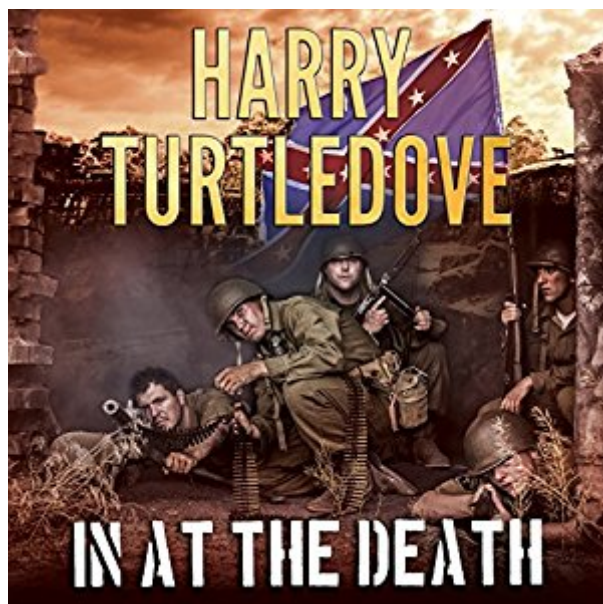


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In At The Death: Settling Accounts, Book 4



Synopsis

Franklin Roosevelt is the assistant secretary of defense. Thomas Dewey is running for president with a blunt-speaking Missourian named Harry Truman at his side. Britain holds on to its desperate alliance with the United States' worst enemy while a holocaust unfolds in Texas. In Harry Turtledove's compelling, disturbing, and extraordinarily vivid reshaping of American history, a war of secession has triggered a generation of madness. The tipping point has come at last. The third war in 60 years, this one yet unnamed: a grinding, horrifying series of hostilities and atrocities between two nations sharing the same continent and both calling themselves Americans. At the dawn of 1944, the United States has beaten back a daredevil blitzkrieg from the Confederate States, and a terrible new genie is out of history's bottle: a bomb that may destroy on a scale never imagined before. In Europe the new weapon has shattered a stalemate between Germany, England, and Russia. When the trigger is pulled in America, nothing will be the same again.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Through eleven volumes and nearly 100 years of alternate history, Harry Turtledove has been writing the story of a North America quite different from the one that we've lived in. It's a world in which the Confederacy won the Civil War in 1862 thanks to a twist in history. In our world, just prior to the Battle of Antietam, a Union soldier found a copy of General Robert E. Lee's General Order 191, which revealed the deployment plans of the Army of Northern Virginia as it moved into Maryland and Pennsylvania. Though some historians would argue the point, the discovery of those plans allowed the Union, then commanded by (the generally incompetent) George McClellan to

force the Confederates into a battle at Antietam Creek that they weren't ready for. A battle which the Union won, and which became the military victory upon which Lincoln based the Emancipation Proclamation, which changed the entire character of the Civil War, especially in Europe, from an internal American dispute, to a war against slavery. In Turtledove's universe, that never happened. Instead, the Confederates scored decisive victories in Pennsylvania and, with the help of British diplomatic intervention, gained their independence. Through ten novels, Turtledove has weaved the story of what a North America dominated by two powerful and antagonistic countries might be like. And it hasn't been a pretty story. A Second Civil War in 1880, which led both countries to seek alliances in Europe. And, when those allies went to war in the early 20th Century, the USA and CSA fought each other in a brutal war that resulted in the CSA being ground down much in the way Germany was after World War I. In what is apparently the final volume of the series, Turtledove lays bare the consequences of the choices that his characters have made. The destruction of the Confederacy that was anticipated in the last volume becomes inevitable long before the book is over. But that's only part of the story. The far more interesting question, which many of the characters that we've come to know only start to deal with as the book ends, is what happens next. Will the United States be forced to occupy the former CSA for decades until it finally submits ? Will the people of the CSA ever really accept responsibility for the fact that they supported a man who murdered at least eight million people ? What ever happened to the Canadian rebels ? Or the Mormons for that matter ? Even though the book stretches more than 600 pages, many of these questions are left unanswered, leading, of course, to the obvious conclusion that there might be at least one more book in the works. It would be nice to see those loose ends wrapped up, but, in the end, this was a satisfying end to a series resulted from, and has created, more than a few interesting alternative history scenarios.

Warning: contains spoilers Harry Turtledove seems to have stepped back from his standard writing style, full of ticks and repetitions and written "In at the Death" as he wrote 20 years ago when he wasn't managing a handful of serial novels on several timelines -- competently, cleanly, and in good English, if not with the style of a Robert Crais or a Robert Harris, and a lot more enjoyable to read than the previous books in the series. The plotting is very good, and the fates of the central characters about what you would hope for and expect. Jeff Pinkard gets hanged by the neck until... Good. But even better Turtledove lets Jonathan Moss make a decent defense, one that was legally stronger than "just following orders" allowed at Nuremberg. Whether he meant to or not (and I think it was fully deliberate), HT effectively raises a question still relevant (Darfur, Rwanda, Kosovo) as to

just how far national sovereignty governs, and where the international community gets to make laws to fit genocide and other especially abhorrent crimes. The ex-Navy Chief raised a bunch of questions about HT's total ignorance of the Navy and its methods of operating -- I'm a retired reserve officer from the engineering duty line -- that are the same ones that have bugged me since Carsten started learning to be a "ship handler" officer. I wish somebody had taken HT down to whatever naval base is close to his house and given him a bit of instruction. I'm also a nuclear physics type, and the description of the CSA weapons project rings very hollow. With just a few lines here and there it could have been made much better. But to the skeptics who say the CSA couldn't have enriched uranium in Lexington, let me say that they didn't. Read it closely; the CSA uses a "jovium bomb" (ie Plutonium), probably a lot like the physics package used over Nagasaki. Still and all, I'm surprised that the reactor survived the bombing. And the notion that both England and Germany got the bomb, and all the countries got their first bombs within weeks of one another, is simply incredible and a very poor plot device. I think I would cut half a star just for that if I could. But there are strange and uncomfortable gaps. What did happen to the Mormons? Did they find Deseret in Hawaii? What about Yossel Reisen, Flora's nephew, or did I miss something? He's just gone. What happened along the railroad in Canada with Mary shot (and a good thing that!)? Did things settle down? I think not. The CSA surrenders at Appomattox, with General Ironhewer (Who's he? He was parachuted in because HT could translate Ike's last name, and not because he was a pre-existing character -- a poor device) in the role of US Grant and Patton as Lee. But the ceremony is far more Yorktown than either Appomattox or Reims, and probably that's just right. But it wasn't "the world turned upside down." Still, this is the best book in the Settling Accounts series. The best written, the most satisfactory plotting (gimmicks aside), but with an end that leaves room for a reunited USA to face the Empire of Japan, both armed with nukes, sometime around 1955 or 1965. With the Mormons being the meat in the Sandwich. (Sorry; couldn't resist.)

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