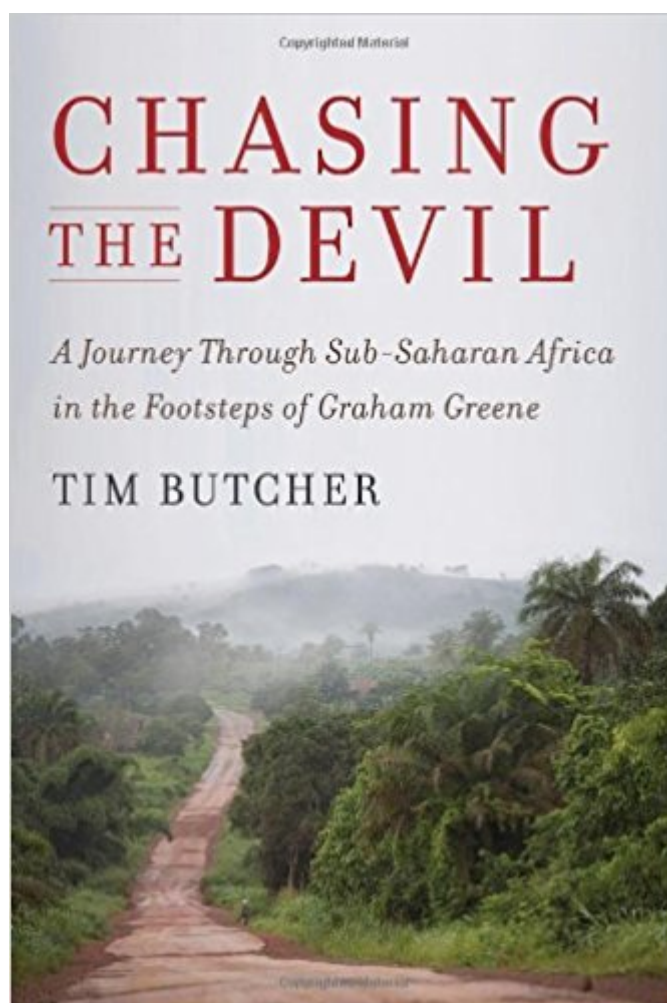


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Chasing The Devil: A Journey Through Sub-Saharan Africa In The Footsteps Of Graham Greene



Synopsis

The audacious, gripping travelogue of a writer chasing the ghost of Graham Greene into the heart of Africa. Of all the anarchic and war-torn African nations, none is more forbidding than Liberia, the land that nurtured child soldiers, the violent trade in "blood diamonds," even ritual murder. Graham Greene, in search of extreme adventure, ventured through its dense jungles to write the travel classic *Journey Without Maps*; three-quarters of a century later, Tim Butcher decided to follow Greene's footsteps, only to find the path even more ominous and overgrown than in his predecessor's day. Among the devils he encounters are masked sorcerers whose magical powers depend on cannibalism and missionaries long forgotten in the hinterland he traverses. Butcher, a former African correspondent for the London Telegraph and author of *Blood River*, his best-selling account of a dramatic journey through the Congo, has produced in this thrilling sequel a book that *The Independent* hails as "fascinating, harrowing, and eventful."

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Customer Reviews

“It is an inspirational account of humanity’s wonderful spirit to survive and proof that, in Tim Butcher, Africa has a worthy chronicler.” (Desmond Tutu) “This adventurous book, in the footsteps of Graham Greene, in many ways goes deeper than Greene, and shows the enduring beauty and danger in Sierra Leone and Liberia.” (Paul Theroux) “Amazing. As history, as anthropology, as a ripping yarn. Both exploration of an epic journey--and a hard yet sympathetic look at a Utopia-gone wrong.” (Anthony Bourdain)

Tim Butcher is an award-winning journalist and best-selling author. His first book, *Blood River*, was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize. He lives in Cape Town, South Africa.

I'm a recent fan of Mr. Butcher's writing. Having been impressed with his *À* book on the Congo, I picked this one up looking for more of the same. I was not disappointed. While in the previous work Butcher was following Henry Stanley's wandering through central Africa, in this volume he follows another famous predecessor, Graham Greene. In 1935, Greene and his cousin Barbara walked through Sierra Leone and Liberia for reasons that are still unclear, but probably a mixture of adventure seeking, humanitarian research, and scouting for British Intelligence. Whatever the intentions, the journey changed both of those travelers' lives. Similarly to the previous work, this one is exhaustively researched, with intermittent discourses on the history of the various villages and towns they pass through. On two occasions he actually meets people who met Greene, bringing the story full circle. The devil in the book's title is the central character in the central African bush societies, a more morally complex character than the pitchfork-wielding simplified character from more modern western understanding. And understanding this character, and the effects he has on the lives of those who eke out a living in the poorest countries on earth, proves central to understanding these countries, and why they remain the way they are. I am consistently impressed with the level of understanding Mr. Butcher brings to his writing and travels. While providing the armchair traveller with vicarious experience, he also inspires those who would follow. While I'm not certain my next international vacation will require years of planning and research the ways his do, I am motivated to read much more extensively than the guidebook introductions we all peruse before journeying. Mr. Butcher's writing shows just how shallow such an understanding can be. They have also shown me the beauty and tragedy of an area of the world I previously had no interest in, and I plan to travel to Africa within the next year partly from this newly sparked interest. And Mr. Butcher, if you're in need of a travelling companion again, I'm available.

Since this is probably the closest I'll get to trekking through the Liberian hinterlands, I relished every moment of reading this book. A vicarious adventure through the jungles of West Africa would be exciting enough, but what makes this book especially satisfying is Butcher's quest to follow the exact trail blazed by Graham Greene and his cousin Barbara back in 1935, an expedition described in Greene's *Journey Without Maps*, published in 1936. In pursuing the Greenes' footsteps, Butcher hopes to better understand Sierra Leone and Liberia, a region of West Africa that he calls "fascinating yet unsettling" and to learn about the Catholic writer's "more earthy" side (25). He does

both brilliantly. Here's what I appreciate most about *Chasing the Devil*. There are a few moments in the book where the author either encounters an elderly African who remembers the Greenes' visit or an aid worker who, perhaps, succeeded someone who met the Greenes during their visit. You just can't help but be thrilled by these fortuitous moments; they just make the world seem smaller. Another point of interest is the author's fascination with secret religious societies in West Africa, a theme reflected in the book's title. Butcher suggests that understanding these secret religious societies, ruled by a hierarchy of "devils" - masked men who masquerade as spiritual beings and often conduct bizarre and inhumane rituals - is the key to understanding Africa's larger struggles. He writes: "It is, I believe, the failure...to dominate over atomistic tribal interests that has led to so many of modern Africa's problems. In the case of Liberia, with twenty recognizably different tribal groups and so many more sub-groups, it is the failure to force the devil to cede his power that has undermined the country's development and made it prone to civil strife and, ultimately, war" (273). And, lastly, worth noting is the book's beautiful multi-genre nature. Peppered throughout the narrative are fascinating images of the Greenes, historical clippings, sketches of maps and pictures of the author at various points where the Greenes also found themselves. The inclusion of these artifacts contribute greatly to the richness of the book. This is one of those great books that stands at the intersection of history, sociology and travel. After reading his first two books, it's safe to say that I now feel about Tim Butcher the way I have long felt about Jon Krakauer. He could write a book about his adventures in Ty Ty, Georgia, and I would purchase it without a thought. And that really says something because, trust me, Ty Ty pretty much sucks.

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