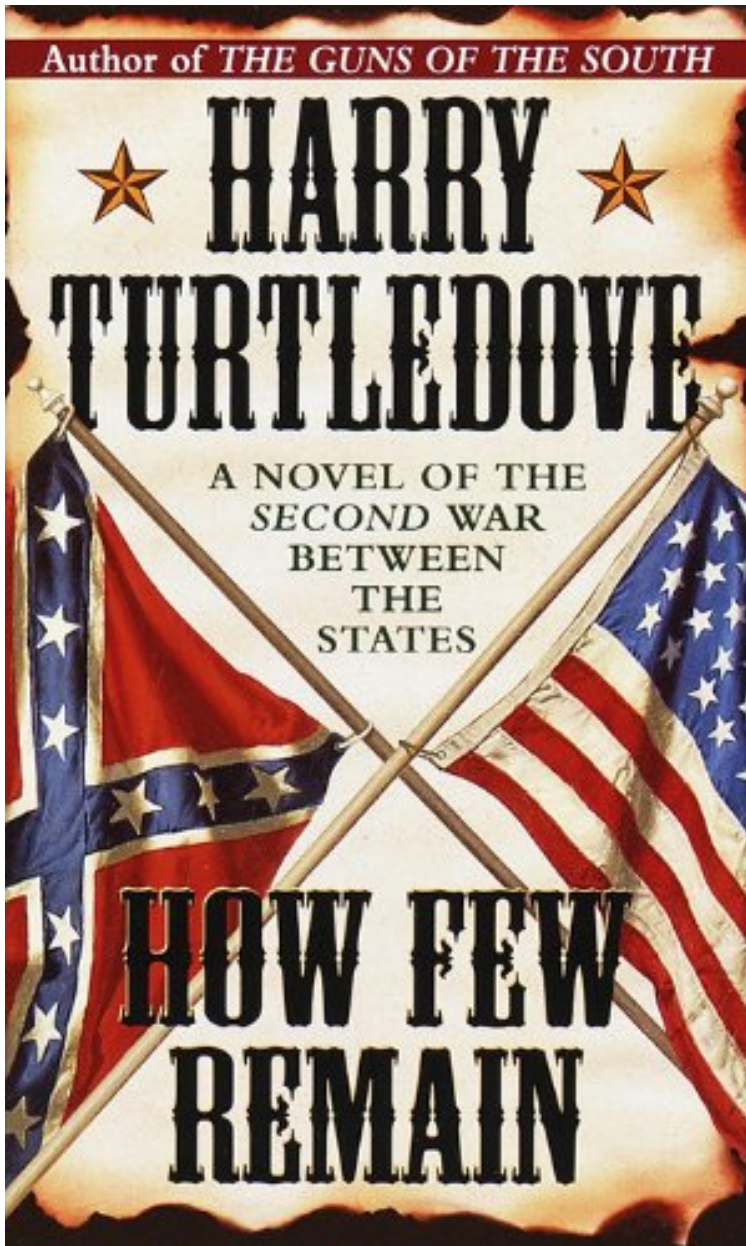


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How Few Remain



Par Harry Turtledove
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the master of alternate history comes an epic of the Second Civil War. It was an epoch of glory and success, of disaster and despair. Twenty years after the South won the Civil War, America writhed once more in the bloody throes of battle. Furious over the annexation of key Mexican territory, the United States declared total war against the Confederate States of America. And so, in 1883, the fragile peace was shattered. But this was a new kind of war, fought on a lawless frontier where the blue and gray battled not only each other, but the Apache, the outlaw, and even the redcoat. Along with France,

England entered the fray on the side of the South, with blockades and invasions from Canada. Out of this tragic struggle emerged figures great and small. The disgraced Abraham Lincoln crisscrossed the nation championing socialist ideals. Confederate cavalry leader Jeb Stuart sought to prevent wholesale slaughter in the desert Southwest, while cocky young Theodore Roosevelt and stodgy George Custer bickered over modern weapons--even as they drove the British back into western Canada. Thanks to the efforts of journalists like Samuel Clemens, the nation witnessed the clash of human dreams and passions. Confederate genius Stonewall Jackson again soared to the heights of military expertise, while the North's McClellan proved sadly undeserving of his once shining reputation as the "young Napoleon." For in the Second War Between the States, the times, the stakes, and the battle lines had changed . . . and so would history. Once again, Harry Turtledove has created a thoroughly engrossing alternate history novel, a profoundly original epic of blood and honor, courage and sacrifice, set amidst the raw beauty of young America's frontier wilderness. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt: Chapter One: 1881 Buffalo bones littered the prairie south of Fort Dodge, Kansas. Colonel George Custer gave them only the briefest glance. They seemed as natural a part of the landscape as had the buffalo themselves a decade before. Custer had killed his share of buffalo and more. Now he was after more dangerous game. He raised the Springfield carbine to his shoulder and fired at one of the Kiowas fleeing before him. The Indian, one of the rearmost of Satanta's raiding party, did not fall. Custer loaded another cartridge into the carbine's breech and fired again. Again, the shot was useless. The Kiowa turned on his pony for a Parthian shot. Fire and smoke belched from the muzzle of his rifle. The bullet kicked up a puff of dust ten or fifteen yards in front of Custer. He fired again, and so did the Kiowa. The Indian's Tredegar Works carbine, a close copy of the British Martini-Henry, had about the same performance as his own weapon. Both men missed once more. The Kiowa gave all his attention back to riding, bending low over his pony's neck and coaxing from the animal every bit of speed it had. "They're gaining on us, the blackhearted savages!" Custer shouted to his troopers, inhibited in language by the pledge his wife, Libbie, had finally succeeded in extracting from him. "Let me and a couple of the other boys with the fastest horses get out ahead of the troop and make 'em fight us till the rest of you can catch up," his brother suggested. "No, Tom. Wouldn't work, I'm afraid. They wouldn't fight--they'd just scatter like a covey of quail." "Damned cowards," Major Tom Custer growled. He was a younger, less flamboyant version of his brother, but no less ferocious in the field. "They bushwhack our farmers, then they run. If they want to come up into Kansas, let 'em fight like men once they're here." "They don't much want to fight," Custer said. "All they want to do is kill and burn and loot. That's easier, safer, and more profitable, too." "Give me the Sioux any day, up in Minnesota and Dakota and Wyoming," Tom Custer said. "They fought hard, and only a few of them ran away into Canada once we'd licked them." "And the Canadians disarmed the ones who did," Custer added. "I'll be--dashed if I like the Canadians, mind you, but they play the game the way it's supposed to be played." "It's cricket," Tom said, and Custer nodded. His younger brother pointed south. "We aren't going to catch them on our side of the line, Autie." "I can see that." George Custer scowled--at fate, not at the family nickname. After a moment, the scowl became a fierce grin. "All right, by jingo, maybe we won't catch them on our side of the line. We'll just have to catch them on theirs." Tom looked startled. "Are you sure?" "You'd best believe I'm sure." The excitement of the pursuit ran through Custer in a hot tide. Whatever consequences came from extending the pursuit, he'd worry about them later. Now all he wanted to do was teach the Kiowas a lesson even that sneaky old devil Satanta wouldn't forget any time soon. He shouted over to the regimental bugler: "Blow Pursuit." "Sir?" the bugler said, as surprised as Tom Custer had been. Then he grinned. "Yes, sir!" He raised the bugle to his lips. The bold and martial notes rang out across the plain. The men of the Fifth Cavalry Regiment needed a moment to grasp what that call implied. Then they howled like wolves. Some of them waved their broad-brimmed black felt hats in the air. From long experience, the Kiowas understood U.S. horn calls as well as any cavalry trooper. Their heads went up, as if they were game fear-ing it would be flushed from cover. That's what they are, all right, Custer thought. As often happened, Tom's thoughts ran in the same track as his own. "They won't duck back into their lair this time," his younger brother said. Now that the decision was made, Tom was all for it. They pounded past a farmhouse the Kiowas had burned in a raid a couple of years earlier. Custer recognized those ruins; they meant he was less than a mile from the border with the Indian Territory. Up ahead, the Kiowas squeezed still more from their ponies. Custer smiled savagely. That might get them over the line, but even those tough animals would start wearing down soon. "And then," he told the wind blowing tears from his eyes, "then they're mine, sure as McClellan belonged to Lee twenty years ago." He fired again at the Kiowas, and shouted in exultation as one of them slid from his horse's back and thudded to the ground, where, after rolling a couple of times, he

lay still. "Good shot," his brother said. "Hell of a good shot." "We've got 'em now," Custer said. The first Kiowas had to be over the line. He didn't care. "We won't let 'em get away. Every last redskin in that band is ours." How his men cheered! And then all of Custer's ferocious joy turned to ashes. Tom pointed off to the east, from which direction a squadron of cavalry was approaching at a fast trot. All the Kiowas were over the line by then. They reined in, whooping in their incomprehensible language. They knew they were safe. Custer knew it, too. Chasing the Kiowas into Indian Territory, punishing them, and then riding back into Kansas with no one but the Indians the wiser, was one thing. Doing it under the watchful eyes of that other cavalry squadron was something else again. Hating those horsemen, hating himself, Custer held his hand high to halt his men. They stopped on the Kansas side of the line. The approaching cavalymen wore hats and blouses of a cut not much different from those of Custer's troopers. Theirs, though, were gray, not the various shades of blue the U.S. cavalry used. And a couple of their officers, Custer saw, were in the new dirt-brown uniforms the Confederate States had adopted from the British. The limeys called that color khaki; to the Rebs, it was butternut. One of those Confederate officers rode toward Custer, waving as he moved forward. Custer waved back: come ahead. The Rebel captain proved to be a fresh-faced fellow in his twenties; he would have been wearing short pants during the War of Secession. Seeing him made Custer feel every one of his forty-one years. "Good mornin' to you, Colonel," the captain drawled, nodding in a way that looked friendly enough. "You weren't planning on riding over the international border by any chance, were you?" "If I was, you'll never prove it, Captain--" Custer tried for cool detachment. What came out was a frustrated snarl. By the way the Confederate cavalryman smiled, he heard that frustration--heard it and relished it. He bowed in the saddle. The Rebs were always polite as cats ... and always ready to claw, too. "I'm Jethro Weathers, Colonel," he said. "And you're right--I'll never prove it. But you and the United States would have been embarrassed if I'd come along half an hour later and found your men inside the territory of the Confederate States." He sounded disappointed he and his troopers hadn't caught Custer in flagrante delicto. Custer's frustration boiled into fury: "If your government would keep those murdering redskinned savages on your side of the border, we wouldn't want to go over yonder"--he waved south, into Indian Territory--"and give 'em what they deserve." "Why, Colonel," Captain Weathers said, amusement in his voice, "I have no proof at all those Kiowas ever entered the territory of the United States. As far as I can see, you were leading an unprovoked punitive expedition into a foreign country. Richmond would see things the same way, I'm sure. So would London. So would Paris." Tom Custer spoke up: "There's a dead Kiowa, maybe half a mile north of here." That didn't faze Weathers a bit: "For all I know, you've already been into the Confederate States, murdered the poor fellow, and then hauled him back into the USA to justify raiding Confederate soil." A flush spread up Custer's face; his ears went hot at the sheer effrontery of that. "You--dashed Rebs will pay one day for giving the redskins guns and letting them come up and raid white men's farms whenever it strikes their fancy." "This is our territory, Colonel," Captain Weathers said, amused no more. "We shall defend it against the incursion of a foreign power--by which I mean the United States. And you have no call--none, sir, none whatever--to get up on your high horse and tell me what my country ought and ought not to be doing, especially since the United States harbor swarms of Comanches in New Mexico and turn them loose against west Texas whenever it strikes your fancy." "We didn't start that until those outrages in Kansas grew too oppressive to ignore," Custer answered. "Why, on this very raid--this raid you have the gall to deny--the savages made two white women minister to their animal lusts, then cut their throats and worked other dreadful indignities upon their bare and abused bodies." "You think the Comanches don't do that in Texas?" Captain Weathers returned. "And the way I heard it, Colonel, they started doing it there first." Custer scowled. "We killed off the buffalo to deny the Kiowas a livelihood, and you gave them cattle to take up the slack." "The Comanches are herding cattle these days, too." Weathers made as if to go back to his troopers, who waited inside Confederate territory. "I see no point to continuing this discussion. Good day, sir." "Wait," Custer said, and the Confederate captain, polite still, waited. Breathing heavily, Custer went on, "When our two nations separated, I had a great deal of sympathy and friendship for many of the men who found high rank in the Army of the Confederate States. I hoped and believed that, even though we were two, we could share this continent in peace." "And so we have," Jethro Weathers said. "There is no war between my country and yours, Colonel." "Not now," Custer agreed. "Not yet. But you will force one upon us if you continue with this arrogant policy of yours here in the West. The irritations will grow too great, and then--" "Don't speak to me of arrogance," Weathers broke in. "Don't speak to me of irritation, not when you Yankees have finally gone and put another one of those God-damned Black Republicans in the White House." "Blaine's only been in office a month, but he's already shown he's not nearly so bad as Lincoln

was," Custer answered, "and he's not your business anyhow, any more than Longstreet's ours." "Blaine talks big," the Confederate captain answered. "People who talk big get to thinking they can act big. You talked about war, Colonel. If your James G. Blaine thinks you Yankees can lick us now when you couldn't do it twenty years ago, he'd better think twice. And if you think you can ride over the line into Indian Territory whenever it strikes your fancy, you'd better think twice, too, Colonel." When Weathers moved to ride back to his squadron this time, Custer said not a word. He stared after the Indians whom Weathers' timely arrival had saved. His right hand folded into a fist inside its leather gauntlet. He pounded it down on his thigh, hard, once, twice, three times. His lips shaped a silent word. It might have been dash. It might not.

From the Hardcover edition.

Revue de presse With shocking vividness, Turtledove demonstrates the extreme fragility of our modern world . . . This is state-of-the-art alternate history, nothing less (Publishers Weekly on HOW FEW REMAIN)) Turtledove plays heady games with actual history, scattering object lessons and bitter ironies along the way. Strong, complex characters against a sweeping alt-historical background. (Kirkus on RETURN ENGAGEMENTS) Good fun. It has an authentic speculative quality, energy and dash. (Time Out on A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE) Engrossing ... definitely the work of one of alternate history's authentic modern masters . . . totally fascinating. (Booklist on THE GREAT WAR series)