



The Palace Tiger

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In her award-winning mysteries—from **The Last Kashmiri Rose** to **The Damascened Blade**—Barbara Cleverly paints a dazzling portrait of the British Raj, infusing it with intrigue, enchantment, and menace. And in her detective hero Joe Sandilands, war veteran and Scotland Yard policeman, Cleverly gives us a gallant guide to this paradise lost. Having seen humankind at its worst, now, in a lush royal kingdom, Sandilands will see it at its most dangerously complex....

In northern India, Ranipur is renowned for its trove of priceless gems, its exquisite palace, and its medieval mores in matters involving men and women. But Ranipur's prince is dying, and Joe has been sent to be Her Majesty's witness to a charged battle of succession. With two heirs dead and another running for his life, Joe suspects that a murderer is hiding among the palace's visitors and residents, from English opportunists to scorned wives and a dangerous seductress. Now, as a gilded, remote bastion teeters on the brink of chaos and a man-eating tiger prowls the nearby countryside, Joe must turn hunter—of a human, an animal, and the hunger that drives them both....

The Palace Tiger Details

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From Reader Review The Palace Tiger for online ebook

Jim Leffert says

It's 1922--the latter days of the British Raj. While on assignment in India, CID Commander Joe Sandilands finds himself dispatched to the remote state of Ranipur, to look into the death of the terminally ill ruler's oldest son, possibly under suspicious circumstances. Ostensibly, he is there to help hunt a ferocious tiger that has been devouring some of the Maharaja's subjects. In actuality, he ends up investigating more mysterious deaths amid jockeying for power among the Maharaja's court and the mothers of the dying ruler's three children.

Alas, this tiger won't hunt! Curiously, the exotic atmosphere of the Maharaja's court and the drama of the tiger hunt notwithstanding, I didn't find this installment in Cleverly's generally fine detective series to be that absorbing. Perhaps it was because there are so many suspects and victims so that the story presents an intricate puzzle but without any compelling character development. So, I would direct prospective readers to other volumes in this series.

Carol says

The fourth entry in the Joe Sandilands series manages to keep up the suspense while presenting an intricate mystery set in early 1920s India. Sandilands, a Scotland Yard inspector who happens to be working in India, accompanies an acquaintance to a remote Indian province to participate in a tiger hunt. (The tiger has been killing & attacking villagers and must be destroyed.) At the same time, Joe is asked by the British government to keep an eye on the political situation. The raja is dying, and his eldest son was just killed in a bizarre accident. Joe arrives just as the raja's second son is killed in a plane accident. Two sons dying in such short succession begins to look mighty suspicious, especially when palace insiders know that the raj has only days or weeks to live.

I enjoyed this fourth installment of the series. It was suspenseful, the plot moved quickly, the characters were interesting and the setting remains fascinating and original.

Quillracer says

Mysteries set in foreign countries? Not really my thing. Historical mysteries? Not high on my list.

This series is both, yet it's high on my Must Read list because Cleverly tells a great story and brings the Post-WWI times and India under British rule to life. The reader can feel the heat of a summer day in India, the tension in a group hunting a man-killer tiger.

The story is full of turns that keep the reader off balance but Cleverly never blindsides the reader with surprises.

The ending, while it resolved the mystery and was logical and realistic, was unsatisfying because Cleverly took the easy way out.

Suzannah Hoppe-washburn says

A mystery set in India, although the main character is British. I found the conclusion to be lacking a "bad guy" as every mystery should have. There were perhaps too many "bad guys" and as a result the characters were a bit weak. The story was complicated, with so many different twists that it was not engrossing. Even as a historical fiction goes, I felt that it got too bogged down with everything the author was trying to convey.

Marilyn says

Hmmm, Of the four I've read, this was not my favorite. It still has the wonderful sense of place, of culture, of interesting characters, of native tribes -- but the mystery itself got a bit tedious because there were so many different versions of what may have happened, that although close to the confusion of real life, it simply bored. The ending wrapped it all up (mostly), but I felt as though I had been in a constant windstorm of ideas and theories before the final result. These books do have a lot of intrigue often attributed to understanding the machinations of a completely foreign culture. That part is fascinating.

She is such a good writer, however. I shall forge on to #5.

Shannon says

Very fast read...I was through it almost before I knew it. Some old friends here, notably Edgar Troop and Sir George from a few of the other "Sandilands" mysteries.

Some slightly annoying features are starting to crop up as I read through this series. There is always a feisty female, usually American, but sometimes British, who entices Joe Sandilands into intimacy of at least one sort or another. She is such a stereotypical character that I am getting bored with her type and wonder why Joe (who is so quick in other respects!) is so slow to realize what she's up to! In this book, "she" is the American wife of the Maharajah's second son. He is killed most dramatically right before her (and Joe's) eyes, before he can even make it into town. Sound familiar? It is a very similar scenario to the opening of "Ragtime in Simla!" That annoyed me. Surely there's more than one way to introduce murder in a sensational way!

Joe's brief is to discover what is going on with the succession in this princely State. Once he arrives, there are more deaths resulting in more chaos and confusion. On top of murder, court intrigues and power plays, a hunt is organized to shoot a man-eating tiger which has been terrorizing a few out-lying villages. During the hunt, Joe is the hero of the hour as well as the dupe of the day! More death ensues. The hunters return home only to find a dying Maharajah, a depleted treasury and courtiers scrambling to keep or increase their political influence.

This book was fast-paced for sure and had some endearing characters (the Maharajah's 12-year-old son, for one,) but it lacked cohesion and development. It ran over the top of some areas that needed more exposition to enhance the reader's grasp of such things as the women's quarters and life removed from regular society. Greed needs no explanation, but personal descent from honor to unscrupulousness does require more motivation than was shown here.

The last chapter (not the exposure of the killer) was powerful and poignant. In this story, the deft writing lifts a mediocre tale from bland to worthwhile, if not quite as good as the first three in the series.

Ryan says

What a gem of a find! Absolutely delightful, a quick romp through a princely Indian state during the British Raj circa 1920s. And also a marvelous mystery thriller to boot, that unfolds in an exotic setting. Cleverly manages to pull it off without becoming cheesy or campy at any point, demonstrating her extensive knowledge of the historical background, fashion and technology of the era, from gaudy palaces and formal dinners to the thrill of royal tiger hunts and even a little aviation history thrown in for good measure. The pacing was a little uneven as the plot quickly thickens and winds up in the last quarter of this short novel, in contrast to the gradual build up in the first half. Just as one settles down and gets used to the locale, the action climaxes and resolves all too quickly. One senses that the author was in a hurry to wrap things up! A pity as such rich historical fiction deserves more extensive treatment for sure. I suppose it could be expected, being just one out of a detective series. And I couldn't help but visualise this being an excellent video game whilst reading it, having all the ingredients for one - stunning and colorful visuals given the locality, plenty of puzzles in a multiple murder mystery for the player to uncover, and some lively action thrown in too!

Val Sanford says

Commander Joe Sandiland of Scotland Yard can't seem to make it out of India. A well-loved Maharaja is dying and the succession to the gaddi of Ranipu, a prosperous kingdom with important and positive relations with Britain. In he goes with a brief to find out what's going on and report. The first son has been killed-- by misadventure or by murder, has yet to be proven. The second and third sons are in danger, but by whom and for what purpose? The book opens with on a pleasant, happy rural scene. A mother's joy as she scythes the grass with her 8 year old, newly married daughter is shattered when a man-eating tiger attacks. The hunt for the man-eating tiger is paralleled by a hunt for killers in the beautifully appointed palace. Joe is caught in a tangle that might have him thinking it's Colonel Mustard in the Library with a gun. As lighthearted as the book might appear at first with barnstorming Americans and Tut Tut Cheerio Brits and three thousand Rajput at the palace, Sandiland's brief is sad and sorrowful. Greed and entitlement sicken the palace and the last days of a once good and thoughtful ruler.

Sandie says

This mystery is set in the time of the British Raj in northern India. Detective Joe Sandilands, war hero and Scotland Yard policeman is sent to witness the succession of the dying prince. Ranipur is noted for its hoard of priceless gems, an isolated expensive palace, and medieval local customs. The heirs keep dying and Joe has to find out if they have been killed, who did it and why. The many suspects range from English officials, American and Indian wives, and even a mistress. Tigers, panthers, and kraits appear as weapons as well.

Interesting and a good read. The author has written several others with the same detective.

Spuddie says

Another series that I've only fairly recently discovered. I think I hesitated to actually start it because it's set in a location/time I'm not crazy about--1920's India during the heyday of the British Raj. It's interesting and all that, I'm just not much of an imperialist. LOL

Detective Inspector Joe Sandilands is based in Simla, on loan from Scotland Yard to educate the native police forces "how it's done" as it were. But his stay seems to have gotten quite a lot longer than he expected. He's been sent by his boss Sir George to root out and keep an eye on a troubled situation in Rajipur where the maharaja, who is dying of cancer, has had his heir killed in what was called an 'accident' but under suspicious circumstances.

Interesting series and I do rather like the main character, probably because his upper lip isn't quite as stiff as that of his cronies.

Carol says

Barbara Cleverly has written a series of detective novels set in the 1920's, several of India, some of Britain and wherever nearby her gentleman or lady detective-protagonists roam. She's excellent of her genre. She provides a top-notch plot with several plausible alternative villains, well-drawn eccentric characters, flowing prose and a literate vocabulary. Those who wonder whether some of the excesses depicted in the fictional princely state in this book can find the source material in her preface.

I complained about another writer, of thrillers, who exceeded my allotted suspension-of-disbelief. One must, of course, go along with the universe described by the author. If the hero is known to leap tall buildings in a single bound, so be it. Sometimes, however, an author desperate for a plot has trouble being plausible within his own usual universe. So far, Cleverly has not made me cringe.

Rossrn Nunamaker says

I received an advance reading copy of the Palace Tiger, which went on sale 7/25/06, by Barbara Cleverly. I had not previously read any of her works and was not aware until I received it that there was a series of books based on the character Joe Sandilands.

All in all, the book was well-worth the read and I anticipate going back to her earlier works to read some more.

The book is set in India in 1922 and features a ranging cast of characters including the main character Joe Sandilands, a Scotland Yard investigator, who has been asked to visit the principality of Ranipur, where the deaths to two sons of the Maharajah, have occurred. More disconcerting is the fact that the Maharajah himself has cancer and will die soon, requiring a transition of the throne.

Sandilands is joined by his Russian acquaintance Edgar Troop, and sent by Sir George. In Ranipur, the wives of the ruler and his sons, an illegitimate child of the ruler, the Regent, and a number of others are keenly aware of the situation and nearly each is calculating his or her own path to power.

The tiger is a real threat to villagers in one of the prince's territories, having acquired a "taste for man" it has attacked and killed numbers of children and people, and a hunt is held to end its reign of terror.

The physical and metaphorical tiger is revealed in this wonderful climax.

I thought Cleverly wrapped things up well and did a great job of portraying this period in time.

Sorcha says

second of her books that I have now read - realised in once she started describing the tiger hunt and I thought "I've read this scene before....." (In "Ragtime in Simla"). Not exactly the same, and I suppose that many of the tiger hunts in upper class Raj era India were all much the same, so poor comparisons cannot be necessarily drawn. It would be interesting to know if she presents a variation of this set piece in any of her other books where by I would then think she was being a little lazy or uninspired.[return][return]Anyway, the book itself is enjoyable as Commander Joe from Scotland Yard, having remained in India for longer than his planned 6 months, is sent out to investigate the deaths of two of the three sons of the Maharajah, who himself is dying and therefore his succession is in doubt. Some of the characters are lightly drawn, and tend to make short appearances, only to disappear again, making for quite a lightweight set of potential suspects when it comes to a head.

LJ says

THE PALACE TIGER (Police Proc-India-1922) – VG

Cleverly, Barbara – 4th in series

Constable, 2004- Hardcover

Commander Joe Sandilands has been dispatched to Ranipur, ostensibly to hunt a man-eating tiger. As he is arriving, a plane crashes in front of him killing the son and present heir of the maharajah. Joe quickly finds the crash was no accident and this is the second heir who has died, the first proving to be murdered as well. It's clear there more danger than from four legged beasts.

*** Cleverly excels as sense of place; you see, smell, hear and feel the atmosphere. She transports you to British occupied India. The dialogue is excellent as are the characters. But under it all, is a solid, basic mystery. There was very good suspense, although there were more twists than Lombard Street--almost too much so. Cleverly is an author for whose next book I await so anxiously, I order them from the U.K. Highly recommended.

Debbie says

There, now I am all up to date. I have read all the Joe Sandilands mysteries to date. She has much better character development than Christie, but the solution to her murders strikes me as being Christie-like. In this one Joe goes to an Indian principality to investigate why all of the maharaja's heirs are being murdered in particularly ghastly ways. Oh, yes and he goes on the hunt for a rogue man-killing tiger, too. Now I just have to wait for Cleverly to write another.

Writerlibrarian says

Intricate plot. A mix of politics, greed and duty pull the story along. Our hero is sent to untangle the mysteries surrounding the deaths of the two elder sons of a dying Raj. Written like that sounds boring and cliché. It's not. Cleverly at her most average is very good. India, in the 1920's, under British rule even if there is a thin veil of independence for some Indian states is shown with vivid colours and a love for the land that can't be mistaken.

The characters are a bit on the thin side, the villains are plenty and predictable, hence the 3 stars. But still it worth a read.

Madonna says

Like the Charles Todd Ian Rutledge series, I've enjoyed all the Joe Sandilands books. I sometimes find it hard for him to avoid temptation with all the women throwing themselves at him, but I guess that is a gentleman of the era. I also find it hard to believe that he doesn't put his foot down and demand to be allowed to go home; he's been in India a while. However, I guess that also comes with being a gentleman--knowing and doing his duty. Besides, I wouldn't have all these great stories to read if he went home.

I enjoy the writing, the atmosphere, the knowledge of India, the eye into life of the times, and learning about Joe the man.

A great series; I'll be sad when I've read the last one.

Marie says

Barbara Cleverly's Joe Sandilands series is about a British detective and former army man working in India during the time of the Raj. I found the first three of the series to be unique and colorful, portraying the evocative, fragrant era of 1920s India. As I've found with other series (such as those by Patricia Cornwell and Sue Grafton), though, this one is struggling to maintain its originality and verve. My interest is waning a bit.

The book opens up with an exciting scene: a person-eating tiger attacks a small Indian village girl. Soon we move onto the lives of the British ruling class in India and Joe Sandilands is sent by his supervisor down to a Northern territory where the ruling maharaja is dying.

I enjoyed the scenes of Joe engaging with Lizzie and Madeline, as well as the scene when Bahadur catches him by surprise while he was sleeping. But much of the story got bogged down in detail, especially the scenes involving just the British. At times I found myself ready for the book to be over so I could move onto something else, which is not a particularly good sign.

So I've been vacillating between 2 and 3 stars but ultimately decided on 3 because it was good...but not great. I'll read more of Cleverly--the Sandilands series has a unique premise and setting, and all of the characters--Indian, British, and American in this book--are equally considered as possible perpetrators.

I find also that Cleverly writes interesting, strong women characters, and it's clear to me that this series

(although masculine in many ways because of the era) was written by a woman.

Bill says

This is the 4th book in the Joe Sandilands mystery series, so far set in India during the time of the Raj. Sandilands is a Scotland Yard commander who, in the first book, was seconded to the British police in India to teach law enforcement techniques to the Indian police and to learn from them as well. In the 4 books he has also worked for Sir George Jardine, the governor of Bengal, travelling around India solving various mysteries and acting as Sir George's eyes and ears in outlying areas. This story finds Sandilands in Ranipur, looking into the suspicious deaths of two heirs to the throne of the prince who is also dying. As well, he is to assist if possible with tracking and killing a tiger that has been killing local people. I like the pace of the story and I've grown to like Sandilands, his detective style and his personality. The mystery is interesting and worked at methodically and this allows Barbara Cleverly to give an excellent portrayal of the region and of life in the Raj at the time. The story isn't complex but it's still an entertaining read. I will now have to find the next in the series, *The Bee's Kiss*, which finds Sandilands returning to London. I'm looking forward to seeing him in action in more familiar turf for him. 3.5 stars.

Elli says

A favorite author and a fascinating place, both in history and the country itself. Each state is like it's own country, and Joe Sandilands roving policeman from Scotland yard, but spending time in India is sent to visit a colleague in the north who has just received an order to look into a situation in a neighboring state. Turns out to be a very exciting adventure, especially since the present ruler is dying of cancer and his position is sought after by a number of people for a number of reasons. It takes place early last century. The characters are all 3 dimensional and can clearly be real to the reader. I felt I knew them, but there were some surprises. And not all of them pleasant. But Cleverly uses many facets to her personalities. Few are just all good or all bad. There is are the traits of humanity to balance the characters as unique individuals that you meet and get to know in various degrees as their part of the story. With each book I feel I have made a visit to the time and place.
