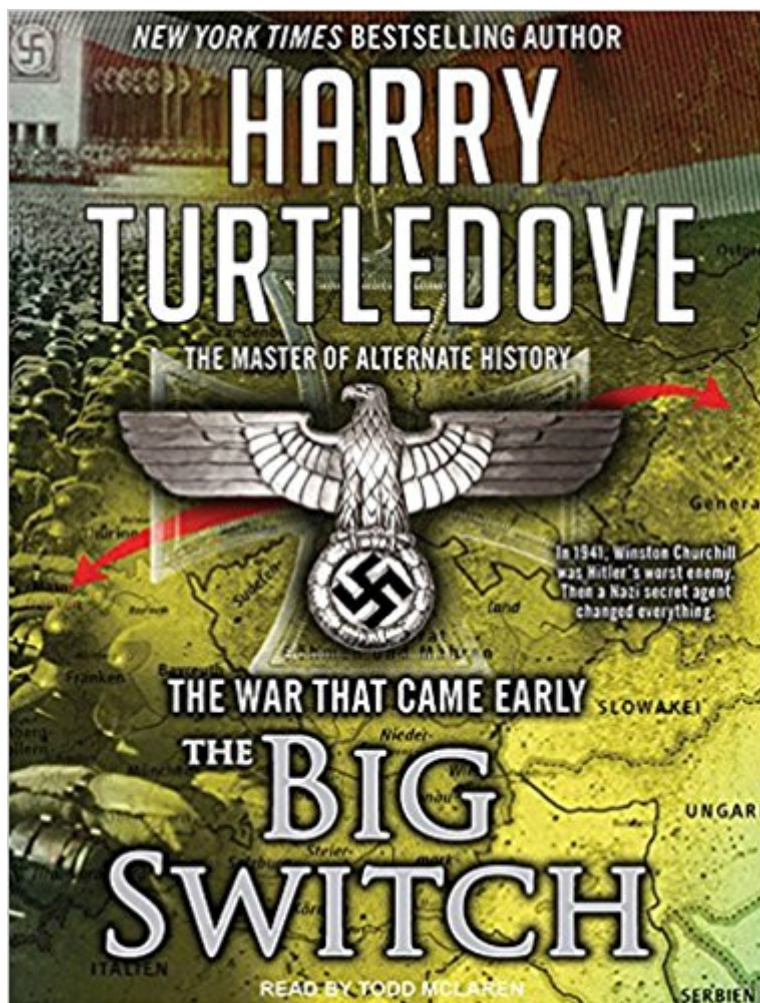


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The War That Came Early: The Big Switch



Synopsis

In this extraordinary World War II alternate history, master storyteller Harry Turtledove begins with a big switch: what if Neville Chamberlain, instead of appeasing Hitler, had stood up to him in 1938? Enraged, Hitler reacts by lashing out at the West, promising his soldiers that they will reach Paris by the new year. They don't. Three years later, his genocidal apparatus not fully in place, Hitler has barely survived a coup, while Jews cling to survival. But England and France wonder whether the war is still worthwhile. Weaving together a cast of characters that ranges from a brawling American fighter in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain to a woman who has seen Hitler's evil face-to-face, Harry Turtledove takes us into a world shaping up very differently in 1941. The Germans and their Polish allies have slammed into the gut of the Soviet Union in the west, while Japan pummels away in the east. In trench warfare in France, French and Czech fighters are outmanned but not outfought by their Nazi enemy. Then the stalemate is shattered. In England, Winston Churchill dies in an apparent accident, and the gray men who walk behind his funeral cortege wonder who their real enemy is. The USSR, fighting for its life, makes peace with Japan-and Japan's war with America is about to begin. A sweeping saga of human passions, foolishness, and courage, of families and lovers and soldiers by choice and by chance, *The Big Switch* is a provocative, gripping, and utterly convincing work of alternate history at its best. For history buffs and fans of big, blood-and-guts fiction, Harry Turtledove delivers a panoramic clash of ideals as powerful as armies themselves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The third volume of Turtledove's latest alternate-historical reworking of WWII, the War That Came Early, is definitely the strongest yet. It is for lovers of high-quality alternate history."

---Booklist Starred Review

Harry Turtledove is an award-winning and bestselling author of science fiction, fantasy, and historical fiction. His alternate-history works include *How Few Remain* (winner of the Sidewise Award for Best Novel), *The Man with the Iron Heart*, the *Worldwar* saga, the *Colonization* books, and the *Settling Accounts* series. Todd McLaren was involved in radio for more than twenty years in cities on both coasts. He left broadcasting for a full-time career in voice-overs, where he has been heard on more than 5,000 TV and radio commercials, as well as TV promos, narrations for documentaries on such networks as A&E and the History Channel, and films.

I have just finished Harry Turtledove's six volume set "The War that Came Early". Being a Harry Turtledove fan I of course enjoyed it. Some very thoughtful switches that made for a good and interesting story. However, I do have a few knock-offs on this series. First, I think it went a book too long. Well two books too long actually. I felt there was a lot of filler that didn't really enhance the story, and an abundance of redundancy in recounting stuff about the characters that were just covered a chapter or two previously and in the previous book(s). I mean how many times does he have to tell me that X character was a possessor of ancient history and now worked in a labor gang. He told me that in the first book and I got it then "but he kept telling me again and again through to the final book. He did this for other characters too. The language in this was far raunchier than his previous books I've read of his. Not a prude, but something that unless it truly adds to a story I can do without. One real nit, is a parachute jump action. He describes how when they were over the enemy territory, each trooper stepped into the door and when the light went to green from red for each trooper they jumped. Trust me the light went from red to green once and when it did all the troopers pushed out the door as quickly as they could. This helped insure they would be less scattered upon landing. Doing it the way he described they'd been spread for miles. Maybe there is a 7th book coming???? If not it seemed to end rather abruptly and with quite a bit hanging. So, I am expecting another in the series. Bottom line if you enjoy alternate history I recommend it. I did enjoy it and am truly hoping for a 7th volume. Still think it could have been done in fewer books though.

Harry Turtledove has proven time and again that he's a really great storyteller, especially when it comes to working with history. Though he's written straight historical novels like *Fort Pillow* and (as

H N Turteltaub), the Hellenic Traders series, he's best known for writing alternate history novels which frequently expand into massive series. The War that Came Early: The Big Switch, is the third in a series where World War II, well, comes early. For those not up on the series, it starts when France, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom stand up to Germany after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938 rather than waiting until the invasion of Poland in 1939. The result is that the war begins before both sides are really ready. This leads to a very different sort of war than what we're used to. Fascists and Republicans continue to fight in Spain, Germany faces off against the UK and France (which does not fall as it did in our world), while also invading the Low Countries, Denmark and Norway, Japan invades Siberia and lays siege to Vladivostok, and Poland allies with Germany against Russia, leaving Germany no place to build their planned extermination camps. Something that would be hard to do anyhow, since Poland isn't interested in killing off their Jews. And through it all the United States sides on the sidelines and waits... As this book begins, it is 1940 and we get updated on the various characters from the previous books. These include an American civilian stuck in Stockholm, a British soldier on an island off Norway, a Russian pilot from the Caucasus, a Czech fighting in the French army, an American Jew fighting in Spain, a German panzer soldier, a Jewish woman living in Germany, an American Marine in Shanghai, a Japanese soldier in Siberia and others. Like any Turtledove book, there's no shortage of viewpoint characters. Some of these characters and their stories are more interesting than others. My favorite thus far is Peggy, the American woman who just wants to get home after getting stuck in Europe far longer than she'd expected. Others, like the German panzer soldier and the Japanese soldier, are less interesting and I didn't care nearly as much for their stories. And that's something of a failing for the series as a whole. While I didn't care about or for every character in the Worldwar or Timeline 191 series, I did at least find almost all of them interesting. It helped that, especially with the Timeline 191 series, I had quite a lot of time to get to know them, both in and out of combat. Even by the end of this book, which is, as I mentioned, third in the series, I don't feel that I know all the characters nearly as well as I should, though one that should make some readers happy is that we don't get nearly as much detail about the characters sex lives as we did with some of Turtledove's other works (something I never had a problem with, but I understand why people don't much care for Mark Twain slash fiction). On the other hand, Turtledove has done an excellent job of overcoming one of the serious problems with Timeline 191, and that's the predictability. In that series, we knew pretty much from the start of the Great War where things were going to go, and there wasn't a single really major surprise. In this series, however, things aren't nearly so predictable, and the surprises are many, including the fate of one of England's most well-known politicians and the "big switch"

that gets mentioned in the title. Ultimately this book, and this series, are an interesting read with a good premise, and even if the characters aren't what I want them to be, I really do look forward to seeing what happens with them, even if I have to wait another year to do so.

I believe it was John Campbell who, when he was editor of "Astounding Stories", said that a science fiction author was entitled to one big lie. In his series "The War That Came Early", Harry Turtledove begins with a lie, specifically that the British and French didn't roll over and allow the Nazis to take over the Sudetenland when they demanded it from Czechoslovakia. So, the Germans begin World War II by invading Czechoslovakia instead of Poland. That was for starters. Then, Spanish Marshal Sanjurjo does not die in a plane crash as he did in real life, thus extending the Spanish Civil War to, oh, the next time the Cubs win the World Series. Then, the Soviets get into a war with Poland instead of Finland before they get into a war with Germany. Then, after the Germans fail to crush the British and French with their blitzkrieg in the West, the British and French decide to change sides and go to war alongside the Germans against the Soviets. Any one of those things would be plausible, and maybe several would. But all in the space of three or four years? I don't know. I think that stretches the premise a bit thin. Nevertheless, Turtledove is a good storyteller. He has believable characters and writes good dialogue. I suppose if you disallow Campbell's dictum and allow the author all the lies he wants, then this is a ripping yarn. As for me, I feel a little conflicted about it. I'm starting to get a little fed up, but for now I'm willing to continue with it. I'll read the next book in the series when it comes out.

I've been a big Turtledove fan for years and I've found myself devouring entire sets of his books in a matter of days in the past. Not this time. This set is bloated with what I considered to be meaningless activities and dialogue involving uninteresting characters and precious little action. I kept getting the feeling this was a two-volume book expanded to five (?) volumes to enhance sales revenue. Not sure I'll be buying Book 5 or anything else from Turtledove without reading several reader reviews beforehand.

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