoubtedly be flying in an environment of Japanese air superiority, which would make attacks where Japanese fighters were around costly. On the other hand, B17s that could actually sink enemy ships could dominate a large area around the Philippines.

How does this play out, both in the Philippines and in subsequent battles through the first year of the war?

The US army air corp general who eventually implemented skip-bombing had experimented successfully with the technique in the twenties. The air corp didn't need to find the technique from somewhere else. They had already experimented with it in-house.

The technique just needed to get into the right position in terms of interservice rivalry to be adopted earlier. As somebody pointed out on AH.com, the army air corp could use the technique to screw the navy out of money.

The main problem with this technique is that you had to come in low and pretty slow. That gave anti-aircraft a good shot at bringing you down. The B25 was better in this role partly because it had a lot of forward-firing firepower to suppress the anti-aircraft, especially after field modifications to add a bunch more 50 cal.

Australian Megafauna survives in Tasmania

What actually happened: There is some indication that a subset of the extinct Australian megafauna survived on Tasmania for about 4000 years after they died out in Australia, probably because at that time Tasmania was an island, so humans didn't get there for about 4000 years after they colonized Australia.

As the last ice age intensified and locked up more water in glaciers, around 43,000 years ago Tasmania became a peninsula of Australia, which it has been off and on through most of its existence. Humans flooded in and the surviving megafauna died out, though Tasmanian Wolves and devils survived there (as they did in Australia until a few thousand years ago). Tasmania became an island again around 10,000 years ago with the start of the current interglacial.

What might have happened: Let's tweak the land level a bit and have Tasmania remain an island throughout the last 50,000 years. We can put the water gap that stays even during ice ages anywhere between the coast of Australia and Tasmania. For the purposes of this scenario it would be good to have it close to Australia, because the larger Tasmania is during the ice ages the more of the megafauna are likely to survive. Small islands and big animal don't mix well long-term.

So, humans colonize Australia, but can't get to Tasmania without crossing an arm of the ocean. They had to cross a water gap to get to Australia in the first place, but tropical oceans are considerably more hospitable to primitive boat tech than cold temperate ones. Apparently humans didn't cross the historic water gap, so there is a reasonable chance they wouldn't cross this one.

So, some of the big Australian animals survive in Tasmania. Diprotodon itself didn't reach Tasmania, but a couple of horse/Tapir-sized Diprotodon relatives did, along with short-faced kangaroos, marsupial lions, and few other oddities.

How long would they survive? There are no signs I'm aware of that the Polynesians ever got to Tasmania, though they might have visited but not stayed due to the incumbent Tasmanians. I don't know if Portugal ever reached Tasmania, though my understanding is that they found parts of Australia. The Dutch definitely discovered Tasmania, so they might be the first to disrupt this marsupial utopia.

Standard disclaimer: Yes, I know that creating a sea channel off of Australia would create butterflies that would probably prevent there being a Portugal or Holland in their historical forms, but messing around with geography is way too much fun to avoid because of butterflies. We could make this less ASB by having humans reach Australia too to make it to Tasmania before the channel opened. Of course then you probably wouldn't have Aborigines as such in Australia.

Soviet-Romanian War-June 1940

In late June 1940, the Soviets demanded that Romania hand over several areas along the Soviet/Romanian border and gave the Romanians four days to vacate. When the Romanians asked for more time, the Soviets invaded. The Romanians pulled out without major fighting.

What if they had fought? Maybe after the Soviet performance in the Winter War, the Romanians aren't impressed and decide to fight it out. Now my first inclination is to say 'curb stomp', but I suspect that the situation would get more complicated than that.

Why curb stomp? The Romanians were probably no match for the Soviets alone, though given the performance of the Soviet Army in Finland and at the beginning of Barbarossa that's not completely a given. To add to Romanian problems, Hungary wanted Hungarian-majority areas in Romania back.

However, Romania had a kind of negative power. If it got into a war with the Soviets and started losing badly, that threatens the only major source of oil available to either the Germans or the Italians. The Germans (and the Italians though they wouldn't matter much) would essentially have to respond in some way.

Most likely result: The Soviets kick Romanian butt. The Germans mass forces in the east, impose a settlement on the Romanians and guarantee the new borders. However, doing that would require that they bring troops, aircraft, etc from France to the eastern front at a time they are trying to gear up for Battle of Britain/Sealion.

Were the Soviets of June 1940 capable of trashing the Romanians? If they do, and that seems the most likely outcome, how does the rest of this play out? Nothing significant changes? Major ripples?

I'm agnostic on how long the Romanians could hold off the Soviets. I suspect that a week or two for the Soviets to overrun much of Romania is a major overestimation of Soviet capabilities for offensive action in June 1940.

My skepticism is based partly on the abysmal performance of the Soviets against the Finns, but mainly on their lack of anything equivalent to the Panzer divisions at this point. Essentially, large numbers of machine guns, rapid-fire rifle and artillery slowed the tempo of war, leading to the stalemates of World War I. Until the problem of firepower on the defensive was solved, it stayed slowed down. The Germans solved the slowdown with their Panzers, but that was because they perfected a combined arms team, not because they had a lot of tanks.

I don't see anything in the Soviet order of battle in June 1940 that would allow quick panzer-like offensives. They had a lot of tanks, but those tanks weren't organized into combined arms divisions, and they didn't have the number of trucks or radios to make deep offensives work at this point. Soviet tank formations at this point were like a heavy club, compared to the German Panzers' rapier. The Soviets were quite capable of offensives that broke through a line. They were probably not capable of then exploiting those breakthroughs to win quick strategic victories.

The timing doesn't work for the Anglo-French to have their resistance stiffened. French armistice = June 22, 1940. Soviet ultimatum = June 26, 1940. Soviet/Romanian fighting would have started roughly a week after the French surrender, at a point where the British had been driven off the continent and were obviously in no condition to come back. Italy had already entered the war against the British and French (on June 10, 1940). Romania was also Italy's only remaining source of oil, so Italy standing by while the Soviets overran the oilfields would not be in the cards.

Those oilfields would also be an issue if the Soviets made large-scale use of their air force. The Germans would not stand by while the Soviets bombed anywhere close to their main source of oil.

Some other aspects of this:

1) The Red Army is going to be losing planes over Romania, especially once the Luftwaffe arrives in force. The 'over Romania' part is significant because those pilots are dead or POWs. Pilots take longer to train than planes do to build.

2) While Churchill would undoubtedly want to prosecute the war with Germany vigorously, if the Luftwaffe pulls out for the most part to head to Romania I'm not sure the British people do. They won't have experienced the Blitz and the Battle of Britain, so there is some possibility that British political opinion would go toward letting the Soviets and Germans fight it out while Britain recovered militarily and economically. Britain was in no shape to fight, and getting ready to fight would (and historically did) bankrupt them in six to nine months. Of course historically the US bailed them out with Lend Lease. However Lend Lease wasn't inevitable: In less desperate circumstances I'm not sure the US would have offered it. And I'm not sure the British would have automatically accepted. I don't see the Brits agreeing to give up their export markets and key bases. Lend Lease said essentially "The US saves Britain. Britain gives up any possibility of being a great power at the end of the war." That's only something a proud great power would accept if it had no other choice. When I say, "Let them fight it out while Britain recovers militarily and economically" I'm not saying that Britain would accept German hegemony over Europe. The Brits would rebuild their forces at a more rational and sustainable pace rather than a panic-driven and wasteful "throw money at it to get capability now!" approach. In late June/July 1940 the Brits were incapable of offensive action anyway, even against the Italians, so why not take advantage of the situation to be more rational in their buildup?

3) Without a blitz/Battle of Britain, the US probably wouldn't feel anywhere near as threatened, which might make US weapons and eventually money much less forthcoming for the Brits. Fall of France did scare the US. But why did it scare the US? If you look at what US leaders were saying privately and to some extent publicly, the concern was that the Fall of France would be quickly followed by the fall of Britain, with the possibility of the British fleet falling into German hands. The fall of France was shocking and unwelcome, but not in and of itself a national crisis. The US perception that it was likely to be followed by the fall of Britain was what made it a national crisis.

4) If Germany intervenes in Romania, the Soviets cut off economic ties. That has a huge impact on the German economy. It doesn't help the Soviet economy much either. The Soviets got stuff from the Germans in return for those raw materials that the Germans regretted during Barbarossa.

5) No blitz means that the Luftwaffe isn't losing planes and pilots over Britain. It also isn't running down fuel stocks in the Battle of Britain.

The Soviets would learn a lot from that war. If they manage to wind it down without an all-out war with the Germans in summer of 1940, which I think is likely, then they are probably in much better shape in summer of 1941.

The Soviets would not be immediately accepted as Britain's new allies. Why not? Let's see how it works: Step One: The Soviets invade Romania, a country whose security the British (and French, though that doesn't matter at this point) have guaranteed. At this point the Germans and Italians have NOT yet intervened. The British government can't actually do anything about the attack, but they can and will ramp up the rhetoric against the Soviet, making comparisons to the Soviet invasion of Finland, etc. British (and US) public opinion puts the Soviets even more firmly in the aggressor camp.

Step Two: There is a period of a week or two, maybe up to a month, where the Germans and Italians are putting pressure on the Romanians to just give up the provinces. British and US governments and public opinion sees this as the dictators ganging up on another victim. Step Three: When the Romanians don't back down and the Soviets threaten their oil sources, the Germans move airplanes and troops east, which the British and US perceive as the prelude to an attack on Romania, thus again putting the Soviets in the perceived role of part of the aggressor team. Step Four: If Stalin doesn't back down, the Germans intervene. Fighting starts. In this scenario you might end up with the US retargeting some supplies that were headed for France toward Romania in the first week or so after the attack, before it became apparent that Germany and Italy were going to jump in on Romania's side.

The amounts would be limited because (a) The munitions would be needed by the Brits, and (b) The Romanians were in a hopeless position in the long term if the Germans decided to sit it out or impose a solution, but you might have the absurd situation of US arms going to an army fighting on the same side as the Germans, at least until US politicians managed to figure out some way of cutting them off without looking too hypocritical.

The Brit and US public has been hearing for several weeks to a month about Soviet aggression and the Brits have been making ineffectual noises about helping the Romanians. When fighting breaks out, there is no guarantee that it is more than a minor skirmish over spoils of war. Given that political background, the rational course would be to wait a while for the public to forget the Soviets as aggressors meme, and wait for developments. From a British and US perspective, the fighting over Romania may well fizzle out, and the two sides come to another agreement.

That's actually the most likely result of this scenario. The Soviets don't want war with Germany in the summer of 1940, and will want it a lot less after they get a taste of it. The Germans want war with the Soviets, but not starting in mid-July 1940 with no preparations. Likely outcome: A couple of weeks to a month of fighting that leads to the Germans taking back the disputed provinces, plus a few dozen miles of Soviet territory along the border, followed by a ceasefire and pullback to the original Romanian border, with fighting restricted to Romania.

A few wild cards in this:

1) How long would it take for the Germans to move enough forces to Romania to deter or defeat the Soviets?

2) How would the rush of German troops away from France affect the willingness of France to honor the terms of the recently signed armistice? I wouldn't expect a renewal of the fighting, but it's possible that the French might be more aggressive at hiding weapons and local authorities in the colonies might even be tempted to stall on implementing the terms.

3) How would the Germans stand in terms of logistics in the immediate aftermath of the Battle for France? In terms of munitions they would be in pretty good shape because they produced much more in the way of munitions than they need to in order to conquer France. Captured French oil stocks would give them ample oil supplies for a few months--more than they had in June 1941. One major problem: Wear and tear on the tanks and planes used in France. The German army would need time for maintenance before they could be up to full power.

4) How would Ukrainian nationalists and other border people react? If the Germans hand the Soviets an initial defeat, do the Soviets face revolts in what had been eastern Poland and the Baltics? They did to some extent historically in Barbarossa. In June/July 1940 the Soviets wouldn't have had a chance to round up and kill as many nationalists, but also wouldn't have had as much chance to hack off the locals. If there are revolts, how do the Germans react?

Challenge: Keep As Many Border States As Possible In the Union

Lincoln's response to Sumter had a great deal of influence on the state reactions. He had to do a careful balancing act. On the one hand, South Carolina had fired on their fellow Americans and killed some. That put the North and west reasonably solidly in favor of ending this whole secession nonsense. If he was going to force the seceding states back in the Union, Lincoln needed to act quickly, while outrage over Sumter was strong. On the other hand, the more aggressively Lincoln goes after seceded states, the more he forces border states to make a choice, and forcing the likes of Virginia and North Carolina to secede turned the Confederacy from obviously non-viable long-term to almost viable. Could you have done better than Lincoln did historically?

The Germans Don't Take Crete

The German invasion of Crete was a close-run thing. More than almost any other major battle of World War II it could have gone either way. Let's say it goes against the Germans. They land airborne

forces, but never hold an airport long enough to fly in additional troops and equipment. As a result, they eventually are mopped up by the Allies.

What are the consequences? A minor one: As Allied air power in Crete builds up, it looks to me as though the Axis position in Rhodes would become untenable.

There would be some downsides to the Allies initially:

- 1) Supplying Crete would require some additional shipping
- 2) The forces evacuated from there would, obviously, not be available elsewhere.

Upsides would probably outweigh those. A big, very public win over actual Germans (as opposed to the Italians) would be a major boost to British morale. It might also have some impact on the Germans. An unbroken string of German victories seemed to confirm the Nazi racial theories. A very public defeat might slow that train down.

Some very speculative possible impacts (not likely but worth considering). Would a very public German defeat cause the Japanese to think harder about attacking Britain in the Far East? Would the Soviets be less abject in their attempts to appease Hitler? Again, I don't think either of those are the most likely outcomes, but maybe worth considering.

Another issue: the attitude of Turkey. This would be a German defeat right at their front door. If it leads eventually to the fall of Rhodes and other Italian islands near Turkey, which it would once the Allies built up air power on Crete, then how does that affect the Turkish attitudes toward the war? I doubt if they would join the war before late 1944 in any case, but it might be possible for the Allies to exert more pressure on them to cut off German supplies of certain natural resources.

What If: Portugal Conquers The Incas

If you want multiple European powers involved in the Aztec/Inca area, Spain for the Aztecs and Portugal for the Incas is the most likely.

Having Portugal conquer the Incas does make some differences, not in terms of intent, but as a practical matter. If Spain holds Panama, which it would be likely to long before the Portuguese got there, then Portugal has to either go across a goodly hunk of South America to get to Peru, or it has to take the long route around the southern tip of South America. That makes Portuguese Peru much more isolated from Europe than Spanish Peru was, which has a lot of implications: (1) Slower disease spread, (2) Less control from the home government, (3) Less reliable supplies, both of European goods to Peru and of Peruvian gold and silver to the Portuguese. Portuguese Peru would probably be much more self-sufficient and somewhat more based on traditional Indian crafts and syncretic mixes of Indian and European crafts, (4) The Portuguese hold on Peru would probably be less solid than the Spanish one was, because (a) the logistics of reinforcement and settlement would be tougher, and (b) the Spanish would be nosing around from their bases in Panama and trying to stir up trouble.

If the Portuguese are moving gold and silver down the Amazon, figure that there will be pirates and adventurers preying on their canoe convoys. (Kind of a cool setting for a story, actually) If they go around the southern tip of South America, then expect pirates to lodge along the coast of Argentina and Chile. In both cases, the pirates could be a mix of Europeans, Indians and mixed race people.

Figure also that France and eventually Holland would make more determined efforts to hold onto parts of Brazil and interdict Portuguese commerce down the Amazon. Of course Portugal would also put more resources into South America.

Then of course, we have the influence of all of that gold in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Portugal has far more resources to fight wars, maintain fleets, etc, but they still have their small population base. Spain has considerably less resources to fight European wars, but also is less thoroughly ruined as a budding manufacturing power by the influx of gold.

Challenge: You're In Charge of the Soviet Union In World War II

It's October 1940. Italy has just invaded Greece. Stalin shuffles off the mortal coil, leaving in charge: you. Your goal is to get the Soviet Union through the rest of World War II in the best shape you can.

1) You have all your historic knowledge, however if you reveal it you will probably get deposed and put in a rubber room.

2) As soon as you take action that differs from what Stalin did historically, you risk creating butterflies that alter events in the time-line. That means your ability to foretell the future becomes less and less useful as you make decisions.

3) Realistically, you don't have Stalin's absolute power. You're leading a world class den of snakes in people like Beria. Your army is cluttered with people with no military ability but who were non-threatening to Stalin.

4) You can't count on a particular date for Barbarossa, if it happens.

5) Barbarossa is not inevitable, but it is extremely likely.

6) British and US support is extremely likely, but not inevitable if you screw up badly enough on the PR front. If you do extremely well early on, you may find Allied aid becoming scarce and token. The Brits especially won't be thrilled about the possibility of the Soviets ending up on the English Channel in early 1942, for example.

7) You can't count on the Soviet population reacting the same way to your leadership that it did to Stalin's. That's the default, but fear of Stalin was pervasive, along with hatred in some circles. Fear of you is not as automatic. Hatred may or may not be there.

So, what do you think? Can hindsight that may or may not be reliable help you do better? What do you change? How does it work out for you?

Here is one hint: Militarily, forward deploying the Red Army into what had been eastern Poland was a bad idea. They were going to lose most of what they put in the forward areas because they didn't have the logistics structure for them to fight there or to get them out in a hurry.

The Soviets were going to have to put some forces into those areas though, just to keep Polish and Ukrainian nationalists from causing trouble there. The Soviets also needed to hold onto those areas long enough to sabotage the numerous scattered oil fields in the southern part of the area. Historically they were able to do that. They would need to slow the Germans down enough to do it in this scenario, which means some forces in the area.

With a start date of October 1940, and with the Germans probably unable to attack until the middle of next May, here are some possible "out of the box" strategies for a Soviet leader. I'm not sure how they would play out:

Declare an end to all of the economic provisions of the pact the Soviets and Germans reached in August 1939. No more Soviet natural resources going to the Germans, including oil. No transshipment of natural rubber obtained by the Japanese or Soviets to Germany. Of course that also means no German machine tools or warships going to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's tooling up for war is substantially slowed down. On the other hand, six months of embargo of goods from the Soviet Union equals a significantly weakened Germany. The question is, who is weakened more? It might even be possible for the Soviets to reach a covert agreement with the Brits: "We'll embargo the Germans if you supply us with machine tools, etc." That would be hard to pull off given the animosity between Britain and the Soviets at this point, but the Brits are in a situation where they really need Allies.

Put the Soviet resources behind preparing Communist revolts in the Balkans for after the German invasion and Communist resistance in France. Maybe even go so far as selling the Greeks artillery and some obsolete warplanes so they can screw the Italians over more than they did historically. That would be tough to swallow given that the Greeks were a right-wing dictatorship, but the longer the Greeks hold off the Germans, the later Barbarossa is.

Another option: Military aid/cheap sales to Yugoslavia. Definitely provocative, but a relatively cheap way of asserting some influence in the Balkans. Sell some airplanes approaching obsolescence and maybe some artillery. If it stalls the Germans a few days, that's a help.

Possibility: Try to keep the Finns from entering the war on the German side. That might be accomplished by promising to give back some of the annexed territories in exchange for (a) the Finns promising not to allow any foreign troops in Finland, and (b) the territories being demilitarized. I suppose you could even have them turn the annexations into a five year lease on the territory involved.

Another possibility: Release the remaining Polish prisoners of war in the Soviet Union to the Brits. That's risky because the NKVD had already killed over 20,000 Poles and the question of where those people were would be bound to eventually come up. There is also the issue of what happens post-war. On the other hand, putting several tens of thousands of additional troops onto the Allied side in the winter of 1940/41 helps keep the Germans distracted.

I don't understand Hitler's psychology well enough to know how he would take all of this. Obviously appeasement didn't work for either the western allied or Stalin. Hitler read it as weakness. In-your-face defiance probably wouldn't cause him to back off. It might cause him to come after the Soviets sooner, but before the middle of May 1941 the weather doesn't allow him to do much, so I think the Soviets can be as provocative as they want to be without much in the way of consequences.

The Soviets could actually organize Polish nationals in their prison camps to go into the German-occupied part of Poland and do acts of sabotage during the winter of 1940/41, though the German policy of killing lots of hostages might have deterred the Poles, even if it didn't bother the Soviets at all. On the other hand, training Poles in sabotage might not be a long-term good thing.

The Soviets would obviously be better off staying out of the war as long as possible. Historically they tried appeasement and it didn't work. Hitler read appeasement as weakness. What if they tried a hard line in the winter of 1940/41? The Germans were sending reconnaissance planes over Soviet-held territory in an increasingly blatant manner. What if the Soviets shot several of them down in the fall of 1940, put any surviving pilots on trial and cut off the supply of Soviet oil and other raw materials to the Germans?

What do the Soviets have to lose? Machine tools and weapons that the Germans promised but delivered as few of as they could? Yeah.

The Germans attack? They're going to do that anyway. If they attack in the winter of 1940/41 or before the spring mud hardens, then bonus. Things that make Barbarosa more likely are freebies since you're almost certain it will happen anyway.

Another option: Play on the German fears. On about June 1, 1941 invite a German delegation to view a demonstration of massed T34s and KV1s, manned by picked crews. Point out that these tanks are not deployed near the frontiers because that's NOT where the Soviets would make their main defensive effort if invaded. Yeah, the Germans have an extra three weeks to prepare for the new tanks, but there is a chance they'll decide to wait and try to come up with a counter,

Releasing most survivors among the purged Soviet officers would help, especially by making training of the much expanded Soviet army more effective. Not continuing the purge would help. Stalin was still purging a trickle of officers throughout the fall and winter of 1940/41.

One of the little-known aspects of the lead-up to war: The Soviets had a large bomber force, theoretically for strategic bombing. The Germans were actually afraid of it--fearing that the Soviets would bomb the Romanian oil fields. The Soviets thought they had a world-class bomber force too. They didn't and that became obvious when they tried to use it at the beginning of the war. Whether due to poor aircraft or poor training, the Soviet bombers lost a lot of pilots on futile and costly raids.

Some possibilities: (1) See if there was anything that could be done to make the Soviet bomber force viable. If the Soviets can bomb the Romanian oil fields effectively early in the war, then the Germans have a real problem. (2) Have preps in hand to allow the Brits to use Soviet airbases to attack the Romanian oil fields early on. Losing Romanian production would be devastating to the Germans early on, less so as more synthetic oil production came online.

COMMENTS SECTION

Tom Cron: Thanks for the recommendation on Doorways. I'll try to remember to check it out. I like your ideas on ISOTing the Woodstock generation. I would be interested in how the sudden disappearance of all of the 'cool kids' would impact US life and politics in the subsequent years. What kind of impact did those 500,000 people have on the US after Woodstock. How would people react to their sudden disappearance? I'm sure some people would invoke God's wrath. In the absence of any alternate explanation that would probably lurk in the back of a lot of peoples' minds, even among non-Christians.

Anthony Docimo: Your reading is eclectic as usual. On the Philippines as an American state: I'm guessing that one of the biggest obstacles would have been the racial attitudes of the time. Would the US of the early 20th century have wanted to bring in a state with a large majority of "those kind of people"? My guess is that would have weighed heavily on the decision. Allowing a theoretically independent Philippine state like the one we set up in Cuba would probably be more likely, or something like the setup with Puerto Rico.

Robert Gill: Lucy sounds interesting. Maybe a little too close to Char for me to be totally comfortable with it, but I'll have to check it out.

Interesting bits about the ties between New York City and the slave trade. As to what would have happened if the Confederate plot against New York had succeeded, good question. I'm guessing that reconstruction would have been more harsh, but there were limits to how harsh it could be and not stir up an ongoing guerilla resistance, or even solidifying a separate southern nationalism.

Part of the reason the south made no significant effort to reverse the outcome of the Civil War was that their military defeat was pretty decisive. Another part of it was that the north backed off on trying to do much to enforce equality or voting rights a decade or two, and let the southern states do pretty much what they wanted to with their African-American population for around 80 years. Given the seniority system and the solidly Democratic south that resulted from denying African-Americans the vote, the south dominated congress for most of those years too, so in some ways they kept a semblance of the old south going into the 1960s.

A more thorough De-Confederating of the south would have been morally the right thing to do, but it did risk having white southerners become permanently antagonistic to the idea of being part of the US. I don't think that would rise to the level of American Civil War II, but I could see the KKK and similar organizations directing at least some of their energies toward preparing for another attempt at secession. That could get dangerous during the World Wars. Turtledove did something similar to that in one of his alternate histories, but I think the pattern would be mainly passive resistance, along with southerners looking for a time when the Federal government was weak and distracted.

The subject of inevitable movement toward intelligence didn't come up in the discussion. I personally don't believe that life develops that way. I see intelligence as just one tool for survival, and one that has its drawbacks as well as advantages for the organism involved. Instincts allow for faster reactions and apparently require less of the very energy-expensive brain tissue. Essentially intelligence is a way of giving long-lived animals some degree of flexibility in dealing with environmental change. Our branch of organisms appear to have developed most of our large flexible brains in order to find large "jackpots" of high energy food (ripe fruit) before it gets eaten by birds, bats or smaller local animals. Monkeys and apes can chase other potential fruit-eaters away from prime fruiting trees, but only if they reach them between the time the fruit is edible and the time birds or bats finish them off. In a tropical environment, with huge numbers of fruiting species, knowing the signs that a type of tree is close to fruiting and the best routes to take to get to the fruit before competitors do is vital to the survival of a fruit-eating specialist like most monkeys and apes. That competition gets us to monkey and ape level intelligence. I'm not going to get into what gets us from there to human.

There may be other routes—dolphins and predatory whales, but I don't get the feeling that intelligence at human or near-human level is inevitable.

On the Fringe alt-US: I would be very surprised to see the Carolinas as one state. They had very different origins, with South Carolina settled from Barbados, which made for a very different founding culture.

David Johnson: Congratulations on the new kitten. Always lots of fun. I made the mistake of playing “chase the laser pointer dot” with my daughter’s cat. Now he comes up to me and begs for a laser pointer fix.

Well, I can’t claim a ‘computer go foom’ of my own, but my wife’s computer recently died, as did my daughter’s Acer Netbook. It would be recoverable if she had burned the recovery CD. I may be able to work around that some way, but haven’t had time to try yet. My wife’s Acer Netbook also went foom temporarily, but I rescued it by reflashing the ROM. My desktop did suddenly forget how to access its LAN card, but I just switched to using the laptop for Internet access. At some point I’ll have to figure out how to reinstall the driver.

On the scans of the Doc Savage series: I would be interested in where you found them. I had the whole series in e-book at one point, but appear to have lost them when a laptop crashed many years ago. I thought I had them backed up, but can’t find any sign of the backup.

Intelligent Scooby Doo? There is a rift in the structure of the universe. Ever watch Phineas and Ferb? Looks dumb until you sit down and watch a few episodes. Then it still looks dumb, but in a twisted Bugs Bunny/Roadrunner sort of way—one joke but told in an infinitely creative variety of ways.

Your comments to Sidaway: The library fiascos continue. I think large organizations are inherently dysfunctional, to varying degrees.

Your comments to Ford: I was fortunate enough to miss *Galactica 1980* altogether, though I did watch the original *Galactica*, I’m ashamed to admit.

Your comments to me: As you may have figured out, *Dog Years* is one of my favorite short stories. I’m going to make a serious effort to get it published as soon as I get caught up with the novels. Thanks for the Snapshot nitpicks. I caught some of them on this edit pass, but there are a couple I missed.

Sorry *Mars Looks Different* is back on hiatus for a few issues. Lots of structural changes to make it make more sense, and I want to get it stabilized before I put anymore in here.

Interesting info on the Southern California water supply. I didn’t know that.

Good point on Germany suddenly running into very good US pilots in long-range fighters in the Hitler Doesn’t Declare War scenario.

On potential breakups of the US: The Red State/Blue State gap is unfortunately widening. Frankly I don’t think either side has much in the way of answers or is even asking the right questions, and a lot of the division is the result of the extremes on both sides outshouting more moderate voices.

I could see at least a substantial minority of people on both sides thinking that the two halves of the country would be better off as separate entities. Of course that was the case in the Civil War too, with a strong initial sentiment to “let the wayward sisters go.” In the Civil War that sentiment faded in the north as the practical implications of secession sunk in. The same would probably be true in any Blue State/Red State crisis. And of course there would be the issue of the many people caught on the ‘wrong’ side of the border. Most states are red or blue by at most ten to fifteen percent, which leaves a large minority that would probably rather have a very different state level outcome. In many cases it’s more of an urban versus suburban/rural divide than a state-level divide. For example, without Chicago Illinois is predominately Republican, though not overwhelmingly so.

Sounds like home taping of the early Dr. Who stuff just wouldn’t work. Too bad. Maybe have some station out in the Commonwealth somewhere accumulate a bunch of the early ones. If I ever perfect my time machine I’ll go back with a video camera and tape them all, then come back and make cents on the dollar invested by selling to wealthy fans. Of course I’ll probably step on a bug while I’m there and start a chain of events that results in a nuclear war just as I pop back out of the past.

I love this installment of Blue Flash. Nicely done! Keep them coming!

Wesley Kawato: Sorry to see that you're still having computer problems. I would send you one of my older ones if I had time to clean the data off of it. Good luck on getting your magazine out before the computer goes foom.

Kurt Sidaway: I've already congratulated you privately for finishing the NaNoWrite goal, but I want to do so publicly. Excellent job! I'm also happy to see that we got the font size problem solved.

Your comments to Gill: I consider myself relatively well informed about the world, but British politics tends to baffle me, as does Canadian politics. I have heard hints that the current US administration has stepped on British toes rather severely a couple of times lately, mainly in points of etiquette, but other than that and a general bemusement at the idea of the Conservatives and Liberals forming a government, I have virtually no knowledge of the current British political scene.

Your comments to Johnson: I suspect your surrender in the bureaucratic incompetence race is a tactical maneuver and you'll return to the fray in an issue or two. I'm glad I'm not the only one who started on AH long before the computer era. If you happen to find some of your old stuff feel free to toss some of it in a zine sometime. See my two Blasts From the Past this issue. I vaguely recall doing elaborate maps of an inhabited Venus where the Soviets and the US were backing competing client-states back in high school, but I have no idea if I kept them. I still do have a surprising amount of stuff from back then, several notebooks full of often embarrassingly bad attempts at fiction, a few of them dating back as far as my preteen years. Hopefully nobody but me will ever see those. If I ever get famous I will probably burn or shred them to avoid any publication after my death.

Your comments to Ford: Interesting. Our two parties are (often unfortunately) so entrenched legally and culturally that it is hard to imagine something coming from outside and ousting them. Taking one of them over, now that's more doable, and has been done from time to time.

Your comments to me: Yeah, *Dog Years* is unique and rather creepy. The original idea came to me out of the blue, almost fully formed, very different from my normal plotting/writing process.

I loved the first two Riverworld books, but I always thought that the World of the Tiers books were in many ways stronger.

On the aftermath of a Dies the Fire scenario. You're right about the distance between friends and lack of knowledge of close neighbors being a factor. On distribution centers: in the US, relatively cheap gas has allowed the distribution centers to be further away from the big cities. DeKalb is sixty miles outside of Chicago, and has several big logistics centers. Goods tend to travel through Chicago as a central transport hub rather than going directly where they are going to end up.

In terms of walking distance, I suspect that most people overestimate how far it would be feasible to walk in a situation where the infrastructure has broken down. If you're in good shape, used to walking, and have logistics backup (food and water), walking twenty miles per day is probably feasible. If someone doesn't walk regularly, and doesn't have logistics backup, I would be surprised if they could average even five miles per day for several successive days. We do a six mile walk for a charity every year and even though we're in pretty good shape and have regular refreshment stations along the way, we're always foot-weary, blistered and sore at the end of the day. I would hate to think about having to do even that several days in a row, while carrying everything I needed to survive in an environment where shelter and water were not a given.

Your comments to Docimo: Banning football so people would devote more time to archery? I can see that. It's kind of weird from a historical perspective that most people consider football a more manly sport than archery.

Interesting about your NaNo experiences. I would probably be better off writing off-line, and I did with Char, but the NaNo challenge seems to be enough to keep me on track for that month. The rest of the year, not so much. I found myself getting sidetracked again and again during my editing.