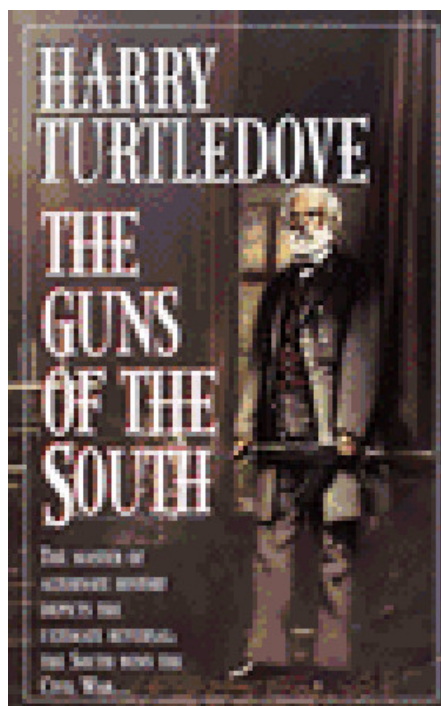




The Guns of the South

Harry Turtledove

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The Guns of the South Harry Turtledove

January 1864 –General Robert E. Lee faces defeat. The Army of Northern Virginia is ragged and ill-equipped. Gettysburg has broken the back of the Confederacy and decimated its manpower.

Then, Andries Rhodie, a strange man with an unplaceable accent, approaches Lee with an extraordinary offer. Rhodie demonstrates an amazing rifle: Its rate of fire is incredible, its lethal efficiency breathtaking--and Rhodie guarantees unlimited quantities to the Confederates.

The name of the weapon is the AK-47....

"It is absolutely unique--without question the most fascinating Civil War novel I have ever read." –Professor James M. McPherson – *Pultizer Prize* winning *Battle Cry of Freedom*

The Guns of the South Details

Date : Published May 27th 1997 by Random House Inc (first published September 22nd 1992)

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Author : Harry Turtledove

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Genre : Science Fiction, Alternate History, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Time Travel, Military History, Civil War

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From Reader Review The Guns of the South for online ebook

Jeff says

The best evil-racists-from-the-future-supply-AK47s-to-the-South-so-they-can-win-the-Civil-War novel I have read.

David McClelland says

Perhaps the only one of Turtledoves novels that I would call truly excellent. Unlike many of his sagas, there's no bloated and exposition heavy storytelling here, just a tightly constructed alternate history with a neat science-fiction twist.

Again, unlike many of his other books, characters are a strength here, bolstered, I think, by the fact that he choses just a few people to focus on, rather than the dozens of on-going characters he usually fills his works with. Robert E. Lee is an interesting choice to act as the protagonist, and though he may be presented as a bit more liberal than he was historically, he still makes for a strong and compelling lead. The supporting cast is also well-constructed, and Turtledove's research into the Civil War was clearly quite detailed. And while the science-fiction elements are a bit flimsy, they certainly serve their purpose and make for an entertaining storyline.

All in all, this is one of the best alt-histories I've read, and I just wish that the rest of Turtledove's work was this tightly focused.

Jessica says

This was the first Harry Turtledove book I ever picked up. Well, "picked up" is misleading...I actually had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Turtledove for half a minute at a Comic Con in San Diego many moons ago. He was at a table in the back, and had books all around him (enough to draw me in, that's for sure!) He signed a copy to me and my (then) boyfriend, and I happily walked away. I wasn't able to pick it up for a few years - I had tried once, but couldn't get past the first chapter - but when I did, it blew me away.

In what I've come to understand is a common theme for Mr. Turtledove, he's taken a major historical event and put an alternate history to it. In this case, the question is, "what would have happened if the South had won, with a little help from the future?"

It's a very interesting read. The story follows several different characters, from actual historical figures to those created to help the story, and it all flows from chapter to chapter.

I had read at one point that Mr. Turtledove had taken some criticism for his portrayal of Lee, because he portrayed him as a gentleman who stuck to his convictions. True or not, the Lee that Turtledove painted in the novel was the type of person I'd want to know, and the same could be said for Nate and Molly.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I first reviewed this some years ago. This is an update 8/17/15

I read this years ago and I must say I liked it. Unfortunately it was the last in this seemingly endless series of books I did like. ***Actually this book doesn't have anything to do with the aforementioned endless series on the Civil War. It simply treads the same "subject ground". This I liked...those I burned out on pretty much right away.

This one explores the anachronistic arrival of some South African white supremacists with a large supply of AK-47s to the south during the Civil War, with the (somewhat predictable) changes for the outcome of said war, and the CSA is established as a separate country.

Pet Peeve:
(view spoiler)

As I said this is a good and interesting read but there is then a series of Civil War books by the author which turns into a sort of "soap-opera" (as has happened with some other Turtledove books). So I read this, then later on started a couple of the later books and put them down.

But, as I said this one is worth the read.

Thomas says

This is a great book. The cover has Robert E. Lee with an Ak-47 so you know it isn't your standard book. Even though a Confederate victory via time travel is far fetched, it isn't the main part of the book. It has much more to do with the Confederate States as a nation and how it comes to terms with its own internal problems as well as facing a racism borne out of hatred (by the time travelers), as opposed to their racism based out of ignorance.

The time travelers from a decade ahead of our own were white supremacists from South Africa and sought to create a puppet state, only Robert E. Lee (while not as enlightened as we may be) was a forward thinking man on race and a moderate abolitionist in his own right, and for diplomatic purposes, the CSA would need to curtail slavery for the sake of alliances with Europe which had abolished slavery a generation or two earlier.

In addition to the main plot about the Confederates vs a futuristic coup are referendums on whether Missouri and Kentucky wish to be in the Union or the Confederacy (Missouri stays in the US while Kentucky joins the CSA) as well as a friendship between Lincoln and Lee (two men whose early deaths greatly damaged the Southern states), Lee's plans to phase out slavery, and a US invasion of Canada to offset the loss of their Southern states.

This book may not be a realistic alternate history, but the main point of it is about how the South evolves after being free and readjusting their own views after seeing a much more malignant side of their perspective.

Libby says

This is the story of what happened when time travelers gave Robert E. Lee advanced weaponry in order for the South to win the Civil War. It is also my favorite alternate universe story. Turtledove is absolutely the best when he undertakes to build an alternate world, whether it is a twin to the Byzantine Empire, the

American South or Nazi Germany. His viewpoint characters are so vivid, so alive that I feel that I know them well. Their thoughts describe their experiences with wry humor and rueful wisdom. His knowledge of history is both wide and deep and he twists it so plausibly that his cloned worlds become as real and complex as our own. Even when I think that I have caught an error or an anachronism, his cunning plotting explains it, or I discover that I was mistaken. This universe begins to split from our own when Lee experiments with the weapons supplied him by mysterious strangers and discovers what his troops can do with superior rate of fire. At first, Lee doesn't know where his enigmatic gun dealers come from or why they would want to help the Confederacy, and as the story progresses, he begins to suspect that it has little to do with altruism, but he cannot lightly discard the great advantage their wares can give him. I will not dilute your enjoyment with plot spoilers, but I will urge you not only to read this one, but to pass it on to others. This is the really good stuff that any avid reader is looking for. When God is bored, he reads Harry Turtledove.

Nate says

I stumbled across this book while prowling around this very site and was instantly captivated by the cover; I mean, it's a picture of famous Confederate General Robert E. Lee holding one of the most recognizable firearms of our time--the AK-47. To be honest, it's not even well-done; he's gripping it all weird and it just kind of looks like shit. Throw in a good review from one of my friends on the site and it was an easy three or four dollars to spend, even though I swear the young lady that rang me up looked at the cover, then back at me with a kind of disdainful amusement...I'm sorry it wasn't fucking *Naked Lunch* or *Gravity's Rainbow* or whatever. Those are probably bad examples, I don't even know what cool people read these days.

So obviously I'm coming into this experience with a fair amount of bias against its literary quality based solely on the cover and the premise. You might be wondering why I would even want to read this having said all that, and the answer to that is because I occasionally enjoy trash. Well, I can safely say that this book is not trash and that the author managed to take such a ridiculous premise and build a convincing speculation on it. The guy is not some weird hack that got popular by a bizarre stroke of fate, he got a Ph.D. in Byzantine history from UCLA and obviously knows the American Civil War and all the people involved back to front. The book also mercifully doesn't consist of scene after scene of Confederates mowing down Union troops like some low-budget action movie, as the war ends fairly early in the novel. The real idea or theme this book deals with is the question of what the CSA would have grown into had it won the war, and Turtledove has some very interesting and even pleasantly surprising speculations on that.

As usual I try to avoid spoilers as much as possible in writing reviews of books but the back cover tells quite a bit; a militant racist South African organization uses a time machine to travel to 1864 and hook the Confederates up with a bunch of AK-47s, which is a hilarious difference from the rifled muskets most soldiers were using. The novel follows two protagonists; the aforementioned Robert E. Lee and Nate Caudell, a teacher and First Sergeant in the Army of Northern Virginia. Despite them both being Confederate scum, I had to like them; Lee is smart, compassionate, and committed to his duties, and Caudell is a rational, humble and thoughtful salt-of-the-earth type guy. Despite my best efforts I enjoyed the dumb love story between Caudell and Mollie Bean, a great Hooker With a Heart of Gold™-type character. The two characters provide a nice and easy way to watch both Lee's decision-making and its effects on the little people.

Some flaws did present themselves as I made my way throughout the novel. Lee is great but he is also a bit of a Gary Stu. (view spoiler) That said, I can imagine that bitching about that kind of thing is pretty common with alternate history stuff--everyone has their own impression of the people and events and that's going to clash. The fact that it stimulates thought and discussion on the subject is probably the important thing.

The best way I can summarize this book is that it combines an outlandish concept with well-researched and detailed speculation and storytelling. Reading the author's note at the end really drove home what an effort Turtledove made to create a realistic alternate world; the different factors and conditions he used to create the presidential elections of both countries was pretty complex and fascinating. The first fifty pages also serve as a kind of rudimentary user's guide to the AK-47. Without giving away too much, it also has a refreshing (for me; some might say naive) faith in humanity's inherent goodness and progression towards a more compassionate state of being. If any of this sounds remotely entertaining and worth looking into, you might want to give this a try.

Alan Gilfoy says

Harry Turtledove, The Guns Of The South

Earns his alternate history reputation

I've been interested in the alternate history genre, and finally picked up some Turtledove. (The local library had a copy, and this is a standalone book, as opposed to starting one of his big series in the middle)

The story offers an interesting point of divergence and series of events following from it. The analogues to and aspects from real history are meticulously well-detailed. I sensed that throughout the book, and was impressed with the thorough research, but was still surprised by the endnote which said that the characters of the 44th North Carolina were based on actual military records.

The book also does a great job illustrating issues related to the American Civil War. Since a Southern victory was so unlikely in real life, perhaps the science-fiction help was necessary to illuminate those issues. There seem to be too many examples of that to go into here.

I liked the style of two POV characters where one was an average soldier, and one a general and later politician, since overall this offered a wider perspective on the story. An educated man and noncommissioned officer like Nate kept the commoner viewpoint from being too narrow. The parts about his teaching and his relationship with Mollie were great as something universal, or a touch of normalcy amongst the chaos

It makes sense that Lee would end up involved in politics in a world where the South won, like how Grant ended up as US President in real life. Davis serving in Lee's Cabinet reminded me of how John Quincy Adams ran for the US House Of Representatives after his presidency.

I realized early on the the AWB were neo-Nazis or somesuch and the letters really stood for something besides 'America Will Break'. However, I was still surprised that they were South African racists, their gold being in Kruggerand form being the first obvious clue. It was striking how they were even more racist than the Confederates. Overall, Turtledove handles the in-character reveal/explanation/investigation of their nature very well, so the ending involving the AWB explaining their technology/history/etc seems particularly fitting.

It seemed convenient that the 44th North Carolina was the group called back for the combat at the end of the book, but that seemed excusable as a way to use characters we were already familiar with.

Turtledove uses the N-word a lot, but it seems to fit the setting, as opposed to using it gratuitously. It's interesting how many of the characters who are relatively reasonable on racial issues still use that word

sometimes. Frankly, I was amused when Turtledove made a pun with the unrelated word meaning 'stingy'.

I read through it again pretty much right after finishing it; I rarely do that even with books I like.

Robert Beveridge says

Harry Turtledove, Guns of the South (Del Rey, 1992)

Time to make shish kebab out of another sacred cow. Guns of the South is considered THE alternate history novel by many, the one alternate history novel that should be required reading in history classes and on just about every historian's list of must-read Civil War books. And to be fair, it's almost that good. Really.

As with most fiction of the speculative type, especially alternate-history speculative fiction, the plot can be summed up by asking one simple question. In that case, "what if the South won the American Civil War?" The book is essentially divided into two halves; the first half takes place during the war, and the second half afterwards. And when Turtledove is writing battle scenes, he shines. The first half of the book flies by. It's a page-turner to end all page-turners.

Unfortunately, when Robert E. Lee moves from military command to political life, the story bogs down. Badly.

It does pick up again, a hundred or so pages later, but there are a few places in the book where the pace gets so glacial I started to think I'd accidentally picked up Frank Herbert's Children of Dune instead. Yes, it gets that slow. It all wraps up pretty nicely, but the journey to get from point A to point B can sure be hard sometimes. ** 1/2

John says

Am I a bad history grad student for reading this? Probably...

I shouldn't have bothered with this. It was really poorly written in parts, especially any time dialogue had to provide some kind of exposition, and plus it made me feel a little dirty to have to root for the Confederates, as they are the heroes of the book. I knew the basic plot: a group of 21st Century racist South Africans travel back in time and give AK-47s to the Confederates so they will win the Civil War. What I didn't realize was that the South Africans don't just leave, they hang around to be a major plot point throughout the book. Why do they hang around? So that the author can constantly compare them with the Confederates and imply that the Confederates weren't all that racist. Turtledove fills the book with South African characters mistreating slaves, and Confederates like Robert E. Lee coming to the slaves' defense. He even goes so far as to have the South African characters buy slaves and horribly abuse them, so he can have Confederates 'rescue' them. The plot of the book turns on R.E. Lee winning the war and almost immediately becoming an open and vocal abolitionist, which is completely nonsensical. And as I said before, the exposition is horribly clunky, with people saying things like "As I'm sure you know, General Lee, because you are a student of our politics, our Confederate constitution, which was passed in 1861, provides for a six year presidential term." Groan. I will say this for Turtledove: he is creative in his ideas about how history would have progressed in the aftermath of a Confederate victory. He goes into great detail about the subsequent presidential elections in the North and the South, about what would happen to a Lincoln who lived, about relations between the U.S. and Britain if Britain recognized the Confederates, about what would happen to the border states, etc. All of that is interesting. But when you combine the awkward writing with this picture of the rebels as a group of

people hardly racist and almost ready to give up slavery on their own...I can't really recommend this book.

Joel says

Turtledove has a unique way of blending science fiction with history. The way he conveys accounts identify him as a master of history and research. In fact, if he were to publish text books in this manner (without the Sci-Fi obviously), the nation's history I.Q. would rise rather sharply.

It's truly one of those "can't put it down" novels. The way he recreates past events and images with his "twists", shows a mind that thinks outside the box.

"Enfield, Springfield, throw them in the cornfield". Brilliant. A typical marching tune that a unit in that era would compose.

His ability to hold the reader to suspense is 5 star. His character composition, also 5 star. There's really nothing to be said negatively about this book.

Ozymandias says

An intriguing novel that has time-traveling apartheid terrorists go back in time to supply the Confederate army with AK-47s and keep white supremacy alive into their day so that they're not isolated when their government comes under pressure in the early 21st century.

With this story I have to wonder who the intended audience is. I doubt the Confederate pride people will be happy at the reminder of just how horrible slavery truly was (even if Southerners are the protagonists), whereas it was physically painful for me to read of admired figures failing utterly in the great dual purpose of preserving the Union and ending slavery. Defeated Abe is truly a painful sight. It's not overly fun to see the bad guys winning, even if some of the people on that side are decent human beings.

The second half of the book breaks free from that and turns to the course of the new CSA figuring out how its going to rule itself. This section is rather less depressing as Lee is basically a really decent guy and in a position to do some good, while the Neo-Nazi Afrikaner scumbags are less able to dominate the proceedings. Seeing how people from the 1860s view some of the future is interesting to see just from a character standpoint.

As you might tell, I found the first half uncomfortable reading and the second half rather more entertaining. In both sections though, the book is consumed with a lot of superfluous details (including a long sequence on just how to use and clean an AK-47) that leave you impatient for it to just get on with it. The sections revolving around the gradually changing opinions of a local teacher and related characters are especially prone to this sort of dead wood.

The main strength of the book is in its characters and setting though. As ever, Turtledove is a master at reproducing historical figures and attitudes in a way that I've rarely seen matched. Even more impressive is his ability to do so without benefit of their historical actions to build a framework around. Lee is about as close to the figure as any attempt I've seen to capture him. Same goes for Grant, Forrest, Davis, etc. Lincoln seems a bit off, but then it's really hard to imagine how he would react to losing the war. It's so antithetical to think of him as an abject failure that I have a hard time envisioning it.

Historical attitudes are on display too, for all their uncomfortable bigotry. Be prepared for a massive use of the word nigger and some really unpleasant and brutal scenes, none of which have negative consequences for

the perpetrators. The book is fortunate in having the Afrikaner fanatics as villains since this gives us someone to hate who's even worse than the Southern slaveowners. But the fact that you end up siding with ever-victorious racist murdering Rebs (and I know the North wasn't much better, but still...) is disturbing in and of itself. So in the end, I still wonder who this book is aimed at?

Zachary says

Strange as the premise may seem, this novel works quite well. It is a plausible look at what might have happened had the Confederacy somehow managed to get its hands on advanced weaponry and the expertise required to use it. Time traveling is as good a reason as any for Robert E Lee to be holding an Uzi, as the author says, and the inherent ridiculousness of the image is tempered by the seriousness of the novel as a whole.

This book doesn't shy away from addressing the issue of slavery, and in fact makes a key plot point of doing so. There is consequently an amount of racist language which must be taken for what it is, period speech, and nothing more than that. It is a remarkable feat that the author manages to make the characters largely sympathetic despite their world views widely diverging from 21st century norms. There is a romantic subplot handled quite well, and the ending feels satisfying and fits neatly with the story.

I can happily recommend this book to history buffs, as with Turtledove's other work. Even if you aren't one of those, it's a fun and accessible read.

Kevin Xu says

The ultimate alternative history book of all time by the ultimate alternative history author of all time. This is the one book to read if to read alternative history.

Sean says

Half masturbatory Robert E. Lee fanfic, half apologia for the South...

Honestly, the concept is brilliant--white supremacists go back in time, help the South win the Civil War with AKs, and it just goes on from there. But man, I lost count of the number of times someone said the war was about keeping slaves, only to be shouted down by people saying that no, really it was about freedom and states' rights. For crying out loud.

Aside from that (which isn't all that bad, it just stands out once you notice it--a la Mieville's crosshatching), the main problem I had with this novel was the second main character. Robert E. Lee is a pretty impressive historical figure, and you could definitely do worse in picking someone to fanfic. But the second lead, Nate Caudell, is a conduit to the story rather than an actor in it. He's there to let us see cool battle scenes from the trenches. This is great as far as it goes--the battle scenes are fun and nicely constructed--but Caudell is simply a dull character. He waits around for things to happen; he's not proactive. Even at the end when (SPOILER!) he marries his sweetheart, it's because she suggested it!

On the whole, I'd recommend this more heartily if it were shorter. As it is... yeah, sure, what the hell. Go ahead and give it a try.

Anthony Ryan says

A seminal work in alternative history dealing with that old chestnut: what if the South had won the American Civil War? Turtledove makes a convincing case to support the notion the only thing that might have swung the balance in the favour of the Confederacy would have been the introduction of something as radically game-changing as the AK-47. Whilst the amateur historian in me doesn't buy all of Turtledove's conclusions, primarily the notion that the Southern states would have quickly thrown off slavery in the aftermath of victory over the north, this remains a fascinating entry in the never-ending game of 'what if'.

Justin says

The Premise: White nationalist Afrikaaners travel back in time and equip Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia with fully automatic AK-47 rifles on the eve of the Battle for the Wilderness in 1864. Hijinks ensue.

That's it, really. *Guns of the South* is simply that premise followed to one possible conclusion. Though the premise is fantastical, it is slyly subversive: in following the most popular general "what if" of alternate history (South Wins the Civil War), Turtledove is able to prey on the vanity and insecurity of the modern day "Lost Cause" sympathizer by juxtaposing those ostensibly racist Southerners with those **even more racist** late 20th Century South Africans.

We see the triumphant Confederates chastened and cognizant of the error of their ways (slavery), so much so that they join up with their Union foes to vanquish the schemes of the two-dimensionally evil Afrikaaners. What's puzzling is that, for someone who is so notoriously conspicuous with his various reminders to the reader that he's Done His Research, Harry Turtledove refuses to recognize the historic reality that a) caused the Civil War, and b) made many of his historical characters (particularly the Southerners) so unsympathetic. Even Nathan Bedford Forrest, the butcher of Fort Pillow and founder of the Ku Klux Klan, is rehabilitated under the magic of Turtledove's prose. Forrest is Not Bad After All, once Saint Robert E. Lee's beatific influence is felt.

One might say "Hey, it's fiction, what's the big deal?" The big deal is that the author is by design using the allure of a well known historical era, with its well known cast of historical characters, to get people to read his book. Playing around with "what if"s can be fun and useful in fiction (cf. Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*). But some counterfactuals are simply nonsensical, illogical, and offer prime examples of begging the question. "What If Hitler Didn't Invade the Soviet Union?" is a good example: anyone with a grasp of the primary sources understands that the only way for that to have been avoided was for Hitler (and by extension, the Nazis) to have never come into power in Germany in the first place, and so posing the question makes no sense. "What if the Civil War Wasn't About Slavery/Race/etc?" is the proposition underlying the more superficial counterfactual in *Guns of the South* involving South Africans and AK-47s. That underlying proposition is necessary, because without it, there's no way to make many of Turtledove's protagonists as likable and sympathetic as he demands. To pose that question is silly, and renders moot the era to which Turtledove would have us journey.

Lyn says

The best alternate history novel?

Hell, I don't know, I haven't read that many, but this one was pretty damn good.

SPOILER ALERT! In this book, the South wins the Civil War! OK, so not that much of a spoiler, I think that's on the cover. But HOW that happens is how Turtledove makes this interesting.

A group of racist South Africans goes back in time and equips General Lee's army with AK-47s. The added firepower was all the crafty old tactician needed to turn the tide on Grant and Lincoln.

So what happens when the CSA lasts beyond 1865? Lots! And Turtledove follows Lee, an educated North Carolina First Sergeant returning to his civilian career as a school teacher and four score and seven other interesting characters both historic and imagined who populate the CSA that might have been.

The most obvious theme explored in this sideways history is racism. For those easily offended by a certain racial slur, this may not be the book for you. Turtledove strives for and achieves narrative historic accuracy but in doing so drops more N words than The Dude dropped F bombs in The Big Lebowski. Turtledove examines the peculiar institution in terms of those most affected, those who have grown to accept that way of life, those who insist on maintaining the status quo and the Apartheid terrorists who started the whole mess.

This was a good book and I enjoyed reading it, but WAY WAY too long. Damn! Tell your story and then stop typing, this could have been so much better a hundred pages less. Still, very good and I'll revisit Turtledove and this sub-genre again.

Werner says

Despite my fondness for alternate history, I've never gotten around to reading much of it, and Harry Turtledove's work in the field was virgin territory to me until I read this book. (I know, that's pretty shocking, since his name is practically synonymous with the sub-genre in U.S. book circles!) But I've recognized this novel as a must-read for years, and finally decided (long story!) to read it now rather than later. I'm very glad I did; it's early in the year, but this might well be my favorite read of 2017.

As is often the case, the Goodreads description of this book is copied from the back cover; and it explains the premise very well. Here, the alteration in history isn't caused by a change of events or decision within the historical setting, but by the intervention of time travelers from outside of it: a fanatical bunch of South African white supremacists from 2014 (this book was written in 1992), who come bearing a supply of AK-47s for the Confederate armies, which they hope will turn the tide of the war. (Their world has developed time travel technology, which they've stolen to use for their purposes, but it only works in 150 year jumps --hence, from January 2014, they couldn't go any further back in time than January 1864.) Since the cover of this edition proclaims across the top in capital letters, "THE MASTER OF ALTERNATE HISTORY DEPICTS THE ULTIMATE REVERSAL: THE SOUTH WINS THE CIVIL WAR," I'm hardly guilty of writing a spoiler in quoting it. But the meat of the novel lies in the scenario of how the South wins - and more importantly, what happens after that, since this tale spans the years 1864-68.

The Civil War was the bloodiest war, in terms of American deaths, in our history; despite the facade of

postwar sectional reconciliation, it left a legacy of grievance and hatred on both sides that's been the province of demagogues to exploit for political advantage ever since. And like the war itself, this legacy is inextricably bound up with the unqualifiedly pernicious institution of slavery, which many Southerners (though not all) went to war with the goal of protecting, and which some Northerners --though not nearly as many as modern Northern pundits would like us to believe--went to war in the hope of destroying. (So inevitably, it's a legacy that tends to be seen differently, and with a lot less detachment, by black Americans than by white ones --even by whites who abhor slavery, as practically all living whites in America do today.) This isn't a moral climate that lends itself to appreciation of nuance and a desire to understand the perspectives of others, historical or contemporary; rather, it's a climate that fosters stereotyping and demonization of the hated Other, whether they actually have or had demonic beliefs or not. All of this makes a premise like Turtledove's an absolute minefield for an alternate history novelist to tread.

Yet Turtledove treads it without flinching, and does so with precisely the appreciation of nuance and desire to truly understand where his characters were coming from historically that tends to be the first casualty of wars (whether they're the shooting kind that we had in the 1860s or the screaming kind that we have now). He does this while putting the issue of race/slavery squarely at the heart of his novel, and as the central question that has to engage his characters' moral growth and decisions. And his characters are almost entirely Southerners, and mostly white Southerners. His perspective is the same basic one that all decent and educated people have today: that race and skin color have nothing to do with individual intelligence and character, and that no human being has the right to own another (though he shows that perspective naturally by the unfolding of his story, rather than by long sermons and didactic passages). Obviously, though, not every character he's dealing with has that perspective. His two viewpoint characters, General Lee and Sergeant Nate Caudill of the 47th North Carolina, start with somewhat more enlightened views of blacks than some Southerners (Lee's being a bit more advanced than Caudill's), and have essentially decent instincts, but even they are people of their time with lessons to learn. Virtually all of his white characters have some racial prejudices --some, like Andries Rhodie and his cohorts, based on hate, but most simply based on the ignorance that comes when whites and blacks never really get to know each other. No punches are pulled here in depicting the ugliness of the whole slavery culture that these people take for granted (the description of a slave auction is nauseating), and the frequent use of racist terminology grates like a vegetable grater over flesh. (The book got its stars despite those characteristics, not because of them.) But the realism is necessary to what the author is trying to do.

Turtledove's day job is an academic historian (he has a PhD. in the subject) and author of serious nonfiction history books written under his pen name of H. N. Turtletaub. He bases this novel on massive research; almost all of the characters who populate the book, as he explains in the historical notes, were real people whose depictions stick as close to known facts as possible, and the locations (except for the town of Rivington) are mostly real places and described accurately as they were in the 1860s. The behavior of Lee, Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Nathan Bedford Forrest, Gen. Grant and the other political figures is entirely consistent with their known personalities and attitudes, and the developments of his alternate history are entirely plausible given the changes to the timeline that he posits. This is a long book (556 pages of text), but it's a gripping page turner all the way, where the length is a plus that just serves to build a fascinating world more fascinatingly, and give you more time with believable, flawed, but mostly likeable people you come to really care about. Apart from the racial epithets, there's some profanity and scatology (many of these characters are soldiers, and they talk like many of their real-life counterparts actually did), but no obscenity except on one occasion from a South African; and while there's some unmarried sex, none of it is explicit. The plotting is spot-on perfect, IMO.

"You Southerners may have made the Confederacy into a nation, General Lee, but what sort of nation shall it be?" --Lord Richard Lyons, British minister to the U.S.

Bart Breen says

Entertaining and Thought Provoking

Turtledove's *Guns of the South*, provides a rollicking good read as well as a great deal of insight into some of the common causes cited for the Civil War and why so many factors contributed to the Confederacy's defeat.

A fair criticism can be made that this book is not alternative history in the purest sense of the word. A more common scenario in such tales might more practically be derived from something like having the South win at Gettysburg. However, the adding of an element of time travel using both racism as it survived into the 21st century as well as the introduction of technology that helps the south to overcome the overwhelming odds it faced proves effective in the author's ability to highlight the points being made. The South was fighting in many regards not only the Union but also world opinion and trends that argue poignantly that even if the South had been successful militarily, it arguably would not have been able to preserve its preexisting society.

Clearly this book helps to illustrate that Slavery was a driving force in the causes of the Civil War but that it was once cause intertwined with many issues that in the end, would have resulted in change even with another military and political outcome.

The writing is well paced, plausible with a large dose of credulity, and most of all, entertaining and well researched.

5 Stars.

I recommend it.
