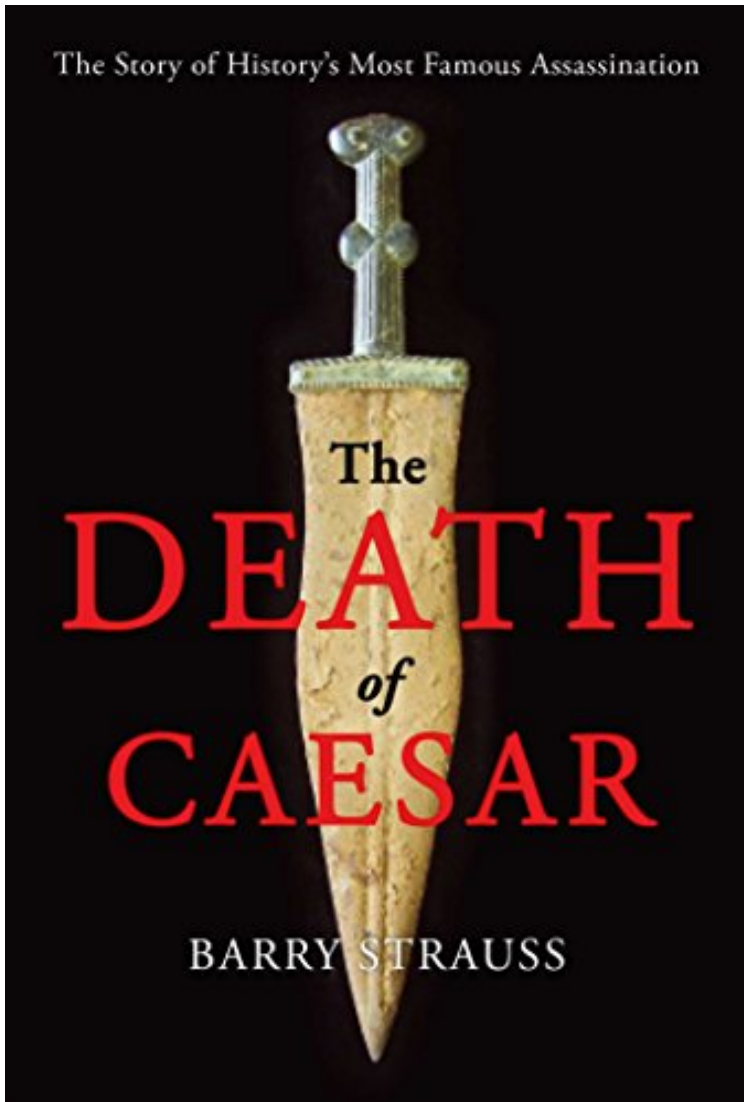


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The Death of Caesar: The Story of History's Most Famous Assassination (English Edition)



Par Barry Strauss

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn this story of the most famous assassination in history, the last bloody day of the [Roman] Republic has never been painted so brilliantly (The Wall Street Journal).Julius Caesar was stabbed to death in the Roman Senate on March 15, 44 BCthe Ides of March according to the Roman calendar. He was, says author Barry Strauss, the last casualty of one civil war and the first casualty of the next civil war, which would end the Roman Republic and inaugurate the Roman Empire. The Death of Caesar provides a fresh look at a well-trodden event, with superb storytelling sure to inspire awe (The Philadelphia Inquirer). Why was Caesar killed? For political reasons, mainly. The conspirators wanted to return Rome to the days

when the Senate ruled, but Caesar hoped to pass along his new powers to his family, especially Octavian. The principal plotters were Brutus, Cassius (both former allies of Pompey), and Decimus. The last was a leading general and close friend of Caesars who felt betrayed by the great man: He was the mole in Caesars camp. But after the assassination everything went wrong. The killers left the body in the Senate and Caesars allies held a public funeral. Mark Antony made a brilliant speech not Friends, Romans, Countrymen as Shakespeare had it, but something inflammatory that caused a riot. The conspirators fled Rome. Brutus and Cassius raised an army in Greece but Antony and Octavian defeated them. An original, new perspective on an event that seems well known, *The Death of Caesar* is one of the most riveting hour-by-hour accounts of Caesars final day I have read....An absolutely marvelous read (The Times, London).

Death of Caesar

RIDING WITH CAESAR IN AUGUST 45 B.C., SEVEN months before the Ides of March, a procession entered the city of Mediolanum, modern Milan, in the hot and steamy northern Italian plain. Two chariots led the march. In the first stood Dictator Gaius Julius Caesar, glowing with his victory over rebel forces in Hispania (Spain). In the position of honor beside Caesar was Marcus Antonius better known today as Mark Antony. He was Caesars candidate to be one of Romes two consuls next year, the highest-ranking public officials after the dictator. Behind them came Caesars protg, Decimus, fresh from a term as governor of Gaul (roughly, France). Beside him was Gaius Octavius, better known as Octavian. At the age of only seventeen, Caesars grandnephew Octavian was already a man to be reckoned with. The four men had met in southern Gaul and traveled together over the Alps. They took the Via Domitia, an old road full of doom and destiny Hannibals invasion route and, according to myth, Hercules road to Spain. Caesar was heading for Rome. For the second time in little over a year, he was planning to enter the capital in triumph, proclaiming military victory and an end to the civil war that began four years earlier, at the start of 49 B.C. But it was not easy to end the war, because its roots went deep. It was in fact the second civil war to tear Rome apart in Caesars lifetime. Each war reflected the overwhelming problems that beset Rome, from poverty in Italy to oppression in the provinces, from the purblind selfishness and reactionary politics of the old nobility to the appeal of a charismatic dictator for getting things done. And behind it all lay the dawning and uncomfortable reality that the real power in Rome lay not with the Senate or the people but with the army. Dark-eyed and silver-tongued, sensual and violent, Caesar possessed supreme practical ability. He used it to change the world, driven by his love for Rome and his lust for domination. Caesars armies killed or enslaved millions, many of them women and children. Yet after these bloodbaths he pardoned his enemies at home and abroad. These overtures of goodwill raised suspicions could the conqueror be a conciliator? but most had no choice but to acquiesce. Of all the Romans in his entourage, Caesar chose these three men Antony, Decimus, and Octavian for places of honor on his reentry to Italy. Why? And why would one of them betray him within seven months? And why, after Caesars death, were the three men able to raise armies and turn on each other in a new war that retraced their route from northern Italy into southern Gaul? Consider how each of these men came to Caesar in the years before 45 B.C.

THE RISE OF DECIMUS Decimus Junius Brutus Albinus, to use his full name, was a close friend of Caesar. They had worked together for at least a decade, beginning in 56 B.C. In that year, when Decimus was about twenty-five years of age, he made a sensation as Caesars admiral in Gaul. He won the Battle of the Atlantic, which conquered Brittany and opened the door to the invasion of England. First impressions are important and, in this case, accurate. War, Gaul, and Caesar were Decimuss trademarks. He was speedy, vigorous, resourceful, and he loved to fight. He was proud, competitive, and eager for fame. Like other ambitious men of his class, he won elected office in Rome, but the capital and its corridors of power never captivated him as the Gallic frontier did. Decimus was born on April 21, around 81 B.C. He came from a noble family that claimed descent from the founder of the Roman republic, Lucius Junius Brutus. Decimuss grandfather was a great general and statesman but his father was no soldier and his mother was a flirt who dallied with revolution and adultery and perhaps with Caesar, who seduced many of the married noble ladies in Rome. A great historian suggested that Decimus was Caesars illegitimate son. Intriguing as this theory is, it is not supported by the evidence. In any case, young Decimus found his way to Caesars staff. The military suited Decimus. By hitching his wagon to Caesars bright star he restored his familys name for armed might. He was Caesars man as much as any Roman was. We dont know what Decimus looked like. He might have been attractive like his mother, a well-known beauty, and as tall as one of the Gauls whom he once impersonated. The dozen of Decimuss letters that survive mix the coarse atmosphere of the camp with the formal politeness and self-assurance of a Roman noble. Elegant at times, his prose also includes clumsy phrases like, just take the bit between your teeth and start talking. Perhaps some of the roughness of his gladiators Decimus owned a trouper rubbed off on him but, if so, it didnt stop

him from trading pleasantries with Rome's greatest orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero. In Gaul, Decimus joined the greatest military adventure of his generation. It took Caesar only eight years (58-50 B.C.) to conquer the big, populous, warlike region that the Romans called Long-Haired Gaul, after the flowing tresses of its people, an area that comprised most of France, all of Belgium, part of the Netherlands, and a sliver of Germany (the Provence region of France was already a Roman province). (He also invaded Britain.) With its gold, agricultural produce, and potential slaves, Gaul made Caesar the richest man in Rome. He shared the wealth with officers like Decimus. After his victory at sea off Brittany in 56 B.C., Decimus next appears in 52 B.C., when a great Gallic revolt almost broke Roman rule. Decimus took part in the most dramatic day of the war at the siege of Alesia (in today's Burgundy). As Caesar tells the story, Decimus began the countercharge against a Gallic offensive and Caesar followed, conspicuous in his reddish purple cloak. The enemy collapsed and the war was over except for mopping-up operations the following year. In 50 B.C. Decimus was back in Rome for his first elective office, *quaestor*, a financial official. That same year, in April, Decimus married Paula Valeria, who came from a noble family. There was scandal here to wink at because in order to marry Decimus she divorced her previous husband, a prominent man, on the very day he was scheduled to come back from service in a province abroad. A year after Decimus and Paula married, in 49 B.C., civil war broke out between Caesar and his oligarchic opponents. They considered him a power-hungry, populist demagogue who threatened their way of life. He found them narrow-minded reactionaries who insulted his honor and no one paid more attention to honor than a Roman noble. Caesar's chief opponents were Pompey and Cato. Pompey the Great, *Cnaeus Pompeius Magnus*, was no ideologue; in fact, he was Caesar's former political ally and son-in-law. A conqueror whose career took him to Hispania, Roman Asia (modern Turkey), and the Levant, Pompey was Rome's greatest living general until Caesar. Marcus Porcius Cato, also known as Cato the Younger, was a prominent senator, loyal to the old-fashioned notion of a free state guided by a wise and wealthy elite. Rigid and doctrinaire, he was mocked for thinking that Rome was the Republic of Plato when others regarded it as the Sewer of Romulus. He was Caesar's arch-enemy. Most of Decimus's family tended to sympathize with Pompey and Cato, and his wife's brothers fought for them. As an adult, Decimus was adopted into the family of Postumius Albinus, a patrician clan that claimed an ancestor opposed to Rome's kings, and his adoptive family had conservative leanings, too. Yet Decimus remained in Caesar's camp. It was probably early in 49 B.C. that Decimus issued coins celebrating his victories in Gaul, his loyalty, his sense of duty and spirit of unity—all propaganda themes of Caesar's in the civil war. That same year Caesar named Decimus admiral for the siege of the city of Massilia (Marseille), an important seaport and naval base on Gaul's Mediterranean coast that supported Caesar's enemies. In the six-month struggle that followed, Decimus destroyed Massilia's fleet. He won Caesar's praise for his vigor, spirit, oratorical skill, foresight, and speed in combat. He gave Caesar's cause a propaganda boost because until then, Pompey had monopolized naval glory. Caesar now returned to Italy and then turned east for a showdown with Pompey. He left Decimus in Massilia to serve as governor of Gaul through 45 B.C. as his deputy. Decimus then acquired additional military renown by defeating the rebellious *Bellovaci*, said to be Gaul's best warriors. Decimus seems as hard as the country in which he spent much of his adult life. He was one of those Romans they were rare, but probably less rare than the sources admit who took on the manners and customs of the barbarians he fought. He spoke the Gaulish language, which few Romans did, and he knew the country well enough to be able to put on Gallic clothes and pass as a local. Around July 45 B.C. Decimus met Caesar in southern Gaul on his way back from Hispania. There Decimus no doubt rendered his accounts of the province that he had governed in the dictator's absence. That Caesar was well pleased with Decimus is clear from the position of honor that Caesar gave him on the return to Italy. After more than a decade in Caesar's service, Decimus came home rich, a hero, and on the rise. He was about to take office as one of the *praetors* (high judicial officials) in Rome for the rest of 45 B.C. Caesar had chosen him as governor-designate of Italian Gaul (that is, roughly, northern Italy) for 44 B.C. and consul-designate for 42 B.C. In short, Decimus was well on his way to restoring his family's fame. There was only one hitch. Decimus's father and grandfather held office by the free choice of the Roman people and at the command of the Senate. Decimus did everything on Caesar's say-so. That accorded poorly with the cherished ideal of every Roman noble, *dignitas*. It's a difficult word to translate. In addition to dignity, it means worth, prestige, and honor. Perhaps the best single translation is rank. The question now for Decimus was whether he would be satisfied to remain in Caesar's shadow or whether he would insist on being his own man. MARK ANTONY As Caesar entered Mediolanum on his return homeward, Mark Antony stood beside him in his chariot. Antony looked the part of a hero. Born on January 14, ca. 83 B.C., he was in the prime of life. He was handsome,

strong, and athletic. He wore a beard in imitation of Hercules, the demigod whom his family claimed as an ancestor. The Romans connected Hercules with Hispania, which gave symbolic significance to Antonys presence. His personality conveyed vigor. He was gregarious, intelligent, and self-assured. He drank lustily and in public and endeared himself to his soldiers by eating with them. If Caesars health had declined at all over the years, as some say, then the robust presence of Antony would prove reassuring. Antony came from a senatorial family. His fathers people, the Antonii, tended to be moderate conservatives, but Antonys mother, Julia, was Julius Caesars third cousin. Perhaps that was his ticket to Caesars staff in Gaul, which Antony joined in 54 B.C. As a youth, Antony had cut a wide swath in Rome, where he became notorious for drinking, womanizing, racking up debts, and keeping bad company. By his mid-twenties, Antony was over his wild ways. He studied oratory in Greece and distinguished himself as a cavalry commander in the East between 58 B.C. and 55 B.C. Already in his earliest armed encounter, he was the first man on the wall during a siege, and he went on in numerous battles to display courage and win victories. Antonys early service for Caesar in Gaul is unrecorded, but it was probably impressive because Caesar sent him back to Rome in 53 B.C. to run for quaestorian election that he won. He then returned to Gaul as one of Caesars generals and, like Decimus, left with a record full of promise. Also like Decimus, Antony held elective office in Rome in 50 B.C. As one of the ten Peoples Tribunes, elected each year to represent ordinary peoples interests, Antony played a role in that years fateful clash between Caesar and his opponents in the Senate. Led by Cato, the Senate stripped Caesar of his governorship of Gaul and denied him the chance to run for a second consulship. Caesar feared that, if he returned to Rome, he would be put on trial and unfairly convicted by his enemies. Antony tried to stop the Senate from its moves against Caesar, but he was rebuffed and fled Rome for Caesars camp. Antony emerged in the Civil War with Pompey as Caesars best general and an indispensable political operative. He received such key assignments as organizing the defense of Italy, bringing Caesars legions across an enemy-infested Adriatic Sea, and linking up with Caesar in Roman Macedonia. Antony played his most important role at the Battle of Pharsalus in central Greece on August 9, 48 B.C., when he commanded Caesars left flank in the decisive battle against Pompey. When Caesars veterans broke Pompeys ranks, Antonys cavalry chased the fleeing enemy. It was a sudden and terrible defeat for Caesars enemies. They still had cards to play hundreds of warships, thousands of soldiers, major allies, and plenty of money. But with the sight of thousands of Pompeys dead soldiers at the end of the Battle of Pharsalus, you could almost hear the sound of the political tide turning in the Sewer of Romulus. While he spent the next year in the East, winning allies, raising money, conquering rebels, and wooing a new mistress, Caesar sent Antony back to Rome. There Antony arranged for Caesar to be dictator for the year and for himself to be Master of the Horse (Magister Equitum), as a dictators second-in-command was called. This was Caesars second dictatorship. It dismayed lovers of liberty. Meanwhile, traditionalists took offense at Antonys rowdy and degenerate lifestyle, which he resumed with abandon. The sources speak of wild nights, public hangovers, vomiting in the Forum, and chariots pulled by lions. It was hard to miss his affair with an actress and ex-slave with the stage name of Cytheris, Venuss Girl, since she and Antony traveled together in public in a litter. Both civil and military politics in Rome slipped out of Antonys hands. When proponents of debt relief and rent control turned violent, Antony sent troops into the Forum and blood flowed the troops killed eight hundred men. Meanwhile, some of Caesars veteran legions, now back in Italy, mutinied for pay and demobilization. The situation called for Caesars firm hand, and he returned to Rome in the fall. He put down the mutiny and agreed to reduce rents, although he refused to cancel debts. As for Antony, Caesar always knew how to turn peoples weaknesses to his advantage. After speaking against Antony in the Senate, Caesar turned around and gave him a new assignment. It was a job that most Romans would have turned down, but not Antony. He lacked political finesse, but he didnt mind getting his hands dirty and he was loyal. Caesar gave Antony the job of selling all of Pompeys confiscated assets to various private bidders. Pompey was the second-richest man in Rome, surpassed only by Caesar. Antony was a sector, literally, a cutter, that is, someone who bought confiscated property at a public auction and sold it off piecemeal at a profit. The Romans considered that an ignoble profession, not suitable for a man of Antonys birth. It was not only a dirty business but a dangerous one because in 47 B.C. Pompeys allies and sons were still armed and at large. A soldier like Antony would surely prefer to win glory in the campaigns in Africa and Spain. Instead, he stayed in Rome through early 45 B.C. raising the money through his sales that Caesar needed to pay his troops. Antony was constantly short of funds and no doubt Caesar allowed him to skim a little off the top for himself. Antony now mended his ways once more by marrying again after a divorce, this time choosing a twice-widowed noblewoman, Fulvia. Of all the powerful women of the era, Fulvia is in a

class of her own. She alone once wore a sword and recruited an army, which earned her the backhanded compliment of having her name inscribed on her enemys sling bullets along with rude references to her body parts. But she did most of her fighting with words. A populist through and through, Fulvia married three politicians in turn: the street-fighting demagogue Clodius, Curioa Peoples Tribune who supported Caesarand finally and most fatefully, Antony. Antonys enemies claimed that Fulvia controlled him, which is not true. But this strong woman probably stiffened his spine and she almost certainly shared with Antony the political skills learned from her two earlier husbands. When Antony joined Caesar on his return to Italy in August 45 B.C., he was back in the dictators favor. As he stood beside Caesar and entered Mediolanum, basking in the publics acclaim, Antony might have imagined a glorious future. But obstacles lay on the road ahead.

OCTAVIAN The third man in Caesars entourage was Octavian. He was born on September 23, 63 B.C. A good twenty years younger than Antony or Decimus, he projected an authority beyond his years. If Antony was Hercules then Octavian was a short-statured Apollo: very handsome, bright-eyed, and with slightly curly blond hair. Only the bad teeth and indifferent hair grooming betrayed the reality of a man who scorned appearances and cut to the heart of things. It was an inner strength that compensated for a less than herculean physique. Neither Antony nor Decimus had been with Caesar in Hispania but Octavian had. He arrived too late for the fighting, however, because a serious illness kept him bedridden. Octavian was never the healthiest of men. When he recovered he and his companions reached Caesar in Hispania after a shipwreck and a dangerous trip through hostile country, which earned the dictators admirationa quality that only increased as he spent time with the clever and talented young man. Caesar now gave his grandnephew the honor of sharing his carriage in Hispania. It was not the first time that Caesar showed his esteem for Octavian, but then again, the youth had long showed promise. In 51 B.C., at the age of only twelve, Octavian gave the funeral oration for his grandmother JuliaCaesars sisteron the Speakers Platform in Rome. Soon after turning fifteen in 48 B.C. he was elected as one of Romes highest-ranking priests. One of his responsibilities was temporarily serving as chief magistrate, and he made quite a sight at his age sitting on the tribunal in the Forum and handing out judgments. In 46 B.C. Caesar returned to Rome and celebrated a series of triumphs for his victories in Gaul and the civil war. In one of them, he allowed Octavian to follow behind his triumphal chariot (presumably on horseback), wearing an officers insignia, even though Octavian had not even taken part in the campaign. Since this honor usually went to the sons of a triumphing general, it suggested that Caesar thought of his seventeen-year-old grandnephew as practically his son. It was an interesting choice. Unlike Antony, Decimus, or Caesar himself, Octavian was not the pure product of the old Roman nobility. Octavian was of noble descent only on his mothers sidehis mother, Atia, was the daughter of Caesars sister Julia. Octavians father, Gaius Octavius, came from a wealthy but not quite top-tier background; from a family of Roman knights, that is, a social order of Romans who were wealthy but not senators. Gaius Octavius was his familys first senator. The Octavii came from Velitrae (modern Velletri), a small and insignificant place in the Alban Hills outside Rome, an origin offering plenty of material for snobs to look down at. Gaius Octavius had a successful military and political career cut short by his death in 59 B.C. around the age of forty. Yet young Octavian had something special about him. He was Caesars blood relative, but other qualities recommended Octavian to Caesar. Octavians cousins Quintus Pedius and Lucius Pinarius were also descended from Caesars sister Julia, but they did not inspire the same esteem. Young Octavian no doubt already showed signs of the intelligence, the ambition, the fingertip feel for politics, the strategic vision, and the ruthlessnessin short, the genius that would eventually take him to the height of power. **THE FOUR HORSEMEN** The four men in the chariots entering Mediolanum were not united. Three of them wanted Caesars favor but only one could be the favorite. Antony was about to become consul with Caesars blessing. Decimus was about to become a praetor in Rome and had Caesars nod for another important governorship next and then, two years later, the consulship. But Octavian would shortly get an equally high office and even better access to the sources of power. How did Antony and Decimus react to the sudden rise of a young rival? We can only guess. Romans had little respect for youth and less for relatively low birth, so maybe they underestimated him. Yet experienced men like Antony and Decimus certainly noticed Octavians place in Caesars entourage. Octavian could be charming, but Decimus might well have recognized his chariot-mates coldblooded ambition. Decimus claimed descent from the founder of the Republic, but the grandson of a local politician Velitrae was muscling him out in the eyes of the man who ran Rome. Jealousy might be too strong a term, but Decimus was a Roman, and honor mattered to him. Cicero alleged that Antony was behind an assassination attempt on Caesar in 46 B.C. That sounds like a Roman orators usual slander but an event in 45 B.C. is more plausible. According to Cicero, when Antony

went to southern Gaul to meet Caesar that summer 45 B.C., he heard a colleagues cautious suggestion about assassinating the dictator. Antony was not interested, but neither did he report the danger to Caesar as a loyal friend would. Instead, Antony kept it to himself. As the victory parade entered Mediolanum, the men projected unity but behind the veneer they were jostling for power. The dictator could not afford to ignore this but he did. For now, he had dozens of men to see, prominent Romans who had hurried northward to greet him. No one among them was more important or more paradoxical than Marcus Junius Brutus (not to be confused with Decimus Brutus). In a few short years Brutus had gone from Caesars enemy to his friend and deputy. Always in the background was the figure that united them: Servilia, Brutuss mother and Caesars former mistress.

Revue de presse"Barry Strauss has a rare gift for the crafting of narrative history: in his hands, figures who had seemed forever frozen in marble breathe again. The Death of Caesar deftly depicts a world in which tangled motives, Machiavellian strategies, and a dose of sheer accident conspired to bring down the most powerful man in the world." (Stephen Greenblatt, author of *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*) "[A] compelling, clarifying account of one of history's most dramatic assassinations. . . . [Strauss] conveys the complexity of late republican Roman politics while keeping up a lively pace." (Lev Grossman *Time*) Strauss account of the worlds most famous assassination is as thrilling as any novel. (Robert Harris, bestselling author of the *Ancient Rome Trilogy*) [A] page-turner. . . . Detail after detail clothes the familiar facts of Caesars seemingly inevitable murder with fresh images. . . . The last bloody day of the Republic has never been painted so brilliantly." (Greg Woolf *The Wall Street Journal*) With keen historical insights and the pace of a thriller, Barry Strauss brings vividly to life the Rome of 44 B.C., the final days of Julius Caesar, and the men who killed him. This is history as it should be writtena deeply human story of all the men and women caught up in these famous events. (Adrian Goldsworthy, author of *Augustus: First Emperor of Rome*) The superb storytelling of Barry Strauss shows that the details of history's most famous assassination are just as fascinating as why it happened. . . . The Death of Caesar provides a fresh look at a well-trodden event, with storytelling sure to inspire awe. (Scott Manning *The Philadelphia Inquirer*) I have never read so detailed an account of the worlds most famous assassinationhow the plot was planned, the many personalities, the killing itself and the bitter aftermath. The Death of Caesar brings back all the suspense of an extraordinary story, as if we werent sure what was going to happen next. An unputdownable book. (Anthony Everitt, author of *CICERO*) "A fresh, accessible account of the archetypal assassination. . . . Strauss underscores [the conspirators'] dilemma with an urgency that makes each page crackle with suspense. . . . The Death of Caesar serves us both as an entertaining, vital act of preservation for those details and figures glossed over by other historians and as a reminder of a plot so daring it would be unthinkable today." (Nick Ochwar *The Los Angeles of Books*) This engrossing account of that pivotal event is exhaustive, yet surprisingly easy to read. . . . The Death of Caesar is brimming with memorable facts. (Joe Queenan *Barron's*) This history of Caesar by the American academic Barry Strauss is a romp, yes, but a glorious one, through the final months of Romes most famous ruler. . . . One of the most riveting hour-by-hour accounts of Caesars final day I have read. . . . An absolutely marvelous read. (Catherine Nixey *The Times (London)*) "Barry Strauss, as both sleuth and classicist, guides us through the why and how of the killing of Julius Caesar. A riveting blow-by-blow account by a masterful scholar and story-teller of a human drama that changed the course of Western history." (Victor Davis Hanson, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University and author of *THE SAVIOR GENERALS* and *CARNAGE AND CULTURE*) "This stupendous book has all the pace and action of a top-quality thrillermurder, lust, betrayal and high politicsyet it's all true, and comes from the pen of the world's senior academic expert in the field. A lifetime's study of the ancient sources has gone into Barry Strauss's utterly gripping account of the day that the course of human history radically changed. Superbly researched, wittily written, but above all driven by a truly exciting narrative that never lets up, this is history-writing at its best. Our understanding of what happened on the Ides of March and its chaotic, bloody aftermath is forever changed, and this will be the standard work for decades to come." (Andrew Roberts, author of *NAPOLEON: A Life*) I always knew the plunging of those fatal daggers was an epochal moment in Western Civ, but I never knew why until now. Barry Strauss is our all-knowing Vergil, escorting us across the dim landscape of history, enlightening us with precious insight. (Steven Pressfield, bestselling author of *GATES OF FIRE* and *THE LION'S GATE*) A classics thriller. . . . The Death of Caesar teases apart this paramilitary operation of 60 or more conspirators and, in reporting the facts, revokes much of Shakespeares poetic license in Julius Caesar. (Katharine Whittemore *The Boston Globe*) Strauss takes us deep into the psyche of ancient history in an exciting,

twisted tale." (Kirkus s (starred review))