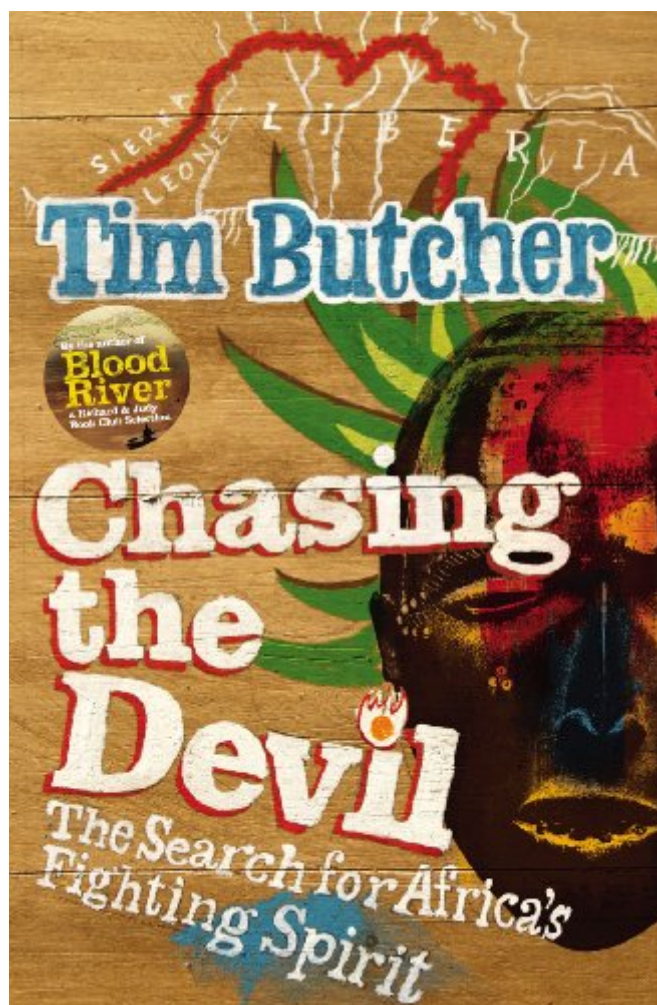


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Chasing The Devil: The Search For Africa's Fighting Spirit



Synopsis

For many years Sierra Leone and Liberia have been too dangerous to travel through, bedevilled by a uniquely brutal form of violence from which sprang many of Africa's cruellest contemporary icons - child soldiers, prisoner mutilation, blood diamonds. With their wars officially over, Tim Butcher sets out on a journey across both countries, trekking for 350 miles through remote rainforest and malarial swamps. Just as he followed H M Stanley through the Congo - a journey described in his bestseller *Blood River* - this time he pursues a trail blazed by Graham Greene in 1935 and immortalised in the travel classic *Journey Without Maps*. Greene took 26 bearers, a case of scotch, and hammocks in which he and his cousin Barbara were carried. Tim walks every blistering inch to gain an extraordinary ground-level view of a troubled and overlooked region. As a journalist in Africa, Tim came to know both countries well although the wars made trips to the jungle hinterland far too risky. This is where he now heads, exploring how rebel groups thrived in the bush for so long and whether the devil of war has truly been chased away. He encounters other 'devils', masked figures guarding the spiritual secrets of jungle communities. Some are no more threatening than schoolmasters but others are much more sinister, relying on ritual cannibalism as a source of their magical power. Tim encounters these devils on an epic journey that demands courage, doggedness and good fortune. *Chasing the Devil* is a dramatic travel book touching on one of the most fraught parts of the globe at a unique moment in its history. Weaving history and anthropology with personal narrative - as well as new discoveries about Greene - it is as exciting as it is enlightening.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

You might know *Blood River*, Tim Butcher's fine account of retracing Henry Morton Stanley's journey down the Congo River, so you will already be interested in his new book where he takes the same approach; to explore, not the Congo, but another heart of African darkness: Liberia in the aftermath of succession of civil wars that convulsed the country over the turn of the century. If anything *Chasing the Devil* is a better book because he follows the route of an indefinitely more interesting and modern writer, Graham Greene. Green made his journey, later published as *Journey Without Maps*, in the 1930s with funding provided by an anti-slavery society. But Greene's real interest was to find or encounter an Africa that had not been corrupted by Western colonialism or capitalism. The great interest of Butcher's journey is that he travels the same route in post 2000, after the terrible civil wars that have become a short hand for the worst excesses of barbarity and atavistic violence in post-colonial Africa. At times I would have preferred a deeper engagement with Greene's views on Africa, but the book is absolutely fascinating on the different dynamics between Greene's party and Butcher's. Greene and his London socialite cousin, travelled with a small army of porters across Liberia and Guinea, while Butcher and his plucky young male companion, have one guide to show them along the jungle paths while a motorcyclist carries their bags. They visit the same villages, and even meet people who remember the Greene party from the 1930s. Like *Blood River*, Butcher's conclusions will take you by surprise, but as a fascinating multi-layered account of life in contemporary West Africa, this is very worth reading.

After I had watched an episode of *No Reservations* during which Anthony Bourdain visits Liberia and mentions Graham Greene's book, I came across *Chasing the Devil*. I, myself, have had an interest in Africa, but knew very little about the continent. This book prompted me to research, order more books and expand my knowledge of history. Butcher sees firsthand the effects of war and explains the influence of the white man in 2 countries (Sierra Leone and Liberia), while also contrasting the land of Guinea during their excursion. Included are heartbreaking stories of corruption, greed, and war. An interesting read filled with hospitality, endurance and comparisons of Greene's journey.

In 1935 the author Graham Greene and his cousin Barbara Greene set out on a walking tour from Sierra Leone through the unmapped interior of Liberia and parts of Guinea to the Liberian coast. Some 60 years later, after Liberia had recently emerged from two decades of civil war, Tim Butcher set out to re-create the Greenes' journey, and the story of his travels is told in the present book. In certain areas of Liberia there exist secret societies for men and women, known as Poro and Sande respectively. These societies are connected with the use of masks, initiation ceremonies and animistic beliefs. Charles Taylor, the man who led a rebel movement in the bloody civil war and subsequently became president, is said to have taken advantage of such animistic beliefs, and the civil war featured many stories of ritualistic killing, cannibalism, and the use of bizarre and terrifying costumes. The "Devil" in the book's title is a reference to members of the Poro society who are appointed to a witchdoctor-type office and perform dances while wearing a full-body mask. If you want to learn about the local people and culture in Africa, then an extended walking tour is a good way to come into contact with a lot of different people. If you want to add a bit of colour and adventure to your journey, choosing a country which is recovering from an unspeakably brutal war will certainly do that for you. Tim Butcher's book is disturbing in parts, moving in others, but all in all a captivating adventure.

Tim Butcher sets out on an adventure few would be willing to undertake and finds himself confronted with the tragedy that is sadly the reality for the most of Africa. However, he also discovers kindness and hospitality among people who have literally been to hell and are trying to make their way back. He is able to convey to the reader that there is cause for hope and that some day the nascent dreams of the citizens of this remarkable continent might be realised. This is a book that, like Butcher's 'Blood River', you won't be able to put down once you start it, and I would say this is mostly due the nature of the places that he visits. A fresh reminder that there are still great adventurers and great travel writers.

Detailed and engaging and a good read for anyone traveling around these parts of the world. A bit slow, perhaps, but all the detail paints a great picture of past and present.

A good way to travel through Sierra Leone and Liberia without actually setting foot in either location.

Butcher traces the steps of the early explorers through what he calls a "broken country", and explains how a "country" created largely on the whims of one individual came to collapse into chaos

and anarchy after the colonists pulled out. Well worth reading for anybody interested in understanding what's going on in Africa

Really great read. Tim Butcher actually did the walk that Grahame Greene did from Sierra Leone to Liberia. This was done in the early two thousands just after the war in Liberia.

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