

DALE COZORT'S ALTERNATE HISTORY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 13: NUMBER 3 --- JUNE 2010

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So What Have I Been Up To?



Writing: As of mid-June I'm still not done with the rough draft of *Snapshot*. I hope I don't get stuck on it like I did with *Mars Looks Different*. I don't think I will. I did go through and line-edit about 80% of it, which needed to be done anyway.

Exchange will actually be available about a week after most of you

read this. It's been a long time coming. I'm not sure how I feel about it. The upside is that now there's a chance for people to see it and enjoy it, which was the point of the whole exercise. On the other hand, it is now, for the first time, set in stone. If I have a great idea for a line of dialogue I can't just fire up the word processor and zap the sucker in there. The book feels a little less mine in a way. And it is going out into a very cold, indifferent world.

I should have some copies to sell by the time I get back from the Science Fiction Writers workshop around July 20th. If you want to see the final result of all of the iterations you've seen in POD, let me know and send me a check for \$13.95. I'll send you a copy, signed if you want it signed. It's already available for preorder from Amazon

and Barnes and Nobles. You'll probably get it faster from the bookstores, possibly even before the official release date.

This issue is going to be a tad abbreviated by my standards I'm afraid. I inadvertently scheduled the deadline for the same weekend as Duckon. Not a good idea of course in any case, but to make matters worse, I made the mistake of e-mailing the person in charge of Duckon programming and suggesting a bunch of panels, including two on fanfiction. All of sudden I found myself on not one, but two panels on fanfiction. Not only that, but I found myself the only person on those two panels. So I spent most of my discretionary time for about a week researching fanfiction so I didn't look like an idiot in those panels. You'll see the results of that research later in this zine.

And then there was jury duty. I was called for a DUI and leaving the scene of an accident case. That took three days out of my schedule, though I found out later that the person on trial was something of a celebrity—a porn star by the name of Amy Damkroger. More about the trial later.

I'm trying to fit prepping for this issue of POD in among preps for the science fiction writers' workshop which I'm going to in Kansas, starting on July 3rd. It's a two-week workshop and it is approaching like a freight train. I'm nowhere near ready.

Health-wise I'm doing much better now than I was last issue. I've been exercising a lot more, and watching my diet, and my body is responding to the extra care, though not as fast as it did before that last milestone birthday. A month and a half of diet and more exercise has made a noticeable difference in how I feel, and I've dropped about 12 pounds, but it hasn't made me 18 again by any means.

What are the highlights of this issue? More again *Snapshot*, of course, and more *Mars Looks Different*. There will be some stuff on fanfiction and a convention report on Duckon, the Chicago area con I visited this past weekend. There will be a few mini-scenarios too, along hopefully with a good comment section.

I seem to have doomed *Flash Forward* by getting into it. The series wasn't renewed, which means it ends on the cliffhanger at the end of season 1, with most of the characters in danger if not dead, and the why of it all totally unresolved. It would be nice if the powers that be at least had class to allow a mini-series to wrap things up. Maybe three two-hour episodes. I'm liking the new Doctor Who himself, but the scripts don't strike me as all that good on average so far. We're several episodes behind the Brits, so they may have improved

the average by now.

Lightning knocked out our DSL modem/router over the weekend, and I'm starting to realize how dependent I've become on having 24/7 access to the Internet. I keep wanting to pop on to grab a little something or pull something off that I wrote somewhere else.

I succumbed to the hysteria and bought an iPad about a week ago. So far I'm not sorry, though I suspect I will be in six months when something far better and more open comes along, probably based on Android or Chrome OS. The iPad is a very nice little gizmo, but it is not a computer, and that's sometime—actually often, a source of frustration. It's easy to buy something for it, but harder than it should be to bring in free stuff like PDF files. I'm using it as a combination e-book reader, Internet browser, and portable TV/movie thing.

To be honest, a light-weight, all solid-state Linux netbook would meet my needs better than the iPad does. I bought one a couple of years ago, but it's falling apart and doesn't have quite enough memory for video anyway. I looked for a replacement, but the places I looked had only Windows netbooks with hard drives or first generation Linux netbooks at two or three times the price of the modern Windows-based ones. The power of Windows. I looked long and hard at an Android tablet with a 5-inch screen, but the only one I found on the market is from a company with a rather poor reputation in terms of quality and a reputation for rushing beta products onto the market.

Oh well. The iPad does what I bought it to do, and should keep doing it for years. If something better comes out, that won't change.

I was impressed by issue #60. It was great to have Andrew and Robert Alley back, even if for just one issue. Hope we see both of you again. And the covers! David outdid himself this time. I went to OfficeMax and had them print the covers on glossy paper. Looked great.

And on to this issue. I hope you enjoy it.

Update: Science Fiction Convention Madness and I play Forest Gump to the Footnote People.

The last few weeks have been strange and eventful. I post little updates on my life on the Writing Wombats group on Gather. Here is a selection of them to give you a bit of the highlights:

Jun 7, 2010, 9:20pm EDT

Hi all. I am on a jury again. That's 3 times called and 3 times on the panel. That's weird since they call 36

people for each 12 person panel. Oh well. It's an interesting case that I can't talk about until it's over, which won't be until at least tomorrow. I will say that it's an interesting case.

I can't seem to escape writing though. One of my fellow jurors is a retired manager of a company that does a lot of underground construction. He gave me lots of details I wish I had known for Exchange. Then I went out for lunch, wandered around and found myself on Exchange street or avenue (don't remember which).

Jun 8, 2010, 11:31pm EDT

Jury duty still for Dale. I go back tomorrow for closing arguments and deliberations. It's an interesting case. A couple of times I wanted very much to ask the witnesses a question that I thought cut to the heart of the matter and would have made the case a slam-dunk one way or the other. The attorneys on both sides appear to be very competent and polite, and the judge is handling the case very well. So far it has been a very positive experience for me.

Jun 9, 2010, 5:53pm EDT

Jury duty is over. It was a DUI case with a side of failure to report an accident. A lady ran her car (an antique VW sports car) into a telephone pole. Car was damaged but drivable. Pole sustained minor damage. Another motorist reported the accident. Police tracked down the car and got to the woman's home somewhere between an hour and an hour and a half later. She claimed that in the meantime she had consumed 2-plus glasses of port and taken some Xanax and a sleeping pill.

Police arrived, and to summarize a complex set of events they discovered that (a) she had (admittedly) hit the pole (b) had brushed the side of her garage with the car as she parked it. They gave her a field sobriety test, which they claimed she flunked, arrested her, and took her down for a breathalyzer. The breathalyzer was about two hours after the accident. She registered well over the legal limit.

To make a long story short, we ended up acquitting on the DUI stuff. The sports car is a stickshift without power steering. The defendant had recently broken her thumb. The road is narrow, curves, and has no shoulder and a drop-off at the point the accident occurred. I think most of the jury thought alcohol played a role in the accident, but we didn't feel that had been proven. The defendant suffers from insomnia and got about 3 hours of sleep the night before the accident. The accident left her left wheel well bent against the tire and made steering difficult. It also left a chunk of the car sticking out a bit on that side. We felt that while it was likely that alcohol was involved there was certainly room for

significant doubt and other reasonable explanations.

So, we acquitted on the DUI. There was no doubt in most of our minds that she left the scene of the accident without properly reporting it. We weren't all sure that the condition of the utility pole represented damage in any meaningful sense, but the letter of the law says that "any" damage is the threshold, and the pole did get scraped up a bit. It was a close call. I can't say what the other jurors were thinking, but there might have been an element of "we gave the defendant the benefit of a lot of doubt on the DUI and she's used up all of the slack she gets" in the thinking.

In any case, it was interesting. The lawyers and the judge were both very professional, though I thought the lawyers on both sides missed some opportunities. The police work seemed a little sloppy in a couple of areas. They had chances to nail down key facts and missed them. On the other hand, that's Monday morning quarterbacking. They were puzzling out a fast-moving situation where they didn't know what had happened or that it was eventually going to court.

It was funny. We elected the youngest person on the jury as foreman. She is 20 years old, but very poised, organized and articulate. She did an excellent job. It was fun and interesting. I think we did a good job on the verdict, even though I don't think the defendant was necessarily innocent. There was reasonable doubt, and that was the question we were there to answer.

Jun 9, 2010, 7:46pm EDT

A little tidbit I just discovered: the defendant's name is Amy Damkroger. Do a Google search on that name and DeKalb Illinois. *My note: Actually, you don't have to. She's a porn star, with nominations for "Best All Girl Scene", "Best Anal Scene", and four or five other types. Forest Gump wanders around and meets presidents. I wander around and help acquit aging porn stars. (She's 43, which in that game has to be toward the end of the line—kind of odd for this somewhat older than 43 guy to think of someone 43 years old as being 'aging', but in that game I'm guessing that anything over about 30 is starting on the downhill slide) Don't know for sure. I'm not particularly into porn.*

Jun 14, 2010, 4:49pm EDT

Talk about your digital overload. I'm currently reading the Wombat thread on the iPad. While it refreshes, I'm looking at Twitter on my laptop, which is encoding a video I DVRed so I can watch it on the train to Kansas next month. Meanwhile, I'm moving a version of Cats that I DVRed earlier to a camera memory chip so my daughter can take it with her and play it on her netbook on a trip she's taking later in July. And I'm also trying to put together my zine for the alternate history newsletter

I do. Is that totally absurd?

Jun 14, 2010, 10:58pm EDT

My daughter and one of her friends did open mike at the local sort of coffee house tonight. She has a beautiful voice. (no bias there).

I have a bad habit of leaving tabs open if I think I might need to go back to the website. When I wrote my early message I had 70 tabs open in Firefox, 12 files open in Word, 3 spreadsheets open in Excel, plus sticky notes and the video encode program. I immediately started closing stuff because that's utterly ridiculous.

Jun 15, 2010, 11:25pm EDT

I suggested a topic for a forum at a science fiction convention I'm attending, and promptly became a presenter on the topic--actually not just a presenter but THE presenter. That's a problem because I don't have a lot of material on the subject. The topic is: "FanFiction: Writer's Friend or Foe." What do you think of the idea of someone you don't know writing stories in your fictional universe and maybe with your characters without your permission? Some authors turn a blind eye. Some tacitly encourage it as a way to keep fans engaged as long as no one makes money off of it. Some send lawyers around.

What would you do if you ever find yourself in that situation?

Btw: fanfiction.net lists over 459 thousand pieces of Harry Potter fanfic and over 149 thousand pieces of Twilight fanfic. Buffy has over 38 thousand. There are fanfic novels continuing the Firefly series. There are even thousands of pieces of Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew fanfic.

June 20 (early morning): I'm at Duckon--Chicago area science fiction con. It has been eventful. Friday I came in for the day and went home for the night. We had a severe thunderstorm just as I was about to leave. Power went out and stayed out for 5 hours. I left after the worst of it passed, with the power still off. Had to open the garage door manually. On the way home, emergency broadcasting came on. Another severe thunderstorm was 20 miles away from home and moving in at 55 miles an hour. I was 25 miles out and doing 70. I knew it would be close. I knew I didn't want to get caught in this thing--55 mph winds, plus quarter-sized hail etc. So I watched the sky as I pushed my old Hyundai as fast as traffic allowed. I could see the storm cloud moving in in the northwestern sky. As I got closer I could see the lightning. I got to the edge of town before the storm hit, but rain was coming down in buckets before I got to the garage--and to the door I had to open manually. I got the car in, but the door was still open when a bolt hit

something across the alley from the garage. Sounded like a gun went off and I saw sparks dripping off of whatever it hit.

I stayed in the garage until the rain slackened, then ran in. Power was back on, but we lost our wireless router/modem, so no Internet at home until maybe Monday.

Tonight Jackie and I stayed over at the con hotel. We were both tired and went to bed at around 11:30. About an hour later the fire alarm went off. Spent 40 minutes in the parking lot before the all clear. Which brings us to now. Can't go back to sleep. Sitting in bed with my iPad. Hopefully tomorrow will be uneventful

Jun 20, 2010, 10:31pm EDT

Hi all. Doing the Internet thing from the local coffee shop due to the lightning-struck modem. Very loud in here. Open mic night. Excuse the brevity. We had another fire alarm at 8 this morning. Oddly enough, both of them were legitimate alarms. In one case somebody tried to toast something with a coffee-maker or something like that. I don't remember what the other one was, but it involved actual smoke, and in quantities large enough to set off an alarm.

Other than the fire alarms, things went pretty well at the convention. I did a little promotional mini-zine for Exchange, and ran out of copies. My forums on fanfic were well received. I was really sweating that because I knew virtually nothing about the subject when I discovered that I was leading not one but two forums on it. So Internet cram sessions for Dale.

Science Fiction conventions are fun. Always something new. They did Singing Tesla Coils again, filking (songs related to science fiction/fantasy themes), a Klingon variety show which apparently involved pole dancing (the mind boggles), had lots of unique T-shirts (I'm now the proud owner of an 'official grammar police' t-shirt), and had a high concentration of readers and other people I needed to network with. One guy has a podcast that covers science fiction conventions. My daughter and I may be on their website, me with my typical awful picture. Totally unphotogenic here.

June 21: My daughter reminds me that I forgot one of the most fun parts of the convention: One of the fans also is involved in a group that rescues injured birds of prey. They do shows at the conventions as a fundraiser. They brought a simply enormous owl, a couple of eagles, a falcon, and a raven. The birds flew from perch to perch to handler, over the audience. They flew low enough that you could feel the wind from their wings as they flew over.

My daughter got to play a small role in the show. They asked her to hold a bag of dice for a raven to take from her and deliver to the trainer. The raven landed on her arm, took the bag, and flew back. She was so nervous.

I never remember to bring a camera to these things. My daughter took a number of pictures and several short videos on her cellphone camera. Actually, that's most of the way she saw the Tesla coil show. She's like 5 foot and maybe half an inch, and with the crowd standing around the coils she rarely saw anything live. I

held her cell phone over the crowd and recorded the video, then handed it back to her to see. I'll see if I can extract some of the pictures and video from her once we get our wifi back and post them to Gather.

Speaking of Internet access: We won't get wifi back until tomorrow or the next day. Showing my obsessive nature, I ran out and bought a wireless modem and a month worth of service. I had been toying with the idea of doing that anyway because we won't have convenient access to Internet in Kansas.

FICTION SECTION

Fiction

SNAPSHOT (PART 4) – BY: DALE R. COZORT

<<< Snipped Sorry >>>

SPECIAL EXCHANGE SECTION

Exchange: A Long Road To The Bookshelves

On June 10, I got a little something in the mail: A copy of my novel *Exchange*. It was a cool moment. The book will be available for sale on July 6 of this year. Getting that book was also a moment that took a long time to get here. I'm going to trace the chronology as best I can.

Sometime in the early 1980s: I'm not sure when I first had the idea for *Exchange*. I remember reading an article that claimed that there were certain kinds of science fiction stories that simply couldn't work and should be rejected without further examination. Among those kinds of stories: ones that involved ecological invasions. The thinking was that the biochemistry of any alien invaders would be so different that they would be incompatible with eating or being eaten by earth life.

So, any invasion by an entire ecology of aliens was impossible. Being the contrary person that I am, I eventually realized that while outer space type ecological invasions were at least unlikely, you could get the same affect by going with an invasion from an alternate timeline.

That idea marinated for quite a while. I was working as a computer programmer and the hours of sitting and doing hard brainwork weren't conducive to coming home and writing.

Around 1985: I started world-building for *Exchange*. I think I still have a couple of legal pads worth of notes around somewhere with preliminary concepts. I don't think that much of that world-building actually made it into the book, but I was seriously working on the concept.

Early 1997: After a long hiatus, I finally came back to the concept and actually wrote a novella based on it. I didn't have a title initially, but saved the file as *EcoInv.doc*, for "ecological invasion". The oldest version I kept was saved on July 24, 1997. I apparently finished writing it sometime before July 17, 1997, and was in the process of line-editing it down.

October 8, 1998 I submitted *Exchange* (by then a 16,000 word novella) to a potential publisher for the first time. I

submitted it to the now defunct prozine Science Fiction Age. It got a form rejection.

April 5, 1999 I got my first personal rejection for *Exchange* the novella. It was from the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.

Late 1990s I wrote several more novelettes and novellas in the *Exchange* universe. *Bat Out of Hell* was set in the area around the Exchange and chronicled the adventures of a guy trying to smuggle fast breeding seed-eater bats out of the part of Bear Country that replaced the Exchange area. He was going to use them for biological warfare purposes. *Freedom* was a standalone about a group of anarchist nutcases who tried to live in Bear Country. Most of it is in the novel, though in mutated form. *West Story* introduced Sharon Mack and Leo West, and their efforts to get Sharon's daughter back from her drunken ex-husband.

July 1999: I put an excerpt (one chapter) of the newly integrated novel version of *Exchange* in POD, and also in the online version of my Alternate History Newsletter for that month.

Over the next decade I rewrote the novel several times to integrate it more tightly. The main problem initially was that I had far too many characters—four stories worth of characters. Harry Turtledove may be able to get away with that or worse, but I couldn't and didn't want to. POD people saw the story grow and become more and more a novel rather than a loosely integrated collection of short stories. Finally, a little over a year ago, the novel was close enough to ready for publication that a small publisher (the Armchair Adventurer imprint of Stairway Press) agreed to publish it, though with considerable revisions. Those revisions went back and forth several times before they were happy with the manuscript and I was happy to put my name on the resulting book.

July 6, 2010: It should be available. I'll probably have a few copies to sign and sell to friends. It won't be distributed all that widely. Amazon will carry it, as will the online versions of Borders and B&N. You'll be able to special-order it from pretty much any bookstore.

THE FRINGES OF SCIENCE FICTION: THE RICK BRANT SCIENCE ADVENTURES

I grew up avidly reading the Grosset and Dunlap Young Adult series books—Hardy Boys, Tom Swift and Rick Brant mostly, along with some Ken Holt. I quickly got tired of the uneven quality of the writing in the Stratemeyer Syndicate books (Hardy Boys and Tom Swift), but continued to enjoy Rick Brant into my mid-teens, though I shifted more of my focus toward more mature mysteries and science fiction.



I still have a nearly complete run of Rick Brant, all of the first twenty-three books. The twenty-fourth and last book, unpublished during the author's lifetime, was published twenty-five or thirty years later in a 500 book edition that I didn't find out about until after it sold out and became a collectors' item that routinely sells for prices approaching \$1000 on e-bay.

The Rick Brant stories were written from the late 1940s until the late 1960s, roughly a book a year. They were written under the pen name "John Blaine". The actual author was almost always a man named Hal Goodwin. Hal Goodwin had traveled extensively, especially in the Far East, and that showed in the books. Unlike most of the young adult series books, Rick Brant books had the strong sense of place that usually comes only when an author has prowled the places the books are set in.

The books were always at the edge of science fiction, but rarely stepped unarguably into that realm. They involved two boys of undetermined and unchanging age, probably in their late teens. Rick Brant was the son of a famous scientist. His friend Scotty was an ex-marine who lied about his age to get into the marines and was mustered out at the end of World War II, still in his teens. They lived on Sprindrift Island, off the east coast, separated from the mainland by a tidal flat. They traveled the world, to the Philippines, Tibet, Nigeria, Egypt,

Europe, etc.

The plots were relatively simple, as befitted their audience, but characterization and dialog were always well done, and the writing quality in general was pretty good.

So how can a book or series be at the edge of science fiction? *The Whispering Box Mystery* had a group running around with a gadget that causes temporary unconsciousness by some unknown mechanism. *Sea Gold* involved extracting gold and other precious metals from sea water.

The fact that the science was a little beyond state of the art, but not far tending to make the books age rather quickly in some cases. For example, one book featured transistors as a new, high tech thing.

Rick Brant books probably couldn't be sold to kids in the United States these days without lawsuits and parent protests. Rick and friends did dangerous things. They used slings (David and Goliath-type rock-throwing things) in several of the adventures, and a companion volume of Science Projects gave detailed instructions on how to make and use them. It mildly cautioned the audience of 12 to 16 year olds not to clobber themselves with the things.

Hal Goodwin wanted to write an actual science fiction young adult series, and actually wrote the first of the series: *Rip Foster Rides the Grey Planet*. Unfortunately, the series wasn't accepted for additional books.

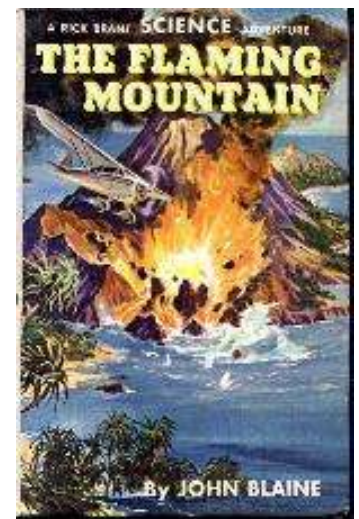
Most of the Rick Brant books are still in copyright and many are difficult to find, but a couple of them are in the public domain. Project Gutenberg lists two of them at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/b#a33540>

Hal Goodwin had a way with dialog and characterization, and bits of dialog and striking situations have stuck in my head enough that I still remember them after nearly 40 years.

The Rip Foster book is available online at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20147/20147-h/20147-h.html>



Scenario Seeds – Forgotten Decades

1817-1827 (yes, I'm cheating a little):

1. Napoleon manages to escape and goes somewhere. When does he escape? Where does he go and what happens when he arrives?
2. Spain holds onto power in Mexico, or parts thereof. If it only holds onto parts, which parts does it hold? The center around Mexico City or the periphery? If the periphery, which parts?
3. Greek revolt leads to the partition of the Ottoman empire rather than just Greek Independence. Who gets what? How does the resulting map shake out?
4. Gold discovered in California?
- 5.

1920s:

1. Washington Naval treaty fails.
2. Irish hardliners win out and continue the fight against Britain in an attempt to force the Brits out of Northern Ireland as well what became the Irish Republic
3. Nationalists in India develop into a militant effort to oust the British by force instead of Gandhi's peaceful resistance approach
4. Chinese Communists win the infighting between them and the Nationalists in the late 1920s
5. The northern warlords beat the Nationalist-Communist coalition in the Northern expedition.
6. The short, but very nasty depression shortly after World War I becomes a prolonged and even nastier equivalent of the Great Depression through most of what was historically the Roaring 20s--probably due

- to protectionist measures or bad British or American economic policy.
7. The Bolsheviks win the Soviet/Polish war.
 8. The Russian Civil War continues for another couple of years, or maybe several years.
 9. Lenin lives longer, and almost inevitably gets into a power struggle with Stalin.
 10. Lenin dies before he implements the New Economic Policy in the Soviet Union.
 11. Thailand launches a successful effort to modernize.
 12. Mexican Civil War results in Villa and Zapata dominating Northern and Southern Mexico respectively, but without the ability to actually govern the country.
 13. Spain accepts Wrangel's offer of his White Russian army to fight in the Rif war against Moroccan tribes in Spanish Morocco.
 14. Bolivia and Paraguay avoid the Chaco war.
 15. Saudi Arabia fails to unify.
 16. Goering doesn't get shot and badly wounded in the Beerhall Putsch.
 17. German/Soviet secret military collaboration gets discovered by the Allies.
 18. Poles win the border clashes that helped decide the boundaries between Germany and Poland in Silesia.
 19. Japanese refuse to evacuate Siberia and maintain a puppet White Russian regime in part of it that they occupy.
 20. Greeks win, or at least don't lose so decisively, their war against Turkey over predominately Greek sections of Asia Minor.
 21. Dustbowl conditions arise a few years earlier.

Snippets From AH.com

I've spent way too much time on alternatelyhistory.com the last couple of months. Here are a few snippets from my comments that make sense without the underlying contest.

Independent Siberia or a longer Russian Civil War:

I don't think an independent Siberia would last long-term, but I certainly think a more capable White leadership on that front could have held out longer, especially if the other White leaders had remained in play for a while.

I'm not sure that a defensive strategy was the best strategy for White armies. The Reds had control of a much larger population, and more industry. They also had competent military men in their army. They were going to eventually build up an overwhelmingly powerful army and pick the White forces off one at a time if they maintained control of the area they controlled. Maybe a more coherent offensive before the Reds got their act together might have been the better strategy. Treating peasants better or at least giving lip-service to more peasant-friendly agenda would have helped a lot.

A Japanese invasion of Hawaii:

Among the many many reasons a Hawaii invasion wouldn't work:

1) *Difficulty of coordinating the transports for the troops with the strike force--getting the forces there at the same time.* How would the Japanese make sure the transports got there at an appropriate time--presumably after the air strikes but no more than a day after them? You have ships with different rates of speed, which presumably means they travel separately. In radio silence. If either of the two groups of ships is delayed by a storm (we are, after all, talking about the North Pacific in winter), then the other one has to sit in extremely dangerous waters while the other one arrives.

Actually, the air strikes can't be delayed without serious consequences. The Japanese picked Sunday morning after a night with a full moon for a very good reason. They couldn't just sit and wait hours or days for the transports to get into position. They also can't send the transports into position early enough to avoid any chance of them not arriving on time, because that would mean that they would likely be sitting within range of Pearl's reconnaissance planes for a day or two. Not a good idea. No innocent explanation for several divisions of Japanese troops sitting 400 miles off of Hawaii.

2) *Coordinating the attack:* Okay. Let's say the Japanese do manage to get the troop transports and the carriers into the vicinity of Hawaii when they plan to do so. They manage to get there undetected with not just one but two rather large groups of surface forces. Now, how do they get those troops onto the beaches? Figure they start their run for the beaches about 300 miles out. Figure they move around 15 miles an hour, which is probably a bit optimistic. So at least 20 hours from the order to go to the time they hit the beach.

Even the Japanese aren't crazy enough to do an opposed night landing across beaches, and they aren't going to be able to zap instantly onto the beaches so they're limited to starting their landing between roughly 7 am and maybe 5 pm (which gives them only around two hours to complete the landing before dark--I'm being extremely generous here).

Want Japanese troops on the beaches at 8 am on December 7? They start their run in at around noon on December 6th. By the time the Japanese fleet hits Pearl (a little before 8 am), the invasion fleet has been within 90 miles of Pearl for five or six hours. Good luck keeping the element of surprise.

Want them there at noon on December 7? They start at 4 pm on December 6. By the time of the Japanese first strike they're 60 miles away from the beaches. By the time the time the second raid returns to their ships, the landing is happening. What happens if the air raids don't succeed in knocking out the US battleships and most of the US airpower in Hawaii? If the raid doesn't come off perfectly, the Japanese have probably thrown away those divisions. Put a couple of US battleships within 20 miles of those transports and they will be sunk. The transports can't outrun the battleships. They certainly can't outfight them. The Japanese won't know their raids have succeeded or failed until it's too late to save the invasion force from a failure.

Go ahead and play with the timing. Want them on beaches at 2 pm? The invasion fleet is within 90 miles of Oahu when the first airstrike happens, much closer than the Japanese fleet every got, and within easy range of any surviving US airpower. The longer the Japanese wait, the more time the US has to recover. The closer to the time of the air strikes the force goes in, the more risk of the invasion force being detected before the airstrikes and/or getting destroyed. If the Japanese don't want to risk the element of surprise and don't want to risk having their invasion force massacred, they pretty much have to wait until the morning of December 8th. Good luck with that. The US forces would be alert and at the beaches in force. The Japanese would have maybe one day of air support before the Japanese carriers would have to withdraw to refuel. The immobilized US battleships would be able to hit most of the island from Pearl Harbor, and if you're within 20 miles of a battleship's main guns, you really don't want to be there.

This is an exercise in shooting fish in a barrel. A Japanese invasion of Hawaii was nowhere close to feasible for those and an awful lot of other reasons.

Successful German Invasion of Britain: You can't get to a successful invasion of Britain from the German situation as of late June/early July 1940. Period. What there was of a German navy was in shambles after losses in Norway. German paratroopers were in tatters in the aftermath of their losses in Holland. The British had the bulk of their army as evacuated from Dunkirk. Given trained manpower, the Brits could reequip their army from US and local sources fairly quickly. The Brits had radar as a force-multiplier for fighter command. The Germans had neglected naval aviation. No working airdropped torpedo as of the summer of 1940. No really appropriate anti-naval aircraft.

The Germans had not really considered Britain a potential enemy until about 1938, and hadn't developed a thorough understanding of how the British economy worked or where it was vulnerable.

To get a successful German invasion of Britain you would have to at the very minimum go back to April 1940 and avoid a lot of the German losses in the Norway invasion and the heavy casualties to their airborne in Holland. Then, assuming that the German victory in the Battle of France didn't get butterflyed away, you would need the Germans to trap nearly all of the BEF at Dunkirk.

That still doesn't take away the RAF or the Royal navy. It does mean that if the Germans do manage to get troops ashore the British wouldn't have much to dislodge them. On the other hand, having total naval superiority means that the Brits could bring battleships in at night and pound any German bridgehead within 20-30 miles of the ocean with firepower that is a large multiple of what the Germans could initially respond with. The Germans wouldn't have any counter to British ships coming in at night for bombardments.

Would the British keep their nerve if they didn't have much in the way of ground forces to oppose a German invasion? Under Churchill they probably would have. Under Chamberlain they might not have. On the other hand, the Brits did have some access to Ultra, and that would have told them how unprepared the Germans were to invade. Take that away, along with the bulk of the BEF, and give the Germans back their naval and airborne casualties--And the Germans could still only win through a British moral collapse, not through a successful invasion.

Better US Tanks at Normandy: The US had several chances to make the Sherman more competitive. The most obvious was to increase the percentage with 76mm guns instead of 75mm guns. The 76 had a longer barrel and higher muzzle velocity than the 75. Give crews some of the better armor piercing rounds that historically went mostly to tank destroyer in the early going, and it would have done considerably better than it did historically. There were also projects to give the Sherman a US-designed longer-barreled 75mm gun comparable to the ones in the Sherman Firefly or a 90mm gun like the one in the Pershing.

One of the issues with the Sherman was that giving it a longer gun meant shipping fewer tanks in a given space because if the gun extended beyond the chassis that meant you couldn't pack them "bumper to bumper".

Another option with some potential might have been to bring one of the early vehicles in the T20 series that eventually led to the Pershing into production. Unfortunately, designers spent a lot of time on the T23, which as I recall it had an electric transmission. Not a bad idea necessarily, but retraining the mechanics would have been a bear. If I recall correctly, the US actually built close to 250 T23s of various versions, though they never entered combat. The T23 had a 76mm gun. It led to the T25, which ditched the electric transmission and added a 90mm gun. The US produced either 10 or 40 T25s. I can't remember which. They split an order of 50 tanks 10/40 between T25s and T26s (Pershing prototypes), but I can't remember which got the 10 and which got the 40. In any case, the Pershing was essentially an up-armored T25. Standardizing the T25 might have made sense, or going with a version of the T23 sans electric transmission initially and then upgunning to 90 mm when necessary.

Late model Shermans got the turret from the T23, so it did make some contribution. I believe someone suggested sending the existing T23s to Europe when the 75mm Shermans proved inadequate, but the maintenance issues shot that down (plus, undoubtedly, the logistic issues of supporting another type of medium tank in the theater).

A Czech/Polish Alliance Against Hitler: Based on the German ammo supply situation at the end of the Polish campaign (two weeks worth of bombs left and less than four weeks of ammo left), the idea of them taking on the Czechs and the Poles together almost a year earlier without access to Czech ammo stocks seems close to ASB.

There was a reason why the German military thought seriously about deposing Hitler when he plotted to attack the Czechs: the Germans were nowhere close to ready for war in fall 1938:

- + Ammunition stocks too low
- + Pilots lacked training (they did okay in Poland after another year)
- + Synthetics plants not ready, which meant dependence on imported rubber and oil. Even if the Brits, etc don't cut that off, how long would the German hard currency supply last?
- + Army training incomplete. That was true to a lesser extent by Sept 1939, but would have been a major issue in Oct 1938.
- + They were desperately short of hard currency, and absolutely had to have it to pay for the imports they needed to keep their industries running.

The Germans were almost always on a shoestring. They had to take Austria or they would have had to reduce military spending by 30%. Their governance of Austria was more a looting than anything else, and they used Austrian resources to keep up the buildup. By fall 1938 they absolutely had to take something again or cut the buildup. Sudetenland was rich in resources, especially a type of coal ideal for synthetic fuel and rubber processes. And by March 1939 the Germans were back to needing another fix. Each conquest made the next feasible. In the early going, the Germans couldn't afford to actually fight for their conquests, though by Sept 1939 they sort of were.

My guess: If the Germans didn't win quickly against the Czechs they wouldn't be capable of offensive action simply due to lack of ammo. They would probably not just lose, but lose in humiliating fashion.

A Stronger Postwar Britain: The British election of July 1945 was in many ways a crucial turning point. I suspect that one's opinion on whether or not it turned the right way is probably dependent on their opinion of British politics and policies. Britain couldn't afford both an empire/major role in world politics and the type of domestic society Labor wanted. Actually, at the end of World War II it couldn't afford either of those two things.

Would Churchill have done better as prime minister post-war? I'm guessing that he would have wasted a lot more of the national resources trying to hang onto the empire. Militarily Britain might remain more powerful, but financially it would have been at least as much of a basket case.

Nationalist Victory in Chinese Civil War: In terms of POV, it would help the Nationalists considerably if the British didn't fritter away the last good German-trained Nationalist division in the Burma campaign. Those guys would have helped a lot in training the Nationalist army as it tried to rebuild. The Nationalists tried a major offensive in 1942, but it fizzled to the point that the Japanese barely noticed it. That might not have happened to the same extent if the German-trained troops had still been available.

It would have also helped considerably if the US had given priority to building up the Chinese army rather than to building up air assets in China in terms of the airlifts over the Hump. Getting the Burma Road reopened earlier might have helped even more. The Ledo Road probably wouldn't have helped much.

A Nationalist China would have probably been US allied, at least at first, but would have probably gone its own way on some issues. Historically the Nationalists gave the Viet Minh some weapons in the early going of their war against the French, and certainly the Nationalists were no friends of restored European empires in the Far East. For that matter, I don't know if the US would have gotten involved on the French side of their IndoChina adventure in the absence of a Communist victory in China.

What would a Nationalist regime look like? The Nationalists were a complex and often unstable mix of warlords and progressive and traditionalist central government factions. The warlords ranged from relatively competent and reasonably supportive of the Chinese war effort, though with a strong subtext of maintaining their own military autonomy (the Kunming faction) to for sale to the highest of most powerful bidder. The center lost much of its power when it lost most of the good German-trained divisions in the battle for Shanghai. It was rebuilding with US-trained and equipped divisions, but the US was primarily concerned with building a Chinese army to fight the Japanese, and didn't understand that the Nationalists were playing a complex chess game where strengthening some elements of what was formally the Chinese army would actually weaken the central government because those elements were of doubtful loyalty. In 1943 and 1944, much of the loyal part of the Chinese army was actually positioned to keep an eye on portions of doubtful loyalty, and (from old and possibly faulty memory) half a million of the best troops were keeping an eye on the Communists.

A Nationalist victory would imply that the US built up central government units to the point where they could keep the bulk of the warlords in line as well as beating the Communists. Defanging the warlords would probably be an ongoing problem though.

If the Germans Used Nerve Gas In the East: It gets uglier for Germany and to some extent the Soviets. German nerve gas production had a lot of glitches and by this time the Allies had overwhelming air superiority, which would have left German cities and logistics vulnerable. If the Germans were going to use Nerve Gas, the time to have done it would have been much earlier--1940 for the Battle of Britain or 1941/42 in the Soviet Union, and especially for the battles of Stalingrad and Leningrad. My understanding is that production lagged and stockpiles were deemed inadequate during that period, which was factor in them not getting used.

One ex-Soviet germ warfare guy claims that the Soviets probably used bacteriological weapons on two occasions in 1942. One involved rabbit fever and ended up infecting a lot more Soviet civilians than it did Germans. Apparently the Germans never figured out they were under biological attack. If that's true, and I'm not sure it is, German detection of that attack and retaliation for it would have been a logical time for the use of nerve gases. Anyone know what the Germans were doing in terms of germ warfare?

Spain Joins the Axis in June 1940:

a) For the summer of 1940, the British would have essentially nothing in the way of ground forces to spare to do anything other than brace for a German invasion. Until the weather made a German invasion impossible until the spring--sometime in October 1940--the British ground forces worth a darn were pinned in Britain by fear of German invasion.

b) As that threat receded, the British would have some modern equipment and decent forces to use somewhere. Figure they would probably go after Canary Islands in November 1940. Forces and equipment and shipping used there would not immediately be available for attacking the Italians in North Africa or transporting equipment to attack the Italians in North Africa. That probably means that the British triumph over the Italians in North Africa is delayed, scaled back, or both.

c) With Spain in the war, and France out of it, the Italian navy should be able to dominate the Western Mediterranean. They might even be able to base surface units and aircraft in the Spanish Mediterranean islands or even in Spanish Mediterranean ports. From there they could probably go in and bombard Gibraltar. As far as I can tell, the British had nothing on the rock that could do more than make a battleship keep its distance. I think everything the British had in the way of artillery in Gibraltar was under 10 inches. Does anyone know of anything bigger? If I'm right on that, the Italians should be able to sit outside the maximum range of the British artillery with a battleship or two and pound the British with impunity. Granted,

Italian battleship guns weren't all that accurate, but they were probably good enough to hit a stationary target as big as the rock.

d) If the Axis did control the western Mediterranean, there would presumably be ways around a bad Spanish railroad system. The Germans could ship at least part of the material they needed from Italian ports or (with a little arm twisting) Vichy French ports.

Bottom line: Yeah, the Germans could probably take the important parts of Gibraltar and neutralize any remaining British holdouts in hidden tunnels. That would be good for the early part of their war effort--through mid-to-late 1942--because it would doom Malta and shield the Italians to some extent from having to worry about British activity from Malta. It would reduce Vichy French options and leverage considerably, because the Germans would be in a position to easily move into French North Africa. They probably would have troops stationed in Spanish Morocco (Operation Felix called for a couple of divisions there I believe).

In the longer term, Spain would be a drain. Food, oil, rubber, most modern weapons would have to come from Germany's inadequate stocks, starting when the Germans attacked the Soviets. It would expand the amount of coastline the Germans had to defend in the west by a lot. Unless the boost from Spain in the war somehow allowed the Germans to knock out the Soviets, in the long term the Germans would be worse off.

I started a scenario on this in my newsletter and never finished it. The key things I figured out for the parts I did do were: (1) Spain in the Axis adds significantly to the German economic/raw material burdens in some areas where the Germans didn't need more burdens: oil and food among the biggest issues. (2) In the early phases of the war, Spain being in helps Italy considerably. Between Spain itself and Spanish Morocco, Axis artillery and planes can come close to cutting off British access to the western Mediterranean, making it extremely difficult to resupply Malta, and making resupply of British forces in Egypt more difficult. In the early stages of the war, the British did run convoys the length of the Mediterranean in a few emergency situations. That would be nearly impossible with Spain in the war. As a result it would take considerably longer to get tank reinforcements to Egypt and eventually Crete. Malta would probably fall. Vichy France would be in a far weaker bargaining position, because Spanish Morocco would give the Axis an easy point of entry to North Africa. Gibraltar might or might not fall, but its sea and air power would be neutralized, and its artillery would be at least partly suppressed. If that allows Italian and German surface ships to go through the Straits back and forth to the Atlantic, it makes life much more interesting for the British Navy in the early part of the war.

As a price of Spanish entry, the Germans would probably give the Spanish some additional slices of Morocco, though if they gave them all of it, the Spanish would probably find it hard to digest. There were some tough, well-armed tribes up in the hills that were strongly allied with the French, and might have decided that they didn't want to be ruled by Spain. Assuming that the Germans gave Spain some additional coastal enclaves and rights to land transportation to Spanish Sahara, I'm guessing that Spanish Sahara becomes a focal point, with Spain and probably the Germans trying to use air power there to allow them to run convoys down the Moroccan coast and then to the Canary islands.

Franco was a realist who would have reinforced and resupplied the Canary islands to the best of his abilities before declaring war and demanded concrete plans from the Germans to help him hold the Canary islands, including German air power both in Spanish Sahara and on bases in the Canary Islands. In the short term, Axis air power on the adjacent African coast and in the Islands would make interdicting Spanish convoys to the islands iffy, especially for surface ships. If the British don't take the Canaries early on, the Germans build them up as an air and submarine base, with nasty consequences for the Battle of the Atlantic.

As a downside for the Axis, German planes and submarines in the Canary islands gives the US major heartburn, and makes the political position of the isolationists more difficult in the US. The US probably brings more surface vessels from the Pacific earlier.

As the British get stronger and especially if/when the US enters the war, the Spanish coast and the Canaries become a major drain on the Axis. If the Axis doesn't take over Portugal, or at least station troops there, Portugal is an easy entry point for Allied troops onto the continent. Taking Portugal would be yet another burden for the Axis, though it would also give them access to some key raw materials. They would undoubtedly have better access to those raw materials even without formally occupying Portugal because an Axis Spain would provide an easy way for the Germans to occupy Portugal if it got out of line.

If Portugal becomes a battleground, and especially if it is occupied by the Axis, Portuguese islands in the Atlantic (Azores) are going to be occupied by the Allies, which helps them in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Spain had some domestic arms production, including license-built German and Italian planes, and a home-grown tank that would have probably gone into limited production. They wouldn't have been able to produce enough to defend themselves though, and they would have been a drain on Axis arms production. On the other hand, Spanish workers for the German arms industry would have probably been part of the price Spain paid for the supplies they got from the Germans, and that would have eased the German production bottleneck to some extent.

That's about as far as I got. There are more details in my newsletter. Long-term, it's plain that Spain is a drain on the

Axis if the Allies can get through 1940, 1941, and the first part of 1942 without losing anything vital. Operation Torch couldn't happen in it's our time-line configuration, but it would probably be replaced by an attack on the Canary Islands if they were still Axis-held, or on the Spanish-held portions of Morocco and Spanish Sahara if they weren't.

Could the Confederates Have Seceded Without a War? The best chance of avoiding Fort Sumter would have been for the garrison to have stayed in their original indefensible location on the mainland rather than sneaking out to the more defensible Fort Sumter. That could have happened either through more vigilant or lucky confederate militias catching the troops early in the operation, or through a different federal commander who adhered more closely to the letter of his orders or simply didn't make a decision like a few other commanders did. If the Federal troops had remained on the mainland, they would have probably been forced to surrender in fairly short order, with no chance of resupply, especially if the confederates took over the initially unmanned (except for a few workmen) Fort Sumter. That's actually another possibility: the confederates take over Fort Sumter before the federal garrison moves there. Yet another possibility: Fort Sumter was actually built by the South Carolina state government, then turned over to the feds. I suppose South Carolina could have hung onto it, or turned it into something other than a fort, in which case it wouldn't have become a flashpoint

If the garrison at Fort Sumter had not been a flashpoint, there were other potential flashpoints, most notably a federal garrison in Florida. Unlike Fort Sumter though, the Florida garrison didn't dominate one of the biggest southern harbors and a major southern city. The south might have been content to let it sit with confederate forces watching it.

As to whether or not the confederates could have been allowed to go without a fight: That's a tough one. Lincoln obviously wouldn't want that outcome. At the same time, there was some sentiment in the North to "Let the Wayward Sisters Go." There was also widespread sentiment in the border states against bringing the seceded states back by military force. Lincoln had to be careful not to appear to be the initiator of a war on fellow Americans.

Historically, Lincoln was much more canny than the Confederate leadership. He maneuvered them into a position where they were likely to fire first, though they didn't absolutely have to. The confederates made their position worse after Fort Sumter by commissioning privateers to attack Union ships.

Probably the more interesting question is: could a more politically canny confederate leadership have been able to make it politically impossible or politically not worth it for the Union to attack? I'm not sure about that one. They might have pushed harder to get Federal garrisons out during the 5 months of Buchanan administration that happened after Lincoln got elected. They could have pushed for that on the grounds that the garrisons were a cause of ongoing friction and that they simply couldn't guarantee their safety. They could have urged southerners in the various branches of the federal government to remain at their posts until the feds recognized the confederacy, especially Senators and Congressmen. That would have given Lincoln an interesting dilemma: there is no basis for removing a duly elected Senator or Representative, but keeping those guys in Congress would be absurd, and it would make the war effort much more difficult. Good luck on getting war appropriations past a southern filibuster.

President Buchanan shares a lot of the blame for the Civil War. He tried to kick the can down the road to the next administration, without making the tough decisions that needed to be made. A more forceful president could have probably prevented secession from developing much of a head of steam. A state legislature meets to vote to secede? The federal government calls up militia units from loyal states and moves them into the state, maybe a few miles from the state capitol, maybe in the streets outside the legislative chambers. If they vote to secede, you arrest them for treason. Not sure if that would work. Not sure it wouldn't just set things off earlier.

One thing that makes this one tricky is that it depends so much on public opinion, and on the opinions of people within the army and the rest of the government. How would they have reacted to any of the situations we've touched on? I don't know for sure, and I've seen no evidence that anyone else does.

US Victory in Vietnam: If we're assuming it's the early 1960s and you want a South Vietnam not run by Ho Chi Minh and company, the most important thing is to understand Vietnamese psychology, geography, politics and history much more thoroughly.

- The South Vietnamese leadership was not composed of all good guys or all incompetents. Neither was the North Vietnamese leadership all ruthless communists or misunderstood nationalists.
- Vietnamese of almost all political stripes did not want a new colonial power to replace the French. Given Vietnamese history, a large influx of white guys with guns was going to delegitimize any group they supported, no matter what the intentions of those guys with guns officially was. An outside power attempting publicly to change the composition or policies of the South Vietnamese government was also going to be perceived as attempts at colonialism and would further delegitimize the result.
- Most people in Vietnam just wanted to be left alone to live their lives in their villages or towns. The politics of which side they end up supporting is going to be local, and is going to be dependent on which side is more likely to let them live their lives, and on which side is going to be able to do them damage if they're perceived to be on the other side.

- Militarily, the south is almost undefendable if the north has control of adjacent regions of Cambodia and Laos. The border is too long and there isn't enough strategic depth. The quality of the South Vietnamese army or its leadership is important in some ways, but is ultimately irrelevant, because it can't do its job.

With that in mind, you don't send a huge army of white guys with guns to Vietnam. You send the minimum necessary of high quality people to keep the north from taking the major cities and you minimize contact between those high-quality people and the Vietnamese. If you have a problem with the South Vietnamese government you keep it very low key. You keep a naval presence off Cambodia and do whatever legal prep it takes to let you seize arms coming to the Viet Cong. You gain strategic depth by equipping South Vietnamese forces to go into Cambodia or Laos if Viet Cong or northern troops are there. You do thorough human intelligence work, infiltrating and turning Viet Cong networks. You train southern forces to infiltrate north of the DMZ and stir up problems. You identify key enemy leaders and put prices on their heads. You study enemy logistics and tie down their forces by South Vietnamese raids on key points. You study the northern leadership and try to figure out what they fear the most. Then you make some of those fears come true. You work to make ARVN effective, not by giving them a lot of material but by giving them a lot of training. You understand that this war is more about intelligence and propaganda than body counts. You also understand that US public opinion will only support about 3 to 4 years of war before getting tired of it and wanting the boys home.

Do you win? I don't know. It wouldn't be easy. It might not even be possible. Certainly the way the war was fought in the Johnson years was a case study in how not to fight a war.

Advice To Hitler—1939: This is the beginning of 1939, right? I would advise him not to casually throw away the "Victim of Versailles" card and any hope of diplomatic solutions with the west by blatantly taking over the remnants of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. The Nazis need Czech resources to keep up the military buildup, and the Czech weapons stockpiles and arms factories are a tempting target, but if the Germans grab all that stuff without leaving the French and British a fig-leaf they make World War II almost inevitable and ensure that once it starts the Germans can never negotiate anything with a country that has other choices, because no one with any brains will trust the Germans to keep the agreement.

Pro-Axis Ireland: If you're going for an Ireland with either an anti-British government or at least a strong and active anti-government faction that's tougher than it sounds. Candidate situations: When the British agreed to Irish independence, a large faction of the IRA considered continued British occupation of Northern Ireland a betrayal. They tried to continue the war, and fought a brief civil war with pro-treaty forces in the early 1920s. When they lost the conventional war they kept fighting as guerrillas for a while, but had little popular support and most of their fighters hid their arms and went back to civilian life after a few months. There was no formal end to the civil war, though a lot of anti-treaty IRA went into more conventional politics. If the anti-treaty faction had won the civil war I'm not sure what would have happened. A renewed British occupation? That could turn things ugly. I'm not sure it would stay ugly until World War II though.

A political party with a high content of anti-treaty IRA won elections in the mid-1920s and there was some question as to whether the then ruling party would give up power peacefully. They did though. In spite of their background, the new government respected the division of Ireland in the treaty.

There was a semi-fascist organization called the Blueshirts in Ireland at the peak of the Great Depression, and they brawled with IRA for a while. I suppose that a deeper depression in Ireland or a more charismatic leader might have made them significant. Doesn't seem likely though.

The IRA did have some contact with the Abwehr (German intelligence) from time-to-time in the lead-up to World War II and on through 1944, but nothing of much significance came of those contacts. The World War II era IRA doesn't seem to have been too horribly competent, and their German contacts don't seem to have been much better.

And, of course, any German assistance to Ireland prior to the outbreak of World War II would have repercussions in terms of increased British rearmament, and reduced willingness to appease Germany.

When you think about it, most of Germany's foreign policy demands and actions prior to about March 1939 would have been perfectly reasonable if Germany hadn't been led by a totalitarian dictatorship with old mush for brains at the top, and part of appeasement was an unwillingness on the part of the British to fight for obviously unfair parts of the Versailles treaty. German meddling in Ireland would bring the German threat home to Britain very quickly and lead to a different set of British reactions on the continent.

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World War II in October 1938: I'm not entirely sure the Germans would have been able to complete the conquest of Czechoslovakia in this scenario, much less anything else. In 1938, the German military was mainly bluff and potential.

Airforce? They hadn't had time to train a lot of the pilots.

Tanks? Production of the Panzers that were worth a darn started in 1936 for the Panzer 4 and 1937 for the Panzer 3. As near

as I can figure out, they would have had 75 Panzer 3 and somewhat more than 77 Panzer 4 (production of the Model C started in 1938 and I'm not sure how many of the 140 produced through August 1939 would have been available in this scenario).

Ammunition? They almost ran out of ammunition in taking Poland. They had approximately two weeks worth of bombs left in October 1939. They had stockpiles of two weeks worth of ammunition for about one-third of their divisions, and enough ammo in strategic reserve to go another two weeks. That's after they took the well-stocked Czech arsenal intact. Historically, they gave ammunition production very high priority in the seven and a half months between the fall of Poland and their attack in the west and made up the deficiency. (Note: there is some question about the accuracy of the ammunition part of those figures. Some sources claim that the Germans were considerably better off)

Add in shortages of oil and rubber just to name a couple of things that the Germans were dependent on the rest of the world for, and you start to see the problem. The Germans would have had to have been insane to actually start a war with Czechoslovakia that brought the western Allies in and where the Soviets were against them. Historically the alliance with the Soviets gave the Germans access to Soviet (or actually US--the Soviets imported almost exactly as much oil as they sold the Germans) oil. It also gave them access to a lot of other raw materials, such as natural rubber, which the Soviets bought and resold to the Germans. The big synthetic rubber plants weren't in operation yet in 1938, and synthetic gas was still in its infancy--it produced considerably less than 25% of Germany's oil needs in 1938. Minor correction. The Germans were producing synthetic rubber at this point, just nowhere near enough to run their economy.

Germany used 44 million barrels of oil in 1938. Of that, 63.6% was imported from overseas. Another 8.6% was imported from within Europe, most of it from Romania. German domestic production was another 8.6% and synthetic fuel was 20.5% (approximate--rounding errors mean that doesn't add up to 100%)

Does anyone know how many days worth of oil the Germans had stockpiled in the fall of 1938? In September 1939 they had approximately 4 months worth of oil stockpiled. That's a little deceptive because domestic production would have stretched that out to around 5 and a three-quarters months before they ran out, assuming no imports. If the Romanians kept exporting they might have made it to a little over 6 months.

Stocks were low enough in 1940 that they fueled their attack on France from oil bartered from the Romanians. They gave Romania cut-rate prices on captured Polish military gear in exchange for the oil. Historically they undoubtedly captured some oil stocks when they took over Czechoslovakia in March 1939. Those stocks wouldn't have been available in the fall of 1938, which would probably mean they were even more short of oil in 1938 than they were in 1939.

Germans Discover Ultra: there were several opportunities for the Axis to figure out at least some of their vulnerabilities:

- 1) The fall of Poland: If the Germans had captured the Polish crypto people and/or their records they would have gotten insights into the vulnerabilities that were later exploited by the Allies. The Poles were responsible for most of the early breakthroughs on reading Enigma.
- 2) The fall of France: The Polish crypto people had turned up in France, and France had their own crypto, which had made considerable progress based partly on the Polish ideas.
- 3) The fall of Singapore: The British had, and lost at Singapore, an American "purple" machine, for deciphering the Japanese diplomatic code. If the Japanese had found it, there is a chance that they would have passed on the fact of advanced Allied code-breaking capacities. At least they might have been a little more careful with their own codes, and the Japanese ambassador to Germany was the source of much of the Allied insights into what the German leadership was thinking.
- 4) There was a want-to-be German spy in the US code establishment. From old and possibly faulty memory, if he had been able to establish contact with the Axis it would have been in 1943 or 1944.
- 5) An Allied ship with decoded Enigma messages was sunk off of North Africa in 1942 or 1943 and the Italians may have done some salvage operations on it or started to. I don't remember the exact sequence of events or the timing, but I do remember that the Allies were concerned.

A 'Good' Treaty of Versailles: I think you can get two of the three conditions in the "good" treaty idea, but not all three. You can make the Allies (or at least the ones that matter) happy and prevent World War II. I don't think you could really come up with a treaty that would be acceptable to Germany at this point, not one that the Allies would actually offer.

You could probably prevent, or at least significantly postpone World War II by:

- a) Giving the Poles essentially all of the areas in dispute between them and the Germans, and between them and the Czechs, while making it clear that they only got those territories after they accepted boundaries in the east that did not include Vilnius or Lvov (predominantly Polish-speaking cities in Lithuanian and Ukrainian-speaking country-side respectively). The Poles get Danzig, all disputed areas in Silesia, and the disputed fringe in the south of East Prussia. They don't get big hunks of Ukrainian, Lithuanian, or Belorussian territory in the east. Hopefully an independent Ukrainian state emerges in the Western Ukraine in the part of what is now Ukraine that Poland held between the wars.

Rationale: The loss of big hunks of Silesia substantially weakens the German ability to rebuild a military machine. That's a huge proportion of interwar Germany's iron and nickel, among other things. It also strengthens Poland and makes it close to impossible for Poland to have a non-hostile relationship with Germany. Poland has to know that any resurgence of Germany will lead to the loss of the most economically important parts of their country, so they are solidly in any anti-German alliance.

b) Keeping French troops in the Ruhr until 1940, when the last of the classes of German troops trained for World War I reached 40 years old. That means the Germans would have to start almost from scratch rather than having some classes of men with some old military training to call up in the early years of rebuilding their military.

That's a harsh peace, but if it was okay for the Germans to hold onto large chunks of undoubtedly Polish territory by force for over a hundred years, I don't see putting the shoe on the other foot for a while as too evil. The territory involved did have a large Polish minority--over a million if I recall correctly.

Stopping the Great Depression: One of the big factors in the Great Depression was the British decision to go back on the gold standard at an inappropriate peg. That forced the US to loosen monetary policy too much, which helped put air in the stock market bubble. (Thank you Winston Churchill-in a key economic role at the time). So: Obvious point of divergence is that the British either don't go back to the gold standard or do it more intelligently.

I'm not sure if a purely monetary analysis captures all of what caused the Great Depression though--although it does explain a lot. The combination of a lot of unsophisticated investors entering the stock market and the activities of stock manipulators like William Durant (founder of General Motors) and his group of "Smart Guys" was going to cause problems eventually.

As an aside: Durant and his friends are an interesting cautionary tale. They rode the market to the top, cashed out not long before the crash and were in great shape until they decided that the stock market had bottomed out, jumped back in and ended up losing everything. Durant died a pauper. Churchill jumped into US stocks and lost most of his family's money too.

In any case, the stock market crash didn't immediately put us in the Great Depression. I believe that the unemployment rate in 1930 averaged a point or two below what it is now. It wasn't until the European banks started collapsing, and the runs started on US banks that things really got bad. Smoot-Hawley played a role in that.

Keeping the "Great" out of the Great Depression? Keeping Hoover out of the presidency would help. He was a bright, capable man, but not the right guy for the job of leading the US through the depression. He wasn't politically savvy enough to head off Smoot-Hawley or economically savvy enough to realize that jawboning companies to keep wages high in a deflationary environment was counterproductive. He was activist in the wrong ways and a horrible communicator.

An independent Hispanic New Mexico?

To be honest, I can't see it as a peer to the US, but what if the Bourbons administratively split New Mexico off from Mexico. By the time of Mexican independence, New Mexico has a tradition of independence and has probably progressed considerably faster economically without having to deal with the bureaucracy of Mexico City.

Probably wouldn't work. What I'm trying to get at with this is that the northern regions of Mexico were considerably more dynamic in many ways than the center. Maybe a split that went beyond New Mexico into northern Mexico, pulling in several of the frontier states. Give them a separate administration for several decades before Mexican independence and you could end up with a country that contained the most dynamic parts of Mexico but left the corrupt center as a separate state.

An Allied Pacific First Strategy

No German declaration of war might make a Pacific first strategy possible. The other option might be to have the Allies sucked into pouring forces into the Pacific even though the official policy was to put Europe first.

Some possibilities for option two: One of the important components of the initial Japanese offensive could misfire. Put a competent British commander in charge at Singapore/Malaya and the British might hold out in Singapore and the base of the Malay peninsula long enough for the US and British to start moving reinforcements in. Both sides escalate their efforts and the effort to hang onto the area and push the Japanese back becomes a major focus of the war. Another possibility: The Japanese win the naval battle of Midway, though maybe not decisively and get troops ashore, but get into a war of attrition over the island. I'm not sure how that would work given the size of the area to be fought over.

From late 1941 until late 1943, the main Allied bottleneck was shipping, so where the Allies allocated shipping was where their main effort in reality was, so if shipping got sucked into supplying a fight against the Japanese somewhere, then effectively the Allies would be doing a Pacific first, whatever their official stance.

Consequences of a Dewey Win in 1944: A lot depends on precisely where the boundaries between Soviet occupied and Western occupied territory ends up. If the Soviets end up with only East Prussia and maybe a sliver of the rest of Germany, things get interesting.

The logical thing for Stalin to do would be to toss any remaining Germans out of those territories and use them to compensate Poland for the losses on their eastern border. There are several problems with that though. First, there would be no Soviet sphere in the remainder of Germany to send them to. Any deportation would have to be either to Allied territory or to somewhere inside the Soviet Union. The most likely course would be mass deportation to the prison camp system, which would work, but would have implications for the future of those camps.

Second, if you deport those Germans and push Poland's borders west, Poland now has a common border with western forces on the new German/Poland border. That makes unrest in Poland much more likely because the Poles are going to feel as though they are more likely to get help from the west. The Polish/German border is going to be extremely heavily militarized, of course. A hot war in the late 1940s or early 1950s is much more likely with those borders. Is the west really going to sit on it's hands right across the border while the Soviets crush a Polish revolt? Are the Soviet going to know one way or the other on that?

The western occupation zones would have to be expanded to handle what was the Soviet zone in real history. The Allies would see substantially less cooperation from the Germans because they would be the only occupiers of German territory, rather than the much preferred of two occupying forces. They would also have to deal with Germans wanting to regain their lost territories, something that was a moot point in real history.

The Czechs, whether they be nationalist or communists, were unlikely to accept the continued presence of Sudetenland Germans, and they would be especially unlikely to allow return of any Germans who were outside the Sudetenland when the war ended. That would create a problem because the western Allies would not be happy with a mass expulsion but no Czech government would want to let that kind of Trojan horse remain within its borders.

Overall, not necessarily an overall less desirable world, but one with its own set of problems.

Some things to keep in mind: A threatening Soviet Union keeps the US in Europe. As the Soviets get less threatening, the US gets less interested in Europe. Also, if the Soviets don't get into Germany, a lot of the issues that plagued Europe between the wars end up in the west's lap: Danzig, the corridor, and the Sudetenland Germans as a few examples.

Whatever his failings, and there were many, Stalin did settle those issues. He did it brutally, but he settled them.

Also, a divided Germany between rival superpowers did make a Nazi or German-militarist resurgence impossible. Keep the Soviets out of Germany and you do end up with all of that stuff in the Allies' laps.

Add in having a Polish exile army that has fought bravely on the Allied side and now wants to go home, and things could get ugly fast. A lot depends on exactly where the armies meet.

Stalin did appear to have a hole card: The US wanted the Soviets to fight against Japan and if the atomic bomb had been delayed he could have sat and let the US bleed for a while if he wasn't pleased with the division of spoils in Europe.

Animal domestication In the New World

There are ways of doing this, but they have their drawbacks.

1) Have a subset of the North American ice age animals that went extinct survive. I did a scenario years ago where one of the North American llama species survived in a remote corner of North America. Most likely candidates for survival: North American species of llamas and peccaries, North or South American horses, Mammoths, and some of the big (up to several hundred pounds) South American grazing rodents. There is no guarantee that any of those could be domesticated. Zebras apparently can't be, so North American horses might not be easily domesticated. North American llamas might not be either. Mammoths would be unlikely domesticates. The Indians would probably have to domesticate something less formidable first and learn the tricks of handling domestic animals before they tackled something that formidable. The North American peccaries might have a shot if they were less fierce than the South and Central American species that survived.

The problem with scenarios like that is that the divergence would have to be at least 8 to 10 thousand years ago. No Indian individual and probably few Indian tribes of our world would ever have existed with even a minor change that far back. I sort of tried to finesse that issue by having my surviving llamas survive in a little pocket up in the mountains, protected by a disease that killed off human hunters who tried to encroach. Even with that, butterflies would change a lot of things in a hurry.

2) Have the animals that the Indians domesticated historically spread further. Llamas, alpacas, and guinea pigs in the Andes made a decent group of domesticated animals, especially the llamas and alpacas. The problem was that they were adapted to the cool mountains, and didn't do well in the tropical lowlands to the north, east, and west of the Andes. If some lowland Peruvian group had managed to breed llamas that could withstand the heat and humidity of the coast early enough I could see llamas spreading along the sea routes that connected coastal Ecuador to the coasts of Western Mexico, and from there to the nomadic tribes of northern Mexico, making it easier for the Chichimecs to adapt to horses and probably giving the

Spanish an even harder time than they had historically. Metallurgy apparently spread by that route. Llamas could have too. Of course depending on the timing of all this, you still might not have a lot of the historic Indian groups or individuals.

3) Have domestic animals from elsewhere arrive earlier and/or spread faster. There is some (controversial) evidence that chickens spread from Polynesia to the coast of Chile in late pre-Columbian times. They hadn't spread through most of the continent though. Get them there a little earlier and add the pigs that the Polynesians spread to most of the islands they colonized, and you could end up with some interesting changes. There is some (again controversial) evidence that Polynesians may have been in sporadic contact with the ancestors of the Chumash Indians in southern California. Get domestic chickens and pigs spreading from there too and you might have something interesting. For that matter, you could have a major early Spanish settlement voyage get pushed into the North or South American coasts by a storm and establish early populations of cattle, horses, and pigs, giving the local Indians an extra fifty to a hundred years to adapt to them. If horses started spreading in North America in the very early 1500s, for example, that would make for a very different Indian culture facing white settlement. Again, you've got to be careful with this, because in all likelihood at least some of the major Great Plains tribes would either not exist in this scenario or not be plains Indians.

The Greenland Vikings had a subset of the European collection of domestic animals, including a very small breed of cattle. Any reasonably long-term Viking settlement on the mainland of North America could be the source of domestic animals for the Indians.

English Mexico

The English would have been quite happy to go down the same path that the Spanish did in Mexico. That (finding precious minerals and living off the Indians) was their first impulse in Virginia. It didn't work there because the Indians were too few and independent and there were no deposits of gold or silver within easy reach. That reaction might have been fueled by English knowledge of the Spanish model though, so no guarantees that Mexico would go the same way

The rest of this assumes that the English discovery happened before the Spanish took control of the West Indies, because it would be very difficult for it to happen if the Spanish controlled Cuba and the other big West Indies islands. So assume that the Spanish turned Columbus down and he ended up in England a few years later. The English bite on his scheme, find the West Indies, settle there and experiment with various schemes to exploit their new colonies.

The Spanish entered the New World with a template for conquering new areas, based on hundreds of years of the reconquest of Spain and their experience in the Canary Islands. The English would presumably fall back on their previous experience at conquest, which would be their experience in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland. They would flounder a bit when they encountered the Tiano in the West Indies, but they would probably not be adverse to conquest and enslavement.

The home country would probably not give the colonists a great deal of guidance, because the Tudor dynasty was very recent to power and not too secure on the throne, not to mention being embroiled in European wars. The settlers would probably have a great deal of autonomy until they found enough gold or silver to get the English crown's attention, which probably wouldn't happen until they found Mexico. Given that background, I wouldn't expect a single English Mexican colony to emerge from an English discovery of Mexico. I would expect a bunch of quasi-independent and competing groups to grab pieces of the Mexican coast and compete for the gold trade.

Fan Fiction: Author's Friend or Foe?

There are two possible definitions of fanfiction floating around the science fiction universe: First definition: Amateur science fiction, written by budding authors who created their own science fiction universe, characters, etc. Second definition: Fan-written fiction written in somebody else's universe, often using characters from popular books, movies or TV shows. I'll be talking about the second type here.

I don't write fanfiction. I've never felt any interest in writing in anybody else's universe or using anybody else's characters. I got interested in fanfic because one of the members of my local Nanowrite group wrote a Harry Potter fanfiction novel. I chatted with her about it, and since I have a novel coming out, I started thinking about how I would feel if someone wrote fanfiction in one of my fictional universe.

The answer is: Flattered and threatened. The flattered part is because the vast majority of books, even popular ones, don't generate enough fan base to generate fan fiction. The threatened part is because I don't feel comfortable having other people mucking about with characters and situations that I created.

How much fan fiction is out there, and for what fictional universes? A very large website called fanfiction.net has been around since 1998, and allows anyone from any fandom to upload to it. The following chart shows how much fanfiction was uploaded to that site for selected fictional universes:

<u>Books</u>	<u>TV</u>	<u>Movies</u>	<u>Comics</u>
Harry Potter (459,527)	Buffy: Vampire Slayer (38,902)	Star Wars (24,396)	X-Men (9,722)
Twilight (149,152)	Supernatural (37,279)	Pirates of the Caribbean (17,968)	Batman (4,196)
Lord of the Rings (43,401)	CSI (24,696)	High School Musical (17,710)	Justice League (2,526)
Chronicles of Narnia (6,555)	Stargate: SG-1 (22,810)	X-Men: The Movie (10,865)	Spider-Man (1,967)
Sherlock Holmes (2,232)	Doctor Who (20,651)	Newsies (6,375)	Jhonen Vasquez (1,662)
Discworld (1,398)	NCIS (19,272)	Camp Rock (6,366)	Ironman (1,330)
Pride and Prejudice (1,323)	House, M.D. (17,889)	Labyrinth (5,919)	DC Superheroes (1,330)
Forgotten Realms (1,299)	Stargate: Atlantis (15,878)	Star Trek: 2009 (5,341)	Marvel (1,118)
Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew (1,057)	Gilmore Girls (15,302)	Batman Begins/Dark	Hellboy (968)
Wheel of Time (1,021)	Bones (13,341)	Knight (3,935)	Watchmen (776)
Mercedes Lackey (1,014)	One Tree Hill (12,294)	Matrix (3,115)	Nightwing (759)
Daughters of the Moon (596)	Charmed (11,661)	Transformers (2,420)	V for Vendetta (684)
<u>Hitchhiker's Guide</u> (561)	Smallville (11,489)	Sweeney Todd (2,401)	
Dresden Files (431)	Power Rangers (11,319)	Covenant (2,184)	
Black Jewels Trilogy (428)	Hannah Montana (11,076)	King Arthur (1,879)	
Dragonriders of Pern (425)	CSI: New York (9,239)	Moulin Rouge (1,684)	
Da Vinci Code (252)	Lost (9,162)	Sky High (1,576)	
Guardians of Time (214)	Grey's Anatomy (8,602)	Lion King (1,574)	
Dune (154)	Angel (8,558)	Van Helsing (1,488)	
Dinotopia (114)	X-Files (8,416)	Mummy (1,426)	
Frankenstein (113)	Law and Order: SVU (8,414)	Fast and the Furious (1,406)	
Time Machine (77)	Torchwood (7,843)	Titanic (1,371)	
Angels & Demons (60)	Criminal Minds (7,664)	Aliens/Predator (1,327)	
Book of Amber (60)	O.C. (6,395)		
Foundation (58) (Asimov)	Dark Angel (6,340)		
Fahrenheit 451 (33)	Heroes (6,329)		
Arthur C. Clarke (20)	Glee (6,299)		
Ender's Game series (19)	StarTrek: Voyager (6,297)		
War of the Worlds (17)	Degrassi (6,058)		
Louis Lamour (16)	Firefly (5,334)		
Robert Heinlein (12)			

That may or may not give you an indicator of how much fanfiction is actually written in each universe. Not all fanfiction is on that site. There are strong independent sites for some types of fanfiction, especially Star Wars and Star Trek. Not everything goes to the big umbrella sites.

Some FanficTerms:

See: <http://fanfic.theforce.net/lexicon.asp> (a Fanfic lexicon)

- Canon: For the most part, anything that happened in the real story universe is considered part of the Canon, and a lot of fans look down on anything that contradicts or ignores canon.
- Alternate Universe or AU: Some fanfiction deliberately changes some aspect of the canon—brings back dead characters, explores a different outcome to some event, etc.
- Slash/Femslash: Puts characters in erotic situations, often same-sex ones.
- Crossover: Quoting Wikipedia: “Two fictional universes, or the real universe and a fictional universe, are placed in a situation in which they interact. Such stories sometimes involve comparisons and conflict between the combat prowess of the two universes, often involving the various strengths and weaknesses of the technology/magic of each world. An example is "A Thin Veneer" by AlbertG, in which *Star Trek* characters meet *Babylon 5* characters...”

What Do Authors Think About FanFiction?

For a good, basic list of author positions on fanfiction, you can go to:

http://fanlore.org/wiki/Professional_Author_Fanfic_Policies

Some authors absolutely hate it. One author recently put a rant on her blog that said in part: “I think it’s immoral, I know_ it’s illegal, and it makes me want to barf whenever I’ve inadvertently encountered some of it involving my characters.” She sparked a debate that went on for over a thousand comments on her blogsite, and then took it down. On the Internet nothing ever really disappears though. You can go to:

http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/1246633.html

and read about the controversy.

Some other websites taking a position on whether or not Fanfiction is legitimate:

Pro Fanfiction:

<http://travelsthroughiest.blogspot.com/2010/05/fan-fiction.html>

<http://www.antipope.org/charlie/blog-static/2010/05/faq-fanfic.html>

<http://bookshop.dreamwidth.org/999259.html> (Position: YES!!!!)

Anti Fanfiction:

<http://grrm.livejournal.com/151914.html>

<http://kate-nepveu.livejournal.com/483239.html>

There is a trend toward allowing fanfiction as long as it is licensed under the Creative commons license. Here is Jim Butcher's policy:

"Now, fanfiction is to be licensed as derivative, noncommercial fiction under the [Creative Commons](#) umbrella.

What does this mean?

A) You can't make money from fanfic based on Jim's work.

B) Jim still isn't going to read it. (Wouldn't you rather he spend that time writing the next book, anyway?) Do not send Jim your stories or story ideas.

C) You need to post a disclaimer on your fic, like this handy example: "The Dresden Files/Codex Alera is copyright Jim Butcher. This story is licensed under the Creative Commons as derivative, noncommercial fiction." In doing so, you waive any rights to that work--you can't sue Jim for compensation if he writes something similar.

D) Fanfic can now be talked about in places that had previously been off-limits, like our forum. We've created a separate "Fan Creations" section of the forum for for this purpose.

<http://ht.ly/1GmHn>

Mercedes Lackey has a similar policy .

Eric Flint actually encourages fan fiction and publishes it in the Grantsville Gazette books.

For me, the most powerful arguments against fanfiction are (1) If you don't defend your copyrights you open the door to nastier stuff, and (2) If you're still writing in a fictional universe, you risk having someone else write up an idea before you do, which puts you in the absurd situation of looking like you're poaching other people's ideas in a universe you created and where they technically don't have the right to be writing in the first place. The most powerful argument for tolerating fanfiction is that you really don't want to be suing your most avid fans.

Is Fan Fiction Ever Worth Reading

Before I started researching this I had never even thought about reading fanfiction. I still haven't read much, and I can only point you in the right directions. From what little I've read, most fanfiction, like most unpublished fiction ranges from okay to eye-hurtingly bad. One member of my writing group, Jennifer Flick, wrote Firedragon, a Harry Potter Fanfic (http://www.fanfiction.net/s/3384611/1/Fire_Dragon -- which is not bad at all, at least for the 15 chapters I read so far). At this point that's the only fanfiction I've read so far. Here are some fanfiction websites I've come across:

www.fanfiction.net online since 1998, allows anybody to upload content in any fandom

http://fanfiction.wikia.com/wiki/Fan_Fiction_Wiki

<http://www.fictionalley.org/>

<http://www.fanfictionwriters.com/>

<http://fanfic.theforce.net/> (Star Wars Oriented)

<http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com/> Harry Potter FanFiction

<http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com/>

<http://trekfanfiction.net/>

<http://ubots.com/b5/> (Babylon 5)

<http://www.hhfic.com/> (Horatio Hornblower)

<http://watchmenfic.beautifulsinner.net/> (Watchmen Fanfiction)

<http://www.pjfarmer.com/fanfic.htm> (PJFarmer Fan Fiction)

I found NO World of the Tiers Fanfiction. There is a new authorized story in the Hadon of Opar series.

<http://www.smstirling.com/> (Links to a Fanfiction page with about 20 pieces of fanfiction)

<http://www.alternatehistory.com/ahdirectory.html> (lists three pieces of Draka Fanfiction, including a Draka/Batman crossover and a Drake/Simpsons-as in Bart Simpson crossover)

I found NO Flandry of Terra Fanfiction and one Harry Turtledove Fanfic: a WorldWar piece.

http://www.changingthetimes.net/admin/alternate_history_fiction.htm Lists some AH-related Fanfiction

<http://www.johncarterofmars.ca/fanfic.html>

POD MEMBER COMMENTS

The Cover: Absolutely spectacular! Thanks David.

Robert Alley: Welcome back! Hope your job gets mundane and routine again so you can join us more often.

On the idea of a US breakup along the lines of the Soviet breakup: I read some articles about the guy's theories, and I very much doubt that a breakup, if it happened, would happen in the timeframe and along the fault lines that he suggests. At the same time, I don't consider the idea of a breakdown of some sort absolutely impossible.

The possibilities for breakup are in my mind—roughly in order of likelihood—and I don't consider any of these particularly likely in terms of an actual breakup:

An economic collapse: The government debts at all levels of government and the demographic problems of the 'grey bomb' are certainly threatening, as is our trade deficit. It sounds reasonable that we won't be able to continue spending a trillion dollars plus a year more than we take in at the Federal level indefinitely. On the other hand, inflation does reduce the value of the current debt to some extent. I believe that the current federal debt is around \$13 trillion. Each percentage point of annual inflation reduces the real value of that debt by around \$130 billion. Run a deficit of \$390 billion and run a three percent inflation rate and the real value of the deficit stays the same. Of course that doesn't help much when the deficits are in the trillions, and there are additional trillions of off-the-books obligations that will come due. If the economy grows faster than the rate of inflation, the growth reduces the size of the deficit compared to the economy's ability to pay for it.

There are two dangers here. First, the deficits may

force a long, slow decline. A deficit of \$1.9 trillion with an inflation rate under two percent means that we just added maybe \$1.7 trillion in real terms to the debt. Figure that holders of that debt will long term want at the very least one percent interest over the anticipated rate of inflation. That means that we just increased our debt service by \$17 billion/year in real terms essentially forever. So can we just increase future deficits by the same amount to compensate? To a certain extent, as long as people are willing to accept dollar denominated debt. If they stop doing that, and the government runs the printing presses anyway, then things get wheelbarrels of money to buy a jug of milk type ugly. Also, since much (around 44% in 2006 and rising fast last time I checked) of the debt is held externally, the interest goes to people outside the US. Let's say \$6 trillion is held outside the US. In the long-term we'll need to pay at least one percent over the rate of inflation to keep those people buying. In real terms, the deficit transfers \$60 billion/year from people in the US to people in other countries. Figure a little over 300 million Americans. That works out to around \$800 for a family of four. Assuming the same proportion of inside the country versus outside the country debt, a \$1.9 trillion deficit adds \$8.5 billion to that transfer. That doesn't seem ruinous, but it does give us a long-term built-in reduction in standard of living and a built-in reduction in the ability of the federal government to react to emergencies and fight wars.

Off-budget liabilities like Fannie and Freddie obligations and Medicare and Social Security are actually more likely to destroy the federal government's ability to do standard government stuff, but I don't see an immediate impact that causes collapse.

Significant deflation could make all of the problems a lot worse. Deflation of 10% would raise the real cost of the deficit by 10%. Is deflation a realistic possibility? I

don't know. Much of the US middle class is overextended in terms of debt, and almost everyone over forty needs to pay off debt and start building up saving, lest we as a generation spend our old age leaning on our walkers and saying "Do you want fries with that?"

That high level of debt among baby boomers makes it difficult to get an economy growing again. For most individuals, it makes sense to lower spending and pay off debt. For the economy as a whole though, that means lower demand and slow or no growth. Slow or no growth for a prolonged period makes dealing with the deficit more difficult. A decline in the size of the economy reduces ability to pay for deficits, regardless of whether or not it is accompanied by deflation.

Deflation in some sectors of the economy is probably inevitable. If you believe that peak oil is coming soon, or even that the spread of the auto culture to China and India will drive up oil prices significantly, it follows that housing prices in the far suburbs will at some point collapse. They're designed around cars and are close to uninhabitable if gas prices get high enough. The impact of that would spread beyond suburbia. The mortgages and home equity loans on those houses are a large part of the balance sheets of a lot of banks, and not just in suburbia.

Even without peak oil, housing prices will probably drop considerably further, especially in the suburbs. Baby boomers will be downsizing as they age. The next generation isn't large enough to use all of the housing that they'll be vacating. The stock market will probably be taking a hit as baby boomers and pension funds liquidate their assets in the market to pay for boomer retirement costs.

The European Sovereign Debt Crisis could provoke a crisis in the US, I suppose. The ability of governments to borrow depends on the market's perception of their ability to repay their borrowing. If a Greek-type situation hits Spain or Italy, and the rest of the EU is unwilling or unable to bail them out, that could bring the ability of all governments with a lot of debt to repay that debt into question. The worst case scenario would be a replay of the situation in the early 1930s, where a fundamentally strong British central bank tried to rescue a series of weak central and eastern European central banks and ended up weakening itself enough that it collapsed. If you ended up with a cascade of national defaults in Europe you could easily end up with a banking system collapse and uncontrollable deflation.

That would be accompanied by lenders either not having the ability to lend money to the feds or being unwilling to do so. Of course deflation would give the

Fed plenty of room to pump money into the system. On the other hand, with such a large part of the economy in debt and trying to work its way out, it might be difficult to find people worthy of lending to or willing to go further into debt.

What would a US collapse look like? I suspect that it wouldn't be anything horribly dramatic. State and local governments would start by cutting programs important to the public—teachers, firefighters, policemen. At some point they would get desperate enough to cut politically protected people burrowed deep in the bureaucracies. As the normal government functions shrunk, the normal bad neighborhoods that exist in most cities would expand, and middle-class neighborhoods in the vicinity would either disappear or develop some sort of private security to protect themselves. Official police and firefighter services would not officially go away. They just would be unable to respond to most calls in a timely manner, and in all likelihood would tend to triage calls based on the political clout of the neighborhood involved. Street gangs are the primary authority in some neighborhoods now. They would become the primary authority in more as police faded away.

As the feds ran out of the ability to borrow money, they would probably cut back deeply on the military. Troops would be brought back from overseas, probably leaving a lot of their equipment behind as too expensive to ship home. New major equipment would be cut to the bone. Spare parts orders would virtually stop. Military satellites wouldn't be replaced as they failed. Aircraft carriers would stay on the books, but would also stay in port. After a few years we would have to cannibalize several to get one operational.

Assistance to states and localities would probably go next, though they represent a lot of the feds power over the lower levels of government, so they probably wouldn't go away entirely.

Health care would get worse, one way or the other. It's a huge cost at all levels of government, so like it or not it would get cut.

And this is getting kind of depressing. Hopefully things will keep pattering along through my lifetime and my daughter's lifetime. Beyond that the unknowns pile up beyond my ability to even figure out what to wish for.

On Hitler's Jewish Soldiers: One of the incredibly sad parts of Hitler's hatred of Jews was that so many German Jews admired German culture and desperately wanted to be a part of it. Attacking them was counterproductive on so many levels as well as morally reprehensible. Interesting book.

Your comments to Johnson: Interesting idea. Russia dominated by a home-grown bunch of nutcases instead of German-influenced socialist nutcases. Could be fun.

Your comments to Gill: I agree on the impact of the Russians killing Napoleon early in the Russian campaign. The French and associated powers would be stronger overall without the losses of the death marches to and from Moscow. I'm not sure the French would have been wise enough to put together a peace that lasted as long as the historic post-Napoleonic wars peace. Part of the problem would be that the minor French allies would be stronger. The Polish, Italian and minor German armies that were nearly destroyed along with the French would still be in play. That would complicate peacemaking. Would the French be willing to sacrifice those rather strong allied forces? Would the Poles and Italians be willing to tamely go back under their historic overlords with much stronger armies than they historically had?

Your comments to Ford: Yeah, a US invasion of Cuba to create more slave states seems quite plausible to me. I'm not sure how the north would have reacted. Succession at some point if the south seemed likely to establish long-term dominance? That could get interesting.

Your comments to me: On Stalin heads east, you're heading in pretty much the same direction I would with the scenario. In spite of Nomanham the Soviets would not coast to an easy victory over the Japanese.

On a more destructive Battle of Jutland: I think you nailed it on the potential impact of the extended battle on German morale and potential changes in political developments in Germany. A couple of other things though: (1) a more destructive battle would leave both sides weaker compared to what was then the number three naval power: the US. The US wasn't in the war yet, and was gearing up to build its fleet to the point where it could take on whichever side won the Great War. How does a considerably diminished British fleet react to the increased relative power of the US fleet? (2) The Germans went to unrestricted submarine warfare partly because they saw that as their only realistic way of hitting back after the draw in the Battle of Jutland. If they perceived Jutland as a win that left them in a position to pursue additional conventional battles, they might delay the submarine campaign. On the other hand, if Jutland was a decisive defeat, then they might move up the start of the campaign slightly, though there wasn't an awful lot of room to do that.

I don't think either side would have concluded that battleships weren't worth pursuing. Until airplanes became capable of carrying and accurately dropping

large enough bombs or torpedoes to sink a battleship while it was manned and underway (probably the very late 1930s) battleships were extremely powerful. Get within 15 to 20 miles of a hostile battleship and unless you were another battleship you were in a world of hurt. Think about it this way: battleship main guns were 14 to 16 inches. A fifteen-inch gun works out to roughly 375mm. Compare that to the size of artillery land-based armies generally mustered, and you can see how much power a battleship could project against anything within 15-20 miles of the ocean.

The US used battleships extensively for shore bombardment throughout World War II, and brought them out of mothballs for Korea, Vietnam, and the first Gulf War. They were a good way of delivering a lot of relatively cheap, accurate firepower. After Pearl Harbor the US navy put a huge emphasis on anti-aircraft capability on the battleships, and the Japanese didn't succeed in sinking any of them, though they tried very hard to.

On a Japanese kamikaze ship-building spree: I'm guessing that the US would be politically forced to match the Japanese at least battleship for battleship in the period right after World War I, which would force the British to keep racing to keep from losing naval supremacy. Economically the Japanese couldn't keep up the race for long. By the mid-1920s they would probably run out of money to keep building at the rate they started. The US had the advantage of having several battleships in the pipeline that historically were scrapped in partially finished condition due to the Washington naval treaty. If the Washington naval treaty never got implemented, in all likelihood aircraft carrier development would have slowed. Many of the carriers of early World War II were built on the hulls of partly completed battle cruisers made redundant by the Washington Naval Treaty.

On a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 or 1942: I think you're right about spring of 1942 being the most logical time, though the months between the start of the German invasion and the time when it got too late in the year to start an attack might also be a possibility. It would take frantic preparations to get an attack ready for an August 1941 kickoff, but from a political point of view it might be somewhat more likely. Historically the Japanese did do quite a bit of prep-work to be in a position to seize hunks of the Soviet Union if it collapsed, with those preparations reaching their peak in the spring of 1942. Of course historically the Japanese were also prepping for and launching their southern attacks during that same period.

One key point: The US oil embargo made a Japanese

attack on the Soviet Union impossible. At the point where the oil embargo was imposed, the Japanese were going to go south. They had to. So one prerequisite for this to happen was for the embargo not to happen. The embargo was imposed in retaliation for the Japanese occupation of the rest of French Indochina. So in order for this to work out, the Japanese have to avoid that.

Hmmm. Maybe the French in Indochina go Free French and put themselves under British protection? The last part of that probably wouldn't work. The British were too preoccupied in Europe and were trying to avoid conflicts with the Japanese. Maybe the French move additional forces to Indochina just before the Armistice with Germany to keep them from falling into German hands and they make Indochina enough more difficult to tackle that the Japanese decide not to go there (unlikely). Maybe the Japanese figure out that going after all of Indochina would make war with the US and Britain inevitable and decide to hold off and keep their options open.

You bring up an interesting point: There is no guarantee that the US and Japan would end up at war in this scenario, even if the US enters the war against Germany. That would make for an interesting situation: the US not involved in a war with Japan and the Soviets trying to get them involved.

Two additional issues: First, the Soviets would probably funnel more aid to the Chinese (both Nationalist and Communist) under this scenario to distract the Japanese, though they wouldn't have a lot to spare. They would probably also put considerable pressure on the Chinese Communists to focus their efforts on the Japanese rather than on maneuvering for postwar position. How much influence that would actually have on the Chinese communists is another issue. Probably some at this point. Second, a rather large percentage of US Lend Lease aid flowed through Soviet Far East ports and across Siberia in the later years of the war. That wouldn't happen in this scenario.

On the Germans keeping Lithuania as their sphere of influence: I hadn't noticed this until lately, but jumping off from Lithuania puts the Germans considerably closer to Moscow as well as to Leningrad.

On the idea of a near earth asteroid threat in the early 1960s as a impetus for more space emphasis: I could have sworn that I read about a fair-sized asteroid passing between the earth and the moon in the 1960s, but I can't seem to find a reference for that. Certainly the threat of a hit would have given us some incentives. The hit would definitely have to be in a remote area if it was oceanic because of the resulting tsunamis. A possibly outdated bit of info (from the 1990s):

“A mainstream scientific analysis currently estimates that an asteroid-induced tsunami exceeding 100 meters in height along the entire coast probably occurs once every few thousand years, which slightly exceeds written history in most of these ocean coastal regions. We've been living on the edge for a long time now. Such a 100 meter tsunami would cause unprecedented damage to now-developed low lying areas all along the U.S. east coast, and may totally submerge vast areas in Europe such as in Holland and Denmark. A 100 meter tsunami would travel inland about 22 km (14 miles) and a 200 meter tsunami would travel inland about 55 km (34 miles)”

BTW: When I read your idea for some reason I remembered one of the Tom Swift Junior books I read as a kid (one of the few that actually something worth remembering in it). The storyline was that near future Earth captured a good-sized asteroid, triggering somewhat of a race to explore and possibly exploit it. I think there ended up being intelligent aliens on the rock or something, which kind of spoiled the story for me, but I remember wishing that something like that would actually happen.

Your comments to Docimo: I could see the Shah being ambitious enough to want his own space program. Apparently he tried at one point to buy B1 bombers. Given the military uses of Space boosters it would probably have been as politically difficult for him to have bought tech for a booster as it was for him to buy a B1 bomber. If it wasn't for the military applications, I could see him having fun buying up Apollo-era rockets—maybe Saturn 1b--and trying to build the infrastructure to use them. That wouldn't have been easy. I believe that Apollo manufacturing had been shut down quite some time before the moonshots. He probably wouldn't have had the money to do something like that before the oil price jump in around 1973. Can't think of any way to make an Iranian purchase of Saturn rockets happen. Not a bad idea though.

Dale Cozort: I'm actually pretty satisfied with my last zine, which is unusual for me. Eight pages of mailing comments is respectable. It doesn't replace Alley's section, but not bad.

Anthony Docimo: Yeah, watching kids grow for those first couple of years in an enormous amount of fun. I'm enjoying that with my step-granddaughter.

On what would have happened if the US had to invade the Japanese mainland: It would have been an incredibly tough, hard fought battle. The Japanese had either gotten their hands on the US invasion plans or did an amazingly good job of analyzing our intentions. They had the landing zones thoroughly covered. They

would have lost, given the disparity in firepower, but they would have hurt the US forces badly. Japanese casualties would have undoubtedly been enormously higher than they were historically, and the war might well have gone on for years.

Ah yes, the return of Firbies in the Sea of Time.

In your reality seeds: The German surrender in World War II probably only cut the duration of the war by a few days or maybe a couple of weeks at the very most. The Germans were pretty much squashed flat between the Soviets and the western allies, and held very little in the way of industrial capacity. Prolonging the war would have mainly turned it into a turkey shoot, or a disorganized series of local surrenders rather than a single national one. It would take a more rational set of German policies in the summer of 1944—or pre-Battle of the Bulge at the latest, to extend the war long enough to make deciding what German cities to nuke an issue.

On England winning the War of 1812: I suspect that the maximum victory for the Brits in the War of 1812 would have been some chewing away at the edges of the US. I can see them carving off big hunks of what was then the western US—maybe Louisiana and some of the old Northwest. I suppose they could have also carved off some of the interior southeast. A victory that put them in front of the US frontier would have probably turned out to be Pyrrhic. I don't think even Britain could have stopped the frontier. A British victory that closed the route west to the US would have almost certainly have led to another war, probably in the 1830s or early 1840s, and then another round if the Brits won that one. The tide west was just too powerful.

Your TV series ideas: *Time Enough* sounds fun. In an alternate timeline somewhere you may have run into some budding want-to-be film producer, who scares up actors for the roles, does a low-budget pilot, releases it to the Internet, gets picked up by Science Fiction channel and then finds out that somewhere along the way you and him have signed away the rights and owe everybody money while they turn it into a runaway hit, which they then spoil by moving it around the schedule constantly, putting Ghosthunters Academy or professional wrestling in its place. Eerm, that thought got away from me somewhere. In any case, not a bad series idea.

Caroline also sounds fun, though I'm not sure how plausible the alternate history behind it is.

Robert Gill: Interesting cover there. Glad you made it past the cut on the employment stuff. John Belushi

would have been great as the character Bill Murray played in Ghostbusters, but Murray did an excellent job. I'm not sure Belushi would have been significantly better. He would have played it quite a bit differently, I suspect.

For some reason, the concept of Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter doesn't appeal to me. I'm not sure why. I like vampires and history and secret history, and from your description it seems like fun. Oh well. No accounting for tastes, including my own.

Your comments to me: Good point on the impact of snapshots on Muslims. That wouldn't be a huge problem for US-53, but by the time of US-2011 it would be a definite issue. I'll have to mention that somewhere and take it into account in later stories.

Yeah, *Martian Upload* has a kind of sad bite to it, doesn't it? Not my usual writing style.

On Flash Forward: I bought the DVD and watched the remaining episodes religiously, only to have the thing canceled on a cliffhanger. Oh well. I killed it.

David Johnson: Sorry that Dee Dee didn't get picked. Switching from cable to satellite: I've thought about doing that, but to be honest I'm deterred by the high pressure marketing that we've been getting around here for the various satellite companies.

The covers are spectacular! Worthy of taking down to the printer and getting them printed on glossy paper.

Your comments to Ford: I like the idea of animals from an alternate reality causing people to toy with the idea of alternate histories, but not seriously.

Your comments to me: Glad you're liking *Snapshot*. I wish I could say I'm still making good progress on it, but I'm bogged down in the last little bit. I have been editing it and making good progress on that—about three-quarters of the way through what I've written so far with a two-pass line-edit. It still has a long ways to go before it is publishable.

On Martian Upload: I really need to stop going into new stories until I get the ones I've already started finished. At the same time, when I have an idea like this I really like to get it down. Hopefully I'll get back to this one before I forget where I was going with it.

On the Kingdom of the Kongo stuff. Yeah, there is some fascinating stuff out there in the non-Western world. This is one of the better areas, but there are others with fascinating histories too. Brazil is one of them. We need to get our Brazilian expert back in the

game.

Your take on Stalin Heads East: Yep. Logistics would be the Soviet Achilles Heel in this one. They can preposition a lot of stuff and live off of that for a while, but eventually they'll run short of stuff. That didn't happen in their 1945 offensive because they were so overwhelmingly superior in combat power and experience to the then shrunken Japanese forces in Manchuria, and because they were only in action for a short time. A US tilt toward the Japanese because the Soviets are seen as allied with Hitler? Possible, but the Japanese have burned up a lot of potential sympathy from the west by their actions in China.

Sea Dragon seems like one of those good ideas looking for a problem to solve. If there was a perceived need to get lots of stuff into space, it would have been the solution. I'm not sure how we get to having that perceived need.

On Germans and salami tactics: Yeah, time wasn't on Germany's side after some time in 1939. The Brits alone would have been out-producing them in airplanes by mid-1940, and the French had some very competitive planes in the pipeline/prototype stage when France fell. French and British tank design was pretty misguided, and probably wouldn't have gotten straightened out for at least a couple of years, but they were starting to build a lot of tanks.

The French didn't have anything in the pipeline that I think would have been worth much in the type of battles that actually got fought in World War II, though a couple of their armored car designs were quite good. One had the oscillating turret that became a major feature of French tanks in the 1950s and allowed them to put much heavier guns on their tanks.

And on to Blue Flash: I like the little touch of having the heading white on blue. It's good to see more of this. This installment was fun, and I hope we see more soon. Timeline seems solid enough for a retrofit of a dream.

Good idea on the random quotes from the 60 issues. You're the only one left who can do that, unfortunately.

Wesley Kawato: Thanks for distributing the fliers. I haven't had any nibbles from them yet, but hopefully that will change. On the issue of how long Germany could have held out: A more rational use of their military power starting in mid-to-late June could have delayed the German defeat. Much after that, and the losses made near-term defeat inevitable. Some things might have changed the week that the end came, or maybe (stretching things quite a bit), the month that the end came. I can't see any revised strategy that would

have kept the Germans in the war past the end of June 1945, pretty much whatever they did. The offensive that led to the Battle of the Bulge probably accelerated German defeat a bit, but going on the offensive did help German morale quite a bit. Staying on the defensive would have helped materially, but the cost to morale might have offset the material advantage. German morale in the west pretty much collapsed in the last couple of months of the war. Without an offensive in the offing it might have collapsed sooner.

Andrew Schnieder: Welcome back! I'm going to jot down my reactions to the first story as I have them, with no filtering and no editing, so you get a reader's eye view of what I experience as I read the story.

First story: What have we here? Confederates in Mexico. Apparently supporting Maximillian. Exiles after a Confederate loss or forwarded there by a Confederate victory? Hmm. Looks like the south won Gettysburg. Doesn't necessarily mean they won the war, but I'm guessing surviving confederacy. Wonder why it would take the French side in Mexico. Maybe to poke a stick in the Federal eye. Good start. Lots of gritty little details.

Later: So it is surviving confederacy, returning a French favor and getting shafted for their trouble. Fighting on the wrong side if you ask me. Understandable reaction to the ambush, but the wrong one, as you undoubtedly know. So the confederates blunder into a Vietnam in Mexico. Not a bad story in terms of content, and nothing about the writing popped me out of the story. Enjoyable in a grim sort of way. Good job.

I'm going to tackle the second story a bit more traditionally. Again, well-written. I don't know enough about the Iran of this era to know if you got the geopolitics correct. I've gotten into earlier and later eras in Iran, but from 1942 to the late 1960s is kind of a blind spot for me. To be honest, the story came across as an "if-only", which isn't necessarily bad, but can often be accompanied by a deification of one side of an issue and the vilification of the other.

Were the British of the era really just imperialists trying to trick the US to keep their empire alive? Were the Iranian nationalists really pure and rational democrats who would have led Iran into the twenty-first century as a modern liberal secular state if only the US had supported them? Maybe. Certainly the first part of that contains an element of truth: the idea of empire lingered in Britain after the British no longer had the physical or economic strength to maintain it. Certainly the colonial powers attempted, sometimes successfully, to lure the US into supporting their efforts to maintain empire. Certainly the British of this era still used their

remaining power to bully other countries into arguably unequal economic arrangements.

On the second part of the proposition: Without the background I can't say for sure what the Iranian nationalists of the 1950s would have done had they remained in power. I am skeptical though, due to what I know about the ethnic and cultural composition of Iran. Iran, both before and after this period, was a tough society to govern democratically. One of the problems is and was that a majority of the population has strong ethnic/linguistic ties outside the country. Add up the Kurds, and half a dozen other minority groups and they outnumber the Farsi speakers. It's difficult to govern democratically when more than half of your population may want to be in a different country. Also, the nutcase clerics didn't just zap in from outer space during the era of the second Shah, though they got stronger during the last part of his reign. They were an issue for Persian/Iranian governments off and on for centuries.

The original shah had his work cut out for him in trying to unify the country. Even without the ethnic issues, a series of weak central governments had allowed tribalism to become entrenched, which made it difficult to have any kind of government that didn't boil down to one tribe running things for its benefit.

In a situation like that, does democracy do better or worse than government by a strongman? Hard to say in general. Both have failed in a lot of cases and succeeded in a few. The Iranian nationalists of the 1950s would have had to be tough, incredibly bright, very practical men. They would have also had to face a Soviet Union that really did try to subvert its neighbors through local communist parties or stirring up ethnic distrust, if it was in the Soviet Union's perceived interest to do so.

I would be interested in your take on what happens next. The US sides with Iranian nationalists and pressures the British to settle their disputes when Iran over oil nationalization on a reasonable basis. How does that play out—not from an if-only perspective, but from a realistic one? Are the nationalists able to hold the country together? Are they able to successfully combat the forces that in our time-line created the current regime? How would that government influence the rest of the Middle East? Would it be a threat to the other regimes of the area, almost none of them democratically elected? Would it be a disaster that deterred the rest of the region from looking at democracy?

To the best of my knowledge, the only Islamic country that has had a continuously functioning democracy for more than about a decade at a time is possibly Turkey,

and even there the military coups have often punctuated civilian rule. I don't want to say that democracy is impossible in an Islamic society, but it has historically had difficulty taking root. Would Iran have been an exception?

How would a successful Iranian nationalization affect the oil industry as a whole? Would other countries follow suit? How would it impact the ability of Britain to maintain its remaining empire? Would the British be forced to wind down their empire more quickly? Would that be better or worse for the countries involved? How would all of this impact the ability and willingness of Britain to maintain its forces in Germany? What would it do to the overall relationship between the US and Britain.

This is an interesting era, and not one I've looked into much. Excuse me if some of my questions seem naïve. Certainly the way we got to the current situation in the Middle East is an important issue, probably in many ways as important as World War II. Unfortunately much, if not most of the history of the area is still highly politically charged, with many key historical facts still in dispute.

In any case, a good pair of stories, each thought-provoking in its own way. Glad you could rejoin us for the reunion issue, and I hope you got enough feedback to make the exercise worthwhile for you.

Kurt Sidaway: Twenty-seven years? Yeah, that seemed like a long time before we lived it. My stepdaughter is 30 now, with a little girl who will be 3 in August. I've known her since she was 2, so that's twenty-eight years. I often think about the people I went to high-school and college with. It's hard to believe she's ten years older than we were back then. Oh well. Life goes by too fast. I can relate to your bookstore experience. I hung around a used bookstore most of my teen years and into my twenties, then kept going back every few years. A couple of years ago I discovered that the couple who ran it had both died within a year or so of each other. The bookstore had been sold. Last I checked it was still a bookstore, but I don't feel any of the old ties with the new ownership.

I'm glad to hear that you're making a resolution to do NanoWriMo this fall. It'll be an interesting experience. Hopefully we'll see the results starting early next year. If you have any questions I'll be happy to point you to resources and tell you things that did and didn't work for me.

Keep us posted on the Staffordshire Hoard. There is a fascinating story to be unraveled there.

Your comments to Johnson: Yeah, the locals would come up with some other name for Madagascar-9M. Not sure what yet. Big Gassy? Big Gasless? Old Big And Gassy?

I'm pretty sure the Romulans were introduced in the original Trek, but they impressed me as being a footnote species rather than headliners like the Klingons. They got more prominent in the movies and the Next Generation.

<<<snip>>>The real world faces irregularly spaced catastrophes of various magnitude, ranging from local to near continent-sized, with a scattering of world-wide ones. Yellowstone erupts roughly every 650,000 years, covering most of North America in enough ash to probably kill the vast majority of individuals in most animal species across the continent. It may kill off a few species every eruption. Smaller stuff happens more commonly. Either you simulate those catastrophes some way, or you have an unnaturally stable environment. Over the long term, that would change the mix between climax species and weedy species that move in and flourish right after a catastrophe. The ecologies of would gradually become less capable of recovering from catastrophes large and small, because they aren't being selected for the ability to recover from those catastrophes to the same extent. Also, they would inherently be more susceptible to introduced animals, invasive plants, and introduced diseases, because their isolation would shield them from those issues, whereas real world ecologies, even the most isolated ones, face all of those things over enough time.

Your comments to Gill: Fox has an infinite ability to screw up promising science fiction ideas. Hopefully they won't get their hands on Torchwood.

Your comments to me: Interesting thoughts on the Wikipedia/infodumps. I need to figure out a better way to integrate that stuff. One of the major problems with Snapshot is that there are a lot of concepts to get your head around, and until you get most of those concepts down it's difficult to move understand the story.

Thanks for the nitpicks. I'll see if I can fix them. By

the way: Thanks also for looking at *All Timelines*. To be honest I haven't looked at your edits yet. I'm concentrating on getting *Snapshot* finished and *Exchange* launched. I'm tentatively figuring on getting back to *All Timelines* for another edit in late July or August. At that point I'll check out your edits.

I'm going to have to get back to Martian Upload. Trying to keep too many balls in the air. Nice set of nitpicks on *Mars Looks Different*. Very helpful.

On the Kongo stuff. I think I mentioned last time that it was entirely real history. That feels a bit like a cheat, but I did give that as one possibility. To be honest, I intended to add in a couple of PODs, but as I got into the history more deeply I realized that the ideas I had in mind paled in comparison to the real world. That little area of Africa had its own Manzikert, and its own Joan of Arc during this period, not to mention probably having American Indians in a battle in Africa. I wonder what those guys thought, coming from Brazil and seeing all of the strange wildlife of Africa. I wonder what they brought back with them disease-wise. Had malaria and yellow fever established themselves in Brazil by that time? If not, returning Indians would have been a good source of those diseases.

The Master: I saw him in an episode of the UK *Life on Mars*. Not a bad performance there either, though the Master role let him really let everything hang out.

On the writing: Good luck. I have the same problem you do with often wanting to get on to the next obsession before I get the current one finished. That's why NanoWriMo seems to work well for me. I just have to get done or very close to it in a month. I strongly recommend YWriter to keep the prep stuff organized. For me, Write of Die is great for busting through writer's block. The biggest stumbling block to actually getting the rough draft done is trying to get it perfect. I'm running into that right now with the last few thousand words of Snapshot. I need to just get it done and then fix anything that I got wrong on the next pass. Easier said than done though without goals and deadlines I've publically committed to.