



The Trigger: Hunting the Assassin Who Brought the World to War

By Tim Butcher



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On a summer morning in Sarajevo almost a hundred years ago, a teenager took a pistol out of his pocket and fired not just the opening rounds of the First World War but the starting gun for modern history. By killing Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Gavrilo Princip, started a cycle of events that would leave 15 million dead from fighting between 1914 and 1918 and proved fatal for empires and a way of ruling that had held for centuries.

The Trigger tells the story of a young man who changed the world forever. It focuses on the drama of the incident itself by following Princip's journey. By retracing his steps from the feudal frontier village of his birth, through the mountains of the northern Balkans to the great plain city of Belgrade and ultimately Sarajevo, Tim Butcher illuminates our understanding of Princip—the person and the place that shaped him—and makes discoveries about him that have eluded historians for a hundred years. Traveling through the Balkans on Princip's trail, and drawing on his own experiences there as a war reporter during the 1990s, Butcher unravels this complex part of the world and its conflicts, and shows how the events that were sparked that day in June 1914 still have influence today. Published for the centenary of the assassination, *The Trigger* is a rich and timely work, part travelogue, part reportage, and part history.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review In a uniquely effective counterpart to Margaret MacMillan's fine account of the run-up to WWI (*The War That Ended Peace*, 2013), author Butcher, who covered the 1990s Balkans conflict for the *Daily Telegraph*, returns to Bosnia and Herzegovina to literally retrace the steps of young Gavrilo Princip, who at age 19 assassinated the heir-apparent to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, a killing that triggered the Great War 100 years ago. Butcher, whose maternal grandmother's older brother died in that appallingly tragic conflict, follows Princip's path from his tiny, near-destitute mountain village of Obljaj to Sarajevo, where he found a cohort of young firebrands like himself, bridling under the harsh economic and political conditions imposed on Bosnians by the empire. Along the way, Butcher renders the countryside and cityscapes—and the people who inhabit them—in fine detail, while also moving back and forth in time, taking in the Ottoman rule, the political climate of the early 1900s, the recent Bosnian war, and the landscape as it looks today. Top-notch reporting by a journalist who knows the lay of the land, as he also keeps a healthy remove from an ethnic conflict that, like a dormant volcano, still seethes.
--Alan Moores

Review

A *Guardian* (UK) Best History Book of the Year

A *Times* (UK) Best History Book of the Year

A *Sunday Times* (UK) Best Biography of the Year

"Riveting."

—*New York Times*

"Tim Butcher does a superb job of filling in [a] large and fascinating gap, with a book that is part travelogue, part biography, part history and part journalism, as well as an absorbing exploration of the way the overlooked past colours the present. Highly readable but profoundly researched, *The Trigger* represents a bold exception to the deluge of First World War books devoted to mud, blood and poetry."

—Ben Macintyre, *Times* (UK), "Best History Books of the Year"

"A triumph of punctilious scholarship and research. . . . Butcher has written a marvelously absorbing book on the nature of one man's political grievance and its terrible aftermath."

—*Guardian* (UK), "Best History Books of 2014"

"Butcher, who covered the 1990s Balkans conflict for the *Daily Telegraph*, returns to Bosnia and Herzegovina to literally retrace the steps of young Gavrilo Princip. . . . Along the way, Butcher renders the countryside and cityscapes—and the people who inhabit them—in fine detail, while also moving back and forth in time, taking in the Ottoman rule, the political climate of the early 1900s, the recent Bosnian war, and the landscape as it looks today. Top-notch reporting by a journalist who knows the lay of the land."

—*Booklist* (starred review)

"Engrossing. . . . A fascinating history of a complex region rife with ethnic rivalries and a vivid travelogue of a dangerous journey across a landscape marked by the minefields and devastation of the fighting of the 1990s. . . . A haunting and illuminating book."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“Journeying to Princip’s birthplace, and finding new documents about his school life, Butcher follows his subject across the Balkans in a sometimes haunting book that is as much about the present as the past.”

—*Sunday Times* (UK), “Best Biographies of the Year”

“No one has got closer into the mind of one of the key figures of the last century, Gavrilo Princip, than the journalist-turned-investigative-historian Timothy Butcher. Part travelogue, part history of the Balkans, part psychological insight into the motivation of History’s most famous terrorist before Osama bin Laden, this book brings an objective eye and flowing prose style to the story of what happened in Sarajevo on that June day a hundred years ago. He makes complex political and ethnic rivalries easy to comprehend, and gets to the heart of the issues, largely thanks to his personal knowledge of the region. Nor does the sheer poignancy of the tale escape his occasionally coruscating ire. This is first class history and in a year swamped with First World War centenary books, it’s the one you should read first.”

—Andrew Roberts, author of *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War*

“Tim Butcher, one of the bravest and kindest foreign journalists who saw the Bosnian war, has written a splendid book, part-memoir, part history, of that country, ingeniously using the assassin of 1914 as an anti-hero. It takes its place among classics of Balkan history.”

—Norman Stone, author of *World War One: A Short History* and *The Eastern Front 1914-1917*

“A fascinating study of one of those rare individuals whose act of violence changed the history of the world. An incisive, shrewd, wholly compelling investigation of an assassin’s life and times.”

—William Boyd, author of *A Good Man in Africa*, *The Ice Cream War*, and *Any Human Heart*

“Tim Butcher has re-written history with this evocative and moving journey in the footsteps of the assassin who sparked the First World War. Instead of a naive and misguided Serbian nationalist, he reveals an intelligent and determined South Slav patriot who gave his life for the cause. The Serbian state should not have been held to account. A superb and important book.”

—Saul David, author of *Military Blunders: The How and Why of Military Failure* and *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Warfare*

“A significant contribution to the growing body of literature on the outbreak of WWI. . . . In the 1990s, Butcher covered Yugoslavia’s collapse into mutual genocide, and his evocative interfacing of his experiences with Princip’s is a highlight of the book.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Take a measure of well-researched history, add indelible personal recollections of the Bosnian war, season with piquant vignettes of traversing rural Bosnia on foot and mix with a light touch. The result is consistently appetizing and occasionally controversial. Tim Butcher goes from strength to strength. I enjoyed every paragraph.”

—Dervla Murphy, author of *Full Tilt: Ireland to India With a Bicycle* and *Through the Embers of Chaos: Balkan Journeys*

“Rarely, if ever, can such momentous and tragic events have been sparked by such an unlikely and undistinguished a man, Gavrilo Princip. This insightful, useful and delightfully written book shines a unique spotlight on the trigger to the First World War, placing the assassin and his homeland in the wider strategic context. A great book—one to be recommended to professional and amateur historian alike.”

—General Sir David Richards, Former Chief of the British Defence Staff

“A compelling and fascinating read. . . . A shadowy assassin brought to life by a writer who gets to grips with a century of Balkan intrigue.”

—Kate Adie, veteran journalist and former Chief News Correspondent for BBC News

"In this book, a masterpiece of historical empathy and evocation, Tim Butcher goes in search of the person behind the myths. . . . A tour de force."

—*Guardian* (UK)

“A superb account. . . . A hybrid of travel and history, *The Trigger* gets inside the mind of the assassin and seeks to understand Balkan geopolitics on the eve of the first world war and after. . . . A triumph of research, it will appeal to the layman and historian alike.”

—*Financial Times* (UK)

“The most original of First World War centenary books. . . . A travel narrative of rare resonance and insight.”

—*Sunday Times* (UK)

“The finest contribution so far this year to the rapidly expanding literature on the Great War.”

—*Herald Scotland*

“The most imaginative and singular book on the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War.”

—*Evening Standard* (UK)

“Extremely well written, taut and evocative. . . . Despite its complex subject, Butcher makes this an easy and engaging read with his breezy style and fascinating encounters. . . . Until now, Princip’s history has been largely obscure to an English-speaking audience. Thanks to Butcher’s timely book, this should now change.”

—*Daily Telegraph* (UK)

“A page-turning exploration of how the forgotten past continues to inform the present.”

—*Independent on Sunday* (UK)

“Utterly absorbing. . . . If journalism is the first draft of history, Butcher marries both disciplines with boldness and originality.”

—*BBC History Magazine* (UK)

“Evocative and ingenious. . . . A well-crafted mix of personal encounters, vivid descriptions and incisive musings on the landscape and its bloody history.”

—*Literary Review* (UK)

About the Author

Born in 1967, **Tim Butcher** was on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph* from 1990 to 2009 serving as chief war correspondent, Africa bureau chief, and Middle East correspondent. His first book, *Blood River*, was a number one bestseller in the UK, a Richard and Judy Book Club selection and was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize. He is currently based in Cape Town with his family.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Allen Scheiber:

Nowadays reading books be a little more than want or need but also work as a life style. This reading routine give you lot of advantages. The huge benefits you got of course the knowledge your information inside the book that improve your knowledge and information. The info you get based on what kind of book you read, if you want send more knowledge just go with education books but if you want really feel happy read one together with theme for entertaining for example comic or novel. The actual The Trigger: Hunting the Assassin Who Brought the World to War is kind of book which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

Shirley Hinkle:

Your reading 6th sense will not betray you, why because this The Trigger: Hunting the Assassin Who Brought the World to War reserve written by well-known writer who really knows well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who have read the book. Written inside good manner for you, still dripping wet every ideas and producing skill only for eliminate your personal hunger then you still question The Trigger: Hunting the Assassin Who Brought the World to War as good book but not only by the cover but also by content. This is one reserve that can break don't assess book by its include, so do you still needing yet another sixth sense to pick this particular!? Oh come on your reading sixth sense already told you so why you have to listening to an additional sixth sense.

John Stewart:

As a pupil exactly feel bored to help reading. If their teacher questioned them to go to the library as well as to make summary for some guide, they are complained. Just little students that has reading's spirit or real their leisure activity. They just do what the educator want, like asked to go to the library. They go to generally there but nothing reading very seriously. Any students feel that reading is not important, boring in addition to can't see colorful images on there. Yeah, it is to be complicated. Book is very important to suit your needs. As we know that on this age, many ways to get whatever we would like. Likewise word says, many ways to reach Chinese's country. Therefore , this The Trigger: Hunting the Assassin Who Brought the World to War can make you experience more interested to read.

Elizabeth Rogers:

A lot of people said that they feel bored stiff when they reading a reserve. They are directly felt the item when they get a half parts of the book. You can choose the actual book The Trigger: Hunting the Assassin Who Brought the World to War to make your reading is interesting. Your skill of reading ability is developing when you including reading. Try to choose simple book to make you enjoy to see it and mingle the idea about book and reading especially. It is to be initial opinion for you to like to open up a book and go through it. Beside that the reserve The Trigger: Hunting the Assassin Who Brought the World to War can to be your brand-new friend when you're feel alone and confuse with the information must you're doing of these time.

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