

2.5 Tim Butcher: Blood River



Katanga, the Congo

The British journalist Tim Butcher has travelled along the Congo River in Central Africa in order to recreate the famous journey made by the renowned explorer Henry Stanley in the nineteenth century. This excerpt is the opening of the book (the preface), in which Butcher tells us about his plans, the country he is travelling in and what he anticipates.

WHO WAS HENRY MORTON STANLEY?

Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) was a British-American journalist and renowned explorer. In 1871 he was sent on an expedition to find David Livingstone, physician, missionary and explorer, who had disappeared in Africa. Stanley found Livingstone by Lake Tanganyika and greeted him with the famous words "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

Three years later, Stanley travelled along the Congo River to Lake Victoria, the trip that Tim Butcher retraces in *Blood River*. Like Butcher, Stanley worked for *The Daily Telegraph*.

2.5.1 GRAMMAR: THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

In English the definite article (the) is used before some countries, e.g. the United States and the Ivory Coast. Generally, the article is included before countries with plural names (the Maldives) or when the kind of state is part of the name (the Czech Republic). A few countries, however, use the definite article without following the general rules.

1. Which of the following countries need the definite article before the name? Does the use of an article follow one of the rules above?

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| • Bahamas | • Gambia |
| • China | • Ukraine |
| • Netherlands | • Iceland |
| • Gambia | • Ghana |
| • Philippines | • Hungary |
| • Congo | • United Kingdom |
| • Nigeria | |

2.5.2 GRAMMAR: THE ODD ONE OUT

Find the odd one out. All the words are from the excerpt from *Blood River*. The odd word out might, for instance, differ in terms of word class or meaning. Look up words you don't understand.

1. smallpox – leprosy – equatorial – endemic
2. itinerary – sorcerer – deferential – compound
3. sickle – tatty – smudgy – grubby

2.5.3 PRE-READING: VOCABULARY

- The following words are all words associated with danger. Look up words you are not familiar with.
 - menace
 - threat
 - uncertainty
 - hazard
 - source of apprehension
 - endangerment
 - peril
 - riskiness
 - imperilment
 - source of dread
 - jeopardy
 - pitfall
- Your job is now to make a risk assessment of your school. What might go wrong, e.g. in chemistry? You must include at least three words from the list above.
- The following words are all words associated with fear. Look up words you are not familiar with.
 - terror
 - agitation
 - unrest
 - fright
 - trepidation
 - foreboding
 - apprehensiveness
 - consternation
 - twitchiness
 - the heebie-jeebies
 - dismay
 - jitteriness
 - fearfulness
 - distress
 - the creeps
 - the shakes
 - the willies
 - anxious
 - panic
 - timidity
 - disquietude
- Pick two words from the list that might be used when you are very afraid and two words for when you are only a little bit afraid. Use each of them in a sentence.
- Pick two words that might be used in a formal text and two words that are informal. Use each of them in a sentence.

2.5.4 GET UP! GO EXPLORE

Individually or in groups:

- Look up the words and find objects in your school building AND outside in the school yard/school premises which you think can be described by the adjectives (all from the text you are about to read) listed below.
- Take photos of all the objects.
- Collect your photos in a document where you connect words and pictures and write one line to explain your choice.
- Send your document to your teacher. You have 20 minutes. Go!

| Inside words | Outside words |
|--------------|---------------|
| Grubby | Fatal |
| Faint | Clunky |
| Toxic | Clammy |

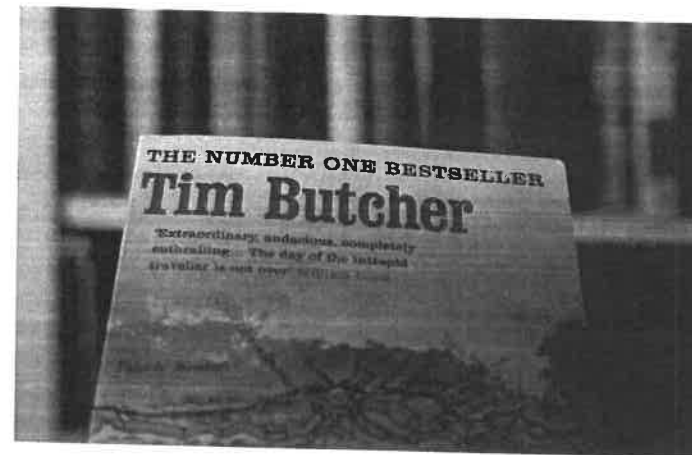
2.5.5 PRE-READING: GETTING TO KNOW THE CONGO

The Congo has a long and complex history. Here is a list of statements about the Congo.

Do some research on the Internet in order to decide whether the statements are true or false. If the statement is false, make sure to write down the correct information.

| Statement | True | False |
|--|------|-------|
| 1. The Congo used to be the private property of King Leopold of Belgium. | | |
| 2. The country's current name is the Congo Free State. | | |
| 3. The capital is called Lumumba after the first president the country elected when gaining independence. | | |
| 4. More than five million people died in the Second Congo War from 1998-2003. | | |
| 5. The River Congo is where Stanley found the lost Livingstone and supposedly greeted him with "Dr. Livingstone, I presume." | | |
| 6. Joseph Conrad's novel <i>The Heart of Darkness</i> is set in the Congo during the age of imperialism. | | |
| 7. The Congo does not have any valuable natural resources. | | |
| 8. Today, the name Congo might refer to two countries. | | |
| 9. English is the country's official language. | | |
| 10. The Congo River is the second longest river in Africa, almost 5,000 kilometres long. | | |

2.5.6 PRE-READING: FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE WRITER



1. Search for pictures of Tim Butcher online and select two pictures.
2. What impression do you get of him?

Tim Butcher: Blood River: A Journey to Africa's Broken Heart (2009)

I stirred* in the pre-dawn chill, my legs pedalling for bedclothes kicked away earlier when the tropical night was at its clammiest. I could hear African voices singing to a drum beat coming from somewhere outside the room, but my view was fogged by the mosquito net, and all I could make out around me were formless shadows. Slowly
 5 and carefully, so as to not anger them, I reached for the sheet balled next to my knees. It stank of old me and insect-repellent* as I drew it over my shoulders. I was not just looking for warmth. I wanted protection. Outside was the Congo and I was terrified.

On the grubby* floor next to the bed, my kit* lay ready in the dark. There were my
 10 boots with their clunky* tread* and sandy suede* uppers*. Two thousand dollars were hidden in each, counted carefully the day before, folded into plastic bags and

stir røre på sig • insect-repellent (her) myggespray • grubby beskidt • kit udstyr • clunky som giver en tung, dyb lyd • tread trin • suede ruskind • uppers overdelen på støvlerne

tucked* under the insoles*. There was my rucksack, packed and repacked several more times for reassurance* with my single change of clothes, a heavy fleece, survival bag and eight bottles of filtered water. Explorers who first took on the Congo in the nineteenth century brought with them small armies bearing the latest European firearms and the best available medicines to protect against ebola, leprosy*, small-pox* and other fatal* endemic* diseases. The only protection I carried was a pen-knife* and a packet of baby-wipes*.

I was in a large town called Kalemie, but all was dark outside. It lies on the Congo's eastern approaches*, a port city* on the edge of Lake Tanganyika, once connected by boat with Tanzania, Zambia and the world beyond. Forty years of decay* have turned it into a disease-ridden* ruin and its decrepit* hydroelectric* station could barely muster* a flicker*. As with the rest of this huge country, the locals in Kalemie have long since learned to regard electrical power as a rare blessing, not a permanent right.

Now too anxious to sleep, I got up and dressed, taking special care not to ruck* the dollars as I slipped on my boots. The charcoal burner*, used to warm the gluey* brick of rice I had eaten the previous night, glowed as I unlocked the double padlock* on the back door and pushed open the crudely-welded* security gate. I was staying in a bleak* building, cloudy with mosquitoes and lacking running water, but the fact that it housed an American aid group* made it a target in a country where acute poverty makes lawlessness routine. Against the lightening sky in the east I could make out a crude line of jagged* bottle fragments* cemented to the top of the high perimeter wall*.

'Is anyone there?' My voice set off a dog barking outside the compound*. The night watchman stepped out smartly from shadows.

'Present, patron*.' The tone of his reply made him sound like a soldier answering roll call*: subservient*, militaristic and deferential*. It was the tone of the Congo, drilled* into its people first by gun-wielding* white outsiders and then by cruel local militia*.

tuck stikke ind • insoles indlægssål • reassurance for at være helt sikker • leprosy spedalskhed • smallpox kopper • fatal dødelig • endemic endemisk (om sygdom: begrænset til en bestemt egn) • penknife lommekniv • baby-wipes vådservietter • approach indsejling • port city havneby • decay forfald • disease-ridden sygdomsplaget • decrepit faldefærdig • hydroelectric elektricitet frembragt ved vandkraft • muster frembringe • flicker lysglimt • ruck krølle • charcoal burner campingblus • gluey klistret • padlock hængelås • crudely-welded primitivt svejset • bleak trøstesløs • aid group velgørehedsorganisation • jagged takket • fragments (her) glasskår • perimeter wall omkransende mur • compound lejr, indhegnet område • patron herre • roll call navneopråb • subservient underdanig • deferential ærbødig • drill indlære, træne • gun-wielding at bære og bruge et våben • militia militis, privat hær

As I checked over the motorbikes I had lined up for my journey, I could feel that the guard was anxious to reassure me. 'Don't worry, patron, everything is okay' he told my arched back as I bent over a rear wheel. 'I was awake all night long and nobody came over the wall.' He was a trained teacher, but the collapse of the Congolese state meant there was no money in teaching. The \$30 he earned for a month of nights spent swatting* mosquitoes in this compound* was enough to keep him from his pupils.

The eastern sky was slowly growing more pale, but I turned to face west. Out there the darkness remained absolute. I felt a presence*. Between me and the Atlantic Ocean lay a primeval* riot of* jungle, river, plain* and mountain stretching for thousands of kilometres. For years I had stared at maps dominated by the Congo River, a silver-bladed sickle*, its handle anchored* on the coast, its tip buried deep in the equatorial* forest, but now I could feel its looming* sense of vastness*. It scared me.

I have come to know well my own symptoms of fear. In ten years as a war correspondent I have crossed enough active frontlines and stared at enough airily-waved gun barrels* to recognise how my subconscious* reacts. For me terror manifests itself through clear physical symptoms, an ache that grows behind my knees and a choking dryness in my throat.

I had spent three years preparing for this moment, planning and researching, and it had already taken a week of delays and hassle* just to reach this spot, but the most dangerous part of my journey was only now beginning. Feeling as if my legs were about to collapse, I croaked* a faint* curse* against the obsession that had drawn me to the most daunting*, backward* country on Earth.

I fingered a piece of paper folded in my pocket. It was a travel pass bearing the smudgy* ink stamps of the local district commissioner, granting* permission for 'Butcher, Timothi' to make a journey overland to the Congo River 500 kilometres away. It spelled out the modes of transport* authorised* for the trip: bicycle, motorbike and dugout* canoe. To reach the river I would have to travel west, crossing Katanga, a province that has been in a state of near-permanent rebellion for more than forty years, and Maniema, a province where cannibalism remains as real today as it was in the nineteenth century, when bearer parties refused to take explorers there for fear of being eaten. Even if I made it to the river, I would still have 2,500

swat smække, klaske • compound lejr, indhegnet område • presence nærvær • primeval ur- • riot of (her) vildtvoksende • plain slette • sickle krumkniv • anchor forankret • equatorial ækvatorial • loom rejse sig truende • vastness enorm størrelse • gun barrel geværløb • subconscious underbevidst • hassle besvær • croak kvække • faint svag • curse ed • daunting frygtindgydende • backward tilbagestående • smudgy udtværet • grant give • modes of transport transportmidler • authorise give tilladelse til • dugout udhulet (træstamme)

kilometres of descent* before reaching my final goal, close to where the Congo River spews* into the Atlantic.

I remembered the reaction of the commissioner's secretary in Kalemie when I had collected the pass a few days earlier. After reading my itinerary* he stopped writing, put his pen down very deliberately and raised his head to look at me. The lenses of his thick-framed glasses were misty* with scratches, but I could still see his pupils pulse with disbelief.

'You want to go where?'

'I want to go to the Congo River.'

10 'You want to go overland?'

'Yes.'

'My family comes from a village on the way to the river, but we have not been able to go there for more than ten years. How do you think you will get there?'

'With a motorbike and some luck.'

15 'You are a white man, you will need something more than luck.'

Shaking his head slowly, his gaze* dropped back to the travel pass, which he stamped with the seal* of office of the District Commissioner for North Katanga. As I turned to leave I looked round the office. It had a crack in one wall so wide I could see blue sky through it, an old Bakelite telephone connected to nothing, and a tatty* air that spoke of regular bouts* of looting*.

Commissioner Pierre Kamulete had hidden his surprise rather better when I approached* him for permission to travel. He listened politely to my request, then gestured* for me to join him over at the cracked wall where a large map hung. It was foxed* with damp* patches* and bore place names that had not been used for decades. He pointed at the gap between Kalemie and the headwaters* of the Congo River.

25 'You see this road that is marked here?' His finger traced what was shown as a national highway running due west* from the lake. 'It does not exist any more. And the railway here. That does not work, either. A storm washed away the bridge. I don't know what route you will use, but it will take you a long time.'

30 But it wasn't the lack of roads that really worried me. It was the rebels, especially the mai-mai.

Mai-mai is a corruption of 'water-water' in the local language of Swahili and refers to the magical water with which rebels douse* themselves after it has been imbued* with special properties by sorcerers*. Believers will tell you that bullets fired at
35 anyone sprinkled with the special water will fall harmlessly to the ground. Non-

descent nedstigning • spew flyde ud i (i store mængder) • itinerary rejseplan • misty tåget • gaze blik • seal segl • tatty snusket, tarvelig • bout omgang • looting plyndring • approach indsejling • gesture give tegn til • fox fugtpletet • damp fugtig • patch plet • headwater udspring • due west stik vest • douse overhælde • imbue (her:) tilføje • sorcerer troldmand

believers will tell you that mai-mai are well-armed, dangerous killers who answer to nobody but themselves.

I had seen my first mai-mai soldier earlier that day. He was sidling* along the potholed* main road in Kalemie. He had the swagger* you see all over Africa when possession of a weapon transforms a boy into a man. His uniform was typically hotch-potch*, his beret* was cocked at a fashionable angle and his eyes were hidden by dark glasses. But the thing that marked him out as mai-mai was that he was carrying a bow and arrow.

'The traditional belief system is very strong, and for the mai-mai a bow and arrow is every bit as good a weapon as a modern assault rifle. The arrow tip is dipped in poison made from plants found in the bush and the poison is highly toxic*. Believe me, it works.' My security briefing had come from Wim Verbeken, a human-rights specialist at the local United Nations headquarters built in the ruins of Kalemie's abandoned cotton mill*.

15 He explained how all the mai-mai in the Congo were meant to have put away their bows and arrows a year earlier under the terms of the ceasefire* that supposedly ended the country's latest civil war. But he also explained how outside the major towns like Kalemie it was impossible to enforce* the agreement and how the killing, rape and violence continued in the area I wanted to travel through.

20 'If we get reports of mai-mai activity, we are supposed to send a patrol to check it out. But then we also have a strict policy* that we only patrol roads that are "jeepable", that we can drive down in a jeep. Here in Kalemie the jeepable roads stop just a few kilometres outside town. I come from Belgium and this province alone is fifteen times bigger than my own country. Nobody really knows what is going on out
25 there.'

I was grateful for his candour* as he spelled out the hazards*. He said there was a particular mai-mai leader who liked to be known by his radio call sign Tango Four. Wim described him in somewhat undiplomatic language as a 'psychotic killer' and warned me that he was still out there in the bush. But Wim hadn't finished. He said
30 there were also reports of activity involving the interahamwe, Hutu fugitives* from Congo's troubled neighbour, Rwanda. These were the murderers responsible for the 1994 genocide* of Tutsis in Rwanda and they had spent the last decade* surviving in the lawless forests of eastern Congo. At this point Wim leaned right across the table for emphasis.

35 'Believe me, you don't want to meet the interahamwe.'

sidle (her) luske • pothole hul i vejen • swagger storsnudet optræden, overdreven selvsikker facon • hotchpotch miskmask • beret baret • toxic giftig • abandoned cotton mill forladt bomuldsmølle • ceasefire våbenhvile • enforce håndhæve • policy regel • candour ærlighed • hazard fare • fugitive flygtning • genocide folkemord • decade årti

Thoughts of rebels and poisoned arrows swirled* through my mind as I tucked* the travel pass safely into a pocket. Someone could be heard running outside the compound and then came a pounding on the gate. It swung open and the sweating face of Georges Mbuyu appeared, gasping* an apology.

5 'I thought I was going to be late. Let's go.'

Georges was a pygmy*. A man just five foot tall and half my body weight was to be my protector through the badlands* of the Congo. It was then that the backs of my knees really began to throb*.

Tim Butcher: *Blood River: A Journey to Africa's Broken Heart* (2010)

2.5.7 COMPREHENSION: CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Answer the comprehension questions individually. Write down your answers.
 - a. Who is Tim Butcher?
 - b. Where is Tim Butcher when the narrative begins?
 - c. How does Butcher feel about the journey?
 - d. What does Butcher bring for the trip?
 - e. By which means of transportation is Butcher planning to travel?
 - f. How long is the trip approximately going to be?
 - g. What is the landscape like in the Congo?
 - h. How do people react to his travel plans and why?
 - i. Which obstacles and dangers is Butcher facing on his trip?
 - j. What kind of people, what tribes live in the region, and what do we learn about them?
 - k. Who is going to help protect Butcher on the journey?
2. Work in small groups. Write the letters a-k from the previous exercise on small slips of paper and place the letters face down. Take turns picking a letter. If you get letter e, you will answer question e and so on. If you cannot answer the question, your classmates will help you out.

swirl hvirvle • tuck stikke ind • gasp gispe • pygmy pygmæ (folkeslag af små mennesker, som bl.a. bor i det centrale Afrika • badlands ørkenområder • throb gøre ondt

2.5.8 COMPREHENSION: DIVIDE THE TEXT INTO SECTIONS

1. Divide the text into sections. Give each section a heading which sums up what it is about.
2. Meet up with classmates. Compare your way of dividing the text and your headings. Do your divisions and headings show a clear development in the text?

2.5.9 COMPREHENSION: RETELLING THE STORY

1. Work in groups. Take turns selecting a word from the wordcloud below. Give the word to one of the other group members.
2. Once you get a word, tell the other group members as much as you remember from the text about that word.

tropical cannibalism
obsession rebellion
darkness poverty
backward motorbike
diseases explorers
arrow

2.5.10 ANALYSIS: SETTING THE SCENE

1. Read the first paragraph closely and discuss what mood Butcher creates and how. What do you think he hopes to achieve by beginning his book like this?
2. In the opening paragraph, Butcher appeals to the reader's senses. How many of your senses does he appeal to? Fill in the boxes below.

| | Hearing | Sight | Taste | Smell | Touch |
|---------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Example | | | | | |
| Example | | | | | |
| Effect | | | | | |

2.5.14 ANALYSIS: THE WAY THE WRITER PRESENTS HIMSELF

1. Look up information on Tim Butcher.
 1. What is his professional background?
 2. What is his travelling experience?
 3. Is any of this information important to bear in mind when reading this text? Why/why not?
2. Butcher compares himself to nineteenth-century explorers who brought armies and medicine. He only carries "a penknife and a packet of baby-wipes" (p. 116 l.6). He also tells us that "A man just five foot tall and half my body weight was to be my protector through the badlands of the Congo" (p. 120 l. 6).
 1. How does this make Butcher come across?
3. Find other examples of how Butcher presents himself to the reader.
 1. What impression of the writer are we left with, and what does that do to our expectations for the story?
4. Finish the sentences below and include relevant words from the pre-reading exercise 2.5.2 (se side 111):
 1. Tim Butcher constantly feels ...
 2. In Butcher's mind, the Congo is ...
 3. Butcher clearly anticipates ...
5. Look at your answers in the exercise about dialogue 2.5.12 (se side 122) and discuss to which extent Butcher uses the dialogue to create a particular image of himself.
6. In conclusion, why do you think Butcher chooses to give the reader this impression of himself in the opening of the book?
7. Compare the impression you got of Tim Butcher in *Blood River* with the impression you got of him in the picture. To which extent is it the same impression?
8. Does Butcher manage to establish his ethos (reliability, credibility)? If so, how? If not, why?

2.5.15 ANALYSIS: CONCLUSIONS

1. What you have read is the beginning of the book. What does Butcher do to entice his readers to continue reading about his journey? Make a list of his devices and discuss which one you think is the most effective.
2. What seems to be Butcher's reasons for embarking on the journey along the Congo River? Write down three reasons and discuss to which extent they are common reasons for travelling.

2.5.16 WRITTEN WORK: THE DANGER OF A SINGLE STORY

1. Find and watch the TED Talk *The Danger of a Single Story* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and write down Adichie's main arguments.
2. In pairs, prepare your arguments and then write a dialogue between Tim Butcher and Chimamanda Adichie in which they discuss whether Butcher tells a single story in the preface of his book. Adichie suggests that Butcher does tell a single story whereas Butcher defends his text and argues that he does not. You may use Messenger or a similar platform.

2.5.17 WRITTEN WORK: BUTCHER AND HIS EDITOR

In his book, Tim Butcher writes that it was not easy to persuade his editor to let him go on the trip.

1. Imagine you are Butcher and write a letter to your editor explaining why it would be a scoop for *The Daily Telegraph* if you go on the trip. Include the following points in your letter:
 - a. Why is it interesting to follow in the reporter Henry Morton Stanley's footsteps more than a hundred years later? Use your knowledge from the text *Who was Henry Morton Stanley?* (se side 110).
 - b. In which ways would the trip be similar and/or different?
 - c. What might be achieved?