



Pages from the Textbook of Alternate History

Phong Nguyen

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At critical moments in world history, every political, spiritual, and cultural leader foresaw a different destiny. Columbus planned a Western sea route to Asia; Hitler applied to art school twice; Joan of Arc prophesied that she would become a mother. It is out of their failures that history itself is made. But what if the history-makers succeeded in the fulfillment of their best-laid plans? In **Pages from the Textbook of Alternate History**, Phong Nguyen explores a myriad of pasts in which these icons of history made a different choice, and got what they wished for.

Pages from the Textbook of Alternate History Details

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Author : Phong Nguyen

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Amy says

For any fan of alternative histories, it is all about the possibilities. This book delves into numerous different areas of history and gives the reader the chance to let their own imaginations expand on the worlds the author has created for us. true to it's title, it presents these alternate histories in textbook format, with questions to guide analysis or ignite the imagination. The more you know the history of our world, the more you appreciate and enjoy the differences the author presents.

In compliance with FTC guidelines, i did receive this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Ambrose Miles says

I started this book as a skeptic. Anyone can fiddle around with history. Listen to anyone's retelling of an event unseen, but heard about. Listen to them spin the story through their own bias's and passions. In the end, did the event really unfold the way it was told? Who knows the truth? A consensus of experts? Documented eye-witnessed accounts? Or the infamous "They say", the one referred to in a lot of stories as the one who said.(The one who knows weather, sports, trivia and history.)Our author uses both the consensus track and the eye-witnessed venue. And instead of "They say", he drops names, big names, of those who ought to know. And there are footnotes. Who doesn't love footnotes to make things real? A skeptic no longer, I found the stories plausible and possibly possible. It is a well researched and well written book, stories told with a straight face, except for the last story about and American king named George. This was a free book sent by the author for review.

Stef says

won on goodreads

I liked the writing style. The stories are thoughtful and entertaining. I enjoyed this book very much.

Imber says

Pages from the Textbook of Alternate History by Phong Nguyen is a very unique book. As I read the accounts of different historical figures, I found them both humorous and horrifying. All in all, it is incredibly imaginative. I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Roger Brunyate says

Varying Degrees of Success

This is a novel, of course, or more like a set of stories. The publisher proclaims that all the characters are entirely fictitious, yet they have well-known names: Cheops, Siddhartha, Plato, Jesus, Joan of Arc, Columbus, John Smith, Ben Franklin, Napoleon, Hitler, Ho Chi Minh, Einstein, George W. Bush. And many of the facts are as we know them; it is just that the things we mostly know them for never come to pass. So Cheops rejects the design for a pyramid, Barabbas is crucified instead of Jesus, John Smith is hanged after all, and Ho Chi Minh remains in America to found a frozen-food empire. [All these outcomes, incidentally, are declared either in the title or first paragraph of each history; these are not spoilers.] A rather silly prologue explains how this "textbook" (complete with provocative questions for class discussion after each episode) came into being; the actual biographies are not so silly—just not uniformly effective.

I started by diving right into the story of Jesus, "a minor prophet from the Hebrew Bible," as this version would have it. For, you see, he was denied his crucifixion. When Pilate offers the crowd a choice, Judas manages to rouse them to condemn Barabbas, a betrayal that Jesus regards as greater than anything he might have done the day before. It is a striking piece of historical subversion that nonetheless manages to ask significant questions about religious belief, as most of the best fictionalizations of Jesus' life have done. But it worked for me since, whatever I now believe, I know the Bible well—much better than any of the other stories that Phong Nguyen inverts here.

And that is the trouble. If you know the original, Nguyen's recensions can be interesting or occasionally funny, though there are few epiphanies. But almost none of the chapters stand up as stories in their own right; they have dimension only when seen in perspective against the original. I did not recognize Cheops under his Egyptian name, Khufu, and the story of him testing out various types of funeral just seemed like an empty fable. I recognized Plato from his style of discourse, but had little knowledge of him in the political world. Since the story of Joan of Arc is entirely concerned with the period after the real Joan was burned, there was no historical record to be altered, but I found little intrinsic interest in the story of her eventual loss of virginity. The story of Einstein's involvement with the Manhattan Project did contain some interesting scientific observation, though it was unclear exactly how it resulted in the failure of the bomb on Hiroshima. But I greatly enjoyed the final story, "The Coronation of King George," in which Nguyen amusingly reworks an episode from *Richard III*, with W as the questionable hero.

All in all, a mixed bag, worth maybe a laugh or two, especially for readers with a broader cultural knowledge than my own.

Sara Habein says

I think I would have gotten more out of this book had I been familiar with all of the historical figures discussed. However, if one is a history nerd who enjoys thinking about *What might have been*, then I'd recommend this odd, short-ish book. True to its name, there are even textbook-like questions at the end of each chapter. Despite this not being entirely for me, I'm still glad I gave it a look.

(Review also appears at Persephone Magazine.)

Bridget Tracy says

I really enjoyed this book by the end, but it took me awhile to get into it. I would probably give it 3 1/2 stars simply because the epilogue was absolutely hilarious, and there were a few chapters that I really did enjoy. However, I wasn't entirely familiar with all of the historical events and figures chronicled here, so I sometimes had a hard time distinguishing the fact from fiction. This book would be great for anyone who knows history really well.
