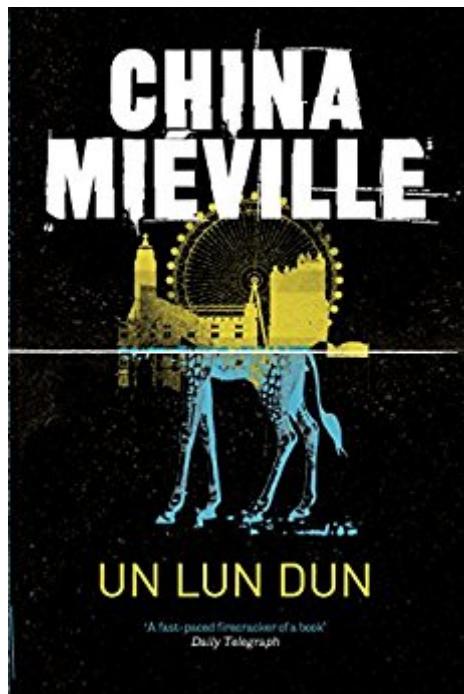


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## Un Lun Dun



## Synopsis

The iron wheel began to spin, slowly at first, then faster and faster. The room grew darker. As the light lessened, so did the sound. Deeba and Zanna stared at each other in wonder. The noise of the cars and vans and motorbikes outside grew tinny . . . The wheel turned off all the cars and turned off all the lamps. It was turning off London. Zanna and Deeba are two girls leading ordinary lives, until they stumble into the world of UnLondon, an urban Wonderland where all the lost and broken things of London end up . . . and some of its lost and broken people too. Here discarded umbrellas stalk with spidery menace, carnivorous giraffes roam the streets, and a jungle sprawls beyond the door of an ordinary house. UnLondon is under siege by the sinister Smog and its stink-junkie slaves; it is a city awaiting its hero. Guided by a magic book that can't quite get its facts straight, and pursued by Hemi the half-ghost boy, the girls set out to stop the poisonous cloud before it burns everything in its path. They are joined in their quest by a motley band of UnLondon locals, including Brokkenbroll, boss of the broken umbrellas, Obaday Fing, a couturier whose head is an enormous pincushion, and an empty milk carton called Curdle. Winner of the Locus Award for Best Young Adult Book, *China Miéville's Un Lun Dun* is an extraordinary vivid creation; is populated by astonishing frights and delights that will thrill the imagination.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Little by little, I've been making my way through a rather long list of books that were recommended to me by my internet friend who works at a library. When it came time to read this one, the premise, at first, sounded intriguing, but admittedly, not all that super original. Even from before the likes of "Alice in Wonderland", the concept of a young child or person stumbling into an alternate, magical world has been done before. None the less, it was getting great reviews, so I gave it a shot.....turns out this book had way more to offer than what was hinted at in the premise, and serves as a great example of how "chosen one" plots aren't always what they're cracked up to be. Twelve year old Zanna and her best friend, Deeba, begin to notice strange things happening around their neighborhood near London. Dogs stop to stare and bow at Zanna, birds circle her head, and a cloud monster nearly kills them. The girls' investigation soon leads them into "Un Lun Dun"--an alternate version of London where all the lost and broken things of our world end up ; a place where words are literally alive, an ordinary house contains a jungle, cities are made from sometimes-sentient trash, and people such as half ghosts, a guy who can control umbrellas, and a tailor with a pin-cushion for a head roam the streets. With an evil storm cloud called the Smog plotting to destroy the world, the city is awaiting its hero, whose coming was prophesied long ago in the pages of a talking book. The citizens are convinced that Zanna is the "shwazzy"--the chosen one that will finally save them, and that Deeba is nothing more than a "sidekick"....but when things start to go horribly wrong, and Zanna is quickly defeated, it then falls on Deeba and a band of unlikely heroes to save the world. Possibly the greatest thing about this book is how it takes every cliché and convention you would normally find in a young adult novel and/or "chosen one" plot and completely messes with it. The "hero" is quickly dispatched, leaving the "sidekick" to have to step up and do all the work--characters that you think are going to be allies turn out to be evil, and side quests that would be taken to gather weapons to defeat the big bad are skipped over in favor of just jumping right to facing the villain straight away. The first third is great set up in how it introduces this fantastical world to the audience and makes you THINK the plot is going to be stereotypical...but then, in an almost self-aware move, it suddenly comes out of left field and twists everything on its head, and then the REAL adventure begins. The characters are all unique, likeable, and/or memorable, especially Deeba, who starts off a bit more meek and complacent, but as time goes on, learns to stand up for herself and become the leader that Un Lun Dun needs, especially when not

everything is as it appears. She's kind and understanding, but also headstrong, in particular, in a memorable moment where the magic prophecy book explains all the many trials she'll have to go through to get the weapon she needs to defeat the Smog....to which she promptly decides to skip all of it and not waste time in jumping straight to the final boss, and the way in which the Smog is defeated is extremely clever, with possibly the coolest fantasy weapon you'll find in a book. But most of all, the many wondrous things our heroes come across are very original and memorable, like a neighborhood filled with ghosts, sentient umbrellas, flying buses, words that become sentient creatures when spoken, or a cute milk carton that becomes Deeba's pet. The Smog itself is actually based off a real life event, and the way in which our world's discarded trash is reused and repurposed in this other fantasy world leaves for a great environmental message that never feels like you're being beaten over the head with it. With clever word play, great world building, good characters, and great suspense, this is the perfect story to read for the person (like me) who's sick and tired of the "chosen one" clichÃ©s. Here's hoping we someday get a sequel.

Single sentence summary: Zanna and Deeba and found themselves in a strange bit of London that is being threatened by the Smog, which will destroy Un Lun Dun unless Zanna can stop it. My favorite thing in this book: Curdle... the milk carton. My other favorite thing about this book: the imagination behind all the weird and quirkiness of Un Lun Dun. Zanna and Deeba were interesting characters but other characters often took over the story at times for me. Curdle is Deeba's pet milk carton in Un Lun Dun and the strange little thing takes over the story for me. The characters and the world of Un Lun Dun make the story for me. The characters were all so unique: a man who wears book pages for clothing and sewing needles in his head as hair, a bus with legs and a ghosts who can lose their clothing. The trash can ninjas were especially fun. I kept trying to image how a trash can could have expressions but this book makes it feel like they do. Enough with the fun characters and on to how I felt about the story, which was interesting, thought provoking and entertaining. This book, while written for young adults, has a lot of commentary that adults can find too. Predestination and pollution are the two big ones that while most kids might pick up but it gives adults something to enjoy about this book besides the fun characters/setting. I really enjoyed Un Lun Dun and give it 4.25 Stars.

My first book by China Mieville was Perdido Street Station. After a grand adventure like that I couldn't resist reading more of his work. UN Lun Dun is another great one by him. The only reason I fail to give it a 5 is because there was a lack of what I view as important answers in the book. Also,

\*slight spoiler ahead\* I was disappointed to hear of fun tasks and objects meant to be gotten in the journey that the character decided to skip. I get the unique and humorous angle he was going for, where a hero simply chooses to skip things because it would take too long, but I'm a sucker for the classic fairytale journey full of special objects meant to help the hero on her journey. However, that's a mild point and doesn't detract from the rest of the book being a fantastic read. I do recommend it 

Instant children's classic? I'm not sure. I enjoyed reading it, and it's got that charming British "Hullo there" tone to it which makes me feel nostalgic - but also makes the characters seem artificially friendly, like puppets or cartoon characters. This is a child's world, I suppose, in which people interact with far less subtlety and nuance than they do in the adult world. Except there's a lot of violence and scary menace (and the villain is based on something real.) I think if I was the presumed target age for this book, it would scare the crap out of me. It's a little heavy for the wee ones, I think. But it's not really heavy enough for the adult reader. Taking a tip from Lewis Carroll and Norton Juster, Mieville has built a juvenile Road Novel that's a series of vignettes based on wordplay and terribly clever ideas, all strung together on a very simple plot as the characters travel toward their goal. It has a few surprises; Mieville takes pains to subvert many quest-story cliches but ultimately the heroes prevail in a way I can only describe as semantic cheating. Perhaps if I'd read this book 25 years ago it would have a special place in my heart - but at my current age, *Un Lun Dun* does not have the power to stand with *Winnie the Pooh* and *The Phantom Tollbooth*. It's a fun enough book to read, but not one I feel compelled to keep or read again.

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