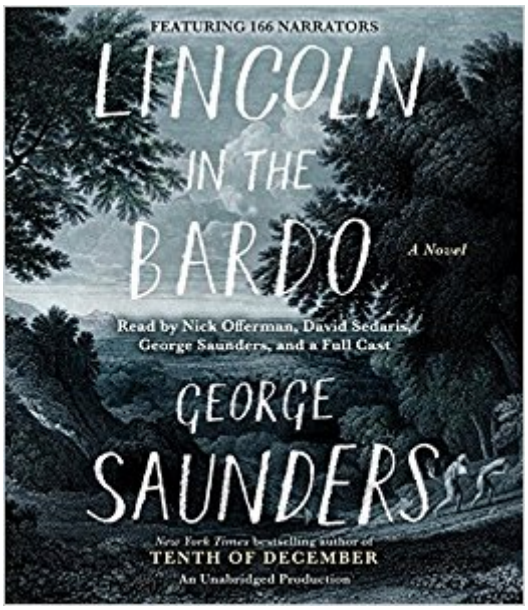
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Lincoln In The Bardo: A Novel



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Synopsis

The long-awaited first novel from the author of Tenth of December: a moving and original father-son story featuring none other than Abraham Lincoln, as well as an unforgettable cast of supporting characters, living and dead, historical and inventedFebruary 1862. The Civil War is less than one year old. The fighting has begun in earnest, and the nation has begun to realize it is in for a long, bloody struggle. Meanwhile, President LincolnÃ¢â ¬â„¢s beloved eleven-year-old son, Willie, lies upstairs in the White House, gravely ill. In a matter of days, despite predictions of a recovery, Willie dies and is laid to rest in a Georgetown cemetery. Ã¢â ¬Å“My poor boy, he was too good for this earth,Ã¢â ¬Â• the president says at the time. Ã¢â ¬Å“God has called him home.Ã¢â ¬Â• Newspapers report that a grief-stricken Lincoln returns, alone, to the crypt several times to hold his boyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s body.From that seed of historical truth, George Saunders spins an unforgettable story of familial love and loss that breaks free of its realistic, historical framework into a supernatural realm both hilarious and terrifying. Willie Lincoln finds himself in a strange purgatory where ghosts mingle, gripe, commiserate, quarrel, and enact bizarre acts of penance. Within this transitional stateÃ¢â ¬â •called, in the Tibetan tradition, the bardoÃ¢â ¬â •a monumental struggle erupts over young WillieÃ¢â ¬â„¢s soul.Lincoln in the BardoÃ Â is an astonishingÃ Â feat of imagination and a bold step forward from one of the most important and influential writers of his generation. Formally daring, generous in spirit, deeply concerned with matters of the heart, it is a testament to fictionÃ¢â ¬â„¢s ability to speak honestly and powerfully to the things that really matter to us. Saunders has invented a thrilling new form that deploys a kaleidoscopic, theatrical panorama of voices to ask a timeless, profound question: How do we live and love when weÃ Â know that everything we love must end?The 166-person full cast features award-winning actors and musicians, as well as a number of SaundersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ family, friends, and members of his publishing team, including, in order of their appearance: Ã Â Nick Offerman as HANS VOLLMAN David Sedaris as ROGER BEVINS III Carrie Brownstein as ISABELLE PERKINS George Saunders as THE REVEREND EVERLY THOMAS Miranda July as MRS. ELIZABETH CRAWFORD Lena Dunham as ELISE TRAYNOR Ben Stiller as JACK MANDERS Julianne Moore as JANE ELLIS Susan Sarandon as MRS. ABIGAIL BLASS Bradley Whitford as LT. CECIL STONE Bill Hader as EDDIE BARON Megan Mullally as BETSY BARON Rainn Wilson as PERCIVAL Ã¢â ¬Å“DASHÃ¢â ¬Â• COLLIER Jeff Tweedy as CAPTAIN WILLIAM PRINCE Kat Dennings as MISS TAMARA DOOLITTLE Jeffrey Tambor as PROFESSOR EDMUND BLOOMER Mike OÃ¢â ¬â„¢Brien as LAWRENCE T. DECROIX Keegan-Michael Key as ELSON FARWELL Don Cheadle as THOMAS HAVENS and Patrick Wilson as STANLEY Ã¢â ¬Å“PERFESSERÃ¢â ¬Â•

LIPPERT with Kirby Heyborne as WILLIE LINCOLN, Mary Karr as MRS. ROSE MILLAND, and Cassandra Campbell as Your NarratorPraise for the audiobookÃ¢â ¬Å“Lincoln in the Bardo" sets a new standard for cast recordings in its structure, in its performances, and in its boldness. Now, let's see who answers the challenge.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â œ Chicago Tribune Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Like the novel, the audiobook breaks new ground in what can be accomplished through a story. It helps that thereÃ¢â ¬â„¢s not a single bad note in the cast of a whopping 166 people. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s also the rare phenomenon of an audiobook being a completely different experience compared to the novel. Even if youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ve read the novel, the audiobook is worth a listen (and vice versa). The whole project pushes the narrative form forward.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â œ A.V. Club Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“The result is an auditory experience unlike any other, where the awareness of individual voices disappears while the carefully calibrated soundscape summons a metaphysical masterpiece. This is a tour de force of audiobook production, and a dazzling realization of SaundersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ unique authorial structure.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •BooklistÃ Â Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“The finished audiobookÃ¢â ¬â„¢s tapestry of voices perfectly mirrors the novel.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Entertainment WeeklyPraise for George Saunders Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“No one writes more powerfully than George Saunders about the lost, the unlucky, the disenfranchised.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Saunders makes you feel as though you are reading fiction for the first time.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Khaled HosseiniÃ¢â ¬Å“Few people cut as hard or deep as Saunders does.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Junot DÃƒÂ-azÃ Â Ã¢â ¬Å“George Saunders is a complete original. There is no one better, no one more essential to our national sense of self and sanity.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Dave Eggers Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Not since Twain has America produced a satirist this funny.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Zadie Smith Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“There is no one like him. He is an originalÃ¢â ¬â •but everyone knows that.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Lorrie Moore Ã¢â ¬Å“George Saunders makes the all-but-impossible look effortless. WeÃ¢â ¬â„¢re lucky to have him.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Jonathan Franzen Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“An astoundingly tuned voiceÃ¢â ¬â •graceful, dark, authentic, and funnyÃ¢â ¬â •telling just the kinds of stories we need to get us through these times.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Thomas Pynchon

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of February 2017: Lincoln in the Bardo is hilariously funny, horribly sad, and utterly surprising. If you can fight past an initial uncertainty about the identity of its narrators, you may find that itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s the best thing youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ve read in years. This first novel by acclaimed short-story-writer and essayist George Saunders (Tenth of December, The Brain-Dead Megaphone) will upend your expectations of what a novel should be. Saunders has said that Ã¢â ¬Å“Lincoln in the BardoÃ¢â ¬Â• began as a play, and that sense of a drama gradually revealing itself through disparate voices remains in the workÃ¢â ¬â„¢s final form. The year is 1862. President Lincoln, already tormented by the knowledge that heÃ¢â ¬â„¢s responsible for the deaths of thousands of young men on the battlefields of the Civil War, loses his beloved eleven-year-old son, Willie, to typhoid. The plot begins after Willie is laid to rest in a cemetery near the White House, where, invisible to the living, ghosts linger, unwilling to relinquish this world for the next. Their bantering conversation, much of it concerned with earthly -- and earthy Ã¢â ¬â œ pleasures, counterbalances LincolnÃ¢â ¬â„¢s abject sorrow. Saunders takes huge risks in this novel, and they pay off. His writing is virtuosic Ã¢â ¬â œ and best of all, its highs and lows are profoundly entertaining. You may hear echoes of Thornton Wilder, Beckett and even a little Chaucer, but Lincoln in the Bardo is peculiar and perfect unto itself. Some advice: donÃ¢â ¬â„¢t try to read this one in a library. YouÃ¢â ¬â„¢ll be hooting with laughter when you arenÃ¢â ¬â„¢t wiping away your tears. --Sarah Harrison Smith, The Book Review --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ã¢â ¬Å“A luminous feat of generosity and humanism.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Colson Whitehead, The New York Times Book Review Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A masterpiece.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Zadie Smith Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Ingenious . . . SaundersÃ¢â ¬â •well on his way toward becoming a twenty-first-century TwainÃ¢â ¬â •crafts an American patchwork of love and loss, giving shape to our foundational sorrows.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Vogue Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Saunders is the most humane American writer

working today.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •HarperÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Magazine Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“The novel beats with a present-day urgencyÃ¢â ¬â •a nation at war with itself, the unbearable grief of a father who has lost a child, and a howling congregation of ghosts, as divided in death as in life, unwilling to move on.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Vanity Fair Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“A brilliant, Buddhist reimagining of an American story of great loss and great love . . . Saunders has written an unsentimental novel of Shakespearean proportions, gorgeously stuffed with tragic characters, bawdy humor, terrifying visions, throat-catching tenderness, and a galloping narrative, all twined around the luminous cord connecting a father and son and backlit by a nation engulfed in fire.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Elle Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Wildly imaginative.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Marie Claire Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Mesmerizing . . . Dantesque . . . A haunting American ballad.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Publishers Weekly (starred review) Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“Exhilarating . . . Ruthless and relentless in its evocation not only of Lincoln and his quandary, but also of the tenuous existential state shared by all of us.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Kirkus Reviews (starred review) Ã Â Ã¢â ¬Å“ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s unlike anything youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ve ever read, except that the grotesque humor, pathos, and, ultimately, human kindness at its core mark it as a work that could come only from Saunders.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The NationalPraise for George SaundersÃ¢â ¬Å“No one writes more powerfully than George Saunders about the lost, the unlucky, the disenfranchised.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Michiko Kakutani,Ã Â The New York TimesÃ¢â ¬Å“Saunders makes you feel as though you are reading fiction for the first time.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Khaled HosseiniÃ¢â ¬Å“Few people cut as hard or deep as Saunders does.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Junot DÃƒÂ- azÃ¢â ¬Å“George Saunders is a complete original. There is no one better, no one more essential to our national sense of self and sanity.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Dave EggersÃ¢â ¬Å“Not since Twain has America produced a satirist this funny.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Zadie SmithÃ¢â ¬Å“There is no one like him. He is an originalÃ¢â ¬â •but everyone knows that.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Lorrie MooreÃ¢â ¬Å“George Saunders makes the all-but-impossible look effortless. WeÃ¢â ¬â„¢re lucky to have him.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Jonathan FranzenÃ¢â ¬Å“An astoundingly tuned voiceÃ¢â ¬â •graceful, dark, authentic, and funnyÃ¢â ¬â •telling just the kinds of stories we need to get us through these times.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Thomas Pynchon

Before you crack open George Saunders’ new (first) novel, "Lincoln in the Bardo", you must empty your mind of what you expect an historical novel to be. Both the structure and the narrative are incredibly non-traditional, somewhat experimental, often disorienting, but ultimately fulfilling. Let me assure you that if you open your mind, you’ll not only get used to it, you will enjoy it thoroughly.That said, I think "Lincoln in the Bardo" would work even better as a stage play, somewhat reminiscent of

"Our Town", and in this sense I think an audio recording of the novel, if done well, might be the best way to experience this work.Bardo is a Tibetan word for the "in-between" or "transitional" state between lives (thank you, Wikipedia). The novel takes place in one night in a cemetery and the story is narrated by hundreds of voices: old and young, men, women, and children, white and black, salve and free. These denizens of Saunders' novel are in a place between life and death. We are told that people stay in this gray area for varying periods of time and that children usually stay there a very short time (this is where it also sounded a lot like Purgatory to me). Do these "beings" know that they are actually dead? They use words like "sick box" for coffin, and "sick-form" for body, "white stone home" for mausoleum, so they seem to be unclear as to their actual state. Through these voices Saunders creates as fascinating (and chilling) a version of the after-life as Dante Alighieri gave us. (There is a particularly interesting and notable discussion among them about free will in the latter part of the novel.)The basic plot is fictionalized history: Willie, Abraham Lincoln's young son, has died and he is now in the Bardo. Here we meet the many fascinating - and funny! characters who show Willie around, who witness the unusual sight of Lincoln cradling the body of his young son, and who endeavor to help both father and son to find peace. That's as far as I will go with the "plot" of this novel.One of my favorite things about this unique novel, was how Saunders presented conflicting "news reports". For example, when reporting on the White House gala reception the night Willie is dying, some "witnesses" said there was a full moon, some said there was no moon, some said it was green, some red, others said it was just a sliver. This serves to remind us that recorded history is just as unreliable as our current news reporting. What is the truth? Do we ever know? For the purpose of "Lincoln in the Bardo", we only need to know that the Lincolns did lose their beloved son Willie in early 1862, all else is brilliantly imagined and "reported" by Saunders.Ultimately "Lincoln in the Bardo" is a riveting exploration of death, grief, and love told in an utterly unique, almost poetic, fashion.

I almost want to break this review into two parts. One for those who know Saunders and one for those whoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll be experiencing him for the first time. What does it matter? Well, youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re about to hear and read a lot about this book, Lincoln in the Bardo, about Saunders himself (there was so much press with Tenth of December that I feel like he and I have hung out multiple times; that I know all his stories), and about his genius. Then, if youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve never read him, and especially if you havenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t read much in the way of modern or post-modern literature, youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re going to pick up this book and put it down in about five minutes. That, dear readers, would be a grave (see what I did there?) error,

a real tragedy. Why? Because SaundersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ much anticipated first novel really is as genius as the stories and interviews and blurbs are going to claim, but you have to do a little more of the work as a reader than you might be used to.Much anticipated is the phrase youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll probably hear most. What that should tell you is that Saunders has a strong fan base. He truly does, and full disclosure here, IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve counted myself among them for a few years now. His mastery of the short story is well known, with the use of quirky characters, odd theme parks, and surreal science fiction-y, angst inducing situations known to take you to dark, uncomfortable places but that still manage to find and nourish a spark of humanistic hope. Perhaps the most common feeling among his readers as theyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve enjoyed these works is ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“man, I wish this guy would write a novel!ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• He has, and in true Saunders fashion, heÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ensured that very little about the experience is ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“normalÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•.IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m not going to regurgitate plot here, plenty of better reviews have already done you that favor. What I do want to make sure to express is the feel of the structure and the experience, perhaps in terms of other things youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve read and seen. The most common comparison IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve read is Edgar Lee MastersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Spoon River AnthologyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•. The comparison is apt, there are similarities, mainly in that the dead speak to us of their pasts and especially of their mistakes. But MastersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ dead are much less playful and rarely attempt humor while SaundersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ cast of spirits deliver several laugh out loud moments as they guide readers through the tale. I thought often of Twain as I read.Another comparison that came to mind several times was DanteÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Inferno. Though instead of a proper hell, we are treated to a description of a Bardo, a purgatory where spirits have remained in between their death and their final destination. Each held up for reasons of their own personal obsessions, several of which are brilliantly and humorously described throughout the novel. Others are devastatingly sad yet delivered equally as powerfully. The reader increasingly learns about the rules and behaviors of that Bardo through these snippets of stories.This is probably a good time to talk about structure. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s quite different and again, IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢d expect no less from Saunders. Picture a Greek chorus, a paragraph or two of dialog (rarely more) with an attribution after each. It is startling at first and again, will be especially so to readers less familiar with modern and post-modern lit. And so it is this difference that will probably be the biggest complaint as the reviews begin to pile up here. My advice? Hang in there, it works and it works quite well. In fact, youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll not only get used to it, youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll learn to love it.More comparisons now. Lincoln, the titular and in some ways central (though in many ways not)

character expresses the most powerful dialog and I often thought of Shakespeare when Lincoln spoke. These are beautiful and profound moments, by far the novelÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s most powerful as he reflects on the death of his son Willie. You donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t have to be a parent to feel the impact of his dialog, but it sure didnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t hurt, and I personally havenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t read such raw, sincere and painful cogitation on death and mourning since I read TwainÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The Death of JeanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•. Readers of Paul HardingsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ Enon have also tasted of similar parental agony. In any case, it is through LincolnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s character that the deepest waters flow.One other comparative thought, especially if youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re hearing all the publicity and thinking of picking up this novel for grandma who loves to read. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll also bring to mind at various times Beavis and Butthead, or maybe Hank and Bobby Hill. I donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t mean that as a negative, I really donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t. But I do understand that this is something about Saunders that people either love or hate. At one moment Lincoln may wax eloquent on the spark of life and in the next, you may be reminded for the tenth time or more that one of the spirits has a massive erection. These moments bring me joy and laughter, but I do comprehend that for some others they donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t carry the proper dignity of their normal read. If you are one such, Saunders may not be for you.Most importantly, IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢d implore all readers to keep an open mind. If youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re a Saunders fan, youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re going to be strengthened in that fandom. If youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re new to Saunders, but enjoy alternative structures and have a history of adventurous reading, IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢m confident youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll soon count yourself a soldier in his army. However, if youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re one whose reading tends toward the traditional, conservative in structure and clear in its identity, then Lincoln in the BardoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s narrative structure and its moments of revelry may at first feel like nails on a chalkboard to you. Please, fight through it. The novel's main points could yet become for you sweet susurrations of humanistic glory that leave you wet eyed and wondering where Mr. Saunders has been all your life.

This is a highly unusual, wonderful, and engaging book, and I have recommended it to others who completely agree with that assessment. I cannot speak highly enough about it.I have already read it twice, first in the Kindle edition (as I read virtually everything) and then again on paper. I suggest that the paper version is superior because of the unusual structure of the book and the ability to view it more fully that way.

This is an extraordinary work of both craftsmanship and narrative imagination, wrapping love and death and questions of the spirit and afterlife in textured and nuanced characters of rich variety and at time great good humor. For readers of Saunders other work, or magical realism, or Lincoln buffs.

I liked that the story was told from many different points of view, yet that made it reading of the book hard work. Characters come and go and reappear and the reader isn't sure how they are connected or what they are supposed to mean. Themes of Life and a Death and Grace abound. Images of heaven and hell tease. Lincoln visits the cemetery while his son lies in the Bardo waiting to understand what has happened to him and all those who surround him. And once he understands, there is. ..... well, that is better left unsaid.

I love a book that makes me think along new paths and this one certainly did that. What a mind it took to conceive this storyline and what a researcher to make it come alive with the somberness of Lincoln's reality. May none of us be tempted to linger in the Bardo when it is time for us to move on.

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