

something sweeter. If I want something less sweet but bigger, there are grapefruits. Then there are lemons, which are great as a healthy spice or sweetened as a beverage. But what do you branch out to from a pineapple? Well, it turns out that there are a whole family of things that, like a pineapple, are a real pain to get

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into but once you do, they are worth the struggle. Scientists tell us that the closest living relative of the pineapple is the lobster. Both are cousins of a Puccini opera, some of which are very sweet inside if you get past the exterior. I have even heard it suggested that when you got past Mark Twain's mean exterior she was sweet inside. I prefer not to believe that. He was sour to the core. That's why I like him.

I recently saw the film biography of Samuel L. Clemens. This was a pretty wretched and overblown Hollywood effort. But one thing they did have in the film was that Clemens was born with the coming of Halley's Comet. And he always claimed he would go out with Halley's Comet. And sure enough, he did. Well, now, I have tried to pattern my humor on his. (Now don't say you hadn't noticed.) And with lifespans I expect to have the edge. He was born with Halley's Comet and was able to hold on until it came again. The only thing I can find that happened when I was born was Harry Truman signing a bill giving parity to Wisconsin dairy farmers and I expect to hang on until Harry Truman signs one again.

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Those who lack the courage will always find a philosophy to justify it.

-- Albert Camus

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DEPARTURES by Harry Turtledove
Del Rey, 1993, ISBN 0-345-38011-8, \$4.99.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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While Turtledove is perhaps best known for his alternate history stories, and while many of the stories in this collection are alternate histories, the back blurb lies when it says, "Here Harry Turtledove explores such 'what-ifs' in twenty alternate history stories ranging from ancient times to the far, far-different future." Even counting stories with werewolves or vampires as alternate histories, only eleven of the twenty stories here are alternate history. But all twenty are good.

Perhaps because of the historical nature of Turtledove's writing, the stories are arranged chronologically (by when the story takes place, not by when it was written). In fact, this collection was originally to be titled P_a_s_t_s, P_r_e_s_e_n_t_s, a_n_d F_u_t_u_r_e_s. And this historical bent is evident even in the non-alternate-history stories, as you will see.

"Counting Potsherds" takes place in the early second century B.C.E. and is an alternate history story. What if the Persians defeated the Greeks and democracy never developed? Turtledove has done his research on the Near East (his degree is in Byzantine history and he has also used the near East as the setting in his set of alternate history stories collected in A_g_e_n_t_o_f_B_y_z_a_n_t_i_u_m, about which I will say more later), and the world here is as well-developed as a reader could hope to find.

"Death in Vesunna" is about history, and books, and the mistake of under-estimating one's opponents. Although reminiscent of Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" stories, it focuses more on the residents of the period to which the time travelers go than on the time travelers themselves or their time--and this is the whole point.

Turtledove's best known alternate history stories are his "Agent of Byzantium" stories, and "Departures" is a prequel to that series. 'Nuff said.

"Pillar of Cloud, Pillar of Fire" is a regular "Agent of Byzantium" story which takes place between "Strange Eruptions" (a.k.a. "Etos Kosmou 6816") and "Unholy Trinity" (a.k.a. "Etos Kosmou 6824"). Turtledove has at last gotten away from having Basil Argyros invent or discover something famous, although the story does center around a very modern problem.

"Islands in the Sea," by its placement here, reads as an alternate alternate history from "Departures" and the entire "Agent

of Byzantium" series--not only does Mohammed n_o_t convert to Christianity, but the Muslim Arabs successfully invade southeastern Europe much sooner than they actually did. There is something odd, however, about reading a theological argument between a Christian and a Muslim written by a Jew. Well, at least no one can claim he is biased.

If the existence of werewolves makes a story an alternate history, then "Not All Wolves" is an alternate history. A young boy who is actually a werewolf is fleeing from an angry mob in Twelfth Century Cologne. Cornered and desperate, he finds help from a most unexpected ally. Though the message is perhaps a bit unsubtle, the story is effective.

"Clash of Arms" is n_o_t an alternate history story, but a story of a heraldic duel. I suspect one needs to know heraldry better than I do to appreciate the story, though even I found it mildly interesting.

"Report of the Special Committee on the Quality of Life" is not, strictly speaking, alternate history. Rather, it's a parody of government feasibility studies by having Jaime Nosenada ("I know nothing" in Spanish) write up all the reasons why Spain shouldn't bother to follow up on Columbus's journey. Cute, but more than a little preachy--I'm sure all the pro-space groups love it.

An alternate history story only under the most liberal of definitions, "Batboy" is a baseball story, but probably wouldn't appeal to the average baseball fan--it's primary focus is fantasy rather than sports. "Designated Hitter" is another baseball story, but it is a straight science fiction story rather than alternate history. It didn't work as well for me as "Batboy" did, probably because it requires more knowledge of the techniques of baseball than I have.

"The Last Reunion" is definitely not alternate history, though it recalls T_h_e_G_u_n_s_o_f_t_h_e_S_o_u_t_h in its story of a Confederate captain returning to Richmond in 1932 for a reunion of the Forty-seventh North Carolina. Turtledove recognizes the conflict between the nostalgia of the old soldier and the horrors of war, and my only

complaint is that he doesn't do an entirely successful job of reconciling the two.

If there's such a thing as an alternate future story, "Gladly Wolde He Lerne" is one. Unfortunately, it's a bit predictable (especially after the introduction Turtledove wrote) and a bit preachy. In fact, while I like Turtledove's introductions to the stories, I would recommend reading them a_f_t_e_r you read the respective stories.

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We're on the receiving end of time traveling in "The Barbecue, the Movie, and Other Unfortunately Not So Relevant Material," an amusing story and a good change of pace from some of the more serious stories in the book.

"In the Presence of Mine Enemies" is set in one of the more common alternate history worlds, one in which Germany won the Second World War. It's about survival under adversity and if it seems unlikely, one merely has to look at the recent revelation that large numbers of Catholics in the Southwest are descended from Jews who fled to the New World to escape the Inquisition.

Just as "In the Presence of Mine Enemies" might have been inspired by news that post-dated it, but wasn't (of course-- Turtledove is a good writer but not a fortune-teller), so might have been "The R Strain." In the latter case, it is the report of the babirusa, a cud-chewing pig, that could have generated this story of a genetically altered pig that just might be kosher. There has been much discussion on Usenet lately as to why pork is the ultimate non-kosher meat, even more so in people's minds than shellfish or anything else. And Turtledove's story acknowledges this by having its Conservative rabbi more concerned about whether the animal is prohibited than whether it has been killed in the kosher manner. To the non-Jew this may not matter, yet to a Jew reading this story there will remain the nagging feeling that if the rabbi is so blase about the manner of killing the animal, his opinion on its kosher status may also be suspect.

I liked "Lure" for its use of Cenozoic mammals, a newly found interest of mine. Everyone is interested in dinosaurs, so I have to be different, I guess. Of course, this somewhat outre interest means I picked up some errors, such as Turtledove's having

C_y_n_o_d_e_s_m_u_s, D_i_c_e_r_a_t_h_e_r_i_u_m, and S_y_n_d_o_c_e_r_o_s, all early Miocene North American mammals, in late Miocene Italy (my reference is T_h_e

M_a_c_m_i_l_l_a_n_I_l_l_u_s_t_r_a_t_e_d_E_n_c_y_c_l_o_p_e_d_i_a_o_f_D_i_n_o_s_a_u_r_s_a_n_d_P_r_e_h_i_s_t_o_r_i_c

A_n_i_m_a_l_s). But what the heck--we have dinosaur movies with cavemen and dinosaurs co-existing, and those are considerably further apart in time, if not in space. And "Secret Names" is a perfect follow-up to "Lure," even though it is set in a post-holocaust future and at first appears to have nothing in common with a tale of prehistoric mammals. In fact, "The R Strain," "Lure," and "Secret Names" form a nice biological triptych.

"Les Mortes d'Arthur" is primarily a science fiction murder mystery, with some sports thrown in. I found it similar to some of Isaac Asimov's "Wendell Urth" stories, and wonder if it isn't an homage of sorts to Asimov.

The only story I have a real problem with in this collection is "Last Favor." Its evolutionary premise is interesting--and has to some extent been proposed as a model for certain groups here on

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Earth--but I think there are major problems in assuming its conscious self-application, particularly as described here. Then again, I'm sure if I'm wrong, some biologist will tell me.

The final story is "Nasty, Brutish, and" It's a bar story, and also a "So there!" to H. G. Wells (in a manner of speaking). Unlike the five stories preceding it, this one at least has some chance of being an alternate history, or at least a secret history.

(There is also an excerpt from Turtledove's G_u_n_s_o_f_t_h_e_S_o_u_t_h, but since it's more an ad than a story, I won't review it here. I do recommend the book, though.)

D_e_p_a_r_t_u_r_e_s is a must-buy for alternate history fans, and highly

recommended even for the general science fiction fan.