

Wildlife thriller with a twist

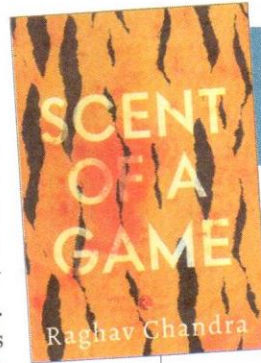
AT last, a new genre of tiger fiction or shall we say wildlife fiction is created! After all the sombre reports about elections won and lost, finally a more inspiring, gripping, nail-biting, edge-of-the-seat mystery-thriller about wildlife, especially the perilously endangered tiger.

Scent of a Game, written by Madhya Pradesh cadre IAS officer Raghav Chandra, is a startling and refreshing story about wildlife conservation. Crisply and masterfully crafted, almost Frederick Forsyth-like, this is a multi-dimensional chronicle of tiger poaching, *shikar* and the international trade in endangered species as it happens and as it has occurred through the past several centuries. It is well researched and presented, the language mature and the characters unbelievably natural and life-like.

The book is set in the year 2006; the time when the author was posted in Madhya Pradesh and witnessed

tiger deaths at close quarters. The story revolves around a popular tigress, Burree Maada (the pride of the tiger gene pool), who mysteriously vanishes from the high-security Kanha Tiger Reserve. An NRI who returns to India to cremate his dead father is arrested when he goes to a conservation museum to deposit his father's favourite tiger skin, on the suspicion that this is that of the missing tigress of Kanha. A Deputy Director of Kanha is unceremoniously transferred for doing his duty and a vivacious female journalist rakes up intriguing but uncannily true issues about tiger poaching and is targeted by the wildlife mafia.

Chandra, who is currently an Additional Secretary in the Government of India, is actually



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writing about more than just wildlife. It is a narrative about *karma* and the need to conserve wildlife not just as an environment-management dogma, but also for cosmological reasons—to every action there is a reaction, and because it must be a personal imperative to absolve oneself of our past wrong deeds—“to undo the scent of the game.” That is why Raghav Chandra's *Scent of a Game* is not just a thrilling story about deep and dark forests and stunning wildlife, but a motivational story whose scent will linger for very long. It is bound to change the reader's attitude towards not just wildlife, but towards life itself. **g**

Excerpt

'You know, Ram,' she said. 'There is a market for endangered species. From the jumbo-sized elephant to a lowly butterfly...'
Her voice dropped theatrically as she brushed her fingers against his.

Her touch was electric; Ram perked up as if it were a magic wand. He thought of the Raja brothers and their Chinese partners. 'Perhaps you are right.'

'Yes, Ram, wildlife was business, and will always remain business,' said Sherry. 'The interconnections and stakes are huge. As one who has some English blood, I should hate to admit it. But the fact is that hunting was the underlying incentive for the biggest conquest in the recent history of mankind.'

Ram's brows arched as he looked up quizzically. 'Attila, the Hun? Alexander the Great? Or, was it Genghis Khan?'

Sherry turned to look outside, beyond the prison, before she announced, with a sneer: 'The conquest of India!'

'1498...Da Gama knocked...at India's gate,' Ram recited the rhyme.

'No! The East India Company—the biggest multinational of its time,' Sherry said. 'Why did it come to India?'

'Spices...silks?'

Sherry remained silent.

'Tea...pearls?'

'No! It brought blood-thirsty hunters to Indian shores, masquerading as a cohort of traders. Do you really think the gentle fragrance of exotic Indian spices lured them? No! It was the tantalizing thrill of the chase, the romance of a free hunting zone, where the sun would never set on whatever anyone from the British Empire did! Lots of Camparis and Sundowners to drink with perfumed women in laced gowns and fancy hats! Bimbettes, all wide-eyed at these outdoor adventures and dying to be laid by randy hunters! The scent of the game! The ultimate turn-on!'

Sherry's voice had risen sharply. And then, just as suddenly, her voice dropped to a whisper, 'Wars in Europe are not even half the atonement, Ram..... Indians would be justified in asking for reparations..... but for the fact.... their own rulers were no less trigger-happy.'

She looked like a rabid feminist urging a jury that a rapist be publicly castrated. For a moment she looked cold-blooded and murderous, ready to go to any length for her cause. He was beginning to feel slightly scared of her. She saw his look and quickly flashed a smile. Once again a harmless diva.