



Un Lun Dun

China Miéville

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What is Un Lun Dun?

It is London through the looking glass, an urban Wonderland of strange delights where all the lost and broken things of London end up . . . and some of its lost and broken people, too—including Brokkenbroll, boss of the broken umbrellas; Obaday Fing, a tailor whose head is an enormous pin-cushion, and an empty milk carton called Curdle. Un Lun Dun is a place where words are alive, a jungle lurks behind the door of an ordinary house, carnivorous giraffes stalk the streets, and a dark cloud dreams of burning the world. It is a city awaiting its hero, whose coming was prophesied long ago, set down for all time in the pages of a talking book.

When twelve-year-old Zanna and her friend Deeba find a secret entrance leading out of London and into this strange city, it seems that the ancient prophecy is coming true at last. But then things begin to go shockingly wrong.

Un Lun Dun Details

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Author : China Miéville

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From Reader Review Un Lun Dun for online ebook

Hazal Çamur says

Okuyal? bir hayli zaman oldu ve ben okudu?umdan beri çok ki?iye bu kitab? tavsiye ettim. Çünkü bu kitap özgün. Çünkü bu kitap ç?lg?n. Çünkü bu kitap fena bir ters kö?e. Her tür basmakal?p macera basama??na her ad?mda bir tekme savuruyor.

China Miéville'in (bildi?im kadar?yla) genç okurlar için yazd??? tek eser. Ancak genç okurlar deyince "sak?n" burun k?v?rmay?n, çünkü Miéville yine her ?eyin sonunda, adeti oldu?u üzere politik duru?unu gösteriyor. Mesaj?n? yine veriyor. Evet, yine siyasi bir mesaj? var.

Yazar?n aç?kça söyledi?i ve kitab?n sonuna da ekledi?i gibi, bu kitap asl?nda Gaiman'?n Yokyer'inden esinlenilme bir eser. Ancak kimi okurlarca Yokyer'i geçen de bir eser.

Klasik "kehanette belirtimi? ki?i gelip bizi kurtaracak" senaryosuyla aç?lan kitap, Londra'n?n bir yans?mas? olan Londrakis (o kelime oyunu yok mu), ya da di?er ad?yla Un Lun Dun'u konu ediyor. Ancak bir ?eyler fena halde ters gidecek ve Miéville, oldukça ba?ar?l? biçimde, o kehanetlerin önceden haber verdi?i kahramanlar? bir güzel tiye alacak. Sonra bamba?ka, uçuk kaç?k ?eyler olacak.

Hiç merak ettiniz mi çöpleriniz nereye gidiyor? Dünyada 7 milyar insan var. Onca insan?n art???, evsel at???, çöpü falan filan ne oluyor? Bir ?eyler oluyor olmal?. Gerçekten. Ve oluyor da!

Kullan?lm?? süt kutular?, k?r?k ?emsiyeler, hayaletler, kehanetler, kehanetleri bar?nd?ran dev konu?an kitaplar, seçilm?ler ve kirlilik son derece özgün bir alt yap?da ?ekilleniyor. Ben böyle deyince o kadar da özgün görünmüyör. Ama okurken etobur zürafalar sizi deh?ete dü?ürecek. Kimyasallarla bir bilince kavu?mu? Duman her ortaya ç?kt??nda sizde bir yer bundan çok rahats?z olacak. Seçilm? kahramana bir haller olacak. Bu s?rada Un Lun Dun'un Londra yans?mas? çarp?kl??nda daha binbir çe?it ?ey göreceksiniz.

Ki?isel favorim, kahraman?n ba?ar?ya ula?mak için ihtiyac? olan o büyük güçlere sahip (tipik) nesneye giden yolda olanlard?. Güzel alay etmi? diyelim .

Bu kitab?n bir ba?ka güzelli?iyse muazzam çevirisi. Kitab?n kendine has çok fazla terimi var ve çevirmenle editör Türkçele?tirme i?inde harika bir i? ba?arm??. Bu alanda benim için en ba?ar?l? eserler aras?nda. Mesela karate yapan çöp kutular?n? "karateneke" diye Türkçele?tirmek çok tatlı? de?il mi yahu? (evet, karate yapan çöp kutular? da mevcut)

Lütfen bu kitab? okuyun . Dahas?, kitap boyunca verdi?i mesaja da gerçekten ihtiyac?m?z var.

Michael says

When I started this book, I thought to myself "oh lord, I hope this isn't another Neverwhere ". I liked Gaiman's novel just fine, but I had in my hand ANOTHER urban fantasy, with a Dave McKean-esque cover, and I didn't think that I could handle it.

Kudos to Mieville for taking my worries and drop-kicking them into the ocean.

There's so much to like about this novel. The protagonist isn't who it seems at first. The level of imagination is astounding (quirky, gentle, but with a definite Mieville flavor). The Norton Juster influence is noticeable but certainly pleasant.

It's just a lot of FUN, without being ponderous or cliche'. I can only really compare it to Clive Barker's Abarat books, which are just as good although pointed in a slightly different, almost parallel direction.

I hope there is no sequel. Let Un Lun Dun be great on its own.

Nandakishore Varma says

Warning: mild spoilers

When it comes to creating weird worlds, there is none to beat China Mieville.

One only has to look at *Perdido Street Station*, where weird beings from various mythologies join together in a strange world to create a socially incendiary cocktail. However, that novel was rather thin on story, and none of the characters were actually likeable. But in this book, which is meant for young readers, Mieville has overcome the failing on the story front: it contains a story rattling along at the pace of a roller-coaster through a fictional universe right out of a surrealist painting.

'UnLondon' is London's twin 'abcity' in a parallel universe. There are portals between the two, and select people can go back and forth, though it is not easy. UnLondon is peopled by strange beings who resemble earthly flora and fauna, but have got some weird anatomical twists (a tailor who uses his body as a pincushion, a bird-man with a birdcage for a head, sentient trash and umbrellas, to name a few), who live in a reasonable parody of human existence in a big city. As the story opens, UnLondon is in danger from the arch-villain - a chemical smog - and only Suzanna (or "Zanna" as she is called) from London can defeat it, according to the 'prophesy' written in the 'book' (which can talk and quote from itself, BTW!). It is all overseen by the 'Propheasers' located on the magic bridge, the 'Pons Absconditus', which can also act as bridge between the two worlds.

Accordingly, Zanna and her friend Deeba cross over into UnLondon. Zanna is celebrated as the "Schwazzy" (a play on the french word *choisi*, "chosen"). She is conducted safely to the Pons Absconditus, where she meets Brokenbroll, the man who is recruiting umbrellas as weapons against the smog. But the man in charge is Benjamin Unstable, a scientist who has crossed over from London, who has reportedly defeated it there taking the help of the 'Armets' (apparently a group of warriors) with the help of the weapon, the 'Klinneract'.

So far so good. But with Zanna's first encounter with the forces of darkness, things start to go wrong terribly. She is laid low with the fog in her lungs, and forced to return to London along with Deeba for her own safety. The book is aghast that it has been proved wrong, but apparently there is nothing to be done. Leaving the fight in the hand of Brokenbroll and Unstable, they return.

However, Deeba is unsatisfied about what happened. She does some research, and discovers something shocking. They have to return to save UnLondon: but Zanna has lost all her memory of the parallel world along with her accident. So Deeba must now do it alone...

...and what follows is Alice in Wonderland on steroids.

The two things I really loved about the novel were (1) the totally surrealist world and (2) the subtle social commentary. Mieville is a communist, and it seems he cannot write a story without commenting on the ills of society. But he does do it in a refreshingly novel way.

In the cause of weirdness, the author has pulled no punches. The world of UnLondon reminded me of the absurd drawings in *Codex Seraphinianus*. Some of it is funny and some of it is frightening (I don't think any kid can read the passage about the carnivorous giraffes without a shudder). But Mieville has followed the golden rule that it is OK for children to be frightened in the cause of a good story, much in the vein of the Grimm Brothers and classic mythical tales - as long as justice is delivered in the end, it does not matter much.

The puns are wonderful. The junk of London that reaches UnLondon and is used in the construction of houses is called 'MOIL' (Mildly Obsolete in London); the broken umbrellas converted to weapons against the smog are called 'unbrellas'; the martial arts expert waste bins, called 'binjas', the parallel cities of Paris, New York and Los Angeles are called Parisn't, No York and Lost Angeles respectively... I could go on and on. It's sheer pleasure.

The social commentary is subtle, but it is very visible. The ghosts, the inhabitants of Wraithtown, ostracised by the 'normal' people as body-snatchers; the 'slaterunners' who live above the street in their 'Roofdom' and refuse to come down; the all-consuming smog which wants to burn everything and consume the resultant smoke; the people who support it so that they can earn their short term benefits, even if the world goes to hell... they all make a pattern. A pattern of the highly stratified society of today, with its haves and have-nots, where the environment is being mercilessly exploited for the pleasure of the select few becomes readily apparent.

But where Mieville really scores is when he inverts the story of the heroic quest so masterfully. Nothing goes as per prophecy; the dark Deeba (she may be of Indian origin, from the clues Mieville leaves around) takes over from the blonde Zanna, the chosen one; the tasks of the quests are hilariously screwed up; and in the end, the victory comes through a pun on a supposedly typographical error in the book of prophecy. To say anything further would be a spoiler!

I loved this tale; and also, the illustrations provided by the author himself. They are rather like Tenniel's pictures for Alice in Wonderland.

Ivan says

A year late review but my impressions didn't fade, that is why this book is on my favorites shelf. I read Mieville's book recently, and ended thinking about his other works and decided to write something about this book too. Of course one might argue that I am doing it only because if I didn't I would be cleaning house, getting ready for work and other adult stuff I avoid doing. Yeah I suck at being adult.

If you haven't read Mieville's books before I would describe Un Lun Dun as Alice in Neverwhere. If you have read his books you know it will be lot weirder than that. This book is targeted at younger audience so

Mieville's usual language is toned down. No need for constant use of dictionary. Of course just because it's children's book it doesn't mean it lacks Mieville's edge. It might start as classical cliched story in weird setting but you soon find out that normal and usual is not way Mieville does things. This is cleaver book, in a way most Mieville's books are, that plays with quest, chosen one and sidekick tropes and twists them. Protagonist of this books is also not clueless and naive like most children's book protagonist, she is rather smart and resourceful and bit crude and not very subtle young girl. It's hard not to love her. I also loved the illustrations.

Whether you are child or adult *Un Lun Dun* is place worth visiting and possibly best place to start if you are interested in strange works of China Mieville.

Susan says

A poor man's *Neverwhere*. I'll admit that I stopped reading after 115 pages.

I read several glowing reviews of this, saying it was going to rescue us in this, the time of no-more-harry-potter. And lookee! It has female protagonists! But no. A typical adventure/sci-fi premise: someone from our world gets transported to a different world and must save something/do a quest.

a) It is, at least in the first 115 pages, entirely plot-driven. I know nothing about what separates the two main characters from one another--they're both young girls from London, and other than physical differences, they talk alike and seem to think alike. The other characters are defined for you; they do not have characters and backstory, they just are. Sometimes their "properties" and abilities are defined, but that's about it. The 115 pages I read were propelled entirely by one plot point after another. One of the great things about *The Golden Compass* series is that the characters are so rich and familiar--there is love and compassion and yearning--those are what drives the narrative.

b) Sadly, I think this book suffers from "sci-fi syndrome". Given that I have no personalities to sink my teeth into, I need to be able to grab onto some part of this world. In many sci-fi books--and this is no exception--the author is so busy cleverly creating new creatures, new worlds, and new vocabularies, that they don't notice they've given readers a whole lot of homework. When a paragraph contains 5-6 made up words describing scenery, characters, or the quest, the reader (me) gets bogged down. I felt like I was slogging through a foreign language.

Neil Gaimen's Neverwhere treads similar territory--London, but not--and does it in a much more character-driven, riveting, terrifying way. If you're looking for an un-London experience, go read that instead.

mark monday says

from English to Tagalog to Hungarian to Esperanto to Chinese... and back to English again!*

It is quite a challenge in front of me, I also played its ideas. Children's Literature in the tradition of *Alice in Wonderland*, but not for me. I do not usually a fan of fun and good times and random stupidity, I'm not really a fan of word games. I like the rules and logic of literature and children's literature is no exception. Almost stimulate me whiny, uninteresting characters. It really grated. But then I began to grow novels. This is not

due to the energetic "fun" on the screen - this is due to the obvious intellectual authors. A moment later, his idea really started to penetrate. They got under my skin, I like that. Despite the antipathy witticisms, continuous commentary language, and more seductive. In this book the nature and power of words, how they are formed and evolve, flexibility and a variety of messages, then you can include some challenging ideas. Oh, Miéville, but convinced. Opposite.

"The thing is," Deeba said, eyeing Mr. Speaker, "you could only make words do what you want if it was just you deciding what they mean. But it isn't. It's everyone else, too. Which means you might *want* to give them orders, but you aren't in control. No one is."

I really like: half ghost boy half. There Nice description. However, accidentally hitting my dear and courageous six legged baby named Bear utterling Diskin (toilet drowned in the river!) And a permanent bus driver Rosa (starve yourself trapped in another dimension of the room!) expected death brutal death. .. I can not say I did not see it appreciate children's book. Death was no accident and death of children's literature in places, but I think there must be some care and attention when it happens. These deaths feel cheap. Fortunately, despite the anger, what happened to the two, has been a very cute Curdle, development distract me, warm my heart.

thank you, Google Translate!

Megan Baxter says

What is it about London that makes it the prime place to create another world, not hidden in the shadows, but accessible through secret passageways that tend to close tight behind those who stumble in? Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* jumps to mind, which China Mieville (I don't know how to do the accents!) credits as an inspiration, and now *Un Lun Dun*.

Although I guess the other example that I can think of, J. Michael Straczynski's *Midnight Nation*, is set in the States. Never mind. And in this book, UnLondon isn't the only city hidden behind another city. There's Parisn't, for example. And Lost Angeles.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the recent changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Robert says

I am not sure what to make of this book or its author.

Considerable time is spent attacking cliches of the fantasy genre, yet Mieville's Unlondon is acknowledged as derivative of Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. Isn't being obviously derivative of your predecessors both a cliche and the worst crime of the fantasy genre? (I give credit for open admission of the debt, though.)

One of the cliches attacked is that of the the Protagonist with a Heroic Destiny (PHD). Fairy Nuff, but you can see the attack coming from about page 5 and what form it is going to take: a Protagonist Switch (PS). Now for me, at least, the PS is a far worse literary crime than dragging out the PHD one more time. An

author can only get away with a PS in a Greek Tragedy (or likeness there-of e.g. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar). Un Lun Dun is not a Greek Tragedy - the Initial Protagonist doesn't die horribly.

There are all sorts of daft elements in the book, such as the Unbrellas that are created when umbrellas are broken or the pet milk carton so it would be tempting to categorise the book as a spoof on the fantasy genre - but spoofs at least try to be continually funny. Un Lun Dun does not; there are funny incidents and funny puns (Binjas?!) but the humour is sporadic - so this is not Terry Pratchett's Disc World, either. Much of the time it wants to be a straightforward fantasy adventure. Eoin Colfer and Partick Landy have successfully created imaginative, humourous fantasies that are also gripping - but they have a uniform tone - this does not. It's not really comic relief, either - it's just random switches of mood.

It's difficult to accept an author tacitly criticising his peers' use of cliche when he can't manage proper plot construction and use of tone to match situation and intensify reader involvement. Mieville has tremendous imaginative invention but he is not in control of his art.

Azumi says

Cada vez que hago una reseña de un libro de China Mieville, lo sé, me repito como el ajo. Y es que creo que nunca dejará de sorprenderme con su imaginación, con los mundos que crea y las criaturas que se saca de la manga, como ventanas araña, Jirafas carnívoras, un tetrabrik de leche muy achuchable o cubos de basura ninja.

Este tiene un tono muy juvenil y me ha recordado mucho a *Neverwhere*. Es una historia sencilla y con un final muy abierto y aunque no va a ser de mis favoritos su lectura ha valido la pena.

He echado de menos una edición ilustrada, hubiese quedado chulísima y se hubiese ganado una estrella más.

Stephen says

Let me begin this sadly negative review by saying that I think China Mieville is one of the BEST writers working today. To put it simply...he is THE MAN!! Unfortunately, and it pains me to say, he is THE MAN in this case that wrote a really shitty book. It happens to the best of artists at some point in their career. Al Pacino did *Author, Author*, Steven Spielberg did *Always* and even Will Ferrell did *Bewitched*. Well, I must report that this is Mr. Mieville's *Ishtar*, sans Dustin Hoffman and Warren Beatty.

Now I don't intend to turn this into a rant of any kind. I just didn't like the book. Nothing in it particularly offended me, though I will say that I was a little put off by the ~~less then subtle~~ "sledge-hammer" approach Mieville took with the central environmental theme of the story.

BRIEF PLOT SUMMARY:

Two young girls, Zanna and Deeba, begin to notice strange occurrences and eventually find their way into a bizzaro version of London (the title being an alternative spelling of UnLondon). This version of London is populated by strange people and objects (most of them animate) that have been discarded from London as

trash, rubbish or obsolete technology. Against this backdrop, Mieville slices, dices and deconstructs the usual YA fantasy tropes of “young child pulled into alternate world where they are destined by fate to dispatch a great evil and save the day.”

To my surprise, I found nothing in the book that I really liked. Even Mieville’s trademark wordsmithing was absent which I found a huge disappointment. Granted, as a YA book, the vocabulary employed might have required a scale-down, but I didn’t find any of the lush, crisp, hip prose that I have come to expect from him. Add to that my irritation with the environmental message being applied hard enough to risk concussion and I was left feeling empty and a tad grumpy at the end.

Thus, I figured if Mr. Mieville can bathe in the effusive praise that I have heaped upon him for the towering greatness of books like *Perdido Street Station* and *The Scar*, then he can certainly take a well-deserved literary scolding for shitting between two covers, wiping his name on the cover and flushing it into the public eye.

By the way, I think the environmental message could have easily been delivered with a few nice ads:

or

Bottom-line: I didn’t like it. It disappointed me. It made me sad and cranky. However, I am going to be reading both *The City & The City* and *Kraken* and soon and CANNOT wait for *Embassytown* and I believe that China Mieville’s place on my list of one of the BEST in the business will remain secure. I will simply consider this a speed-bump. 1.5 Stars.

Trin says

A sort of kiddie *Neverwhere* (and Miéville does indeed credit Neil Gaiman in the intro), this is one of those books that’s packed with cleverness—and really, *really* aware of it. I like some of Miéville’s attempts to turn the typical quest-y fantasy on its ear—The Chosen One turns out to be fairly useless! The “tasks” one must complete to defeat the bad guy are highly skippable!—but *UnLondon* never felt like a real place to me, or its denizens real people. I’m still really not sure who Deeba was supposed to be—she was just the girl who was in this story. (And whose relationship with grammar was most puzzling—why is she portrayed as wildly articulate and proper one minute, and all dialect-y the next?) Likewise, the journey from one look! look! how clever! bit of *UnLondon* to the next didn’t help build a portrait of the character of the city—it just felt self-conscious.

I read *Neverwhere* when I was eleven or twelve, and wasn’t wildly traumatized by it—quite the opposite, in fact. I think kids are much better off just reading that. (Though I did like Miéville’s illustrations.)

j says

For the second book in a row, China Miéville's writing has reminded me of nothing so much as one of Stefon's drug-fueled gay fantasies:

UnLondon's hottest club is Smog. This place has everything: naked ghosts, balloon zombies, sentient pollution, buses with lizard feet, spider windows, ninja R2D2s. You know that thing where a trash can has been trained in the martial arts?

This year it was my goal to read 100 books. Which I have accomplished with several weeks to spare!

Number one, read in January, was China Miéville's *The City & the City*, a new weird fantasy about two cities that are like mirror images of one another and connected in mysterious ways. Number 100, which I finished just yesterday, was China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun*, a new weird fantasy about two cities that are like mirror images of one another and connected in mysterious ways.

Hmmm. That's... weird. And also *totally unintentional*. My mind: blown.

Of course, what I should do is read 20 more books before the end of the year (quick, lend me your novellas!) so that China's *Kraken*, which was book number 60, can sit at the halfway mark, because if you think about it, *The City & the City* + *Kraken* = *Un Lun Dun* (amirite, 12 people reading this who have read all three of those books?).

So, echoing statements in Michael's most excellent review, I kind of don't have a lot to say about *Un Lun Dun* that I didn't say in my review of *Kraken* (take a look; there are pictures of cats!). This one is just as jam-packed with absurdities, and just as much fun because of it. Nay, more fun, as this volume is *illustrated by the author*, which is a big help because China's brain on a normal day is like my brain after I spend an hour painting the inside of a garbage bag while sealed inside of it (see, I can't even come up with a worthy simile).

Like *Kraken*, *Un Lun Dun* is a little deficient in terms of characters and particularly story, which is a pastiche of Niel Gaiman, *Alice in Wonderland* and an '80s Jim Henson movie. But he is aiming for the YA crowd this time, and there is a classic underdog-on-a-quest event-event-event structure that made me ache to go back in time and shove the book into the hands of my 11-year-old self, so I can't complain too much that I'm no longer a pre-teen. That said, I wonder if any kids have actually read this because it doesn't have any dorky wizards or lame vampires in it. Also I think reading this at 11 would have broken my brain.

Michael says

The thing I DON'T like about reviewing books from my very favorite authors is that I always find myself praising the same things like a broken record. So, by the time I'm writing a fourth review for an author, I

barely talk about the book at all, and instead keep myself entertained by writing something ridiculous. (See my review of Blood Meridian, which I would link to if I weren't technologically handicapped.)

So let's get the boring part out of the way right now: in this book, Mieville is every bit as inventive as usual, with fantastical ideas lying all over the place like you're wandering a junk shop in the Twilight Zone. His prose is always terrific, and this book is no exception. The characters aren't as developed as they were in The Scar or Perdido Street Station, but they're stronger than the characters in The City and The City.

That's my review of Un Lun Dun. Now we're gonna talk about what you REALLY want to hear about: cage matches. First up is the middleweight match between Joe Abercrombie and R. Scott Bakker for the New Gritty Fantasy Belt. Our second match will be Jeff Vandermeer and China Mieville, battling for that New Weird Belt. Then, in a totally politically incorrect move, we have a match for the Epic Belt between George R R Martin and zombie Robert Jordan.

Match 1

Bakker is in the red corner, looking pale, devilish and Canadian. Joe Abercrombie is bouncing, his fists up, looking like he was out too late last night at the pub.

Bakker rushes in, swinging his big badass barbarian character with all he's worth. Abercrombie is too quick, and, using his equally-nuanced barbarian that actually has a complete character arc, pitches Bakker across the ring. Bakker, gritty as always, tries to climb to his feet. Abercrombie, not quite matching Bakker's grit, tries to elbow-drop Bakker and misses, rolling around and clutching his arm.

Bakker climbs to the top of the ropes and, flying through the air with his excellent war combat scenes ready to crush Abercrombie, suddenly realizes that Abercrombie's combat scenes move too quickly for him! Now, it's Abercrombie who is rolling out of the way, and Bakker is on his face again. Abercrombie stands up and starts stomping the back of Bakker's head with the stark and grim conclusion of The First Law Trilogy, knowing Bakker doesn't have any resolution to defend himself with...

But, oh, snap! Scott Lynch is running in from the sidelines with a chair! He's coming, he's coming, he's...oh, he made a strong start, but now he just stopped and unfolded the chair, sitting down in it.

Abercrombie has Bakker pinned....one, two, three! This match is over, Abercrombie jumping up and down and shouting something cockney.

Match 2

Jeff Vandermeer is in the red corner, looking small and pear-shaped in comparison to the buff, pierced and bald Mieville in the blue corner. Mieville lets out a fierce war cry, rushing in with Perdido Street Station's melding of sci fi and fantasy, brutally knocking Vandermeer against the post. Jeff Vandermeer raises gracefully to his feet and pommels Mieville about the chest and neck with a clever contrast of fantastic elements in City of Saints and Madmen. Mieville laughs and shouts, "Bullocks, little man! I've got TWO cities in one title!" Then he headbutts Vandermeer back to the mat purely on the strength of The Scar.

Vandermeer isn't even moving! Uh, oh, now Mieville is stomping again and again on Vandermeer's chest with a barrage of novels and novels and novels in every conceivable genre...OH, NO, it's The Sex & The City & The City! It's UnLondon Calling, his spoken word punk poetry album! It's 3:10 to Perdido Street Station, a fantasy western musical!

Vandermeer is dead! Mieville is drinking his blood! Where did this guy come from? Is he human? Well, either way, he's still the New Weird Champion.

Match 3

Martin is in the red corner, looking like Gimli the dwarf, his jolly beard sitting upon his pot belly, which shakes when he laughs like a bowl full of jelly. Zombie Jordan is walking slowly across the mat, generating some energy with Conan spinoff novels. He's moving in..slowly...slowly...

Martin doesn't look like he knows where he is or what he's doing! Ohmigod, he's writing mediocre science fiction! He's spending too much time at cons! Doesn't he know this is the Epic Fantasy Belt on the line? What's going to happen?

Jordan attacks with his vicious spin-kicking Eye of the World! It's a weak strike, but Martin's just taking it! Oh, The Great Hunt bodyslam! Martin's just lying there, writing episodes of "Beauty and the Beast" and "The Twilight Zone"! What's wrong with him? He's not even moving! Another dropkick from Jordan! He's grabbed Martin's beard and he's swinging him around by it! He's tossed him into the ropes, and now, with book 5 in the series, Jordan's still drubbing him about the face and neck but can't seem to finish this thing off! He's just going on and on redundantly!

Out of nowhere, Martin knees Jordan right in the magical items! Oh, he's clubbing him with A Game of Thrones again and again! Jordan doesn't know where he is! He's writing a whole book without including the protagonist! What on earth is he thinking?

A Storm of Swords! A Feast For Crows! What's Martin doing? He has zombie Jordan on the mat, almost re-deaded, and now he's just running around the ring and editing collections!

18 years pass...

Finally, Martin is climbing up to the top rope, about to premier his new signature move, The Dance With Dragons! Here it comes...Oh, no. Martin had a heart attack and has fallen to the mat, motionless. Neither one of them is moving. This can't be happening! Oh, they're putting the Epic Fantasy Belt back in Tolkien's coffin! I never saw that one coming.

Tony says

I hated this book to start with, which is to say the first third or so. However, since I was reading it for work, I stuck with it, and finally came around to the novel.

My specific gripes with the first third are that it's clichéd, the characters lack distinction, and it falls into the classic sci-fi/fantasy trap of deluging the readers with unfamiliar and hard to describe details, thereby alienating them from the workings of plot and character. Instead of coming off as unique and charming, instead the prose avows itself to being self satisfied and quirky.

I think that this is intentional (mild spoiler warning ahead) in so far as there are clichéd 'chosen one saving a fantastical land' plot points that are deliberately dismantled and examined by Mieville. To do this, he seems to use the first third to make the reader believe that they're in for another 300 pages of the same old stuff. Bookish, clever young child is chosen by fate to save a quirky and magical land by the power of friendship, wit, and bravery. Plot points will include a few close (but ultimately costless) scrapes with danger, some hackneyed romance, friends turned enemies, enemies turned friend.

However, the direction that the last 2/3rds of the book take steer away from this - instead opting into fresher territory. There is actually danger - many main characters either lose something important, or die outright. Fate plays almost no role in the plot - instead the character's own abilities and personality are what gets her

through tough spots. There are a few predictable changes in allegiance, but these are offset with some well done twists that I honestly didn't see coming. Altogether, the novel accomplishes what it seems the author intended; a reaction and deconstruction of the Narnia/Spiderwick/Potter formula.

There are still flaws that hang heavily on the enjoyment of the story. The main character isn't really too fleshed out beyond being quick witted, plucky, and brave. I didn't really have a firm image of her in my mind, and I don't think I could describe her personality beyond clichés of the genre, and the content of the plot. She works to move the story along, but doesn't really seem to do much else.

The side characters are slightly more interesting, but seem to have little depth beyond their quirky appearance. They also flit in and out of the story so frequently that I really didn't feel much investment in them.

The odd world of UnLondon is fascinating, and captivating, but only after one has time to become accustomed to it (and only after the plot starts to get interesting).

The chapters and scenes are written at an ADD pace, which left me a bit disoriented. Often times chapter breaks are used where scene breaks would work better.

These flaws are offset by the great imaginative abilities of Mieville. The puns are, admittedly, clever, the imagery gets good towards the middle of the story, and I found myself wanting to read more of the Abcity universe.

The illustrations are also a nice touch: supplementing the difficult task of describing the otherworldly, without becoming a crutch for the writer (and very well drawn to boot).

The plot of the last half of the book is riveting, has several great twists which lead to an exciting climax.

In its own way the novel manages to offset its flaws, and to become a rewarding read overall - but to get to this point you have to put up with a lot of dross. Like I said, if not for being required to read this for work, I would've put it down before it ever got good.

The main problem, honestly, seems to be the editing. I think that the work could've benefited from more time under the knife to focus the early chapters of the book, and to perfect the later.

Catie says

Wow. How do I describe this book? It's on the one hand a bit of an ode to all of the quest based, parallel world containing fantasies that have come before: The Wizard of Oz, Narnia, Mary Poppins, Alice in Wonderland, most of Neil Gaiman's catalogue, hell even Harry Potter. On the other hand, it undermines the typical tenets of these books in a way that's a bit of a fuck you to the whole genre. It also manages to transcend both of these things and become a decent quest based, parallel world containing fantasy itself. It's fun, playful, and sometimes just downright silly. I wish that I could morph into Will Ferrell as James Lipton right now and declare it *delightful*. There are a few things that I could have done without, but for the most part I really enjoyed this book.

It all starts when Susanna “Zanna” and her BFF Deeba notice a few strange things around their estate: A fox looks at them gravely, Zanna’s face appears in a cloud, a flattering graffiti proclaims “Zanna For Ever!,” and odd people start recognizing Zanna around the town and calling her “Shwazzy.” One night Zanna and Deeba follow a spying broken ~~umbrella~~ umbrella and discover a way into London’s “abcity” – Unlondon. Soon Zanna is discovering that she’s a hero of great prophecy, destined to save Unlondon from a powerful enemy. But everything gets turned on its ear when Zanna falls to the enemy and loses her memory. Now it’s up to the Unheroes to save the day.

The city of Unlondon is wonderfully described in all its breathtaking, peculiar detail. It’s a feast for the imagination...the kind of feast where there are about twelve different utensils that you’ve never seen before, and every course is comprised of something that you didn’t even know could be classified as a food. There are so many parts of the city that I fell in love with: the donut sun, the book of prophecies (who was written by idiots), the killer giraffes, the binjas, the extreme librarians, the utterlings, CURDLE! Some of the inanimate objects in this book have more personality than human characters I’ve spent time with. But there were a few times that I felt like it was just a bit...ham-fisted. Like the character that is essentially a bunch of fish trapped in a diving suit named...Skool. Get it? Skool!

Or the main villain: I was intrigued by his insatiable drive to consume more and more information, but I couldn’t help the feeling that I was essentially reading a book starring the villain of the silly (but environmentally conscious!) nineties animated film, Ferngully: the Last Rainforest. Seriously, the villain is this guy:

I also really don’t love the Ungun. I absolutely adore everytime Deeba goes against “the rules” by bypassing the prophecies or outwitting some of the bad guys. But the Ungun just seems like such a magical panacea of a weapon. I don’t like easy solutions in fantasy novels, and I wish that this was one of the tenets that he had chosen to subvert in this book.

It’s really hard to know who to recommend this book for. I think that a subset of the reading population will think that it’s the best thing since sliced bread. Another set will think that it’s absolutely crazytrain. I guess if you enjoy bizarre/absurd fantasy and like playing with words, I would say give this a try.

Perfect Musical Pairing

Radiohead – Subterranean Homesick Alien

Woohoo, I can stick with the same artist!

When I recently read The City & The City, it struck me as dense and hard to get into, but it really grew on me and I love the big ideas it contains. This book is like a much younger, more accessible, but also more shallow version of that book (if you subtract a noir mystery and add in a fantasy funhouse mirror). Radiohead’s Ok Computer is also much more accessible and popular than some of their later albums. This song is about feeling bored and restless with your surroundings – so much so that you want anything to happen, even something drastic.

Also seen on The Readventurer.

Fuchsia Groan says

Quizás quien sea ya lector de Miéville y se encuentre con esta obra pueda salir de la experiencia un poco decepcionado, y es que para leer *Un Lun Dun* creo que conviene cambiar un poco el chip.

No es una de sus abrumadoras novelas, como *La estación de la calle Perdido*, *La Cicatriz*, *Embassytown*, *La ciudad y la ciudad*... pero aunque sea bastante diferente, sí encontramos aquí muchas muestras de su imaginación desbordante, y los momentos en que describe este nuevo mundo son lo mejor de la novela: Alondres, los pasaguas, los pronúnditos, las Viudanas Negras... solo por esto es ya una obra recomendable y altamente disfrutable. Un poco menos llamativos me han parecido los personajes, exceptuando quizás a la protagonista, ya que aunque todos son grandes ideas, no son del todo memorables.

Es lo que es: una buena novela juvenil, de aventuras, original y entretenida, con buen ritmo, capítulos cortos, un importante trasfondo ecologista, con ecos de autores como Lewis Carroll y su *Alicia* o de Walter Moers. Fue ganadora del Locus a mejor novela Young Adult.

El original está ilustrado por el propio autor, con pequeños dibujos intercalados en el texto, pero en la edición de Oz en castellano los han eliminado de un plumazo.

Amber says

What do you get if you cross one of Hyao Miyazaki's animated films with Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, the imagination of Clive Barker, and *Alice in Wonderland*? You get this book: *Un Lun Dun* by China Mieville. When young friends Zanna and Deeba follow a broken umbrella down to a sewer with a steering wheel, they turn it and enter the world of *Un Lun Dun*. *Un Lun Dun* (or *UnLondon*) is an urban wonderland where things that are thrown away in regular london are found and given a new purpose there. Upon entering the strange new land, Zanna and Deeba encounter a variety of strange creatures from an animated milk carton who acts like a puppy, ghosts, carnivorous giraffes, a man who when he speaks creates his own creatures, a flying british bus, garbage can ninjas, and a whole lot of other creatures who believe that Zanna is the one to save them from the dreaded smog. Can the friends save this new land from the smog? Read on to find out.

I thought this story was wild. The illustrations were incredible as well. Fans of Neil Gaiman, Clive Barker, and Hyao Miyazaki will enjoy this Young adult whimsical fantasy tale! I recommend this book to all ages. Be sure to check this book out. You'll enjoy it. This book is available wherever books are sold and at your local library.

Jonathan Peto says

As I came to the end of *Un Lun Dun*, I decided that one of my New Year's resolutions should be to make this story into a script for an animation movie. Maybe I'll Google it and see if anyone owns the rights. It would be a lot of fun, I think, to pare this novel's fantastical events, curious assortment of characters, and diverse settings into a two-hour movie. Not that I'm a movie-maker, I'm just saying there would be a lot to work with.

The story is a wonderful adventure written for children and adults. It manages a large, rotating cast of individuals questing together and includes tight, hopeless situations where the heroes scramble for allies in a place where few people/creatures are what they appear to be. Solutions are always fun and always satisfying, "realistic", mind-blowing and/or witty. The lead is a wonderful, likeable, kick-ass teenage girl who should please anyone looking for a strong female protagonist whose confidence and determination grows immensely.

Animators would have a blast portraying this thing. It would certainly not be a Pixar product though. Mieville's fantasy is not inspired by Tolkien. It's more in Lewis Carroll's wacky vein, which would normally not be a selling point for me but I thoroughly enjoyed what he did here. Neil Gaiman gets a nod and should, but I was relieved that Mieville's *Un Lun Dun* was very different than the setting in Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. I am shocked - shocked! - that anyone would claim Mieville cut it too close.

The narrative questions authority hilariously, not only in the form of powerful individuals but written prophesies too. I welcome this in children's books and I don't mind saying that you should too.

I've noticed some disappointment among adult readers over this one. WTF. Glad I read it first then. I'm very interested in reading more of his work. I may even start with his first, *King Rat*, under the assumption I'll eventually read them all. The marketing department must be furious with Mieville. As far as I know, his other books are aimed at adults. I'm not sure how much this book has penetrated the children's market but it deserves a place, not for lower elementary, but definitely advanced readers in upper elementary and beyond. I'm going to share it with my oldest soon. And the world once my script is turned into a movie.

Phrynnne says

One star off for making this too long Mr Mielville. Towards the end I felt tired and just wanted it to finish despite the fact that I did enjoy the book. The best books are the ones that finish and leave you wanting more. This did not do that! In many ways I was reminded of reading *The Golden Compass* which meandered along from one danger to another in similar fashion to the point where danger became tedious instead of suspenseful.

Anyway enough of what I did not like and more about what I did. I always love China Miéville's imagination and the fantastic things he does with his worlds. In this book *Un Lun Dun* is a different kind of London containing places such as Webminster Abby (covered in webs and the home of a kind of spider). As with many young adult books (and this one is for the younger end of that category) the main characters are children who are smarter than the nasty grown ups who are out to get them. That was all good though and Reeba was a very smart, tough young lady.

Not the author's best book but still very enjoyable and I bet he had an absolute ball writing it:)

Nataliya says

If (for whatever strange reason) you ever wondered what a **love child of "Alice in Wonderland" and Gaiman's "Neverwhere"** would look like if it were raised by the Master of Weird - well, say hello to *Un Lun Dun*.

'I know you're not a sidekick.'

'No one is!' Deeba shouted. 'That's no way to talk about anyone! To say they're just hangers-on

to someone more important.'

This is an ode to all the sidekicks out there, those who were 'destined' to be on the sidelines, to be the 'funny one' or 'brainy one' or 'whatever one' to the Chosen One. Don't you hate that trope? I do. I know that in a fantasy setting I'd surely be the sidekick. I do not love that designation, and, apparently, neither does China Miéville. And while he is busy subverting that ages-old trope, he decides to overturn a few more genre clichés (*the quests, the prophesies, all that*), making it a delightful, fresh read.

'If we planned ahead, sent a few messages', Obaday went on, 'maybe got a gnostechnician to check the travel reports on the undernet, stayed each night with friends in safe places in whatever borough we reached then it would be perfectly safe. Well, reasonably safe. Safe-esque. But, yes, it would be dangerous if we didn't think ahead, and we took a wrong turning into Wraithtown, or met some scratchmonkeys or a building with house-rabies, or, lord help us, if we ran into the giraffes.'

The **city-protagonist** that CM excels at creating is the titular UnLondon, the '**abcity**' (just like "*Parisn't, or No York, or Helsunki, or Lost Angeles, or Sans Francisco, or Hong Gone, or Romeless*") that can (of course!) be entered by '*booksteps*' and '*storyladders*', with the parallels to the 'regular' world in the same way as "*Alice in Wonderland*" has parallels to it.

Miéville lets his boundless imagination run wild. The surreal world of the abcity is fantastic and neatly crafted - *the extreme librarians, umbrellas, the living words, carnivorous giraffes, binjas, Black Windows in Westminster Abbey, Puzzleborough, donut-shaped UnSun, bus conductors that also conduct electricity, and even what to me looks like a version of Perdido Street Station...* The details are fascinating, the world-building, as usual, mind-boggling. The world that would be amazing and captivating to the eyes of a child and an adult alike - but still, in true Miéville fashion, it has its ugly sides. **And now it is threatened and is in need of the (Un)Chosen one.**

"In the streets of UnLondon, a group of a girl, a half-ghost, a talking book, a piece of rubbish, and two living words was unusual, but not very."

This book won its way into my heart because of its delightful bizarre weirdness, and **stayed in my heart because of its 'sidekick', Deeba Resham.** The funny, brash, not particularly sophisticated, snarky young girl with bad grammar, good heart, street-smarts, stubbornness and determination enough for a whole city, with an (Un-)milk carton Curdle as a pet, with complete disregard for tropes and destiny and prophecies and all that fluff. **TEAM DEEBA!** is the next t-shirt I'm investing in. Seriously.

As for the villain of *Un Lun Dun* - well, some can call it comical, some - heavy-handed environmentalist message. I found it **very creepy**, especially after wondering over to Wikipedia to read about the London Great Smog of 1952. With all the recent environmental disasters all over the world, (view spoiler). *Thanks to my very liberal undergraduate education, I tend to take environmental message seriously, even though I do stop short of hugging trees.* And given the enormity of threat to UnLondon, I'm willing to forgive a very *deux-ex-machina* conflict resolution - without it, I don't see a way to even a remotedly happy ending.

Miéville wanted to create a modern-day "Alice in Wonderland", to write a fully immersing world for young readers. And, as I came to expect from this incredibly gifted man, he succeeded. I loved it to pieces, and I wish I could go back in time and hand it to my younger self. It is like a younger, less corrupted and more wide-eyed cousin of "Perdido Street Station" (no bug sex in this one, sorry). It's weird to the *nth* degree, surreal, captivating, stretching imagination to the depths his Chinaness has perfected by now. And with all that, it is refreshingly modern and free of sentimentality and nostalgia for childhood (way too common in books with young protagonists). **Please do not be fooled by the "YA" designation** - it easily avoids the present-day YA tropes. *You will NOT come across insta-love or damsel-in-distress or the too-special-for-her-own-good nonsense here, no ma'am.*

Miéville appropriately tones down his dictionary-like baroque language for the younger audience (even though I still consulted a dictionary on a few occasions). Far from disappointed, I was actually happy to see that his prose is just as captivating and engrossing even without his trademark thesaurus-like style. It is simply good, no matter how he chooses to write it.
Oh, and did I mention he illustrated this book, too? Is there **anything** that man cannot do? If I ever meet him, I will be completely awestruck and speechless.

I adored this book. **Actually, it's only the second Miéville that I easily and without hesitation give 5 stars to** (and I'm actually quite surprised to see that it's not a Goodreads fan favorite). I will add it to the to-read pile for my (future, hypothetical) daughter and add Deeba Resham to the imaginary list of literary heroines the above-mentioned daughter should be having sleepovers with.

In front of 'CHOSEN ONE ROOLZ!' someone had added 'UN-'.

'Look at that,' she said, delighted. 'It's accurate now'.
