

"Polansky is the love child of J. K. Rowling and Kurt Vonnegut."
—TOM ISABELL, author of *The Prey* trilogy

A City Dreaming

A Novel

Daniel
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A powerful magician returns to New York City and reluctantly finds himself in the middle of a war between the city's two most powerful witches.

“It would help if you did not think of it as magic. M certainly had long ceased to do so.”

M is an ageless drifter with a sharp tongue, few scruples, and the ability to bend reality to his will, ever so slightly. He's come back to New York City after a long absence, and though he'd much rather spend his days drinking artisanal beer in his favorite local bar, his old friends—and his enemies—have other plans for him. One night M might find himself squaring off against the pirates who cruise the Gowanus Canal; another night sees him at a fashionable uptown charity auction where the waitstaff are all zombies. A subway ride through the inner circles of hell? In M's world, that's practically a pleasant diversion.

Before too long, M realizes he's landed in the middle of a power struggle between Celise, the elegant White Queen of Manhattan, and Abilene, Brooklyn's hip, free-spirited Red Queen, a rivalry that threatens to make New York go the way of Atlantis. To stop it, M will have to call in every favor, waste every charm, and blow every spell he's ever acquired—he might even have to get out of bed before noon.

Enter a world of Wall Street wolves, slumming scenesters, desperate artists, drug-induced divinities, pocket steampunk universes, and demonic coffee shops. M's New York, the infinite nexus of the universe, really is a city that never sleeps—but is always dreaming.

A City Dreaming Details

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From Reader Review A City Dreaming for online ebook

Mark says

Halfway through A City Dreaming I posted this on Facebook:

"It's like Kerouac ate some really good acid and had a love child with Burroughs after time traveling to 2016. Actually it's probably not but that's the closest I can figure at about the halfway point. There's probably plenty of people who can tell me why my description is wrong, but I don't wanna be right, I just want to keep reading..."

I thought that by the end of the book that things would sort of coalesce in to a more coherent idea of what was happening but I was so very wrong. And before you think I'm being negative, glance at the number of stars I've given for this review. This is why my post from halfway through names Kerouac as the first thing that comes to mind. Polansky's M is the central character in a story, or maybe a series of stories, told in a breakneck style that can't help but remind me of the The Subterraneans and a bit less of On The Road. There simply doesn't seem to be any overarching story other than "what M did when he came back to New York that one time". This method used to tell this tale is very much a slice of life with a little bit of stuff leading up to M heading back to New York and culminating with M leaving New York. It's like a fractal of M's life, if you'll allow me to put it in those terms.

I've seen some reviews that describe M as some sort of adventurer but that's not really an accurate portrayal of the protagonist. He gives off more of a Henry Chinaski vibe, except when he doesn't, and well there's that whole magic thing. M seems, at least from my perspective, to be more of a vagabond. He doesn't really have much of a moral compass other than a desire to not upset Management (more on this later) and be involved in anything that he didn't start as little as possible. Not that he actually manages to accomplish this but I think in his heart he'd really rather be left the hell alone.

The world is modern, there's nothing really out of place or anachronistic going on. Most of the time, maybe most but possibly less, we are treated to fairly normal world that none of us would feel uncomfortable in. However when that stops and the strangeness starts it becomes all fever dreams, LSD trips, tumor induced hallucinations. Whether it's subway trains to fantastical destinations or child eating houses Polansky nails it and he nails it hard. Reality is not so much malleable as it is a lot more of what it is. If you don't understand that last bit, don't worry, you possibly could after reading the book, but probably not.

The magic system, well, it sort of isn't. There's never a described system laid out and, in fact, not one I can really glean from reading. A glimpse in to M's take on it is that the powers that be, reality if you will, let this stuff happen and if you don't warp things too much you're alright, if you warp things just right, at the right times, then you can manage enough luck to not actually work and live pretty well. That's slightly more than you'll actually find laid out in the book but it's how my head chose to wrap around what M described, but mostly in my own words.

While we have that glimpse in to how M sees things, we really never get another characters perspective on magic. M pretty much only hangs with others of his kind and they never really discuss quantum mechanics much less magic. While the use of an ill defined magic system is not unheard of, it usually detracts from whatever story is being told. A City Dreaming manages to do just the opposite. With the delerium tremens pacing and the lack of an overarching story line the way Polanksy uses magic here fits in perfectly.

For lack of a better term I will call some of M's destinations (even destinations may be for lack of a better word) alternate realities. The alternate realities is where Burroughs comes to mind. There's a Naked Lunch quality to a lot of the things that happen because of magic that flows under the whole narrative. Most magic in most stories strives to be real so we will be able to suspend our disbelief and Polansky obviously decided to throw that shit right out the window and does so in a beautiful manner.

In the end it's the writing that makes this book what it is. The prose in here is just amazing and I literally didn't want to put this book down. There are some scenes that should have offended my sensibilities but I couldn't manage to get any ire up at all because the writing was just good that I glided through those chapters without blinking. I may have thought back and realized I should have been disturbed but while reading I was completely entranced. Daniel Polansky has accomplished what amount to giving the finger to the entire urban fantasy genre in a spectacular manner.

If you've gotten this far and have no idea what this book is about, then don't worry, reading it won't help. While I put it on urban fantasy shelf, I really should make a shelf called WTF. I don't think I've ever read something so completely strange and enjoyed it so very much. I know I've never finished a book and been at a complete loss as to what just happened as I was when I put this one down. Please realize that I say those things in the absolute best way possible. Polansky is a goddamn genius and this book proves it beyond a shadow of a doubt. If you know me in real life then you can expect me to be hounding you to read this the next time I see you. I don't know if we'll ever see M again but if we do I look forward to finishing the next edition and wondering "what the fuck did I just read"!

Bradley says

Ah, this one is going to be somewhat difficult to define as a genre, for while it seems to have the trappings of an Urban Fantasy, what, with magicians in New York City, it's something a bit more and a bit less than what the genre usually offers.

What do I mean? I mean that it feels more like a collection of short stories with the same characters, with each story being a commentary on life, living in the city, on friendship, on love, on action and inaction, on power and apathy, on pure, plain luck.

The title is very close to what the whole book is about, too, oddly enough, and while it's never entirely about a dreaming city, the amount of magic, the oddness, the weird doors to steampunk realities, subways as open maws, or pirates kidnapping the wrong Boy, it's a strange New York, even by the standards we all seem to hold for the city. :)

I had a great time reading it, but I learned very quickly not to expect more than a number of vignettes, not an overarching plot... although there are definitely threaded themes.

Is this about M and his life? Or is this actually about the city? Maybe it doesn't really matter. The writing invites us into careful reads and very interesting interactions among friends, of funny commentaries and fairly awesome magical surprises. But more than anything, we're invited to come along for a ride with a lucky slacker, M, who isn't always as he seems and sometimes even rises above his Switzerland to venture upon a tiny, tiny taste of heroism.

This is definitely the right book for you if you love much more substantial magical realism stories that have a

lot to say about living in the modern world, about growing up, or not growing up, and finding balance in it all.

Thanks, Netgalley, for the ARC!

Faith says

Witches, wizards or magicians? I'm not sure what the protagonist, known only as M, and his friends were, but they were all capable of making and experiencing magic in New York City. Do not believe the blurb that says this is about a war between two rival magician queens. At most, there is some occasional petulance between them - there is no war. In fact the queens are barely in the book at all. Not that I missed them, but I hate it when the blurb is this misleading. Also, this isn't a novel, it's a collection of related short stories. Some of the stories were good, some of them were unbearably dull and a couple of them were a little touching.

The author writes in a wry, clever and imaginative manner that I enjoyed. It was the structure and content of these stories that eventually sunk the book for me and I struggled to finish it. I started out really liking the book, and then I found that the stories followed a predictable pattern. M, a Brooklyn hipster, gets into trouble, usually caused by one or more of his friends, and then he gets out of trouble. Along the way there were subway lines that did not exist, amazing things happening in the back of nondescript bars, constantly shifting tattoos, multiplying coffee shops and other phantasmagorical inventions. I kept reading for these touches, but they were not enough to save the book for me. There was just too much repetitiveness and not enough plot.

I also think the Brooklyn hipster satire is going to date very quickly. Some of it already felt old. However, the author is a keen observer (and lover) of the details that make up NYC. While this book didn't totally work for me, I'd be willing to read another book by this author.

I received a free copy of this book from the publisher.

Joel says

I like Daniel Polansky. I own hard copies of all of his books, including multiple printings of some. There's just *SOMETHING* about his prose and style that speaks to me, something that I always seem to come back to.

However, this book is certainly inconsistent, in almost every way, with his previous works. A *City Dreaming* is an odd piece of magical-realism, kind of a schizophrenic Vonnegut-meets-Kerouac-meets-Lewis Carroll. It follows M, a degenerate substance abuser with some magical ability, as he is drug into a fairly large-scale conflict in NYC. He is required to use his entire band of equally-semi-magical friends and degenerates, as well as an oddly large cast of ancillary characters, who vary wildly in quality and usefulness.

The novel starts out well - M is an interesting character, someone I can sadly relate to in some ways, and his cast of friends are equally colorful and interesting. However, I almost immediately started to tick off little annoyances with the story, prose points, and characters. In spite of that, for the majority of the first 2/3 of the

book, it was a total page-turner for me, and I was hooked on it. As the book progressed, however, some of the minor and major annoyances started to be a real detriment for my enjoyment of the book.

The first, and major, issue I took was simply how self-indulgent the novel is. Knowing the limited amount I know about Daniel from social media, I can't help but feel like M is either a manifestation of Daniel himself, or at least an idealized version of what he wants to be, or thinks he is. There just feel like a lot of similarities there. Additionally, there was an egregious amount of drug and alcohol references, far past the point necessary even to represent the nature of the characters. I am a massive beer geek and will talk about it for days, but if I read "Belgian beer" or some iteration of it one more damn time in this book, I was going to throw it against the wall. Probably close to 20 oddly specific references to beer, mostly Belgian beers, in a relatively short book. As if Polansky was going "look guys, I'm a beer geek!" It came across less endearing, and more obnoxious for my taste. Polansky certainly doesn't shy away from alcohol and drug use in his other novels, however he handled it in a much more proficient way in those, rather than an excuse to make references to show off his knowledge or preferences.

The second major issue I took was just how scattered the novel was. I used "schizophrenic" in an earlier paragraph, and I think it's an apt comparison. I was never really sure what the main point of the story was - is it a memoir of M? Is it a novel about the magical NYC? Is it the various underlying messages that he was trying to push forth? I was never really sure. On top of that, there is not a lot of direction - there are long stretches of M and Co. completing arbitrary tasks, introducing a massive amount of nothing side characters. So while Boy, Andre and the other main side characters were interesting and at least somewhat complex, the pieces that come-and-go were much less so, and often felt hollow.

In spite of most of this, I did enjoy big chunks of the novel. As I said, it had a bit of an **IT** factor that kept me interested, and enough going on to motivate me to rapidly crank through the pages. However, I found the end to be a bit disappointing compared to the rest of the book, though oddly fitting to feel kind of scattered and incomplete, considering how the rest of the story was presented. I feel like I either understand what Polansky was going for and think he missed the mark, or I'm just too unintelligent to understand the complexity and symbolism used, and I am the problem here. Regardless, all I can judge by is my impressions, and while this isn't going to dissuade me from reading future Polansky, it certainly made me long for more of his traditional fantasy work.

Althea Ann says

Our protagonist, M, is an ancient sorcerer of unimaginable power. M is also a Brooklyn slacker/hipster, with no particular concrete goals. He's in with The Management, and things tend to go his way and fall into his lap. Most of the time. Not all of the time. Because among the secret societies and hierarchies of magical New York City, not all is always peaches and cream, or craft beer and sex with models.

I ended up really enjoying this roughly-chronological set of linked short stories. I had a few reservations: I'm really not a Brooklyn hipster and don't want to be, and there were more than a few moments where I felt like "M" was the wish-fulfillment version of the author, and all the supporting characters were probably based on his friends, and it got just a bit too precious. There were also a few bits where I had to say, "no, you got that bit wrong." (If you walk through Brooklyn toward the Verrazano Bridge, you hit fancier neighborhoods, not more dilapidated ones.) But those moments were outweighed by the reminders of how it felt to be new to New York City and the sense of potential, of discovery, of not knowing what was ten blocks that way or outside the next subway stop. It's also really very funny in many places - and more often than not, it gets

NYC right.

I do have to say though, this city has been my home for about 25 years now, and I think a lot of my enjoyment rested on that sense of recognition. It's hard for me to say how it would hold up for readers who weren't familiar with the city. (On the other hand, if you ARE a Brooklyn hipster, this is one you really truly should not miss.) But, just for myself, I liked it, and much more than the previous piece I read by Polansky. Will definitely give him another try after this one!

Many thanks to NetGalley and Regan Arts for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinions are solely my own.

Rjurik Davidson says

Daniel Polansky lives in New York, though I think he's originally from Maryland, which gives him the advantage of being both an insider and an outsider in the Big Apple. This liminal position is one of the things that tends to make original art -- think of the Irish writers in London and Paris -- and may go some way to explaining why 'A City Dreaming' is so excellent. The novel isn't so much about a single conflict or goal, but rather about the kind of world/New York the magician-protagonist M lives in. It's full of quirky and often hilarious events; the scenarios are imaginative and absurd. Polansky's world-view is something like a humorous existentialism and its form is reminiscent of European novels of the 20th century. In other words, in the world of genre, it's formally inventive -- you will find no Robert McKee 3 act structure here. Thus, the novel is bound to unsettle genre readers. In short, I loved it and it's the kind of thing genre readers should, but all too often don't, read. Go and get it. It's great.

Scott says

Took me a bit to get into the flow of this book, but I ended up really enjoying it.

Think I say this on my reviews of Polansky's work, but I just really love his style. He has a great way with words that brings his characters to life. Just like in Low Town, the setting here is also a character. A vibrant New York filled with all sorts of wonder and horror and comedy.

M was wonderful, I loved his attitude, his humor, his quiet power. Definitely looking forward to more of his adventures.

Ints says

Pola?skis man?s ac?s ir izcils autors, tik izcils, ka izlas?jis vienu vi?a gr?matu, es p?r?j?s glab?ju nebalt?m dien?m. Šo gan nol?mu neglab?t, bet las?t uzreiz.

Visiem mums jau no b?rnu dienas ir skaidrs, ka paties?b? m?s dz?vojam ma?ijas piln? pasaul?. Maza da?a no mums ar laiku šo pasauli aizmirst, noreduc? to l?dz fizikas un citiem dabas likumiem, l?dz ar to izskaidrojot liel?ko da?u no pasaules pied?v?t?. Ta?u liel?k? da?a cilv?ku sev par laimi paliek ma?ijas valgos, vi?i nezina, kas ir, piem?ram, transformators, un k?d?? Eiropas govs ?dot Amerikas z?li nospr?gtu,

k? Saule ražo ener?iju un k? dators nulles un vieniniekus p?rv?rš feisbuk?. Daži iet v?l t?l?k – dz?vo uz plakanas zemes vai visp?r p?rlieku par šiem jaut?jumiem nesatraucas. Ja š?d?m liet?m nepiev?rš uzman?bu, tad tas nodrošina pel?ku, bet stabilu dz?vi, kuru laiku pa laikam izskaistina zi?k?r?bas uzplaiksn?jumi, kas liel?koties p?rliecina par ma?iju m?su dz?v?s. Tas viss par to gudro lieto, ko reiz teicis Aizeks Azimovs – ja tehnolo?ija ir pietiekoši sarež??ta, tad t? nav atš?irama no ma?ijas. Vi?š gan negaid?ja, ka liel?k? cilv?ces da?a sav? nesp?j? atš?irt non?ks tik ?tri. Š? gr?mata gan nav par t?du ma?iju, bet par ?sto.

Ar ?sto es nerun?ju par Harija Potera pasaules ma?iju, kur sl?pta buryju kopiena gadsimtiem v?r?s sav? sul?, sarg?jot savas burvest?bas, un varask?ri m??inot ieb?zt lab? un ?aun? kategorij?s. Š? ir urb?n? ma?ija, kur magiem ?sti ner?p, vai k?ds vi?us pamana vai nepamana. Cilv?ki ir pietiekoši stulbi, lai neparko daudz nebr?n?tos, cilv?kiem ir slinkums dom?t un analiz?t, vi?i labpr?t paši ignor?s visu neizskaidrojamo. Ta?u liel?koties vi?u dz?v?s neizskaidrojam? ir tik daudz, ka nedaudz ma?ijas tur p?r?k nekait?s.

M. ir klai?ojošs mags, ne p?r?k sp?c?gs, bet visnota? apsvied?gs. Ne p?r?k bag?ts, bet pietiekoši lab?s attiec?b?s ar Birokr?tiju, lai dz?ve vi?am visu pienestu uz papl?tes. Vi?š labpr?t dzertu alu sav? iem??otaj? ?ujorkas b?r? un nejauktos iekš? pils?tas politik?. Ta?u plaukstoš? megapole ir gr?ti palikt atstatu, seviš?i, ja tava pag?tne ir visnota? gara un tu esi pasp?jis sakaš??ties ar daudziem pasaules varenajiem. T?d?? reiz?m n?kas b?t varonim, bet reiz?m laisties lap?s. Katrs pa??miens ir labs, ja tas pal?dz palikt dz?vam. Š? gr?mata ir par gadu no M. Dz?ves, kas pavad?ts ?ujork?.

K? t?ls M. ir ?oti pievilc?gs, tipisks pofigists – vismaz ?r?ji, kuram pat?k s?d?t noma?us. Ta?u vi?a raksturs un š? patikšana b?t vienam nemaz neiet kop?. Ar savu nesp?ju pievald?t m?li vi?š bieži ieku?as piedz?vojumos. Vi?a draugi labpr?t izmanto M. V?j?bas, pien?kuma apzi?u un v?lmi laiku pa laikam spriest taisnu tiesu. Nemaz nerun?sim par br?žiem, kad šis atrodas narkotisku vielu reibum?. Gr?mata sast?v no daudziem st?stiem – gar?kiem un ?s?kiem, kuri v?sta par atseviš??m M. dz?ves epizod?m. St?sti ir lab?kas un slikt?kas kvalit?tes, bet kopum?, kad viss izlas?ts un saliekas kop?, t? rada izcila darba iesp?aidu. Nu par, manupr?t, spilgt?kaj?m M. dz?ves epizod?m.

“Bad decisions” – ja m?k uz pasauli pareizi paskat?ties, tad sabiedriskais transports paver pašas iesp?jas. Metro l?nijas, kuras var pa tiešo aizvest neuzman?gu pasažieri uz Elli, bet var ar? uz le?end?ro staciju Nexus, no t?s uz jebkuru pasaules vietu var nok??t pa tiešo. Rikt?gi labs, kodol?gs ce?ojuma apraksts. Un beigas t?das – k? no Spr?d?ša norakst?tas.

“A moral obligations” – cilv?kam ir nav j?b?t varonim, bet ir j?b?t gatavam mirt par savu iem??oto b?ru, tas ir katra mor?lais pien?kums.

“The spirit of the age” – laiku pa laikam ?ujork? savairojas k?ds uz??m?jdarb?bas veids. Gad?s, ka cilv?ki nemaz nepamana, reiz?m var b?t par v?lu. Šaj? st?st? M. ir spiests veikt mazo kafejn?cu eksorcismu, pirms t?s p?r?em visu pils?tu.

“The Coming of the Four” – vesels episk?s fant?zijas cikls ielikts padsmiit lapasp?u gar? st?sti??. Cilv?kam izejot ?r? no b?ra reiz?m gad?s nok??t paral?laj? pasaul?, kur? valda pavisam citi likumi. Šoreiz M. un vi?a draugu pas?d?šana izv?ršas episk? kvest?. Las?t?jam ir dota reta iesp?ja redz?t M. patieso dabu.

“Tit for Tat” – nav nek? kaitinoš?ka, ja esi sag?jis ragos ar citu magu. Ja otrs ir nepraša, tad vari gaid?t l?dz pretinielu nogal?s vi?a paša p?rliec?ba. Bet ja pretinieks ir tik sl?p?ts k? Rjuriks, tad pat, lai sagl?btu savu ?du, var n?kties pasv?st. Par bomžošanas ietekmi uz person?bu, diki? labs st?sts.

“A soporific for the World Turtle” – ?ujorkas ?eostratifik?cija nudien nav tik vienk?rša, k? tas izskat?s

?eolo?ijas pl?n?. Katrus piecdesmit gadus visiem magiem ir j?met pie malas domstarp?bas, lai sagl?btu savu iem??oto pils?tu. Ir t?da lieta, ka liel?k? ?ujorkas da?a ir uzb?v?ta uz liela bru?rupu?a muguras. Kam?r tas gu?, viss ir k?rt?b?. Ta?u šoreiz bru?rupucis ir uzmodies p?r?k agri. Un tikai M. redz patieso c?loni.

“An Offering to Moloch” – šis ir ironisks st?sts (labi, visi vi?i ir t?di, bet šis ir ?pašs). M. non?k ball?t? un otr? r?t? atkl?j, ka vi?š šaj? ball?t? ir izraudz?ts par upuri Moloham. Ta?u kurš gan cits, ja ne M. nezin?s, ka Molohs nemaz nav ?sts dievs, vi?š pat nav pusdievs, nek? t?da nemaz pasaul?s nav. Idiotiem var b?t likten?ga pat pašu mu??ba.

Gr?matai lieku 10 no 10 ball?m, patika t?s nedaudz padr?m? noska?a, galvenais varonis M., kurš nemaz nebija tik vienk?ršs, k? izliekas. Es pat teiktu, ka vi?a noz?me pasaul? ir nenov?rt?ta. Autors raksta nudien izcilus darbus, b?s vien j??eras kl?t ar? pie p?r?jiem. Ir pien?cis tas br?dis, kad j?lasa kvalitat?va fant?zija.

Lynn Williams says

<https://lynns-books.com/2016/10/13/a-...>

A City Dreaming is such a strange and intriguing book, I admit that my expectations picking this up bear no relation whatsoever to the read itself and yet I found that I really enjoyed this nonetheless. When I started reading my first thoughts were ‘what am I reading’ and yet just a few pages into the book I found myself really keen to pick it back up. It defies description in some respects and I think this will probably turn into a bunch of random thoughts but I’ll do my best to keep it coherent.

The jacket for A City Dreaming talks about two queens poised on the brink of war. A world with divinities, wolves and phantom subway lines. Reading the description you will probably imagine this is urban fantasy and to be honest it is although it might take a little time for you to become accustomed to that fact when you first pick it up. It reads like a collection of short stories and yet that’s not really the case. Basically the story covers (roughly) a twelve month period in the life of ‘M’. The chapters are all self contained but the characters from certain stories crop up again and again and as the chapters move forward so the story develops and we gain an understanding of M and the world in which he lives. Put bluntly, this is urban fantasy with a difference and I have to admit I found it fascinating and very entertaining – don’t be put off by my saying it reads like a collection of short stories. I’m not a fan of short stories normally but this is different, the stories do all link and build a bigger picture and the chapters, whilst they may seem individual, play a part in building up the life of M and picking up the main thread of the story – which is his attempt, in a very unassuming fashion, to prevent certain disaster happening. I think what makes it seem so unusual for me is I’m not really used to this approach in urban fantasy and maybe it won’t always work but I think this is really well done.

At the start of the book we make the acquaintance of M. M is an unusual character. He doesn’t like responsibility, No long term relationships for him, no children, no real job to speak of and no home. He just drifts from place to place and to be honest he seems to have an excess of good fortune not to mention a lot of friends in need! M is an enigma, I don’t feel completely confident that I fully understand him – he has magical ability although he doesn’t seem to be one of the big shooters in that respect, and yet, he is frequently called upon when somebody he knows has something of a dodgy situation to face and he’s very creative with his solutions to any problems he finds himself in, he has a minimum effort style approach to things – why go for all out fireworks when a little puff of smoke can do the job? I liked M – he’s well written and amusing and whilst you might start off thinking he’s a bit of a shirker I think as the story progresses you begin to see why he never really settles in one place for too long – he has a certain ‘friend in need is a bloody

pest' type motto that he lives by and yet at the same time, and in spite of all his grumblings, he always ends up helping. Given his long life and extensive travel he seems to have a clutch of the strangest friends wherever he happens to be and they usually all request something from him. He's like the 'fixer' of the supernatural world. And what a world of supernatural this is. Everything is possible and if it's possible its likely to be in this book.

In terms of world building. Well, this is a contemporary setting, the majority of the story takes place in New York and I think Polansky does a great job in setting the scene and making things that we take for granted turn into major plot points. We have slick parties, hipsters, a plethora of coffee shops and subways that are in fact gaping maws that lead straight to somewhere you don't want to go. I really love the title – A City Dreaming – which seems such a great play on the story – is the city asleep and dreaming whilst this alternative world takes place around them, are the city dreaming of this alternative world – and this also seems to bring me to my next point. Which is, I think people will take different things from this – it's all about your interpretation really. At the back of my mind I feel like I'm missing something important but I can't figure out what it is – maybe there's nothing to figure out more than what I've gained from the story already, maybe there is something more or just maybe the author has written it in a very clever way to make you feel that way! Like I say, I feel this book is massively open to a reader's own thoughts, not just of the characters, the fantasy elements and the plot but even down to the title of the book and the nature of each of the individual stories.

The writing is really good in fact it's quite addictive – I found myself literally racing to find out what the next chapter would bring to the overall story and although I clearly liked some chapters more than others the whole book is just packed with imagination. We also move a little into the field of horror and the world of surreal.

Overall I thoroughly enjoyed this. In terms of urban fantasy it's unusual and innovative. I'm not sure whether it will work for everyone and in fact I'm a little surprised that it worked so well for me with this short story feel – but, like I said, it's so much more than I imagined after I first started reading.

I received a copy courtesy of the publisher through Netgalley for which my thanks. The above is my own opinion.

Kari Rhiannon (Moon Magister Reviews) says

This is a really strange, not so little book. Structurally, it resembles most closely a set of short stories which roll inexorably on from one to the next. I honestly had no idea what the endgame was until 94%, and that would usually drive me into a frenzy, but, do you know what?

I loved it.

'It was around two in the afternoon on a hot August Saturday when M realised the rest of the people at the beach house were planning on using him as a human sacrifice.'

Oh, it's weird and the prose reads like silk, it truly does. I admit, the first few chapters, maybe even the first 25% I found myself railing against everything I eventually came to love. Probably because I was expecting a linear story and I very much did not get one.

I adored the main character. M is the definition of neutral when it comes to alignment. He rolls with the tide, lets the sweep of New York's power draw him from chess matches to drug dens, coffee shops and backstreet orgies. Most of the book he underplays himself, moving in circles in a way that makes you feel he's an underdog, not honestly one of the most powerful magic users in the city, an ageless being travelling with the ebb and flow of civilisation.

The side characters are painted in broad, electric strokes, overlaid with M's sometimes snarky, sometimes apathetic commentary. Every one of them could be a character in a graphic novel he brings them to life so vividly.

Plotwise, I'm not entirely sure what to say to you. The plot is a subtle little thing, twisting sinuously through each of M's escapades, more like a background concern than an overwhelming worry. Initially, I found myself annoyed and searching for the plot, once I sat back and let the weirdness flow, I found it was something that no longer concerned me. This book's a bit like a fever dream. If you try to grab at anything, it'll just flutter away.

It's urban fantasy to a backdrop of microbreweries and artisanal moustache wax and it's horrible and beautiful to read. It's very self aware, cattily funny and sometimes bordering on inappropriate. I loved it.

(Many thanks to Regan Arts and Netgalley for the ARC in return for an honest review.)

19/07/2016: I'm not entirely sure what just happened, but it was great. I kind of feel like someone whose just finished a sky dive and their legs are all wobbly and eyes are slightly glazed and elsewhere.

A proper review will follow.

Allison says

3.5?

Loved the way this started and then it kind of began fizzling out a bit? Still think it's a much better contemporary fantasy than *The Magicians* but I was expecting a more cohesive narrative and less of a vignette style. Still, if you love Polansky signature with, it translates well from epic to contemporary fantasy.

Daniel says

Evo naslova knjige koji je odlicno opisuje. Savrsen izbor.

Sama knjiga pretstavlja vise gomilu manjih prica sa likovima koji se ponavlja ili kroz uvek nove dogadjaje, vinjete, koje odlicno opisujuivot u velikom gradu mada sve je pokriveno ko malim velom magle. Skoro da gledamo lucidan san :) Trebalo je vremena da se priviknem na sam tok price ali onda postaje dosta zabavno.

I ne citajte opis (blurb) posto pruza nekako lazna ocekivaja od knjige, barem meni.

Paul says

What makes a city a city? Is it just a matter of some smart urban planning, a large population and a little bit of luck, or is there something more to it? Is there an intangible element that shapes a community? What if there were people responsible for making sure that that this power kept flowing? What if those people had abilities, let's call it magic for want of a better word? What if they had a tendency to squabble amongst themselves...a lot. *A City Dreaming* by Daniel Polansky asks those very questions. The city in question – New York.

M is a truly enigmatic creation. He's been around for a long time. He's travelled everywhere and has seen the best and worst that humanity has to offer. After years of globe-trotting, he finds himself back in New York, being part of the magical counter culture that exists throughout the city. M may sometimes come across as little more than a louche party boy, but you see hints that in the deep dark depths of his soul he is honourable and always tries to do the right thing.

Our hero, though he would likely never admit to that honorific, flourishes in a constant state of now. The past and the future just don't really factor into his world view so he chooses to ignore them for the most part. A vast chunk of the novel is episodic in nature and this is the perfect way to learn more about the world that M inhabits. I was impressed that each chapter reads like a self-contained single short story but when viewed together they combine to be part of an overarching whole. This is razor sharp, wickedly intelligent writing.

There is some wonderfully quotable dialogue between the characters. M's social circle are a hugely diverse bunch. M veers from snarky to disinterested and back again with ease. Only the ennui of the truly long lived can produce such barbed comments. My favourite moments however occur when M attempts to untangle the human condition and what it all actually means.

"Infinity overlaps to such a degree as to make the outcome of any event essentially a matter of perspective."

Hands down my favourite chapter of the book involves M versus the alarming increase of independent coffee shops appearing in his neighbourhood. Turns out, interdimensional beings are just obsessed with the perfect cup of java as the rest of us. Now that I think about it, this caffeine related tangent also goes a long way to explaining the existence of hipsters.

M, his friends, acquaintances and enemies, embody so many different things. Daniel Polansky weaves thoughtful bon-mots throughout the ever flowing narrative. He picks apart his characters and he picks apart the elements that make a city what it is, the good and the bad are explored in depth. From the Mass Transit Authority and its labyrinthine subway system, to the city's green spaces and the industrial districts. Millionaires and powerbrokers rub shoulders with the dispossessed and homeless. New York shines, it is a microcosm of humanity. All life is here and much more besides. Just imagine, millions of lives all clamouring for the right just to exist. It's insightful stuff alright.

It is highly likely that some will find Daniel Polansky's literary wordsmithery perhaps a bit too surreal, a bit too odd for their taste. Personally, I adored every single word. The ebb and flow of The Big Apple is the perfect location to follow a character who appears to just drift through his life. New York is as much a character in this novel as M is. This is top notch stuff that melted my brain in a whole host of wonderful ways. The further you journey into M's world the darker things become. I was working under the assumption

that I was reading urban fantasy novel, but there are flashes of the darkest horror that remind me of Clive Barker's early work. In all honesty, it is almost impossible to adequately categorise this book. There is so much going on, and more than enough ambiguity about the events themselves. I suspect different readers are going to have different interpretations of just exactly what is going on.

I have an admission to make, I've never had the opportunity to visit New York. I'm a terrible traveller, but this book makes me want to go there. Daniel Polansky's vision of the city is just so damned evocative. Prior to this novel, there have only ever been two other occasions where an author has managed to pique my interest so vividly*

I'll be honest, I felt mentally drained after reading *A City Dreaming*. I wanted to go lie down in a darkened room with a cold compress atop my brow. There are just so many beautifully expressed ideas and concepts I needed to ruminate over. There was that other part of me though, who wanted nothing more than to head right back to page one and start again all over again. This the sort of fiction I love to discover. Everyone needs to read this so I can talk to them at length about how it made me feel. I actively want to know what other people think. I hope this book prompts all manner of debate. I've read some of Daniel Polansky's other novels. I'll happily admit that I enjoyed them, they were entertaining. *A City Dreaming* beats every single one of those hands down. I foresee awards in the future. Polansky has offered us just the tiniest glimpse of something wonderful. Long may it continue.

Normally my musical suggestions to accompany a novel tends to lean towards the soundtrack/non-vocal end of the spectrum but there is an exception for every rule. For this singular work of fiction I'm breaking with tradition. *A City Dreaming* can best be enjoyed whilst listening to *Who Can I Be Now? [1974-1976]* by David Bowie played on random. As Aladdin Sane once told us – New York's a go-go, and everything tastes right. If that doesn't sum up this book in a single lyric, I don't think anything can.

I'm willing to bet that for many readers *A City Dreaming* is going to be quite different from anything else they have ever read before. My advice – persevere, ponder and ultimately enjoy. Fiction like this comes along far too infrequently. This is a great book that deserves to be hugely successful. I rather suspect Daniel Polansky's latest is in the running for my book of the year.

A City Dreaming is published by Hodder & Stoughton and is available from 6th October. Highly recommended. Please tell me that there will be more? There had better be more, no one likes to see a grown man cry. It ain't pretty.

*The other books were *The Watchers* by Jon Steele and *The Age of Misrule* by Mark Chadbourn in case you're curious.

Jason says

5 Stars

I want thank Netgalley for an early copy in exchange for an honest review.

A City Dreaming by Daniel Polansky is a brave and bold adventure into the depths of dark urban fantasy, or

is it horror, or more likely the new weird. The streets of New York have never been this dark, and this shadow filled, or shifty, and at often times unreliable. This is a city that is on the verge or a precipice hanging between one reality and another. A door that maybe a road. A window that may be a moon. And, a house that may be Hell itself. These are like the things that you will find when reading *A City Dreaming*. As others have said, this is not your New York City.

I confess that I am a huge fan of Daniel Polansky. I have devoured almost everything that he has written. I consider myself a fanboy and I am always looking to see what next is he going to bring to the table. With this book Polansky gives us an incredible amount of things are not what they seem to be. Phantasmical urban fantasy...It could be a new genre. The world building took on a role as a major character along side our protagonist M. Fans of China Mieville will find a lot to like here as it clearly is part of the new weird movement. I also found many parallels to a favorite series of mine and that is Matthew Swift series by Kate Griffin. Polansky does things smartly by showing the city as one would a character without bringing the reader into the mix. You are forced to see things as they come along.

Polansky deserves full marks just from the bold format and structure of *A City Dreaming*. If I haven't said it already Polansky is a gifted writer, a Wordsmith if you will. With this one he has shown me that he is also an architect, able to put words and chapters together that fit in with the feel and the insubstantiality of the City. Polansky gives us M our hero/anti-hero in chapter style that play out like short stories or episodic television. However, this is not a book of short stories that could be published individually, they wouldn't work. Together as this book, they make up a collective that works. This was the coolest thing about this book as you never knew where one would take you from chapter to chapter. There is no linear storyline, and with this world, there shouldn't be.

Finally I have to mention how freaking cool M is as the main character. Like everything about *A City Dreaming*, it is nearly impossible to pin him down with a simple definition. Is he good or bad? Is he neutral? Does M care about others? Or is it the City that drives him? Is M a wizard or mage? A sorcerer or a magician? M blurs the lines between just about everything that makes a hero the one to route for and also that which makes us loathe the bad guys. I really enjoyed his character.

A City Dreaming is a well written dark and dirty new weird urban fantasy that will leave you scratching your head while at the same time it will leave you wanting more.

I want to thank Regan Arts and Netgalley for the ARC in return for an honest review.

Tracey the Lizard Queen says

Full review at: <http://thequeenofblades.blogspot.co.u...>

Urban fantasy, traditionally, gets a bad rep, especially among the holier-than-thou readers. I can say that because I freely admit to being an enormous book snob. I have been conditioned to think 'Urban' is synonymous with awful female leads, creepy shape shifting stalker-boyfriends, and that disheartening phrase paranormal romance. Ugh. The same way I automatically think reality tv stars are all thick. Probably not true

(I really hope so otherwise we are all fucking doomed!).

So you might think I was nervous about this. Well no. I try to always have zero expectations when it comes to books, but I knew this would be good. I mean come on, its Polansky. I've never been disappointed with any of his books. So I had expectations. High ones. So much so that I was saving it for a special occasion (I've had my ARC since July). Then I got sick of everything else and decided to fire up the old Kindle. This plan kinda backfired because Polansky's books always give me gigantic book hangovers. After I finished this I really was sick of everything else.

Okay enough about me and my book snob attitude.

In reality it's a challenge to write a review on this. I'm not sure how to express it in words. It's like trying to share a childhood memory with someone who wasn't there. You can describe as much as you want, but it just doesn't come close. And every time you try it cheapens the whole experience. No fuck off, I am most certainly not going to use gifs! So I will attempt it with words.

Lets start with M. He is brilliantly written. Smart, entertaining, and hysterically funny. There's a 'realness' to him, I could almost believe that somewhere in some alternate reality there is a guy just like M living a life just like his. Everything about him is just right. From his laid-back approach to life, to the little tattoos that occasionally appear on his wrist, to his dubious nighttime habits. All these details come together to form an incredibly vivid picture of this man and his everyday life. It's like 4k Ultra HD for your imagination. (No, I was not high when I read this, I just don't know how else to describe it.)

The supporting cast is just as great, all with their own quirks and excuses. I loved and hated them all, just like I love and hate my own friends, but still accept them for who they are. It can be impossibly difficult for an author to sell characters like these, they are essentially just normal people with a special gift. Besides immortality and the occasional channeling of the elements. They really are no different to the rest of us. Neither good nor evil. Just human.

This brings me to the final character. The city.

I'm still asking myself if this New York is alive. Is it sentient? It's so beautifully done I honestly don't know. Its perfect. I want to visit the real New York and see all the places that inspired this New York. See all its weird inhabitants, experience this bizarre lifestyle, drink coffee, eat bagels, pet hipsters (I'm kidding). Its magical and I want some too!

I really love it.

*I received an e-copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.
