

## **SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW** by Stephanie Young

TITLE            *The Disunited States of America*  
AUTHOR        Harry Turtledove  
PUBLISHER     Tor  
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PRINTING      Ebook

**Précis**            A teenage boy and his mother travel to an alternate timeline via Crosstime Traffic, a provider of this service to anyone willing to pay for the unusual vacation of sorts. They are going to Virginia and in this alternate slavery is still the norm as the Constitution was never accepted and the states are independent countries.

The boy, Justin Monroe, meets Beckie Royer who is visiting an aunt, who lives in Virginia, with her grandmother who is every granddaughter's worst nightmare. They are from California which, in this timeline, is a powerhouse nation and like many other states has outlawed slavery. Justin and Beckie become good friends and because Justin is supposed to be from the Virginia in this timeline he has difficulties with his attitudes toward slavery being against what the people of this timeline are. Beckie notices that there is something different about Justin and that is why she likes him.

While they are there a war breaks out between Virginia and Ohio. Ohio uses a biological agent which prevents Justin and his Mom from going back to their timeline even if he can find a way back to the town he came in to. Justin does come up with a plan that gets him back to Charleston and he comes up with a plan to return that is acceptable to Crosstime. He leaves a hint of who he is for Beckie but she never knows for sure.

**Protagonist**     Justin Moore  
**Antagonist**     The alternate timeline

**What I liked**     The timeline changes were interesting and the clue Justin leaves at the end is interesting.

**What I didn't like**     The story was very thin, the characters under-developed, the tension never came across and the pace was so-so.

**Final Comments**     This is the first Harry Turtledove I've read and I am disappointed. Granted this is the fourth book in the 'Crosstime Traffic' series - seven books have been published so far - which could account for a mediocre effort since I found the story lackluster and plain. The main problem was the preachy nature of the slavery issue. It, not the story of Justin and Beckie was the driving force for the book. I understand the need to speak out against slavery and racial injustice, but I don't want it to dominate the novel.

Turtledove is a prolific writer and he has won a Hugo for a novella some years back. He is popular and frankly is the best known alternate history writer currently, so this cannot be his best effort. I have a few of his books on the shelf so I will have to pull one down and read it soon to compare. I hope and expect it will be better.

Rating 🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌