

## REVIEW OF *IRON COUNCIL*

I had to get through more than a third of this book before I really started to feel invested in it—it's a slower start than the earlier books in the series, which were themselves sort of slow burns. But like them, it pays off. Perhaps not quite as well, but still quite well.

As always, Miéville's world is teeming with novel oddities mentioned offhand, like the “casino parliament” where gambling is also lawmaking, or the creature called the “throng-bear”:

In a zone of dead, bleached trees, an ursine thing, unclear and engorged with changing shapes and colours, reeled out of the brush toward them. They screamed, except Pomeroy who fired into the creature's chest. With a soft explosion it burst into scores of birds and hundreds of bottleglass flies, which circled them in the air and recongealed beyond them as the beast. It shuffled from them. Now they could see the feathers and wing cases that made up its pelt.<sup>1</sup>

The novel focuses on resistance to New Crobuzon's oppressive government. One theme is the tension between talk and action among would-be revolutionaries. Ori is frustrated with Runagate Rampant's endless meetings that never seem to precipitate serious change, so he gets involved with a plot to kill the mayor. Conversely, Judah is so determined to ensure that the symbol and story of Iron Council will remain potent that he would rather literally freeze them in time than let them attempt a doomed insurrection. There's no unambiguous message; between this and the first book, we've seen how New Crobuzon's malcontents made seemingly no progress over decades, and it's easy to imagine that the build-support-and-wait-for-the-right-time approach is never going to pay off. Yet those who do take decisive action in the story largely turn out to have been manipulated: Ori's group was the pawn of a foreign power trying to destroy the entire city, and Iron Council's return was orchestrated by a capitalist who just wanted their knowledge.

---

<sup>1</sup>China Miéville, *Iron council* (New York: Del Rey/Ballantine Books, 2004), 13–14.