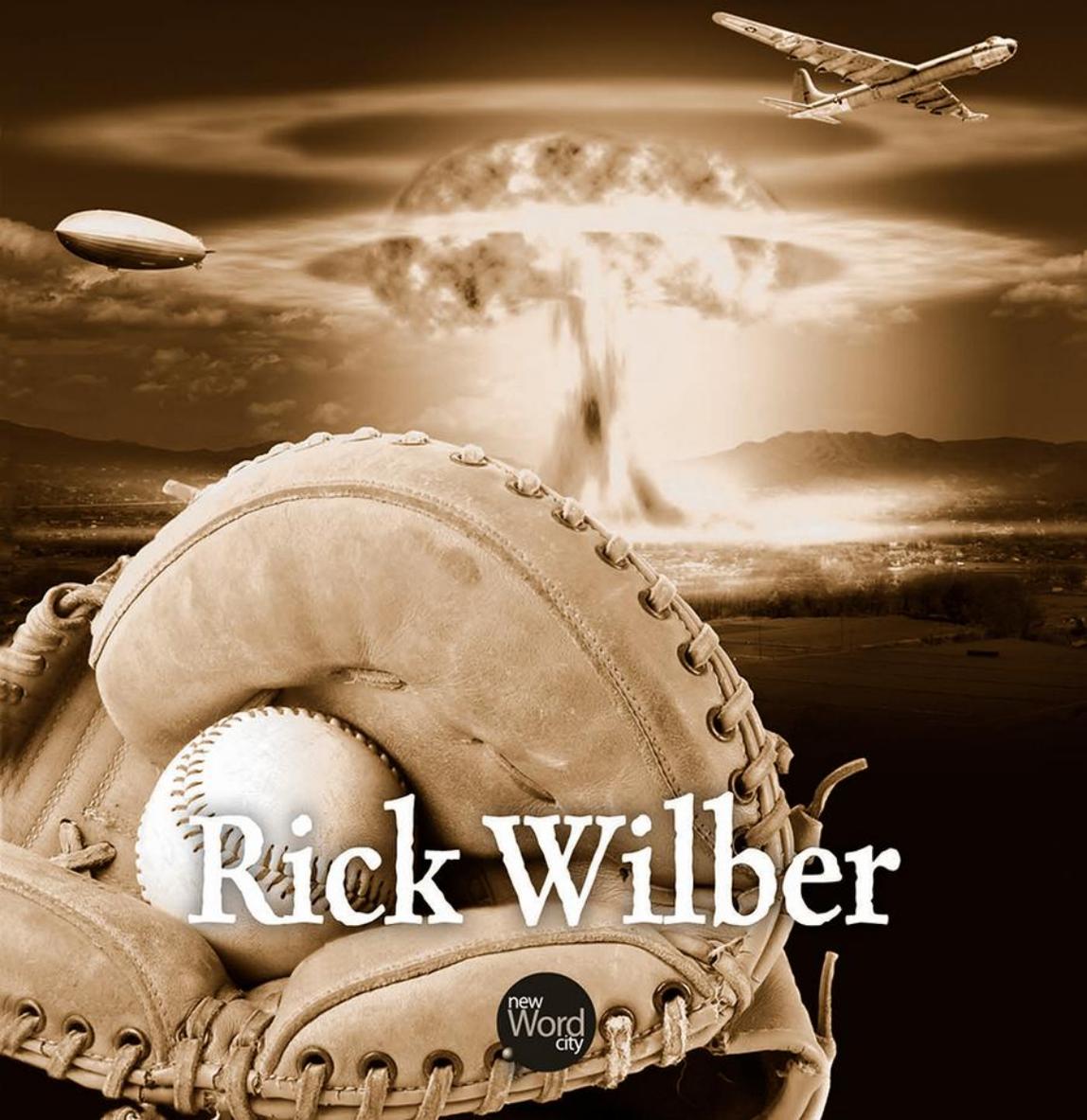


THE MOE BERG EPISODES



Rick Wilber

new
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city

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EPISODES

ALTERNATE HISTORIES OF
THE BALLPLAYER AND SPY

Rick Wilber



INTRODUCTION

The back story of *The Moe Berg Episodes* collection starts with my friend Ben Bova, the novelist and editor. Ben and I had collaborated some years ago on a screen treatment about a fictionalized version of Moe Berg, a famous baseball player who became a spy during World War II. That ultimately came to nothing, but Ben's deep baseball knowledge and his familiarity with Moe's fascinating story got me started on writing about Moe. I grew up in a baseball family – my father played for the Red Sox and Phillies and Cardinals, and was a coach, a scout and a minor-league manager, until he retired in his 60s – but for some reason I hadn't heard about Moe. I read Nicholas Dawidoff's excellent biography, *The Catcher Was a Spy: The Mysterious Life of Moe Berg*, and that was it, I was hooked. I started reading everything I could find on Moe, including another excellent book, *Heisenberg's War: The Secret History of the German Bomb*, by Thomas Powers. That book explores German physicist Werner Heisenberg and his leadership of the German A-bomb program during World War II. There's quite a bit in the book about Moe Berg, including passages about the famous Zurich incident where Moe was incognito in the audience at a lecture by Heisenberg in neutral Switzerland, with orders to assassinate Heisenberg if it looked like the German program was close to building a super bomb. The incident has been fictionalized by some great writers, but I wanted to take my own crack at it and I did so in the story, "Something Real," which appeared in *Asimov's* in the April/May 2012 issue. I set it in an alternate history and got pretty wild with it. It was a great pleasure to write, and I was absurdly pleased when it won the 2012 Sidewise Award for Best Alternate History – Short Form.

The enjoyment of writing that story and placing it with *Asimov's* led me to write another Moe Berg story for the magazine, *At Palomar*, which ran in the July 2013 issue, and then another, "In Dublin, Fair City," which ran in the November/December 2017 issue, and then another, "The Secret City," which came out in the September/October 2018 issue and is very much a follow-up to the Dublin story and by far the most ambitious of all my Moe Berg stories.

I should add that the novella, "The Wandering Warriors," co-authored by Alan Smale and myself, might well be another Moe Berg story. Moe isn't mentioned by name in that story, but Alan

and I decided it would be fun – and that story is very much a fun romp – if the character of The Professor was suspiciously similar to Moe Berg. At least one major critic noticed the similarity and, in writing a very nice review of the story, assumed the character was Moe. The story ran in the May/June 2018 issue of Asimov's and has been republished by New Word City publishing and is available on the usual sites as an ebook and in a limited print edition.

"The Secret City" seems, in some ways, to wrap up my alternate-history take on Moe's career as a spy, just as that career received some notice. "The Secret City" came out just a month or so after the movie version of Moe's work as a baseball player and OSS spy career hit the theaters and the streaming services. That movie, *The Catcher Was a Spy*, is based on Dawidoff's biography.

The Moe Berg stories are focused on spycraft and baseball, in that order. But it's important, I think, to not dodge the horrors that fascism in the 1930s and 1940s brought to our timeline, so I have them threaten the world similarly in Moe's other timelines. In "The Secret City," that anti-fascist thread runs right through the story. It includes an alternate take on famous German general Erwin Rommel, who was skeptical of Hitler's plans in our reality and is even more skeptical in the alternate past I posit. I also have Moe in conversations with my alternate versions of OSS chief William "Wild Bill" Donovan and U.S. President Roosevelt (though my Roosevelt is Eleanor). I even have a character who went through an alternate version of the Spanish Civil War and reminds Moe and his handler of the perils the world faces from fascism. All of this, I hope, adds a little heft to the importance of Moe's work in the fight against fascism in that alternate universe.

I've put this New Word City reprint collection of the four stories in order as they appeared in the magazine. I very much think of them as episodes, linked by a common focus on Moe Berg in various alternate-history scenarios, but not telling a linked story, as such. You should read them as individual episodes about Moe, his spycraft, his baseball past, his quirky brilliance, the race between the American and German atom-bomb programs, and more.

And now for a bit of a tease. I've been thinking all along that this collection contains the first through the last of my stories about the very odd, and very interesting, Moe Berg. But I've gotten interested recently in the fascinating story of Hedy Lamarr, the Hollywood film star in the 1930s and 1940s who was also an inventor. Along with composer George Antheil she developed and patented a radio-guidance device that could be used to steer torpedoes toward the ships they were trying to sink. In our reality, that invention was patented but wasn't used in the war effort. But in some alternate history I can see Hedy and Moe having some adventures in the North Atlantic or the English Channel, using this guidance system with its well-aimed torpedoes to sink the ship carrying heavy water to the site of the German bomb program. Sounds like fun, so watch for "Alternating Currents" sometime soon.