

## REVIEW OF *PERDIDO STREET STATION*

I love the luridly grim atmosphere:

In a thicker, stinking haze just above the rooftops, the detritus from a million low chimneys eddied together. Crematoria vented into the airborne ashes of wills burnt by jealous executors, which mixed with coaldust burnt to keep dying lovers warm. Thousands of sordid smoke-ghosts wrapped New Crobuzon in a stench that suffocated like guilt.<sup>1</sup>

That sort of writing could be cheesy, but the great plot and characters and highly creative world-building make it work.

By the end, I'd forgotten about the mystery of Yagharek's original crime. The book patiently built up my affection for him only to ensure the revelation would be especially painful. Once his sin is known, every possible resolution to his story—whether his dream is crushed or fulfilled—seems bitter.

Yagharek's wings were taken from him as punishment; Isaac had promised to repair them; Yagharek's victim begs him not to. Should Isaac break his promise? It's a fascinating dilemma, particularly because the victim insists that the decision ought to be made on the basis of garuda principles (which call the original crime, and all crimes, "choice-theft") instead of human ones (which call the crime rape). Yet the intuition that we should *not* defer to her interpretation, and that we should instead recognize the crime as rape, is what gives strength to the intuition that Isaac should do as she asks and break his promise.

I also thought this bit of reflection from Yagharek was interesting:

One day I realized that I no longer dreamed of what I would be when I was whole again. My will burned to reach that point, and then suddenly was nothing. I had become nothing more than my desire to fly. ... The means had become the end. If I regained my wings, I would become someone new, without the desire that defined me.

I saw ... that I was not looking for fulfillment but for dissolution. I would pass my body on to a newborn, and rest.<sup>2</sup>

Which is, in a way, what he does. He makes peace with never being able to fly again, never being able to achieve his dream, and decides to embrace what life is available to him wholeheartedly. I think it's a brilliant ending, though far from a pleasant one.

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<sup>1</sup>China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station*, 1st American ed (New York: Del Rey, 2001), 64.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 200–201.