



The Center Cannot Hold

Harry Turtledove

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AMERICAN EMPIRE: BOOK TWO

In this spectacular, thought-provoking epic of alternate history, Harry Turtledove has created an unparalleled vision of social upheaval, war, and cutthroat politics in a world very much like our own—but with dramatic differences.

It is 1924—a time of rebuilding, from the slow reconstruction of Washington’s most honored monuments to the reclamation of devastated cities in Europe and Canada. In the United States, the Socialist Party, led by Hosea Blackford, battles Calvin Coolidge to hold on to the Powell House in Philadelphia. And it seems as if the Socialists can do no wrong, for the stock market soars and America enjoys prosperity unknown in a half century. But as old names like Custer and Roosevelt fade into history, a new generation faces new uncertainties.

The Confederate States, victorious in the War of Secession and in the Second Mexican War but at last tasting defeat in the Great War, suffer poverty and natural calamity. The Freedom Party promises new strength and pride. But if its chief seizes the reins of power, he may prove a dangerous enemy for the hated U.S.A. Yet the United States take little note. Sharing world domination with Germany, they consider events in the Confederacy of little consequence.

As the 1920s end, calamity casts a pall across the continent. With civil war raging in Mexico, terrorist uprisings threatening U.S. control in Canada, and an explosion of violence in Utah, the United States are rocked by uncertainty.

In a world of occupiers and the occupied, of simmering hatreds, shattered lives, and pent-up violence, the center can no longer hold. And for a powerful nation, the ultimate shock will come when a fleet of foreign aircraft rain death and destruction upon one of the great cities of the United States. . . .

From the Hardcover edition.

The Center Cannot Hold Details

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Author : Harry Turtledove

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From Reader Review The Center Cannot Hold for online ebook

Will H says

The characters in this series spend all of their time doing the following three things:

- (1) Recapping events that just happened
 - (2) Watching election returns
 - (3) Fucking
-

Bob says

This was an alternative history book set mostly in the early 1900s in what we know as the US and Canada but in this book things are quite different. It was a fairly good read even though I didn't read its predecessors. I am going to defer to the description found at the web site listed here for a much better description.

<http://www.scifidimensions.com/Nov02/c...>

ISBN - 0-345-44421-3, Alternative History, Pages - 547, Print Size - R, Rating - 4

All books reviewed are from the library or purchased by the reviewer.

Mike Hedley says

I've read several HT books, including several in this series. While the narrative is good and overall enjoyable reading, I found several aspects to be unrealistic, no matter that it's "alternate history". The first is the tiny part Britain plays, even being defeated in Northern Ireland by the Irish (with help from the Yanks of course). No mention of the naval battles against Germany which, but for some bad luck (and some glitches in British ship design) could have led to the routing of the German High Seas Fleet. The easy defeat of the British in the Sandwich Islands involved too much "suspension of belief" for me, along with the rise of Fascism in UK and elsewhere in Europe. The near-total subjugation of the Negroes in the South (and not far behind in the North) seemed to demean that group completely. The comparison with the Jews was obvious, yet the Negroes were in far greater numbers proportionally than the unfortunate Jews of post WWI Europe (although disadvantaged by poor education) and their largely futile efforts at times beggared belief.

The rise of a military dictatorship in the South after defeat by the North (itself unlikely given that the North was fighting on two land fronts plus two sea "fronts") was an interesting parallel with post WWI Germany, a bit too parallel for this reader!

I think I'll leave Harry's works alone for a while...

Holden Attradies says

Like most of the books in this series the ones in the middle of story arcs tend to be slow. But unlike the other middle books the last half of this book really picks up steam. Now I'm not complaining about the slow pace. That slow, detailed pace is why I adore these books. But when things keep you on the edge of your seat like the rise to power of Jake Featherston in the end of this book it's really hard to stop reading (or listening in this case). This book has such a good ending in fact that it felt more like the end to a full story arc than just a

middle book.

Peter Federman says

Finished! Next one downloaded and ready to go. I am loving the storyline but to be honest, there are some things that get too repetitive. Turtledove treats each book as if you have not read the predecessor, which seems highly unlike. Nonetheless, I am pushing on!!!

Reza Amiri Praramadhan says

After the reparation payment imposed by USA to CSA had stopped, things seemed to look better for CSA. The Whigs were set to rule like it used to, and Freedom Party looked like it headed to oblivion, since one of its members assassinated the President of CSA. However luck changed when there was Great Depression came, propelled Freedom Party to power. And thus, CSA looked forward to war, to avenge its humiliation on the last war by its northern neighbor. Overall, I tend not to be very excited to the series' books when it is all about the preparation towards war. I prefer when the war is actually started, for it gets my blood boils and hungry for more reading. Perhaps, in the next book there is really a next great war.

The other John says

This is the middle volume of the *American Empire* trilogy, volume six of the story arc in which the South's victory in the Civil War makes the North American continent a place of hatred and bloodshed. At this point, the whole story has run out of steam, somewhat. This part of the tale runs from the early 1920s until 1932. Things happen, but life during the boom of the Roaring 20's and the depressed 30s isn't quite as dramatic as it was during wartime. The characterization is still good, and I'll undoubtedly read onward. It's just not as good as its predecessors.

On my second read through, 7 years later, it's lost its magic for me. I realized that this series really does spend way too much time updating backstories. I wonder if Mr. Turtledove *expects* people to pick up these books without having read the predecessors. Anyway, it makes for a great book to read at the bus stop or in a waiting room.

James says

The continuation of the long and intricate alternate history track Harry Turtledove began with a "what if" change of events during the Civil War. For me, this series is addictive. The characters and events are intriguing and I want to know what happens next.

Bill says

I somehow missed Turtledove's birthday last week. A few signs you've read too much Turtledove: You're

automatically suspicious of any political movement that crows too loudly about "freedom", you can envision Mormon suicide bombers, and you wonder how World War II would have turned out if alien lizards invaded Earth in the middle of it.

Michael says

Nice progression in Turtledove's alternate history now. This is probably the best in the series so far. Characters are still largely predictable but the parallels between the CSA and the Weimar Republic / Nazi Germany from history are now quite interesting.

Brad says

I didn't enjoy this book as much as I usually enjoy Turtledove novels. Maybe as I am reading the American Empire Series as a block, and after 1200+ pages, am I suffering from fatigue. I am still keen to continue on, so the story is still engaging. However instead of being a ripping yarn, it seems to have bogged down in too much character developing/living their normal (boring) lives as the world turns on Turtledove's alternate axis.

Onwards and upwards!

Kb says

More familiar historical figures showing up in different contexts and more of the world going to Hell in a hand basket as reactionaries take control of the Confederate government. Characters introduced as young children in novels from the previous series are now getting married and having children of their own. The breadth of these narratives is amazing.

George Flannary says

Pretty good

It was a good book but definitely the second book of a trilogy feel to it. It's interesting that the first carrier battle in this timeline happened almost a decade before in happened in ours

Brentman99 says

Another good book in a fun series. Turtledove works the period between the wars quite well. I love how the characters interact and the plots are quite interesting. This series was so enjoyable that it was worth the time spent reading as the payoff is great. I really enjoyed this series.

Marc says

Once again, Harry Turtledove takes the fabric of history and twists it into a new shape. With a mixture of fictional and historical characters, he takes us through the rest of the 1920's and into the 1930's. He's not afraid to knock off a character or two along the way as well, thus opening up new storylines along the way. He truly is the master of alternate history!

David Potocnik says

Yet another installment in a series that I am happy that a buddy of mine got me hooked on. I love all the different characters and the unfolding of similar yet different events in alternative history. The author must have one of the most active imaginations to bind so many different characters over such a long story. I look forward to the next one!

Tim Basuino says

Occasionally while perusing a book store, I'll see that a particular novel has multiple authors, which always had me wondering as to why. After reading a succession of Harry Turtledove novels, I am starting to understand the impetus.

Turtledove is outstanding when it comes to contemplating 'what-if' scenarios - hence his presence as one of the most popular alternate history writers. But he's downright inadequate in terms of writing dialogue, which prevents him from reaching the category of 'great' overall. He may want to contemplate getting somebody to assist him in that category. On the other hand, maybe he doesn't care...

"The Center Cannot Hold" looks primarily at the USA/Canada and The Confederate States/Mexico in the late 1920's/early 1930's, I believe covering more years than any other effort in The Southern Victory Series. The seeds for the WWII-like conflict between the two nations are sowed, and more attention is paid to Europe than any of his previous work.

Mike says

Well thought out alternative history, though it does feel like more effort was put into developing the characters rather than the plot.

That being said, I've read this before any other books in Turtledove's alternative American history.

Ryan says

In part two of the American Empire trilogy, Harry Turtledove continues his story of the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of fascism in the Confederate States of America.

The story's interesting enough, and I tend to agree with the view of history theory that Turtledove puts forward (that history is mostly the result of economics and cultural progress, rather than the actions of select individuals). I'm not a terribly big fan of Turtledove's writing style, though; he writes like he's writing a history textbook, moving workmanlike throughout the decades without taking the time to really developing the characters too much. There's too many characters throughout the series, and as a result we don't get to attach ourselves to them enough to really care about what happens to any of them.

I'm intrigued to see how far Turtledove takes the series in the final part of the trilogy; he's already had the Freedom Party, the CSA's version of the Nazis, get elected - the next logical step will be for outright war to cross the American continent again, but the unknown is how much he'll have the Freedom party adopt the terrible social policies of the Nazis as well.

Andrew says

This is the sixth installment in Turtledove's sweeping epic retelling of American history based on the Confederate States of America winning the Civil War and establishing their independence. Having posited a redux of that war a generation later, and re-imagined World War I with the USA and the CSA on opposite sides, he has now moved on to the decades between the two World Wars.

The USA, as one of the victors in the Great War, has become an empire, having annexed significant portions of the CSA and occupying Canada (except for Quebec, which has been established as an allied Republic). Meanwhile, the CSA continues to struggle under the punitive terms of the treaty that ended the war.

But when the economic boom of the 1920s gives way to economic collapse and the depression of the 1930s, the politics of both nations are thrown into turmoil. In the CSA, the Freedom Party, a fascist party that longs for revenge against both the USA and the blacks who rebelled during the Great War, finds increasing support among the people struggling to find work and feed their families. In the north, the failure of the Socialists to prevent the devastation of the depression undermines their support.

Turtledove continues to extrapolate his history from his original premise, but as he gets further away from it, the more "what ifs" he needs to contend with. This makes his alternative history feel increasingly fanciful. However, his large cast of characters help him explore the impact of events across a wide cross section of both countries, which makes his retelling compelling. It is also interesting to see how he incorporates actual historical figures into his alternate history alongside his fictional characters. His suggestion that some historical events (such as the market boom and crash, with the subsequent worldwide depression) would likely occur in spite of the changes he has envisioned also provides some meaty food for thought.

This series continues to fascinate me, and I look forward to continuing to explore his extrapolations.
