



Chinaman

Shehan Karunatilaka

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Retired sportswriter WG Karunasena is dying. He will spend his final months drinking arrack, making his wife unhappy, ignoring his son and tracking down Pradeep S. Mathew, a spin bowler who has mysteriously disappeared and who WG considers 'the greatest cricketer to walk the earth'.

On his quest to find this unsung genius, WG uncovers a coach with six fingers, a secret bunker below a famous stadium, a Tamil Tiger warlord, and startling truths about Sri Lanka, cricket and himself.

Ambitious, playful and strikingly original, *Chinaman* is a novel about cricket and Sri Lanka - and the story of modern day Sri Lanka through its most cherished sport. Hailed by the Gratiaen Prize judges as 'one of the most imaginative works of contemporary Sri Lankan fiction', it is an astounding book.

Chinaman Details

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Author : Shehan Karunatilaka

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From Reader Review Chinaman for online ebook

Brian says

I won't say this is my favorite novel, nor one of my favorites. I will say I had more fun reading it than almost any other book I can think of.

I am a huge sports fan, but I don't know anything about cricket. The way this book approaches the sport makes it universal for any fan. The characters, the emotions and most of all the foreboding sense of doom of the underdog fan feels so familiar, and comfortable, to me.

But there is more to this book. The search for Mathew is funny, smart, and maddeningly twisted in its plot. It's an enjoyable detective story wrapped in a look into a (to me) unfamiliar sport in a far away country and culture. Honestly, how could I not like it?

Renuka Mendis says

I could write a book about Chinaman; but its late and I am a bit drunk. So consider this a shitty first draft. I hope its ok to say shitty on goodreads.

A post colonial post modern and well earned insult to colonialism and its barbarities; legacies and loves. Consider jonny; ahem and cricket. And a sweet sweet love song to cricket the way Sri Lankans see it, do it and love it. A highly realistic tale about Colombo people; their lives, loves, hypocricies and most of all their sometimes maddening yet occasionally adorable and definitely scary craziness.

Well. I've read Chinaman three times over the last two or three years and pining to re-read except for the stack of un-read books tugging at my skirt each time I pass them. At the outset I wonder if non-Sri Lankans will understand the gems in this book. And even for some who are not from Colombo some of it might go over their heads. Let me elaborate but not now. Later. In a twisted way I like that the book contains so many Srilankanisms (if there is such a word) and that not everyone might get it.

The achingly tenderest morsels in Chinaman are the few times when WeeGee talks about his long suffering wife Sheila in the tenderest way he can possibly come close to for an Arrack loving cricket obsessed drunk. And of course his love for Jonny is the benchmark for friendships for the ages. Irrespective WeeGee is a great man. More on that later.

The cruel corruptions that is the Colombo bureaucracy and the lives they destroy.

Beautifully written; Thousands would kill to write like him. Funny and even better --Sri Lankan funny! But with substance to every page. And read it also to find out what I.E. Kugarajah told WeeGee and here is a bit of a priceless (see I told you. insider's privilege) catalogue I kept note of:

1. That the Jaffna of his childhood was the most beautiful place on earth.
2. That he invaded the pitch in 1975 during an SL vs Aus World Cup Game at the Oval, carrying an Eelam flag.
3. That he lost more relatives in the 1977 anti-Tamil riots than he did in 1983.

4. That he was a founding member of Eelam Revolution Organisation of Students in Wandsworth in 1978.
5. That it matters not whether you believe the Tamils were only brought here in 1823. Or whether you accept that they've been here since King Ellara Cholan's reign in 100 BCE. They are now here to stay.
6. That most Sri Lankan Tamils and many Muslims would fail Lord Tebbit's famous cricket test.
7. That the Burghers told to 'burgher off' in the 1960s by the Sinhala Only policy were the island's first example of ethnic cleansing and its biggest cultural loss.
8. That ministers who laugh loudly, cry openly, bomb civilians, and burn libraries deserve to die.
9. That he trained with Palestinians in Beirut in 180 and several Tamil recruits died during that training.
10. That Buddhist priests have no business carrying handguns.
11. That many Sri Lankan geniuses have been Tamil. Anandan, Sathasivam, Mathew, Kadirgamar, Ediriweerasingham, and the Thalaiver himself.
12. That everything has a price. And that a Sri Lankan victory is far more expensive than a Sri Lankan defeat.
13. That Satyagraha does not work.

See I told you at the beginning I'd lose you. This stuff is arcane to outsiders. Insiders privilege and all that. But for insiders this is flesh and blood. Fear not you'll find your way. Its worth the trip. All the bloody way to New Zealand. Yup.

More to follow. In the interim -- this is in my top ten books list. I am not being arrogant, believe me I am a nice person but I feel sorry for anyone who has not read Chinaman; or indeed is unable to devour it as if it were a wonderful plate of your mother's yellow rice with a killer beef curry, brinjals, ATD etc. etc. with Watalappam for desert. And of course Arrack on the side.

More later. Await a properly written review soon. Read the book. Really. Read it. No sh*t. You thought ceylon tea was the best thing that came out of sri lanka. No man. This is it.

hics. as they say in Sri Lanka.

Nancy Oakes says

There is a Sinhalese expression "Konde bandapu cheena," which translates as "ponytailed Chinaman," and connotes someone gullible -- someone who will believe anything. A "Chinaman" in cricket terms is (according to Wikipedia) "a left-handed bowler bowling wrist spin (left arm unorthodox). For a right-handed batsman, the ball will move from the off side to the leg side (left to right on the TV screen)." The question asked by the narrator of this novel is this:

"Is this a story about a pony-tailed Chinaman bowler? Or a tale to tell a pony-tailed Chinaman? That is for you to decide."

Whatever your choice may be after finishing this novel, Chinaman is one of the best novels I've read so far this year. I know jack about cricket, which features heavily throughout the story; no surprise there, considering Americans are far more involved in football, baseball and basketball. Strangely enough, my lack of knowledge was not a drawback in any form. The mix of Sri Lankan history, contemporary politics, humor, the characters and the author's prose all come together to make this book an unforgettable experience.

"There is nothing more inspiring than a solid deadline," notes retired Sri Lankan journalist WG Karunasena, and after a long career of both sportswriting and serious drinking, he has been given his last one. His doctor has given him about a year to live if he does not stop drinking; if WG cuts down to two drinks a day, maybe a year or two at most. He decides that it's a good time to do a "halfway decent documentary on Sri Lankan cricket", and is obsessed with a cricket player named Pradeep Mathew, who he says, is Sri Lanka's all-time best cricketer. Mathew was a "top spinner..." "Chinaman, googly, top spinner and that amazing arm ball that god rid of the Aussie captain." Along with his friend and fellow cricket fanatic Ari Byrd, WG begins to gather information on Mathew, who has long-since disappeared from the cricket scene, official records and also from Sri Lanka, seemingly vanishing into thin air. As they start the documentary project, which will later evolve into a book project for WG, they run into several people who claim to know something about Mathew, and they run into others who do not want WG to go any further with the project. Is there some conspiracy at work here? As WG and Ari embark on their at times rather strange quest, WG's obsession with Mathew and his discussions about the game of cricket become a vehicle for exploring Sri Lankan politics and history, and life in contemporary Sri Lankan society.

But there are other considerations at work in this novel as well, both on and off the cricket field -- relationships within families; friendships; politics and money that get in the way of sportsmanship; old age; the sadness and regret of wasted lives; the inescapable power plays -- all presented in a style that fits well into the story without ever getting overly preachy. And then there's WG himself -- should anyone even believe his ramblings, considering his alcoholic bent toward self destruction and considering the characters that populate this novel? There's WG's old nemesis, once a rival for WG's wife Sheila, who may or may not have had six fingers and who may or may not have been Mathew's school coach ; a midget who claims to have had an underground bunker and to have secretly taped damning conversations on the cricket field; a friend of WG who may or not be a pedophile; and there's WG himself, the very center of the novel. The story is punctuated throughout with definitions of cricket terms, diagrams of different cricket techniques, parts of the field etc, largely to help the reader and to move the story along. . There are also fuzzy photos here and there that may or may not lend credence to WG's search for the truth about Pradeep Mathew.

Chinaman is funny and downright sobering at the same time, which given the seriousness of the history of ongoing problems in Sri Lanka is a good juggling act, keeping the reader entertained on one hand while exploring the problems of this nation. And then there's the sports aspect: the author clearly brings out the "magic" moments of sporting events that tie people together: "sport can unite worlds, tear down walls and transcend race, the past, and all probability. Unlike life, sport matters." As WG notes,

"In thirty years, the world will not care about how I lived. But in a hundred years, Bulgarians will still talk of Letchkov and how he expelled the mighty Germans from the 1994 World Cup with a simple header."

As an American who knows little to nothing about the sport of cricket, at first the book was a bit daunting, even though the author lays out the basics and then throws in bits about different throws or batting techniques. When I realized that this could be problematic, I went to the internet for help in getting a quick rundown on how this game is played -- problem solved. Cricket might be a sticking point for some readers in this country, but ultimately I discovered it didn't really matter -- the overall story is so good and is so well told that my lack of cricket knowledge was only a momentary glitch that really did not distract from the narrative. The ending may be a bit gimmicky for some readers, but the book's good points are so numerous that they outweigh any negatives.

Whether or not you care about cricket, I definitely and highly recommend this book -- it is that good, offering its readers a glimpse into life in another country, and into one man's journey of discovery in his last months of life. It's a beautiful book, and I hope it finds other Americans to cheer it on.

Mark Staniforth says

Sports writer W.G. Karunasena is drinking himself to death. The way he sees it, he has no choice. He needs the arack to sustain him through his final assignment: to resolve the mystery of Pradeep Mathew, the greatest bowler he has ever seen, and a man whose fleeting fame and subsequent deletion from cricket history begs unfathomable questions.

In *Chinaman*, Karunasena, fondly known as Wijie by his friends and neighbours, and the most unreliable of narrators, given he is blind drunk most of the time, scours the Sri Lankan cricket hinterland in his quest for answers.

He encounters bent officials, busty media executives, gangsters, paedophiles and midgets, all of whom seem to have their own vested interests in either hiding or entirely misrepresenting Mathew's story.

What Shehan Karunatilaka has fashioned is, like Mathew's legendary delivery itself, a great, double-bouncing googly of a debut novel. It is by turns inebriated, bewildering and uproarious; a unique and dischordant symphony of tall stories, Sri Lanka-style.

Karunatilaka has taken a brave step into that in-between world in which fiction and fictional characters are melded into an existing, factual framework. Most of the cricket matches are real, as are their protagonists, but the line is blurred to the extent that Mathew often interacts with them. The book's inherent unpredictability soon makes it impossible to separate fact from fiction, and this serves to perpetuate the Mathew myth: he may well be the greatest spin bowler the world has ever seen. Or he might just never have existed at all.

If it is first and foremost a novel about cricket, and a timely exploration of the roots of the match-fixing scandal which still grips the game, it is also so much more. As Karunasena opines early in the book:

If you've never seen a cricket match; if you have and it has made you snore; if you can't understand why anyone would watch, let alone obsess over this dull game, then this is the book for you.

'Chinaman' presents a rare insight into a modern Sri Lanka still (then) in the grip of the Tamil Tiger insurgency. On an individual level, it describes the determination of an ailing, ageing sports writer to take his last chance to make a mark in both his professional and personal lives. Sports writing can be the most vicarious of professions, in which even its finest exponents are forced to measure their achievements not through their own pen, but the greatness of others. It is almost as if, by restoring the memory of Mathew, Karunasena believes he will go some way towards making up for his own missed opportunities.

'Chinaman' is an incredibly difficult book to describe in a way that does it full justice. The topics it raises go way beyond the boundary. It breaks just about every literary convention going: there are false starts, blind alleys and contradictions, and by the time you reach the reality-stretching coincidence which heralds this truly brilliant book's final pages, it will seem entirely fitting.

Shortlisted for this year's DSC Prize for South Asian literature, 'Chinaman' indicates that Karunatilaka's talent will sustain much longer than that of Mathew ever did, or might have done.

Sankarshan says

You need to do a bit of reading up on the side about the matches and the players mentioned. But in all this is a splendid book. Calls out for a re-read.

Sairam Krishnan says

I had been thinking about buying this particular novel for some time, and I found it at the Landmark at the Mylapore City Centre, now defunct. They were closing down, and some genius had stowed a beautiful yellow hardcover of Snehan Karunatilaka's cricket novel in the lowest rung of a rapidly-emptying, discounted bookshelf. It was priced at INR 36, less than even the big glass of filter coffee at Saravana Bhavan, which is INR 45. I was overjoyed, and billed it immediately, lest someone recognise their mistake and price it back at what should be at least 200 or 300 rupees.

I didn't read it then, though. I kept it at the bottom of my own shelf and proceeded to look at it wistfully at intervals, until last week. India had just returned from a rather successful tour of Sri Lanka, winning a test series after 20 or so years. I watched the Galle test, and was consumed by a desire to go watch the next game from the fort. Alas, the next Galle match is very near in time and I won't be able to raise enough funds that quick. However, since I was thinking about cricket and Sri Lanka, I picked up the book from my shelf, dusted it off, and start reading.

Chinaman is not the best sports novel I've read. That, perhaps, would be Chad Harbach's *The Art of Fielding*. And I can't talk about cricket novels, because this is the only novel about cricket I've read. There is another that has been suggested to me, a novel about cricket among immigrants in America, the name of which eludes me now.

What *Chinaman* could be, as has already been suggested, is the first great Sri Lankan novel.

In the way the best stories about sports are, the book is about so much more than cricket itself. It's about the island and a people, a way of life and a nation, the story of a sport and the obsession with it. There's so much about cricket itself, which, for a lover of the game like me, translated to hours of pleasure, but the reason *Chinaman* is so good is because it relates life and the sport in ways you can only read, smile and nod about. You don't need to know the game to read this book, you'll love it anyway.

It's an extraordinarily skilful work, told in spurts of little stories, anecdotes and cricket lore. God only knows how he structured it, and I'll have to read it several times to get a feel for how he managed to execute the narrative. It does sag at places, and very clearly at the very end, when the old drunk who we've come to know and love so intimately is not narrating the story. But who cares? By that time I was so taken by the reading experience that I was willing to overlook anything.

The island is in these pages, it's sweltering afternoons and its beautiful sands, its people and their lives, its war and what it brought, sport and what it means. One answer to that last question I found on two pages a little to the end.

In the words of our W.G. Karunasena:

Some people gaze at setting suns, sitting mountains, teenage virgins and their wiggling thighs. I see beauty in free kicks, late cuts, slam dunks, tries from halfway, and balls that turn from off to leg.

When the English toured in 1993, their supporters arrived in droves and formed a jolly beer-swilling troupe called the Barmy Army. A t-shirt of theirs read as follows: One day you will

meet a goal you'll want to marry and have kids with.

Anyone who saw Diego Maradona in 1986 will agree that the t-shirt speaks the truth. To be in the right place at the right time and to watch a gifted athlete is one of life's true pleasures.

In sport, has-beens can step onto a plate and smash a last ball into oblivion. A village can travel to Manchester for a cup tie and topple a giant. Villains, can heroes become.

In 1996, subcontinental flair overcame western precision and the world's nobodies thrashed the world's bullies. 60 years earlier a black man ridiculed the Nazi race theory with 5 gold medals in Berlin before Mein Führer's furious eyes.

In real life, justice is rarely poetic and too often invisible. Good sits in a corner, collects a cheque and pays a mortgage. Evil builds empires.

Sport gives us organism that attack in formation, like India's spin quartet and the three Ws from the Caribbean. Teams that become superhuman right before your eyes. Like Dalglish's Liverpool, Fitzpatrick's All Blacks, and Ranatunga's Lankans.

In real life, if you find yourself chasing 30 off 20 balls, you will fall short, even with all your wickets in hand. Real life is lives at 2 runs an over, with a dodgy LBW every decade.

In 30 years, the world will not care about how I lived. But in 100 years, Bulgarians will still talk of Letchkov and how he expelled the mighty Germans from the 1994 World Cup with a simple header.

Sport can unite worlds, tear down walls, and transcend race, the past, and all probability.

Unlike life, sport matters.

Yes, it does.

Sometimes I'm asked why I watch cricket with the intensity that I do, and at other times I'm asked why I choose to spend half a day buried in a book when I could be doing something else. This here is one of the passages I can show them before I ask them to fuck off.

Nilu says

Probably the best Cricket oriented Novel, and one of the 'Best' novels I have read so far.

Despite being a debut novel the book does not reek of amateur writing. It transported me back to the days of reading 'Jeeves' and other works by P G Wodehouse. Shehan has managed to retain the same vein of wit running throughout the book.

Narrated through an aged, dying, alcoholic Sportswriter, we witness a tapestry of events that shaped Sri Lanka, told in a perspective of Cricket (the National Past time).

Highly recommended to all Sri Lankans, who are also ardent Cricket Fans.

Dan says

"I may be drunk but I am not stupid. Of course there is little point to sports. But, at the risk of depressing

you, let me add two more cents. *There is little point to anything.* In a thousand years, grass will have grown over all our cities. Nothing of anything will matter." [pg. 14]

"Sports can unite worlds, tear down walls and transcend race, the past, and all probability. Unlike life, sport matters." [pg. 357]

I know what you're saying. Nobody in their right mind would want to read a book about cricket. Well, saying that this book is about cricket is like saying Friday Night Lights was about football. Not really. Those sports just happened to be the backdrops for great stories and some wonderful characters. The only cricket knowledge you might need can be learned from a two minute visit to the cricket Wikipedia page. As long as you pick up the very basics of the game, that's probably all you really need.

What really makes the book great has nothing to do with cricket. WG is a drunk sports writer, is dying from his drinking problems, and is kind of terrible to his family. I loved him. Having him as the narrator was so much fun. You'll learn a lot about Sri Lanka and what it's been like to live there over the last 20 years or so. You'll also laugh a lot because Shehan is a very sharp dude.

WG is searching for Pradeep, the greatest Sri Lanka cricket player, who has disappeared. I think the greatest achievement of this book is nailing why we love sports so much as fans. It nails why I love basketball, why you love football, etc. Any sports fan would love this book I'd think. Also non sports fans. Anyone who has ever obsessed about something likely will dig this.

Great writing transcends everything no matter what. Whether it's foreign fiction, or a book involving cricket, none of that really matters. This is just great writing. Period.

Then there is the ending which is crazy and wonderful and perfect. I would describe the entire book in exactly the same way actually.

Indika De Silva says

The following book contains 3 elements that is nearest and dearest to many Sri Lankans including myself. That is Cricket, Sri Lankan society/politics and alcohol. Shehan Karunatilaka takes us through a wonderful adventure through all these elements and much more in this rather long but highly enjoyable novel.

If you are a fan of cricket I highly recommend this book to you. If you wish to analyze the Sri Lankan society grab this book. For crying out loud...

If you have some part of you which is Sri Lankan; then read this book. It is awesome.

The only question I have after reading this book in a very eager manner is...
Who the hell is Praddep Mathews??

I shall say no more...

Palmyrah says

This is very probably the first novel written in English by a resident Sri Lankan author that has any literary merit whatsoever. It's insightful, realistic, funny, ironic and a guaranteed page-turner to boot. I don't even like cricket, but it still kept me reading.

A full review, written from the point of view of a Sri Lankan reader, is available [here](#).

Abhaga says

Lots of cricket, lots of booze and all kinds of fantastic tales. Fact and fiction are spun up into an enticing weave in this story of a drunkard sports writer chasing a missing spinner whom he considers to be the greatest cricketer to walk the earth.

This was an enjoyable read. It is also nicely wrapped up in the end although did feel a tad too long.

Stephen says

I must slightly caveat this 5* - if you're interested in cricket, the subcontinent (especially Sri Lanka) and have a tolerance for fictional unreliable memoirs, then you may love this book. If you are deficient in any of these criteria, this may not be the book for you.

However- for those still with me - I think this is a wonderful book. All about unfulfilled ambition, and legacy. And the beauty of sport. The beauty and the glory and the capriciousness and the tragedy - in short, the romance. All set against the backdrop of the history of Sri Lanka, with its civil war and corruption and bigotry, and punctuated by cricket matches. It is sad and sweet, and suffused with the wisdom and acceptance of old age (impressively, this despite being the first novel by Karunatilaka).

The book is named for the stock delivery bowled by an unorthodox left-arm spinner - the main delivery bowled by the main character. The plot follows a dissolute sports writer W.G. (Wije) Karunasena and cricket fan trying to find out what happened to Mathews, the greatest bowler Wije had ever seen.

Is Mathews fictional or real? It is difficult to know what's real and made up - certainly I recognised many of the cricketing stories. Having done a little bit of research I would say the vast majority is fiction, but Karunatilaka has done a great job of weaving the two together. This greatly enhances the "unreliable narrator" aspect of the book - if you don't know what bits have been borrowed from the real world, it's impossible to know which bits are supposed to be made-up in the suspended-disbelief fictional world.

In my googling, though, I found a couple of faked up websites about Pradeed Mathews - versions of cricinfo.com and crikipedia (with a strategic '1' in place of an 'i') - clearly created as supporting material for the book (one of these pages is featured in the book, but I only reached that after I found the page myself). So you have a fictional book that uses stories from the real world, with fictional bits leaking back out into the real world - it's kinda fascinating (and I'm certainly not saying it's unique, but it was very pleasing and effective to stumble across these fictional spillages).

<http://pradeepmathew.com/>
<http://cric1nfo.com/player/srilanka/a...>
<http://crickiped1a.com/record/engine/...>

Minor faults: it is somewhat romanticising of alcoholism (this is well reversed by the end, but may be jarring during the reading). And I found it a bit tricky to keep track of all the side characters. This is partly due to unfamiliar Sri Lankan names, but also because of the discursive nature of the narrative. I don't think these hamper the book particularly.

Waqas Mhd says

This is one of the best books I've read this year (2011).

Let me start with telling this first, I used to like and play cricket a lot. But over the time I just got dragged away from the game and lost all interest in the game. Now I hardly watch or play it. I am not interested in cricket anymore.

So for exactly this reason I was reluctant to pick this book up, thinking of it containing all sort of cricket clichés and stuff, which is another way of making myself bored. I only bought it on the forced recommendation of a friend who also doesn't like cricket but told some good things about this book. Although, I bought it, it stayed in my 'to-be-read' bucket for longtime after my buying it.

Finally when I decided to read this book, I wasn't expecting much and thought I wouldn't be able to go beyond first few pages. So I wanted to get done with it asap, without wasting my time on something I wasn't interested in.

But to be honest I was sucked right into it from the start despite my lack of interest in the cricket. Shehan's got brilliant writing style that never feels tedious or overbearing. Writing flows from one heading to another at quite reasonable intervals so you don't feel stuck under same chapter for long. Book is actually divided into 5 main parts (2nd being the longest).

Reading the blurb would make you think that its chockfull of cricket terminologies that would require thorough background knowledge of the game on your part as pre-requisite. Well, I cannot say completely no to it and I can understand if someone is not aware of cricket, it could be hard to digest this book for him, but you don't need to know the game in detail. And knowledge about name of certain cricketers will let you enjoy this book a lot more.

What I realized that it wasn't as much about the game of cricket itself rather it portrays Srilankan society, its culture and its ugly politics both in and out of the game. Cricket is part of the story but these other stuff makes this book very interesting.

Usman Hickmath says

Fierce war, suicide bombings, change in government after 17 years, weakening economy, struggling middle class families and in the midst of all a cricket team which was the only solace of people: Shehan has taken this backdrop to tell the story of an exceptionally talented, rebellious and mysterious cricketer and a retired sports journalist.

Never in my life had I imagined that someone will take the story of bars and betting centers of Colombo, prestige issues and politics involved in school cricket, corrupt officials, mood of the city during the nights when the team won matches and the beautiful evenings of Colombo where we can see, through the gaps of fences, players practicing, to international readers. Shehan has done that and he has done that so beautifully. A must read.

Dimensions says

Having just come back from Sri Lanka to follow England in their 2 match Test series, this book had a special resonance to me, as the places, sounds and sights described by the author were still fresh in my mind.

While it was suggested that this book would appeal just as much to non-cricket fans, it has to be said having a knowledge of the sport is a distinct advantage. But I wouldn't let that put off those who aren't familiar with cricket, if anything a lack of knowledge would add to the sense of mysticism which makes this such a good storyline.

Shehan Karunatilaka achieves many things in this book, he gives the reader an understanding of the cultural and historical make up of Sri Lanka, cricket, Sri Lankan cricket. But above all he should be applauded for the feeling of fun throughout the book, probably necessary considering the main character is approaching his death bed.

The author also encapsulates beautifully the boundless enthusiasm for cricket which you can't fail to encounter when in the sub-continent. For Sri Lanka in particular, a relatively small island who are known throughout the world for winning the World Cup in 1996, it is more than just a sport.

Karunatilaka very cleverly uses real names for players and weaves his fictional players into the plot, adding to the sense of realism. This book has one of the most clever endings I have ever read and leaves you asking the question: 'was it all real?'

I want to end with a very funny passage from the book, which any cricket fans who has watched any India or Pakistan videos on Youtube will identify with!!

"I get sidetracked by a preview of the India Pakistan game where the readers comments begin with 'Dravid may struggle against Gul' and end with 'you goat fucking paki swine fukkers drink yo ma's urine and cum in your Dad's terrorist beard'."

Lisa says

Most of the other reviews of this book that you'll come across have been penned by people who love cricket and understand it properly. But as one who has done her best to avoid any exposure to the game ever since being dragged off to an interminable test match at the MCG by a well-meaning MIL in 1972, I am here to tell you that you can have a deep-seated antipathy to all forms of sport in general and you can rejoice in complete ignorance about cricket in particular - and still love Chinaman, The Legend of Pradeep Mathew by Shehan Karunatilaka. All the reviews I've seen quote this snippet, and so shall I, because it's true:

If you've never seen a cricket match; if you have and it has made you snore; if you can't understand why anyone would watch, let alone obsess over this dull game, then this is the book for you.

I loved the novel's sly wit, its penetrating social and political critique, and its delicious portrayal of human nature. The male friendship between W.G. and his mate Ari is especially well done.

To read the rest of my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2013/05/11/ch...>

Jaanaki says

This book is the second exceptional book that I enjoyed reading this year. Most of Srilankan fiction talks about the atrocities of the civil war and I wanted to read something different that would also lay bare the soul and spirit of the island nation .

Snehan Karunatilaka actually does that by giving us a telescopic view of Srilanka through the eyes of cricket fanatic, aged and retired sports journalist and dying alcoholic Mr.W.G Karunasena ,lovingly called Gamini by his wife Sheila and best friend Ari Byrd. Once ,he realises he has only a few days on planet Earth ,he decides to spend his remaining days writing a book on elusive cricketeer Pradeep Matthews ,who he feels is the best spinner the world has ever produced ,an unsung hero whose records have been vengefully erased and who has disappeared from public life since 1995 . His search for Matthews is the backbone for the entire story and it is ironic because in the process Gamini tries to search for his heart and spirit which he lost to alcohol many years ago. I love the fact that the author effortlessly has interweaved a friendship between two old men that has lasted over decades ,a rivalry between two old men,a marriage that still has a lot of love in it inspite of a lot of wear and tear over the years in the form of dead hopes and unfulfilled expectations and Srilankan cricket history into the story. We also have a midget,cricketing syndicates,caste differences, bombings ,cricketing anecdotes and the LTTE all thrown into the story. He cleverly shows the reader the quirks and behavior of Srilankan society at various levels.

The writing is philosophical,humorous and cheeky in many places and we realise halfway through that the writer loves his cricket and

his country. One can sense the writer's sadness when Gamini says that whatever the difference between the Tamilians and Sinhalese ,it is not so big that they have to shoot bullets at each other or burn down libraries or his disappointment when another character Johnny says that this is a beautiful country but you are going to destroy it.

This book is a celebration of cricket and Srilanka as a nation .Don't miss it if you are a die hard cricket fan

Rohit Enghakat says

I came across this book on GR and was absolutely bowled over (pun intended) by the blurb, the beautiful

cover and the reviews. This is a fantastic story about an alcoholic sports journalist W G Karunasena and his quest to uncover the story of Pradeep Mathew who was perhaps the greatest spinner to have bowled on the Sri Lankan pitches. He is aided by his friend and neighbour Ari Byrd and a couple of other colourful characters.

The author has spun a beautiful story incorporating the politics of Sri Lankan cricket and the country. The book has anecdotes of cricket in the 80s and 90s. It also gives an insight into the Srilankan people and culture, the racial tensions between the Sinhalas and the Tamils and a little bit about the LTTE. He has also explained each and every cricketing term and jargon with beautiful illustrations so as to make it inclusive to a non-cricket fan. But according to me, this book can only be enjoyed by a cricket fan or at least somebody with a passing interest in cricket. However, I found the book a bit too long. Otherwise, this is a brilliant piece of work by the author.

Amina says

A book about cricket... yes i know i live in South Asia and we're all a little obsessed with this game but a whole book seriously? The answer: OH YES PLEASE!!!!. This book made me keep going back to Google and wishing with all my heart that the bowler Pradeep Mathews was a real person, that he existed, that he was as great as sports writer W.G. Karunasena made him out to be, that his life was mostly bad luck, that he did disappear to live a life of obscurity. I Googled not just him but all Sri Lankan cricketers to see if he was at least based on someone. Pardeep Mathews is a character you wish would just step out of the book and be. And the brilliance of it, even for someone who finds the game (except during World Cup days) a tad bit boring i fell in love with every aspect of it.

Shane says

A rather unusual novel that reads alternatively as a Cricket for Dummies instruction book and a History of Cricket scrapbook.

The author weaves himself into this fictional tale along with well-known international cricketers, and I wondered how he gets away with it, for some of these personalities are not painted in a favourable light. After many local rejections, the final international publisher of the book within this book also hints to taking it on because “getting sued is good for business” - I hope the real book didn’t end up in any lawsuits! The focus on cricket, the anecdotal incidents throughout the history of the game, the how tos of the craft, the descriptions of the tools of the trade, and the speculations on what really happened behind the scenes of pivotal matches tend to overshadow the story line; we wonder whether the target audience comprises of only cricket-crazy Sri Lankans (of which I am admittedly one). But then, what of the larger literary, non-colonial readership who doesn’t understand this strange game; has it been given as many bones, as I have, to chew on?

Alcoholic, self-destructive journalist W.G. Karunasena is on a mission to find out what happened to spin bowler Pradeep Mathew, who in his mind is the “greatest cricketer to walk the earth.” Mathew can bowl fast or spin, bowl right arm or left arm, and deliver several variations on his pitch, including the Chinaman and the double bounce ball - unheard of in any cricketer. Like his chronicler, and despite his talent, he is an undisciplined player who runs into conflict with coaches, managers, and the murky Sri Lankan Cricket Board

(SLBCC) authorities who shield many secrets. Mathew's behaviour finally causes the SLBCC to ban him from the sport and erase his spectacular record of bowling in the few matches he played for his country. W.G. with his unreliable chronicling of events, his picaresque behaviour, and his technicoloured language is the real hero of this piece; Mathew, when we finally encounter him, is a rather boring immigrant in the West, who has been tamed by time and circumstance, with his myth reading larger than his reality.

Through W.G.'s pursuit of Mathew, the author takes the opportunity to observe, expose and condemn all that is wrong with Sri Lanka, from its discrimination of minority Tamils, to the shallowness of Colombo society, to match-fixing by the authorities, to the local mobsters and politicians who infiltrate the game as Sri Lanka rises in the ranks of the global cricketing hierarchy and arrives at the pinnacle by winning the World Cup in 1996. Some of these observations are not earth-shattering and are typical of Sri Lankan society, and have no bearing on the story: e.g. paying bribes to get a student into a Catholic school. Some of the one-liners that the author relies on so heavily to keep us engaged in this long narrative would be best understood only by a Sri Lankan audience: "...ode to Surangani and her fish." Some condemnations are blatant: "Unlike our sub-continental brothers, we do not throw bottles or light fires. We save our barbarism for the north and the east." There were times when I wondered whether the author had squeezed out every statistic, anecdote and joke he had encountered in his life in Sri Lanka and thrown them into this book.

The jerky story line that jumps back and forth in time, and which is interrupted constantly by side descriptions of certain aspects of cricket, or by historical incidents that occurred in the sport, just as we are getting to a juicy part in the narrative, is a bit irritating and impedes the flow of the novel. And the end, as described by W.G.'s literary agent Enid (Blyton?), flagged. However, the narration and the dialogue are typically Sri Lankan - caustic, flamboyant and funny - and I laughed a lot.

As I finished the book, I came back to my original question: "Novel, Cricket for Dummies, or a History of Cricket scrapbook?" I guess the reason this book has won so many awards in Asia, must mean that it is still considered a novel, albeit a new inflection point in its evolution. The author's courage to go where no one has hitherto dared in this art form, like his heroes W.G. and Mathew did in their respective pursuits, is to be commended.
