



Lincoln's Grave Robbers

By Steve Sheinkin

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The action begins in October of 1875, as Secret Service agents raid the Fulton, Illinois, workshop of master counterfeiter Ben Boyd. Soon after Boyd is hauled off to prison, members of his counterfeiting ring gather in the back room of a smoky Chicago saloon to discuss how to spring their ringleader. Their plan: grab Lincoln's body from its Springfield tomb, stash it in the sand dunes near Lake Michigan, and demand, as a ransom, the release of Ben Boyd --and \$200,000 in cash. From here, the action alternates between the conspirators, the Secret Service agents on their trail, and the undercover agent moving back and forth between the two groups. Along the way readers get glimpses into the inner workings of counterfeiting, grave robbing, detective work, and the early days of the Secret Service. The plot moves toward a wild climax as robbers and lawmen converge at Lincoln's tomb on election night: November 7, 1876.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 5-9-Lively dialogue and a fascinating narrative make this an entertaining read. A true-crime thriller set in 1876, the story involves Secret Service agents on the trail of counterfeiters who hoped to spring their leader from jail by holding the body of President Abraham Lincoln for ransom. The men involved included "Big Jim" Kennally, the mastermind behind the plot; Terrence Mullen; and Benjamin Boyd. Among the lawmen are James Brooks, chief of the Secret Service, and agents Patrick Tyrrell and Elmer Washburn. The account of the body-snatching plot is interwoven with the presidential election of 1876 between candidates Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden. There is also information about Mary Todd Lincoln and her son, Robert, who was a prominent Chicago attorney at the time. Readers also learn about the workings of the association in Springfield that operated the Lincoln Tomb. The book includes a glossary of phrases used in the dialogue. Readers will be entertained by the animated writing style, which creates a real page-turner, and learn history at the same time. An essential addition for all collections.-Patricia Ann Owens, Illinois Eastern Community Colleges
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From [Booklist](#)

With a title uniting two highly popular topics—Abraham Lincoln and ghoulish crime—this is sure to pique the interest of many readers, and Sheinkin's gripping narrative will hold them to the thrilling climax. In 1876, a group of Chicago counterfeiters hatched a half-baked plan to remove President Lincoln's corpse from its resting place near Springfield, Illinois, and hold it for ransom. Although there was minimum security at the grave site and little to prevent the thieves from carrying out their dastardly scheme, the fledgling Secret Service was onto them (more for their counterfeit operations than their grave-robbing conspiracy), and their plans were foiled in the nick of time. While describing this small episode, Sheinkin weaves in information about the formation of the Secret Service, the history of counterfeit operations, presidential campaigns and elections, and much more. Excellent pacing within an appealing format. Photo elements were not available for review. Grades 5-8. --Randall Enos

Review

This meticulous and tremendously suspenseful account of the attempted heist of Abraham Lincoln's body in 1876 reads like a smartly cast fictional crime thriller, with a skillful buildup of tension and sharp character portrayals. Sheinkin (Bomb) lays the groundwork for the plot by delving into the history of counterfeiting, a booming business during and after the Civil War ("By 1864, an astounding 50 percent of the paper money in circulation was fake"). James Kennally, leader of one of the largest counterfeiting rings in the Midwest, masterminded the plot to steal the late president's body from the Lincoln Monument, outside Springfield, Ill. His intent was to ransom the purloined corpse, hitting up the government for a tidy sum of money and the freedom of his jailed, top-notch engraver. Perhaps the most dynamic player is Lewis Swegles, a shrewd career criminal who juggled double roles as Secret Service informer and alleged conspirator. Sheinkin's study of Swegles's thought process and machinations intensifies the drama of the final showdown between the would-be robbers and government officials. A sizzling tale of real-life historical intrigue.

- *Publishers Weekly* starred review

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Hilton Rogers:

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