



## The Trench Angel

*Michael Keenan Gutierrez*

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"In the Somme Valley a British soldier teaches his fellows to hide cigarette coals inside their mouths. Half a world away, a war-ruined photographer drinks in a bar beneath a Colorado butchery, blood dripping from the floorboards into ashtrays. Gutierrez writes with a metaphorical gift and fine hand of an age of war and upheaval where anarchists, coal barons, Pinkertons, corrupt police, broken idealists, and broken families fight to claim history's muddied field. . . . *The Trench Angel* announces a great new talent set to shine for a long time."—Alexander Parsons, *Leaving Disneyland*

"Breathes new, vivid life into the old wild west."—Mat Johnson, *Pym*

"Gutierrez's splendid debut bypasses the archives, whisking us straightaway into the seedy saloons, the twisting back alleys, and the trenches. . . . Like Denis Johnson's *Train Dreams*, this potent, lyrical novel unspools beyond its own time and lands squarely, unforgettably in our own."—Tim Horvath, *Understories*

Colorado, 1919. Photographer Neal Stephens, home from the War, is blackmailed by the sheriff over his secret marriage to a black woman in France. When the sheriff is murdered, Neal's investigation calls up memories of the trenches and his search for his dead wife, as he untangles the connections among the murder, the coalminers' strike, and his mysterious anarchist father.

**Michael Gutierrez**, MFA (fiction) and MA (history), teaches in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at UNC Chapel Hill, and has published in many literary journals. *The Trench Angel* was a finalist for the James Jones First Novel Fellowship.

## The Trench Angel Details

Date : Published October 13th 2015 by Leapfrog Press (first published September 21st 2015)

ISBN : 9781935248712

Author : Michael Keenan Gutierrez

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## **From Reader Review The Trench Angel for online ebook**

### **Danielle says**

This was a mystery/noir masquerading as historical fiction. Lots going on, but hard to follow. Narrators voice was strong and distinct, but overall not my cup of tea.

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### **Jim Hunter says**

Meh must be a first novel uses the same template every budding genius uses

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### **Debra Jeakins says**

THE TRENCH ANGEL BY MICHAEL KEENAN GUTIERREZ is a story of post WWI where men come home either physically or emotionally damaged by war. Its about one man, Neal Stephens who comes home from France with a secret, and he's being blackmailed for it. In between the covers you walk thru time back to depression, hatred and brutality.

I found,reading this book,having to remind myself this is fiction,the characters so vividly portray what life could be like during that period. The only complaint I have about the book is the type face,too light for me,otherwise an interesting read.

I received this book from goodreads in exchange for a review

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### **The Irregular Reader says**

I won this book as part of a Goodreads Giveaway.

The Trench Angel is a poetic and beautifully written mystery, set in the tumultuous American West just after the first world war.

Neal Stephens is home from the great war, trying to find his place in his old hometown. When the sheriff is murdered, the violent history between Neal's family and the sheriff's make him one of the prime suspects.

The Trench Angel is a beautiful book about a grim time and place. The prose highlights the blood and terror of World War I, the violent clashes of American labor unrest, and the starkness of life on the Frontier after the turn of the century. A recommended read.

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### **Emiley Allen Bowes says**

5 STARS Seeing the war thru the lenses of his camera. Caught in a corrupt mining town, trying not to become his father's son. Thanks to goodreads for ARC.

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### **Soren says**

This is a beautifully written and adroitly plotted novel that grabbed my attention from the first page. The characters are interesting and complex and the setting paints a vivid picture of the old west. There's much to learn from this novel, and even more to enjoy.

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### **Ronald Roseborough says**

This is a hard hitting, gritty novel. The characters have very distinct voices accentuated with vernacular appropriate to the period and setting of the novel. It has plenty of action, yet is also very thought provoking. Neal Stephens was a photographer during the first years of the Great War. He recorded the faces of the soldiers who were about to go over the top into no-mans land. Most would not return. Though he never picked up a weapon, he suffered the same privations as those who did. He endured the constant shelling, the rats, the vermin, the sleeplessness, the bad food, the trench rot that took one of his toes, the ever present mud and filth, and the death of his comrades, whose images were captured forever by his camera. In this crazy time he met and fell in love with a Negro woman, who had fled the prejudices of the United States, in order to create a new life for herself in Paris. He wed her, but soon lost her to an errant shell fired from a German gun miles away. Neal returned to the U. S., but found the people of 1919 Colorado no more forgiving than the guns of the enemy. He lied to his friends about his marriage, saying the wife he lost was a beautiful blonde woman. The only thing he could cling to was his ability to take pictures. Neal finds the situation in the coal town he calls home is no better than before the war, possibly worse. The miners are about to go on strike for better wages and living conditions, while the mine owner, Neal's uncle, has called in the Pinkerton's to break the strike no matter what the cost. Neal's father, who deserted his family years ago, is a ruthless anarchist willing to tear down the establishment regardless of the cost to life or limb. Neal is torn between the two sides of the battle for the town, while he tries to drown in booze, his guilt not only over losing his wife, but of being afraid to admit his love for her and who she was. Book provided for review by Leapfrog Press and LibraryThing.

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### **Joanna says**

I can't finish this....to me its terrible...the story is boring and I just give up....and I don't do that a lot...no books for me by this author....

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### **Melissa says**

I really wanted to like The Trench Angel, but it just didn't happen for me. As a matter of fact, I couldn't even finish it. At times, I really liked the writing style and felt like the book was picking up. Then it would take a confusing turn. One example is when Gertie Pinkerton popped up in Neal's apartment! I didn't like the characters including Neal, plus the mystery and story line weren't compelling enough to keep me interested.

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### **Ashley says**

Didn't finish....too much language

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### **Judith Yeabsley says**

I so rarely ditch a book unless it's badly written or the plot is ridiculous. This was both well written and cogent. However, I just found it so dull and dreary and it just didn't seem to be going anywhere. It started with such promise but became disjointed and pointless for me. Sorry, bailed 60% through ...

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### **Daniel Clausen says**

4.5 Stars

Trench Angel is a novel of early 1900s mayhem and upheaval -- a lone war photographer struggling with the memories of his past, a twisted family history, and a landscape of hardnosed Pinkerton detectives, class warfare, anarchists, and death.

The author has a talent for using historical details and recreating the mood of the early 1900s. We get each scene in a clear and engaging style. The sentences were beautifully written and a pleasure to read. The tone of the book is at times hard-boiled, at times romantic, and at times tongue-in-cheek black comedy. For the most part, these varying tones work to create an entertaining period piece. Though, occasionally, the varying tones don't always balance.

There are two main stories going on at once: one that takes place in the post-WWI period when the main character has returned from abroad and must unwind a tangled knot of family history, personal failures, labor tension, and a murder mystery; and a second one that takes place in the past that involves a love story set in the early days of the WWI.

For me, my heart was set in the WWI story. That story was simpler and more beautiful. However, it also had much more unexplored territory. Unfortunately, this story comprises much less of the book than I hoped. It's entirely possible that they are two separate stories that could have been told in two separate novels.

At times, too, I struggled to understand the protagonist's motivation. Since he is in a state of depression and alcoholism when we meet him after WWI, it's hard to know exactly what his internal motivation is (other than to get another drink). If I read the book a second time, I might pick up on this more.

One last note about this book. I was able to finish it in a few days on top of a busy schedule. Thus, in addition to being a solidly written work of fiction, it was also highly engaging.

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## Lynn says

I picked this advanced e-book because I thought it was a WWI story. And, it is. But it is so much more. This splendid debut is about situations black and white, but also gray. Binaries, dualities. Lies which are untruths told; lies which are truths untold. The powerful grip of family. And how concepts of right and wrong can change minute by minute, hour by hour, and a million times in the course of a lifetime.

This is post-war America, depressed. Filled with men wounded and crippled from the endless days in Europe, fighting the war to end all wars. A Colorado town called Rayhillville - built by the Rayhill family on the backs of coal miners who would do almost anything to feed their families. Almost anything. But a line gets drawn in the sand, and the miners can't back down, and the Rayhills won't give in, and the Pinkertons are called in to 'keep the peace' but end up causing the violence.

### Filled with humor

Neal Stevens is the Rayhill nephew, freshly back from the European war where he had been a photographer with "Miss Constance" (his camera) where he was told that ... "Frenchmen are always French," she said... "Chinamen are always Chinese. But Americans are just renters".... [he looks] across the street, in the square's traffic circle... and has no idea how his life will change. "My uncle owned the mines, and my father shot their leader and I worked for the company paper."

McGuffy's speakeasy down some steps under the local hog butcher, so that blood seeps through the ceiling and fills the ashtrays and the empty glasses.

### and pathos

[...The morning rain turned the dirt into a heavy, clumpy mire that caked their uniforms, weighing down their seventy-pound packs another pound or two, but what was another pound or two when you were going to die?...]

### beautiful prose

[...if Eskimos have a hundred words for snow, and Americans have a dozen words for indifference, then trench soldiers have a thousand words for mud: mire, sludge, bogland, clay, blood-soil, death marsh...]

### a cast of 'colorful' characters

'Big Hank' O'Leary, 'Lazy Eye' Norris, Jesse Stevens - anarchist, ladies' man, champion of the underdog

and this book grabbed me from the first paragraph:

The men lined up for their pictures before they died. It was an orderly, single-file queue snaking through the trench, no pushing or shoving...each held a letter addressed to his mom or his sweetheart, brother or father, mostly commenting on the poorness of the weather or the morale of the men...When their turn arrived, they handed the letter to me, the Yank, and I raised my camera...then fired."

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I read this E-book courtesy of the publisher.

### **Laura says**

Loved it! From the first line, "The men lined up for their pictures before they died." I was pulled into the story. Although the main character trudges through the war trenches with soldiers, he tells his story through the lens of his camera. While there is some of the dark violence of war, the images that have stayed with me are the simple human tragedies.

The novel is both beautiful literary fiction and a fast-paced story.

The colorful characters are unexpected, larger then life and downright entertaining.

It's the very best of all worlds.

I highly recommend.

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