

**REVIEWS FOR
THE MARLOWE CONSPIRACY**

[Publisher's Weekly](#)

[Historical Novel Review](#)

[Stimulated Outlet Book Reviews](#)

[Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award Reviews](#)

[Historical Novels Review Online](#)

PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY

April 26th 2011

Set in 16th-century England, this story weaves historic details about the life of playwright Christopher "Kit" Marlowe and his contemporaries into a compelling tale of political intrigue. Kit's plays enjoy the attention of gentry and commoner alike, but also the scrutiny of powerful religious figures. While his service as an English spy ensures him a measure of protection from the designs of personal enemies, the popularity of his literary works -- as well as his affections for Audrey, the wife of a former patron and fellow spy, Thomas Walsingham -- expose him to public charges of atheism and a murder plot. As Walsingham aligns with Archbishop Whitgift and others for diabolical purposes, Kit enlists the aid of William "Will" Shakespeare. Fisticuffs and physical action occur frequently throughout the novel, lending a cinematic feel. Queen Elizabeth and her contentious political relationships are well-rendered, and the period details -- ranging from individual dress to the streets' dingy sanitary conditions -- ring true. Kit's continual work on the poem "Hero and Leander," even during a stint in a dungeon cell, adds color to an indefatigable main character who forever remains restless in both his heart and his mind.

[HISTORICAL NOVEL REVIEW -- 01/13/11](#)

The Marlowe Conspiracy

By: M. G. Scarsbrook

Reviewed by: [L. G. Graham](#)

What do you get when you make Christopher Marlowe a master spy in the employ of the English government during the reign of Elizabeth I? What happens if you give him a side kick by the name of Will Shakespeare? You get a delightful romp through the whole of English society in 1593. Along the way, Marlowe manages to be accursed of atheism, a crime punishable by hanging, he makes love to one of Elizabeth's ladies-in-waiting in the queen's bed, spends several nights in dungeons, sparks a prison riot, passes counterfeit money, and pens his poem, 'Hero and Leander' while dodging assassins.

This is not a book for the Elizabethan purist. While it is obvious that Scarsbrook spent a great deal of time researching Marlowe and his times, the tale is fanciful. The gossamer webs of the storyteller connect Marlowe to plots among Lords of the Realm to gain influence with the queen and to become spymaster of all of England. That being said, the book does a very good job of cleaving to the few facts known of Marlowe's life.

Since this novel is not history, it can be fun. Shakespeare can take on the role of Watson to Marlowe's Sherlock Holmes. Queen Elizabeth can come off as being a bit like the Red Queen in 'Through the Looking Glass' and Marlowe's love interest can be a married lady of high standing and noble blood. The archbishop can decide the only way to save people is to kill them, and Marlowe's patron and spy handler can decide to have him killed because Marlowe is having an affair with his wife. This is a very busy book.

There is a great deal to like about this book. Both Marlowe and Shakespeare are fully realized, very likeable characters. Both are complex men for a complex age. Marlowe is clever, arrogant, and the smartest man in the room most of the time. Shakespeare is subtle, witty, and loyal. Together they take on the whole of England to save Marlowe from the gallows.

Scarsbrook does a masterful job of describing the sights, sounds and smells of an England on the verge of the seventeenth century. His descriptions are organic and often evoke the mood the character. Here Scarsbrook describes what Marlowe sees following a prison break as he rides through the countryside:

"...the moon turned a shade of grayish blue and assumed the tone of frozen skin. Clouds stretched down to the horizon, each one long and thin, like scars made by a whip."

He does an excellent job of painting a dynamic society on the verge of spinning beyond the control of the ruling class. The archbishop worries about atheists, Puritans, and plays. The nobles worry about the riots and the never ending war with France, and everyone worries about the plague. The action is fast, and only slightly incredible. You will find no deep introspection. This

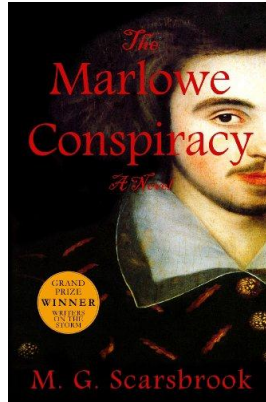
Marlowe is a man of action.

This book does not fit easily into any one genre. The historical purist would break out in a rash while reading this book. It isn't exactly a spy novel. Scarsbrook's subtle literary allusions would be roof jokes for the casual reader. In the end, I would have to guess that it is written for the intellectual adventure market if such a thing exists. I suppose it does. Therefore I recommend it to people who know the works and the lives of Shakespeare, and Marlowe, and are willing to look at them as literary characters rather than as authors. I would also recommend it to anyone who loves a good adventure story and is willing to suspend belief for the sake of the story.

There is one final question that has to be answered. What would Marlowe and Shakespeare have thought of the book? I think they would have liked it, Shakespeare would have refused to take a back seat to Marlowe, and I think they would have enjoyed adding a few touches of their own.

STIMULATED OUTLET BOOK REVIEWS -- 3/2/2011

Reviewed By [Alice Yeh](#)



All the world is a stage — or so [The Marlowe Conspiracy](#) would have you believe. In this fanciful tale about a literary genius, we are drawn into street fights, assassination attempts, secret dealings, and yes, even slow poisonings.

- **Overall: 4**
- Plot: 4/5
- Originality: 5/5
- Language: 3/5
- Believability: 3.8/5

In *The Marlowe Conspiracy*, Scarsbrook draws us into Elizabethan England and the double life of Christopher Marlowe, or Kit. As a spy for his patron, Thomas Walsingham, Kit has given his allegiance to his country and his heart to the stage, in spite of recent jadedness over the limitations of his craft.

As far as conspiracies go, the standard formula goes something like this: innocent hero finds himself in trouble; innocent hero runs away from trouble; hero and confederates uncover an increasingly messy plot; hero saves the day and lives to tell the tale. Scarsbrook turns this step-by-step process on its head, as the suspected plot is actually *more* intricate than the real one, and the truth behind the conspiracy is revealed to the reader right from the get-go. In spite of this foreknowledge, the storyline remains intriguing, with surprises and stressful situations that are wholly unexpected. Seemingly unimportant information becomes crucial in later scenes, forcing the reader to pay attention. Also, taking a larger view, parts of the tale coincide quite well with the real Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*.

The author paints Marlowe as a friendly man with a good sense of humor but a terrible temper. As a spy, he has both physical skill and mental resourcefulness, and both prove vital as the situation around him worsens. In spite of his pride and his occasional bouts of arrogance, he is a likable protagonist who makes you urge him to succeed while shaking your fist at the villainy of his enemies. In fact, Scarsbrook's renderings of both Marlowe and Walsingham are delightfully

human, and the changes in their characters interesting to behold.

The tension between Audrey and Kit is fantastic, and their hesitancy and internal struggle are in keeping with such a conservative society. The love scene is a bit hard to swallow, however, given its setting and the nature of their relationship before. I can see the importance in terms of hardening Walsingham's attitude towards Kit. All the same, the insertion of the act itself feels a bit contrived.

Equally difficult to absorb is the start of the friendship between Kit and William Shakespeare. Once it is underway, it is believable enough, but the start of it feels rushed, lacking the instant chemistry that would account for such suddenness. Something about Will's deportment also had me picturing him as a teenager, and Marlowe as the experienced adult. This could be due to the forced growth curve of espionage; even so, it was hard to imagine that they are the same age.

Scarsbrook's writing is comfortable, and his pacing excellent as he varies quick fist fights with slower, ponderous segments. My chief complaint, however, is a fondness of apostrophes that borders on gluttony. Instances of "you're" instead of "your" aside, the manuscript is peppered with pluralized words or varying verbs that are given apostrophes for no reason that I can fathom. I lost count by the time that I was ten percent in, and the quality of the author's actual word usage and phrasing was the only thing tempering my vexation.

In *The Marlowe Conspiracy*, the author gives a colorful tale that cleverly coordinates fact and rumor with his own imaginings. The story could very well stand on its own, even without the historical tie-in, as a well-written piece of historical fiction. More proofreading would likely be beneficial, however, as would a less trigger-happy pinky.

[Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award Reviews -- 3/22/11](#)

ABNA Expert Reviewer #1

The plot and main character seem plausible and interest is held from the beginning. The reader is never lost as to knowing what is happening, perhaps not the deeper reason why; but yet there is mystery enough to create a curiosity in continued reading. The pacing is done well, from the beginning to set up the action to the final scene of Queen Elizabeth's departure from the Archbishop of Canterbury. There is a satisfactory evenness between dialogue and figurative language.

ABNA Expert Reviewer #2

This is very well-written, fast-paced and riveting. The action scene with Kit at the beginning immediately captures interest and the writer's skill allows the reader to really root for Kit, despite not knowing him very well yet. The historical details were interwoven seamlessly into the narrative. The details were crystal clear and painted a vivid picture of the setting and the action occurring.

THE MARLOWE CONSPIRACY: A NOVEL

Historical novelists would be lost without the dashing, mysterious figure of Christopher Marlowe, and they'd be equally lost if there were video footage of him getting fatally stabbed in a Deptford rooming house on May 30, 1593. The shady background of the men with Marlowe that day (and their summary acquittal by a royal inquest) has been grist for conspiracy mills ever since, and M.G. Scarsbrook, after a great deal of obvious and reassuring research, takes on the whole murky mess of Marlowe's life and death and afterlife in his packed and rambunctious novel, *The Marlowe Conspiracy*. Every major incident from the poet's life is re-imagined and very effectively dramatized (indeed, Scarsbrook often subtly re-arranges details to enhance the drama) as Marlowe enlists the aid of his friend Shakespeare to clear himself of charges of atheism in the spring of that fatal year. The vast and tangled world of Elizabethan culture and court politics is brought spectacularly alive under Scarsbrook's handling, and the dialogue crackles with urgency and wit. From the book's great first line ("The moon looked flat and pale and ready for a kill"), through the machinations of Elizabeth I's devious and powerful councilors, to an ending that will please most, if not all, conspiracy buffs, this novel never flags for an instant and never disappoints. Highly recommended. -- Steve Donoghue