

The background of the cover is a surreal landscape. At the top, a city skyline with various skyscrapers is visible against a pale, hazy sky. Below the skyline is a vast, flat, light-colored ground. In the foreground, several large, dark, circular holes or pits are scattered across the landscape. A small figure of a person is visible standing in one of these holes, providing a sense of scale. The overall color palette is muted, with greens, greys, and purples.

CHINA MIÉVILLE  
KING RAT

KING rat

"A genuine  
contribution  
to London's

subterranean mythology . . . It's humane and  
delinquent. And it bites"

IAIN SINCLAIR

"Full of the rank energy of Jungle rhythms, China  
Mieville's rat's nest of a book gives a new meaning  
to the term 'alternative London', a kingdom we  
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tale, away from the romanticised city streets of many  
current fantasies, down into the sewers . . . And his  
characters are fabulous, even the bit players . . .  
This is a riveting, brilliant novel. The language  
sings, the concepts are original and engrossing ... an  
utter delight"

CHARLES DE LINT

CHINA MIEVILLE

KING RAT

PAN BOOKS

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First published 1998 by Macmillan

This edition published 1999 by Pan Books

an imprint of Pan Macmillan Ltd

Pan Macmillan, 20 New Wharf Road, London E11 9RR

Basingstoke and Oxford

Associated companies throughout the world

[www.panmacmillan.com](http://www.panmacmillan.com)

ISBN 0 330 37098 7

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57986

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Phototypeset by Intype London Ltd

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

Mackays of Chatham plc, Chatham, Kent

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TO MAX

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who read this in the early stages. All my love and gratitude go to my mother, Claudia, for all her support, always: and to my sister,

Jemima, for her advice and feedback.

Deep love and thanks to Emma, of course, for everything.

My heartfelt thanks to Max Schaefer, who gave me invaluable criticisms, hours of word-processing help, and great friendship during a generally rubbish year.

I can never thank Mic Cheetham enough. I am incredibly lucky to have her on my side. And thanks to all at Macmillan, particularly my editor Peter Lavery.

I owe too many writers and artists to mention, but respect is especially due to Two Fingers and James The. Kirk for their novel Junglist. They blazed a trail. Many thanks also to Iain Sinclair for generously letting me keep the metaphor I accidentally stole from him. Jake Pilikian introduced me to Drum and Bass music and changed my life. Big up to all the DJs and Crews who

provided a soundtrack. Awe and gratitude especially to A Guy Called Gerald for the sublime Gloc: old, now, but still the most terrifying slab of guerrilla bass ever committed to vinyl. Rewind.

A London Sometin'...  
Tek9

KING RAT

I can squeeze between buildings through spaces you can't even see. I can walk behind you so close my breath raises gooseflesh on your neck and you won't hear me. I can hear the muscles in your eyes contract when your pupils dilate. I can feed off your filth and live in your house and sleep under your bed and you will never know unless I want you to.

I climb above the streets. All the dimensions of the city are open to me. Your walls are my walls and my ceilings and my floors.

The wind whips my overcoat with a sound like washing on a line. A thousand scratches on my arms tingle like electricity as I scale roofs and move through squat cospes of chimneys. I have business tonight.

I spill like mercury over the lip of a building and slither down drainpipes to the alley fifty feet below. I slide silently through piles of rubbish in the sepia

lamplight and crack the seal on the sewers, pulling the metal cover out of the street without a sound.

Now I am in darkness but I can still see. I can hear the growling of water through the tunnels. I am up to my waist in your shit, I can feel it tugging at me, I can smell it. I know my way through these passages.

I am heading north, submerged in the current, wading, clinging to walls and ceiling. Live things scuttle and slither to get out of my way. I weave without hesitation through the dank corridors. The

rain has been fitful and hesitant but all the water in London seems eager to reach its destination tonight. The brick rivers of the underground are swollen. I dive under the surface and swim in the cloying dark until the time has come to emerge and I rise from the deeps, dripping. I pass noiselessly again through the pavement.

Towering above me is the red brick of my destination. A great dark mass broken with squares of irrelevant light. One glimmering in the shadow of the eaves holds my attention. I straddle the corner of the building and ease my way up. I am slower now. The sound of television and the smell of food seep out of the window, which I am reaching towards now, which I am rattling now with my long nails, scratching, a sound like a pigeon or a twig, an intriguing sound, bait.

## PART ONE

### GLASS

#### CHAPTER ONE

The trains that enter London arrive like ships sailing across the roofs. They pass between towers jutting into the sky like long-necked sea beasts and the great gas-cylinders wallowing in dirty scrub like whales. In the depths below are lines of small shops and obscure franchises, cafes with peeling paint and businesses tucked into the arches over which the trains pass. The colours and curves of graffiti mark every wall. Top floor windows pass by so close that passengers can peer inside, into small bare offices and store cupboards. They can make out the contours of trade calendars and pin-ups on the walls.

The rhythms of London are played out here, in the sprawling flat zone between suburbs and centre.

Gradually the streets widen and the names of the shops and cafes become more familiar; the main roads are more salubrious; the traffic is denser; and the city rises to meet the tracks.

At the end of a day in October a train made this journey towards King's Cross. Flanked by air, it

progressed over the outlands of North London, the city building up below it as it neared the Holloway Road. The people beneath ignored its passage. Only children looked up as it clattered overhead, and some of the very young pointed. As the train drew closer to the station, it slipped below the level of the roofs.

There were few people in the carriage to watch the bricks rise around them. The sky disappeared above the windows. A cloud of pigeons rose from a hiding place beside the tracks and wheeled off to the east.

The flurry of wings and bodies distracted a thickset young man at the rear of the compartment. He had been trying not to stare openly at the woman sitting

opposite him. Thick with relaxer, her hair had been teased from its tight curls and was coiled like snakes on her head. The man broke off his furtive scrutiny as the birds passed by, and he ran his hands through his own cropped hair.

The train was now below the houses. It wound through a deep groove in the city, as if the years of passage had worn down the concrete under the tracks. Saul Garamond glanced again at the woman sitting in front of him, and turned his attention to the windows. The light in the carriage had made them mirrors, and he stared at himself, his heavy face. Beyond his face was a layer of brick, dimly visible, and beyond that the cellars of the houses that rose like cliffs on either side.

It was days since Saul had been in the city.

Every rattle of the tracks took him closer to his home. He closed his eyes.

Outside, the gash through which the tracks passed had widened as the station approached. The walls on either side were punctuated by dark alcoves, small caves full of rubbish a few feet from the track. The silhouettes of cranes arched over the skyline. The walls around the train parted. Tracks fanned away on either side as the train slowed and edged its way into King's Cross.

The passengers rose. Saul swung his bag over his shoulder and shuffled out of the carriage. Freezing air stretched up to the great vaulted ceilings. The cold shocked him. Saul hurried through the buildings, through the crowds, threading his way between knots of people. He still had a way to go. He headed underground.

He could feel the presence of the population around him. After days in a tent on the Suffolk coast, the weight of ten million people so close to him seemed to make the air vibrate. The tube was full of garish colours and bare flesh, as people headed to clubs and parties.

His father would probably be waiting for him. He knew Saul was coming back, and he would surely make an effort to be welcoming, forfeiting his usual evening in the pub to greet his son. Saul already resented him for that. He felt gauche and uncharitable, but he despised his father's faltering attempts to

communicate. He was happier when the two of them avoided each other. Being surly was easy, and felt more honest.

By the time his tube train burst out of the tunnels of the Jubilee Line it was dark. Saul knew the route. The darkness transformed the rubble behind Finchley Road into a dimly glimpsed no-man's-land, but he was able to fill in the details he could not see, even down to the tags and the graffiti. Burner. Nax. Coma.

He knew the names of the intrepid little rebels clutching their magic markers, and he knew where they had been.

The grandiose tower of the Gaumont State cinema jutted into the sky on his left, a bizarre totalitarian monument among the budget groceries and hoardings of Kilburn High Road. Saul could feel the cold through the windows and he wrapped his coat around him as the train neared Willesden station. The passengers had thinned. Saul left only a very few behind him as he got out of the carriage.

Outside the station he huddled against the chill. The air smelt faintly of smoke from some local bonfire, someone clearing his allotment. Saul set off down the hill towards the library.

He stopped at a takeaway and ate as he walked, moving slowly to avoid spilling soy sauce and vegetables down himself. Saul was sorry the sun had gone

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down. Willesden lent itself to spectacular sunsets. On a day like today, when there were few clouds, its low skyline let the light flood the streets, pouring into the strangest crevices; the windows that faced each other bounced the rays endlessly back and forth between themselves and sent it hurtling in unpredictable directions; the rows and rows of brick glowed as if lit from within.

Saul turned into the backstreets. He wound through the cold until his father's house rose before him. Terragon Mansions was an ugly Victorian block, squat and mean-looking for all its size. It was fronted by the garden: a strip of dirty vegetation frequented only by dogs. His father lived on the top floor. Saul looked up and saw that the lights were on. He climbed the steps and let himself in, glancing into the darkness of the bushes and scrub on either side.

He ignored the huge lift with its steel-mesh door, not wanting its groans to announce him. Instead he crept up the flights of stairs and gently unlocked his father's door.

The flat was freezing.

Saul stood in the hall and listened. He could hear the sound of the television from behind the sitting room door. He waited, but his father was silent. Saul shivered and looked around him.

He knew he should go in, should rouse his father from slumber, and he even got as far as reaching for the door. But he stopped and looked at his own room.

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He sneered at himself in disgust, but he crept towards it anyway.

He could apologize in the morning. I thought you were asleep, Dad. I heard you snoring. I came in drunk and fell into bed. I was so knackered I wouldn't have been any kind of company anyway. He cocked an ear, heard only the voices of one of the late-night discussion programmes his father so loved, muffled and pompous. Saul turned away and slipped into his room.

Sleep came easily. Saul dreamed of being cold, and woke once in the night to pull his duvet closer. He dreamed of slamming, a heavy beating noise, so loud it pulled him out of sleep and he realized it was real, it was there. Adrenaline surged through him, making him tremble. His heart quivered and lurched as he swung out of bed.

It was icy in the flat.  
Someone was pounding on the front door.

The noise would not stop, it was frightening him. He was shaking, disorientated. It was not yet light. Saul glanced at his clock. It was a little after six. He stumbled into the hall. The horrible bang bang bang was incessant, and now he could hear shouting as well, distorted and unintelligible.

He fought into a shin and shouted: 'Who is it?'

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The slamming did not stop. He called out again, and this time a voice was raised above the din.

'Police!'

Saul struggled to clear his head. With a sudden panic he thought of the small stash of dope in his drawer, but that was absurd. He was no drugs kingpin, no one would waste a dawn raid on him. He was reaching out to open the door, his heart still tearing, when he suddenly remembered to check that they were who they claimed, but it was too late now, the door flew back and knocked him down as a torrent of bodies streamed into the flat.

Blue trousers and big shoes all around him. Saul was yanked to his feet. He started to flail at the intruders. Anger waxed with his fear. He tried to yell but someone smacked him in the stomach and he doubled up. Voices were reverberating everywhere around him, making no sense.

'... cold like a bastard ...'

'... cocky little cunt...'

'... fucking glass, watch yourself...'

'... his son, or what? High as a fucking kite, must be ...'

And above all these voices he could hear a weather forecast, the cheery tones of a breakfast television presenter. Saul struggled to turn and face the men who were holding him so tight.

'What the fuck's going on?' he gasped. Without

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speaking, the men propelled him into the sitting room.

The room was full of police, but Saul saw straight through them. He saw the television first: the woman in the bright suit was warning him it would be chilly again today. On the sofa was a plate of congealed pasta, and a half-drunk glass of beer sat on the floor. Cold gusts of air caught at him and he looked up at the window, out over houses. The curtains were billowing dramatically. He saw that jags of glass littered the floor. There was almost no glass left in the window-frame, only a few shards around the edges.

Saul sagged with terror and tried to pull himself to the window.

A thin man in civilian clothes turned and saw him.

'Down the station now,' he shouted at Saul's captors.

Saul was spun on his heels. The room turned around him like a funfair ride, the rows of books and his father's small pictures rushing past him. He struggled to turn back.

'Dad!' he shouted. 'Dad!'

He was pulled effortlessly out of the flat. The dark of the corridor was pierced by slivers of light spilling out of doors. Saul saw uncomprehending faces and hands clutching at dressing-gowns, as he was hauled towards the lift. Neighbours in pyjamas were staring at him. He bellowed at them as he passed.

He still could not see the men holding him. He

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shouted at them, begging to know what was going on, pleading, threatening and railing.

'Where's my dad? What's going on?'

'Shut up.'

'What's going on?'

Something slammed into his kidneys, not hard but with the threat of greater force. 'Shut up.' The lift door closed behind them.

'What's happened to my fucking dad!'

As soon as he had seen the broken window a voice inside Saul had spoken quietly. He had not been able to hear it clearly until now. Inside the flat the brutal crunch of boots and the swearing had drowned it out. But here where he had been dragged, in the relative silence of the lift, he could hear it whispering.

Dead, it said. Dad's dead.

Saul's knees buckled. The men behind him held him upright, but he was utterly weak in their arms. He moaned.

'Where's my dad?' he pleaded.

The light outside was the colour of the clouds. Blue strobes swirled on a mass of police cars, staining the drab buildings. The frozen air cleared Saul's head. He tugged desperately at the arms holding him as he struggled to see over the hedges that ringed Terragon Mansions. He saw faces staring down from the hole that was his father's window. He saw the glint of a million splinters of glass covering the dying grass. He saw a mass of uniformed police frozen in a threatening

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diorama. All their faces were turned to him. One held a roll of tape covered in crime scene warnings, a tape he was stretching around stakes in the ground, circumscribing a piece of the earth. Inside the chosen area he saw one man kneeling before a dark shape on the lawn. The man was staring at him like all the others. His body obscured the untidy thing. Saul was swept past before he could see any more.

He was pushed into one of the cars, lightheaded now, hardly able to feel a thing. His breath came very fast. Somewhere along the line handcuffs had been snapped onto his wrists. He shouted again at the men in front, but they ignored him.

The streets rolled by.

They put him in a cell, gave him a cup of tea and warmer clothes: a grey cardigan and corduroy trousers that stank of alcohol. Saul sat huddled in a stranger's clothes. He waited for a long time.

He lay on the bed, draped the thin blanket around him.

Sometimes he heard the voice inside him. Suicide, it said. Dad's committed suicide.

Sometimes he would argue with it. It was a ridiculous idea, something his father could never do. Then it would convince him and he might start to hyperventilate, to panic. He closed his ears to it. He kept it quiet.

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