

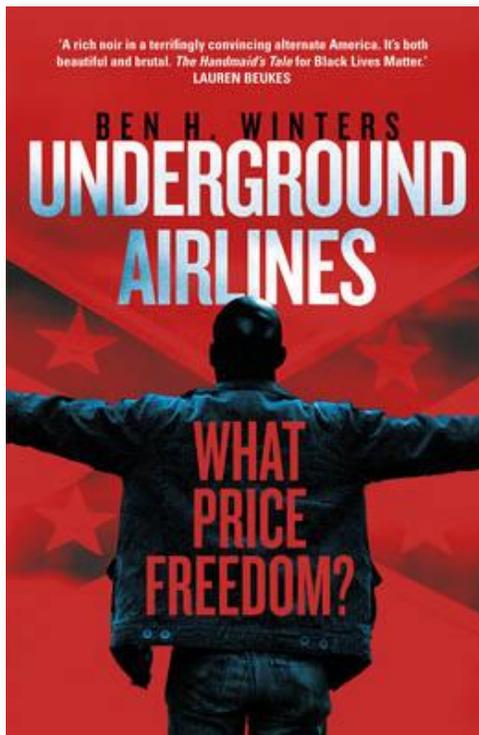


Helping you choose
your next book

LoveReading Reader reviews of **Underground Airlines** by Ben H. Winters



Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.



Catherine Bryce

A terrific and gripping read that will keep you hooked from beginning to end.

This is a fantastic story regarding Victor living in the USA where slavery is still acceptable in certain States. Send a thief to catch a thief type of storyline in that the main character himself was once a slave but 'freed' under the conditions that that he search for and catch runaway slaves who decide to try and escape from their owners.

The story is told through the eyes of Victor, which makes the reader feel as they are at Victor's side and constantly being updated about how his latest case is

progressing and his own personal feelings on the matter.

A great book that falls into several genres but one that is a little different and totally enjoyable. Written in a factual down-to-earth style Underground Airlines makes for a fantastic read.

Humaira

It was brilliantly glorious- everyone must read this.

This book is a masterpiece. It was brilliantly glorious- everyone must read this. I've never read a book like this and I think I'm going to make it my aim to read

more books like this because it was truly terrific!

Robin Little

An intelligent thriller set in an alternative reality skilfully created and enabling a well-paced story of the moral dilemmas facing a slave required to support the evil regime. This thriller creates a credible alternative reality and an engaging story.

*Without dwelling on the horrors of slavery the story deals with the moral dilemma of a former slave living free but having to look after his personal good rather than that of his race. The story pulls off the need to describe a different USA without slowing the pace of the action. It is a brave subject and accomplished writing although there are a few holes in the story. **It is thought provoking & an intelligent story.***

Carolyn Huckfield

This novel creates an alternative reality in the USA. Part thriller, part denunciation of an evil belief system this book will keep you gripped right from the start.

This novel creates an alternative reality in the USA. What would have happened if four cessation states managed to keep slavery going up right up until today? You will find out by reading this. Part thriller, part denunciation of an evil belief system this book will keep you gripped right from the start. Victor is a double agent who has gained his freedom by paying the heavy price of the betrayal of his fellow slaves. During his latest case, trying to trap a priest into revealing his contacts, he stumbles across the game changer that will create people with no names to be created as lifelong slaves.

The writer is white so it may be seen that he cannot get into the mindset of Victor but I think that he does portray the pain of this alternative reality from the perspective of a black and flawed hero. Suspend your knowledge of what really happened and look at this alternative reality-what would you have done to put it right?

Sarah Musk

An exciting, unusual book about a present day America where slavery has not been abolished. A former slave has turned slave hunter and has to chase down a 'special' fugitive.

This is a really exciting book set in an alternative history. It is in a present day America but one where slavery was not abolished in the mid nineteenth century. America is two countries - the southern states are almost behind a fence cutting society in two and thriving using slaves to manufacture goods.

The main character is a former slave called several names - you never quite find out his real name - who on threat of being returned to slavery is a hunter of fugitive slaves from the south. However, he is being asked to hunt a slave who is a special case and the story centres around this.

Ben H Winters has created a very believable scenario and present world which still uses slaves. The south is unbelievably menacing and scary for blacks and the north is not whiter than white. They are not meant to be buying goods from the south but they do. The whole situation is absolutely sickening and if anyone needed justification for the American Civil War a lot of people would say that it prevented this possible future.

*The way the story ends looks as if it is set for a sequel. I would certainly want to read a follow up book since the story is so captivating and exciting. **Well done Ben H Winters for writing such a thought provoking and unusual book.***

Cathy Small

They say that you can't trust anyone. Well if you are a black man in a world where slavery still exists then it is very true for you.

Victor had escaped his life as a slave but he has paid a high price and whilst he is free he is still under control by the government. He is on a mission to follow directions from Mr Bridge and resolve each case as it is issued but this latest one doesn't feel right as he gets deeper into his investigations. He meets Martha, someone who needs his help in life but it turns out that she is the one who will help when he most needs it. As to story goes on the trust from all parties can further apart until the truth is finally out. You see what lengths Victor will go to to get the promised freedom and we get a stark insight & reminder of how life was for those caught up in slavery.

Sarah Jones

A hard-hitting novel about a modern day alternative America where slavery still exists. It forces the reader to consider their attitudes towards racial discrimination and slavery today.

The main character, Victor, is a former slave who has turned bounty hunter to preserve his freedom. In Victor's world, the general population cannot be relied upon to help return runaway slaves to the Hard 4 southern states. The US Marshals service has to turn to bounty hunters. At the start of his current case, Victor meets a white single mother with her mixed race son, who is searching for her lover. Victor attempts to infiltrate the Underground Airlines, a network of people who try to help runaway slaves, by pretending to be a former slave searching for his wife. He assumes various personalities to manipulate others into giving him information that will lead him closer to his quarry. The hunt triggers memories of his life as a slave and he has to fight to keep control of himself. He wrestles with memories of other runaways he has tracked down. From the opening of the file on his current runaway, he has an inkling that the case is different from all his others. He gradually comes to realise that there are secrets that some people want hidden at any cost. There's a chance to think about how a single event in history could lead to a world where slavery still exists. In this alternate USA, Lincoln was assassinated in 1861, shortly after he was elected. There is a chilling end to the story with the hint of a "Brave New World " of slaves.

Jan Kirkcaldy

To say this book started in a not particularly appealing way is probably an understatement but I had to keep going if only to find out about "Underground Airlines".

Victor (and his numerous aliases) is a very complex character and it takes a while to get into his story and supposed life in a modern America that has not actually abolished slavery. That is what this story is all about. Victor is a bounty hunter working with an American government agency to track and recapture runaway slaves which he hopes will earn him his ultimate freedom. Intriguing definitely and fascinating in a rather unpleasant way. It did go back and forth from Victor's childhood in captivity to the present day which became confusing at times but I felt I had to struggle on as he did. Not a favourite story to me by any means but I just had to finish it and in the end almost began to wonder if there was slightest chance of it not being entirely

fictional. I hope not. On the plus side it is brilliantly written, possibly an award inner, as the characters and situations were very believable. Not light holiday reading.

Janet Gilliard

*This book is set in a present day world as we know it apart from the fact that slavery still exists. Victor is an escaped slave who works as a bounty Hunter to keep his freedom. Victor is sent to capture a man with a secret that could change the state of the country. **I enjoyed this debut novel and look forward to the next book by this author.***

Alfred Nobile

*Once you remember this is an alternative history novel, that things haven't happened, things have happened or may or may not happen in the future, then this becomes an exciting read. America but not as we know it. **A thrilling, alternative history read**, whilst stretching the mind remains plausible. I recommend this book. **A worthy 5 stars.** Thanks to lovereading.co.uk and the publishers for ARC.*

Clare Topping

It's present day America, but in a world where slavery was not abolished in the 19th century, but persists in four southern US States. Victor is an ex-slave, now working for the US Marshals, tracking down runaway slaves. His latest job is to find Jackdaw, known to be heading to Indianapolis via the Underground Airlines; a network helping slaves to a new life in Canada. This is a job that doesn't add up and leads Victor to memories he would rather forget, and to question what he is doing. In many ways the novel is a formulaic thriller. A likeable Antihero, Victor, trying to escape the past. Potential love interest with a related background story. Mysterious handler that Victor has never met. Government conspiracies, good guys that are bad guys and bad guys that are good guys. Throw in a big pot of racial tension and some guns and you have a standard thriller. However, that is not to say that the book isn't enjoyable. It is fast paced, with characters that maybe are written for a Hollywood movie, and several twists along the way. Although I did find the ending, as is often the case, a bit of a let down. I have to admit though, I did have a look online and

would read another of Ben Winters' books. **Four stars out of five, for a book that doesn't really make you think, but keeps you turning the page.**

Anne Rhodes

*This is a compelling story of present day America, but set in a different time frame where black slaves are still the norm. The "Four" - the Southern States of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Carolina – all have slaves under strict control. The Northern States allow free blacks – but mainly tolerated rather than integrated. The Underground Airlines is a very secret group who endeavour at great risk to rescue slaves – and Victor works for the Marshals Service recapturing these escaped slaves. Victor is very good at his job – but as the story progresses we learn a lot about him, his story, his emotions, and the stories of those he has to recapture. **A compelling read which will have your heart in your mouth on occasion, and your emotions swinging at the same speed as Victor's.***

Richard Wright

*Underground Airlines provides the reader with a fully fledged American Horror, in Winters world slavery still plagues the southern states which allows the reader to escape into an alternate reality but is also poignant to what is happening in America at the moment. The similarities to other so called "what if?" stories are undeniable but I feel Underground Airlines stands with undeniable classics like The Man in the High Castle. The richness of the world pours off every page and Winters craft with prose leads to a comfortable sense of pace. The story itself sets up a compelling protagonist with no clear sense of what is right and his battle doesn't seem like a fight against slavery but a fight with his past, at the beginning he seems both comfortable and disgusted with himself and his journey towards freedom becomes the focal point of the story. The world created is both complex and deep with the relationship between the slave States and the free States fully explored but still leaves the reader wanting more. **Underground Airlines is an extremely poignant and dark piece, which gives us a glimpse into an America with eerie connections to our own.***

David Gay

An interesting book that is all too believable making it a challenging but ultimately enjoyable read. The author skilfully makes you root for the “wrong” side.

This book is interesting from a number of dimensions – the premise is that slavery was not eradicated by the American constitution and still exists in the South. The main character is an ex-slave or Person Born into Labor (PBL), to give him his correct title, has been blackmailed by the authorities into hunting down escapees. The author is very skilful in giving him both abilities and flaws in equal measure but it is his flaws that make him human enough that you want to him succeed even though what he’s doing is wrong.

The book is also interesting in that the scenario that the author outlines is all too believable – does a country that is divided with different rules in each region sound familiar? And it’s this believability that makes this a difficult book to read; yes, you do have to suspend believe at certain points, but not at the points related to the premise an description of slavery.

Ultimately the book is a thriller which is set in an interesting political concept and it’s both good and interesting enough for me to look forward to more books from the author.

Alison Layland

I really enjoyed this gripping thriller, set in the alternative world of a United States where some southern states still have slavery – not only raising “what-ifs” but also some serious questions that are equally relevant in today’s real-world society.

The embittered, sharp but thoughtful central character, Victor, is skilfully portrayed with a lively, sparky first-person voice that gets you sympathising and rooting for him. His dilemmas, the parts he has to play in his undercover world, and his reluctant gradual remembering of his past are portrayed in a way that drives the story. Both Victor and the cast of other characters, particularly Martha, the woman he becomes drawn into helping, are really relatable.

There is some excellent world-building, too. This alternative USA is richly and convincingly imagined, from the extracts of the constitution that head the sections of the novel, to the euphemistic acronym for slaves, PBs (Persons Bound to Labor) or peeps. Opponents of the system are often scorned as verbal

protesters who take little practical action, although the difficulty of actually achieving anything is highlighted both in Victor's personal situation and the fate of others who dare to stand against the system.

This is all put across with a deft touch in an exciting thriller with plenty of twists and turns, action and emotional involvement – an excellent read, and I will look for more from Ben H. Winters.

www.alayland.uk

Adrienne Kinsella

Underground Airlines is an interesting thriller in which author Ben H. Matthews tackles the issue of racism and depicts an America in which slavery still exists in four Southern states.

*The central character, Victor, is now supposedly free, but at a high price. He has to work as a bounty hunter for the Federal Marshall service, who inserted a tracking device at the top of his spine, so they can follow his every move. Victor has to track and report runaway slaves, betraying that very group to which he once belonged. He has frequent flashbacks to when he was a young slave and he knows that he can never escape the dreadful memories. He befriends a white girl called Karen and her son, who have their own issues. Victor knows there is something not quite right about his latest assignment, but he does not get many answers. He has to track down a runaway slave called Jackdaw. He tries to infiltrate the local cell of an abolitionist movement called the underground airlines, who he believes helped free Jackdaw. He faces many obstacles and when he does finally find him, he gets caught up in a dangerous mission to uncover a vast conspiracy, the hard four states and the Federal Marshall service are desperate to hide. He also realises this could be his chance to finally be free. **There are many unexpected twists and turns in this story and although the plot dragged a bit in places, overall it was an intriguing read.***

Peter Baiden

Victor is a man with a mission! He is very good at his job!

Victor is an American 'Bounty Hunter', identifying; chasing; capturing and returning Slaves to their owners. Yet Victor is not a happy man. He is beginning to realise that he too is a slave and the deeper he gets into his work the more dangerous it is getting for him. He wants 'out!' but 'how?'

*He contacts the Underground Airlines" who are at the forefront of finding escaped slaves a way to freedom in the Northern United States and Canada. Set in the modern day, Ben H. Williams gives a view of four Southern States that have opted out of the Union that was formed after the Civil War that ended in 1863. Slavery is still upheld and escaped, but recaptured slaves are treated badly. To gain his freedom, Victor has to undertake one last investigation, that leads him to discover an evil that even modern readers might find frightening. The ending should not be read before the reader completes the whole text of what is **in some ways an uncomfortable story, but one with familiar resonances, even in today's society.***

Steph Harding

Set in the present time, the story is that the American Civil War never happened, the outcome being that there are four states (the Hard Four) that now have slavery written into their constitution. 'Violent Slavery' has been abolished but replaced with a well regulated and humane type of slavery that doesn't look much different.

Victor is a slave turned Bounty Hunter looking for a runaway. But even though he is now a free man, is he really free? Or has he just been recruited into another type of slavery.

A good read that imagines what American history could have been, if another route had been taken. Gripping!