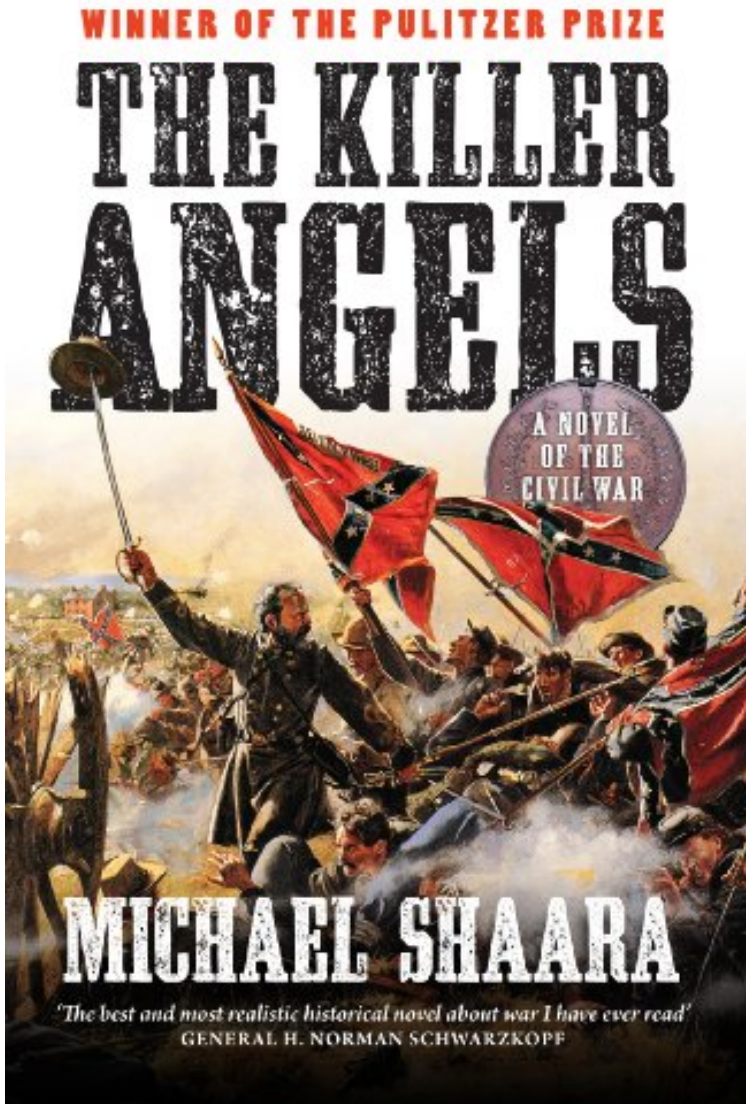


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# The Killer Angels



Par Michael Shaara  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIt is the third summer of the war, June 1863, and Robert Lee's Confederate Army slips across the Potomac to draw out the Union Army. Lee's army is 70,000 strong and has won nearly every battle it has fought. The Union Army is 80,000 strong and accustomed to defeat and retreat. Thus begins the Battle of Gettysburg, the four most bloody and courageous days of America's history. Two armies fight for two goals - one for freedom, the other for a way of life. This is a classic, Pulitzer Prize-Winning, historical novel set during the Battle of Gettysburg.Extrait1. THE SPYHe rode into the dark of the woods and dismounted. He crawled upward on his belly over cool rocks out into the sunlight, and suddenly he was in the open and he could see for miles, and there was the whole vast army below him, filling the valley like a

smoking river. It came out of a blue rainstorm in the east and overflowed the narrow valley road, coiling along a stream, narrowing and choking at a white bridge, fading out into the yellowish dust of June but still visible on the farther road beyond the blue hills, spiked with flags and guidons like a great chopped bristly snake, the snake ending headless in a blue wall of summer rain. The spy tucked himself behind a boulder and began counting flags. Must be twenty thousand men, visible all at once. Two whole Union Corps. He could make out the familiar black hats of the Iron Brigade, troops belonging to John Reynolds First Corps. He looked at his watch, noted the time. They were coming very fast. The Army of the Potomac had never moved this fast. The day was murderously hot and there was no wind and the dust hung above the army like a yellow veil. He thought: there'll be some of them die of the heat today. But they are coming faster than they ever came before. He slipped back down into the cool dark and rode slowly downhill toward the silent empty country to the north. With luck he could make the Southern line before nightfall. After nightfall it would be dangerous. But he must not seem to hurry. The horse was already tired. And yet there was the pressure of that great blue army behind him, building like water behind a cracking dam. He rode out into the open, into the land between the armies. There were fat Dutch barns, prim German orchards. But there were no cattle in the fields and no horses, and houses everywhere were empty and dark. He was alone in the heat and the silence, and then it began to rain and he rode head down into monstrous lightning. All his life he had been afraid of lightning but he kept riding. He did not know where the Southern headquarters was but he knew it had to be somewhere near Chambersburg. He had smelled out the shape of Lees army in all the rumors and bar talk and newspapers and hysteria he had drifted through all over eastern Pennsylvania, and on that day he was perhaps the only man alive who knew the positions of both armies. He carried the knowledge with a hot and lovely pride. Lee would be near Chambersburg, and wherever Lee was Longstreet would not be far away. So finding the headquarters was not the problem. The problem was riding through a picket line in the dark. The rain grew worse. He could not even move in under a tree because of the lightning. He had to take care not to get lost. He rode quoting Shakespeare from memory, thinking of the picket line ahead somewhere in the dark. The sky opened and poured down on him and he rode on: It will be rain tonight: Let it come down. That was a speech of murderers. He had been an actor once. He had no stature and a small voice and there were no big parts for him until the war came, and now he was the only one who knew how good he was. If only they could see him work, old cold Longstreet and the rest. But everyone hated spies. I come a single spy. Wet single spy. But they come in whole battalions. The rain began to ease off and he spurred the horse to a trot. My kingdom for a horse. Jolly good line. He went on, reciting Henry the Fifth aloud: Once more into the breach . . . Late that afternoon he came to a crossroad and the sign of much cavalry having passed this way a few hours ago. His own way led north to Chambersburg, but he knew that Longstreet would have to know who these people were so close to his line. He debated a moment at the crossroads, knowing there was no time. A delay would cost him daylight. Yet he was a man of pride and the tracks drew him. Perhaps it was only Jeb Stuart. The spy thought hopefully, wistfully: If its Stuart I can ask for an armed escort all the way home. He turned and followed the tracks. After a while he saw a farmhouse and a man standing out in a field, in a peach orchard, and he spurred that way. The man was small and bald with huge round arms and spoke very bad English. The spy went into his act: a simple-minded farmer seeking a runaway wife, terrified of soldiers. The bald man regarded him sweatily, disgustedly, told him the soldiers just gone by were plu soldiers, Yankees. The spy asked: What town lies yonder? and the farmer told him Gettysburg, but the name meant nothing. The spy turned and spurred back to the crossroads. Yankee cavalry meant John Bufords column. Moving lickety-split. Where was Stuart? No escort now. He rode back again toward the blue hills. But the horse could not be pushed. He had to dismount and walk. That was the last sign of Yankees. He was moving up across South Mountain; he was almost home. Beyond South Mountain was Lee and, of course, Longstreet. A strange friendship: grim and gambling Longstreet, formal and pious old Bobby Lee. The spy wondered at it, and then the rain began again, bringing more lightning but at least some cooler air, and he tucked himself in under his hat and went back to Hamlet. Old Jackson was dead. Good night, sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest . . . He rode into darkness. No longer any need to hurry. He left the roadway at last and moved out in to a field away from the lightning and the trees and sat in the rain to eat a lonely supper, trying to make up his mind whether it was worth the risk of going on. He was very close; he could begin to feel them up ahead. There was no way of knowing when or where, but suddenly they would be there in the road, stepping phantomlike out of the trees wearing those sick eerie smiles, and other men with guns would suddenly appear all around him, prodding him in the back with hard steel barrels, as you prod an animal, and he would have to be lucky, because few men rode out at night on

good and honest business, not now, this night, in this invaded country. He rode slowly up the road, not really thinking, just moving, reluctant to stop. He was weary. Fragments of Hamlet flickered in his brain: If it be not now, yet it will come. Ripeness is all. Now theres a good part. A town ahead. A few lights. And then he struck the picket line. There was a presence in the road, a liquid Southern voice. He saw them outlined in lightning, black ragged figures rising around him. A sudden lantern poured yellow light. He saw one bleak hawkish grinning face; hurriedly he mentioned Longstreets name. With some you postured and with some you groveled and with some you were imperious. But you could do that only by daylight, when you could see the faces and gauge the reaction. And now he was too tired and cold. He sat and shuddered: an insignificant man on a pale and muddy horse. He turned out to be lucky. There was a patient sergeant with a long gray beard who put him under guard and sent him along up the dark road to Longstreets headquarters. He was not safe even now, but he could begin to relax. He rode up the long road between picket fires, and he could hear them singing in the rain, chasing each other in the dark of the trees. A fat and happy army, roasting meat and fresh bread, telling stories in the dark. He began to fall asleep on the horse; he was home. But they did not like to see him sleep, and one of them woke him up to remind him, cheerily, that if there was no one up there who knew him, why, then, unfortunately, theyd have to hang him, and the soldier said it just to see the look on his face, and the spy shivered, wondering, Why do there have to be men like that, men who enjoy another mans dying? Longstreet was not asleep. He lay on the cot watching the lightning flare in the door of the tent. It was very quiet in the grove and there was the sound of the raindrops continuing to fall from the trees although the rain had ended. When Sorrel touched him on the arm he was glad of it; he was thinking of his dead children. Sir? You asked to be awakened if Harrison came back. Yes. Longstreet got up quickly and put on the old blue robe and the carpet slippers. He was a very big man and he was full-bearded and wild-haired. He thought of the last time hed seen the spy, back in Virginia, tiny man with a face like a weasel: And where will your headquarters be, General, up there in Pennsylvania? Tis a big state indeed. Him standing there with cold gold clutched in a dirty hand. And Longstreet had said icily, cheerily, It will be where it will be. If you cannot find the headquarters of this whole army you cannot be much of a spy. And the spy had said stiffly, Scout, sir. I am a scout. And I am a patriot, sir. Longstreet had grinned. We are all patriots. He stepped out into the light. He did not know what to expect. He had not really expected the spy to come back at all. The little man was there: a soggy spectacle on a pale and spattered horse. He sat grinning wanly from under the floppy brim of a soaked and dripping hat. Lightning flared behind him; he touched his cap. Your servant, General. May I come down? Longstreet nodded. The guard backed off. Longstreet told Sorrel to get some coffee. The spy slithered down from the horse and stood grinning foolishly, shivering, mouth slack with fatigue. Well, sir the spy chuckled, teeth chattering you see, I was able to find you after all. Longstreet sat at the camp table on a wet seat, extracted a cigar, lighted it. The spy sat floppily, mouth still open, breathing deeply. It has been a long day. Ive ridden hard all this day. What have you got? I came through the pickets at night, you know. That can be very touchy. Longstreet nodded. He watched, he waited. Sorrel came with steaming coffee; the cup burned Longstreets fingers. Sorrel sat, gazing curiously, distastefully at the spy. The spy guzzled, then sniffed Longstreets fragrant smoke. Wistfully: I say, General, I dont suppose youve got another of those? Good Southern tobacco? Directly, Longstreet said. What have you got? Ive got the position of the Union Army. Longstreet nodded, showing nothing. He had not known the Union Army was on the move, was within two hundred miles, was even this side of the Potomac, but he nodded and said nothing. The spy asked for a map and began pointing out the positions of the corps. Theyre coming in seven corps. I figure at least eighty thousand men, possibly as much as a hundred thousand. When theyre all together theyll outnumber you, but theyre not as strong as they were; the two-year enlistments are running out. The First Corps is here. The Eleventh is right behind it. John Reynolds is in command of the lead elements. I saw him at Taneytown this morning. Reynolds, Longstreet said. Yes, sir. You saw him yourself? The spy grinned, nodded, rubbed his nose, chuckled. So close I could touch him. It was Reynolds all right. This morning. At Taneytown. Exactly. You didnt know any of that, now did you, General? The spy bobbed his head with delight. You didnt even know they was on the move, did ye? I thought not. You wouldnt be spread out so thin if you knowed they was comin. Longstreet looked at Sorrel. The aide shrugged silently. If this was true, there would have been some word. Longstreets mind moved over it slowly. He said: How did you know we were spread out? I smelled it out. The spy grinned, foxlike, toothy. Listen, General, Im good at this business. Tell me what you know of our position. Well, now I cant be too exact on this, cause I aint scouted you myself, but I gather that youre spread from York up to Harrisburg and then back to Chambersburg, with the main body around Chambersburg and General Lee just round the

bend. It was exact. Longstreet thought: if this one knows it, they will know it. He said slowly, We've had no word of Union movement. The spy bobbed with joy. I knew it. That's why I hurried. Came through that picket line in the dark and all. I don't know if you realize, General Sorrel said coldly, Sir, don't you think, if this man's story was true, that we would have heard something? From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* The best and most realistic historical novel about war I have ever read. GENERAL H. NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF My favorite historical novel . . . A superb re-creation of the Battle of Gettysburg, but its real importance is its insight into what the war was about, and what it meant. JAMES M. MCPHERSON Author of *Battle Cry of Freedom* Remarkable . . . A book that changed my life . . . I had never visited Gettysburg, knew almost nothing about that battle before I read the book, but here it all came alive. KEN BURNS Filmmaker, *The Civil War* Shaara carries [the reader] swiftly and dramatically to a climax as exciting as if it were being heard for the first time. *The Seattle Times* From the Hardcover edition.