



## Hunting the Hangman by Howard Linskey

*This is the kind of book that I would describe as 'historical fiction'. Although it fictionalises events to the extent of inventing dialogue, mood and emotion, the novel is clearly so firmly based on fact that it can serve as a reliable alternative to a non-fiction account. As someone who can find non-fiction a little dry or hard-going at times, this kind of novel represents the perfect way to access history and I never felt that Linskey was drifting too far from the actual events; in fact, in the foreword he states that, to the best of his knowledge, everything that happens in the book actually occurred.*

*The novel tells the story of Operation Anthropoid, which involved two Czechoslovakian soldiers being trained in Britain and sent back to their own country to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich, one of the architects of the Holocaust. It takes the reader from the planning and strategising through to the actual execution of the plot and then beyond as the events were the catalyst to one of the War's greatest atrocities. The events may be familiar to some from the 2016 film 'Anthropoid', which I have yet to see but immediately added to my wishlist after reading this book.*

*Interestingly, Linskey's foreword describes a previous attempt to have the book published that saw him encouraged to add new scenes to flesh out the story, but this is certainly a tale that needs no fleshing out. Truth can indeed be stranger, or at least more dramatic, than fiction and this book is a genuine page-turner.*

*While thrilling, the book is also incredibly chilling, particularly in some of the historical quotes that introduce each chapter. You may find yourself wondering how on earth someone could ever have thought, let alone said, what is written here. There is also real horror in the description of what came after Operation Anthropoid and the effect that decisions made in the relative safety of Britain had on the ordinary citizens of Czechoslovakia.*

# RealReaders

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*For me, this book is a resounding success. It tells an important story and gives you all the facts of what happened, while also delivering an emotional impact that a non-fiction book may not be able to. I was also impressed that, while Linskey certainly does not evoke any sympathy for the Nazi characters in the book, he still manages to depict them as human beings (albeit deplorable ones) rather than comic book monsters. This is 'historical fiction' at its very best.*

**Cathy Boyle**

**5\***

*Fiction based on historical fact, makes this a fascinating thriller. Gripping you from the first paragraph, with fast pace, the story draws the reader in to the way of life in German-occupied Czechoslovakia and the risks that the Resistance fighters were up against daily. Howard Linskey has you hooked. Reinhard Heydrich may not be an instantly recognisable name from the Second World War but after reading this, it is one you will never forget.*

*Two men, one Czech, one Slovak, are recruited for the most important event in their lives - the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, the main instigator of the Holocaust. The retribution from the Nazis was truly horrifying.*

*Lest we forget.*

**Cathy Holland**

**5\***

*This is a first rate thriller and a realistic fictional account of the real events that shook the world at the height of WWII. Hunting the Hangman is thought provoking, exciting and clearly a labour of love for the author - a genuine joy to read.*

*Hunting the Hangman is about Operation Anthropoid set up by the SOE, (Special Operations Executive), in the Autumn of 1941. The brainchild of Eduard Benes, the London exiled Czech Prime minister, the plan was approved and supported by Winston Churchill. The target was Reinhard Heydrich, deputy to Heinrich Himmler, head of the Reich Main Security Office and Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia. An audacious plan to assassinate the man in charge of the Nazi regime subjugating*

*the people of Czechoslovakia with relentless cruelty. Heydrich was a man arrogant enough to believe that no one would dare to make an attempt on his life. Hunting the Hangman relates the story from inception and recruitment of agents to the execution of the plan, the fall out and terrible aftermath. A story of the best and worst of humanity; conviction, sacrifice, betrayal and brutality.*

*The introduction to the novel provides a short explanation of how Linskey came to the story and how the novel progressed. It also sets the scene for readers new to this momentous event in world history, (a brief cast of characters may also help). The brief quotes that preface each chapter help are a clever adjunct to the story. Reinhardt Heydrich is an enigma, he may not be the best-known Nazi but he is the one most people have trouble figuring out. Clearly erudite, courageous, fiercely intelligent and talented (a highly regarded violinist). Yet he is known to history as 'The Hangman', 'the Butcher of Prague' and even his colleagues referred to him as 'The blond beast'. His role in the Wannsee Conference and the 'Final Solution' is a part of this novel. It is often surmised that Heydrich would have followed Hitler as Fuhrer if the Nazis had not lost the war. That may be one of the motivations for Benes' plan. Linskey seeks to get under the skin of this man and explore the complexity of his character and he paints a very credible portrait.*

*The heroes of the novel are the brave partisans, Josef Gabcik and Jan Kubis, the men who volunteered for this mission despite knowing the personal sacrifice demanded. Linskey has imagined two men with the usual ambitions of the young, flawed but with a burning idealism, determined and brave. Keen despite the knowledge of the terrible cost of success and what it will mean for them personally and the people of Czechoslovakia. Believable young men, not super human but ordinary people rising to the challenge of extraordinary times.*

*Linskey has a flair for scene setting. Such as; the meeting between Benes and Churchill to agree the plan, or the introduction of Heydrich to the novel as a family man at a photograph session. Or the fear, apprehension, opposition, acceptance and enthusiasm for the plan by the partisans who helped the two men carry out their operation. From the first page where the merits of the plan are discussed; is this an assassination or a murder? Important questions of morality and consequence are explored. From the home counties to the heart of the action in Prague, the denouement at St. Cyril's and St. Methodius church, Linskey sketches out places and people that provide real colour to the storytelling.*

*This is one of the most courageous and conspicuous events of the second world war, ideal fodder for a novelist but also a daunting task to do it justice. Linskey manages*

# RealReaders

*Totally independent book reviews*

to do this. 'Hhhh' by Laurent Binet, may be a more literary retelling of the events of Prague, 1942 but *Hunting the Hangman* is much more engaging emotionally. The novel is meticulously researched and a number of real events are brought to life with reimagined dialogue and descriptive prose.

It is coming up to the 75th anniversary of the incident at the heart of the novel which was an impetus for Linskey to finally publish a novel that had existed unfinished form for some time. There are two Hollywood movies scheduled this year, 'Anthropoid' and 'The Man with the Iron Heart' and if they live up to the standard of the book in telling the story they could be very interesting. There was an earlier film made in the 1970's called 'Operation Daybreak'.

This is unlike anything Linskey has previously published, he is the author of the David Blake thrillers (also published by No Exit Press). On the strength of *Hunting the Hangman* I would welcome more historical fiction from him. As the book went along it became more engrossing, (very exciting and thought provoking). If you liked *Corpus* by Rory Clements I think this novel will interest you. If you want to know more about Heydrich as architect of the final solution there is a short book called 'The Villa, The Lake, The Meeting' by Mark Roseman. This details how the decision to exterminate the Jewish people of Europe was made in such a speedy and chilling matter of fact way.

**Paul Burke**

**4\***

We may feel we know all there is to know of the WWII Nazi atrocities. Many incidents and places are familiar to us. But the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich and its impact on Prague in Czechoslovakia is one I was not aware of.

Hitler referred to Heydrich as the 'Blond Beast' and Heydrich fancied himself as his heir apparent. His skull sculptured features in photographs underline his personality as Heydrich cared little for life if it stood in the way of his success.

This year is the 75th anniversary of the plot, set up in England by the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and exiled Czech Leader Eduard Benes which chose two Czech soldiers- Josef Gabchik and Jan Kubis to parachute back into their homeland and kill this most prominent Nazi leader. Heydrich, although a seemingly cultured family man, was ambitious and trusted hardly anyone. He now controlled the city of

Prague and was formulating the Holocaust plans. The lives of many were in his hands.

Linskey has obviously thoroughly researched this book - after all he states it was 17 years in the making! Sometimes it is good also to be able to put faces to the people of whom we read and a cursory search of the internet can assist with fleshing out the main protagonists of this highly readable piece of 20th century history. Obviously, the dialogue is fiction but much flows convincingly well for the various characters and their lives. A portrait of Prague, now it seems a city of stag weekends, reminds us of its glorious architecture and culture.

Gabcik and Kubis knew the danger of their plan. Their time in Prague was short and seemed also to allow for love interests (which it also seems will feature in a forthcoming movie about this assassination starring Cillian Hands).

I would not normally read more about WWII, but this is still one of those episodes that can simultaneously enlighten and destroy your belief in humanity.

An excellent personal read. Might be worth Book Clubs using the book alongside the forthcoming film for comparison. Well done to the author for finally finishing his task!

**Philipa Coughlan**

4\*

I was first introduced to the writing of Howard Linskey back in 2017 when the first of his gangster David Blake trilogy books *The Drop* was released. I was intrigued by the setting, not London or Manchester, no Liverpool or Glasgow, but somewhere much nearer to my home, Newcastle. I thoroughly enjoyed the three books and when a chance came to review a book he is about to release the name of the Author swung it for me straight away.

*Hunting the Hangman* starts with an Introduction about the book and the authors fascination with a German called Reinhard Heydrich who was based in Czechoslovakia in the Second World War. The book then has two 'Cast of Characters' pages and their official titles or roles in the book. At first I wondered about the Introduction? Would this have been better written as an epilogue and would the lengthy list of characters mean I was checking my list page all through the book. Regarding the

introduction, it's personal choice and not once did I refer to the list of characters after I'd started the first chapter.

The book is written in a date ordered diary style and goes from Great Britain to Czechoslovakia comfortably without you losing your thread. You are introduced to the main players as you go through the early chapters and you are taken on a ride of emotions, the abhorrent reading of systemised deaths by Heydrich as if he is reading a business spreadsheet he is not happy with to the frustration of the Czechs exiled in Great Britain, Gabcik and Kubis who want nothing more than to get back to their country and fight the war for the resistance. I found the book distressing when they describe and quote Germans and their feelings and barbaric actions taken against the Czech people and the Jews, or 'Untermensch' as the victims are described. The bravery of the resistance and the overtaking of the country and beautiful city of Prague is described brilliantly. You genuinely read on wanting to know what happens to Gabcik and Kubis before and after they leave Great Britain. I knew nothing of the Czech involvement in the war before this book and Linskey's writing doesn't make it boring to read, he brings out the good and the bad, love and hate, trust and betrayal with passion that his fascination with the subject shows here. It is uncomfortable and sometimes incomprehensible when the German actions are shown and the numbers of deaths are there in black and white.

Thoroughly a really good book to read from start to finish. Films are apparently following but when I watch them I'll always have in the back of my mind the harrowing shadows of innocent deaths and the inhumane German and traitorous Czechs actions during this time.

**Mark Abrahamson**

**5\***

This is a story set in the Second World War and is a real chiller of a thriller. What makes it all the more chilling is the fact that this is based on a true story. Reinhard Heydrich is a less well known Nazi than some of the more infamous ones, but his story matches that of the Nazis that committed the worst of atrocities. Heydrich was in charge of the territory under Nazi control that was Czechoslovakia and ruled with a rod of iron. Many Czechs had been exiled to Britain, including the President. So it was that a plot was hatched to assassinate this butcher that was destroying the Czech people's homeland.

# RealReaders

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*The story, as portrayed by Howard Linskey, the author, starts off a little slow but really gets going after that and is definitely worth persevering with. When the two would be assassins arrive in their now former homeland, the real horrors unfold and we get an insight into the make-up of the various Nazis involved. We also get an insight into the lives of the Czech people at that time from the vivid descriptions of the author. I like the quotations from various contemporaries of the time, at the beginning of each chapter, mainly from the German side, but also some from the British too.*

*A stunning read to mark the 75th anniversary of this episode in history.*

**Martin Turner**

**4\***

*I must admit I had never heard of Reinhard Heydrich, the hangman of the title. He was in charge of Prague when occupied during WWII and was only second to Hitler himself. This year marks the 75th anniversary of Operation Anthropoid which was designed to kill Heydrich.*

*The men concerned are under no illusion that this is a suicide mission but welcome the chance to destroy the man who is responsible for many vicious deaths in their home country.*

*This is well researched and written thriller which brings a little-known story to a wider audience.*

*We are taken along a journey which is quite a roller-coaster and it's hard to put down as the need to know what happens is fuelled by the dramatic story.*

*Will the men succeed and what will happen to the city of Prague after these dramatic real-life events...*

*I got this book from Real Readers in return for my honest review. If you enjoy War stories this is definitely a book for you.*

**Morag Buchan**

**5\***

*In May 1942 Hitler's deputy in Moravia and Bohemia, Reinhard Heydrich, was seriously injured in a bomb attack in a suburb of Prague. As Protector he had absolute power over the subjects of the Reich, and had been the main architect of the Final Solution. Although an unwritten "code" of war existed that no senior figure of the regime should be assassinated, in this instance Churchill sent two men, trained by the newly formed SOE, Jan Kubis and Josef Gabcik, to Czechoslovakia (as it then was) to carry out the killing.*

*Ten days after the attempt, Heydrich died. He was given a Nazi state funeral where he was lauded by Hitler as "the man with the iron heart". Heydrich had been tipped as Hitler's successor, and was certainly a paradox amongst the Nazi elite. He was a brilliant musician, flying ace and Olympic fencer in 1936. He had built up an extraordinarily efficient information centre for the SS which contained facts, not only about enemies, but the Nazi party members as well. It is not without possibility that Hitler may have been relieved by his removal from power, as Heydrich was the best placed of the inner circle, and the most intelligent, had he wanted to stage a coup.*

*Kubris and Gabcik paid the ultimate price for their bravery, as did hundreds of innocent Czechs who were rounded up and shot, or deported to concentration camps, in reprisal. Their names have never been forgotten.*

*The novel is a gripping story, and of course reads like the thriller it is. The reader is willing the two SOE operatives to survive and escape, but they were betrayed by another man trained in England (and who was ultimately hanged as a traitor after the war).*

*It seems rather petty to point out a couple of inaccurate details which unfortunately slipped in. The term "Queen's English" was not applicable in 1942, and would not be until 1952. Filter cigarettes were not widely available until the 1950's, and zips on clothing were not common during the war years. However, this must not detract from a book which it is difficult to put down, and I can thoroughly recommend it to the individual read and to reading groups.*

**Ruth Ginarlis**

**4\***



# RealReaders

*Totally independent book reviews*

*According to both the introduction and acknowledgements of this book it took 17 years from first word to publication, and so obviously this was a labour of love to the Author, and in my humble opinion a very good job he made of it.*

*A work of fiction based on the real-life events of "Operation Anthropoid". Two British SOE trained operatives one Czech and one Slovak are parachuted back to Czechoslovakia to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich known by the locals of Prague as 'the Hangman' a man so evil even his fellow SS soldiers call him 'the Blond Beast', considered to be Hitler's' chosen heir and known by him as 'The Man with Iron Heart' and trusted with implementation of the 'Final Solution' to the Jewish problem.*

*This is a terrific read instantly readable which grabs and keeps you engaged from first to last page, intelligent well written with excellent characterisations throughout, and a real sense of what life would be like in war torn Prague. A story of betrayal, consequence, courage, cowardice, evil, heroism, honour and love, as our heroes and the resistance who help plan the attack.*

*This is a book I personally very much enjoyed and therefore recommend accordingly.*

**John McCormick**

**4\***

*Had read one of Howard Linskey's gang/crime thrillers before I was wondering how he would transfer his speed and energy from that into a historical fact/fiction story.*

*I shouldn't have worried. A quick, energetic page turner that got you feeling for the protagonists, as they undergo selection and training for a 'do or die' mission against the Nazi occupation of their country, and that had me gripped from start to finish. Set across 2 countries, the scene is set for the 2 men to get back into the country they left to carry out the mission they are selected for.*

*Short chapters kept the speed high, the characters had depth, human flaws, compassion and the supporting cast were not just filler to the scene but involved in the action too.*

*Enjoyed the scenes in a city I have visited, so could imagine the action as it unfolded and the described retribution carried out by the Nazi occupants made by blood run cold.*

*Really enjoyed this, will be looking out for more of Howard's books in the future.*

**Richard Clarey**

**5\***

*In 1942 two men, trained by the British SOE, parachuted into their native Czechoslovakia with one sole objective: to kill the man ruling their homeland. Jan Kubis and Josef Gabcik risked everything for their country. Their attempt on Reinhard Heydrich's life was one of the single most dramatic events of the Second World War, and had horrific consequences for thousands of innocent people.*

*If this book was purely fiction it would be hard to swallow but the fact that it is based on true events, makes it horrific. I can hardly say that I 'enjoyed' this book. It is common knowledge what the Nazis did to various people, most of all the Jews, but when you read that one man was responsible for all the atrocities in order to further his own career, one can understand the hatred felt by those resisting his actions.*

*The book also describes what devastating effects the attempt to murder Heydrich had. The repercussions were horrendous with whole villages massacred and houses destroyed until nothing remained.*

*I was also amazed at the display of treachery. It is hard to understand how fellow conspirators could do what they did to their comrades. However, when one reads about the torture they underwent, maybe one should not be over judgmental.*

*In conclusion, it is hard to read this book as fiction knowing that the 'Jewish problem' resulted in the murder of eleven million people. It is a difficult book to read without getting emotionally involved. I never cease to be amazed by some of the bravery displayed by people and the story is a thrilling tale of courage, resilience and betrayal. It would be hard to 'make up' some of the things in the book and hope the integrity is kept when it is made into a film.*

*The book would make a good read for a book group. I feel it should also be on the school syllabus as we should never forget these atrocities or allow them to be repeated.*

**Dorothy Flaxman**

**5\***

*The year is 1942 and the world is at war with Germany, and Reinhard Heydrich is a wanted man...he is wanted DEAD! He was deemed so evil even his fellow SS officers gave him a name - The Blond Beast. Hitler however called him The Man with an Iron Heart and in Prague The Hangman, He was given a job, to eradicate "the Jewish" problem, to systematically murder over eleven million people.*

*Two men have him in their sights and nothing and nobody will get in their way, Jan Kubis and fellow Czechslovakian Joesf Gabcik have been sent by the British SOE, because they are the best for the job. Based on real life events, this novel of the two brave men who parachuted back into their native country, will have the reader holding his or her breath. It has been classed as one of the most dramatic events during the Second World War, but it also had horrific consequences for thousands of innocent people.*

*Howard Linskey has taken the time to read and research this evil man's life, and what he did next, and deserves to be read by anyone, male or female who want a thriller that will have you holding your breath!*

**Angie Rhodes**

**5\***

*This was a fascinating insight into the Czech resistance in WWII. I still found myself rooting for Jan and Josef, even when the odds were stacked against them. And the story of how the book came to be published was just as fascinating. An enjoyable read for anyone with an interest in 20th century European history.*

**Vicky Stone**

**3\***

*This is a very clever piece of work. For it can be accessed on a number of levels which surely guarantees it reaching a wider audience. It can be taken as a good old WWII yarn. It can be read as a spy/resistance thriller. You can enjoy it as an historical fiction. Students of the Holocaust will find it of interest. There's even some fleeting chick lit appeal!*

*2017 is the 75th anniversary of the attempted assassination of Reinhard Heydrich who earned himself a number of nicknames none of which match what I'd like to call him but unprintable in this context! This book is a fictional account of that assassination attempt.*

*And the result is an extremely readable and engaging book which may sound paradoxical given the subject matter. And it's no mean feat either. A straightforward non-fiction account of this event could have come across as somewhat turgid and inaccessible. I believe readers who might ordinarily eschew a book of this nature would be surprised at how much they gain from reading it. Mr. Linksey has liberally punctuated this book with humanity. The paradox of all the Nazis stood for in many ways?*

*The narrative flows easily and gathers momentum as the book progresses. The historical research is impeccable and what shines though is Mr. Linskey's passion for his subject. Without that this story would be just another tale. But he makes every word count. He makes his characters come to life and we care about those we are supposed to care about.*

*I am not unfamiliar with Howard Linskey's work and I love the way he has developed as a writer. But this book has elevated him even further in my opinion. And to know that it has been seventeen years in the making fills me with awe.*

*I have a strong belief that the damage carried out by the Third Reich should never go forgotten for the sake of those who perished innocently and those who gave their lives to resist the evil onslaught. So this is an important book. It also celebrates Jan Kubis and Josef Gabcik - all that they did and all that they stood for. Celebrate may seem an inappropriate choice of word for which I only partly apologise.*

**Gill Chedghey**

**5\***