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Killing Lincoln: The Shocking Assassination that Changed America Forever

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Review

*Killing Lincoln* is a non-fiction (though it reads like historical fiction) account of the end of the Civil War, the assassination of Lincoln, and the capture of John Wilkes Booth and his conspirators (time period between March 4, 1865 thru July 7, 1865). The book is divided into 4 parts: total war, the ides of death, the long good Friday, and the chase. Part 1 describes the final days of the Civil War as Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant are locked in battle. John Wilkes Booth is introduced as a Northerner who is a southern sympathizer and is outraged that the Union is winning so he plans to kidnap Abraham Lincoln. The Ides of death begins on the night of April 10 in Washington, D.C. with citizens celebrating the end of the war and waiting for a speech by Abraham Lincoln. Booth’s plans to kidnap the President have changed to killing the President. In “The Long Good Friday,” April 14th begins with Lincoln in the White House, then at the play at Ford’s Theater, and ends the following dawn. The final section details the search for John Wilkes Booth and anyone connected with or suspected of being linked to the assassination of President Lincoln.

The book is written in present tense, with short chapters, vivid details, and an emotional intensity that gives the story a sense of urgency, intimacy and suspense. The narrative is very easy to follow. The events are described in great detail feeling the exhaustion and feelings on the battlefield, the thoughts and feelings Lincoln had, the streets of D.C. during those days, putting the reader into Ford’s Theater the night of the killing, the young doctor tending to Lincoln after he was shot, John Wilkes Booth’s pain as he attempted to escape after breaking his leg, and the manhunt and eventual killing of John Wilkes Booth. The Afterword includes synopses of figures, both well-known and not-so-well-known, touched by the historical events of April 1865. The Appendix, photos and index complete the compelling picture of this historical work that reads like a thriller.