



Final Impact

John Birmingham

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“The action is nonstop, the characters very real—and very different from each other—and, to coin a phrase, it makes you think.”

—S. M. Stirling, author of *Island in the Sea of Time*

In the year 2021 a multinational fleet—experimenting with untested weapons technology—pitched through time, crash-landing in 1942. The world is thrown into chaos as Roosevelt, Hitler, Churchill, Tojo, and Stalin scramble to adapt to new, high-tech killing tools, and twenty-first-century ways of war.

For “uptimers” like Britain’s Prince Harry and the men and women who serve aboard the supercarrier USS Hillary Clinton, war is a constant struggle with their own downtime allies, who are mired in ignorance and bigotry.

As the Allies counter the Nazi assault and set off for the coast of France, Japan begins to buckle, soon every battle will be played out in a lethal dance of might and intelligence, unholy alliances and desperate gambles, and each clash will be fought with the ultimate weapon; knowledge from the future.

Thanks to the historical records, all sides know that two superpowers will emerge, while the losers will be pounded into submission. But time has shifted on its axis, so none know who will survive, or how peace will take hold in a world turned upside down. These are the questions that John Birmingham brilliantly answers in his critically acclaimed adventure of war and imagination.

Praise for John Birmingham’s Weapons of Choice

“Birmingham’s enthralling battleground mixes provocative historical fiction and socially conscious futurism.”

—Entertainment Weekly

“High-tech intrigue and suspense similar to the works of Tom Clancy.”

—Library Journal

Final Impact Details

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From Reader Review Final Impact for online ebook

Nicci says

I really enjoyed reading this series consisting of Weapons of Choice, Designated Targets, and Final Impact. The format is setup like a diary with date and time, a leading topic sentence in metaphoric style to start the scene. Then there is the background information immersed in the details of the actual events giving the readers a flavor of actions. The author introduced a slightly different format for Book Two: Designated Targets. I read some complaints some readers missed the format of the first book. It came back with the third and last of the series.

What is so cool about the American led Multinational 21st ships was the meeting its 1942 counterpart, the US Task Force heading to Midway to fight the Japanese navy. The 21st ships had built in Combat Intelligent technology. Combat units spoke with a particular personality. The unit on HMS Trident was named POSH. Have the capacity to design defensive attacks without human interference, as with the situation of the armada crew being unconscious resulting from transportation through the wormhole.

The not so cool but granted awesome for a science fiction story, the CI units practically wiped out the US Task Force with the wonder of laser rays, rockets, and missiles multitasked to hit multiple targets. Of course, once the commanders of the 21st became conscious and aware of the situation, they immediately obliged the 21st armada to the Americans to continue the fight in WW II.

To be fair and to level the playing field, Japan, Germany, and Russia captured their own 21st century ships to their joy and detriment. Searching through historical archives, they discovered they would lose the war. Yeah, that includes Russia's cold war with the US.

They will set about changing history, which ultimately leads them straight to a predetermined fate.

Meanwhile, American society in the 40's must contend with a group from the 21st century that follows a difference set of laws and social values. On those ships, blacks, Hispanics, Asians (especially Japanese,) women, people of any color, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation are in position of authority as part of the of the year 2021 social construct. One can imagine the major undertaking of acceptance or more likely unacceptable attitudes towards these people. Imagine a Japanese Commander committing horrible crimes against women and children taking a terrible beating from a **woman** naval security officer. Or the Eurasian, Captain Karen Halabi, Royal Navy, telling Commander Spruance(WWII Task Force Commander of Midway,) "...you wouldn't have caught Nagumo with his pants down around his ankles and his cock on the chopping block."

His reaction: *God Help us, are all the women from her day like this?*

Hee, yes we are like that.

Enjoy!

Sebastien says

Wow. Seriously. What a great series.

John Birmingham has a style that I appreciate, even though his version of tech-from-the-future-that-never-would-have-ended-up-coming-true didn't work out.

For example, this is in the book: *"Thank you," said Himmler, who found the Windows file management system a diabolical confoundment. And they accuse me of crimes against humanity, he thought as he settled himself in at his desk. Wilhelm Gates, you are a beast, and your family will pay.*

That, as well as Stalin complaining that he doesn't want his advisors quoting old Wikipedia articles at him, really do something for the adult nerd in me.

Birmingham, strangely enough, seemingly has an obsession with balls. Take the following line: *Beria could imagine the dread Malenkov was experiencing, as if the cold finger of a dead man had been laid at the base of the spine, making the heart lurch and the balls contract upward.* References to balls occur several times in the book. I appreciate the creativity of his descriptions, but they seem to overwhelmingly have to do with testicles.

Now, as much as I adored this book, there were some things that peeved me. For example, a character moves to Canada, but Birmingham can't be arsed to pick a town - ANY town - in Canada for the character to move to. He just moves to Canada. You know, that giant country, the second largest one on earth? But in most other sections of the book, Birmingham specifies what part of Siberia, Los Angeles, Hawaii, etc, that the characters are in, including whether they're traveling over land, sea, or air. What gives?

I know I have a tendency to gripe about inane, ridiculously dumb things, and this certainly is one, but this is just a testament to how good this book is. This was basically all I could find to complain about. I mean, the uptimers nickname the first atom bomb Big Ugly Fat Fucker (once again nodding at Turtledove) instead of Fat Man. How can you hate this book?

Birmingham is really good at this and I'm glad I stumbled into this series.

Paul says

A bit disappointed really. Started out with a great concept and an interesting look at the cultural and social interactions involved in the 'Transition'. By halfway through book 2 and all of book 3 I felt an inevitable drive towards a minimalist ending....good guys win, bad guys lose and we can all have a good night sleep. I had such high expectations and feel that this series of books is an opportunity lost for a great exploration of alternative realities.

Stephen says

4.0 to 4.5 stars. As a whole, this series is an incredible achievement and I HIGHLY RECOMMEND it to anyone who likes military fiction. This last novel, while very good, was not quite as good as the first two novels in the series (which I thought were AMAZING). Even so, it was a very satisfying ending and left the

door open for the author to come back to this "alternative" history in the future. I hope he does!!!

David says

The war for the future has begun

I will start by saying that I love alternate history. Harry Turtledove is in my top 5 authors. This trilogy by John Birmingham is as gripping to me as the Worldwar series was. The way the story moved ahead at a brisk pace without a lot of embellishments was just right. Characters were hard because of the future they came from but they have some humanity. I like how historical characters were portrayed and shocked at what happened to some. One has to suspend some disbelief when reading books like this and for some things it was kind of hard (for example that it took two years from arrival in the past to build a B-52). I really enjoyed the series, highly recommended.

Mieczyslaw Kasprzyk says

The Axis of Time series is superb, not just because of John Birmingham's ability to pack his writing with tension and excitement but also with the way he keeps us on edge throughout. You think you know how things are going to work out but you're left with enough doubts and misgivings that you just have to carry on to the next page, the next chapter... The outcome isn't predictable; there is enough mayhem and destruction, intrigue and chaos (enough cliffs to hang from by your fingernails!) that you really can't be sure... People die, battles are fought... and the arrival of the fleet from the future has muddied the water so much that you have to question that it is a better world... no, you KNOW that it isn't. There is deep-rooted suspicion of these men and women of the future which interferes with the creation of a (possibly) better world.

Superb trilogy.

Garth says

Fun if you enjoy a 1% Sci-Fi, 99% alternative history mix.

Lots of military action as WWII forces are injected with future military and communications technology.

Abounds in stereotypes, but what the hell.

Allen Garvin says

Final book in a trilogy that included Weapons of Choice and Designated Targets. A fleet from 2020 gets thrown back in time to 1942 right before Midway. The first two books were very intelligent, but were basically alternative-history-technothrillers. This last one is darker and ambivalent. It's two years since the previous book. At the end of the last, the Soviets and Germans agreed to a cease fire because of the threat of the western democracies. Now, 2 years later, the Japanese invaded Australia and Hawaii, but got repelled. The allied invasion into France is just starting. Several characters have died in the meantime. The darker side of the "good guys" is on display here. No qualms about torturing or humiliating their enemies, or killing in the cold blood. Admiral Kolhammer manipulates politics and goes behind Roosevelt's back. Roosevelt

comes across as peevish and unwilling to look at the long term. Duffy is haunted by the ruin of her contemporary marriage and deaths of her friends. Halfway through the book, the Soviets get the bomb first and use it on Lodz. The Germans retaliate with chemical and biological weapons. Then the US drops 3 bombs on Berlin. The future will be vastly different, but instead of giving some hints as to how, the novel ends with personal notes about several of the characters returning to civilian life. Interesting, but ultimately disappointing end to a trilogy that started so great.

Jeff says

Axis of Time Trilogy: a Next Generation United States Carrier Battle Group (next generation from the one in which we currently inhabit) ripped out of time from fighting a World War on Terrorism and Terrorist states and plopped down right in the middle of the Pacific Ocean in World War II.

An unsatisfactory conclusion to the otherwise acceptable alt-history trilogy by John Birmingham. The ending was far too rushed. Several compelling story lines that had been nurtured in the first two books were simply abandoned in this one; seemingly for the sake of "getting to the good stuff", ie: the very graphic ahead-of-its-time introduction of the world to the nuclear age. It felt like three more books' worth of material was crammed into this one volume.

The Socio-political changes one would expect due to the deposit of a slice of fully-integrated "future America" - seismic in any society, but even more so in a pre-Jim Crow United States - seemed also to have been given short shrift in this book, abnegating the promise of the first two.

Characterizations mostly coast along from the first two books, as no major characters are introduced in this installment; or at least none who don't immediately die in variously gruesome ways.

The only thing that saves this final novel is the action; and even that is somewhat formulaic, with future technology standing in as a Deus Ex Machina device far too often.

Darcy says

When I first started Final Impact I thought I had somehow made a mistake and missed an entry in the series. When part 2 ended, the Japanese had just taken Hawaii and yet this story commences after the state was retaken by the allies, along with some other developments. Once assured that I did not miss anything I plowed onwards and gradually had the salient details unveiled as the 3rd part progressed. Other than that narrative hic-cup this entry continues with the same pacing and thrills that Mr. Birmingham had previously established.

I very much enjoyed the approach taken with these books and also with the conclusion as it was not where I thought this saga would end up. I choose the word saga, as I do not believe this will be the end of the story since the world created has much more potential. Overall I thought the author was true to his characters and that the conflicts and resolutions were in keeping with the combatants at the time. On a side note, without giving it away, I thought for sure I knew who the guilty party was regarding an atrocity committed in part I, but as usual, I was wrong. (That entire story line could make an interesting read on its own).

This is an excellent alternative history series and I was very glad I purchased them. I am moving on to Stalin's Hammer, which I understand to be more of a, "set in the same universe," type of story more so than a sequel, but I do not care. If John Birmingham wrote it, I am sure it will be terrific!

Neil says

Thots so far:

I do like how the author has mixed 'old' tech with the 'new' [modern] tech in the series, especially this book. He has done a good job of it so far.

I also like how the author has included dates with each chapter. I think it helps the narrative; it helps create a sense of what is happening and how much time has elapsed. The first two books did not have this 'feature' and it showed.

It bugs me to no end that the Allies 'are so far behind' in the technological race [as it were] and yet the Germans and Russians 'are so far ahead' with no justification for it. This novel takes place eighteen months [nearly two years] after the second novel; it is during the time when America's industrial base is geared up for wartime production, yet it seems to have made no difference. Yet the Russians are supposed to have created advanced testing centers out in the middle of nowhere and created advanced tech faster than the rest of the world? Not to come across as judgmental, but this is the hardest part of the book to swallow, and it is kind of ruining it for me.

I'm about halfway through the book - I figure I should finish it in the next day or so. Hopefully it gets better.

Oooooh, that was a dirty trick! But well played! (view spoiler)

"Best Scene of the Book" so far: (view spoiler)

Well, I was pleasantly surprised by this book. I actually 'liked' it more, by the end, than I did the second book and even the first book. I liked it enough to give it three stars. Maybe it has to do with (view spoiler) being (view spoiler) too cool, though, or with (view spoiler) 'making things right' [so to speak]. I still do not agree with the 'ultimate ending' to the book, personally (view spoiler).

It was an odd book, for being about World War II. Obviously the book could not have an overall broad focus; we only get snippets letting us know that the war is still being fought in other parts of the globe. It was so 'focused' in its narrative that it made it seem like the War had devolved to specific locales and nowhere else. If it were not for those snippets, then it would no longer have seemed to have been a global conflict any longer.

I did appreciate that it was not so focused on the 'political agendas' of the author like the first two books. The second book seemed to bog down in the minutia of 'civilian life' like the first book did, ignoring the fact that a war was going on. The uptimers, while being the 'saviors' of the world [as it were] were shown to have their own foibles and weaknesses and imperfections, which was 'nice' on the one hand. There did not seem to be as many consequences for their actions, though, when they disobeyed orders and 'took the law into their own hands' because it was more expedient to do so.

I was actually "sad" [disappointed] at one point in the book (view spoiler).

I guess it was a decent series. Eighteen months did pass between the second and third book, so perhaps the Russian improvements were more feasible than I give them credit for. It just seemed like the United States still had one hand tied behind its back in the narrative whereas the Nazis and the Communists had everything going their way [for a while]. Obviously, it had to stop for the Nazis, as they still are shown as losing the War.

(view spoiler)

(view spoiler)

(view spoiler)

I am glad that I finished the series. It ended on a better note than I thought it would [based on the first two books in the series and how they bogged down on stupid details that really had nothing to do with the story].

Adam Whitehead says

World War 2.3: Final Impact is the conclusion to the Axis of Time trilogy, following Weapons of Choice and Designated Targets. Those books chronicled how, in the year 2021, a UN multinational carrier taskforce was deployed to drive a terrorist insurgency out of Jakarta. Unfortunately, a nearby scientific vessel undertaking experiments into quantum tunnelling accidentally opened a wormhole through space and time, dumping the entire fleet on top of Admiral Spruance's US Navy fleet sailing to relieve Midway in the summer of 1942. With no way home, the UN force's presence rapidly changed the course of the Second World War.

The final novel opens in the late spring of 1944. Both the Axis and Allies are now equipped with considerable technological advances gleaned from the ships from the future. Jet aircraft fight on both sides, and the UN taskforce's immense AWACS and radar capabilities provide the Allies with considerable tactical and intelligence advantages over the enemy. Germany and Japan made alterations to their strategies after capturing some of the ships from the future themselves and these paid off in the short term, with Germany and the USSR concluding a cynical peace and Japan successfully invading Australia and occupying Hawaii. Driven by their superior economic base, however, the Allies are now resurgent, having retaken Hawaii and defeated a German invasion of Britain before preparing their own, improved version of D-Day. The Allies, the Germans and the Russians are now in their own, frantic races to complete the atom bomb before the others, for whoever develops a nuclear arsenal the earliest will likely be the side that wins the war.

Final Impact marks a solid conclusion to the trilogy, although unfortunately some of the more interesting elements that were being developed in Designated Targets seem to have been scaled back. The sociological ramifications of the arrival of the ships from the future continue to be examined, but not quite so cleverly as in the previous volume. The sheer mass of data that the people of the 1940s would have to absorb is overwhelming and you can't help but feel that Birmingham occasionally misses out on a few interesting possibilities (although a scene where John Kennedy quietly arranges for a young Lee Harvey Oswald to be taken into state care is a nice touch). However, with the need to bring this alternate Second World War to a conclusion the sacrificing of some of the quieter elements in favour of the main storyline is understandable.

This also explains the somewhat jarring leap ahead of more than a year since the end of Book 2. Several major characters die off-page between the two books, and given the ending of Book 2 it is a surprise to find Hawaii already back in Allied hands. Birmingham obviously felt that expanding on these elements would expand the series to four books or more and I certainly understand him wanting to avoid that.

Final Impact marks a solid ending to the series, with the war rapidly winding down after the nukes start being deployed. Birmingham treats these weapons as the terrible forces they are (some military authors, Turtledove particularly comes to mind, seem to love hurling them around with almost gleeful abandon) and the impact of their use is made clear. The ending is also not particularly neat. The USSR emerges from the war far stronger than it did in real life, with the threat of a real 'hot war' with the Allies seemingly much greater than in reality, but that is not part of the story that the author is telling, so that element is left dangling. As with the prior books, the author mixes action with intriguing historical speculation with solid characterisation and a fascinating contrast of the morales and attitudes of the two time periods: the 'uptimers' are far more inured to war and suffering after twenty years of warfare, whilst the 'downtimers' are prepared to accept far vaster civilian casualties to achieve victory. There is also plenty of humour to be mined, such as SAS commander Harry Windsor having an amusing conversation with his 16-year-old grandmother or disco becoming popular thirty years ahead of schedule, as well as interesting side-effects of the transition, such as questions over who has the copyright on films yet to be made by directors and actors yet to be born.

Final Impact (****) is a solid and worthwhile conclusion to this intriguing trilogy. It is available in the UK from Penguin and in the USA from Del Rey.

Tim Hicks says

Third of three in the Axis of Time series. It's a good fast read. I suspect it was researched thoroughly but written hastily.

Some characters are well developed, others are cardboard caricatures. Admiral King continues so be so ludicrous that I want to throw the book across the room every time he appears. Kolhammer and Jones are impossibly competent in a Heinleinesque way; perhaps it's a tribute.

Author was careful to explain how ship A could communicate with ship B 200 miles away, but didn't tell us how they pulled off a worldwide videoconference without having satellites, especially when he explicitly mentions their lack a few pages later.

At the end, they are talking about dividing Japan. We're told that the Good Guys will get Tokyo, as if that matters when the city was completely destroyed about ten pages earlier.

There's some sloppy editing. A character struggles to breath (not breathe); the Japanese missiles are sometimes Ohkas, sometimes Okhas; and there wee several other sloppy bits that a copy editor should have caught.

It's military porn. I understand that there's an audience for that. Things happen that need to happen, and in reasonably plausible ways, but as guts hang out, people are turned to a "pink mist", and gory deaths abound, I get the feeling that the author was enjoying himself a little too much; if he were reading the book to us he'd say, "Hoo-hah, here comes a juicy bit!"

If the world of sci-fi is a month's worth of different meals, this is a container of fairly good fries from a roadside takeout. You eat them all, and they're tasty, but later you wonder if you couldn't have used the day's calories better.

Louise Potterton says

could keep going! great series

Celesthe Story says

Mind bending

I read many, many, many books - John Birmingham pulls you in after the first chapter and doesn't let you go until the very end. This leaves you wondering where to now? I have only read the trilogy and I'm looking forward to the other offshoots to the series
