My first encounter with a wild tiger was in India, in Bandhavgarh National Park. The tiger was larger, louder and more beautiful than I imagined.

Cutting for Stone, by Abraham Verghese is a novel with a story embedded in it. Abu Kaseems Slippers tells of a Baghdad merchant who can’t run away from his old slippers. They keep finding him. Funny on one level, it is full of symbolic ideas on another. I made the tale into a children’s story with tiger characters, set in the Mughal Courts of India, a melting pot of Persian, Indian and Mongol artistic cultures. I read the tale again in Eaters of the Dead by Michael Crichton, making my head spin. Stories do have a life of their own.

I was astonished to see wild peafowl in the forests of India, trembling their tails, dazzling in the sun. Mughal Court art has a gesture that illustrates the way I felt. A subject bites his finger to prove to himself, he is not dreaming!