



The Way It Wasn't: Great Science Fiction Stories of Alternate History

Martin H. Greenberg (editor), Robert Silverberg

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The Way It Wasn't takes an amusing, intellectually stimulating excursion into speculative history. Here are thirteen memorable stories by renowned science fiction writers, telling what things might be like if... Elvis Presley weren't the "King" but the President of the United States ("Ike at the Mike" by Howard Waldrop)... The Black Death had killed the entire population of Europe in the fourteenth century ("Lion Time in Timbuctoo" by Robert Silverberg)... John F. Kennedy had survived the 1963 shooting in Dallas ("The Winterberry" by Nicholas A. DiChario). Included, too, is fascinating short fiction by Mike Resnick, Susan Shwartz, Larry Niven, Pamela Sargent, Fritz Leiber, Greg Bear, Barry N. Malzberg, Harry Turtledove, Gregory Benford and Kim Stanley Robinson. After reading these stories - some of the most compelling examples of alternate history anywhere - your mind will keep spinning the question "What If...?"

The Way It Wasn't: Great Science Fiction Stories of Alternate History Details

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Jim says

Ike at the Mike was a lot of fun, imagine if Ike and Patton had discovered jazz instead of the army.

The Winterberry by Nicholas A. DiChario was among the most tearjerking stories i've ever read. Bobby and Ted and JFK's doctors smuggle the heavily brain damaged president out of the hospital and tell no one, not even Jackie, that he still lives. told in the first person by JFK it skips about ten years at a time. his mind is about that of a six year old, w/no memories of his adult life, living in one room on martha's vineyard. so so sad.

Jason says

A hit-and-miss collection of alternate history short stories. The stories contained herein are:

"Lion Time in Timbuctoo," Robert Silverberg - Funny and racy goings on in a world run by everyone but the Europeans.

"Ike at the Mike," Howard Waldrop - Maybe the least believable story in the bunch, in which Senator E. Aaron Presley swings to the jazzy sounds of clarinetist Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower.

"Over There," Mike Resnick - Teddy Roosevelt takes his Rough Riders into the meat grinder of the Western Front during WWI.

"Suppose They Gave a Peace....," Susan Schwartz - Eugene McCarthy defeats Nixon, the U.S. leaves Vietnam in defeat, and an MIA veteran's father makes a new sort of peace when he discovers he has a Vietnamese daughter-in-law... and a grandchild.

"All the Myriad Ways," Larry Niven - Schroedinger's characters are alive and dead.

"The Sleeping Serpent," Pamela Sargent - Powerful story about a Mongol-dominated Old World and a New World soon to be controlled by an Iroquois-Mongol confederation.

"Catch That Zeppelin!" Fritz Leiber - odd alternate history in which Thomas Edison and Marie Curie get married, have a supergenius son, and pave the way to an era of world peace and helium-powered airships.

"Through Road No Whither," Greg Bear - Nazis encounter God, and She saves her chosen children.

"Ship Full of Jews," Barry N. Malzberg - Columbus sails to the Indies with ships full of Jews, criminals, and other personae non grata from 1492 Spain.

"Archetypes," Harry Turtledove - the Roman Empire never ended, Mouamet became a Christian saint instead of the founder of Islam, and movable print is invented--in the 20th century--with hilarious consequences.

"We Could Do Worse," Gregory Benford - Joe McCarthy is President, Richard Nixon is his running mate, and brown-shirted thuggery runs rampant in the U.S.

"The Winterberry," Nicholas A. Dicario - strangely affecting epistolary story told by a brain-damaged JFK who secretly survived the shooting in Dealey Plaza.

"The Lucky Strike," Kim Stanley Robinson - wonderful five-star finale about the first atom bomb, moral courage and its consequences, and how the actions we make as individuals can tip the scales of world affairs.

I have encountered several of these stories, including "Over There," "The Sleeping Serpent," and "We Could Do Worse," in other anthologies of alternate history. It chaps my ass that anthologists select the same stories time and again (especially when that anthologist is Martin Greenberg time and again), but at least in this case he selected strong stories.

Bev says

Alternate histories are always intriguing. I like it when authors choose a lesser point of history. Preventing the assassinations of Lincoln & Kennedy are way overdone.

Johnny says

Normally, I don't rate as 5 stars especially anthology books because in most cases, the work by its very nature is uneven and there always some stories either I didn't like or found just too unbelievable. But this book is not the case. I think one of reasons is that instead of a group of historians writing this alternate history work, it was writers (I have found that many historians when writing about alternate history is tell the history and the alternate part almost as an afterthought). In most of the stories, the actual change in history as we know it is not readily apparent. It is up to the reader to decipher where history diverged.

David Brown says

Hit or miss with the stories in this anthology. I really like the ones by Larry Niven and Mike Resnick. Overall, a good sampling of alternative history, but not by any means a holistic look.

Cindi Blyberg says

everyone has wondered "what if..." at some point, whether the question involved his or her own life or some pivotal event in history. history as we know it is jolted and questioned at every turn in this emotional collection of engaging and imaginative fiction. many "what if..." questions are addressed in this volume that allow authors and readers alike to rewrite history, correcting perceived wrongs or tragedies ("suppose they gave a peace..."), creating heroes where none existed before ("the lucky strike"), and exploring horrors best left to imaginations and late night readings ("we could do worse"). any fan of science fiction will enjoy these well-selected, well-ordered stories.

Steven Raszewski says

Some good stories and some bad ones.

Rose Ann says

Some of the best sf stories I have ever read are included in this anthology, including "Ike at the Mike" and "Over There." Also "The Winterberry" (which will break your heart).

John E says

Only the first story and an introductory essay were by Silverberg, the anthology was edited by Martin Greenberg. One really good story "The Winterberry" on John F. Kennedy; two long stories that were a waste; and two obligatory Nazi stories that weren't that good either. Why are Alternative History stories considered Science Fiction if they contain no "alternative science?" The Mongols in colonial America and the Africans after the Black Death really didn't have much science that I could find.

David R. says

A fairly pedestrian anthology of alternate history short stories. These range from the absurd (Senator E. Aaron Presley envies the life of jazz clarinetist Ike Eisenhower) to the banal and forgettable. There's really only two gems in the lot: Pamela Sargent's "Sleeping Serpent" involving a conflicted Mongol whose people seek to overwhelm Amerinds in a very different 1600s, and Harry Turtledove's "Archetypes" with its 15th century Byzantine secret agent.

Sarah says

several EXCELLENT stories in this book--more good than bad. i think only 2 i had to skip because i just could not get into them.

my 3 faves were ike at the mike, the winterberry, and the lucky strike. once i got into it i also enjoyed lion in timbuctoo.

i was surprised that there was nothing said anywhere by greenberg, but at least he compiled a good collection.

Billy Roper says

Once again, this collection disappoints because (((Greenberg))) focuses on pop culture novelty rather than serious political differences in the parallel universes explored.
