

## The Unchosen Ones and Environmental Activism in China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun*

This paper explores what alternate methods of activism and empathy are available in one text within the genre that I have deemed “fantastic weirdness.” Neither exactly sci-fi nor fantasy, fantastic weirdness involves an outburst of the uncanny or unexpected into a character’s everyday life. Sometimes deemed portal novels, the portals in fantastic weirdness work both ways, interjecting the unusual into the real world and pulling the main characters from their homes into alternate universes. Through these weird eruptions, the characters are offered alternate versions of reality in ways that make new forms of activism and maturation possible.

Examples of this type of fantastic weirdness and empathetic growth are the flexibility of sexual identity and time in the comic *Paper Girls*, alternate models of masculinity in the television show *Stranger Things*, and the necessity of environmental activism in China Miéville’s 2007 novel *Un Lun Dun*. Here, I argue that *Un Lun Dun* uses the threatening interjection of a deeply polluted shadow London to encourage new models of heroism, growth, and environmental awareness. The book becomes a call to action for all readers while upsetting narratives of the “chosen one.” Instead of a traditional white savior story, the beautiful, blonde Zanna is defeated by The Smog in their first battle. In her place, the brown-haired and brown-skinned Deeba must step in as the “unchosen one” to defeat the pollution and decay of The Smog and its minions. Miéville’s *Un Lun Dun* asks all the “unchosen ones” to consider their actions within their environment and distributes the power to cause change into the hands of all young readers, a message that only grows in importance as the effects of climate change become continually more severe.