The Origins of The First World War
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This book explores some of the long-term and short-term causes of the First World War. It will investigate:

- The Royal Cousins
- Nationalism
- Alliances
- The Arms Race
- The Scramble for Africa
- Franz Ferdinand
- The Schlieffen Plan
The royal leaders of Germany, Britain and Russia were close relatives. Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, King George V of Britain and Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany were cousins.
Kaiser Wilhelm II, Germany

- Wilhelm was born on the 27th of January 1859 in Berlin, Prussia.
- His mother was Victoria, Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, and his father was Friedrich III, Prince of Prussia.
- Wilhelm would write letters to Tsar Alexander III, (Nicholas' father) telling him of his hatred towards his English family and the British Empire in general, but he adored his grandmother Queen Victoria.
- In 1890 Wilhelm sacked Otto von Bismarck (The German Chancellor) partly to gain control over Germany’s foreign policy.

Tsar Nicholas II, Russia

- Nicholas was born on the 18th of May 1868 in Saint Petersburg, Russia.
- His father was Alexander III, Emperor of Russia. His mother was Dagmar, the daughter of King Christian IX of Denmark.
- Alexander III died on the 1st of November 1894 and Nicholas became Tsar at the age of 26.
- The relationship between Russia and Britain improved when Nicholas II became Tsar. Queen Victoria was very fond of Nicholas.

King George V, Britain

- George was born in London on the 3rd of July 1865.
- His father was Edward, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of Queen Victoria. His mother was Alexandra, another daughter of King Christian IX of Denmark.
- George and Nicholas were friendlier with each other than either of them was with Wilhelm.
- George’s brother, Albert, died in 1892 from pneumonia. As a result, George became the heir to the throne.
George did not like Wilhelm, and Wilhelm disliked Britain.

In general the relationship between Nicholas and George was good. Queen Victoria was very fond of Nicholas.

Nicholas and Wilhelm respected each other, but they still had a problematic relationship.

These cousins ruled over millions of people, not only within their countries but also as part of their vast empires. In 1914, King George V was the head of state for about 400 million people within the British Empire.
NATIONALISM

Nationalism can be defined as a feeling of devotion or loyalty to a country or people. It has sometimes led to the belief that one country's interests are more important than those of other countries.

This is an example of a propaganda poster that was popular at the beginning of the 20th century. The governments of countries such as Britain and Germany tried to persuade the public that fighting for their country was a worthy cause.

The largest countries in Europe all believed that they would win if they went to war. In many cases their leaders were overconfident and wanted to appear powerful and strong.
Tensions between a number of European countries started to mount at the beginning of the twentieth century. This led to many countries creating alliances to support them if they were attacked.

The Triple Entente: Britain, France and Russia (red) surrounding Germany (yellow).

France, Russia and Britain agreed to a pact in 1907 known as the Triple Entente. One of the main reasons for the Triple Entente was to prevent Germany from becoming too powerful in Europe. The countries of the Triple Entente were confident that they would be able to deal with any sort of threat posed by Germany if they acted together. Germany had a similar partnership with Italy and Austria-Hungary called the Triple Alliance.
The Arms Race

From 1870 onwards an arms race developed between the major European powers. Countries in Europe produced ships, guns, and all kinds of armaments and increased their armies in competition with their rivals in Europe. The governments of these countries did not want their neighbours to have more potential power than them, and this led to an arms race where the major powers produced more and more weapons.

This is a chart showing the number of soldiers each country had in its army on the eve of the war. Countries on mainland Europe had larger armies because they were more concerned about attacks from neighbouring countries.
The Arms Race

The arms race led to an increase in the number of soldiers in armies and the development of new weapons. Germany built more railways towards the French border which meant that they could transfer soldiers much faster in the event of war. The main arms race was between Britain and Germany.

Germany wanted to increase the size of its naval forces so that no other country, including Britain, would want to start a war against them.

When I was elevated to the throne I aspired to have a large navy in order to achieve my ambition of Germany becoming a world power.

Kaiser Wilhelm II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
<th>Dreadnoughts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>54,000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria-Hungary</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>3</td>
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Britain had the largest navy in the world at the beginning of the 20th century, but Wilhelm II and Germany were eager to change that. In June 1900 Germany decided to double the size of its navy over the following 20 years to a total of 38 battleships, 20 armoured cruisers, and 38 light cruisers.

This chart shows the number of Dreadnoughts in Britain and Germany between 1906 and 1914.

Each Dreadnought had at least 10 guns, and these guns had enough power to sink any boat.

This is H.M.S Dreadnought. Germany and Britain built as many of these powerful ships as they could.
At the end of the 19th century European countries were competing with each other to conquer land in Africa. By 1914 European countries ruled most of Africa, and only Ethiopia and Liberia were independent.

**Consequence**
A number of European countries saw an opportunity to conquer land and make money from Africa. Kaiser Wilhelm II and Germany were determined to gain more land abroad to create a larger empire. **The competition for land in Africa created even more tension in Europe.**
By 1914 The Arms Race and the Scramble for Africa had increased the tension between European nations. The spark that led to the war was the shooting of the Arch-duke of Austria, Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by a young man from Serbia. The assassin, Gavrilo Princip, was a young Bosnian Serb nationalist who wanted to free his people from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Gavrilo Princip shoots the Arch-duke of Austria, Franz Ferdinand.

Britain and France have an agreement with Russia and join the war.

Russia defends Serbia.

Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.

Germany defends Austria-Hungary.

Italy has an agreement with Germany and Austria-Hungary but refuses to join the war.
The Schlieffen Plan

The Germans had been preparing for war for years and had devised a plan known as the ‘Schlieffen Plan’ to attack France and Russia. For this plan to be successful they had to attack France quickly through Belgium and hope that Russia didn’t have time to mobilise its army.

Britain had an agreement with Belgium that dated back to 1839. This agreement stated that Britain would defend Belgium if it was attacked. This was the reason given to explain why Britain joined the war.