



Volume 13, Number 10  
October 2002

The official newsletter of Novelists, Inc.—  
a professional organization for writers of popular fiction

## Scent of a Writer

BY CAROLE BELLACERA

I'm reading a novel that is tempting me away from my writing time. Do you know how long it's been since that has happened to me? Years. In fact, this hasn't happened to me since I began pursuing a writing career in the mid-eighties.

Don't get me wrong. Since I became a published author, I've met hundreds of talented authors, and have read many, many good books written by them, and I've got plenty more in my TBR pile. But have I become lost in a book, completely immersed in a world created by an author to the extent where I'm living and breathing and...conversely, *drowning* in its pages? No. Not until now.

This book was originally published in 1956. Probably twenty years ago, I read an earlier book by the same author, and come to think of it... that was probably the last time I became "lost" in a book, totally caught up in the characters and the exotic setting. I'm talking about M.M. Kaye and *The Far Pavilions*. My memory of that book is hazy now, but the feeling it evoked in me is still strong. I remember being horrified when Juli, a young Indian girl, who was in love with an Englishman, was being forced

to commit *suttee*—throwing herself onto the fires of her husband's funeral pyre because it was the tradition to do so. I can't say for sure, but I believe there was a happy ending to the romance in that book, even though their love was forbidden.

I went to a used book store, planning to buy a copy of *The Far Pavilions* so I could re-live that incredible literary experience again. (Yeah, I know. What about that TBR pile at home? What can I say? I wanted to take a trip to India without actually going there.) Instead I found another Kaye book, *Shadow of the Moon*. It, too, was about 19th Century India, and the British occupation of the country. I bought it, hoping it would be as good as *The Far Pavilions*.

I wasn't disappointed. Immediately, Kaye's world reached out and enclosed me, and I was transported from the deck of my home in Northern Virginia to the sultry heat and sandalwood-scented air of India. I found myself enthralled by her vivid description of a country she so obviously adored. Here's a passage that literally took my breath away:

*The noise of the city beat about the pink walls of the Rose Palace night and day, filling the small, hot, stifling rooms with sound,*

*as the unguents and essences used by Aziza Begum and the zenana women filled them with the heavy scent of sandalwood and attar-of-roses, and the cooking-pots of the kitchen courtyards filled them with the smell of the boiling ghee, curry and asafoetida.*

*Even the nights brought only a diminution of the noise; never silence. Tom-toms throbbed in the crowded mazes of the city, beating in counterpoint to the piping of flutes and the tinkle of sitars, the barking of pariah dogs, the crying of children, the clatter of armed horsemen riding through the narrow streets, or the drunken shouts of revellers returning from some debauch at the King's palace.*

*With the passing of each slow day the heat became greater, and during the hours of daylight the walls and the roofs of the houses and the stone paving of the courtyards would steadily absorb the fierce rays of the sun, so that when night fell it seemed as though every stone and brick in the city gave off the stored heat in waves, as from the open door of a potter's kiln.*

*Sabrina found it possible to sleep a little during the day, for a hot, dry wind frequently blew during the day-time, and then the doors and windows would be opened and hung with curious thick matted curtains made of woven roots, which were soaked with water. The hot winds blowing through the damp roots cooled the rooms and filled them with a not*

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# THE PRESIDENT'S VOICE.....

I'm writing this before the conference, for a newsletter that won't come out until after the conference, which leaves me betwixt and between. So I'd like to use this column to welcome the many newcomers who have been added to our roster recently.

When this organization was founded some fourteen years ago, many of our members knew each other already. As we worked to put the organization and the first newsletters and conferences together, we expanded our network of friends to the group as a whole. We have relationships forged in fire (or in six-seater airplanes or ferries during thunderstorms) and by experience (ask Resnick about loading trucks in dark alleys). Those of you new to the conference will have seen us laughing uproariously in corners or rushing to hug each other at the conference desk. On the Ninclink, you'll hear us carping at each other over conference sites and hotels or poking fun at each other's idiosyncrasies, because we know each other well, and as the group has grown, so have our friendships.

To all the newcomers, I invite you to join this select group of friends and business partners, for we are select, no matter how arrogant that sounds. The members of Novelists, Inc. have done what a very small percentage of the population has accomplished: published *at least* two novels. Those of you who have accomplished this in these tough economic times with an even tougher publishing market deserve a huge round of applause and acknowledgement. We can learn from each other. You already know this is a business, and a tough one. We oldtimers know how to survive.

Ninc is a different environment than the larger organizations that mix unpublished and fans in with the published writers. Because we are a select group, we are small. We do not have a huge office of fulltime paid staff. Our fabulous up-to-the-minute newsletter is edited by an unpaid board member, and the articles are, in the majority, written by members for a minimum fee, or on a volunteer basis. Our conference has one paid planner for dealing with the hotel, but all other activities are organized by volunteers.

In some ways, this exclusivity is an advantage. It means there are opportunities for every member to become an integral part of the community. Like a prestigious club, those members who participate in the activities get to know each other. We become a family who can offer a helping hand when it's needed, or a big cheer when it's deserved, or a united front when it's time to stand up for our rights. Through the newsletter and the conference, we have opportunities to meet editors, agents, attorneys, publishers, distributors, and others who are in a position to advance our careers—as we are in a position to advance theirs.

None of this comes about by magic. Sending in your dues may earn you a figurative wand with the power to open new horizons, but you have to take the initiative, wave the wand, and learn how it works. If you have e-mail, join the Ninclink; lurk if you're shy or too busy to post. You'll hear a lot of chatter that will make you smile or roll your eyes, but you will also recognize the vast expertise and resources available among our members. When you can, join in, let us know you're there so you can become another link in the chain of expertise. If your name is new to us, we may take a while to get to know you, but be confident that we'll recognize you after we've "seen you around" a few times.

When you can, come to the conference. Sharing rooms and tables and smokes in the hall builds lasting relationships and a stronger network. Listening to the vast encyclopedia of experience our speakers bring to the panel discussions is enlightening even for oldtimers, and for new ones, it can open doors—and eyes. Volunteer to help and our conference coordinator will no doubt revere you forever. And you'll have fun, too.

Use this organization as you would any other tool in your office. If you don't know how to turn on the computer or use the word processing program, they're useless to you. But once you power them up and start hitting buttons, the world is at your fingertips.

Welcome to our world!

— Pat Rice

# Scent of a Writer

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*unpleasant aromatic odour. But often the wind did not blow; and it always died at sunset.*

Genius. Sheer genius. Can't you just feel the heat? Smell the scent of the damp roots as the hot, dry wind blows through them? I feel hot and sweaty just reading that passage again. I feel like I'm right there in India, even though I've never been anywhere near that country.

But Kaye's descriptive power is only one of her talents. She has a way of bringing her characters to three-dimensional life, so that they take shape in your mind, and you see them as clear as if they're standing in front of you. And she does it without giving long, drawn-out physical description...just enough so that you can form your own picture of them. Even more important, though, Kaye has a knack for making you really care about those characters, and about what happens to them.

There is a scene in *Shadow of the Moon* where I was practically biting my fingernails off because a plot had been hatched to assassinate a main character that I loved. When it was foiled, I slumped in relief. That's what I mean by creating characters the reader really cares about. M.M. Kaye is a master at this.

In *Shadow of the Moon*, like *The Far Pavilions*, there is also a story line involving forbidden love. A young English heiress, Winter de Ballesteros, is being escorted to India for her upcoming marriage to a British commissioner by Captain Alex Randall, an English soldier of great integrity who is one of the few Englishmen to suspect that a rising of Indian Sepoys is in the making. Alex, aware that Winter's husband-to-be is a debauched drunk, is dismayed at the thought of the innocent virgin being possessed by such a despicable man, but there is nothing he can do about it. The commissioner is his superior

officer. Winter and Alex fall in love during the long journey to India, but they both deny their feelings, and she ends up marrying the slothful Commissioner Barton as planned. The couple pine for each other from afar, only occasionally meeting for morning rides away from the Residency. These meetings are totally innocent. There's no touching between the two, but the physical attraction is so thick, the pages crackle with it.

The couple eventually gives into their feelings and consummates their love. Technically, it's not adultery because her husband is dead. But they don't know it, yet, so I guess you can say they committed adultery in their hearts. Some readers find adultery inexcusable. I don't. Because we're only human, and sometimes, for whatever reasons, we marry the wrong people. And sometimes, after marriage, we find the *right* person. (I don't speak from experience, having been happily married to my husband for 28 years, but my latest book is about adultery, and I know at least one reader found it inexcusable because of the score she gave it in the first round of the RITAs—a two on the scale of nine. My husband calls it the ultimate #@%\$\* you score.)

I wonder what M.M. Kaye would do if she ever got a #@%\$\* you score? I'm guessing she'd just let it slide off her back and keep writing her wonderful books. Because it's clear to me that she wrote the books of her heart, books that came alive for her as well as for her readers. Her stories sink into your consciousness and carry you away to exotic lands where the characters come to technicolor life and the prose is so vibrant you can practically smell the scent of sandalwood and hear the chaos of a busy Indian bazaar. I call this the "blink effect."

You're lost in a book, and someone or something interrupts you, and you look up and blink, not quite in the real world yet, but still lost in the

magic of the fictional world created by a super talented author.

Isn't that what we all should strive to do with our writing? Create the "blink effect" in our readers. We want them to become lost in our books. And if that muse calls for an adulterous relationship for our protagonists, then, our protagonists will be adulterers. I think the worst thing, we, as writers, can do, is to write our books to the dictates of public opinion, and what may or may not offend them.

Our goal is—or should be—to write books that readers will become lost in, where the world comes alive and draws the reader in so that when they finally finish that last line and close the book, the scent of sandalwood will still be hanging in the air.

**NINK**

## Bits'n'Pieces

### Call for submissions:

EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing is expanding the number of titles to be released in the coming years. EDGE requires more manuscripts to include in our production schedule. We are looking for high-quality science fiction and fantasy novels from new and/or established authors. Please visit [www.edgewebsite.com](http://www.edgewebsite.com) for our submission guidelines and contact information.

We plan to expand to six titles per year. We publish in trade paperback and hard cover. Advances are rarely negotiable but set at time of contracting (more info on this can be found in our FAQ).