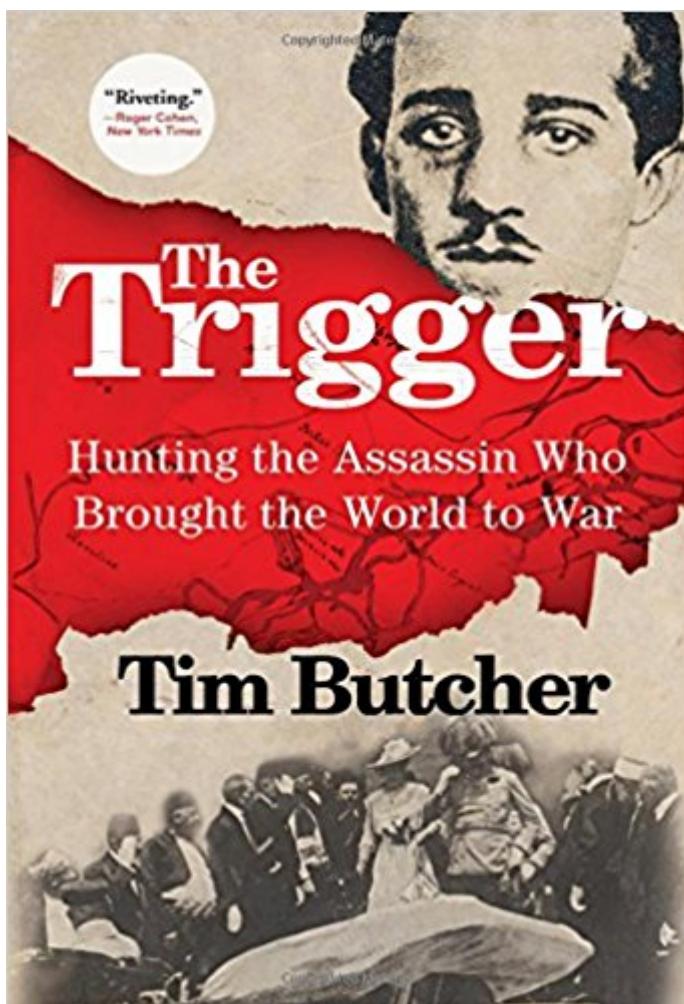


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# The Trigger: Hunting The Assassin Who Brought The World To War



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*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

A Guardian (UK) Best History Book of the YearA Times (UK) Best History Book of the YearA Sunday Times (UK) Best Biography of the Year"Riveting."<sup>1</sup>New York Times<sup>2</sup>;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.<sup>3</sup>Ben Macintyre, Times (UK), <sup>4</sup>Best History Books of the Year<sup>5</sup>;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.<sup>6</sup>Guardian (UK), <sup>7</sup>Best History Books of 2014<sup>8</sup>;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<sup>9</sup>;and the people who inhabit them<sup>10</sup>;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.<sup>11</sup>Booklist (starred review)<sup>12</sup>;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.<sup>13</sup>Kirkus Reviews (starred review)<sup>14</sup>;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.<sup>15</sup>Sunday Times (UK), <sup>16</sup>Best

Biographies of the Yearâ •#147;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 Historyâ ™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, itâ ™s the one you should read first.â •#151;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.â •#151;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.â •#151;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.â •#151;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 Yugoslaviaâ ™s collapse into mutual genocide, and his evocative interfacing of his experiences with Principâ ™s is a highlight of the book.â •#151;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.â •#151;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&#151;one to be recommended to professional and amateur historian alike.â •&##151;General Sir David Richards, Former Chief of the British Defence Staff&#147;A compelling and fascinating read. . . . A shadowy assassin brought to life by a writer who gets to grips with a century of Balkan intrigue.â •&##151;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."&amp;#151;Guardian (UK)&amp;#147;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.â •&##151;Financial Times (UK)&amp;#147;The most original of First World War centenary books. . . . A travel narrative of rare resonance and insight.â •&##151;Sunday Times (UK)&amp;#147;The finest contribution so far this year to the rapidly expanding literature on the Great War.â •&##151;Herald Scotland&amp;#147;The most imaginative and singular book on the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War.â •&##151;Evening Standard (UK)&amp;#147;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, Principâ ™s history has been largely obscure to an English-speaking audience. Thanks to Butcherâ ™s timely book, this should now change.â •&##151;Daily Telegraph (UK)&amp;#147;A page-turning exploration of how the forgotten past continues to inform the present.â •&##151;Independent on Sunday (UK)&amp;#147;Utterly absorbing. . . . If journalism is the first draft of history, Butcher marries both disciplines with boldness and originality.â •&##151;BBC History Magazine (UK)&amp;#147;Evocative and ingenious. . . . A well-crafted mix of personal encounters, vivid descriptions and incisive musings on the landscape and its bloody history.â •&##151;Literary Review (UK)</p></div><div data-bbox="46 682 942 915" data-label="Text"><p>A century ago a non-descript teenager pulled a gun out of his pocket, stepped out of a crowd, and fired two shots into an automobile, killing a man and his wife. He was quickly arrested and put on trial, found guilty and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment (at 19 he was slightly too young to receive the death penalty), and then died himself less than four years later from tuberculosis contracted in prison. A non-entity unworthy of further attention? No, because that teenager's name was Gavrilo Princip and the people he killed in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 were Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie, and the course of the twentieth century was irreversibly altered by his act. Those shots led to World War I breaking out a month later, to revolutions in Russia and other countries, to the rise of Communism and Fascism and then World War II, the Cold War,</p></div>

countless other hot wars, and eventually to the chaotic world we inhabit in 2014. Tim Butcher is the ideal chronicler of this search to learn more about Gavrilo Princip, because he was heavily involved in one of the recent after-effects of Princip's shots: he was an embedded reporter during the fighting that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, when Serbs, Croats, and Muslims struggled for conquest and survival in Bosnia, Princip's home territory. Thus this book is really three parallel journeys: Princip's own life story being one, then the tortured history of Bosnia as the second, and then finally Butcher's own memories of the terrible things he saw in the 1990s and his revisit of them over twenty years later as the third. Of the three Princip's own is the briefest, since his life was both short and obscure for the greater part of it. Butcher did an incredible job of tracking down living relations, old homes, the few photos ever taken of him, and even ancient school reports for Princip. Butcher followed Princip's literal trail, travelling the same roads and paths the future assassin took as he left his home village for Sarajevo, then Belgrade, and then back to Sarajevo for that fatal rendezvous with the Archduke. Princip's trail led through areas which Butcher already knew well from his experience covering the war, and at times the book almost becomes a macabre travelogue in which we are led from minefields to massacre sites to bombing ruins. On a more positive note, we also learn a lot about human resilience, because nearly everywhere Butcher went in pursuit of Princip we see rebuilt churches and mosques, reviving towns and cities, and a populace still scarred by conflict but determined to survive and prosper. Peopling the pages of *The Trigger* are many colorful characters, including not just Princip and his fellow assassins like Trifko Grabež, Nedjelko Čabrinović, Danilo Ilić, and Mehmed Mehmedbašić (plus a few others here and there) but also of the extraordinary people of today's Bosnia, many of whom, such as Mile and Arnie, went to great trouble and some peril to assist Butcher on his quest. This is also a story of many foreigners, including Franz Ferdinand and Sophie as well as the colorful diplomat/spy Sir Fitzroy Maclean, whose activities affected Bosnia. I thoroughly enjoyed *The Trigger* and came away from it with a deeper understanding not just of the events of June 28, 1914 but also of many other dark times in the torturous tale of twentieth century Bosnia.

This is an excellent book providing information on the 19 year old Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, who assassinated Archduke Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1914. The result was the beginning of WWI which changed Europe radically and eventually led to WW II. I would guess that the war would have broken out anyhow due to the rivalries and secret alliances between the great powers in Europe at that time. Still it is fascinating to learn about the young man who actually did the deed. Butcher, who covered the war in Bosnia in the 1990s, moves back and forth between

relating Princip's story and his own experiences in Bosnia. This may not satisfy those who are interested in only one or the other. However, I was interested in both and found the book quite informative in telling both stories. Butcher was traumatized by what he saw during the war in 1990s. There was brutal genocide, mainly of Muslim Serbs by Bosnian and other Serbs. He is obviously still processing the experience while writing this book. He believes that Princip, back in the early 20th Century, wanted to free all Slavs, not just those in Bosnia, from the Austro-Hungarian regime. He finds that Princip's current reputation is bad (or unknown) among those who fought in the 1990s war as the ethnic hatreds were so inflamed at that time. Butcher admires Princip's pan-Slav ideology feeling that he sets a good example for modern Bosnia as a contrast to the ethnic and religious hatreds generated in the 1990s. However, I did not see any comment or moral judgment about using assassination to further a political ideology. In our current era of terrorism and ongoing assassinations, I think that should have been addressed.

World War I has always been a very difficult war to understand. First, in our American schools it was never explained. We fought it "to save the world for democracy" and it was "the war to end all wars". Reading August, 1914, I was finally able to understand that the alliances that had been deliberately formulated as an effort to make large wars impossible actually caused the war. In Tim Butcher's The Trigger, I now understand further the situation in Europe that preceded the start of the war. The empires of Austria-Hungary, Britain, and Russia were much more interested in preserving the concept of empires ruling others when the Ottoman Empire fell in the 1870's. At their meeting in Berlin, they divided the spoils of the Ottoman collapse, ignoring any wishes of the parts of the Ottoman Empire who desired to become their own nation. Obviously, this left a legacy of bitterness in the Balkans. Princip, a young Serb was swept-up in this bitterness. His killing of Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, who was visiting in Sarajevo, was an attempt at liberation for the southern Serbs. He had no plans to start a war, but the alliances caused such a war. Tragic results of a tragic time.

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