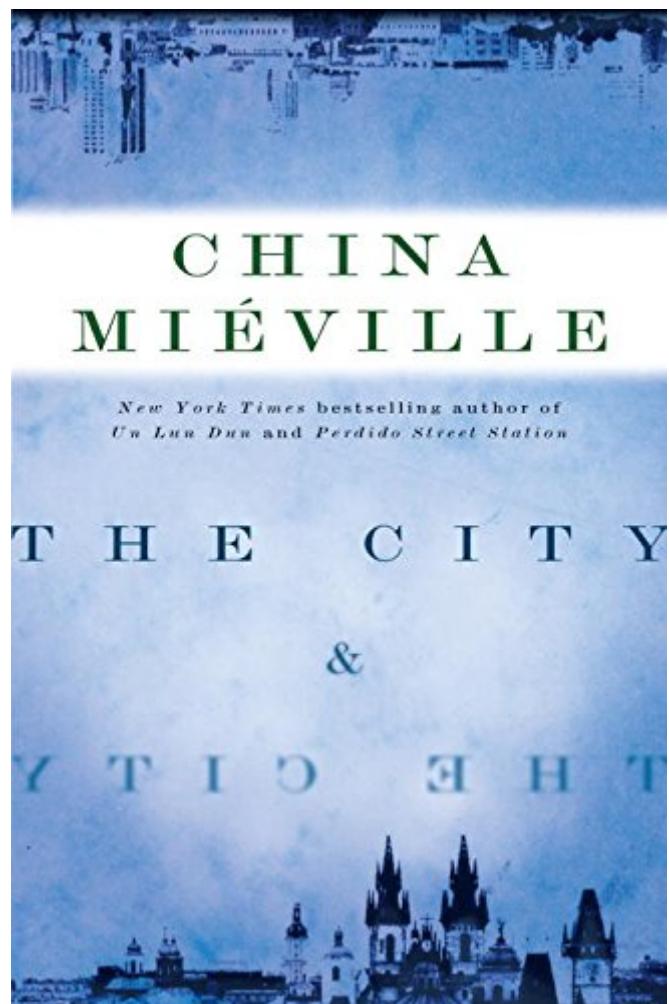


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The City & The City



Synopsis

BONUS: This edition contains a The City & The City discussion guide and excerpts from China Miéville's Kraken and Embassytown. NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, THE SEATTLE TIMES, AND PUBLISHERS WEEKLY. When a murdered woman is found in the city of Beszel, somewhere at the edge of Europe, it looks to be a routine case for Inspector Tyador Borló of the Extreme Crime Squad. To investigate, Borló must travel from the decaying Beszel to its equal, rival, and intimate neighbor, the vibrant city of Ul Qoma. But this is a border crossing like no other, a journey as psychic as it is physical, a seeing of the unseen. With Ul Qoman detective Qussim Dhatt, Borló is enmeshed in a sordid underworld of nationalists intent on destroying their neighboring city, and unificationists who dream of dissolving the two into one. As the detectives uncover the dead woman's secrets, they begin to suspect a truth that could cost them more than their lives. What stands against them are murderous powers in Beszel and in Ul Qoma: and, most terrifying of all, that which lies between these two cities.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My first by China Mieville, and well worth it. The City & The City tells the story of a murder

investigation in a city divided despite the two sides living side by side, intertwined with each other. It is interesting to speculate what this metaphorically might represent, but the only hints Mieville gives are references to Foucault, Lacan and Zizek early on. In other words, it represents us. The people of the two cities, Bes el and Ul Qoma, are raised from the cradle to "un-see" the other city, knowing instinctively what not to notice and what not to allow into consciousness. The authority beyond any other authority is Breach, which can make you disappear if you directly violate these rules of consciousness. Our hero, inspector Tyador Borlu, gets drawn into a murder with obvious political overtones. Despite wishing to turn it over to Breach, he must follow the clues with the help of some daring but not entirely willing collaborators, and even finds himself assisting the Ul Qoma police, where he must see what he normally un-sees, and vice-versa. There are hints of dark conspiracy and evidence of secret manipulation, and they do amount to a suspenseful hunt and a resolution full of surprises. I found myself following a different set of clues as to what Mieville was actually suggesting about the world, but never felt that they added up to a worldview or a tidy commentary on any particular issue. I liked the resolution, and it did feel rather "meta" in that the politics of the division turned out to be . . . oh, all right, I won't spoil it. Suffice it to say some will feel the resolution is a letdown, but if you like Zizek and Eco, its common sense interpretation will feel right. Nobody is a great hero, nobody is a great villain, people are part of systems and yet have some scope for thinking for themselves. Do you have a problem with that?

I first found out about this book after listening to a lecture hosted by Keith Mitnick (Taubman College). He introduced the topic by discussing the general theme of this book and the idea of "seeing and unseeing" as a means of understanding space as well as neighboring architectural forms from different eras or topologies. Just from his description of the book's premise, I knew I wanted to read it. To start, this book is BONKERS. But in the best way possible. Admittedly, I found the beginning to be tough to get through simply because Mieville's writing is something I wasn't used to reading; at times it feels very sporadic and seems to "jump around" a lot without much exposition, but after a while I realized that I actually enjoy it that way, things seem more "fast-paced" which fits well with the story itself. It gets really interesting once he starts to describe "Breach" and the way the characters "unsee" the neighboring city. [MILD SPOILER] these details don't get "explained" until some chapters into the book, but I felt that this helped set the tone earlier on by making the character's actions that more intriguing; I kept reading because I wanted to better understand their strange behaviors and "see" the picture that Mieville was creating. I love the concept (I haven't seen or read other stories like it), and the characters are believable and

entertaining. If anyone has other suggestions for books like this please let me know, but in the meantime I would recommend this to anyone interested in more speculative fiction.

I had been wanting to read this book for a very long time since I had heard so much about it. Also, the title is intriguing. I thought it might be like Simak's The City and the Stars. It is not. Not at all. Nothing. I'm not sure I would call it science fiction because there is no science in it. I can't call it historical fiction because it is set in current time. I can't call it alternative history because, while it doesn't exist, it is not history and it confines itself to itself. So science fiction it is. The novel takes place in two cities in different countries which occupy the same physical space. You wouldn't have thought that possible but the author makes the world so logically consistent that you come to believe it. While the setting is inventive, imaginative, and engrossing, the author does not make the mistake of thinking it is the story. The story is also engrossing and consistent, and dependent on, its weird local. The characters, except the main one, might stand a little fleshing out, but that does not detract from the story. In fact, with so much else to think about, maybe their lack of depth is a bit of a relief. At the end, I really could not put this down. Strong recommendation.

A city unlike any other. A brilliant idea and a fantastic, unforgettable setting (no wonder it got Hugo award!). Highly imaginative, vivid, rich urban world of city-state(s) complete with their own imagery and languages, which bring to mind metaphorical associations with some real-life divided cities that unsee each other (think Jerusalem, Berlin of Cold War, Paris and its banlieu etc). The story and the human characters are only a vehicle to introduce the real superstars of the book - Besz and UI Quoma, the city & the city. And this is the only misgiving I have about the book: the story line is simply not very interesting, the characters are a bit mechanical and utterly forgettable (perhaps with the exception of the girl who is dead already on the first page), the mystery murder not very mysterious, the action not very suspenseful, the efforts to create a sense of foreboding and fear does not make you hold your breath. But the cities shine through on every page - and perhaps that was the purpose. I usually skip through the parts that describe the nature and the environment to get to the story and interaction among characters. In this book, I found myself skipping through the story and dialogue to get to Besz and UI Quoma unseeing and unhear either and neither. All in all, this one will stay with me, Mr. China.

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