



Smoking Poppy

Graham Joyce

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travels to an enthralling, suspense-charged landscape in this hallucinatory novel of a father's quest to save his daughter -- without destroying himself.

Dan Innes has received shattering news from the British Embassy in Bangkok: his daughter, Charlie, whom he hasn't seen or spoken to in two years, has been imprisoned in a Thai jail for drug smuggling. Angry, terrified, seething with reprimands and questions, Dan leaves for Thailand. But the jail at Chiang Mai marks the beginning of his search rather than the end. Following the faintest of trails up into the lawless, dangerous mountain region near Myanmar, where opium grows abundantly, Dan must retrace Charlie's steps -- and brave the same traps that have swallowed her...on a terrifying mission of self-discovery, blind faith, and salvation.

Smoking Poppy Details

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From Reader Review Smoking Poppy for online ebook

Doug Bradshaw says

I still feel a little hot and sweaty, stinky, clothes are stained and dirty, mosquito bites both old and new all over my body, and I'm very relieved to leave the jungles of Thailand still in one piece. Graham Joyce, or at least the protagonist in this story, is a bit of a red neck (what do we call red necks from England?) know it all, emotionally closed guy who has lost any meaningful connection to his two kids who are in their twenties, one a born again Christian (boy how that bothers our hero, Dan), the other, the daughter that he loved dearly, now in prison in Northern Thailand for drug smuggling.

The story of the struggle and sacrifices to find her is well told, but to me, it's really a story of how we as adult parents connect to our friends and family, and especially to our own children. It can be a difficult relationship, especially as kids enter into their teens and start thinking independently and often go in directions that parents aren't stoked about.

Sometimes the connection is brutally tested and it's the parent who must yield and accept more than the child. The story convincingly tests the limits of the parental love and in this setting, in the hidden Poppy Fields in remote jungle areas and in huts far away from any normal civilization, that the healing of these relationships can sometimes occur. Are you ready to go way outside of your normal limits and boundaries, do things you've always hated, eat humble pie, and do what it takes to save your child, the one who has abandoned you and disliked you? Maybe not.

It's a macho story, but with tears, a story of the jungle and our privileged way of life, but with some interesting insights into tribal ways and customs.

Give it a shot, I think you'll like it.

Rich says

Dan Innes has serious flaws as a father, husband and friend, the least of which being that he doesn't realize he's flawed. Dan's journey to attempt to locate and then ultimately bring his daughter home from jungles of Thailand is also a journey where he must confront and accept his own imperfections, as well as accepting the imperfections and embracing the strengths of those around him. In reality, this is a coming of age story for a middle-aged guy. It took awhile to realize that it was Dan who was the one with all of the issues, because he's the narrator of the story, so we've only his side of the story at the beginning as he points out the flaws of all the other people around him. I was actually learning about Dan as he was learning about himself. This was a good thing, and a bad thing, because as the book went along, he became a less sympathetic character and could be more than a jerk at times. Nevertheless, I remained interested in the book throughout, and I was glad that I went along for the trip.

Susan says

For me, this book had it all....an exciting, fast paced story, that whilst being both an adventure and a mystery, was peopled by ordinary everyday characters who were flawed with all the usual human failings, but who magnificently rose to the occasion when someone they loved was in danger.

This was a novel about the fierce and unquestionable love of a parent for their child, no matter how difficult that child has been.....it's also about the love of an adult son for a less than perfect Father, and about the true meaning of friendship, displayed by my favourite character, Mick.....and it was about self discovery, and seeing ourselves and our flaws....perhaps for the first time....as others see us.

I loved every page of this book....there wasn't one word too many....its easy to describe a book as un- put-downable, but, for me, this one truly was.

Shelli says

This is my second book this month by this author. I am already planning on reading more. I hadn't even heard of him before coming across Some Kind Of Fairy Tale. These books were completely different but I enjoyed both. I felt pretty sure I was going to like this one after reading the author's note in the beginning. I could relate to his thoughts on his love for his children.

This one for me was scary in its subject matter. Receiving a call that his daughter (who is just out of Oxford) is in a Thailand jail on a drug smuggling charge, this father goes after her. He has some unlikely traveling companions in his drinking buddy and his Christian fundamentalist son. He has recently separated from his wife and has been basically estranged from his children for the last couple years.

I hated to put this book down after I started. It felt very real. I enjoyed the characters and appreciated their growth throughout. Difficult to read at times I felt rewarded at the end. A story of family and friendship and life's unexpected turns. A story about love, especially between parents and children and how it changes over time but doesn't go away. A powerful and moving read.

Joseph D'Lacey says

This was such an enjoyable read that I actually got angry whenever anyone interrupted my reading of it. I flew through the pages like I used to years ago. It's easy to fall out of love with reading when you write. I think this is because you develop such a hyper-critical eye – both for your own work and everyone else's.

But Joyce's style and first person narration built swiftly from a trickle to a torrent and the momentum carried me effortlessly to the book's conclusion. A bit like the raft ride towards the end of the story.

The switch from the ordinary world to the extraordinary world was just brilliant in this. Danny, a recently separated electrician has little more than double-sockets, quiz-night and whisky to look forward to.

Estranged by his children, it's not looking good for Danny and things get worse when the foreign office phones to tell him his daughter has been caught smuggling heroin into Thailand. Now in Chiang Mai jail, she may face the death penalty. What else can Danny do but saddle up and head for Thailand to save his child?

A richly told trek into the heroin jungles of the Far East, Smoking Poppy manages to be funny, frightening, thrilling and heart-warming all at the same time. It rekindled my desire to read for pleasure.

Stacy says

This is different from the first four Graham Joyce stories I've read in that it does not start with a happy but dysfunctional family in the heart of England, but starts with a father, estranged from his two adult children, and separated from his wife, who is completely at a loss as to how this happened.

His life is filled with the day to day things, but he keeps a distance between himself and everyone and yet, he has a best friend, Mick, who would do anything for him.

When word comes that his daughter has been imprisoned in Thailand for drug smuggling, our hero, Dan, decides he must go see her and see what can be done. Much to his surprise, his son, Phil, and his friend, Mick, insist on going with him.

What follows is an amazing story of common people facing unbelievable challenges and a journey more incredible than the three men could ever imagine. I will not try to retell this story, but would say I couldn't put this book down, and as always with Graham Joyce I loved all the characters. He has a knack of making even the unsavory have at least something redeeming. It also gets back to his theme of family love, and how we push people away without meaning to.

I cried at the end.

Oh, and there are ghosts and spirits.

Caroline says

Dan Innes is a father, his two children, Phil and Charlie are young adults, independent, wilful, detached. Somewhere along the way he lost the connection with his kids, more recently he lost a connection with their mother. Now, with books as his only friend, he plays weekly trivia with a group of people he doesn't like, and pool with a man he hardly knows. That's just how he likes it.

When he receives word that his daughter, Charlie, is in Chang Mai prison, Thailand, for opium smuggling, he sets about going to save her. He intends to go alone, but Mick, his trivia and pool partner (and self-proclaimed best friend) buys himself an air ticket and a seat next to Dan. Phil, a fundamentalist Christian, once told of his sister's situation wrings his hands and prays to God. He declines the invitation to join his father, claiming responsibilities to his ministry, his congregation, his faith. Dan is unimpressed and tells him so.

Several days later, all three men board the plane, Mick and Dan seated together, Phil at the back with his bible and devil talk. Phil gives no indication of what changed his mind, in fact, he says very little. Mick, on the other hand, is loud and obnoxious, making fart jokes and flirting with the air-hostesses. Dan seeks distance from both men with a selection of library books by authors with opium addictions. He tries to understand his daughter's descent, how she turned from a sweet child into a nose-pierced, Oxford-educated, societal vagrant... and now a drug mule. He finds no answers in the books, and soon enough he and his maligned companions are in Chang Mai, a seething bustle of glitter and debauchery, sex-workers so desperate that they cling like the sweat on Dan's skin. Phil, convinced he has entered Hell on earth, near comes undone, Mick revels and Dan struggles with nausea and fear.

The prison visit with his daughter is a welcome relief to the agony of waiting, but it brings an unpredicted twist that throws Dan off-balance. Mick takes charge, revealing the depth of his friendship, while Phil teeters on the brink of spiritual meltdown.

This marks the beginning of Dan's journey to reconnect with his children. In the jungles of Thailand, amongst poppy fields, ancient tribes corrupted by western ways, a culture he can barely understand, and companions who love him more than he knows, Dan learns about family, about love, friendship, sacrifice and fatherhood. There are glimpses of the supernatural, a study into the relationship between adult men, humour so dry that I laughed out loud, and uncertainty so real that my nerves scraped against the brittleness of it.

Graeme Joyce writes beautiful prose that brings the senses alive. Reading this novel in late-winter, Australia, I felt the suffocating closeness of high humidity, the jangled fear and perilous danger these men are put in. The novel is unpredictable, the pace not too fast to lose the depth of the story, but fast enough to keep the reader buoyant and turning pages.

Dan is such a rich character that it's impossible not to empathise with him. He's flawed, harsh and misguided, intelligent in mind, rich in soul, stunted in heart. Mick and Phil are frustratingly lovable, so flamboyantly unique that their hearts beat upon the page. Charlie is misguided but inspirational. Saving her life is the focus of this book, but it's not the journey -- it's far richer than that.

Anna Klein says

Dan Innes's little girl, Charlie, is now an adult with a mind of her own. And she's in a Thailand prison. Even though she never turns to her daddy for help anymore, when he hears she could get the death penalty it never occurs to him not to rush to her aid. Leaving behind his intellectual but empty life in London, Dan takes his pub buddy, Mick, and his fanatically Christian son, Phil, and sets out on the long journey to find his daughter. Instead, he finds the girl who stole her passport. Desperate now, he and his buddy and son hire guides to help them follow Charlie's trail in what turns out to be a grueling trek into the wilderness near Myanmar, where they encounter a wild, surreal world of spells and spirits and opium that will either split them apart forever ... or bring them back together.

In *SMOKING POPPY*, Graham Joyce has done an excellent job of handling both the psychological and spiritual issues mysteriously yet honestly. This book is a striking portrayal of a father's unconditional love for his children (and his children's unfailing desire to protect him). Nothing here is portrayed as right or wrong beyond the demands of loyalty. More than a thriller, more than a family novel, *SMOKING POPPY* seamlessly weaves the two genres together into a painful, amusing, and unnerving tale of love and violence in the exotically dangerous Asian jungle.

If you have trouble with slightly far-out spirituality, you may have trouble with this story, but if you're interested in a seriously disturbed literary trip, *SMOKING POPPY* will definitely deliver.

Martha? says

When Daniel's Oxford-educated daughter ends up in a Thai prison on drug charges, he and his motley crew

of companions head to Asia to release her. From there, they are sent on a wild opium chase through the jungles of Thailand, learning (the hard way) about drugs, warlords and addiction.

The first half of the novel kept me amused as perpetually-negative Dan leaves his pathetic excuse for life in search of his once doted-upon daughter. For the first time in years, his eyes are opened to the world beyond his pub-night quizzes and he begins to understand that he does not have all the answers. But, by the second half, I grew tired of these bumbling, unlikable characters who endlessly interfere with the local villagers. Just when the action seemed to be picking up, the plot fell into a opium-like daze and Joyce lost all the momentum that had been building. After all the initial absurdity of Dan, Mick and Phil's interactions, it was a stretch to feel threatened as their situation unraveled. At that point, I couldn't have cared less if they succeeded in their plight or if they were chopped into little bits.

Davy says

This book represents a nearly perfect narrative set-up. Curmudgeonly dude whose life is kinda of falling apart in slow motion gets a phone call out of the blue and learns that his estranged daughter is locked up in a Thai prison for smuggling opium, facing a possible life sentence (or worse). Accompanied by a drinking buddy (a kindhearted, somewhat goofy bear of a man), and his tense, evangelical Christian son, he sets off to fight for her freedom. From there, the story twists and it turns. There's a lot of drinking, a lot of smoking, a lot of depravity and transcendence. There's some mystical elements (it would not otherwise be a Graham Joyce novel), but there's also an invigorating dose of hard-boiled jungle adventure story, a'la Indiana Jones or Heart of Darkness. It's just bloody brilliant. It says many beautiful things about parenthood, about love, about what makes a life worth living. It's the sixth Graham Joyce novel that I've read this year, and one of the 2 or 3 best. Certainly one of his most tightly plotted stories...a frenzied joy to read.

Elizabeth says

A British father gets a phone call that his 20-something daughter is incarcerated in a jail in Thailand for smuggling dope. With a drinking buddy and his son, he rushes to Thailand, only to find that the girl incarcerated is not his daughter, but has his daughter's passport. They embark on an arduous journey into the jungles near the border with Myanmar, where drug lords control villages in the cultivation of poppies and finding his daughter is only the beginning of their harrowing experience.

I was captivated by this story and its well-wrought characters, impressed by the vivid writing, and intrigued at the depth of insight and sensitivity the author displayed for the complex relationship between parents and their grown children, especially when, as in this book, they are very different from each other. He captured well the fierceness parents feel in wanting to protect their children, regardless of their age or circumstances. He also beautifully conveyed the lessons learned by the protagonist: that loving your children is not contingent on understanding them or molding them into your own image and that friendship and loyalty can come in strange packages. Powerful.

I'll definitely be reading more Graham Joyce.

J.K. Grice says

One of my favorite reads from 2016 was SMOKING POPPY. A bit of a departure from Joyce's usual dark fantasy fare, this is an amazing book. Reminiscent of Theroux's THE LOWER RIVER, this novel is a classic tale of a man out of his element in a foreign country. He's in over his head and has to find a way out of his predicament, just to survive. Wonderful characters and a story that will keep you guessing until the end. I loved this book.

Mayra says

Graham Joyce has been one of my favorite authors for years, ever since I discovered him with Some Kind of Fairy Tale. Most of his books that I've read, however, seem to have astounding, otherworldly conceits and immediately hook me in at the beginning, but end sort of abruptly. This was true for me with Indigo, Requiem, and even in Some Kind of Fairy Tale, all of which I still loved, however I feel like with its simple but gripping story and (especially!) the satisfying ending Smoking Poppy is my favorite of his books so far. This book is the perfect escape from everyday life with its surreal journey and family connection. I'm a fan of a fairy tale-like quest and that's what this book is--as soon as protagonist Danny discovers that his daughter's passport was stolen and she's somewhere up in the wild mountains, his adventure is cut out for him. This is also the only one of Joyce's books that I've read that is told completely in first person and I thought it was a nice change of pace. Smoking Poppy is a beautiful, glorious and magical tale of family and love that you should read if you haven't already.

PhebeAnn says

This was a random pick from the used book store. I was intrigued by the title and the synopsis on the back. The plot is definitely unique: Dan, a middle aged guy who is estranged from both his children and separated from his wife finds out his daughter (Charlie) has been arrested in Thailand for drug smuggling and he embarks on a journey with his born-again-Christian son Phil and his buddy Mick to rescue her.

Hard to put my finger on exactly how I feel about this book. It wasn't what I expected. I think the dry British humour woven through it was surprising given the topic, and it made the book feel like less of a thriller than the synopsis would have seemed to suggest it was. Though the tone was a bit all over the place, the novel was thriller-like in its fast pace and it did push me through the book quickly as I was interested to know what would happen.

The depiction of the tribes that Dan, Mick, and Phil encounter on their journey into the mountains came across as potentially not very authentic/somewhat problematic to me but then again I've never been to Thailand and don't know what remote Thai villages are like.

I also didn't expect the magic realism aspect of this book, but I suppose with the opium component I should have expected some hallucinatory moments. This book was kind of like Heart of Darkness plus On the Road plus A Christmas Carol (maybe not a Christmas Carol, but Dan definitely goes through the rigours of facing his past decisions and trying to repair broken relationships. He's also a definite grinch).

I appreciated Dan's growth as a character throughout the novel because honestly before he gets to Thailand I couldn't stand him--he's kind of stuck in his ways and overly critical of his kids who want to live life on their own terms. I think I am a lot more like Charlie than like Dan, and to some degree could recognize in the strained relationship between Dan & Charlie some of the changes in my relationship with my dad as I grew up and went to university and began to see the world in a different way.

This novel got better as it went along. Ultimately, it is a story about friendship, about family, and about accepting people for who they are even when they drive you nuts. Phil's reckoning with his own mental rigidity and emotional walls was actually really touching, especially in the epilogue. A very odd novel that in the end, and surprisingly, captured the experience of a father adapting to a relationship with his adult children very well.

Nancy Oakes says

Smoking Poppy tells the story of Danny Innes, who one day gets a phone call saying that his daughter Charlie has been arrested in Thailand. It seems that she's now imprisoned and may be facing the death penalty. Even though Charlie and Danny have been somewhat estranged for a while now (since Charlie went off to Oxford, it seems), Danny is off to see what he can do. He is accompanied by a friend, Mick, and his son Phil, who has channeled his alienation from his father into religious zealotry. Their arrival at the prison only brings disappointment...it seems that the woman being held there isn't his daughter after all; she's stolen Charlie's passport. Rumors say that Charlie trekked into the opium fields...and that's really where the story takes off.

I won't say more, because it would spoil the read for anyone who may be interested, but Smoking Poppy was very well done. All of the characters were realistically written, the setting was exotic and real enough that you could picture yourself there. I couldn't put it down once I started.

I wouldn't advise this for people who are happy when writers spell everything out neatly and cleanly; this is a book that requires reader participation and lots of thought.

Overall, a fantastic story and one I won't soon forget.
