

1865 synopsis – by Michael Perlmutter

The stage is bare and broken, a ghost of the preceding hours as Jenna LaFluer, a company actress, steps out onto the stage, surveying the wreckage that was Ford's Theatre shortly following the assassination attempt of Abraham Lincoln on April 14th, 1865, to sneak a cigarette. She and six other performers and stagehands have been temporarily trapped inside the locked down theatre as a growing mob congregates outside the building to await the fate of the President and the nation. The ongoing interviews of those who claimed to have witnessed the evening's attack have been postponed due to the increasing danger from the assembled crowd. In order to ensure their protection, the actors and crew are all quickly sequestered to the stage itself as the news of further attacks on the country's leaders is revealed.

Relationships strain as the evening wanes on. The crowds outside begin demanding justice from those responsible, shooting at the building and smashing windows in an attempt to force out the conspirators and vent their anger while a small faction of Union soldiers hold down their ground. Ned, a simplistic stagehand, is flushed out from deeper inside the theatre by the mob's actions. The chant of "Burn it down!" raises the stakes higher, taking a further toll on those embedded inside.

Tensions inside build as well as the group question each other as to their own allegiances North and South as well as their personal histories with John 'Wilkes' Booth, uncovering that there may indeed be a conspirator amongst them. News finally comes forth in the morning that Lincoln has died, dashing any hopes of their release. In an effort to purge their own frustration and simultaneously satisfy the outside mass's cry for vengeance, the group attempts to torture the truth from Ned by hanging on the stage's fly rigging. Jenna and Peter, a drifter in the acting ensemble, become the last hold outs against the inside mob's mentality, ultimately saving Ned by putting their own lives at risk. Final orders are received and the small group is removed from the theatre to be formally jailed awaiting pending charges of conspiracy in an act of war, leaving the theatre itself as the final ghost and silent witness.

1865 is as relevant and true today in the wake of 9/11 and LA riots (1965 and 1992) as it was when our nation first lost its innocence.