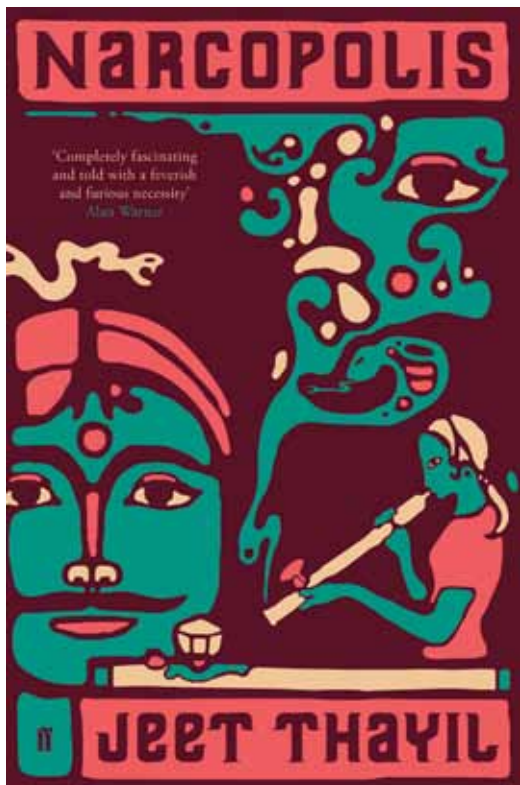


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## Reader's Guide



*Narcopolis*  
is Jeet Thayil's first novel

# Narcopolis

## Jeet Thayil

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## About the author

Jeet Thayil was born in Kerala, India, in 1959 and educated in Hong Kong, New York and Bombay. He is a performance poet, songwriter and guitarist, and has published four collections of poetry. He is the editor of *The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets* (2008). He currently lives in New Delhi.

## Narcopolis

Shuklaji Street, in Old Bombay. In Rashid's opium room the air is thick and potent. A beautiful young woman leans to hold a long-stemmed pipe over a flame, her hair falling across her dark eyes. Around her, men sprawl and mutter in the gloom, each one drifting with his own tide. Here, people say that you introduce only your worst enemy to opium.

Outside, stray dogs lope in packs. Street vendors hustle. Hookers call for custom through the bars of their cages as their pimps slouch in doorways in the half-light. There is an underworld whisper of a new terror: the Pathar Maar, the stone killer, whose victims are the nameless, invisible poor. There are too many of them to count in this broken city.

## Discussion points

Dom is the first person narrator but there are multiple storytelling voices that belong to other characters, what impact does this have on the narrative?

The prologue is one single six-page long sentence. Why do you think the author wrote it this way? What effect does it have on the reader?

Jeet Thayil, in a recent interview with Siddhartha Bose in *Wasafiri*, said 'The point about the novel is that there is room for more than one kind of voice. You can switch from tragedy to comedy on one page, and it doesn't have to seem contrived.' Does he successfully achieve this shift in *Narcopolis*?

How do the changing fortunes of the characters in the novel reflect the changes to the city over the decades?

Do you agree with the reviewer who wrote 'I wished that this book, like some long and delicious opium-induced daydream, would go on and on.' Kevin Rushby, *The Guardian*

## Themed reading

Amitav Ghosh *The Ibis Trilogy*  
Denis Johnson *Jesus's Son*  
William Burroughs *The Naked Lunch*  
Dostoyevsky *The Brothers Karamazov*

## Useful links

[Publisher's website](http://www.faber.co.uk)  
www.faber.co.uk

[Interview with Wasafiri](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02690055.2012.636895)  
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02690055.2012.636895