

The Kite and the Coin Toss

Ron Swan

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History could be rewritten in the exciting, alternate history time travel novel The Kite and the Coin Toss.

In Ron Swan's novel *The Kite and the Coin Toss*, a college student hopes to master time travel and right a historical wrong.

In the alternate history of this novel, the American Revolution ended with the colonies falling before the might of the British Empire. In July of 1782, the signers of the Declaration of Independence were executed in a full public spectacle led by King George.

Two hundred years later, the British Empire leads a global monarchy, and Joshua is a promising college student who works at a royal lab. Joshua hopes to harness lightning as an energy source for the impoverished villages on the outskirts of the royal cities. Then, on his twenty-first birthday, he uncovers a shocking family secret: he's the direct descendant of Benjamin Franklin, and the truth of the Signer's Day of Reckoning was hidden from everyone.

Within journals kept by his ancestors, Joshua finds the seeds of a fantastic plot to correct the events that lead to the mass execution. Then he's struck by lightning and travels back in time; he and his friends learn how to control that power. With King George VII and a ruthless army tracking him, Joshua races to correct the past.

Set both in the 1780s and the 2020s, the novel balances its shocking historical alterations well with its drastic variations on modern life. Its tension comes both from Joshua's interactions with historical figures—including Thomas Jefferson (here, prone to giving speeches) and George Washington (who acts with authority)—and from the uncertainty about where Joshua's story is headed prior to the development of his ability to time travel. Afterwards, he hides his abilities from the king and wrestles with the question of what he should do with the skill.

But the book's historical characters are better fleshed out than its modern ones. Joshua, his classmates, and the citizens of the contemporary British Empire have similar names and voices; they behave in much the same way. They become an indistinct group—a situation worsened by the book's indulgence in nicknames, which also dilutes tension. Still, the novel does an able job of conveying the technological and cultural differences of its alternate world. Joshua doesn't know if changing the past is possible at first, or what that would mean for everyone in his present, but he is sure that a wrong needs to be righted. His decision to risk everything is involving.

History could be rewritten in the exciting time travel novel *The Kite and the Coin Toss*, in which an enterprising student draws on his family's history to prevent a political shift from ever happening.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 9, 2021)

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