

THE CITY & THE CITY

China Miéville



BALLANTINE BOOKS

***New York Times* best-selling author China Miéville delivers his most accomplished novel yet, an existential thriller set in a city unlike any other, real or imagined.**

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 Borlú of the Extreme Crime Squad. But as he investigates, the evidence points to conspiracies far stranger and more deadly than anything he could have imagined.

Borlú must travel from the decaying Beszel to the only metropolis on Earth as strange as his own. This is a border crossing like no other, a journey as psychic as it is physical, a shift in perception, a seeing of the unseen. His destination is Beszel's equal, rival, and intimate neighbor, the rich and vibrant city of Ul Qoma.

With Ul Qoman detective Qussim Dhatt, and struggling with his own transition, Borlú is enmeshed in a sordid underworld of rabid 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 and those they care about 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.

Casting shades of Kafka and Philip K. Dick, Raymond Chandler and *1984*, *The City & The City* is a murder mystery taken to dazzling metaphysical and artistic heights.

- **Hugo Award, Best Novel, 2010**

we get a lot of that shit, and she was obviously smarter than the loons into it, so I figured she was just feeling her way around, getting to know stuff."

"Weren't you curious?"

"Sure. Young foreign girl, clever, mysterious? *Intense?*" He mocked himself with how he said that. He nodded. "Sure I was. I'm curious about all the people who come here. Some of them tell me shit, some of them don't. But I wouldn't be leader of this chapter if I went around pumping them. There's a woman here, a lot older than me ... I been meeting her on and off for fifteen years. Don't know her real name, or anything about her. Okay, bad example because I'm pretty sure she's one of your lot, an agent, but you get the point. I don't ask."

"What was she into, then? Byela Mar. Why did you kick her out?"

"Look, here's the thing. You're into this stuff..." I felt Corwi stiffen as if she would interrupt him, needle him to get on with it, and I touched her *no, wait*, to give him his head on this. He was not looking at us but at his provocative map of the cities. "You're into this stuff you know you're skirting with ... well, you know you step out of line you're going to get serious trouble. Like having you lot here, for a start. Or make the wrong phone call we can put our brothers in shit, in Ul Qoma, with the cops there. Or—or there's worse." He looked at us then. "She couldn't stay, she was going to bring Breach down on us. Or something."

"She was into ... No, she wasn't *into* anything, she was *obsessed*. With Orcincy."

He was looking at me carefully, so I did nothing but narrow my eyes. I was surprised, though.

By how she did not move it was clear that Corwi did not know what Orcincy was. It might undermine her to go into it here, but as I hesitated he was explaining. It was a fairy tale. That was what he said.

"Orcincy's the third city. It's between the other two. It's in the *dissensi*, disputed zones, places that Beszel thinks are Ul Qoma's and Ul Qoma Beszel's. When the old commune split, it didn't split into two, it split into three. Orcincy's the secret city. It runs things."

If split there was. That beginning was a shadow in history, an unknown—records effaced and vanished for a century either side. Anything could have happened. From that historically brief quite opaque moment came the chaos of our material history, an anarchy of chronology, of mismatched remnants that delighted and horrified investigators. All we know is nomads on the steppes, then those black-box centuries of urban instigation—certain events, and there have been films and stories and games based on speculation (all making the censor at least a little twitchy)

about that dual birth—then history comes back and there are Beszel and Ul Qoma. Was it schism or conjoining?

As if that were not mystery enough and as if two crosshatched countries were insufficient, bards invented that third, the pretend-existing Orciny. On top floors, in ignorable Roman-style town-houses, in the first wattle-and-daub dwellings, taking up the intricately conjoined and disjointed spaces allotted it in the split or coagulation of the tribes, the tiny third city Orciny ensconced, secreted between the two brasher city-states. A community of imaginary overlords, exiles perhaps, in most stories machinating and making things so, ruling with a subtle and absolute grip. Orciny was where the Illuminati lived. That sort of thing.

Some decades previously there would have been no need for explanations—Orciny stories had been children's standards, alongside the tribulations of "King Shavil and the Sea-Monster That Came to Harbour." Harry Potter and Power Rangers are more popular now, and fewer children know those older fables. That's alright.

"Are you saying—what?" I interrupted him. "You're saying that Byela was a folklorist? She was into old stories?" He shrugged. He would not look at me. I tried again to make him out and say what he was implying. He would only shrug. "Why would she be talking to you about this?" I said. "Why was she even here?"

"I don't know. We have stuff on it. It comes up. You know? They have them in Ul Qoma, too, you know, Orciny stories. We don't just keep documents on, you know, just *just* what we're into. You know? We know our history, we keep all kinds of..." He trailed off. "I realised it wasn't us she was interested in, you know?"

Like any dissidents they were neurotic archivists. Agree, disagree, show no interest in or obsess over their narrative of history, you couldn't say they didn't shore it up with footnotes and research. Their library must have defensively complete holdings of anything that even implied a blurring of urban boundaries. She had come—you could see it—seeking information not on some ur-unity but on Orciny. What an annoyance when they realised her odd researches weren't quirks of investigation but the very point. When they realised that she did not much care about their project.

"So she was a time-waster?"

"No, man, she was dangerous, like I said. For real. She'd cause trouble for us. She said she wasn't sticking around anyway." He shrugged his shoulders vaguely.

"Why was she dangerous?" I leaned in. "Drodin, was she breaching?"

"Jesus, I don't think so. If she did I don't know shit about it." He put up his hands. "Fuck's sake, you know how watched we are?" He jerked his hand in the direction

of the street. "We've got you lot on a semipermanent patrol in the area. Ul Qoman cops can't watch us, obviously, but they're on our brothers and sisters. And more to the goddamned point, watching us out there is ... you know. Breach."

We were all silent a moment then. We all felt watched.

"You've seen it?"

"Course not. What do I look like? Who *sees* it? But we know it's there. Watching. Any excuse ... we're gone. Do you ..." He shook his head, and when he looked back at me it was with anger and perhaps hate. "Do you know how many of my friends have been taken? That I've never seen again? We're *more* careful than anyone."

It was true. A political irony. Those most dedicated to the perforation of the boundary between Beszel and Ul Qoma had to observe it most carefully. If I or one of my friends were to have a moment's failure of unseeing (and who did not do that? who failed to fail to see, sometimes?), so long as it was not flaunted or indulged in, we should not be in danger. If I were to glance a second or two on some attractive passerby in Ul Qoma, if I were to silently enjoy the skyline of the two cities together, be irritated by the noise of an Ul Qoman train, I would not be taken.

Here, though, at this building not just my colleagues but the powers of Breach were always wrathful and as Old Testament as they had the powers and right to be. That terrible presence might appear and disappear a unificationist for even a somatic breach, a startled jump at a misfiring Ul Qoma car. If Byela, Fulana, had been breaching, she would have brought that in. So it was likely not suspicion of that specifically that had made Drodin afraid.

"There was just something." He looked up out of the window at the two cities. "Maybe she would, she would have brought Breach on us, eventually. Or something."

"Hang on," Corwi said. "You said she was leaving ..."

"She said she was going over. To Ul Qoma. Officially." I paused from scribbling notes. I looked at Corwi and she at me. "Didn't see her again. Someone heard she'd gone and they wouldn't let her back here." He shrugged. "I don't know if that's true, and if it is I don't know why. It was just a matter of time ... She was poking around in dangerous shit, it gave me a bad feeling."

"That's not all, though, is it?" I said. "What else?" He stared at me.

"I don't *know*, man. She was trouble, she was scary, there was too much ... there was just something. When she was going on and on about all the stuff she was into, it started to give you the creeps. Made you nervous." He looked out of the window again. He shook his head.

"I'm sorry she died," he said. "I'm sorry someone killed her. But I'm not that surprised."

THAT STINK OF INSINUATION and mystery—however cynical or uninterested you thought yourself it stuck to you. I saw Corwi look up and around at the shabby fronts of the warehouses when we left. Perhaps seeing a little long in the direction of a shop she must realise was in Ul Qoma. She felt watched. We both did, and we were right, and fidgety.

When we drove out, I took Corwi—a provocation I admit though not aimed at her but at the universe in some way—for lunch in Beszel's little Ul Qomatown. It was south of the park. With the particular colours and script of its shop fronts, the shape of its facades, visitors to Beszel who saw it would always think they were looking at Ul Qoma, and hurriedly and ostentatiously look away (as close as foreigners could generally get to unseeing). But with a more careful eye, experience, you note the sort of cramped kitsch to the buildings' designs, a squat self-parody. You can see the trimmings in the shade called Beszel Blue, one of the colours illegal in Ul Qoma. These properties are local.

These few streets—mongrel names, Illitan nouns and a Besz suffix, YulSain-Strász, LiligiStrász, and so on—were the centre of the cultural world for the small community of Ul Qoman expatriates living in Beszel. They had come for various reasons—political persecution, economic self-betterment (and how the patriarchs who had gone through the considerable difficulties of emigrating for that reason must be rueing it now), whim, romance. Most of those aged forty and below are second and now third generation, speaking Illitan at home but Besz without an accent in the streets. There is maybe an Ul Qoman influence to their clothes. At various times local bullies and worse break their windows and beat them in the streets.

This is where pining Ul Qoman exiles come for their pastries, their sugar-fried peas, their incense. The scents of Beszel Ul Qomatown are a confusion. The instinct is to unsmell them, to think of them as drift across the boundaries, as disrespectful as rain ("Rain and woodsmoke live in both cities," the proverb has it. In Ul Qoma they have the same saw, but one of the subjects is "fog." You may occasionally also hear it of other weather conditions, or even rubbish, sewage, and, spoken by the daring, pigeons or wolves). But those smells are in Beszel.

Very occasionally a young Ul Qoman who does not know the area of their city that Ul Qomatown crosshatches will blunder up to ask directions of an ethnically Ul Qoman Beszel-dweller, thinking them his or her compatriots. The mistake is