



SCIENCE-Fiction Fanzine

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כנס "מאורות" בירושלים:

<http://meorot.sf-f.org.il/2016/>**חדשות האגודה – דצמבר 2016 The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy**

מועדון הקריאה של חודש דצמבר יעסוק בספר "פרשת ג'יין אייר" מאת ג'ספר פורד (מודן, 2004).
 בירושלים יתקיים ביום רביעי 21.12 ב- 19:30, בבית הקפה "נגילה", משיח ברוכץ 5, ירושלים. מנחה: [שרה מולדבן](#).
 בת"א יתקיים ביום חמישי 22.12 ב- 19:30, ב"קפה גרג", ויצמן 2. מנחה: [רונית פוקס](#).

אספה כללית ב-8 בדצמבר, 2016 תתקיים באשכול הפיס תל אביב בשעה 19:30.

כל האירועים של האגודה מופיעים בלוח האירועים (שפע אירועים מעניינים, הרצאות, סדנאות, מפגשים ועוד)

לקבלת עדכונים שוטפים על מפגשי מועדון הקריאה ברחבי הארץ ניתן להצטרף לרשימת התפוצה או לדף האגודה בפייסבוק.

Society information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

This month's roundup:

- About our new SF friends across the seas in Montreal, Quebec, Canada
- A special guest contribution: "Alternate History SF: So Many Worlds to Explore" by Shlomo Schwartzberg

And, of course, the Sheer Science section by Dr. Doron Calo: Communication by X-Rays!

– Your editor, Leybl Botwinik

(...and still on the backburner [but getting EVEN closer to realization] the completion of the Zombie series special issue ...)

Real Reader Remarks:

Kudos for the calculation – According to John, this is the 336th issue!!! (actually more – since we also published a few Specials):

Well, assuming that you have been putting out monthly issues for 28 years, so $27 \times 12 = 324 + 11$ this year makes 335. So there. Does that number boggle your mind? When you stop and think about it, monthly issues add up. Heck, quarterly issues add up. *Askance* will have its 40th issue next March, the tenth anniversary of the zine's beginning. All grown up now as it hits middle age.

Cathy Palmer-Lister consistently sends me the link to the Montreal SF club's zine, *Warp*, which I haven't looked at in a while. Your brief intro to the club is a nice teaser, and I look forward to reading more about it in the next issue of *CyberCozen*.

The more I watch the original series of *Star Trek* and compare it to *The Next Generation* – and then the *Voyager*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Enterprise* versions – the more I prefer the classic series that began the entire franchise. While the scripts and stories have always been hit or miss over the years, the chemistry and camaraderie among the cast was unique and perfect. I never cared for the stiffness of TNG – so formal! – although *Deep Space Nine* and *Enterprise* were much better at developing characters and their interactions. The original series suffered a lot from its budget and limited special effects, but the stories submitted by some of science fiction's finest writers helped a great deal. Like every great first love in life, the original *Star Trek* holds a special place in our collective fannish hearts. I still watch those reruns much more often than any of the other franchise offerings. So it goes.

That should do it for now. Many thanks for posting the fanzine. As always, it is enjoyed.

All the best,

John Purcell

And ... one more:

... just returned from a trip overseas, which afforded me the chance to watch the latest Star Trek movie. While it had its moments, overall it was not as satisfying as the previous two flicks, which reminded me of what was written in the latest CyberCozen -- the original ST series endeared a young person to SF, and all of the subsequent ST series pale in comparison. I share the same experience (opinion) as the author of that 2013 article, except that I am 4 years younger and grew up in the northern USA. The original series placed emphasis on people, and not so much on technology. Each episode's pace was digestible, not too fast nor too slow, and the plot's resolution was unpredictable. There was more hand-to-hand combat, and lots of Kirk's resourceful solutions along with Spock's application of science to overcome barriers. While more could be said on the subject, suffice it to say that the various later series, with their individual positive features, just didn't offer the same flare, ingenuity, originality, spirit, humor, excitement, etc.

Just one observation of that movie -- there was a lot of action, plenty of special effects, but less emphasis on using one's noggin (Kirk kept saying in a "knee-jerk" reaction to just fire weapons, even though it was clear that it wasn't a viable solution), and salvation seemed to come from unlikely sources.

G. Roth

Montreal SF & Fantasy Association (MonSFFA) [cont'd]

- By Leybl Botwinik

As mentioned in our previous issue, we had the pleasure of meeting some members of the Montreal Science Fiction and Fantasy Association "MonSFFA" (feel free to visit their website: <http://www.monsffa.ca/> and Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/MonSFFA>): the dynamic and super-friendly secretary Cathy Palmer-Lister, René Walling (who was chair of *Anticipation*, the World con in Montreal 2005, and MonSFFA's go-to person for anything SF/F outside the usual track), and Danny Sichel who Cathy named as: "probably the most literate of our members ... fantastic memory for detail".



Cathy Palmer-Lister, the current president and editor of their flagship publication "WARP" honoured us with 4 printed issues: 90-93 (you can download PDF versions here #90 <http://www.monsffa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/WARP-Winter-2015-opt.pdf> and here #91-96 http://www.monsffa.ca/?page_id=952).



"WARP" is MonSFFA's official fanzine. An amalgam of word-processed and typewritten articles, photocopied photographs and line illustrations. Reading their publication's history sounds just like CyberCozen's, only our Aharon Sheer (o'h) managed to keep pumping out issue after issue on a monthly basis, and they gave up after a few years, to first publish every two months, and then to become the quarterly publication it is today. See: http://www.monsffa.ca/?page_id=148

Coincidentally, the first issue of WARP was released in October of 1988 – roughly the same time as the first "CyberCozen" (though we did not have this title yet, until about 1990).

Each issue of 12, 14, or 16 pages has a fascinating full-colour cover, followed by an inner cover containing a listing of MonSFFA's executive and upcoming meetings/events.

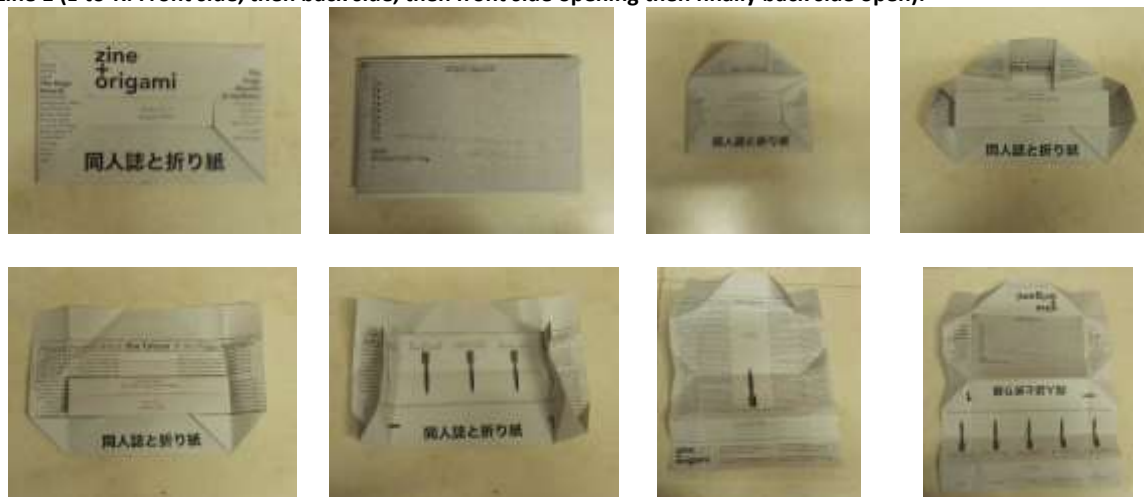
The fun begins, starting with p.3, with contents including letters to the editor, reviews, a listing of upcoming events, etc. One major bonus, you don't often see, is a running Star Trek storyline entitled "Starfleet Treachery" by Barbara Silverman (currently up to chapter 35 in the latest, just-released issue "Warp #96"). Barbara has several e-books out and is a member of MonSFFA. Issue #90, as you can tell from the cover, was in memory of Leonard Nimoy. Issues #91 and #92 have a great set of short reviews of "Golden Age" SF movies, written up by Keith Braithwaite (MonSFFA's VP), and #91 also has a fascinating review of French Steampunk graphic novels (Note that WARP is mostly in English, with a few contributions in French. This write-up is in English).

Cathy also presented us with a special CANADA POST 10-stamp commemoration of Star Trek:



René Walling also presented us with a few more mementos: 1) The book "Aurora Awards": An Anthology of Prize-Winning Science Fiction & Fantasy (see: <http://www.prixaurorawards.ca/>) and two fascinating issues of his original hand-made origami fanzine "zine + origami", issues #1 and 2 from Aug 2016. The 2nd one has a subtitle "Because you can't fold PDFs". I was afraid to open them – lest I have trouble refolding them... so I took out my handy smartphone and decided to photograph each step of the unfolding:

Zine 1 (L-to-R: Front side, then back side, then front side opening then finally back side open):



Zine 2 (L-to-R: Front side, then back side, then front side opening then finally back side open):



And so, what did we talk about?...

Cathy was first to get there. Rather than talk about us (CyberCozen, the Israel SF scene, the Israel SF&F Society, Zion'sFiction – and of course, our own projects and plans – we would get to that when the other members would arrive, so as not to need to repeat) Nathaniel and I asked about MonSFFA. Cathy obliged and told us a little about the history and membership – and much of it seemed very familiar – a kind of parallel world with Israel. However, she was much too modest... Once I started wandering around the website, I discovered that there was so much more (feel free to see <http://www.monsffa.ca/>). They are very well organized and have all sorts of fascinating events, movie outings, and short trips (*).

Our short visit was very productive, and hopefully, the next time I'm in Montreal I can synchronize with them and make a more formal presentation at one of their meetings.

[*and of course, Nathaniel gave them a signed copy of his Hebrew book "Anshey Hamaagal"]

POST-SCRIPT: Collaboration in the works?

A month ago, I had just wrapped up the November issue and I contacted Cathy about the preliminary write-up about our get-together in Montreal. She was just in the middle of struggling to put out her latest publication WARP #96. Her major complaint – just as mine is – that she had trouble getting contributions. I then offered her that WARP can republish stuff from CyberCozen and return we could publish material from WARP. She wrote me back: "...Hi! There is no problem in reprinting anything I wrote..."

So Cathy offered us a very nice story about the legends of how star-systems were named and the fanciful stories surrounding them, beginning with the legend of the Mi'kmaq (The Great Bear and the Birds). Unfortunately, it's more in the realm of fantasy, and so I asked her for other stuff. However, if you would like to enjoy a short magical romp into this world of legends, then read at your pleasure: "http://www.monsffa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/WARP_95-LR.pdf" on page 7 under the title "Star Legends".

I hope that this will be the beginning of a lasting friendship.

Vive Les Canadiens!

Post-Post-script #1 vis-à-vis collaboration/distribution:

Just before my trip to Montreal, I received an appeal from Ahrvid Engholm via the efanazines website to contribute to EAPA (e.g. <http://efanzines.com/eapa/eapa150.pdf>) and I wrote him, that he is free to attach any of my articles to his mailing list...

And now, I received an offer from George Phillies (President, National Fantasy Fan Federation – <http://n3f.org/>) to freely distribute our fanzine to their mailing list members. This will give us very good exposure.

Now, if I could only get paid for this ...

Post-Post-script #2 vis-à-vis collaboration:

You may have already noticed, that in the previous issue we reprinted an article by my good friend Shlomo Schwartzberg about Star Trek. It was taken from a site called "critics at large" (co-founded by Shlomo) that offers us free high-calibre articles, and we hope to benefit from him/them, as in the following write-up too:

Alternate History SF: So Many Worlds to Explore

With permission from the author. Originally presented June 21, 2014 at:

<http://www.criticsatlarge.ca/2014/06/alternate-history-sf-so-many-worlds-to.html>



Believe it or not, the idea of alternate history, or counter-factual worlds as it's also known, where historical events turned out differently from our world, dates as far back as the 4th century BC. That's when the Roman historian Livy contemplated an alternative 4th century BC in which Alexander the Great of Macedonia expanded his empire westward instead of eastward, thus meeting up with the Romans and in Livy's view, losing to them in battle. Had that happened, the geographical realities of our time and who ruled where would have been significantly altered.

Since then, everyone from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Winston Churchill has pondered what might have been.

Hawthorne's "P.'s Correspondence," published in 1845, speculated on a different 1845 where famous people such as Napoleon Bonaparte were still alive. Churchill's alternate history speculation, "If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg," (part of the 1931 anthology **If It Had Happened Otherwise**) postulates a Civil War won by the South, which along with the idea of Nazi Germany winning World War Two remains the most frequently written about alternate history scenario.

Both of those turnabouts could have happened, which is the point of examining alternate history, recognition that history can literally turn on a dime or on a specific event – such as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which was the main trigger of World War One, or 9/11, whose ramifications are still being felt today.

Had either of those events not happened, where would we now be? (Richard Ned Lebow's fascinating **Archduke Franz Ferdinand Lives!: A World Without World War One** offers up speculations on a history without both world wars had the archduke not been assassinated one hundred years ago this week.)

But just because there are so many alternate histories being written – new ones seem to come out weekly – does not mean that they are all of equal quality, or equally plausible. How and why alternate histories convince us, or work as literature, have as much to do with the writer's biases, talents and abilities to believably explain the altered course of history and those who make it.

C.J. Sansom's **Dominion** (2014, published 2012 in the U.K.), which imagines a fascist Britain in 1952, after Churchill lost out to the appeasers who were prepared to make peace with Nazi Germany, is a scrupulously thought through and utterly believable scenario for a

novel. It doesn't exaggerate the social and political aspects of its created world and provides some nuance to it, too. (England and France have not deported their Jews (yet) to concentration camps nor given them over to their quasi-German masters). It helps, of course, that it's such a well-written, atmospheric book, as well.

Good ideas are no substitute for bad writing. Philip Roth's **The Plot Against America** (2004) contained fine writing, too – Roth is incapable of faltering in that regard – but its alternate world wherein aviator Charles Lindbergh, an isolationist, fascist sympathizer and anti-Semite becomes President and begins tightening the screws on America's Jews is, finally, a failure of the imagination.

Roth does not have the genre writer's ability to go all out imagining a fictional science fictional universe – Sansom is a long time mystery writer – so his novel is mostly anchored to the sober, disturbing facts of what a Lindbergh Presidency might feel like, in this case as experienced by a young Philip Roth and his family who would have been alive in the 30s.

And while those details are chillingly and realistically rendered on the page, Roth cannot quite figure out how to resolve his situation and where to go with it. The book's conclusion is thus slapdash and far-fetched in equal measure.



The same problems afflict Len Deighton's tale of an Occupied Britain in **SS-GB** (1978). As a spy writer, he, like Roth, is interested in the

mundane, day to day facts of how an alternate England would function, particularly in respect to the new-found and understandably uneasy relationship between Scotland Yard and the SS, and succeeds less in capturing the altered atmosphere of that world, or the big picture so to speak.

Robert Harris's debut novel **Fatherland** (1992) isn't well written at all, as he is not adept at strong characterization – except, perhaps, for his two lead protagonists and even they're not as rounded as any of Sansom's characters in **Dominion** – but he also fails to convey the small, salient facts of his altered world. His Berlin of 1964, where Hitler's 75th birthday celebrations are about to occur, is your basic Soviet-style police state with only the slightest sense that it is something different than what we've ever experienced in our real world.

Guy Saville's **The Afrika Reich** (2011) takes the same alternate jumping off point as Sansom did – after the near fatal disaster of Dunkirk in 1940 the British choose not to fight Germany and thus, perhaps, hold onto their overseas Empire, such as India. **The Afrika Reich**, however, despite its unique alternate WWII African setting, expects us to swallow the presumption that the Nazis would not use black slave labour to build their sprawling autobahns, massive new cities and other symbols of the dominant worldwide Reich, but would import Slavs and poor indentured Germans to do so instead, after wiping out the local populations. (If the Nazis used Jewish and Polish slave labour in Occupied Europe as they did in reality, there's no reason to think they would not do the same in Africa and then exterminate the inhabitants).

The fatal flaw of **The Afrika Reich**, which is otherwise well imagined, lies in its pedestrian characterization and lame cliff hanger endings – for each chapter! We don't need a second coming of Michael Crichton, thank you.

None of the books mentioned above actually suggest that there are parallels to anything going on in our present day world. Philip Roth had to continually insist to interviewer Katie Couric that he wasn't implying that George W. Bush's presidency bore any resemblance to a Lindbergh one, which Couric kept suggesting, but simply speculating on an alternate historical possibility that scared him as a child.

However, Jo Walton in her Small Change trilogy (**Farthing, Ha'penny, Half a Crown**, 2006-08) gave several interviews where she

said Bush's Presidency prompted her to write the novels as a warning to our present day. (Science fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin, author of **Lathe of Heaven**, in a blurb for Walton certainly made that case for Bush = Fascism.) But it's a facile, even ignorant observation and indicative of her (unfounded) political biases. More to the point, it's a dumb reason to write an alternate history as the motives for it seem to point to the writer playing prophet, compelled to warn us that the British are coming; or in this case, the American Fascists.

I also take issue with her depiction of Canada, in the books, as a safe haven for Europe's Jews. Considering my country took in almost no Jews from Europe during the war (Harold Troper and Irving Abella's 1983 history book **None is Too Many** explored that shameful fact), her view is highly problematic since she offers no explanation of why Canada,

ever loyal to the Commonwealth, deviated from her fascist mother country in that regard. Even in **Dominion**, where commonwealth countries like Canada and Australia are chafing under Britain's increasingly fascist actions, the two countries don't take in too many Jews; only New Zealand has no such restrictions on Jewish emigration.

The Small Change trilogy is one of the more strongly written recent alternate histories. It does, however, trail off, as Walton seems to get increasingly bored with it. Perhaps, she only wanted to write a standalone novel but succumbed to the publisher pressure for a trilogy, which seems to be the new normal in SF and fantasy ... and so, the series ends flatly and unsatisfactorily.



An altered world which includes a Confederate States of America (click image to expand)

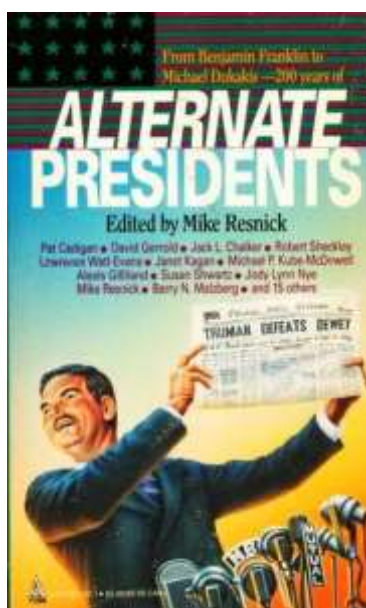
Walton's views on present day America, or Bush's version thereof, where it's being portrayed as akin to any aspect of fascism betrays a simplistic take on America by a non-resident (Walton is Welsh born) that bears no relation to the facts, even as laid out in alternate histories. (Now that Barack Obama is President there are any number of silly alternate histories, masquerading as serious tomes, speculating/warning of his plans to change the U.S. into a socialist version of the old Soviet Union.) I could only stomach a few pulpy chapters of **K is for Killing** (1978) by Daniel Easterman, the pseudonym of British writer Jonathan Aycliffe, as its view of an alternate fascist America, run by the Ku Klux Klan, no less, with Lindbergh as their puppet, recreates America as an exact duplicate of Nazi Germany, concentration camps and all.

Noting that even Fascist Italy and Fascist Spain didn't hold the same anti-Semitic attitudes as the Nazis did, that's a gross simplification of what fascism could come to mean in other countries like the U.S.

A more believable scenario is proffered by American writer Brendan Dubois, writing as Alan Glenn, in **Amerikan Eagle** (2011), wherein **Huey Long** has become the American President and plays political footsie with the Germans. He doesn't do anything about the

Jews in terms of directly threatening them but neither does he shut down, as President Franklin Roosevelt eventually did, or limit the hate filled ravings of (real life) anti-Semitic priest and radio broadcaster Charles Coughlin.

Fearing for their lives and future, American Jews in **Amerikan Eagle** have voluntarily retreated to ghettos in New York, Los Angeles and other large cities, assuming there is safety in numbers. Unlike in **K is for Killing**, that's a nuanced portrait of American fascism. (It's also a clichéd and obviously plotted book which may explain why Dubois, who wrote the very fine 1999 **Resurrection Day**, about the outgrowth of a dictatorial United States in the aftermath of the nuclear war that ensued because of the Cuban Missile Crisis, is using a pseudonym here.)



One of my favourite alternate history stories also involves Long. In Barry Malzberg's **Kingfish**, appearing in the (excellent) 1992 **Alternate Presidents** anthology, President Long invites Adolf Hitler to Washington and has him killed. If you know anything about Long, who was assassinated when he was governor of Louisiana after announcing he would be running for President in 1936, and his political tactics, it's a strangely believable scenario.

Alternate history anthologies such as **Alternate Presidents** and **Hitler Victorious** (1986) whose American edition sports a dramatic cover shot of Hitler touring Washington, D.C. are often the best bets for such what-if speculations. They're short and sweet and less likely to fall apart or be hobbled by lame characterization, which is not of such importance in the novella or novelette form.

(**Hitler Victorious** also includes Brad Linaweaver's terrific novella **Moon of Ice**, later expanded into a good 1989 novel, with a Libertarian America and a deft use of Nazi occultism to underpin its fascinating, original alternate world. Linaweaver also wrote the novelization of **Sliders**, an awful alternate history based TV series but we won't hold that against him.)

Other alternate WWII anthologies, more academic in nature and often edited by historian Peter G. Tsouoras such as **Rising Sun Victorious: The Alternative History of How the Japanese Won the Pacific War** (2007); **Third Reich Victorious: Alternate Decisions of World War II** (2007) and **Hitler Triumphant: Alternate Decisions of World War II** (2006) are of historical interest but can be awfully dry, too.

A small sidebar to check out is Harry Turtledove's short story "The Last Article" (1988), which you can download [here](#), wherein non-violent pacifist Mahatma Gandhi learns, too late, that a Nazi Germany, which has conquered India cannot be successfully opposed in the same manner as the democratic British were. It's a smart take on the naiveté of some of our greatest figures – based on fact, incidentally – and a reminder that politically correct comparisons between Nazi Germany and any of the Allied powers cannot apply in real life.

As a political and history buff (I have a bachelor, majoring in the former with a minor in the latter) and a Jew, I naturally have a specific interest in alternate World War scenarios. (How could I not?) but that's not all I am compelled to read. I'm also fascinated by nuclear war scenarios, which pop up in any number of alternate worlds, such as **Resurrection Day** and Professor Eric G. Swedin's **When Angels Wept: A What-If History of the Cuban Missile Crisis** (2010), which though it takes too long to get to its main point offers a devastating and memorable picture of what a nuclear war, emanating from that crisis would have looked like.

Jo Walton's latest novel **My Real Children** (2014), about a woman who lives two lives in two different worlds but remembers them both, postulates it as the Nuclear Missile Exchange wherein the Soviets bombed Miami and the Americans retaliated by destroying Kiev, prompting President John F. Kennedy, who survived in one of the two worlds, to

decline to run for a second term out of remorse for what happened.

Those books are a timely reminder of how close such as an exchange came to actually occurring. Less believable in **My Real Children** is Walton's contention that that nuclear exchange would be followed by several others over the years, which is not that plausible to countries' learning from past mistakes. After all, we've avoided that grim reality since Hiroshima and Nagasaki were nuked in 1945. (Walton's other world in **My Real Children** is more utopian and just as far-fetched. Again, not being internally plausible, whatever their other strengths, is why so many alternate history novels come a cropper.

Other alternate history books stem from similar deep conviction as Swedin's book and in the case of Jeff Greenfield's **If Kennedy Lived: The First and Second Terms of President John F. Kennedy: An Alternate History** (2013), which came out in time for the 50th anniversary of his assassination, are also based on his knowing the martyred president when he covered him as a journalist and like so many bemoaning that he died as he did.

Greenfield's book does not exaggerate the accomplishments of a two-term Kennedy Presidency, but neither does it suggest that he would not have made a difference as in Vietnam, for example. (Greenfield also wrote **Then Everything Changed: Stunning Alternate Histories of American Politics: JFK, RFK, Carter, Ford, Reagan** (2012), another discerning book on alternate Presidential election results).

One man can make a difference, but in the U.S., exceptions like Franklin Roosevelt aside, in incremental fashion only. That's why Mitchell J. Freedman's **A Disturbance of Fate: The Presidency of Robert Kennedy** is such an utter failure. His meticulously written and lengthy book imagines Robert surviving Sirhan Sirhan's attempt on his life and going all out to turn the U.S. into a socialist paradise.

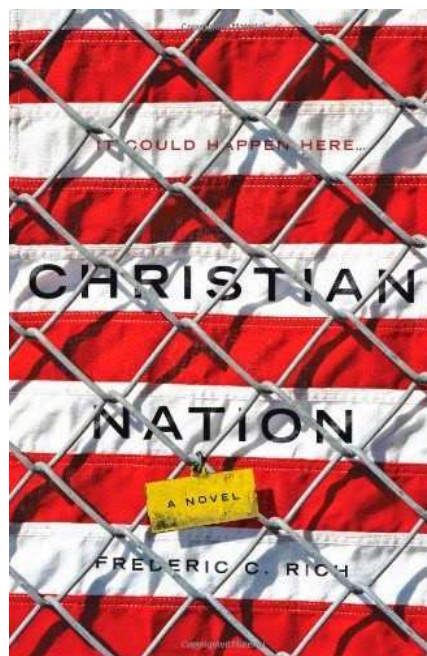
I'm not being hyperbolic here as Freedman has RFK and his Vice President, Liberal Texan Ralph Yarborough (who existed in real life) transform the U.S. for the better in every way possible, despite (supposed) Republican and conservative Democratic opposition. (Well, except for gun control; no one can hope to succeed in that endeavour, real or imagined words alike.) I say supposed because they lose

every time like Perry Mason's opponents in the old TV series.

Freedman then postulates a Second American Civil War in the 80s after Kennedy has left office. I get that Freedman's book is therapy for him, the ultimate wish fulfilment, but though I got through it I barely believed a word of it.

The reverse applies to **Christian Nation** (2013) by Frederic C. Rich, a lawyer and author who wants to warn America against the dire threat of Christian fundamentalism, by conjuring up a world somewhat similar to [Margaret Atwood's](#) 1985 dystopian **The Handmaid's Tale**, only here explaining the political basis of how his theocracy came to be. Vice President Sarah Palin, who becomes President when John McCain dies soon after attaining that high office in 2008, starts the ball rolling, but it's a fictional Chief Executive named Steve Jordan who brings America fully over to the dictatorial dark side.

Rich is a descriptive writer and some sequences are truly horrifying as what if ideas but I'll never be convinced that the U.S. could turn fully fundamentalist simply because too many Americans are individualistic. Besides, unlike the alternate WWII and Southern victory books, which are based on real possibility, a Sarah Palin presidency was almost always unlikely and writing a book about it so long after she ran for office is redundant, unless you're convinced, like Rich obviously is, that America's future could someday be this darkly (ir)religious.



Much better is Stephen King's excellent [11/22/63](#) (2011) with his protagonist Jacob Epping discovering a way to go back in time to 1958 and then endeavouring to prevent JFK's murder five years on. It's a beautiful amalgam of alternate history and time travel tropes (one of my other SF favourites) and apropos since time travelers have the ability to change the future if they're not careful.

The only weak link in the book, which overall is one of King's best, is his depiction of a world where Kennedy survives; it's genre overkill in this case as King lets loose with so many imaginative and wild leaps into dystopian SF that he neglects to build a nuanced, subtle alternative world in a novel that is otherwise scrupulously so.

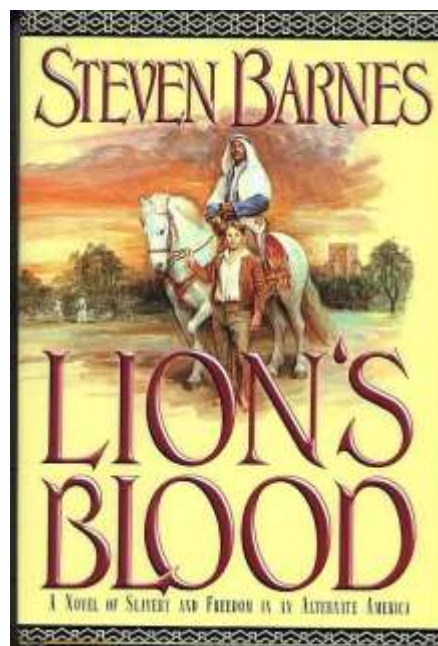
I had high hopes for Matt Ruff's **The Mirage** (2012), an alternate take on 9/11 wherein the Twin Towers are located in Baghdad, UAS (United Arab States) and the terrorists are Christians from a backwards U.S. targeting the dominant Arab superpower on 11/9. I liked some of its jokey ideas, such as a modern Israel being located in Germany, as recompense for the Holocaust, and occupying the West Bank of the Rhineland and facing an existential threat from a Holocaust-denying British Prime Minister (real life Holocaust denier David Irving).

However, the book does not gel for a reason I could not pin down until I read the novel's postscript where Ruff talks about wanting to present an alternative to the Arab terrorist stereotype and humanize the Arab world in the process. But because, as he freely admits, he was less interested in depicting the American world of **The Mirage** – and it's sketchily drawn at best – the book falls apart as a fully realized SF vision.

Michael Chabon's **The Yiddish Policemen's Union** (2007) is another alternate history which skimps on the interesting details of its fabricated world. Chabon builds a world where the Israel we know was defeated and destroyed by the Arabs in 1948 and a new Jewish state unofficially set up in Sitka, Alaska, when America let in many more Jews in 1941 than were ever allowed into the country in our real world.

Even though there are hints of momentous alternate historical events – an American invasion of Cuba, World War Two ending with the nuking of Berlin in 1946, Marilyn Monroe marrying one of the Kennedys (presumably

Robert) – Chabon is more preoccupied with writing a detective story, one so hard boiled it seems to be set in the 1950s instead of 2007. The book is very well written, but this science fiction fan was not satisfied with Chabon's (barely) speculative efforts.



Much more tantalizing and satisfying is Steven Barnes' highly provocative **Lion's Blood: A Novel of Slavery and Freedom in an Alternate America** (2002), wherein the slaves are Irish and the masters black Muslims. (He also wrote a sequel **Zulu Heart** in 2003 which I have not read.) Barnes, who is African American, makes the obvious but not always admitted point that skin colour as the basis of slavery was as much an accident of history as a racist outgrowth of it. (Many of the blacks sold into slavery were done so by their own people).

Contrast that complex view with Kevin Wilmott's simplistic 2004 film **C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America**, a rare foray into cinematic alternate history. (TV series usually tackle that subject.) That 'mockumentary' seriously postulates that slavery would still be a reality in a present day 21st century Southern-run America, highly unlikely as every other slave owning society has historically jettisoned that barbaric system sooner or later. I haven't yet waded through Harry Turtledove's **CSA** series of books (eleven in all, published from 1997-2007) but from what I know of them, they strike me as much more intelligent and nuanced than **C.S.A.**

Sometimes alternate histories, such as Kim Stanley Robinson's masterful **The Years of**

Rice and Salt (2002), generate controversy within the SF field. He depicts a world where the Black Death wipes out 90 per cent of Europe (instead of the 30% it did in our world). This allows Islam and Hinduism to be the dominant world religions (and implacable enemies). This prompted Harry Turtledove, whose oeuvre is mostly made up of alternate history (his latest series, the six-book **The War That Came Early** (2009-2014), imagine a WWII that began in 1938, one year earlier; that's a little too narrow an alternate perspective for me) to assail Robinson for political correctness. He maintained that an Islamic dominated world would be more backwards than the one portrayed in **The Years of Rice and Salt**.

Well, actually, Robinson does suggest that his created world is a generation behind ours in technological terms and also imagines a 67-year-long war between the Islamic world and China that cost many more lives than in our world wars. However, he does not bring into the book any of the Islamic fundamentalist elements we might expect, based on our own modern history. But as Islam in our 15th century was highly progressive, who's to say Robinson's fairly generous view is a faulty one?

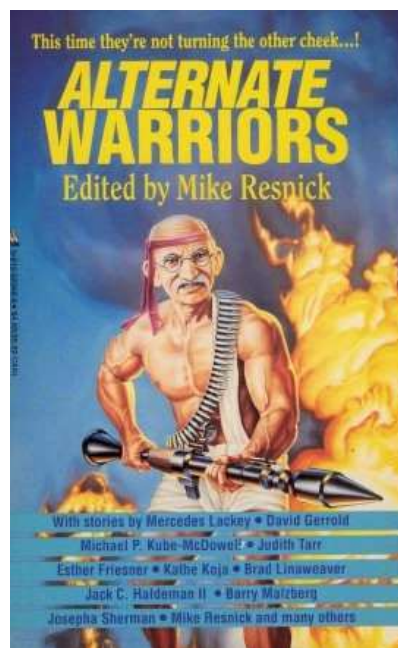
Another worthwhile read is Terry Bisson's post modernist and satirical **Any Day Now** (2012), an alternate counter-cultural novel where the positive, left-wing developments of the 60s unfolded at an increased pace, affecting the U.S. and the world's political trajectory and impacting in a very different way on the lives of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, among others. Think of it as an acid trip by a die-hard leftist but one possessing real wit and talent.

Another highly altered America pops up in **The Two Georges** (1995), co-written by Turtledove and Richard Dreyfuss (yes, the actor!). Its version of a world where the American Revolution never happened and North America is still under the sway of the British Empire is more fun than you might think.

I'm only beginning to scratch the surface of the world of alternate history books. Check out the Uchronia web site (<http://www.uchronia.net>) if you want to know more, including information on the winners of the Sidewise Award, given out annually to the best novels and short stories in the genre.

This site encompasses so many more must reads: classics like Ward Moore's seminal

alternate Civil War book **Bring the Jubilee** (1963) and Philip K. Dick's superb alternate World War Two novel **The Man in the High Castle** (1962), which like **The Mirage** has its inhabitants get wind of a world (our world) where history turned out differently from theirs.



Or the entertaining Mike Resnick edited alternate series of books such as **Alternate Kennedys** (1992) – which has John and Robert in one story as stars of a **Star Trek** like TV series and in another as members of a Beatles like rock group. Also, his **Alternate Warriors** (1993) and **Alternate Outlaws** (1994) that transform perceived icons of good such as Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Elvis Presley and Nelson Mandela into villains, a gutsy but thought provoking take on the subject of what might have been.

Going back historically are Robert Silverberg's novel **The Gate of Worlds** (1967), kind of a young adult novel which also posits the Black Death destroying most of Europe, significantly delaying the Industrial Revolution and ensuring that the Aztecs and Incas rule to the present day.

Also Harry Turtledove's **Ruled Britannia** (2002), with one William Shakespeare trying to write a subversive play in a Britain occupied by Spain when the Spanish Armada defeated England in 1588; and Keith Robert's **Pavane** (1968) where Queen Elizabeth I was assassinated and the Protestant Reformation never happened, a theme also explored in Kingsley Amis's fine **The Alteration** (1976).

Actually, as long as people remain intrigued by history and why specific events turned out as they did, talented (and less talented) writers and historians will turn out books on that speculative subject. There will be, as there are now, more hits than misses but if you like SF, you'll find plenty of quality reads to occupy your time. At their best, alternate history books are as good as SF ever gets.



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Sheer* Science: Communication by X-Rays!

(* In memory of Aharon Sheer (ז"ל) – Founding Editor)

– Prepared by: **Doron Calo****, PhD (**our CC Sheer Science editor ☺)

There are not an awful lot of ways to communicate in space. There's mostly the old and trusty **radio**, and some SciFi-ish technologies such as **comm lasers** are still in early development. A new experiment by **NASA** carries the hope of introducing a new player in this narrow field: **X-rays**. Yes, the same as those used by your dentist and in airports. And the nice thing about all this is that X-rays might prove to be much more efficient and versatile than the other methods. This all started with two other NASA projects: the first, **NavCube**, is aimed at high-precision positioning and navigation in space using GPS. The other, the **Black Hole Imager**, was designed to utilize numerous NavCubes to map out black holes by measuring X-ray radiating from their edges. These satellites are required to maintain very precise positioning in space by sending and receiving X-ray beacons. These beacons, apparently, can also be used to transfer more complex data when their frequency is modulated.

And so a new technology, **XCOM**, was born (there's no connection to the classic video game of the same name as far as I know). It is theorized that XCOM could easily carry a significant amount of data (up to **1 gigabit per second**) from edge to edge of our solar system. This is significantly more than the amount of information that radio waves or comm lasers could possibly carry.

What's more, X-rays can penetrate most materials while the radio alternative is literally stopped at the gate. This could, for example, be especially useful when trying to communicate with spacecraft during **re-entry** though the atmosphere. Radio is pretty useless in this scenario, and laser is troublesome too. All this X-ray promise will be put to the test on board the **International Space Station in 2018** – so I'll keep you updated! It will definitely change my perspective the next time I'll be sent to do a chest X-ray or a CT scan...

Links:

NASA statement:

<https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2016/nasa-s-navcube-could-support-an-x-ray-communications-demonstration-in-space-a-nasa-first>

Article at space.com:

<http://www.space.com/34824-nasa-x-ray-tech-deep-space-communication.html>

We'd love to hear your thoughts on any of the above subjects and we may publish some of them!

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