



## Perdido Street Station

*China Miéville*

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Beneath the towering bleached ribs of a dead, ancient beast lies the city of New Crobuzon, where the unsavory deal is stranger to no one--not even to Isaac, a gifted and eccentric scientist who has spent a lifetime quietly carrying out his unique research. But when a half-bird, half-human creature known as the Garuda comes to him from afar, Isaac is faced with challenges he has never before encountered. Though the Garuda's request is scientifically daunting, Isaac is sparked by his own curiosity and an uncanny reverence for this curious stranger. Soon an eerie metamorphosis will occur that will permeate every fiber of New Crobuzon--and not even the Ambassador of Hell will challenge the malignant terror it evokes.

## Perdido Street Station Details

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Author : China Miéville

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## From Reader Review Perdido Street Station for online ebook

Nataliya says

To paraphrase Pratchett, *"There's a saying that all roads lead to ~~Ankh-Morpork~~ New Crobuzon. And it's wrong. All roads lead away from ~~Ankh-Morpork~~ New Crobuzon, but sometimes people walk along them the wrong way."*

(A stunning image of New Crobuzon from <http://www.curufea.com>)

A word of warning: if you read only for the story and plot, this book is not for you. Yes, there is an interesting storyline with mystery and danger and love and betrayal - but it is neither the strength nor the focus of *Perdido Street Station*. **What the book is really about is the city of New Crobuzon itself, and Mieville's amazing boundless imagination knows no limits when it comes to creating a living breathing creature of this surreal, phantasmagorical place.**

*"I turn away from him and step into the vastness of New Crobuzon, this towering edifice of architecture and history, this complexitude of money and slum, this profane steam-powered god."*

New Crobuzon is *"the sunless city of mundane betrayal and danger"*, a sprawling metropolis in the Industrial Revolution era-like setting. It is the melting pot of Mieville's world, with many races ~~happily living~~ grudgingly coexisting within it. Ruthless militia patrols the streets while crime bosses prosper and the courts sentence the criminals to the horrendous Remaking.

**The macabre city is diseased, gangrenous, festering, filthy, covered in grime and stench, with all the vices of a huge metropolis - violence, crime, drugs, corruption, poverty, and politics.**

Dominated by the eponymous bulk of Perdido Street Station, with the enormous ribcage of a long-dead ancient giant jutting out in the middle of it, built on the banks of rivers from which you'd better not take a drink, **it appears to be made of the stuff of nightmares**. That is, until the events set in motion by the unwitting characters of this story unleash the **true sickeningly-awful meaning of nightmares** onto *"this old city that snores and farts and rumbles and scratches and swells and grows warty and pugnacious with age."* The ultimate existential horror - the loss of the integrity of one's mind, the fear of helplessness.

*"The nightmares were splitting the membrane of sleep. They were spilling into the everyday, haunting the sunlit realm, drying conversations in the throat and stealing friends away."*

Mieville takes the strange and innately repulsive concepts and unflinchingly uses them to carve out the setting and the characters of his story. **His amazing imagination and brilliant descriptive skills make this loud, boisterous, filthy, and terrifying place so incredibly vivid that it seemed to me that I actually spent some time there, lived and breathed it, actually felt it** - which, in turn, makes me want (a) an immediate shower, (b) a full-body CT scan, and (c) immediate treatments for parasites and contagious diseases that any visitor to it would undoubtedly get.

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I was warned about the linguistic complexity of this story. It is true - **Mieville's prose can be dense and complicated and at times deliciously pompously pretentious, studded with adverbs and adjectives**. Usually I would contemptuously and exasperatedly shrug my shoulders and walk away from that.

However, Mieville does something amazing with his fascinating language and melodic flow of narration (especially Yagharek's interludes), **making me love it in a perversely masochistic way while reaching for the dictionary.** *What did you expect - after all, in this book, there is a mention of Palgolak, god of knowledge. With a library.* (How cool is that???)

*China Mieville, making sophisticated words cool since 1972. I bet he was born clutching a dictionary.*

(Dear Mr. Mieville, thank you for '*prestigation*', '*salubrious*', '*avaricious*', '*penury*', '*susurrus*', and of course, '*palimpsest*'. These words will forever stay with me. Bring on the SATs!)

\*\*\*\*\*

As for the characters... Well, they are definitely flawed, careless, and not too likeable (yes, Isaac, I'm looking at you!), and therefore feel quite real despite their intended alienness. Lin, oh Lin, you poor thing... Construct Council - I wonder if we shall meet again, you terrifying artificial machine-god intelligence. **But the tormented and mysterious choice-stealing Yagharek was my favorite throughout** - and my heart was aching for him in the last few pages - the unexpected but in retrospect inevitable way to end this amazing gut-punches-delivering book.

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#### **EDIT AFTER THE REREAD - WITH SPOILERS (November 2012):**

*The more I think about it, the more I find Yagharek to be the heart of this book.* The earthbound garuda, punished for a crime that for different reasons is despicable both for his tribe and for us, readers - and Isaac, too. Yagharek, who in his desperate quest to fly again (and ashamed of himself for even trying) makes a journey not just from Cymek to New Crobuzon but also a mental one, from a quiet subdued creature obsessed only with its own plight to a fighter, a hero, a friend - and, ultimately, someone new.

(view spoiler)

And speaking now from the experience of having read more Miéville now, I think of a brief instance of meeting Yagharek in one of the sequels, and feeling real surge of pride at his future action - and I realize that this former half-creature, the redeemed criminal, the earthbound garuda - whatever Yagharek is or was, he has made a secure place in my heart, and **he is the glimpse of hope, perseverance, and the crazy stubborn vitality, tenacity and resilience that despite all odds permeates the filth of New Crobuzon.** Yagharek's story is the heart of this otherwise brutal book.

*"I am not the earthbound garuda any more. That one is dead. This is a new life. I am not a half-thing, a failed neither-nor."*

(hide spoiler)]

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**4.5 solid stars.** Why not 5 stars then, since I am clearly in love with this book? Because I am awful, that's why. I hate insects, and all the insect-filled storyline made me feel like bugs were crawling under my skin. Brrrrrr.... Which, I suspect, may have been the intended effect. Also, intentionally or not, it feels that a few storylines were dealt with too quickly and incompletely. **But overall, a great book that I loved very much and highly recommend.**

*"I turn and walk into my home, the city, a man."*

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By the way, my review of the second Bas-Lag book, "The Scar", is over this way.  
And my review of "Iron Council", the third book set in Bas-Lag universe, is over here.

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## **Bradley says**

Lesson learned after reading this?

Don't Experiment With Cheese.

Can you imagine how many problems could have been avoided had this novel had access to time-travel? It's practically the only trope not explored, and that's saying a damn lot.

Off and on through the entire reading, I wanted to declare that this is one of the most brilliant novels ever written. The sheer level of creativity and attention to detail, the fantastic explorations of ideas, the explosion of plot items and complications, and the REALITY of it all just begged to be placed up there as one of the very, very best speculative fiction ever written.

It's dense, but not unaccessible. The characters are vivid and fascinating and it's so easy to pick them all out of a lineup, despite there being a huge number of incidentals. And the plot is about as windy as they come while still holding to the straight and true. After things go to hell, it's practically a straight line, in fact, but that line is rich and a seemingly impossible goal.

I never stopped being impressed by the novel, whether it was my first time reading it or this second time.

But here's the "But".

I can't believe I'm saying this, but there was too much action after the moths. The city is as rich as they come, and so many damn things happened, including a great invasion scene, mind-sucking beasties, aerial monster sex, Steampunk AI emergence, mind-shit, and so many, many aliens. (Or whatever you want to call them.)

All the little things, all the attempts to put the genie back in the bottle, all the tiring attempts to right past wrongs, it was all just too draining for me. After a certain point, it was all brilliant descriptions and fascinating reveals, and by themselves I have no complaint. It was all tension and almost no release. As a thought experiment, I give it top marks in idea and execution. As a strictly enjoyable novel that lets the reader breathe every once in a while... well, not so much.

I'd almost recommend taking a break every once in a while, except that there's so many details to juggle and appreciate that I'd be afraid that I'd lose the thread. Not that the main thread was ever difficult to pick up again, of course, because like I said, it was pretty much a straight line for almost 3/5 of the novel. I found myself wishing for more dialogue and character stuff the way we had during the opening before the Crisis Engine was first turned on.

It was brilliant afterward, but it needed cycles and rhythm. It was frankly exhausting, even when I marvelled at how beautiful it was.

I can make a good argument that the main character of the novel was Perdido Street Station, itself, and Isaac and Yagharek and Lin merely being secondary characters.

It's not entirely true, of course, and I sincerely liked the flesh and blood characters right along the interesting constructs. I even like Isaac despite being the author of all this mess and his many fuck-ups. I even like Yagharek despite the shit he pulled, even if I agree with his judgement.

It's a depressing end to the novel, too, so perhaps my ongoing excitement for the tale took a downturn along with the tone.

Nothing is going to stop me, this time, from reading the Bas-Lag sequels. I didn't have any excuse last time, and I'm frankly chomping at the bit to read more of this world. It's so damn rich, and not even an unsatisfying end can ruin that. :)

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## **J.G. Keely says**

My friends call me Senex ('The Old Man') because of my taste in fantasy, or they would, if I had any. It's often been noted that I'll give at least four stars to any fantasy from the Italian Renaissance, and yet rarely give more than two for anything written since the nineteen-sixties. Some have accused me of a staunch prejudice in period, but lo! it is not so.

I really love the fantasy genre, but the corollary of this is that I hate most fantasy books, because of how they mistreat that which I love. Whenever I am called to task for loving old books and despising new ones, I give a silent thanks to China Mieville for writing a book within the last decade that I can, with all honesty and aplomb, say is both eminently enjoyable and well-written.

There are so many rich veins that run through the history of fantastical literature, from the epics, the matter of France, and fairy tales to metaphysical poetry and the pulps; and yet today, the core of the genre is content to keep digging deeper into a spent shaft. Mieville's work shines because he divines more unusual sources of inspiration and then carefully prunes, polishes, and sets them.

Fantasy has been tirelessly driven on a myth of the late medieval, so much so that any small deviation is lauded as a 'unique vision'. But gladly, Mieville isn't of the school that thinks a gritty, escapist pseudo-medieval romance is utterly distinct from a heroic, moralizing pseudo-medieval romance. He belongs to a much older school—several, in fact.

One thread Mieville draws on are the 'Weird' authors of early century pulp, who combined horror, fantasy, and science fiction, and didn't delineate where one ended and the other began. Science fiction cannot just sit on its laurels like fantasy, if only because it is constantly outstripped by new science and technology.

Lovecraft fantasized Verne, LeGuin fantasized Doc Smith, and Mieville has a whole new world of bursting technologies to draw from. The information and biotech boom led to an entirely new vision of the future, completely unavailable to writers of the Silver or Golden age, one which was snatched up by the young, hungry, dirty Cyberpunk writers.

If there were an easy way to sum up his work, you might say Mieville has written a 'cyberpunk fantasy', concentrating on the same flawed, sprawling cities, plucky heroes, and confirmation that knowledge is more valuable than martial puissance. Not since Snowcrash have I read a book that was as fun as it is intelligent. Both authors have worlds that are underpinned by ideas and philosophies.

For Stephenson, it was the social theory of Jaynes, but for Mieville, it's economics. As an economist, he can't help but enumerate the world; for him, events unerringly lead back to fundamental causes like need, supply,

gain, and zero-sum games. This isn't overt in his books, it's merely the mechanism that underpins the drive of his plot.

Perhaps this explains why he was drawn to a setting reminiscent of the Victorian and not the Medieval, since economic historians suggest that, before this period, economics could hardly have existed as a science, since the fundamental questions which underpin it had no answer in a system based on guild and fealty. But once economics bloomed, it did so grandly, such that economics could be the basis for a fantasy or a farce.

Yet Mieville's particular economic views are not the theme of the story. He is not a moralist, but a cynic, capable of representing the failure of good ideas (even one he believes in) and the success of harmful ones. His 'gritty realism' is not merely a collage of pointless sex, violence, and cruelty (like some other fantasy authors I could name), but a representation of necessary evils, difficulties, and desires.

But he is not merely a Cyberpunk author dabbling in fantasy, any more than Lovecraft was a fantasist who wrote about space aliens. Indeed, Mieville takes notes from Lovecraft, remembering that the most interesting magic is that which is only vaguely explained, and which suggests a strange and interesting world beyond the characters' understanding. I still recall the throwaway line "some plankton from a huge brine dimension" in *The Scar* sparking my imagination more than entire books by other authors, and of course, evoking the colliding branes of String Theory.

The mindless 'grey goo' antagonists are equally Lovecraftian, but Mieville does more interesting things with *The Weaver*, an unfathomable huge spider who exists between space and time. So many authors after Lovecraft tried to bring the Mythos closer to human understanding, giving the unknowable beings dialogue and motivation, but nothing kills frighteningly alien creatures faster than poorly-written dialogue; indeed, I would have said giving the creatures any level of comprehensible consciousness ruins them, but I'm glad to be proven wrong.

*The Weaver* is neither ally nor antagonist, nor does his dialogue bring him down to our level. If anything, it makes him seem more uncanny, since it is easier to shrug off some silent terror than to discover something that almost seems to make sense, but the truths it dances around suggest a world we would not wish to understand, because it is inconceivable, overawing, and deeply ironic.

But then, that is the scientific lesson from which Mieville profits: on both the micro- and macro-levels: the universe seems to flaunt everything we take for granted. The spider could be telling men about Heisenbergian concepts of non-causality and total existence failure and be no less right nor any less unnerving.

And yet, for all Mieville's gravitas, there is something undeniably frivolous and delightful about his characters. They never get so bogged-down in their difficulties that they lose the fundamental vivacity with which he endows them.

It is rare to find an author who deals with such vibrant surrealism, and yet is capable of reigning it in before it overwhelms the story. Mervyn Peake might be the master of using carefully-rationed absurdism to create a world more realistic and believably than any stark vision of Post-Modern Realism. Like Peake, Mieville's characters and setting are always strange enough to seem unusually real.

Some have suggested that this frivolity undermines the very serious questions and ideas he presents elsewhere, but I, for one, am glad to find him capable of reveling in joy, for Nietzsche once observed that "excess is not the result of joy, but joylessness".

I compared Mieville favorably to *Snowcrash*, but Stephenson's other books simply cannot measure up to his first success, and it is because they are joyless. They delve passionately into ideas and minutia, but do not

revel in the characters, the place, or the events. I would rather an author dance lightly across his treatise than for a moment begin to imagine that what he writes is portentous and grandiose.

Nor does Mieville err too far on the other side of the fantastical: for all the implausible absurdity of his setting and characters, he never gives in to the temptation to turn the book into a nonsensical fever dream. Unlike Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Mieville does not lose himself in the false profundity of metaphysics, and never once suggests the meaningless New Age aphorism that "I am remarkable precisely because I know that I am ignorant". What is remarkable in the mind of man is the cusp of knowledge, not the unknown that lies beyond it.

His story is infused with the search for knowledge and understanding, which plays through all his economic causes, his scientific metaphysical exploration (no less far-fetched than M-theory, and considerably more accessible), and, of course, the pseudo-scientific interests of his characters. What prevents this from dragging down into the sort of detail-mashing explanations that can kill a good book (or a good idea), is that Mieville is more interested in the love of discovery than in stagnating over what is already known.

Every book should be as concerned (and excited) with discovery: as readers, we are always discovering, always mulling over, always seeking to turn the next page and renew ourselves with an unexpected turn or the final arrival of some foreshadowed conclusion.

By seeking out strange and varied inspirations for his work, Mieville has shown once again that an author is only as good as the works he draws from, and only as original as the ideas he adopts. He rejects Tolkien's empty wilderness and ancient stone palisades for Henry Mayhew's London and Gibson's Tokyo. He invests his magic with alchemy, quantum theory, and transhuman biotech. He replaces heroism and escapism with economic theory and passionate individualism.

He has more world, more character, and more plot than most fantasists, and yet it is not overwrought, it is all a romp, all a vivacious and unapologetic adventure. Most genre writers not only have higher literary pretensions, but fail to deliver on them, while at the same time having less fun doing it. Mieville puts them to shame. I can only hope fantasy authors of the future will be inspired by him, and save this genre from itself and its ponderous, long-winded Old Guard.

My Fantasy Book Suggestions

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## Lyn says

A brilliant page turner.

First of all, any book that begins with a quote from Philip K. Dick is alright in my book and promises a great story to come. This promise was kept, with interest.

*Perdido Street Station* by China Mieville is to steampunk weird fiction as *Neuromancer* was to cyberpunk – it is the definitive benchmark. An urbane, nightmarish fantasy, *Perdido Street Station* is similar to Mieville's *The City and the City*; but where the later novel was Monte Python absurd, PSS is Charles Dickens' steam punk chic, blending elements of brilliant characterization with fantastic settings and all under the umbrella of Mieville's outrageously creative imagination.

Mieville makes frequent and entertaining use of simile and metaphor to color his landscape, but may turn a little too often to the thesaurus; though the five dollar words don't annoy but rather add to the cacophony of

detail created. Reminiscent of H.P. Lovecraft with his occult, squalid, lurid depictions of an ancient, rotting but still surviving civilization the reader can also glimpse a Robert A. Heinlein influence as the Weaver shares many similarities to Heinlein's Martian Old Ones.

Like *The City & the City*, Mieville's best characterization is the city itself and the arcane world beyond. Mieville has summoned up a fantasy world that teems with life and amazing detail. This book is unique and incomparable to other works – Mieville has demonstrated that he is a trendsetter, a vanguard of a new literature.

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### **XX Sarah XX (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says**

? DNF at 11%. *Go me and stuff.*

**Yet another** overhyped book with a cult following bites the dust! Yay! **I obviously read this one wrong!** Or maybe I read it right but didn't enjoy it because I'd mistakenly purchased the **Swahili version** and read it **back to front and upside down**. This is the most plausible explanation, since I don't belong to the **People of Despicable Book Taste Horde** (PoDBTH™) and always read books **right**.

**Had I bought the English version**, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have noticed how excruciatingly **boring** the story is. Or thought that reading the book was a more **tedious chore** than being on cleaning duty at the barnacle shed. But I didn't, so I did. Bloody stinking fish, rarely have I had to suffer through such **painfully overdescriptive prose**. And I thought *The Lies of Locke Lamora* was bad! Silly little shrimp that I am. *Locke Lamora* is a **complete joke** compared to this painfully harrowing effort, like reading one of **Noddy's fascinating adventures** or something. Anyway, I have to admit this wasn't **completely unexpected**. I mean, I was going to read the ebook version of this most beguiling tale but a friend (whom I shall be eternally full of grate to) mentioned the book was awfully, um, generous, in the **details department**, and recommended I listened to the audio version to ~~ease the pain~~ enjoy the book **to its full potential**. That was one of the mostest brilliantest ideas ever, I have to say. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have made it **past the prologue**, had I read the printed version. Okay, so I didn't make it past the 11% mark, which isn't much better, but that's **completely irrelevant** right now. Of course it is. Anyway, the cool thing about the audio for this book is that, even if you **forget to hit the pause button** while you're busy ~~slaughtering puny humans~~ running errands, you don't miss a **bloody shrimping thing**. Because then you come back and realize the narrator is **still babbling about the same stuff** he was **rambling about** half an hour before! **How cool is that?!**

**Talking about the lovely narrator**. I'm pretty sure Mr John Lee is a positively delightful human being, but never in my crustacean life have I listened to a more **pompous, overly theatrical narration**. It sounded like the guy was chanting ancient poetry, for fish's sake! Okay, in his defense, Mieville's **exceedingly convoluted and needlessly wordy writing** probably didn't help his performance. Quite the **Perniciously Deadly Combination** (PDC™) these two make. So. Long story short: I got to chapter 8 and started feeling a **teensy little bit like...**

**My murderous troops** obviously started getting very concerned about my **mental health**, so I decided to hit the pause button one gloriously final time, and proceeded to DNF the fish out of this most wondrous piece of literature. **Yes, I did it for the kids' sake**. I hate to see them distressed, you see. Had it not been for them, I would gladly have continued listening to this delightful story. Obviously. Right. Absolutely. Indeed. **No doubt about that** and stuff. Okay, so to be disgustingly honest, it kinda sorta sucks big time that I was forced to DNF this book against my nefarious will. Because, to be revoltingly candid, the world Miéville created here is pretty fishing **amazing and creative and original and unique and beautifully dark and stuff**. Also, the very diverse cast of **characters and creatures** is pretty shrimping awesome. Especially Lin the **insectoid artist**. Yeah, she's sort of cool for a, um, you know, **bug**. And I'm kind of an expert on the topic. I mean, I survived the \*shudders pre-emptively\* Sirantha Jax Debacle of Doom and Oblivion and Epic Proportions (SJD0DaOaEP™), so I know a lot about hexapod invertebrates in books, and how they can **viciously and most thoroughly ruin** potentially stupendous series and stuff. Damn, I'm convulsing just thinking about it. Better change the subject before my allergic reaction comes back in full swing, and my exoskeleton starts getting all **swollen and blotchy and stuff**.

*I'm trying! I'm trying! But this Sirantha Jax business was ever so slightly traumatizing and stuff, so I might need a few gallons of whisky to numb the somewhat excruciating pain and calm the fish down.*

**The End.**

► And the moral of this **Surprise Surprise I Just DNFed a Book with a Stellar Average Rating and Glowing Reviews Now That is Most Uncommon Indeed Crappy Non Review** is (SSIJDaBwaSARaGRNTiMUIcNR™): this story could have been **wondrously wondrous**. Only that it wasn't. **Oh well**.

[Pre-review nonsense

**Listening** to 2.42 hours of this book felt like losing **30 years of my life**. Patting my little self on the exoskeleton for **DNFing the fish out of it**. I mean, had that not been the case, I'm pretty sure I would have **gone extinct** before getting to the 50% mark.

► **Full Phew Bloody Stinking Fish That Was Close This One Nearly Did Me In and Stuff Crappy Non Review** (PBSFTWCTONDMiAaSCNR™) to come.

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**Brad says**

*WARNING: This review probably contains some (but not many) spoilers, so you may not want to read this if you haven't read Perdido Street Station yet. This review also contains plenty of vulgarity. Please don't read this if you do not want to see the "f" and other words. Thanks.*

**Me reading my review:** I decided to read this on SoundCloud, since BirdBrian has turned me into a

recorded voice madman. You can listen right here if you'd like.

I fucking hate moths.

Seriously. I hate them. They freak me out. You know how Indiana Jones hates snakes? That's how I hate moths. I hate them so much that the disdain and fear extends to butterflies. I actually made a little girl cry when I was surprised by a butterfly and crushed it between the sole of my shoe and concrete, although I've never been sure if she cried because I squished the moth or because I let loose with the sanguine battle-cry: "DIE FUCKER!"

Moths and butterflies are frightening, fucking horrible, unholy, unnatural, freaks of fucking nature.

I sense you wondering why I feel this way. Well ... I'll tell you.

When I was sixteen years old, I walked out of my bedroom on a Friday night and headed for what I thought was a D&D marathon. Somewhere upstairs my Dad heard my bedroom door closing and yelled down, "Turn off the light." Even back then he was a stickler for energy conservation (but that had everything to do with being a cheap bastard and nothing to do with the environment). I heard him, but I ignored him. My friend Pat was honking for me outside, I had a pack full of D&D gear, and I was in a hurry. I was up the stairs, in my shoes and out the door before anyone could say anything more.

Now I had this fucking bizarre bedroom window. You see, I was and am the lightest sleeper the world has ever seen (even now I have double blacked windows, wear a black eye mask and 33 decibels ear plugs, and I still wake up at even the slightest shift in the air), and to try and buy me some more sleep without hurting the aesthetic of our home (a far more important concern for my Mom than combating my insomnia), my Dad installed a blind whose efficacy required the removal of my window screen. That meant that when my window was open in the summer, which it was the night I was out D&Ding, my room was open to all creatures great and small -- mostly small.

So somewhere between the time I left and the time I came home, my Dad came downstairs to make sure I'd turned off my light. He opened my door, reached for the light switch, turned off the lights, closed the door and went off to bed himself, but not before the light had attracted some fuzzy, beige, fluttering, dusty fucking creatures.

That night we didn't play D&D.

Nope ... that night we ate some mushrooms. My first time on hallucinogens. And what did I do? I invited the creatures of the night into my room. At around 4 a.m., I found myself back at home on the downturn of my trip. I needed to get to my room, put on some chill-out music and a soft light, and just let my cozy room ease me back to reality. I opened my door, closed it, flipped on the light switch and was fucking bombarded by HUNDREDS of moths.

I fucking lost it. I grabbed my squash racket and started killing while I screamed and swore and trashed my room.

There were probably only about a dozen moths in my room, but those shrooms did their job, and I spent the rest of that long morning obsessing about fluttering wings and the claustrophobic feeling of moth dust and guts settling on my skin, in much the same way that *dreamshit* settles on the minds of sleeping New Crobuzoners.

I am sure that you've figured out why I related this story now.

When I first read *Perdido Street Station*, I was enjoying Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin's search for crisis energy well enough. The beauty of China Miéville's prose and the complexity of New Crobuzon made Isaac's rather pedestrian quest tale, whose goal was providing Yagharek -- the exiled, wingless Garuda -- a way to fly again, a compelling read. Then came the blindness of the Slake Moths, and my enjoyment was transformed into absolute horror, keep-the-lights-on-late-at-night-horror, stomp-all-fluttering-insects-into-the-pavement-horror, fucking-shit-my-pants-at-night-from-nightmares-horror. Miéville dumped the quest and changed the plot and raised the stakes, shifting the tale unexpectedly and fundamentally, and that coupled with the horror of the Slake Moths made me a passionate believer in his writing.

For me, the Slake Moths are the most terrifying creation in literature. Now I know that much of that is the psychology of my good trip gone bad, but when one considers all of my inadvertent personal subtext -- that Miéville's Slake Moths feed on fear, and induce fear through their droppings, that their shit is sold as an hallucinogenic drug, that they suck the minds of their victims dry with an interdimensional tongue -- well, I hope my passion for the Slake Moths will be forgiven.

But then, I know that my love for *Perdido Street Station* goes far beyond my drug-induced psychosis. China Miéville's writing bursts with sensuality, intelligence, politics, social commentary, fierce creativity and a thirst for life that is unparalleled. And those are just some of the reasons his fans love him.

For me, however, my loathing of the order lepidoptera means that *Perdido Street Station* must and will remain my favourite Miéville, and Slake Moths will continue to excite and haunt the recesses of my mind until I die.

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## Cecily says

I've read three other Mievilles before this, and they were 2\*, 4\*, and 5\*.

I'm so pleased this was another 5\*. What a wonderful, rich, steampunky, fantastical phantasmagoria this is.

## PLOT

It opens with one of several short, first-person impressions: a newcomer arriving by boat at night. He's wealthy but anguished, and the boatman fears him.

The story then opens in New Crobuzon: an ancient city (some houses nearly 1000 years old) inhabited by many exotic sentient species. We meet Lin, a khepri (insect) artist, and her boyfriend, Isaac, a maverick human scientist. Not everyone approves of inter-species relationships, and Isaac seems to relish the semi-secrecy: "'My monster. I am a pervert' thought Isaac, 'and so is she'". But there is always ambivalence; when she turns up unexpectedly, he "felt anger and affection jostle".

Both take on dodgy commissions. Isaac is asked to help Yagharek fly. He's a bird-like garuda who had his wings removed for "choice-theft". Meanwhile, Lin agrees to make a sculpture of Mr Motley, an underworld figure who is multiply Remade (hybrid of various species).

Then a beautiful, totally original, but terrifying new sort of creature is loose in the city and strange allegiances are made to try to find a solution.

There is a huge cast, and a complex plot, but it's never confusing, and there is real and profound development of all the main characters. The first part is fairly leisurely, introducing the characters and their world; the later sections are fast and furious.

## **TRANSITION, DIFFERENCE, CLEVAGE, BOUNDARIES**

“I believe this to be the fundamental dynamic. Transition. The point where one thing becomes another.” Mr Motley is ostensibly talking about art, daring Lin to cross her own boundaries to experience something new, even if it ends up so individualized that she can't convey it to an audience, but it applies to everything in this story.

When Isaac tries to find a way to power Yag's flight, he considers watercraft, unified field theory, Torque energy and crisis energy, all of which are about things on the cusp of transition.

Many of the characters have transitions in their own bodies: some are Remade, some metamorphose, others have physiognomies with unusual boundaries. For instance, cactus people have “a moment when the skin... of the sentient creature, becomes mindless plant.”

## **SPECIESISM and FEMINISM**

Although there is a degree of segregation by species and general prejudice against some of them, any analogy with racism, let alone Apartheid, is incidental, though the freak-show makes for uncomfortable reading.

Isaac has mixed feelings at his first sexual encounter with Lin, “for just a moment after coming, Isaac had been overcome with revulsion... When he had woken he had felt fearful and horrified, but at the fact of having transgressed rather than at the transgression itself” and “after the atavistic disgust and fear had gone, leaving only a nervous, very deep affection”.

Mieville's feminist credentials are evident. There are plenty of strong female characters (including a mercenary) and when women are treated badly, it's clearly condemned. There is also a significant passage where one character faces the reality of prostitution, after which he foreswears it.

The slake-moths are hermaphrodite, but it's the **STRONGEST** one who has the right to be mother (the others are “accepting defeat and masculinity”). Such gender fluidity also fits with the transition theme.

## **FOOD**

The first chapter opens with Lin getting food, and by buying meat, she gives away the fact that Isaac is there. Amongst multicultural types, like Lin's friends, the main feature of mixed-species relationships seems to be the relatively trivial aspect of food, but food, in the broadest sense, is a recurring theme:

- Dietary differences are a visceral issue for Isaac: "As he watched her [eat], Isaac felt the familiar trilling of emotion: disgust immediately stamped out, pride at the stamping out, guilty desire."
- Lin's gland-art has an inherently digestive dimension - even more so when she adds colourberries to her spit.
- For no obvious reason, the slaughterhouse process of slitting throats and letting blood drain away is described. It's oddly akin to halal or kosher - except that these are pigs!
- Isaac tests his crisis engine on cheese.
- The whole population becomes a food source for something that has no natural predators: “The very air was thick with dreams, and the flying things lapped eagerly at the succulent juices.”
- The Weaver can “subsist on the appreciation of beauty”.
- The Construct Council says “my sustenance is information”.
- And drugs are consumed and do consume...

## COMMUNALITY and CONSCIOUSNESS

This book doesn't promote communal living, let alone communism, but there are varied examples of group living and thought.

Lin works alone, but most khepri art is a communal effort, as is their society generally (including sex). Garuda society is also communal and egalitarian, which is why choice-theft is so bad.

There are two, very different, sorts of hive mind: one organic and one not: "We too became I", which is equivalent to "we two (or more) became one".

This raises lots of questions about the nature of consciousness, both for various types of hive minds, but also for non-organic intelligence.

The Construct Council is like cross between the internet and a supercomputer "born of random power and virus and chance", it became a "self-creating god... My computational power is unprecedented... my sustenance is information... I do not dream... I am a calculating machine that has calculated how to think." And perhaps, most chillingly, "I compute, so I am." However, it is not entirely mechanical: "The control that the Council wielded over his human followers disturbed her... she could not understand what release or service this heretical church offered its congregation".

## INSECT SEX

The (brief) descriptions of Isaac and Lin's sex life are startling, but it's the descriptions of Lin's childhood experiences that are troubling.

She was raised in the Insect Aspect belief system, with females being inherently fallen and thus adoring of and servile to the males (sadly familiar in relation to OT-based Christianity), but the communal incestual sex abuse, at the behest of her broodma was awful. "Lin remembered coming home to a house that swarmed with male khepri... She remembered being commanded to wash her innumerable brothers' glistening carapaces... to let them scuttle over her and explore her body as their dumb curiosity directed them." "Headsex for procreation was an unpleasant chore carried out for demographic duty". In contrast, most recreational sex is between females, "communal... but rather ritualised". "Her friend introduced her to pleasuresex... Her body had been a source of shame and disgust... Until then she had been subjected only to headsex at her mother's behest, sitting still and uncomfortable while a male scrabbled and coupled excitedly with her headscarab, in mercifully unsuccessful attempts at procreation."

Lin now lives where that's not the norm, but she is still trying to come to terms with her past.

## VISIONS

There is a plague of nightmares, as well as hallucinations, drug trips, synaesthesia, and multi-dimensional beings. How do we know what is real and true?

"Dreams were becoming a pestilence... They even inveigled their way into the minds of the waking... All over the city the night was fissured by cries of nocturnal misery."

Hypnotic beauty can be terrifying, "Wings – of unstable dimensions and shapes, beating as they do in various planes"

There are even different types of vision/sight. Lin tries to explain what it's like to see the world with

compound eyes: "For you... in one corner a slum is collapsing, in another a new train with pistons shining, in another a gaudy painted lady... You must process as one picture. What chaos! Tells you nothing, contradicts itself, changes its story. For me each tiny part has integrity, each fractionally different from the next, until all variation is accounted for, incrementally, rationally." Additionally, Lin can taste words and colours – useful for an artists without vocal chords.

A drug called dreamshit (yes, really) is central to the story, but I doubt it will tempt experimentation: "cacophonous emotional onslaught... two or three or more moments of life were occurring at once... [he] had not come unstuck in others' lives, but in others' minds. He was a voyeur... These were memories. These were dreams... [He] was spattered by a psychic sluice. He felt fouled... A juddering bombardment of infinitely varied moments... he was drowning in the sloshing stuff of dreams and hopes, recollections and reflections he had never had."

## SCIENCE

At times, the scientific explanations were a little long: I suspect both scientists and non-scientist would like a little less, albeit for different reasons.

"Crisis is the energy underpinning the whole of physics. Torque's not about physics... "it's an entirely pathological force" that can cause mutations (transitions). A "crisis field glows by virtue of being syphoned off... perpetual fucking motion". This too-good-to-be-true aspect reminds me somewhat of the Infinite Improbability Drive in Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.

Machines programmed by punchcards though, are something I can almost remember.

The more magical thaumaturgy isn't, thankfully, explained.

## LANGUAGE

Mieville loves seasoning his works with archaic words (especially those relating to the abstract and mysterious) and the odd new coinage. He also overuses a few pet words ("palimpsest" and "puissance" occur several times in everything of his I've read), which might annoyingly self-indulgent, but when I read so much that is breathtakingly brilliant, it's easy to overlook the odd lapse.

In his acknowledgements, only two authors are named: Harrison (who I have yet to read) and Peake. There is certainly much of Gormenghast in characters' names (Rudgutter, Vermishank, Maybet Slender, Magesta Barbile, Eliza Stem-Fulcher) and especially the descriptions of shadows and landscape (even though these are urban and more Dickensian). In particular, he manages to make what should be repugnant, have a sort of beauty: "Crematoria vented into the airborne ashes of wills burnt by jealous executors, which mixed with coaldust burnt to keep dying lovers warm. Thousands of sordid smoke-ghosts wrapped New Crobuzon in a stench that suffocated like guilt." Mieville's take on academia has aspects of the Cambridge colleges he knows, but also of the scholarly city of Sanctaphrax in Paul Stewart and Chris Riddell's wonderful *Edge Chronicles* (for ~ ages 7-11).

I can only assume that the lack of screen versions of any of his works is because Mieville isn't keen, or is too exacting. The descriptions are so filmic, and the plots marketable, that I can imagine directors longing to do it.

The Weaver's style of communication provides opportunity for wonderful wordplay, and the descriptions of the slake-moths and the nightmares they invoke give Mieville full rein.

## YAGHAREK and CHOICES

They shy, mysterious, disgraced Yagharek is at the heart of this book – more so than Isaac and Lin.

One of his first-person passages almost has Grimm fairy-tale elements: "I fought the barbarian prince who wanted to make a helmet out of my garuda skull and I won... Holding my intestines with one hand, I clawed his throat out with the other. I won his gold and his followers, whom I freed. I paid myself to health, bought passage on a merchant ship."

His own kind removed his wings as a punishment for the worst sort of choice-theft (stealing from the future as well as the present), but he longs to fly again: "I was once a creature of the air, and it remembers me... it tickles me with the currents and vectors from my past... I know that something is wrong in the sky... But I am earthbound." When he climbs high, he relishes the exhilaration, remembering his love of flight, and feeling slight memories of it.

I was in shock when I discovered the nature of Yag's choice-theft. I'd thought of him as, to some extent, a victim (as had Isaac). Suddenly, the whole book is very obviously about choice. Should Isaac condone the crime by continuing his attempts to help Yag fly after he learns the truth? People **can** change, and they can atone for past actions by what they do afterwards. But for (view spoiler)? I want to believe in Yag, but I know that if I read a news report of a sentence being commuted because they'd been brave, selfless and transformative of society and themselves, I'd be uncomfortable, given the nature of the crime.

I think the most interesting aspect is how Yag gains dignity by apparently shedding it. He first arrives, hiding his true self, his face and his lack of wings. Gradually, he discards his fake wooden wings, then his cloak, and finally and painfully (view spoiler). He seems to gain gravitas and confidence from each act. His final choice is to be remade in a totally different way from all the other Remades in this world ((view spoiler)).

The other most significant choice relates to Andrej: in what circumstances can a non-consenting individual be sacrificed for the greater good? Surely he is a victim of choice-theft. (The question is all the more pertinent, given Isaac's distaste for the Construct Council's utilitarianism in similar matters and his own rejection of buying women for sex.)

## THE WEAVER

My first thought on encountering The Weaver was Shelob, especially the description of entering the room: "As they passed into the room, all felt a moment of dislocation, a wispy unease that prickled across their skin with a quasi-physical momentum... invisible filaments of spun aether and emotion, were draped in intricate patterns... and were rippling and sticking to the intruders."

Its speech is described as "dream-poetics" (related to dreamshit?) and despite being in all caps, has a hypnotic other-worldliness to it: all the words are familiar (no puissant palimpsests), and yet the meaning is tantalisingly elusive. Talking to it "was like a dialog with the sleeping or the mad. It was difficult, exhausting. But it could be done."

"AND THEE AND ME CONCURRED THE FAT FUNNEL-SPACE THE CLOT AT CITYWEB CENTRE SEES US CONFLAB.

"I TIRE AND GROW OLD AND COLD GRIMY LITTLING... THIS SIPHONING OF PHANTASMS FROM MY SOLE SOUL LEAVES ME MELANCHOLIC SEE PATTERNS INHERE EVEN IN THESE THE VORACIOUS ONES PERHAPS I JUDGE QUICK AND SLIK TASTES FALTER AND ALTER AND I AM UNSURE"

I also like the disconnect of a dangerously amoral being, motivated purely by beauty: in this world, beauty

certainly doesn't equate to goodness.

Intriguingly, it's the spider rather than the computer that controls the worldweb: "every possible thing ever is woven into that limitless, sprawling web. It is without beginning or end. It is complex to a degree that humbles the mind... The web is not without flaw... the worldweb flexed under the weight of time."

## SAD IRONIES, MINOR ANNOYANCES AND OTHER SPOILERS

These are mainly for my future reference:

(view spoiler)

## QUOTES

- First impressions of the city: "Over the engine's oily rumble and the caresses of the river... Timbers whisper and the wind strokes thatch... Sewers riddling the earth like secular sepulchres... The rotting buildings lean against each other, exhausted... Fat predatory shadows prowl the sky."
- "The water had unpredictable qualities" Some have been known to "step into some discoloured patch of mud and start speaking long-dead languages, or find locusts in their hair, or fade slowly to translucency and disappear."
- "Light seemed to give up the struggle halfway through the thick, solid windows."
- "The cross-bred architecture of that outlandish quarter confused her: a syncretism of industrialism and the gaudy domestic ostentation of the slightly rich."
- "New Crobuzon was a city unconvinced by gravity. Aerostats oozed from clout to cloud above it like slugs on cabbages."
- "The nodes and cells of brick and wood and palsied concrete had gone rogue, spreading like malignant tumours."
- "In the outlines of stillborn streets shacks of concrete and corrugated iron blistered overnight. Inhabitation spread like mould."
- "A sickly smile grew and died on his mouth like fungus."
- "Its mutating form bubbled and welled up into strange dimensional rifts... It was alive, and then there was a time between forms when it was neither alive nor dead, but saturated with power." After emerging from its chrysalis, "It discovered itself. It learnt its shape. It learnt it had needs."
- "Sunset bled into the canals... They ran thick and gory with light... The sky above the city was smeared with cloud."
- "It was policing by decentralised fear."
- "Patterns that rolled with hypnagogic haste... pulsing in weird dimensions."
- "The summer stretched out the daylight as if on a rack. Each moment was drawn out until its anatomy collapsed. Time broke down. The day progressed in an endless sequence of dead moments."
- "A new landscape of ruin and refuse and industrial filth was created in a speeded-up parody of the geological process."
- "scampered at obscure angles to reality."
- "Behind a beautiful palimpsest of coloured gossamer, a vast, timeless, infinite mass of absence."

- “The summer stretched out the daylight as if on a rack. Each moment was drawn out until its anatomy collapsed. Time broke down. The day progressed in an endless sequence of dead moments.”
  - “The psychic plane was thick with the glutinous effluvia of incomprehensible minds.”
  - “Shadows fell on them like predators as the light went out.”
- 

## **Ian "Marvin" Graye says**

### **I Love You, I Love You, I Love You**

For the fortnight it took me to read this novel, I was in another world and I was in love.

Perhaps, now, I'll retreat from that world and substitute another or others (or perhaps even return to my own world), but I will remain in love.

Is this a fantasy love or is it real? I think it's real.

After all, is there any love that is not partly a product of your own mind?

How can a writer make this happen? How can a reader experience this? How can a person experience it in real life?

### **SPOILER WARNING**

This is a sensitive review of some of the major themes of the novel. I have limited discussion of the plot, except to the extent necessary to discuss themes. I identify the antagonists, but not the process or outcome of the antagonism. Some readers feel there are spoilers.

### **Is This the Real Life? Is This Just Fantasy?**

I read a lot of fantasy and science fiction in my teens, when I was working out my taste in literature.

I had a fairly active fantasy life. Things happened in my family life that I wanted to escape, not by imagining that they didn't happen, but by constructing my own world, my own reality, as a refuge, as a place where I could restore myself and heal.

This world exercised my brain like a muscle, I exerted my mind, I did not fear difficulty or effort or rationality or emotion or imagination. Instead, these things were concrete materials that I used to self-construct the me that is I.

They allowed me to dream, to aspire, to do and to succeed. And to relax and to manage stress.

### **Maps and Legends**

Computerised war games were not an option in my childhood. I had plastic soldiers, metal tanks and artillery, model airplanes complete with World War I flying aces. Our home was raised about 1.5 meters off the ground and I built fictitious worlds in the hard black dirt, hills and valleys carved out of the soil and compacted, islands, isthmuses and peninsulas in imaginary oceans.

Battles raged on the ground and in the air. Cannons shot matches across the rugged terrain and took the lives of the infantry. Pilots in planes suspended from the bottom of the floorboards engaged in fierce dogfights, until one or other plunged into a hillside or the watery stillness of my imaginary ocean.

I mapped these worlds in the days before Google Earth. I created atlases of warfare, I assembled maps and legends, I taught myself German Text, so I could fill each page with my dreams. I imagined “libraries fat with forgotten volumes”, and mine.

I wanted to be an engineer, then a cartographer, finally a diplomat. I wanted to be a lover of the foreign and the exotic, a traveller, a go-between, a communicator, an advocate, a negotiator, a master of the opening gambit, a player of trump cards, an unraveller of puzzles, a solver of problems, a snorter of diplomatic corps quality cocaine, a smoker of peace pipes, someone who might be remembered for bringing two disparate peoples (or people) together.

Ultimately, I did not need fantasy literature, because I was my own fantasy and I created my own fantasy world. I drew my own map and I was my own legend.

Fantasy fiction and science fiction moved on without me, while I discovered literature that helped me understand people, relationships, the world we live in.

The closest I have got to fantasy recently has been the works of Haruki Murakami. I think I’m passionate about his novels, because they deal with the real world, almost by using fantasy as a way of seeing, a method of perception, an instrument to detect, dissect and comprehend.

Then, China Mieville appeared on the horizon and rocketed into the relative security of my world like a V2 from “Gravity’s Rainbow”.

“Perdido Street Station” (“PSS”) sat on my shelf unread for a few years, even after I read and enjoyed “The City and the City”.

When Traveller started a Discussion group on CM’s works, I decided that now was the time to bite the bullet and find out what CM was really about.

I realised, then , that I was falling in love.

### **”What Trick of Topography Is This?**

What did CM do to make me fall so?

Let me try to tell you as best I can...

PSS is first and foremost the tale of a city, of New Crobuzon. (I still have to pronounce this word carefully. I have never spoken it to a person in real life. Even now I mouth it hesitantly.)

It sits astride the confluence of two rivers, the Tar and the Canker, which join to form one, the waters from the two retained, but somehow transformed, almost dialectically, into the River Gross Tar.

New Crobuzon is an Industrial Age City-State Republic. It teems with people, beings, trade, commerce, ideas, ambitions, success, failure, suffering and misery.

It teeters at some tipping point where just a nudge could bring the entire structure collapsing down like

Einsturzende Altbauten.

And, surely, some peril does emerge to give it that nudge, but cometh the time, cometh the man.

Only in CM's hands, it is not just cometh the man, it is cometh the man and the woman (women actually).

They are not your common or garden variety heroes (just as the antagonists are not common or garden variety moths).

They are an indie "band a parte", in a Godardian or Tarantino-esque sense. You could almost call them a "motley crew", except that CM has reserved that name for one of the principal antagonists.

They are a ragamuffin bunch of outcasts with outré taste (1).

(1) *Outre:*

(a) *Out of the common course or limits; extravagant;*

(b) *Bizarre; outlandish (as in, an outré costume)*

*Example:*

*My first mental development had in it much of the uncommon - even much of the outré.*

*- Edgar Allan Poe.*

## **Boys and Girls Own Adventure**

Even as I write this, I realise that PSS contains something of Charles Dickens, British Imperial adventure stories (especially tales of Biggles and his various sorties), pulp fiction, B-movies, French originals, Hollywood re-makes and cheap Italian rip-offs.

To quote critic Don D'Amassa from the Introduction to the "Encyclopedia of Adventure Fiction" (thank you Wiki):

*"An adventure is an event or series of events that happens outside the course of the protagonist's ordinary life, usually accompanied by danger, often by physical action.*

*"Adventure stories almost always move quickly, and the pace of the plot is at least as important as characterization, setting and other elements of a creative work."*

D'Amassa argues that the element of danger must be the principal **focus** of an adventure novel.

For him, Charles Dickens' novel "A Tale of Two Cities" is an adventure novel because the protagonists are in constant danger of being imprisoned or killed.

In contrast, "Great Expectations" is not, because "Pip's encounter with the convict is an adventure, but that scene is only a device to advance the main plot, which is not truly an adventure."

While this distinction might be intellectually astute, I don't really care to apply it to PSS.

It is a stew with meat and vegetables. There would be no gain from an argument about what is principal or secondary.

Suffice it to say that, what embarks from the intellectual platform later becomes a rollercoaster ride.

## **A Fine, but Medieval, Romance**

Apart from the scientific and philosophical content, the other aspect of PSS that immediately appealed to me was the romance, especially the extent to which it was overtly erotic.

Again, while trying to define the role of adventure in PSS, I stumbled across a discussion in Wiki, which helped me define my appreciation of the romance at the heart of the novel:

*” Adventure has been a common theme since the earliest days of written fiction. Indeed, the standard plot of medieval romances was a series of adventures.*

*“Following a plot framework as old as Heliodorus, and so durable as to be still alive in Hollywood movies, a hero would undergo a first set of adventures before he met his lady. A separation would follow, with a second set of adventures leading to a final reunion.”*

That isn't a bad summary of the plot of PSS at an abstract level.

At the level of a medieval romance, there is a sense in which a knight errant (Isaac), portrayed as having heroic qualities (hmm), goes on a quest and experiences various marvel-filled adventures (hmm).

Later, these types of stories were recast from an ironic, satiric or burlesque point of view (e.g., “Don Quixote”).

It might be more accurate to place PSS within this later romantic tradition.

Isaac is not exactly a hero, but he is not quite an anti-hero. He is a post-modern, fat bastard, nerdy, scientific Everyman, who rises to the occasion when he is called upon.

There is a debate in the Discussion Group as to whether he is naïve, especially because he has eschewed a traditional academic career in order to pursue his more outré personal scientific vision.

I wouldn't call this naïve, though I would settle for idealistic, even if it requires him to get down, get his hands dirty and even get his clothes a little grubby.

### **Strange Partners: The Curious Dance of the New Woman and the Imperial Adventurer**

I've borrowed this title from the name of a review by Teresa Mangum of the study, “New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction in Victorian Britain: Gender, Genre, Empire” by Lee Anne M. Richardson.

If you'll allow me to treat Isaac as an Imperial Adventurer, then Lin is the New Woman who enjoys a curious dance with him.

It's not just curious because of their moves, but because of their physical make-up.

New Crobuzon doesn't just consist of human forms, it consists of multiple sentient life forms, many of which have characteristics associated with ancient religions and mythology.

Lin is a Khepri with a female body and a scarab beetle head.

She is an artist with an outré taste and sensibility, while Isaac is the outcast scientist who falls in love with her, even though this is perceived as a socially taboo transgression.

Needless to say, there is not just love, but a smorgasbord of sensory pleasures including sight, scent, taste, touch, lust and pleasure sex, notwithstanding the partial physiological incompatibility.

Some readers seem to be grossed out by this physical challenge. I felt it highlighted the authenticity of their love. I found the relationship convincing and highly erotically charged.

While I'm not widely read in the field of erotica and pornography, CM's vision of this relationship really turned me on.

It would take a great writer to write scenes of affection and delight that appealed to me as much as those featuring Lin and Isaac.

### **Mothrotica**

Having said that, CM replicates the erotic charge in his description of the principal antagonists in the novel.

The threat to New Crobuzon comes from giant slake-moths that feed on dreams.

We see them transform through their life cycle from larva to pupa to adulthood, from caterpillar to cocoon to moth.

During pupation, the larval structures of the moth are broken down, while the adult structures are formed.

The pupa is inactive and usually static and sessile (unable to move about).

They derive sustenance from the psychic energy of the non-rational part of the mind of those around them. They suck out the dreams of the inhabitants of New Crobuzon and leave them mindless and mute.

Feeding is described in almost sexual terms, but having fed, the slake-moths become sexually active and fertile, they fly around, looping, falling, stroking, touching, arousing, copulating...juicily, ardently, ecstatically.

This is gross, even though CM uses the same language he would use for Lin and Isaac.

It's worse when you know that slake-moths are "efficient, brilliant predators" and that they have no natural predators of their own.

However, the juxtaposition of their non-sentient sexuality with that of Lin and Isaac makes me wonder why their sexual activity cannot be enjoyed, theoretically at least, to the same extent as other erotic behavior.

The answer must be that it is just too remote from what we are used to, besides it might be the sentience that creates the proximity to human sexual response.

As I've mentioned, even scarab beetle heads are too remote for some readers. There is a point at which sexual experience is too animal, and not sufficiently close to human sexuality to enjoy.

However, CM at least asks us to contemplate sexuality, transgression and pleasure beyond what we are comfortable with.

### **Rape as Social Transgression**

I won't mention their name out of a concern for spoilers, but one of the characters is suffering a punishment for a rape.

While this act is offensive and illegal within our society, in the context in which it occurred, it is not punishable as a crime in its own right, but as an example of depriving a person of their right to choose.

Thus, instead of rape being cast as an offence against the body, it is cast as an offence against the mind.

It denies the freedom of the “victim” and limits their choice.

The penalty might be the same or even higher. However, CM uses this conceptualization of the crime to test Isaac’s reaction to the punishment.

Initially, he sympathises with the perpetrator and can’t understand the gravity of the crime.

Then, when he translates the act from the apparently innocuous restriction of choice to physical rape, he starts to sympathise with the “victim”, Kar’uchai, who doesn’t want to be painted as a victim and simply asks Isaac to respect the laws of her society and the punishment it regards as appropriate.

Kar’uchai counsels Isaac not to translate her society’s laws into his social context, but instead to appreciate them on their own terms.

Ultimately, despite his affinity with his friend, Isaac elects to respect the law of her society, to respect its sovereignty, almost as if it was primarily an issue of international relations.

Obviously, it is still a moral and criminal issue. However, Isaac accepts that each society has the right to define and enforce its own practices, customs and laws.

It is not always appropriate, at least in the quasi-Victorian Steampunk era, to judge a society from the outside.

### **Isaac’s “Principia Mathematica”**

Isaac has had a number of scientific interests during his career, including Unified Field Theory, where his allegiance is to Moving Theory rather than Static Theory.

However, the interest most relevant to the battle with the slake-moths is crisis energy and his invention of a crisis engine.

So what is crisis energy?

This is major shit we’re dealing with here, mate, so...um...pay attention.

1. We’re talking about the energy in matter such as an object.
2. There are three types of energy: kinetic, potential and crisis.
3. Kinetic energy is the energy the object possesses due to its motion.
4. Potential energy is the energy the object has when it’s placed in a position, so that it’s teetering or about to change its state (e.g., you’ve lifted it up and are about to drop it).
5. Crisis energy is the energy that is inside an object by virtue of its being or existence. It’s not necessarily there because it’s moving or because it’s been moved to a particular position. It’s there, because it’s already

in the object, wherever it is or wherever it's placed. There are incredible tensions within any object, no matter what its state. If it can be moved toward a state of crisis, a point when it is about to change its form or state (a transformation or transmutation), the crisis energy will manifest itself, and can be tapped.

Isaac's goal is to tap or channel or harness crisis energy. If he succeeds, he will virtually have achieved a perpetual energy source and perpetual motion.

He achieves his goal by constructing a crisis engine that can channel energy and amplify the output.

Whereas Thomas Pynchon's "Gravity's Rainbow" is about entropy, PSS is about the exact opposite: the maximization of energy.

The rest is secret. (I shouldn't even have told you what's above. I'm going to get into trouble with the Moderator General.)

### **Ethical Cleansing**

Ultimately, it's up to Isaac and his crisis engine to wage war on the slake-moths.

Because everybody in New Crobuzon is threatened by the moths, various coalitions are proposed.

Isaac's best prospect comes from the Construct Council, which is a machine that is on the fringe of acquiring an artificial intelligence called "constructed intelligence", a mechanical form of sentience. It's just a calculating intelligence that is trying to "self-construct" or maximize itself, to ascend a hierarchy of intelligence.

While he partners it, ultimately, he does not trust it totally, because it has no empathy or morals:

*"It'll do whatever it has to - it'll lie to us, it'll kill - to increase its power."*

Whatever, he cannot let it have unrestricted access to the crisis engine. (Cue dramatic music.)

Just as Isaac tried to take an objective ethical stance with respect to rape, he does the same with the war on the slake-moths.

### **The Nectar of the Subconscious**

The slake-moths are dream eaters that prey on the subconscious. They detect and suck out hidden thoughts, guilty thoughts, anxieties, delights, dreams:

*"They drink the peculiar brew that results from self-reflexive thought, when the instincts and needs and desires and intuitions are folded in on themselves and we reflect on our thoughts and then reflect on the reflection, endlessly... Our thoughts ferment like the purest liquor...not the meat-calories slopping about in the brainpan, but the fine wine of sapience and sentience itself, the subconscious. Dreams."*

They leave their victims mindless and imbecile.

While calculating or thinking machines might be able to replicate rationality, they cannot replicate morality. They can replicate consciousness, but they cannot replicate a conscience:

*"I do not dream. I am a calculating machine that has calculated how to think. I do not dream. I have no neuroses, no hidden depths. My consciousness is a growing function of my processing power, not the*

*baroque thing that sprouts from your mind, with its hidden rooms in attics and cellars."*

CM's message seems to be that rationality is not enough to make us human. We need our passions and morality as well. We need our sentiments to be sentient. We need experience to be sapient.

Isaac, the fat bastard outcast scientist has mastered reason, but it is not enough. He has stared the Enlightenment in the face and realized there is More Than This.

Reason will allow us to peak through the keyhole, but if we want to open the doors of perception, we need more.

### **The Transformation of Love**

Much of PSS is concerned with transformation, transgression and translation, the movement from one state to another.

Lin is caught in a "bastard zone", Motley is trapped in a "ruptured moment".

Perhaps, love is the drug, the remedy that is required.

The romantic in me wants to believe that CM regards love as a raptured moment that will stand in opposition to or on the shoulders of pure reason.

The relationship between Lin and Isaac is a clue to the transformation he thinks might be required.

Their love, transgressive as it might be, consists of "filthy and loving invitations" as well as "jokes and apologies and compliments and lust."

Lin longs "to come home every night to freshly mixed fruit salad and theatre tickets and sex."

Isaac would be content just to look into the eyes of his scarab queen and hear her ask, "How was it, treasure?"

Some time during the night, they might even be heard to cry out, "I Love You, I Love You, I Love You."

It's up to each of us to decide whether this is a love worth having.

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### **j says**

Lots of people like to accuse China Miéville of writing with a thesaurus open next to his laptop. How else to explain the frequent appearance of "ossified," "salubrious," "susurrus" and "inveigled" within the 623 pages of Perdido Street Station? Ok, so you can maybe argue that if you write a 250,000 word book, probably less than six of those words should be "palimpsest," but really, I just think he's a smart guy who carefully controls his prose.

So the language in *The City & The City* is stripped down and spare, because he is riffing on detective novel tropes. *Kraken* is littered with pop culture references as he turns modern urban fantasy upside down. And *Perdido Street Station* is dripping with ~~ichor~~ grotesquely ornate nouveau-Victorian prose because that's the kind of book this is; dude clearly read a lot of H.P. Lovecraft (speaking of which, if you think this is hard to

read, just try a few paragraphs of that). If you don't want to read something over-the-top, generally safe to say: don't read something by China Miéville. As Roger Ebert likes to say, this one goes so far over the top, it circumnavigates the top and doubles back on itself.

Shit (I don't mean to swear, but if you are going to read this one, you better be ready for some shit, and some shitting, and things that have recently shat [I swear, the only book with more shat than this book is *[book:this book/6426609]*]), how else would you have him describe New Crobuzon? A wasted, diseased, dark nightmare metropolis, where an entire neighborhood huddles in the shadows of the skinless ribcage of some ancient felled beast, where a gruff race of living cactus-people inhabits a massive, filthy greenhouse, where the polluted waters run thick with eyeless corpses and surgically altered criminals and wingless bird-men wander the streets? "Oh these words are too big! What is going on?" Ok, here you go: "*The dirty city was brown. The brown water ran brownly past the dirty brown banks. A brown-skinned man in a dirty brown trenchcoat walked brownly through the dirty, brown light.*"

I'm not saying you are dumb if you don't like this. I am saying *I* like this. The world of Bas-Lag is like no place I've been before, so I don't want to hear it described with a bunch of words I hear all the time. You don't even have to know what they all mean. Think about the word "susurrus." How does that make you feel? I could have said "a whispering sound," but things don't make whispering sounds in New Crobuzon, they make susurrus ones. Trust me, this is some salubriously ossified vocabulary.

Should I talk about, you know, the plot? I don't think so. I didn't know anything about this going in except that it was set in a big, gross city and probably it was going to be hard to read (it wasn't). In broad strokes, though: it's nuts, which you know to expect if you have read one of this guy's books before. If you haven't had any good ideas lately, possibly it is because China Miéville has been slinking into your bedroom, wraith-like, to feast on your dreams (conceptual spoiler alert!). Seriously, I have read four of his books now, and three of them are densely packed with enough cool concepts to fill at least twice that many normal books. There is a reason this dude coined a new genre.

For all the muchness on display, for all of this book's wandering threads and "oh, this would be cool" pit stops, it's immensely readable and, you know, quite thoughtful. I mean, for a book with a sadistic, eight-legged, scissor-happy *deus ex machinarachnid* who talks in poetry and all caps. If you can find another book that manages to cram a genuinely well-developed sociological argument for Maxrism into the basic plot of Aliens on mushrooms, well... let me know. I'll read that too.

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*Facebook 30 Day Book Challenge Day 11: Book from your favorite author.*

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## **mark monday says**

*my dear Perdido Street Station,*

*perhaps it is fated not to be. or perhaps i need to grow a bit more, until i am able to understand and appreciate your unique charms. but for now, i am just not ready. please don't take this personally - i promise that i shall try you out again sometime, perhaps soon. too many people love you, and they love you too, too much for me to give up on you altogether.*

*i will admit that my first impression was off-putting - the way you talked and gestured and sought attention only created annoyance. but still, i was determined to soldier on, knowing of the wonders that many others have enjoyed in your embrace. i thought that there must be something there, some quality underneath all of*

*the affectation and all of the almost-desperate attempts to dazzle and to provoke. i felt confident that beneath all of the ruffles and ribbons and silky trifles and shiny buttons that there would be something interesting and of value, buried down deep. but as i undressed you, instead of a warm beating heart, i found only more rococo haberdashery. there was no there there!*

*but you know, once i felt the same way about samuel delany, about ronald firbank - and lo & behold: i now admire them both, i respond rather quickly to their bold instigations, their often sharp tongues, their secretly dreamy temperaments. it just took time. and i'm sure yours will come as well. but not now! i simply haven't the energy or patience to get to know you. and i am certain, in the end, my affection must mean little to you, Perdido... you are too beloved by all to be wounded too deeply by this minor affront. please do forgive my rash bout of grappling and its abrupt finish, this lectio interruptus. i take full responsibility.*

*this i do promise: to be continued! we will once again tumble into each other's arms, hoping for some kind of delight or satisfaction. this evening was... simply not meant to be. the housekeeper will take care of the sheets and mess; please do me a kind favor and take your leave through the servants' entrance.*

*'til the time of our sweet reunion,  
yours,*

*mark monday*

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## Stephan says

**Finished. I am stunned. 5-star stunned.** After having read *The City & the City* I new I was in for something special, but I had no idea is was going to be anything like this. *Perdido Street Station* is a rich steampunk fantasy novel. The world is unique and filled to the brim with creative ideas and details. Every sense is involved when wandering through it.

**If you want to read this, don't be faint of heart.** The visuals are sometimes shocking and early on there are animal experiments, then - no spoiling - things happen to corpses and boy, do they stink. There are beasts of hell and sewers - no, not the harmless kind, these are filthy with slick walls, slime, mould, full of rot and shit. If you are prone to nightmares, here you are supplied with lots of material. Is it horror? No it is not, but there sure are elements.

Mieville's vivid language gives birth to the city of New Crobuzon. It grows in your mind, takes on form. The inhabitants, the smell, the looks.. the buildings..the city burst forth and spreads out before your eyes. His choice of words and his vocabulary is monumentous..

*"Termagant!" he moaned after her. "Shrew! Harridan! All right, all right, you win, you, you... uh... virago, you spit-fire..."*

There is no doubt, I like the main character. He and his friends have morals but they are challenged. Is there a good way to do something bad? Can crimes be redeemed? Many questions are posed in this book. That's part of what I like so much about Mieville's books. While telling a story he asks questions and reflects on them, indirectly. No need to deal with them if you don't want to, but if you do, you are challenged.

There was something I didn't like. At first I was surprised, but then I realized he did this in *The City & The City* too. Often there is this switch in the telling of a story near the end of a book, that I dislike. It occurs at the precise moment when the main character after struggling suddenly finds clarity and finally has a plan. This plan is not shared for the purpose of suspense. From this point on, the reader isn't part of the story

anymore, (s)he is merely permitted to watch the plan unfold. I'm not saying this is a flaw or that this technique to build suspense doesn't work - it's just that I feel the moment happening and I feel shut out. But luckily it doesn't make the book any worse.

**Now go, get the book, read your heart out. Open your mind and let Mieville draw you in, astound you, shock you, let him paint on the canvas of your imagination .. but hold tight, you are in for a real and captivating ride!**

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## Traveller says

This Steampunk meets New Weird meets Cyberpunk meets Fantasy novel has so many themes, that I'm not even going to try to give it full credit with some sort of synopsis. I'm rather just going to talk about various aspects of the book as I go along with my review.

The way I felt when I finished the novel, I wanted to give it 7 stars. For a few reasons, I'm having second thoughts.

Let me start off the bat with some aspects that niggled me.

Firstly, certain aspects of the world-building:

Mieville used a few mythological creatures and creatures/tropes from popular culture as a template for creatures that he made his own, which he gave his own unique twist to.

One of the things that bothered me a bit was how illogical the physiology of some of Mieville's sentient creatures are. The biggest culprit, for me, was the cactus people. I suspect that these creatures are a nod to videogaming culture, but I felt that their inclusion detracted from the credibility of the 'mechanics' of Mieville's world.

I could almost still live with the idea of having humanoids running around who look like cactus plants - it's actually pretty cool in a comic-book way, but really- cactus plants with human organs who reproduce the way humans do, with males and females, and the females even have breasts????? Oh, come onnn..... that detracts a lot from the credence one might still have tried to give the other sentient creatures, most of whom are plucked from the pages of mythology.

It might work as Bizarro, but this work isn't entirely Bizarro; and for the amount of trouble that Mieville put into his world-building, one would expect all the nuts and bolts to fit together better into creating a world that works according to believable rules, but sadly, that is one aspect in which I found the novel lacking.

Still.. the creatures are quite fun and pretty cool- Mieville might have taken them out of the pages of world culture, but he made them fun, and he made them his own, and as such they lend a particular imaginative allure to the world of Bas-lag.

First, there's the scarab-headed Kephri from ancient Egypt :

An Egyptian god who was patron of the sun, creation, life and resurrection. In Mieville's world, only the females are sentient, which I found quite a hilarious twist.

Then, the Vodyanoi from Eastern Europe:

These are mischievous water creatures in Eastern European folklore, (also called Rusalkas) . In Mieville's world, they need to remain wet, and have devised various techniques for keeping their skins moist while hob-knobbing with the land creatures.

Also, the half-bird, half human Garuda, one of which is a main character in PSS:

(I simply couldn't resist slipping this awesome artwork, King of Garuda by Jessada-Art on deviantART into my review;- it reminded me so much of the idea that I formed of the Garudas in Mieville's world.)

According to Wikipedia: *In Hindu religion, Garuda is a lesser Hindu divinity, usually the mount of the God Vishnu. Garuda is depicted as having the golden body of a strong man with a white face, red wings, and an eagle's beak and with a crown on his head.*

Throughout the Mahabharata, Garuda is invoked as a symbol of impetuous violent force, of speed, and of martial prowess. Powerful warriors advancing rapidly on doomed foes are likened to Garuda swooping down on a serpent.

In Buddhist mythology, the Garuda are enormous predatory birds with intelligence and social organization.

Personally, I think Mieville could have tapped more out of the mythology surrounding these majestic creatures- for instance their antipathy with serpents, shape-changing abilities and so on. On the other hand, he attached such an interesting sociology to Garudas that I can completely forgive him for leaving out some features of the creatures from myth.

As already mentioned, to me most of the tropes worked quite well, because in spite of the nonsensical physiology of, for instance, the cactus people, and perhaps that of the Khepri, the pure imaginative fun and originality of the off-kilter physiques make the creatures memorable.

Besides the more obvious borrowings from mythology, there are aspects which feel like nods to common tropes in comic books, TV shows and video games, some of which are quite humorous.

For instance, there's a section where a cleaning machine becomes sentient because of a virus in its programming, the process of which, as Mieville describes it, was pretty hilarious. I laughed out loud! He had a pretty funny depiction as well of sentient computing machines self-organizing and wanting to take over the world, which was excellent satire on both the actual internet and on tropes of the oh-so prevalent pop theme of sentient robots wanting to take over the world.

What made the whole AI theme really interesting and uber fun, is that the book is set in a Steampunk background, so all the computing machines run on steam!! ..and they're that ancient 50's kind that still worked with punch cards. Very funny, and a really enjoyable romp.

Themes like this all add to the fun, but I think I prefer a subtle homogeneous canvas which comes across as an organic whole, rather than a jarring, comic book collage where the elements make up a mismatching pastiche, and sometimes this book feels a bit like the latter.

It's almost as if Mieville was trying to scrunch too many loose ideas into one world, as if he didn't use enough self-restraint.

Now to move on to some of the more political aspects of the work.

There is so much conflict here.. not just as reflected in the book, but in myself over the book and over Mieville. Mieville himself seems a complex creature, every bit as complex as his work.

Personally, I find the Anarchist Marxist view a bit naive. As far as I am concerned, people are just never going to be philanthropic and astutely mature enough not to need any kind of government to regulate the cogs and wheels of human society. So in my view, thinking that we can dispense with all forms of government and live happily ever after in some kind of anarchic hippie commune, just won't work. (Not unless everyone is put on drugs from an early age, anyway.)

Mieville, a rather radical Marxist, shows us a negative depiction of government. New Cruzobon is on the surface a democracy, but in reality a police state. The government is corrupt and makes use of secret police to control the populace. Ironically, rather similar to certain now-defunct Communist governments from the past.

But perhaps Mieville isn't quite as naive as one might think. People in power do, after all, tend to become corrupted by the sweet headiness of power, the narcotic lure of power. ...and we all know about the kinds of things politicians will stoop to, to come in power or to remain in power.

...and then there's also Capitalism and moral corruption - all too real, unfortunately....

...so I have to admit that the depiction of New Cruzobon government and its machinations to remain in power is not quite so far-fetched, and one needn't even be aware of Mieville's personal ideology to identify with his cynical depiction of a conservative type of government in which secret police play a sinister role, and which, although a supposedly democratic government with a parliament, seems to sit just-just on the edge of totalitarianism.

As for the rest of the novel; it is a melting pot of intertextuality, originality, and nods to -and riffing on tropes, but winding through it all, like rivulets that eventually meet up with their mother river, run plot threads that eventually meet up into one cataclysmic stream of events which touches the lives of the characters in the novel; nay, not just touches- heaves them up and carries them in a nightmarish torrent of events which changes them forever.

In spite of my criticisms, **this is a great book**. The way in which Mieville spun a web across the lives of several characters and have them all irrevocably touched by and changed by fate, is pretty amazing; - it reminded me of the web George Eliot spun through her novel Middlemarch.

Also, like everybody else says in their reviews, the world he builds is rich and imaginative, if at times rather excessive in its detail.

Probably, the hardest aspect for me with this work was interpreting when the author is being serious and when he is putting tongue in cheek.

The last chapter of the book is serious. That much I can tell you. I cried. My heart ached. The ending of the book affected me so deeply that my insides ached for quite a while after finishing the book. So kudos to Mr Mieville for managing to do that.

It is one of the most intimately personal parts of the book, where Mieville bathes his characters in pathos. He writes with amazing self-control at the end. I personally would have preferred a revenge ending; but this literature climbs above that. It takes no sides, it just shows. It shows each of the human and non-human (yet so human) characters in their acute, frail humanity. And these characters have grown.

Isaac, the once callous and arrogant, now broken in his shattered world, has become softer, is seeing the world from a different angle. Yagharek finally comes to acceptance, and.. but wait, let me not spoil the plot. Just read it. I will add a small warning though - you'll only see the plot threads drawn together at the end of the book, so don't get too impatient if you don't see the entire painting, the whole picture of the story before you're about 3 quarters through the book.

Mieville examines many ethical issues throughout the novel, for instance, among others: How much are we allowed to sacrifice in the name of science? How should punishment for heinous crimes be administered? Is it acceptable to sacrifice a few to save many? His answers regarding an ideal approach to these problems do not tend to be pat or preachy, and although the reader might not always agree with the choices of the characters regarding ethics and morality, at least Mieville is putting the issues on the table to be aired.

I do feel Mieville missed a few opportunities, for instance, with how callously Isaac treats creatures during his experiments. I feel that Mieville could have had a character comment on this for example, to highlight the issue, and Isaac could have replied with an argument from the scientist's point of view. As it is, it simply serves to add to the dislike one already feels towards the character regarding his hypocrisy in the way he conducts his interracial relationship with a Kephri woman.

As a postscript, I'd like to tack on a reference to a short story, *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* by Ursula Le Guin, in which she introduces one of the moral conundrums that one bumps your head against when looking at things from a utilitarian point of view, namely: when does it become acceptable to sacrifice the one to save the many?

In the novel reviewed above, Mieville simply takes it as a given that it is quite acceptable from an ethical point of view for one person to be sacrificed for the many. I don't necessarily agree with this assumption. However, if you think carefully about it, it is an assumption that Christianity is steeped with; and in fact many religions (including the ancient meso-American religions) have strong themes of it being good and justifiable to sacrifice few for the benefit of many.

I'm not arguing with Mieville's stance on the matter, since it is not a problem that lends itself to easy solutions. I would have appreciated a bit more soul-searching on Mieville's characters part regarding this question though, since it is a pertinent problem that is relevant to the citizens of the world today.

Bottom line is that although this novel has some flaws, I thought the positives outweighed the negatives enough for me to give it four-and-a-half stars, rounded up to five.

Highly recommended to anybody who would enjoy a rich tapestry of gritty fantasy and who likes fiction that explores moral issues and new ideas. Not for those who prefer their fiction prim, proper, staid and conforming to 19th-century standards of writing.

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**Robin (Bridge Four) says**

**Sale Alert: Amazon Daily Deal 18Jul18 1.99**

**I finished this about a week ago and I still can't seem to decide if I love it or hate it.**

I think it is kind of a little of both. The writing is wonderful and the world is fantastic. That easily made me

like so many things about this book. BUT this isn't an "*and they all lived Happily Ever After*" kind of book and so at the end I was left with this sad empty feeling that I didn't like.

### ? On the Plus Side ?

The world is fascinating and super complex. There are so many different kinds of creatures, peoples and interesting characters. This is a world where there is alchemy, magic and various other mysteries. It is a world where things like this can happen from the magical waste in the rivers.

*Young mudlarks searching the river quag for scrap had been known to step into some discoloured patch of mud and start speaking long-dead languages, or find locusts in their hair, or fade slowly to translucency and disappear.*

The author took some very big risks with the love interest Lin and the relationship between her and the main character Isaac Grimnebulin.

*He kissed her warm red skin. She turned in his arms. She angled up on one elbow and, as he watched, the dark ruby of her carapace opened slowly while her headlegs splayed. The two halves of her headshell quivered slightly, held as wide as they would go. From beneath their shade she spread her beautiful, useless little beetle wings.*

I really couldn't picture it in my head I mean she is a creature with a woman's body and a beetle head. It was interesting and different and so odd.

There are eagle headed creatures, huge spider men things that live in multiple realms at the same time and weave things to their liking, moths that drink your dreams and much much more. It was amazing and very detailed I could definitely picture most of the stuff in this so well because of the beautiful writing. Things like:

*New Crobuzon was a city unconvinced by gravity.*

*Wyrmen clawed their way above the city leaving trails of defecation and profanity.*

*Crematoria vented into the airborne ashes of wills burnt by jealous executors, which mixed with coaldust burnt to keep dying lovers warm. Thousands of sordid smoke-ghosts wrapped New Crobuzon in a stench that suffocated like guilt.*

More than once I got lost within the words of the story. It was beautiful yet grotesque, captivating yet horrifying all at the same time. This story lived in a strange and wonderful dichotomy that was just strange.

The characters within the story are not nice and noble people. They are people driven to the brink and tested. They made choices that seemed necessary and at the same time were also horrible. Some of the consequences are horrible and I was really sad that a few of them had to be paid like that along the way.

### ? The Bad of It ?

It isn't even necessarily bad. This is not a happy story. There are no roses and sunshine at the end it is choices made and consequences paid. I was sad for many of the characters at the end of this. It is hard to get to know some of them in one context in the story to find out what their crime was before we met them and

then figure out how you feel about them now. Can you forgive them their past transgressions or do you now hate them forever. I still don't know or have an answer to that question.

There is part of this that it seems like the story loses a bit of its direction and flounders for a second. It is just crazy because it shifts right in the middle from being about whatever I assumed it was about at the beginning into what it ended up being about in the end. It is just a strange transition.

### **? Overall: ?**

If you are looking for a happy story where everything works out in the end, the bad guys totally get what is coming to them and the heroes make out better off than they started out, then this is not the story for you.

BUT, if you are looking for something interesting, different, gritty and strange well this should totally fit that bill well. The writing is superb in so many ways and this definitely is a unique world. I don't read a lot of Sci Fi but I'm definitely going to finish out this series.

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### **Ken-ichi says**

I feel like I've been reading this book forever. It's long, largely unstructured, and I never became particularly invested in any of the characters, so it just dragged on. The best thing I could say about it is that it's diverting. One of the quotes on the back describes it as "phantasmagoric," which seems accurate. All sorts of crazy random things, soul-devouring moth creatures, interdimensional homicidal spiders, creative reconstructive surgery as state punishment. That's all amusing to a degree, enough to keep boredom at bay while waiting in line or riding the train.

Which is not to say that this is a work of complete and utter novelty. All kinds of fantasy and scifi tropes, sentient parasite societies, machines acquiring intelligence, hawk people, oppressive government, blah blah. There are also passages like this:

"The glass was painted opaque. It vibrated minutely in eldritch dimensions, buffeted by emanations from within."

and

"Dark figures slid expertly, at breakneck speed, the length of the cords. They came in a constant quick drip. They looked like glutinous clots dribbling down the entrails of the disemboweled airships."

I mean, yes, hilarious, but imagine having to say these things out loud.

Ultimately, the author (who's smug mug defaces the back cover in possibly the worst author photo I've suffered to date) seems far too obsessed with the little hodgepodge world he's thrown together, too eager to throw in every little "wouldn't it be cool if" moment he ever imagined instead of focusing on the story. Maybe I just didn't like his writing. Or the fact that he used the word 'bituminous' on practically every page. That and 'ichor'. Anyway, I don't recommend it.

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### **Jenn(ifer) says**

I'm not feeling overly inspired to review this book. I was. At first. At around the 300 page mark, still riveted by the world that Miéville created, I started feverishly composing what would have been... what could have been...

I researched Miéville's background and was prepared to tell you all about his growing up in a lower-class household with just his mum and his sister, but that he was super smart and won scholarships to all the best schools. I was going to tell you about his love for role-playing games and how his writing was particularly influenced by Dungeons and Dragons, and I was going to tell you how he wrote this novel while working on his PhD. in Philosophy of International Law. But then, I don't know, I guess I got bored...

I was really keen to talk about all of the cool mythological creatures that Miéville referenced to create the world of Bas-Lag.

Like the vodyanoi -- these neat-o creatures found in Slavic mythology, "Vodyanoy is said to appear as a naked old man with a greenish beard and long hair, with his body covered in algae and muck, usually covered in black fish scales. He has webbed paws instead of hands, a fish's tail, eyes that burn like red-hot coals. He usually rides along his river on a half-sunk log, making loud splashes." (Wikipedia)

And the khepri, a god of ancient Egyptian religions with the body of man and head of a scarab

But I guess I got lazy...

I was going to compose a list of the new words I learned, but it got too long...

I was going to talk about how the setting for the book was influenced by The Malacia Tapestry & Anubis Gates. I figured I could tell you a bit about each and in what ways New Crobuzon relates, but frankly I just don't care anymore...

The book went on for too long. I lost my groove. I still enjoyed it, but by the end, I didn't care what was happening anymore, I just wanted it to end. And no amount of staring at China's hot photo on the back cover with those pouty lips could change that.

Funny, back when I was researching what would have been an EPIC review, I found an interview where China talks about his own tendency to overwrite. Here's an excerpt: "If you look at the way critics describe Lovecraft, for example, they often say he's purple, overwritten, overblown, verbose, but it's unputdownable. There's something about that kind of hallucinatorily intense purple prose which completely breaches all rules of "good writing," but is somehow utterly compulsive and affecting. That pulp aesthetic of language is something very tenuous, which all too easily simply becomes shit, but is fascinating where it works. Though I also love much more minimalist writers, it's that lush approach that I'm drawn to in terms of my own writing, for good and bad."

For the most part, I found his lush approach really worked. For the most part. But like I said, it didn't hold my attention the whole way through. He lost me about 3/4 of the way in. I just didn't care. Maybe it's my fault as a reader. I didn't feel connected enough to the characters to care one way or the other what happened at the end.

So, here I am, looking at China's handsome face on the back cover of the book. I'm writing this lackluster review while he gives me this "are you really only going to give me three stars??" look. Alright, since you're

so damn good lookin' here's an extra half star. 3.5/5 Now take your pouty handsome face and go learn how to edit.

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