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Sent back in time to record a speech by Abraham Lincoln, Ben Steward learns that he has been transported twice--on two consecutive days--and that his double still exists in the same time zone. Reprint.--*NYT*

The Lincoln Hunters Details

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Author : Wilson Tucker

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From Reader Review The Lincoln Hunters for online ebook

Nicholas says

"It was all over but the Monday morning quartering."

I was surprised when, after I started reading this, I glanced back at the copyright page and saw that it was from 1958, though after than I did notice the similar qualities to 50s and 60s science fiction. But that line, from a few chapters in, broke the mold a bit. It's clearly designed to be a drift of the term Monday morning quarterback, but it's thrown in there, naturally, not to make a point, or played for laughs. It's exactly how Ben Stewart would express himself.

This is casually in there as a contrast to the obsession the other Characters all have with Shakespeare, which clearly hasn't drifted much (though their history has a second Shakespeare as well, I would have liked to see the story behind him).

The story is set several hundred years in the future and in 1856, featuring (obviously) time travel and Tucker's versions and outcomes of paradoxes: overlapping visits by the same person and elasticity of history. Of the two main problems in the story for the characters, one of the outcomes was completely predictable, however the other did have me wondering until the end. Not the best time travel ever, but hints at being bit ahead of its time.

Roddy Williams says

'Ben Steward, man of the 26th Century, was a "Character" for Time Researchers: he was an adventurer, an actor, a student of history... a man trained to blend into any era of man's long past. In the overpopulated, stultifying world of 2578, his was an exciting job.

He had, for example, been standing on the shore with the Indians when the Pilgrims rowed ashore from the Mayflower. And now he had been sent back 700 years into his past, to the political furore just before the Civil war... and he was facing certain death.

For the engineers who operated the time machine had made a mistake, and Steward was stuck in a time which would overlap the time-segment he had already scouted. No person could twice exist in the same time; it was an impossibility. And so Steward, in a few moments, would simply disappear...'

Blurb from the Ace paperback edition

In 2578 Time Travel is possible but fiendishly expensive. The chrononauts employed to travel the time lanes are known as 'Characters' because of their ability to adapt to different ages and assume characters with society. They are employed to retrieve artefacts or recordings (for profit) from the past and the company employs – apart from the chrononauts themselves – a team of research specialists and engineers to ensure that they will pass unnoticed in the relevant period and that they have a precise geographical and temporal target. All does not always go according to plan however.

Amos Peabody, the curator of a future museum has discovered a reference to a lost speech by Abraham Lincoln, made in Bloomington, Illinois in 1856 and wants the Time Researchers to obtain a recording for

him.

The leader of the four man chrononaut team, Ben Steward, is sent to reconnoitre the area, but arrives a day too late on the morning after the speech. He explores the town, finds a fragment of the company's recording wire and is greeted by a man who appears to have met him the day before.

Steward returns to the future and selects three colleagues to accompany him back to 1856; Doc Bonner, Dobbs and Billy Bloch. the latter two are by trade, actors, a profession which lends itself to the business of fitting into the local scene.

Billy has problems though. he is an alcoholic and has learned that his brother – by dint of becoming unemployed – has been sequestered into one of the government's labour gangs. To all intents and purposes this is government endorsed slavery.

The recording of Lincoln's speech is made but Billy disappears and Steward is forced to try and find him before his earlier self appears the following morning. This will create a 'cancellation' of the individual since no two manifestations of the same person can exist at the same time.

One might consider it to be a cosy little novel but Tucker includes a rather sobering afterword. Within the novel he gives no hint of the text of Lincoln's speech, although it is common knowledge that Lincoln is an excellent orator and knows how to work a crowd. It has long been supposed that that the speech was a dire condemnation of the slave-owning states of the South and that this was a turning point in US history when other political parties (such as the Whigs) died out, leaving only the Democrats and Lincoln's Republican party.

Tucker tell us that he was prompted to write the novel by an old booklet published in 1897 for the Republican Club of New York entitled 'Abraham Lincoln's Lost Speech' assembled from notes taken at the time by one HC Whitney:-

HC Whitney quotes Lincoln as follows:

(Speaking of a statement made by Stephen Douglas: "As a matter of fact, the first branch of the proposition is historically true; the government was made by white men, and they were and are the superior race. This I admit." (A paragraph later:)

"Nor is it any argument that we are superior and the negro inferior – that he has but one talent while we have ten. Let the negro possess the little he has in independence; if he has but one talent, he should be permitted to keep the little he has." (Speaking on a plank in the Whig Party platform:) "We allow slavery to exist in the slave states – not because slavery is right or good, but from the necessities of our Union... and that is what we propose – not to interfere with slavery where it exists (we have never tried to do it), and to give them a reasonable and efficient fugitive slave law... It was part of the bargain, and I'm for living up to it..."

Tellingly, within the novel Dobbs tells his colleagues a story about Ramses who was at one time at war with the Hittites. He suffered a terrible loss in a decisive battle, but decided – in a masterful ancient Egyptian act of spin, to tell his nation that he had won a glorious victory. This account of Ramses' victory was recorded and was accepted as historical fact for at least 3000 years. Tucker is telling us in his own way that the Americans, and presumably all other societies, are very adept at rewriting their own history.

Lauren says

Dated but kind of fun

Jeannie says

I had forgotten the title of this book, but it was mentioned in Stephen Kings 11/22/63 and I could now add it to my list. I read it in high school and since we had a copy of it, I read it several times. I was fascinated by the time travel.

Dan says

I looked for this book for 8 years and found it at a library book sale!!! Considering how old this book is, I think it was well written with an interesting coherent story line. There were a few surprises along the way but I enjoyed it for what it was.

Bill FromPA says

A very good time travel novel which fudges things (a bit) unnecessarily at the end.

Jim Ross says

Wilson Tucker is a wonderful storyteller with an awesome skill for putting readers into period settings. I read The Lincoln Hunters in the early 70's and came away with a satisfied glow, one that rekindled on the first page of this re-read. It held me captive again for the length of the characters' breathtaking journey. No spoilers here. Mesmerizing work.

James Mourgos says

There was small mention of this slim volume in Stephen King's recent book, "11/22/63". It too had some concept of the problems relating to time travel so I picked up "The Lincoln Hunters."

First Impressions:

I read Tucker's "Year of the Quiet Sun" which is more fast-paced and interesting with a twist ending. "Lincoln Hunters" lacks that twist and is a bit anti-climatic.

Plots:

It's not a bad book but really has little to do with Lincoln. Time Researchers scour the past for lost treasures. This 24th century company employs "Characters" who go into the past and record actual events for museums and other clients. One Benjamin Stewart is chosen for the trip to Lincoln's first speech which was never recorded nor written down by reporters of the time, somewhere in Bloomington, IL at the Republican convention, many years before the Civil War.

What's interesting is Tucker's explanations of the time – the warm, subtropical climate of Cincinnati, the USA went through a Second Revolution and is now run by an Emperor in city-states, and the unemployment problem is solved with labor camps (a fate most of the characters in the book shudder to contemplate!).

Most of the book deals with personalities and a somewhat soap opera style with a woman engineer, secretly married to the guy who died under Benjamin's watch in a Roman gladiator adventure and less-described characters including a drunk who thinks he's a Shakespearean actor, a doctor and an adventurer.

The actual traveling to the 19th century and meeting Lincoln was a bit anti-climatic, but I did not know a lot about Lincoln's start in politics so I did learn something.

The writing is at times hard to follow. Tucker will say Benjamin, then later say "The Character then" implying that Ben is also the Character named. It's confusing not to use pronouns, Tucker!

Bottom Line:

"The Lincoln Hunters" is not a historical novel so much as a book about societies, where we look towards the past, whether personal past or Man's past, and regret a little too much rather than look towards the future. Cute little novel.

Les says

I read the book today - basically in one sitting. Yes, it was dated. But, hey, it was written 55 years ago! What matters to me are the story, the characters, and the overall plausibility - and The Lincoln Hunters succeeded in all three. Reading it felt like watching an episode of the Twilight Zone - a rating I don't bestow lightly...

Jessiqa says

In the far future a gentleman who runs a museum wants to find a copy of a speech that Abraham Lincoln gave in 1856 in Bloomington, Illinois which has since been lost. Time Researchers is the only company with the ability to travel through time, and this seems like a pretty easy job. They'll send an advance man back in time to get the lay of the land. After his return and debriefing, he will lead a team of four back to 1856 to record the lost speech. It should have been routine. But when the advance shoot is off by 48 hours, the advance man has a strange encounter with a local, and one of the team members gets drunk, it bodes very poorly for the shoot.

Time travel is my favorite sub-genre of science fiction. This story is fun and since I am an Illinoisan, even scratches the itch for a bit of local history. Given that the book is written in the 1950s, it does have its issues with sexism and racism, especially toward Native Americans. As such it is a product of its time, but it can also turn away some readers, and understandably so. Aside from those issues, I enjoyed the story. The main character is charismatic and funny. The descriptions of the future world painted a picture of a world that is definitely more technologically advanced than our own, yet certainly not perfect. I wasn't terribly satisfied with the ending, but it didn't ruin the book for me either.

John says

The Lincoln Hunters holds up surprisingly well. It's a solid time travel story about trying to record a one of Lincoln's lost speeches (bonus points for making the macguffin an event instead of an object -- I mean, don't you want to know what it was that Lincoln said?) and Tucker shows us what it's like when time travel goes wrong and gets messy. Ben Steward is a likable, flawed Character (with a capital C); I wish Tucker had written another novel about the "Sam Wendy incident."

Minor parenthetical notes:

- I can only assume that the character of "Bobby Bloch" is Tucker's way of making fun of his friend Robert Bloch.
- In an instance of life imitating art, in reference to a time traveler describing the Hamilton-Burr duel, another character declares, "I saw it at the theater."

Raegan Butcher says

This was a disappointment. I kept waiting for something to actually happen but the plot just seems to plod along to a very unspectacular ending. Meh. I Don't understand how this has acquired a reputation as a great time travel story.

Mark says

The power of time travel to open up the past provides the starting point of Wilson Tucker's novel. In the 26th century, a business specializing in time travel is hired to record a speech made by Abraham Lincoln in 1856. What seems like an ordinary assignment, though, is soon complicated by an error that sends the team leader, Benjamin Steward, to the morning after speech. Now risking a fatal paradox that may lead to his death, he travels back with his team to the day of the speech itself, where he faces complications that threaten to undermine his mission and may lead even to his death.

Tucker's novel is a short and engaging venture about the perils and complications of time travel. His premise of a history only half-remembered is an entertaining one and his characters, while somewhat dated, are interesting and sympathetic. While not as good as his later time-travel novel, , Wilson provides one of the better efforts at a time travel novel and an enjoyable adventure that entertains the reader.

Tom Britz says

This novel, though written in the late 50's did not read at all "dated". It is the tale of a time traveling trip by a group of "Time Researchers" from the year 2578 that go back to record the "missing speech" of Abraham Lincoln. It was given in the year 1856 at the First Republican Congress.

A word about Wilson Tucker. He was a well known SF fan before he became an author and he liked to give

his characters "real" names. He would name a character after a real life SF author and give them characteristics that may or may not be true to the real person.

The story also has a recurring story line about no one can "meet" themselves during a time trip, without "cancelling" each other out. Though this was only a theory, but the best scientific evidence was weighted this way, and no-one wanted to test it out. Due to an engineering snafu Benjamin Steward was to be sent back to reconnoiter the scene before the mission took place, but he was mistakenly delivered a day late. He had arrived the day after the speech.

So when the mission to record was sent to record the speech Ben had a certain window of time to get the speech and head back. There shouldn't have been a problem, but for one of his crew members, a Bobby Bloch (Robert Bloch who in this tale is a thespian with an alcohol problem.) gets lost and the mission is in jeopardy. Though the recording is accomplished one of the group has come up missing.

There are other side stories as well that make this novel a well written adventure that is running against the clock. The ending was satisfying, though not as I would maybe have wanted it. This is a good fast read and the tension drives the narrative.

Carol Cotter says

I registered a book at BookCrossing.com!
<http://www.BookCrossing.com/journal/14416599>
