A gripping investigation into the extraordinary career of Serbia’s legendary warlord.

Zeljko “Arkan” Raznatovic began his life as a petty criminal, a juvenile delinquent adrift in the floundering state of Yugoslavia. He would eventually become famous throughout Western Europe: as the “smiling bank robber”; as a Houdini-like fugitive from multiple prisons; and even as a state-sponsored assassin. Stories of motorboat robberies and daylight bank heists would follow him from country to country. Yet however impressive his criminal reputation seemed at first, it was only the beginning of his path to infamy.

Following Yugoslavia’s chaotic descent into madness in the 1990s, Arkan would become not only a gangster but one of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic’s most valued henchmen in the country’s civil war. He rallied Belgrade’s notoriously violent soccer hooligans, paired them with inmates from Serbia’s prisons, among other brutal street thugs, and trained them to become his ruthless foot soldiers, known as the “Tigers.” During the war, the men rampaged through Croatia and Bosnia---killing, raping, burning, and looting. As they earned a reputation as Serbia’s most feared death squad (accused of genocide by The Hague tribunal), Arkan became one of the region’s wealthiest men. A national hero, he married the country’s greatest pop star---the so-called “Madonna of the Balkans”---in a ceremony that was compared to that of Prince Charles and Princess Diana.

His fame and good fortune, however, could not last. In 1999, as NATO bombs fell on Belgrade, The Hague’s International War Crimes Tribunal indicted Arkan for crimes against humanity, the United States called for his
arrest, the world media chased him, and mobster rivals wanted him dead. His days were numbered, and just after the Serbian New Year, he was shockingly assassinated in the crowded lobby of a high-profile Belgrade hotel.

In Hunting the Tiger, journalist Christopher S. Stewart tells the spectacular, bloody, and often nebulous story of a man who was equal parts James Bond, James Dean, Billy the Kid, and Al Capone. In a region still in the throes of sectarian conflict and wracked by the aftermath of decades of violence, Stewart gives us an engaging first-person look at one man who became a symbol of an intensely combustible and illicit age, and who played both villain and hero at a profound historical moment.

My Personal Review:
Although I have read numerous books on the Balkan wars none ever offered a broad picture of Arkan.

Some books offer a rather journalistic view of the conflict. I'm referring to works like Alan Little and Laura Silber's "The death of Yugoslavia" which is a rich chronicle of political and military events before and during the war. A similar book is David Rohde's "Srebrenica", although this one deals with a particular conflict (Bosnia) and with events taking place in one specific town.

Other books' dwelve deeper on the historical roots of the conflict (some elaborate on the Turkish period more than others; some examine the interwar period with detail, the Second World War or the Titoist regime).

I first heard of Arkan and his exploits in newspaper reports, back in the late 1990s. News reports spoke of a certain fellow (Arkan) which they put on a par with Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic and Milosevic). These reports mentioned Arkan's previous history of delinquency in Sweden.

Books that I read also mentioned Arkan. However, these books didn't elaborate much on his person; there was a repetitive mention of the tigers, of Swedish bank robberies and there was also some mention of Arkan's post-war life --such as his marriage to Ceca and ultimately his assassination in Novi Beograd's Hyatt Hotel.

Hunting the Tiger: The Fast Life and Violent Death of the Balkans' Most Dangerous Man is the first book I read where Arkan is not only an anecdote.

I am very grateful to this book for filling a gap of knowledge. I have travelled to Belgrade on two separate occasions (the last time in 2001)
and I remember having taken pictures of a big compound on Knez Mihaila street. One of the soldiers guarding the building forbade me to take any more photos. That building, now I know thanks to this book, once housed offices of the powerful UDBA.

I also remember Zoran Djindjic's death and at the time I didn't connect this event to Nicola Kavaja (because I had never heard of him, there's not a mention of Kavaja in any of the books I cite). I also knew how bad things turned out for Belgrade (especially the rise of criminal activities after communism) but I had never heard of the policeman who wanted to put Arkan behind bars, whose story is told in the book with some detail.

Why did I ignore all of this? There could be a number of reasons, maybe the language, since I don't read nor understand Serbian, books printed in Belgrade were out of my reach --as were valuable B92 documentaries. Secondly, books I read (and in this case books printed in Western European countries or in America) seemed more concerned with the broad picture of the war: the dispatching of UN or European emissaries, the voting of resolutions at the UN level, the manoeuvres of the Clinton administration, the international reactions to bloody events in Sarajevo, etcetera, etcetera...

I'm not saying that other authors are wrong in their approach, I'm not saying either that those books are incomplete. What I'm trying to say is that the events surrounding Arkan's life are very important, if not essential in the understanding of the Balkan wars. For any academic with an interest in this subject Hunting the tiger is a very important part of the puzzle.