



The Kingdom of Ohio

Matthew Flaming

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An incredibly original, intelligent novel?a love story set against New York City at the dawn of the mechanical age, featuring Nikola Tesla, Thomas Edison, and J. P. Morgan.

After discovering an old photograph, an elderly antiques dealer living in present-day Los Angeles is forced to revisit the history he has struggled to deny. The photograph depicts a man and a woman. The man is Peter Force, a young frontier adventurer who comes to New York City in 1901 and quickly lands a job digging the first subway tunnels beneath the metropolis. The woman is Cheri-Anne Toledo, a beautiful mathematical prodigy whose memories appear to come from another world. They meet seemingly by chance, and initially Peter dismisses her as crazy. But as they are drawn into a tangle of overlapping intrigues, Peter must reexamine Cheri-Anne's fantastic story. Could it be that she is telling the truth and that she has stumbled onto the most dangerous secret imaginable: the key to traveling through time?

Set against the mazelike streets of New York at the dawn of the mechanical age, Peter and Cheri-Anne find themselves wrestling with the nature of history, technology, and the unfolding of time itself.

The Kingdom of Ohio Details

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Elizabeth says

I wanted to like this book. I really did. And there were parts I did like a lot—any book that sends me to the computer to dig around for historical accuracy/detail is onto something, I think. The fact that Flaming relied on references to actual books (I first realized he was using actual books when Walter Havighurst's book showed up in the footnotes, and as a Miami grad, I know exactly who Havighurst is) was a very clever tool in setting up the "what if" possibility of a lost kingdom of Toledo's existence.

The book fell apart for me in the disjointed narration and lost opportunities to develop the more interesting storylines in favor of spending a little too long on the less interesting ones. The subway scenes were definitely fascinating, and I enjoyed reading about the workers who did the hard work of excavating the subway tunnels, but there simply wasn't enough to hold the two storylines together. This would have been a far better alternative history book, focusing on the Kingdom of Ohio only and leaving the time travel bit out completely. I wanted more of the Toledo family, their existence in the American frontier, and the difficulty the U.S. government might have had dealing with a renegade royal kingdom in the early stages of U.S. history. That was the story I wanted to read.

Neil says

First time author Flaming does a good job of creating a nice atmosphere for a ripping speculative historical tale. He's got the ambience of period New York City, some spooky early subway tunnels under construction, and interesting historical secondary characters in Nikolai Tesla, Thomas Edison, and J. P. Morgan. He's got a nice tall tale about a kingdom within the early United States, centering around Toledo of all places. He actually had me looking to see if there was any truth in his story about the Latoledan family.

Unfortunately, he's much better at creating ambience than delivering his story. The plot is slight; the lead characters are vague and flat. What there is of the plot is predictable and in the end the secondary characters are underused. In particular, I was bothered by the weird insertion of a reference to the Roanoke Island settlers that came out of the blue in the last thirty pages. It could have been interesting in a more developed plot, but coming where it did it was just a distraction.

K. Lincoln says

I read an ARC of this book

I'm from Ohio, so I had to read this book. And I did a report on the Toledo War in high school.

So the whole thing about the french aristocrat who came to Ohio and started his own kingdom made a vague kind of sense to me in the way that good alternate history can.

And that's what this book is: alternate history. Oh, the blurb is all like:

"After discovering an old photograph, an elderly antiques dealer living in present-day Los Angeles is forced to revisit the history he has struggled to deny. "

But really Peter, the old man, and Cheri-Anne, the possibly time-traveling girl he meets, aren't the real main characters of this story. The real main character of this story is the time period when John Pierpoint Morgan and Nikola Tesla and Edison were alive in New York. Peter and Cheri-Anne could be the same character for all the difference I felt in them, and for all the meaning they had in the story. There were used but as a focal lens to go here and there in this New York the author obviously loves, so he could give us more and more details of the time and the place.

The story itself boils down to: Boy comes to New York to dig subway. Boy meets girl. Girl says she knows Tesla. Girl gets arrested. Boy saves girl. Boy and Girl blow up a part of the subway.

Pretty basic. What makes this story enjoyable, and ultimately drags it down, is the details of time, place, factoids about Edison and Tesla, and the oddly believable story of the Kingdom of Ohio (from whence Cheri-Ann came). These details are fascinating, but in the end, make this book more of a history tome than a story. In some ways it reminded me of *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* by Susanna Clark, but without the overarching story that pulls the reader along the history-laden world. Rather, Kingdom of Ohio is a historic mine one has to dig through to find the story.

History buffs will love this. People who want to immerse themselves in a New York of another time will like this. However, people looking for a rousing plot or strong characters will probably not enjoy it as much.

Steve says

I wanted to give this book 3 1/2 stars. I really liked aspects of it, but it never really came together as a whole in a satisfying way. I think the idea was great as was much of the execution. Flaming's writing is especially compelling in setting up his protagonist in turn-of-the-century New York City. His descriptions of the work on subway lines, and the lives of the men building them, was the highlight for me.

Unfortunately, when he introduces the sci-fi elements of the time travel, his story-telling begins to fall flat. I can be a fan of sci-fi, especially the kind of "light" sci-fi that this book tries to pull off. But while Mr. Flaming's story depends on this time travel element, his descriptions of the science involved suffers two contrasting fates: at times the ideas are too complicated and explained in too confusing a manner to allow the casual reader to really understand what might be going on. In other places, the science just isn't explained enough, with the result being that we are asked to accept certain outlandish twists with not enough hard science to back them up.

In addition, Mr. Flaming's treatment of the historical characters he introduces in J.P. Morgan, Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla are not at all successful. None of these characters carries with them the weight (or excitement!) of their historical importance. There was very little unique in Flaming's rendering of them. Their impact on the plot was such that they could have been substituted with fictional characters without making much difference. And too many of the main characters' interactions with them end with nothing concrete being resolved and the heroes repetitively running away to avoid a violent confrontation.

Mr. Flaming has cleverly given himself a built-in scapegoat for any flaws in his storytelling by giving us a contemporary narrator who is new to this writing thing. It allows him kind of a layman's way into the story which helps to put the reader at ease. His actions in the present day are supposed to be mysteriously tied to the story he tells of the past (and are supported by sometimes interesting, but ultimately unnecessary footnotes). I think it becomes clear fairly early on who the narrator is, though Flaming doesn't give us confirmation of this until much later on. In the end, he uses this device to tie up the story neatly, while still leaving some things up for speculation.

I would be interested in reading Mr. Flaming's next book, as I think there is much in his style to like. His historical context (but NOT characters) make for a very interesting read. If he can strike a better balance in his attempts at folding in the science-fiction elements, I think he could really strike gold.

Caitlin says

Peter Force relocates to New York City at the turn of the century and takes a job helping to drill the first subway tunnels. A poor newcomer to the city, Peter finds a room in a flophouse and befriends his fellow workers, but the city only really seems to come alive for him when a chance encounter introduces him to Cheri-Anne Toledo, a woman who believes she has traveled seven years into the future. Cheri-Anne is the last of the House of Toledo, a small independent kingdom that few know has existed in the center of Ohio since before the Revolutionary War. She insists that she and eccentric inventor Nikola Tesla were working on a time-travel device and that an attack on her home caused the machine to activate and catapult her to a future New York City. Peter believes Cheri-Anne to be insane, but after meetings with Albert Einstein and fiscal baron J. P. Morgan, he starts to wonder if there might be some truth to Cheri-Anne's wild tale.

My first issue with the book comes from what I would call wasted potential. While the title of the book may be *The Kingdom of Ohio*, the kingdom itself plays a bit part. It's merely in Cheri-Anne's backstory and we get only some "historical" excerpts and a chapter that seems ripped from a dry history book. I would have gladly read an entire novel on the struggle to found the Kingdom of Ohio, the secret royal family that existed within the United States, the mechanations of the government to take control of the tiny rebellious state. Was it real? Or was all that "history" invented for the book? I still have no idea! But it hardly matters because the story of the Kingdom is buried and told without personality or character.

Speaking of character, there were two in this book with great potential about whom I would have gladly read an entire novel: namely, Tesla and Einstein. But these colorful characters in American history seem merely props in a time travel romance. With all the historical potential here—Ohio, Tesla, Einstein, New York, J. P. Morgan, the subway, the Brooklyn Bridge—why was the focus on a romance between two watery nobodies and a time travel device clumsily laid over more interesting material?

My other minor problem was that the book happens to be framed by one of my greatest pet peeves—a narrator who writes about writing the book we now read. I just hate this. In rare cases, it can be done well, but more often than not the effect is to pull me out of the story and disconnect me from the narrative. When one of the first paragraphs in the book started off something like "getting the first sentence down was the difficult part" or "I wondered how to best capture the story," I knew I was in trouble. I recognize this voice of the fictional narrator as the voice of our author as well. It only served to disconnect me from an already scattered story with too many potential directions. I only wish the focus hadn't been romance and time travel, what I consider to have been the weakest points in *The Kingdom of Ohio*'s arsenal.

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switterbug (Betsey) says

This is an unusual genre-buster of a book. At the outset, it is historical fiction-- the story of a subway worker, Peter Force, who is hired to help dig the first transit tunnels in Manhattan, circa 1900. Interspersed with Peter's story is a fable about a pioneer family from France that ruled their own "Free Estate" in Ohio during the latter part of the eighteenth century. The Latoledan family *kingdom* was separate from the rest of the United States and the boundaries drawn by the Treaty of Paris. For almost a century, the rulers enjoy a pastoral and aristocratic life.

The story soon proceeds into speculative fiction, as elements of time travel are introduced. A beautiful and mysterious woman named Cheri-Ann Toledo, descendant of the Ohio kingdom family, sharply enters the narrative and upsets Peter's life. A frayed polymath, she claims to be a time-traveler, and is targeted by both the police and the scientific community. Additionally, the battle between Nikola Tesla, the trenchant inventor of alternating current electricity, and Thomas Edison, (with his backing by financier J.P. Morgan), is a parable and a fuse for the chasms between realms of reality and the riddle of time. Cheri-Ann and Peter are ensnared at the center of the enigma.

The narrator of this tale is an elderly owner of an antiques store who currently lives in Los Angeles. He finds an old but familiar photograph during one of his business-related treasure hunts, which leads him to a life-changing decision and the unfolding of this story. As we follow him to his final destination, he braids all of these elements into one epic tale.

Flaming's use of non-linear narration epitomizes the philosophies embedded in this novel--the lacunae of memories and the distance of time. However, the novel becomes a bit long-winded and cumbersome as the story progresses. He tends to declare these conceptual mysteries rather than weave them delicately into the tale. I was frequently removed from the story into the author's dialectical pondering. It was an engrossing novel, but it was too cerebral. The story never evoked a tone; instead, it felt like a vehicle for a tract on the conundrum of existence. The flow was dry and distant and clumsy. The narrative perspective was not well controlled, either--the unnamed narrator was sometimes buried in these musings (or it awkwardly shifted to Cheri-Ann's or Peter's point of view).

And yet...and yet--I really liked this novel. Despite its flaws (which is evident with many debut authors), I connected with Flaming's fable of ideas. If I hadn't been smitten by his philosophy, I would have assigned a three-star rating. But within the scope of this very ambitious and blemished book was a winning and exuberant saga. If you seek a polished piece of literature, you won't be satisfied. But you may be surprised and engaged by his recondite mind.

If you enjoy themes of time-travel and want to get further into the mind of Nikola Tesla, I recommend the haunting and sensuous *The Invention of Everything Else*, by Samantha Hunt.

Laurie says

‘The Kingdom of Ohio’ is a time travel book, an alternate history book, but most of all, a love story. Set in 1901 New York City, I thought at first it would be a steampunk novel, since the young protagonist is working on the construction of the new subway tunnels, learning how to repair the machinery. Knowing from the book jacket that Edison and Tesla were part of the story, I thought that there would be marvelous inventions and electricity flying. This was not to be, either.

The story is very, very low key. Peter Force finds a young woman stumbling and starving, and takes her for a drink & a snack. She reveals that she is the Princess of Ohio, and that she has traveled forward in time 6 years and sideways across the country. Peter suspects that Cheri-Anne Toledo is delusional, but he can’t resist helping her. Slowly he comes to believe her story- and to understand the danger she- and possibly the world- is in. And they fall in love, a bittersweet ‘Time Traveler’s Wife’ kind of love.

All this is good, but the story moved much too slowly for me, at a glacial pace. Tesla and Edison have minor roles- Edison comes off as a buffoon- and the only scientific wonder on display is the time/space machine- in the shape of a wooden door. I’m afraid I prefer my alt-history stories to move along a bit faster.

Kathy says

Although, as some of the other reviewers have said, the main characters are a bit underdeveloped, this is just a great story. I even googled it to see how much of it was historically accurate. I could barely put it down.

The idea is a unique one, and this is a great first novel. Even though Tesla, Edison, and Morgan are secondary characters I believe that they were developed much better. Tesla, in particular caught my attention.

Perhaps we are all missing who the primary characters are... I also love descriptions of new york from that time period. The author made it feel familiar and foreign all at the same time. i believe that there are more good things to come from Flaming I can't believe how harsh people have been. I look forward to seeing the second effort.

*Book received free as part of Goodreads First-Reads giveaway

Kt. says

This book was SO disappointing! I actually couldn't wait to read this book and bought it in hardcover. The premise was ambitious to say the least and the author was just not up to the task. If you read this, be prepared to read things like, "She shrugged mentally" a lot. Sentence fragments abound in this book. The characters are dull, two dimensional, and irritating. Mostly the book is just plain boring. For example, there is a scene where the main characters are in the subway tunnels under NYC at the turn of the century when they were just being excavated. The characters, two star crossed lovers, were looking for a time traveling portal (never clear to me why it would be there), and were down to five matches for light when there was an explosion. I FELL ASLEEP in the middle of the scene. How poor a writer would you have to be to lose a reader under

those circumstances? He gets two stars for coming up with an interesting idea for a novel. Too bad he couldn't write it.

A. S. says

There isn't an option to give half stars, but if there was, Matthew Flaming's (lol, what a name: Flaming, Matt) novel The Kingdom of Ohio would receive 2.5 stars. I guess I'm feeling particularly generous today and have rounded up instead of down.

Like the actual last King of Ohio in the book, Louis Toledo, Flaming has grand ideas and tries to do a lot of things in his novel. However that is the ultimate failing of the book: it tries to be too much: part philosophy, part sci-fi, part faked research articles/footnotes, part detailed "history" of a past civilization, part action/adventure, part mystery/thriller, part love story. And while it was cool to see those things being attempted, it was not interesting enough for me not to be able to put it down. A good book would make me try to forsake sleep to read it, but I kept getting up to do things while I read this.

Anyway, the book's narrative is predictable. I knew who the narrator was from the beginning, I just didn't know how the reveal would happen. The narrator tells the story of Peter Force, a young man living in the Roaring Twenties who moved from Idaho after the death of his father to NYC. There he gets work as part of the crew building the NYC subway line. He soon gets promoted to a mechanic's position, though he has no formal training. One day he meets a ragged-looking young woman named Cheri-Anne Toledo, and she tells him the most unbelievable story. She says that she traveled through time accidentally when she used a teleportation machine she was building (with Nicola Tesla) and it exploded. She claimed that she was proclaimed dead seven years ago, and that there used to be a sovereign nation in the midwest called the Kingdom of Ohio, of which she was the princess.

Peter finds much of her story difficult to believe. She tries to visit Nicola Tesla but finds he does not remember her, causing her to be arrested. Peter puts it out of his mind until a man comes to his door and asks that he bring Cheri-Anne to visit J.P. Morgan.

It is there that Peter starts to believe Cheri-Anne, as fragments of his own life start to make sense. A large part of the story is devoted to philosophical ideas like that of memory, and I was not surprised when I turned the book jacket over and saw that Mr. Flaming was a philosophy major. It also had a lot to do with major rivalries and figures of the time, namely the Edison versus Tesla fight over AC vs DC that lasted for years, and Edison's partnership with Morgan, and how it differed from Tesla's relinquishing of rights to Westinghouse. It also highlighted Morgan's immense ego.

One issue I had was the footnotes in the book. It's cute to have fake references, but these take up like half the page, and continue on for more than one page sometimes. It gets irritating to read after a while. Another issue was the lack of characterization. I liked knowing some of Cheri-Anne's and Peter's backgrounds, as well as a bit about Tesla and Edison's rivalries, but I felt like I couldn't really connect to the characters the way I wanted to. I really wanted to know more about how Edison felt being a yes-man to Morgan.

Overall, I'd say read it if the premise sounds interesting to you. It's not the worst book ever, even if it does have a few flaws.

Shaunesay says

I really would have liked more of the last third of the book spread into the first 2/3's. I liked the idea, but all of the really interesting things happened in the last part, and really left everything up to your imagination.

Historically, very interesting and I'm wanting to read more about Edison and Tesla and even J P Morgan. I feel like the writing is well done, the concept is intriguing, just not spaced as well as it could be? I would have been happy if this were a longer book that could have gone more in depth and earlier on to the historical aspects that got my attention. I really don't want to say more than that because I'm afraid it would spoil it for people.

Cornelia says

This fabulous, creative and heartwarming time travel is an intriguing, mysterious, and intimate read. Realistic fantasy, with deep, fleshed out characters. Beautiful. It may not be some people's idea of Steampunk but to me it is the very essence of the genre. Love it. I highly recommend The Kingdom of Ohio by Matthew Flaming, one of my favorite books.

Emily Park says

<http://em-and-emm.blogspot.com/2011/0...>

This is a difficult book to summarize or categorize. The main setting is 1901 New York City, though it may or may not be the same 1901 NYC from our timeline. The story is also set in Los Angeles, probably in the 1990s, where the narrator lives. Peter Force is a young man who has moved from the wilds of northern Idaho (Kellogg, ID, if you must know) to NYC to be a construction worker on the new underground railroad system. One evening Peter encounters a distressed young woman, who claims to be Cheri-Anne Toledo, the daughter of the king of Ohio. She claims to have survived the assassination of her family, and was suddenly transported through space and time from 1894 Toledo to 1901 New York. Claiming to be a student of famed inventor Nikola Tesla, Cheri-Anne attributes her travel to her work on a teleportation device. However, after going to visit Tesla, she finds that he has no idea who she is, suggesting that not only did she travel through space and time, but that she also traveled between parallel universes. Peter and Cheri-Anne find themselves caught between Nikola Tesla, Thomas Edison, and Edison's financier J.P. Morgan, all of whom are using the subway construction project to search for something hidden below the ground. The outcome of their struggle could change all of history and time.

The plot of this book is slow. It's definitely not for someone who likes an action-packed, fast-paced thriller. A great deal of the novel is taken up by dialogue, or internal musings by the characters. It's really the setting and the premise of the book that makes it interesting. One of the most important things to consider about this book is that it is an alternate history novel, so a great deal of the historical facts presented in the book are actually false (despite the author's convincing historical "footnotes"). I'm not actually sure how many different versions of history are presented in the novel... it's never explicitly clear whether any of the plot threads are set in a real part of history. From hints given throughout the novel, I am inclined to guess that there are at least two separate parallel universes, with neither of them being set in "real" history. The

uncertainty of the setting, and the characters' own self-doubt about their own sanity and recollection, makes the nature of history and memory the primary theme of the novel. Flaming's writing style is engaging and thought-provoking, which is helpful since the plot itself doesn't necessarily always pull the reader in.

It's hard to pin down this book's genre. Other reviews have dubbed it a steam punk, though I would disagree with that classification. It's not really focused on Victorian culture, and there isn't really any anachronistic technology, and the technology that does exist is not steam-powered, but is electric (Edison and Tesla, natch). It certainly has some elements of science fiction, and maybe some hints of fantasy at the very end, but I would say that if you exclude the alternate-history part, this book is first and foremost a meditation on the lines between memory and history, and secondly a romance between Peter and Cheri-Anne, with Tesla, Edison and Morgan as part of the backdrop to their story.

In terms of characterization, this isn't a character-driven plot. Peter is probably the most fleshed-out character, probably because he's the one telling the story. Peter's fairly short acquaintance with Cheri-Anne means that we don't really get much of her backstory. Because the story is told as Peter is remembering it many decades later, Cheri-Anne seems to be described in ideals, and therefore comes across as being a little flat and boring to the reader. Tesla, Edison and Morgan are all interesting and intriguing, but none of them gets enough page time to become fully fleshed out. It probably also doesn't help that all three are historically significant, so just seeing their names on the page gives them a sort of larger-than-life feeling. I am not sure that characters were necessarily meant to be the primary focus of the book. About halfway through the book, I noticed that pages would go by before anyone was referred to by name. For the most part, the entire story of Peter and Cheri-Anne is told only using "he" and "she". Flaming really only names people when there are multiple men in a scene and using "he" would be unclear. Aside from Cheri-Anne, there are no other female characters who appear for more than a page or so. I actually had to go hunting through the book for her name, because when I started this review I couldn't remember how to spell it.

My one complaint is that towards the end of the book, we're presented with something of a deus ex machina. Something important is presented, making a really random connection to a completely different part of history, with basically no warning. This is where the very mild hints of fantasy come in, though no other part of the book had hinted at fantasy. The ending is also very open-ended, which isn't really my thing, but in this case it sort of works. Because I was a little baffled by the sudden appearance of this mystery thing, I might have preferred a more concrete ending, but I can see why Flaming chose to end it this way instead.

In short, this is a book that will appeal to a very specific audience. I think that either you'll really enjoy it, as I did, or you'll be bored out of your skull. If you enjoyed *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, then I think this book would be right up your alley.

5/5 stars

Stephen says

I fully admit to only picking up this book based on the title, and even that was a whim. Being from Ohio, I figured this would be some meta-ironic thing and I would get bored and put it down. Thankfully, I was wrong.

What Flaming does here is so amazingly original, it's hard to exactly put down what genre this is. Historical

Fiction? Sci-Fi? Steam Punk? It may sound confusing, but I assure you it's not. Flaming takes all of these concepts, throws them in a blender and pours out a delicious literary smoothie.

That being said, I wanted to rate this book 3.5/5 stars, but I wound up with three because you can't rate half a star and I didn't feel comfortable with giving it a four. The main reason for this rating is that the flow of text can be a bit verbose at times and seems to drag on past its welcome. Instead of saying something like "The character was scared beyond reason, as cold fear crept up their spine in waves of dread.", the author would say "The character swallowed hard as fear crept over them, making it impossible to move or react. Time itself seemed to slow down as everything ground to a screeching halt, with the world itself frozen in place, as if life itself had become stuck on a ghastly pause button. This was beyond fear, a horrible excursion into mind-numbing agony that seemed to ravage a man's soul and reduce even the strongest of wills to a blubbering mess. Indeed, he had never known fear like this his blah blah blah etc." You get the point. Very few authors can pull this off (H.P. Lovecraft especially) but at this point, Matthew Flaming cannot.

Now that may not seem like much, but when you encounter it over and over and over again it can make the reading seem like a chore. There were several times where I actually felt frustration at sections like this, like I wanted to scream at the book "I GET IT! They are scared, now let's move the plot on!" Too many times characters seem to stand around doing nothing while the author goes into tangents about what they're feeling. It brings the plot to a screeching halt as you wait for something, ANYTHING, to happen.

All in all, for a first outing, this book isn't too bad. And honestly, I wouldn't mind a sequel, as I'm that curious about the characters and this universe. My only suggestion would be to tone the excessive verbiage at times, but keep everything else in the same general flow.

FINAL RATING: 3.5/5

Nina says

This book had lots of potential, but almost none of it was fulfilled. I wanted to like it, and I spent about three months trying to get through it, trying to approach it with new eyes each time. Despite this, the plot still felt loosely constructed and clumsily executed, the characters were somehow both forgettable and overdone at the same time, and it seemed the author only really enjoyed writing a few isolated parts of the story: anything pertaining to mechanical devices, and anything pertaining to the science of time travel. All of those (small) sections were well done, but I couldn't shake the impression that while the author was trying to write a cast of characters the reader is supposed to care about, he paid as little attention to developing them as he would to developing a piece of lint on their sweaters. Because of this cold treatment, the story, which is character and relationship driven, never seems to go anywhere.
