



1901

Robert Conroy

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The year is 1901. Germany's navy is the second largest in the world; their army, the most powerful. But with the exception of a small piece of Africa and a few minor islands in the Pacific, Germany is without an empire. Kaiser Wilhelm II demands that the United States surrender its newly acquired territories: Guam, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. President McKinley indignantly refuses, so with the honor and economic future of the Reich at stake, the Kaiser launches an invasion of the United States, striking first on Long Island.

Now the Americans, with their army largely disbanded, must defend the homeland. When McKinley suffers a fatal heart attack, the new commander in chief, Theodore Roosevelt, rallies to the cause, along with Confederate general James Longstreet. From the burning of Manhattan to the climactic Battle of Danbury, American forces face Europe's most potent war machine in a blazing contest of will against strength.

1901 Details

Date : Published January 2004 by Ballantine (first published June 1st 1995)

ISBN : 9780891418436

Author : Robert Conroy

Format : Mass Market Paperback 404 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Alternate History, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, War, Military Fiction

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From Reader Review 1901 for online ebook

Amy Stoltman says

It was ok. It was a bit too long

Steven Saunders says

I have read a bunch of Conroy alternative history books and enjoyed all of them. Like his other books, this one has a decent pace without a lot of needless filler other authors work into their stories. He also sprinkles a small but decent amount of a love story that doesn't overwhelm the main story. I enjoyed the discussions between the various historical figures, like Longstreet, Roosevelt and the Germans (e.g., Turpitz, who had a Nazi battleship named after him). Reference to young WW2 legends D McArthur and Halsey was fun...although their fates were troubling. The only criticism is that all of Conroy's books seem to follow a common pattern. Overall, a fun read that was hard to put down.

Pat says

A fascinating fun romp through 1901 USA vs Kaiser Wilhelm's army and navy - re-writing 1914 history to occur just a little earlier and play with the idea. Some interesting cameo appearances such as James Longstreet at age 86 taking command of the US army to fight against the German Army, and various younger versions of the WW1 and WW2 leaders we know from our history: Douglas McArthur, Dewey, Roosevelt, and their matching German counterparts. Overall, very entertaining with some riveting naval and land battles in the later half of the book.

Gregory Tait says

I liked this book.....I like history and understood many of the historical characters

Patrick says

Really 2.5 stars, maybe 2.75. Conroy's first novel; I can only hope they improve from here. First, big points for an AU that isn't the Civil War or WW2. Concept is an Imperial German invasion (more like a large raid) of New York in 1901 to force America to hand over its newly-acquired colonies. The problem lies in the execution: the time period (late Victorian/Early Edwardian) doesn't ring true, feels anachronistic. The historical figures aren't convincing, particularly Theodore Roosevelt (who comes across as bipolar) and Kaiser Wilhelm 2 (presented as a shrieking cartoon villain). The otherwise well-crafted writing is bogged down by unnecessary detail (like the tonnage and armament and speed of nearly every ship mentioned) and interminable dragging exposition (most of it of little value to the plot) delivered through multiple boring military briefings and Cabinet meetings. The ultimate American victory also seems to owe quite a bit to

amazing coincidence verging on Alien Space Bat territory. Worse, one of the few non-white vantage point characters is an Apache presented in a ridiculously stereotyped fashion.

David says

Alternate history has always been one of my go-to sources for books, so I was intrigued by this book about a potential war between the US and Imperial Germany. I was very disappointed. From the back flap, this is Robert Conroy's first book and it shows. One of the most important parts of alternate history is that you have to get the reader to buy in to this different version of history. Instead, we have Germans landing within the first 25 pages or so with almost no set up. If he had taken the time to set up the plot a bit more, it would have been more plausible. The next problem that leads into is the fact that we don't really know the main characters at all before the main plot starts. I did not really understand what he was trying to do with the main characters either. The main male protagonist is promoted multiple times for questionable reasons and spends most of the book/war romancing the main female character. Apparently being a general isn't too hard. His most uncomfortable scenes are with a 16 year female character that is brutally raped twice, but then immediately falls in love with and starts sleeping with an American soldier. Apparently, Conroy was a very prolific author, so I assume his books got better.

Eric Smith says

Good lord, what a truly mediocre book. Cartoonish characters, clunky dialog, gratingly bad love scenes, and name-dropping of historical figures are all much as expected. All that might be forgivable if the military history was at least plausible, but it descends into the worst kind of rah-rah pro-American jingoism, making the last 50 pages of the novel excruciating to read. U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

Mark says

One of the great problems with alternative history is the lack of imagination. All too often, the novels of the genre begin with a divergence, usually involving the Civil War or World War II, and lead to a result that is not unfamiliar to a student of our history. In this respect, Robert Conroy's book is a refreshing change of pace with its intriguing premise: what if the German kaiser had decided to attack the United States in an effort to take over its recently acquired colonies? As ideas go, it is imaginative enough to be refreshing, yet plausible enough to work. Conroy follows this up with a believable plot that details the consequences of this decision on the world and on the cast of characters he assembles.

Nevertheless, this is the limit of Conroy's achievement, as having avoided one pitfall he ends up stumbling into others. Though the plot is engaging the writing is not, as Conroy's insertion of details often gives passages the feel of a textbook. A similar problem exists with the characters; while his main hero and heroine are well fleshed out, the rest often come across as underdeveloped and stereotypical.

The greatest problem with Conroy's novel, though, is its lack of respect for the historical background. Though this might seem counter-intuitive in a novel of alternative history, it is one of the keys to a successful alternative history novel. Yet Conroy seems uninterested in this. All too often he infuses his characters with more modern sensibilities (such as attitudes towards blacks and immigrant Germans) which no event could

have created back then. Doing so robs them of their distinctive voice, and strong historical personalities such as Theodore Roosevelt seem to be little more than two-dimensional mouthpieces used to offer expositions on the plot. He also falls victim to name-dropping, introducing other famous figures no matter how implausible their participation in events might have been, apparently for no reason other than to give him an excuse to crowd his narrative with a “who’s-who” of historical characters.

As a consequence, the novel fails to live up to the promise of the plot. Readers drawn to the genre by the works of authors like Harry Turtledove will find Conroy’s novel a pale imitation of their best efforts. Though entertaining in some respects, it lacks the vivid evocation of an alternate past that makes such books compelling reading. I only hope that other, better writers of the field will be inspired to make similar bold leaps of the imagination when defining “what might have been.”

Benjamin Barnes says

Loved this book

Parts where incredibly graphic it was slow at first than Picked up!Several Believable Characters as I've Come To expect from Robert Conroy

Sid Sidner says

A fun read

A great yarn, well told. Lots of engaging characters. I learned a lot of strategy and tactics, some history and geography.

Brent says

Robert Conroy's first novel presents an engrossing historical fiction of a German invasion of New York by Kaiser Wilhelm 2. In an effort to expand Germany into a global empire by taking the recent US acquisitions of Cuba and the Philippines (among others), a German Army/Navy sneak attack forces the US to re-enlist Civil War generals, rely on international partnership with England, and quickly test a new military and Navy. Recommended.

Joe Boeke says

Most people realize that an alternative history novel (just like a Science Fiction novel) requires some ability, on the part of the reader, to suspend one's disbelief. A good, well written, story assists the reader in doing this. For me this is the hallmark not only of a good story but also a good writer. In the case of Robert Conroy's 1901: A Novel, the premise behind the story certainly was engaging enough (a punitive German invasion of the United States in the aftermath of the Spanish American War) for me to pick this up from the \$1 bin at my local used book seller. Not expecting great literature (it was in the \$1 bin for crying out loud) I

assumed that the subject matter would keep me reading... however, the execution by the author, Conroy, failed to deliver on the promise.

In other alternative history books that Conroy has written, he is praised for his historical research. However based on the conclusions that he drew from his "research" for this title I am highly suspicious of this praise for his other works. In the first two chapters Conroy sets the tone for 1901 by claiming that Germany had the second largest fleet (the largest belonging to Great Britain) in 1901. Regardless how you measure Germany's fleet, it wasn't just far behind Great Britain's at this point in history, but also the French Fleet and (prior to its destruction by the US Navy in the Spanish American War) possibly the Spanish Navy as well. Furthermore although the Imperial German Navy was a force to be reckoned with during the First World War (technically, organizationally and manpower-wise) in 1901 Kaiser Wilhelm II (and Admiral Tirpitz) was just embarking on their project to build a first class navy to rival his Grandmother Victoria's Royal Navy.

As I said in the opening of this review, alt-history requires some ability to suspend one's disbelief so if you can forgive Conroy's shoddy research on this point, his portrayal of Wilhelm as some kind of Hitler-esque villain and the Imperial German Army (and by extension the entire German nation) as mindless Nazis strains my disbelief faculties to the breaking point. In the post World War II world, it is easy to pick on the poor Germans. Hitler is the personification of evil and Conroy uses our own bias to create a cartoon like villain that will play upon our sympathies without having to work to hard to develop a real set of circumstances or characters to be the "bad guys" for the novel.

This is especially problematic when the French make a much better villain during this time period. The French still have a jealousy/dislike of Britain (still true in 1939 and probably so today as well) that dates back to when Angles, Franks, Saxons and Celts fought over the British Isles. France had a powerful navy which rivaled Britain's for most of the 19th century (and was certainly the second largest in 1901) not to mention that the French had overseas colonies in Africa, Asia and the Americas. However, there is some historical basis for German animosity towards the US in the wake of the Spanish American War (the German Navy and Dewey's Asiatic Fleet almost coming to blows after the Battle of Manila Bay as well as incidents in Samoa in the late 1880s).

Given these first two strikes I have to give props to Conroy for his use of former American Civil War generals as commanders for the US Army in 1901. This was certainly the case with two of the Spanish American War's more successful commanders Joe Wheeler and Fitzhugh Lee (who were both Confederate Generals during the American Civil War). Also, I believe that Conroy's "rehabilitation" of General James Longstreet (General Lee's right hand man after Stonewall Jackson died) in 1901 pre-dates most of the Longstreet apologetic histories that have come out in the last several years.

However, having these Generals use expletives like the sergeants who pushed me through my own basic training in the 1980s stretches credibility beyond the breaking point again. It is almost as if Conroy believes that all Southerners are rednecks, trailer trash or worse. I am certain that the modern "lost cause Confederate gentlemen" school of thought is just as flawed, but these generals were the aristocracy of the time and while they probably did swear they most certainly did not use modern expletives.

So if you consider that a 0-2 foul ball, the final strike against Conroy's work comes in his portrayal of the British Admiralty as scared of the "mighty" Imperial German Navy. To the point where they let the entire German fleet (auxiliaries and all) sail into the North Atlantic bound for an invasion of the United States, unchecked, unmolested and almost unconcerned (yes, the British provide some covert assistance to the US) is simply a "wave of the hand" to make the story work.

Couple this with uneven writing (which should have been fixed by the editor) and the melodramatic love story that seems like a tack on (to what purpose I am uncertain, because those scenes feel "Harlequin Romance Novel" to me) and this book is probably a 1 1/2 star book on my shelf. Conroy's authorship suffers when compared to Turtledove (the later is very good at writing character descriptions) and even though I liked (and related to) the main character, Patrick Mahan, Conroy's characterizations are quite one-dimensional and cardboard.

So what is the bonus star for (note: I'd rate the book 2.5 stars if GoodReads allowed)? Well, I think the premise of 1901 is interesting, if you strip away most of the "junk" noted above, there are some pretty decent short stories here -- which may have been how this book came about (a series of short stories or ideas by the author). With a little imagination and some better research this could have easily been a good read. As it is, the story wasn't much more than a cheap and partially entertaining way to spend a late evening plane flight.

Marcus Latham says

Enjoyable alternate history

Tony Held says

The plot of this novel had much merit, especially since Robert Conroy was inspired by actual plans made by Imperial Germany to invade the USA. But Conroy's novel soon runs around on one-dimensional fictional characters, cliched events and situations (including romances!)

Conroy also delights in killing off historical personalities. In this alternate history, William F. Halsey (then a midshipman at the US Naval Academy) and John Philip Holland (a pioneer designer of submarines) bite the dust. And Douglas MacArthur (then a West Point cadet) is severely wounded. (Why couldn't he have whittled down the ranks of his flat, boring fictional characters instead?)

Conroy also blows up half of Manhattan and has German troops set fire to Sagamore Hill, Teddy Roosevelt's Long Island estate. Even this does not inject a sense of pulse pounding drama into Conroy's narrative.

Speaking of historical characters, his depictions of the likes of William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Nelson Miles, and James Longstreet have promise at first, but in the end are as forgettable as his fictional characters, though his depiction of former Union General William F. "Baldy" Smith redeeming himself for a mistake he made at Petersburg during the Civil War is creative, and one of the precious few flashes of gripping alternate history Conroy displays.

In closing, I feel "1901" is a forgettable read that does no justice to its intriguing premise.

gargamelscat says

Intriguing idea but poorly executed with caricature as characterisation.

