

alternate history of the us

A Comprehensive Guide to Crafting Compelling Alternate Histories of the US

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Summary: This guide delves into the art and craft of writing compelling alternate histories of the US, examining best practices for research, narrative construction, and avoiding common pitfalls. It provides a framework for creating believable and engaging narratives while staying grounded in historical context, exploring the ethical considerations of such work, and offering insights into how to effectively market and share these captivating stories.

I. Understanding the Foundation: Research and Historical Accuracy in Alternate Histories of the US

The allure of "what if" scenarios is undeniable. Alternate histories of the US allow us to explore the butterfly effect of crucial historical events, revealing potential paths not taken. However, crafting a compelling alternate history demands a rigorous foundation in actual history. Before diverging from established facts, thorough research is paramount. Understanding the political, social, economic, and technological context of the chosen period is crucial. An alternate history of the US built on shaky historical ground will quickly lose credibility.

II. Identifying Pivotal Points for Divergence in an Alternate History of the US

Choosing the right point of divergence is crucial. This is the "what if" moment that sets your alternate history in motion. It should be a significant event with far-reaching consequences, offering ample

opportunity for exploring cascading changes. For instance, consider:

The Civil War: What if the South had won? How would this have impacted the development of the US, its relationship with the rest of the world, and the very fabric of American identity?

The assassination of JFK: Exploring a world where Kennedy survived or a different individual became president could yield fascinating results, impacting the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and domestic policies.

The 1968 election: A Nixon defeat, a Wallace victory, or a Humphrey landslide would have dramatically reshaped the American political landscape.

Choosing a pivotal point and carefully considering its ramifications is essential for creating a believable alternate history of the US.

III. Crafting a Coherent Narrative: Maintaining Internal Consistency

Once the point of divergence is established, consistency is key. The changes introduced must have logical consequences, rippling through the subsequent historical timeline. Unforeseen consequences should be explored, creating a believable chain reaction. Inconsistencies break immersion and undermine the reader's suspension of disbelief. Careful world-building is essential, ensuring that every aspect of your alternate US, from its political structure to its social norms, is internally consistent.

IV. Avoiding Common Pitfalls in Alternate Histories of the US

Several common pitfalls can derail even the most promising alternate history:

Ignoring unintended consequences: A simple change can have unforeseen, wide-ranging impacts that are often overlooked.

Mary Sue/Gary Stu characters: Avoid overly perfect or unrealistic protagonists who easily overcome every obstacle.

Deus ex machina: Reliance on improbable events to resolve conflicts weakens the narrative.

Anachronisms: Incorporating elements from the wrong time period undermines credibility.

Ignoring the nuances of human behavior: People don't always act rationally, and your alternate history should reflect that.

V. The Ethical Considerations of Alternate Histories of the US

Alternate history should be approached with sensitivity. While exploring "what if" scenarios can be insightful, it's crucial to avoid trivializing real-world suffering or promoting harmful ideologies. It is vital to handle sensitive topics with respect and historical accuracy, never using the format to justify prejudiced or revisionist viewpoints.

VI. Marketing and Sharing Your Alternate History of the US

Whether you're writing fiction or non-fiction, effective marketing is crucial. Engage your target

audience through social media, writing blogs, and participating in relevant online communities. Building an online presence helps expand the reach of your work and fosters engagement with potential readers.

Conclusion

Crafting a compelling alternate history of the US requires careful planning, rigorous research, and a deep understanding of historical context. By following best practices and avoiding common pitfalls, you can create engaging and thought-provoking narratives that explore the "what ifs" of American history while maintaining historical credibility and ethical responsibility.

FAQs

1. What is the difference between alternate history and historical fiction? Alternate history focuses on a divergence from established historical events, whereas historical fiction uses a real historical setting as a backdrop for a fictional narrative.
1. How can I research effectively for an alternate history of the US? Utilize primary and secondary sources, focusing on the period you are exploring. Consult academic journals, books, archives, and other relevant resources.
1. What makes a good point of divergence for an alternate history of the US? A good point of divergence is a significant event with far-reaching consequences that offers a compelling "what if" scenario.
1. How do I maintain internal consistency in my alternate history? Carefully consider the ripple effects of your point of divergence, ensuring that your narrative remains logically consistent.
1. How can I avoid creating unrealistic characters in my alternate history? Ground your characters in historical context, giving them believable motivations and flaws.
1. How can I ensure my alternate history is ethically sound? Avoid trivializing suffering, promoting harmful ideologies, and handle sensitive topics with care and respect.

1. What are some popular examples of alternate histories of the US? Examples include "The Man in the High Castle" by Philip K. Dick and various works exploring the consequences of a Confederate victory in the Civil War.
1. Where can I find feedback on my alternate history of the US? Join online writing communities, attend writing workshops, or seek feedback from beta readers.
1. How can I market my alternate history of the US effectively? Utilize social media, blogging, and online writing platforms to reach potential readers and build an online presence.

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alternate history of the us: *The Disunited States of America* Harry Turtledove, 2013-10-02 Justin's having the worst trip ever. He and his mother are Time Traders, traveling undercover to different alternate realities of Earth so they can take valuable resources back to their own timeline. In some of these worlds, Germany won World War I or the world has been destroyed by nuclear

warfare. Justin and his mother are in an America that never became the United States: each state is like a country, and many of them are at war with one another. Their mission takes them to Virginia, which is on the verge of bloody violence with Ohio. Beckie is from California and, like the rest of her world, is unaware that Time Traders exist. The only reason she's in small-town Virginia is because her grandmother dragged her there to visit old relatives. Beckie is just as horrified by the violence and racism of the alternate Virginia as Justin is, and the two are drawn to each other. But when full-fledged war breaks out between Ohio and Virginia, including a biologically designed plague, will either of them manage to get back home? Forget about home: will they make it out alive?

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alternate history of the us: *Underground Airlines* Ben H. Winters, 2016-07-05 The bestselling book that asks the question: what would present-day America look like if the Civil War never happened? A New York Times bestseller; a Goodreads Choice finalist; named one of the Best Books of the Year by NPR, Slate, Publishers Weekly, Hudson Bookseller, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Kirkus Reviews, AudioFile Magazine, and Amazon A young black man calling himself Victor has struck a bargain with federal law enforcement, working as a bounty hunter for the US Marshall Service in exchange for his freedom. He's got plenty of work. In this version of America, slavery continues in four states called the Hard Four. On the trail of a runaway known as Jackdaw, Victor arrives in Indianapolis knowing that something isn't right -- with the case file, with his work, and with the country itself. As he works to infiltrate the local cell of a abolitionist movement called the Underground Airlines, tracking Jackdaw through the back rooms of churches, empty parking garages, hotels, and medical offices, Victor believes he's hot on the trail. But his strange, increasingly uncanny pursuit is complicated by a boss who won't reveal the extraordinary stakes of Jackdaw's case, as well as by a heartbreaking young woman and her child -- who may be Victor's salvation. Victor believes himself to be a good man doing bad work, unwilling to give up the freedom he has worked so hard to earn. But in pursuing Jackdaw, Victor discovers secrets at the core of the country's arrangement with the Hard Four, secrets the government will preserve at any cost. *Underground Airlines* is a ground-breaking novel, a wickedly imaginative thriller, and a story of an America that is more like our own than we'd like to believe.

alternate history of the us: *What Might Have Been?* Andrew Roberts, 2010-08-26 A dozen star historians on what might have happened at history's turning points if the dice had fallen differently. 'Stimulating, provocative and playful' Literary Review Throughout history, great and terrible events have often hinged upon luck. Andrew Roberts has asked a team of twelve leading historians and biographers what might have happened if major world events had gone differently? Each concentrating in the area in which they are a leading authority, historians as distinguished as Antonia Fraser (*Gunpowder Plot*), Norman Stone (*Sarajevo 1914*) and Anne Somerset (*the Spanish Armada*) consider: What if? Robert Cowley demonstrates how nearly Britain won the American war of independence. Following her acclaimed *GEORGIANA*, Amanda Foreman muses on Lincoln's Northern States of America and Lord Palmerston's Great Britain going to war, as they so nearly did in 1861. Whether it's Stalin fleeing Moscow in 1941 (Simon Sebag Montefiore), or Napoleon not being forced to retreat from it in 1812 (Adam Zamoyski), the events covered here are important, world-changing ones.

alternate history of the us: *1864* James Cupelli, 2006-07 November, 1864: What if Robert E. Lee was in command of General John Bell Hood's army at Spring Hill, Tennessee?

alternate history of the us: *If the South Had Won the Civil War* MacKinlay Kantor, 2001-11-03 Just a touch here and a tweak there MacKinlay Kantor, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, master storyteller, shows us how the South could have won the Civil War, how two small shifts in history (as we know it) in the summer of 1863 could have turned the tide for the Confederacy. What would have

happened: to the Union, to Abraham Lincoln, to the people of the North and South, to the world? If the South Had Won the Civil War originally appeared in Look Magazine nearly half a century ago. It immediately inspired a deluge of letters and telegrams from astonished readers and became an American classic overnight. Published in book form soon after, Kantor's masterpiece has been unavailable for a decade. Now, this much requested classic is once again available for a new generation of readers and features a stunning cover by acclaimed Civil War artist Don Troiani, a new introduction by award-winning alternate history author Harry Turtledove, and fifteen superb illustrations by the incomparable Dan Nance. It all begins on that fateful afternoon of Tuesday, May 12, 1863, when a deplorable equestrian accident claims the life of General Ulysses S. Grant . . . At the Publisher's request, this title is being sold without Digital Rights Management Software (DRM) applied.

alternate history of the us: Alternate Presidents Mike Resnick, 1992 An anthology of pieces, by such writers as Jack L. Chalker, David Gerrold, Michael P. Kube-McDowell, and others, speculates on what might have happened had the presidential elections over the years ended with different results. Original.

alternate history of the us: *Rebels Against War* Lawrence S. Wittner, 1984

alternate history of the us: *We the States* Adam Sivitz, 2018-01-30 Imagine if the United States Constitution had never been ratified and George Washington had never become President. In *We the States*, author Adam Sivitz creates an alternative narrative acted out by the founding fathers of the United States. As the story unfolds, readers find George Washington at home in Virginia impatiently awaiting news of each state's response to the constitution. Patrick Henry will persuade Virginia to reject the constitution, which will lead to the formation of three independent countries, and Alexander Hamilton will become the leader of one of the newly formed countries. Within the tumultuous and divisive chain of events, Sivitz weaves the tale of two slaves owned by Washington. Their story displays the darker side of U.S. history and underscores the struggle for freedom for so many, while also reminding readers of the ongoing fight for equality and justice.

alternate history of the us: *How Few Remain* Harry Turtledove, 2008-12-24 From 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. . . . 1881: A generation 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 in 1881. 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, the French, and the English. As Confederate General Stonewall Jackson again demonstrated his military expertise, the North struggled to find a leader who could prove his equal. In the Second War Between the States, the times, the stakes, and the battle lines had changed--and so would history. . .

alternate history of the us: *A People's History of the United States* Howard Zinn, 2003-02-04 Since its original landmark publication in 1980, *A People's History of the United States* has been chronicling American history from the bottom up, throwing out the official version of history taught in schools -- with its emphasis on great men in high places -- to focus on the street, the home, and the workplace. Known for its lively, clear prose as well as its scholarly research, *A People's History* is the only volume to tell America's story from the point of view of -- and in the words of -- America's women, factory workers, African-Americans, Native Americans, the working poor, and immigrant laborers. As historian Howard Zinn shows, many of our country's greatest battles -- the fights for a fair wage, an eight-hour workday, child-labor laws, health and safety standards, universal suffrage, women's rights, racial equality -- were carried out at the grassroots level, against bloody resistance. Covering Christopher Columbus's arrival through President Clinton's first term, *A People's History of the United States*, which was nominated for the American Book Award in 1981, features insightful analysis of the most important events in our history. Revised, updated, and featuring a new afterword by the author, this special twentieth anniversary edition continues Zinn's important contribution to a complete and balanced understanding of American history.

alternate history of the us: Ruled Britannia Harry Turtledove, 2002-11-05 The year is 1597. For nearly a decade, the island of Britain has been under the rule of King Philip in the name of Spain. The citizenry live under an enforced curfew—and in fear of the Inquisition's agents, who put heretics to the torch in public displays. And with Queen Elizabeth imprisoned in the Tower of London, the British have no symbol to unite them against the enemy who occupies their land. William Shakespeare has no interest in politics. His passion is writing for the theatre, where his words bring laughter and tears to a populace afraid to speak out against the tyranny of the Spanish crown. But now Shakespeare is given an opportunity to pen his greatest work—a drama that will incite the people of Britain to rise against their persecutors—and change the course of history.

alternate history of the us: Nation Terry Pratchett, 2009-10-06 New York Times Bestseller * Winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize * Winner of the Boston Globe/Horn Book Award * Michael L. Printz Medal honor winner From the pen of Sir Terry Pratchett, author of the beloved and bestselling Discworld fantasy series, comes an epic adventure of survival that mixes hope, humor, and humanity. When a giant wave destroys his village, Mau is the only one left. Daphne—a traveler from the other side of the globe—is the sole survivor of a shipwreck. Separated by language and customs, the two are united by catastrophe. Slowly, they are joined by other refugees. And as they struggle to protect the small band, Mau and Daphne defy ancestral spirits, challenge death himself, and uncover a long-hidden secret that literally turns the world upside down. Sir Terry also received a prestigious Printz Honor from the American Library Association for his novel *Dodger*.

alternate history of the us: Alternate Tyrants Mike Resnick, 1997 Twenty offbeat stories celebrate despots that never were, including a holy war-declaring Pope John XXIII, an assassinated president Reagan's successor Alexander Haig, and a Parliament-dissolving new king of England. Original.

alternate history of the us: To Climates Unknown Arturo Serrano, 2021-11-02 On September 11, the United States were destroyed. That is, September 11 of the Year of Our Lord 1620. In this alternate history, the Mayflower was lost at sea, and the English Separatists were disheartened from further colonization of North America. The United States were never born. The centuries that follow will see the emergence of rival empires that will split up the world between them. One will become the terror of the seas. One will rampage with carriages of steam. One will take to the skies. And the people caught in the middle will fight against the colonial system to bring an end to all empires.

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alternate history of the us: Alternate History Kathleen Singles, 2013-10-14 While, strictly speaking, Alternate Histories are not Future Narratives, their analysis can shed a clear light on why Future Narratives are so different from past narratives. Trying to have it both ways, most Alternate Histories subscribe to a conflicting set of beliefs concerning determinism and freedom of choice,

contingency and necessity. For the very first time, Alternate Histories are here discussed against the backdrop of their Other, Future Narratives. The volume contains in-depth analyses of the classics of the genre, such as Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* and Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*, as well as less widely-discussed manifestations of the genre, such as Dieter Kühn's *N*, Christian Kracht's *Ich werde hier sein im Sonnenschein und im Schatten*, and Quentin Tarantino's film *Inglourious Basterds*.

alternate history of the us: 1920: America's Great War Robert Conroy, 2015-03-24
NATIONAL BEST SELLER IN HARDCOVER By the author of breakout WW II era alternate history *Himmler's War* and *Rising Sun*, a compelling alternate history thriller. After winning WW I, Germany invades America in 1920, marching through California and Texas as a desperate nation resists. Consider another 1920: Imperial Germany has become the most powerful nation in the world. In 1914, she had crushed England, France, and Russia in a war that was short but entirely devastating. By 1920, Kaiser Wilhelm II is looking for new lands to devour. The United States is fast becoming an economic super-power and the only nation that can conceivably threaten Germany. The U.S. is militarily inept, however, and is led by a sick and delusional president who wanted to avoid war at any price. Thus, Germany is able to ship a huge army to Mexico to support a puppet government. Her real goal: the invasion and permanent conquest of California and Texas. America desperately resists as the mightiest and most brutal army in the world in a battle fought on land, at sea, and in the air as enemy armies savagely marched up on California, and move north towards a second Battle of the Alamo. Only the indomitable spirit of freedom can answer the Kaiser's challenge. About 1920: America's Great War: Conroy offers up a believable scenario and heroics galore on the part of the good guys, ranging from trench fighting to the first tank charge. . . .good fun for alternate history buffs.—Library Journal About Robert Conroy's *Rising Sun*: "Conroy extrapolates a new and militarily plausible direction for WWII . . . A thrilling adventure."—Booklist About Robert Conroy's *Himmler's War*: "[Conroy] adds a personal touch to alternate history by describing events through the eyes of fictional characters serving on the front lines. VERDICT: Historical accuracy in the midst of creative speculation makes this piece of alternate history believable."—Library Journal About *Red Inferno: 1945* "An ensemble cast of fictional characters. . . and historical figures powers the meticulously researched story line with diverse accounts of the horrors of war, making this an appealing read for fans of history and alternate history alike."—Publishers Weekly "[E]ngrossing and grimly plausible. . . the suspense holds up literally to the last page."—Booklist About *1945*: "moving and thought-provoking. . ."—Publishers Weekly "Realistic. . ."—Booklist About *1942*: ". . . fans of Tom Clancy and Agent Jack Bauer should find a lot to like here."—Publishers Weekly "A significant writer of alternate history turns here to the popular topic of Pearl Harbor, producing. . . this rousing historical action tale."—Booklist "A high-explosive what-if, with full-blooded characters."—John Birmingham, bestselling author of *Without Warning* About *1901*: ". . . cleverly conceived. . . Conroy tells a solid what-if historical."—Publishers Weekly ". . . likely to please both military history and alternative history buffs."—Booklist

alternate history of the us: The Fiction Writer's Guide to Alternate History Jack Dann, 2023-07-13 A comprehensive guide to the speculative sub-genre of alternate history fiction, this book maps the unique terrain of this vibrant mode of storytelling and then explains how to write it. First giving a concise conceptual overview and the critical tools to differentiate the different forms of counterfactual fiction, Jack Dann lays out the 'tricks of the trade' such as 'Heinleinizing', how to create recognizable 'divergent points' and how to employ paratextual elements and 'layering' to overcome readers' unfamiliarity with invented counterfactual events and cultures. Alongside this, Dann takes you step-by-step through a complete short story to demonstrate, line-by-line, how alternative history fiction works. As well as Dann's exacting methodology for writing professional quality alternate history stories, this book also features a live-on-the-page Q&A with some of the most esteemed alternate history writers working today, including Kim Stanley Robinson, John Birmingham and Lisa Goldstein among many others, who will detail their own particular hacks, theories, processes, methods and strategies. Combining extensive and deep knowledge of the field with accessible

writing advice, this is the ultimate guidebook to the broad and complex sub-genre of counterfactual and alternative history fiction.

alternate history of the us: The Ancient World in Alternative History and Counterfactual Fictions Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas, Leire Olabarria, 2024-08-22 Focusing in turn on history, powerful individuals, under-represented voices and the arts, the essays in this collection cover a wide variety of modern and contemporary narrative fiction from Jo Walton and L. Sprague De Camp to T. S. Chaudhry and Catherynne M. Valente. Chapters look into the question of chance versus determinism in the unfolding of historical events, the role individuals play in shaping a society or occasion, and the way art and literature symbolise important messages in counterfactual histories. They also show how uchronic narratives can take advantage of modern literary techniques to reveal new and relevant aspects of the past, giving voices to marginalised minorities and suppressed individuals of the ancient world. Counterfactual fiction and uchronic narratives have been largely up until now the domain of literary critics. However, these modes of literature are here analysed by scholars of Ancient History, Egyptology and Classics, shedding important new light on how cultures of the ancient world have been (and still are) perceived, and to what extent our conceptions of the past are used to explore alternate presents and futures. Alternate history entices the imagination of the public by suggesting hypothetical scenarios that never occurred, underlining a latent tension between reality and imagination, and between determinism and contingency. This interest has resulted in a growing number of publications that gauge the impact of what-if narratives, and this one is the first to give scholars of the ancient world centre-stage.

alternate history of the us: Turning Points—Actual and Alternate Histories Rodney P. Carlisle, J. Geoffrey Golson, 2007-02-12 In this unique reference, leading historians describe not only how the expansion of the American nation in the early 19th century was a turning point in U.S. history that led to the Civil War, but also alternative scenarios—what happened and what almost happened. This volume poses what if questions about ten crucial tipping points in the history of U.S. expansionism between 1800 and the Civil War. It not only describes what happened—in the case of Lewis and Clark, the War of 1812, the Monroe Doctrine, railroads and telegraphs, the Mexican War, the gold rush, the Compromise of 1850—it also offers alternative scenarios, essays on what could have happened. In this exciting and imaginative approach to history, students not only develop analytical skills by tracing the causes and effects of crucial events; they are empowered by the knowledge that at moments when history hangs in the balance, many paths are possible, and that they, as citizens, can tip the scale.

alternate history of the us: Turning Points—Actual and Alternate Histories Rodney P. Carlisle, J. Geoffrey Golson, 2006-09-21 This work is a thought-provoking look at the original 13 colonies, presenting the facts and engaging the reader by using alternate history—what if key events had turned out differently?—to help develop critical thinking skills. This entry in ABC-CLIO's exciting series Turning Points—Actual and Alternate Histories covers the development of the original 13 states, from first European contact up to the Revolutionary War. Using the fascinating tool of alternate history—postulating the course of events, had one key fact been different—the book engages students' imaginations and critical thinking skills. This critical period in American history is particularly suited to the alternative history approach: The population of the colonies was small, so the import of individual actions, or of singular events, was proportionately large. If the English had lost one battle to the Swedes, the United States might have been a Swedish colony. If James, Duke of York, had died of the plague in 1654, the U.S. and French revolutions might not have happened.

alternate history of the us: Relativism, Alternate History, and the Forgetful Reader Derek Thiess, 2014-11-25 The writer of alternate history asks “what if?” What if one historical event were different, what would the world look like today? In a similar way, the postmodern philosopher of history suggests that history is literature, or that if we read certain historical details differently we would get a distinctly different interpretation of past events. While the science fiction alternate history means to illuminate the past, to increase our understanding of past events, however, the postmodern approach to history typically suggests that such understanding is impossible. To the

postmodern philosopher, history is like literature in that it does not offer the reader access to the past, but only an interesting story. Building on criticism that suggests personal psychological reasons for this obscuring the past, and using a literary theory of readership, this book challenges the postmodern approach to history. It channels the speculative power of science fiction to read the works of postmodern philosophy of history as alternate histories themselves, and to map the limits and pathology of their forgetful reading of the past.

alternate history of the us: Kingdom of the Silver Sea (Mars Sword and Planet Alternate History) Sawyer Grey, 2012-07-19 Book 2 of The Age of Aether After years in exile on Earth, Jack Branham finally returned to Mars. Now agents of the Tharsis Company have abandoned him to die in the ruins of the ancient Martian city Odusar, while anarchists have kidnapped the beautiful Charlotte, the woman he loves. Jack must survive duels between mighty airships, attacks by Martian assassins, and the terrible dust storms that sweep across the face of the entire planet to follow their trail into the uncharted wilds of southern Mars. There, hidden inside a ring of lofty mountains, he discovers a lost civilization on the shores of the mysterious Silver Sea. In the magnificent city of Kor Vosheth, he must defeat a cabal of priests and princes to save the throne of the young queen who holds his only hope of resuming his quest--or of dooming it forever. The Age of Aether takes place in a universe where the social revolutions of the 18th Century never happened. Mighty airships fill the skies while Cavorite-hulled aetherships ply the airless voids between the planets. From the torrid jungles of Venus to the frigid deserts of Mars, the British Empire has truly become the Empire on which the sun never sets. The crowned heads of Europe share power with the immensely wealthy chartered companies created to exploit the wealth of the Solar System, while anarchist and republican terrorists try to stir up revolution in the colonial territories. Political activists and dissidents are shipped offworld to work alongside criminal transportees in the company towns of Mars and Venus. The Empires of Mexico and Brazil dominate the Americas, while Japan is a rising force in the East, and from the deep fastness of Nix Olympica the Martian High Emperor reigns over the remnants of his slowly dying planet.

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