Alternate History: Creating Stories by Changing the Past

J.L. Gribble
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About J.L. Gribble

J.L. Gribble writes the urban fantasy/alternate history Steel Empires series (Steel Victory, Steel Magic, Steel Blood, and Steel Time). Her other jobs include medical editing, watching too much Netflix, and blogging for Speculative Chic.

She lives in Ellicott City, Maryland, with her husband and three vocal Siamese cats.
What is alternate history?

- “Alternate history fundamentally concerns itself with the genesis of history…. The basic premise that some event in the past did not occur as we know it did, and thus the present has changed.” The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time (p. 2)

- Sometimes also called:
  - Alternative history
  - Alternative universe
  - Allohistory (literally “other history”)
  - Uchronia (literally “no time”)
  - Parahistory
  - Counterfactual
Most Common Examples

- Premise: The Confederacy wins the American Civil War.
  - Result: Slavery still exists legally in North America.

What if the South won the Civil War?

- The Guns of the South, Harry Turtledove (1997)
  - Science Fiction
- Underground Airlines, Ben H. Winters (2016)
  - Literary Fiction (with a bit of SF)
  - Mockumentary/Satire
What if the Nazis won WW2?

- **The Man in the High Castle**, Philip K. Dick (1962)  
  - Science Fiction

  - Political Thriller

- **After Dachau**, Daniel Quinn (2001)  
  - Fantasy/Magical Realism
Is alternate history a genre?

- Science Fiction
- Fantasy
- Horror
- Literary Fiction
- Romance
- Mystery
- Thriller

Alternate History
Is alternate history a subgenre?

- Urban Fantasy
- Paranormal Romance
- Cozy Mystery
- Political Thriller
- Coming-of-Age Story

But...

- Alternate History
- Steampunk
- Multiverse
### Alternate History: Story-Telling Technique

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nexus Story</th>
<th>True Alternate History</th>
<th>Parallel Worlds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Time Police</td>
<td>• Different physical laws:</td>
<td>• Different course of history</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Battle Stories</td>
<td>• Steam vs electricity</td>
<td>• Characters can jump between worlds</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Existence of magic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Dinosaurs!</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Story occurs at the moment of the break (hinge moment)</td>
<td>• No break at all: All events that could have occurred did occur</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Story occurs after the break (sometimes long after)</td>
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...As Science Fiction

**The Lords of Creation** duology by S.M. Stirling
- *In the Courts of the Crimson Kings* (2008)
...As Fantasy

The Pantheon series by James Lovegrove
- The Age of Ra (2009)
- The Age of Zeus (2010)
- The Age of Odin (2011)
- Age of Aztec (2012)
- Age of Voodoo (2013)
- Age of Godpunk (2013)
- Age of Shiva (2014)
As Action-Adventure

The Ring of Fire series created by Eric Flint

- 1632 (2000)
- 1633 (2002)
- 1634: The Ram Rebellion (2006)
- ...and many more novels and anthologies
...As Mystery

The Yiddish Policemen’s Union
By Michael Chabon (2007)
…As Romance

The Magnificent Devices series by Shelly Adina

- Lady of Devices (2011)
- Her Own Devices (2011)
- Magnificent Devices (2012)
- Brilliant Devices (2013)
- A Lady of Resources (2013)
- …and many more
...As Literary Fiction

The Plot Against America
by Philip Roth (2004)
Quiz Time!

- Nexus Story?
- True Alternate History?
- Parallel Worlds?
Choose Your Own Adventure History

Things to Think About

- Historical Changes, but also...
- Technological Changes
- Societal Changes
- Economic Changes
- Political Changes
Nexus Story Change

Pick a major historical event within the past 200 years.

Let’s change it!

Credit: DeviantArt user KevinAuzan
Nexus Story Change

Three changes in the next 1 to 5 years:

- Is the change localized or have the ripples expanded?
- Who is in power now? Who has lost power?
- How has the map changed, if any?
Nexus Story Change

Three changes in the next 20 to 50 years:

- How have technology levels changed? (Stagnation or dramatic increase)
- Have any wars been averted? New wars caused?
- Who holds power now? (Politically, economically, etc.)
Nexus Story Change

How do things look in 2019?

- Where have the ripples reached? Still localized or worldwide?
- How much or little has the fabric of society changed?
- What is life like in Grand Rapids, Michigan (or where you live)?
True Alternate History Change

Create a major change to the world we live in.

- Physics
- Magic
- Religion
Three initial changes:

- What does the world look like 2,000 years ago?
- How has the map changed?
- Who is in control?
True Alternate History Change

What does the world look like 200 years ago:

- Who lives/has control of North America?
- How do the genders/races related to each other?
- What does technology look like?
True Alternate History Change

How do things look in 2019?

- What level is technology at?
- How much or little has the fabric of society changed?
- What is life like in Grand Rapids (if it exists)?
  - What is YOUR life like?
Alternate History in Other Mediums

- Marvel 1602
- Fallout video games
- Star Trek’s Mirror Universe
A Few of My Favorites

- Ilona Andrew’s *Hidden Legacy* series
- Gail Carriger’s *Parasol Protectorate* series
- Mercedes Lackey’s *Elemental Masters* series
- Cara McKinnon’s *The Fay of Skye* series
- *Chronospace*, Allen Steele (2001)
Additional Resources

- Uchronia.net
- AltHistoryHub channel on YouTube
- AlternateHistory and AltHistory forums on Reddit
J.L. Gribble’s Books
Find J.L. Gribble Online

- **Social Media**
  - Facebook.com/jlgribblewriter
  - Twitter @hannaedits
  - Instagram @hannaedits

- **Blogs**
  - www.jlgribble.com
  - www.speculativechic.com
Find J.L. Gribble at StokerCon 2019

- At the Raw Dog Screaming Press booth!
Q & A

About alternate history, about me, about my books, about whatever!

Thanks for having me!