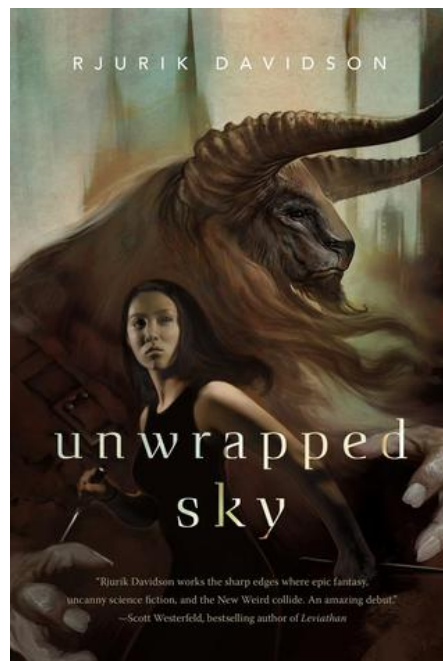




Unwrapped Sky

Rjurik Davidson

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Caeli-Amur: an ancient city perched on white cliffs overlooking the sea; a city ruled by three Houses, fighting internecine wars; a city which harbours ancient technology and hidden mysteries. But things are changing in Caeli-Amur. Ancient minotaurs arrive for the traditional Festival of the Sun. The slightly built New-Men bring their technology from their homeland. Wastelanders stream into the city hideously changed by the chemical streams to the north. Strikes break out in the factory district.

In a hideout beneath the city, a small group of seditionists debate ways to overthrow the Houses. How can they rouse the citizens of the city? Should they begin a campaign of terror? Is there a way to uncover the thaumaturgical knowledge that the Houses guard so jealously? As the Houses scramble to maintain their rule, it becomes clear that things will change forever in Caeli-Amur.

Unwrapped Sky Details

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Author : Rjurik Davidson

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From Reader Review Unwrapped Sky for online ebook

Lori says

I'm a harsh rater and this is a 3.5 but I rounded it up to 4 because it deserves more than the average rating here. I've seen many comparisons to Mielville and I can understand that, this a solidly built up fantastical world that is beautiful but also very grimy. And while many don't love China's lush and love of language and words, I do. I dreamed China's Bas-Long, and it was fully alive in my imagination as I read. With *Unwrapped Sky*, there were only a few of these internal images and they were fleeting. I still sometimes think I see another city interwoven with My City.

Ok onto this book. There are great ideas and philosophical questions here that made me think. I liked that. The drawback is that the characters serve these ideas and the plot, not quite to the point of declaiming but close. This is one reason I almost stopped midway, (I had so many books come at once from the library, the stress!), I just wasn't completely invested and that's what makes the high ratings.

But I'm very glad I stuck to the end, the last half was exciting plot wise and various things about the world were partially revealed. The characters aren't fully realized but they are very much human, not black and white but all shades. I also shifted gears, and recognized that this was an intellectually exciting book.

So there you have it in a nutshell and I think that's the disparity in ratings. People looking for standard fantasy fare will feel a bit removed, but for intellectual stimulation this is a very good read. And you know sometimes I want to just escape myself, which is how I initially approached this. Glad I was in the mood to shift gears.

Alex Ristea says

We've all had those books where it starts off as the greatest thing ever and but somehow along the way loses that spark and makes you reconsider why you're reading it at all. (Actually, if you think about it, this happens a lot in general life. That ice cream tub you bought at midnight for a Netflix marathon that you're suddenly regretting. That ski trail where you're suddenly lost, out of your league, and sure to get your pass revoked when Ski Patrol finds you. That phone call with an old friend that just won't end. That bike commute in the pouring rain. That evening coffee and now you can't sleep. That toddler which you soon realize is just a mewling poop factory for much of its early life.)

First, the good things about *Unwrapped Sky*, because it has many.

The language. Oh, the language. If you love prose for prose's sake, I would recommend this book to you. Poetic, poignant, pithy, and a plethora of other adjectives that start with P.

This is a strong and engaging secondary world. It draws you in from the first page and captivates you throughout. Think along the lines of Max Gladstone and Brian McClellan when it comes to that quasi-industrialized society filled with cafes, newspapers, philosophy, and the like. Better yet, here's an article the author wrote about his world if you want a quick glimpse.

The POVs work spectacularly. We start with two long chapters with each character—long enough to get you invested, but short enough to hook you into craving more. From there, they're in a whirlwind of a tightly woven plot. Every action affects everyone else and the ramifications spiral out in spectacular fashion.

It's also nuanced in a way I haven't seen since A Game of Thrones. We're seeing all sides of the revolution and the POVs make you care about it all. There are no antagonists or protagonists. Each character is somewhere in the middle, as it is in real life.

However, for all of this, it's missing a certain spark; a drive.

I can't even really put my finger on it. All I know is that from about halfway through the book to the finish, it was a definite trudge.

(I've read enough books now to recognize the feeling of being excited to read a book versus being excited to finish. There's a distinction, and I know that there are plenty out there that fall into the first category.)

The conclusion was unsatisfying since it didn't fulfil any of the promises that the story set up. Whatever happened was something the reader didn't care about since it came out of left field.

The story felt organic rather than something constructed for a novel, but I think it went too far into that direction. It was a "slice of life" into this world, but without a compelling narrative to see us through.

Quality prose and a quality story are two different things, and the former does not cover your ass for a lack of the latter.

And here's the most telling thing: I didn't read the last 20 pages. I simply got to that point and just thought "yup, I'm done with this book," and put it down.

Who does that?

Anyway, because I can't quite explain that feeling of something missing, I'm going for the cop-out of just linking you to Liz Bourke's review on Tor.com called "Symbols Without Substance." Go read it by clicking [here](#).

Overall, this book got me super excited in the first 100 pages, and just couldn't deliver.

Ash says

A good friend recommended Rjurik Davidson's Unwrapped Sky to me. When I asked him what it was about, he told me he couldn't and just instead summarized what he read. After having finished it, I can see what he meant. I am still racking my mind on how I could summarize Unwrapped Sky and go into my review. Here's the old college try!

Caeli-Amur is a city that is ruled by three Houses: Technis, Arbor, and Marin. These Houses have secrets about how to better wield and recover from the effects of Thaumaturgy which has incredible effects. Certain citizens known as seditionists believed the Houses are an antiquated method of ruling and want to overthrow the entire system.

The major players in this narrative is Boris, a former tramworker turned House officiate, who dreams of changing the system not realizing the system might be changing him. Kata, a philosopher-assassin who might not be entirely the free agent she thought she was and Maximillian, a man whose quest for the unified theory of Thaumaturgy might lead him to lose himself.

Davidson, in my opinion, did a very fine job with his mythology and expansive world-building. That's what he did; he built an entire world. Sometimes, as I was reading, it felt like a living, breathing entity. I loved how technology and alchemy worked believably in tandem. There was such a great usage of binary code, physics, chemistry, and religion that I had to stop myself from going all "fangirl."

However, within this great world Davidson created, there is a great character study developing. Though I really enjoyed Kata and related to her plight, my heart went out to Boris. He was pulled in 2 equally compelling directions and ended up lost in the grey. His story was heartbreaking.

I am assuming this will be part of a trilogy. That's what all the cool kids are doing these days. I can't wait to read the next one. Perhaps more minotaurs?

Apparently, Unwrapped Sky falls into the genre of New Weird. I knew when I was reading it, it was unlike anything I read before. I googled the term and that definition confused me so if anyone out there can clear it up for me. I would greatly appreciate it.

Sarah says

Unwrapped Sky is one of those books that just worked for me on almost every level. Some readers might shy away from it, as this book does have quite a lot of layers and things to unpeel as you go, but for the most part, speculative fiction fans should add this to their to-be-read pile. Unwrapped Sky is stunningly written, and the world is so lush, vibrant and full of nuances and detail that it absolutely enchanted me. The characters are easy to like, and their stories are interesting. And minotaurs. SERIOUSLY. MINOTAURS. Unwrapped Sky is a nice mixture of myth, lore, and something completely new and different and absolutely worth your time.

This book is a journey, and that's the kind of book I like the most. It's one of those novels that I had to savor and read slowly, and I just know I will catch something different every time I read it. What a gift.

Read my full review here:

<http://www.bookwormblues.net/2014/04/...>

Jasper says

originally posted at: <http://thebookplank.blogspot.com/2014...>

Another author that is taking a step to the stage this year with a cracking debut is Rjurik Davidson and his Unwrapped Sky. Rjurik Davidson was the winner of the Ditmar Award as Best New Talent and has also won the Aurealis Award for his short fiction. He works as a columnist and film and literary critic. I learned late last year about Unwrapped Sky and it made it directly onto my to read list. I had read several genre bending and breaking books last year and the mentioning of minotaurs and a technology created a weird but interesting promise to the story. And of course lets not forget thaumaturgy! In Unwrapped Sky, Rjurik Davidson creates a vivid, vibrant world that is constantly in motion. Blending technology with mythology to create the perfect setting. At times the scenes are painted with colorful strokes, but in a split second Rjurik Davidson doesn't hesitate to throw them to the darker side. Perfect and unpredictable. Definitely not to be missed.

The first thing that really gripped me in *Unwrapped Sky* was the world itself. The book opens with a scene featuring the mythical minotaurs, they sort of go on pilgrimage to the Festival of the Sun. My hopes were directly raised as I was completely immersed into the world that Rjurik Davidson was set out to create. He does a tremendous job on the worldbuilding part of the book that I haven't seen many debuting authors do in this way. This really is a combination of both writing style and the idea's behind the books. The writing style is just excellent, Rjurik Davidson has a way with words and uses them to create the perfect setting for his story. It's on many parts nicely detailed but not in a way that it starts to overtake the story and feels like an information dump. The setting that he managed to create really spoke to my imagination and more than a few times I found myself daydreaming away in this immensely rich world, thinking about the different places and inhabitant that you read about in *Unwrapped Sky*. The other part of the combination, the idea's behind the book feel unique and fresh and I have only encountered them two times earlier. In both *Perdido Street Station* and *The Scar* by China Mieville, though *Unwrapped Sky* was for me less towards the dark and gritty side. *Unwrapped Sky* has a interesting world to say the least. It has on one side a heavy influence of an ancient technology going towards a steampunkish side and on the other some epic fantasy influences such as many different beings like the minotaurs, Elo-Tarn and Xsanthians. Added to this is the influence of thaumaturgy that only the Houses control, Rjurik Davidson creates a dangerous and interesting magic system with this thaumaturgy, that it will keep you wanting read more about it. This worldbuilding is on par with some of the great names in the science fiction fantasy field and was utterly impressed. The world of *Unwrapped Sky* is a perfect balance delicate beauty and dark and haunting. It grows on you and stays there lingering in the back of your mind!

The story of *Unwrapped Sky* starts with one of the point-of-view that you follow throughout the book. Kata an philosopher-assassin has been tasked by House Technis with eliminating two of the minotaurs, from which they will be able use different parts in their thaumaturgical experiments. After having eliminated the said minotaurs, though with much hesitation, Kata starts to question herself whether she is on the right track with her actions. While still pondering this she is sent by House Technis to infiltrate the seditionist camp. Soon after the introduction of Kata the other two main perspectives are shown. One of them is Maxmilan, a seditionist, that plans to overthrow the rule of the Houses over Caeli-Amur. Maxmilan plans to overthrow the houses to give Caeli-Amur back to the people, let them make their own decisions. In trying to achieve this Maxmilan and his seditionists go far, terrorist attacks and the like included. He plans to get to his goal in two ways, the first is to rouse a rebellion amongst the people of Caeli-Amur and the second is to learn more about the power of thaumaturgy itself, which now is only in control of the Houses. There is a wealth of knowledge hidden in the Library of the sunken city of Caeli-Enas. The other is Boris Autec, an ex-tramworker for House Technis who has been steadily proving himself climbing up the ranks of the house, eventually becoming the Director of House Technis. Now that Boris is becoming the big man or rather part of the voice behind House Technis he need to quell the starting rebellion against the Houses. But even with the hard hitting thaumaturgical power this sounds much easier than it is... Boris is in for a challenge.

The great thing about how Rjurik Davidson has set up his story was that each of these three different perspectives start off as individual tracks but soon the start to collide. For example Kata infiltrates the seditionist camp led by Max and she is swayed but believes that are being preached about in the camp. There are many parts where the stories of the individual characters come together creating and even better sense for both the story and the whole dynamic of the world.

The characters that you follow like Kata, Max and Boris are very well developed from the start you see that they all have problems that they are coping with. None of them are really happy about their current situation but don't really know how to make this better. Kata is a very strong female lead, but doesn't know what to do, what is good and what is bad, this duality is shown perfectly in her character, in the beginning she is doing things because she must, but as the story starts to progress she starts to learn that making your own decisions and pursuing what you want is more important. Max is an idealist, he wants to make this world a better place no matter the cost. The best thing in his character for me was that, on one part he asks a lot of his followers

but he also tasks himself to the maximum to drive this revolution, his passion for revolution comes to a nice show in the end, especially some revelation that were shown in the Library of Caeli-Enas gave a broadening of the storyline. Boris is a dark and negative character. His view of the current world has been shaped by the hardships that he has had to endure in his past. Losing his wife and his current addiction to the hot wine. His character is quite troublesome and reading about him casts a definite dark sense over the story of Unwrapped Sky, Boris is one who will go over corpses to get what he wants...

Unwrapped Sky is a terrific debut, this is just the story that will make Rjurik Davidson breakthrough in the genre fiction world. The story is fresh, original and exciting. Rjurik Davidson shows an interesting world built from mythical ideas and ancient technology that amplify each other to create a world in which you will dream away in. It's vibrant and dynamic and the characters that you get to meet along the way keep the storyline just as exciting to read about. There is no strong division between the good and the evil with the seditionist and the Houses but they all fight their own beliefs and existence. The characters are by far the typical flawless ones, they each have their own demons they have to fight and make them that more relatable. The world is brimming with very cool and well thought through ideas. Rjurik Davidson cleverly builds up his world, there is a lot of time invested in showing several mechanisms but he doesn't let this overtake the general flow of the story. Where some authors find it hard to strike a balance, Rjurik Davidson does it perfectly. Make sure you read this book! It's terrific.

Althea Ann says

It's always an unexpected pleasure to discover a new author this good.

Davidson starts this tale with a shocking scene, and keeps the energy going all the way through to the end. As I said in my review of the author's short story, 'Nighttime in Caeli-Amur,' Davidson excels at creating characters who roundly deserve to be condemned for their actions - but still capture the reader's empathy, if not sympathy.

Their home, Caeli-Amur, feels like a real place. It's vivid, teeming with dreams, ambition, love and tragedy - and the bitter, grotesque things that all of those can twist lives into.

This is a story of a city on the brink...of a fall, or of revolution. Corrupt officials war with seditionist saboteurs. Here we meet Kata, former street orphan, trained philosopher-assassin (ninja) - a woman who's learned to always have an eye for the main chance. But will her self-interest be her downfall? We also have Maximilian, an idealist and revolutionary whose dreams of studying the dangerous arts of thaumaturgy may not be compatible with the violent revolution some of his compatriots aim for. Then there's Boris, former tramworker, on his way up the bureaucratic ladder to success... but will he be willing to trample over the bodies of his old friends on his way up?

And more... much, much more. This is a complex work exploring multiple layers of power and motivations. I'd say: China Mieville meets Tanith Lee - injected with a full syringe of originality. Recommended for fans of steampunk who are tired of the clichés. Davidson's an author I'll be following from here on out.

Advance review copy provided by NetGalley. Thanks to Netgalley and Tor Books. As always, my opinion is my own.

Phil says

Writing 5/5

Imagination 5/5

Plot 5/5

Setting 5/5

Characters 5/5

My Overall Enjoyment 5/5

This is an ARC from Netgalley. This book comes out April 15.

Stunningly beautiful and original, a mix of steampunk and ancient mythology with a blend of action and suspense, this is a readers book. The descriptions of the city Caeli-Amur and its technology were astounding; it was so easy to imagine the trains, steamers, machines, moving about this world. The opening scene at the Festival of the Bull, which introduces the Minotaurs and the main character Kata, a philosopher-assassin (a concept I love), is one of the best I have read, so good I had to stop reading it several times to absorb and savor it.

A few other things I loved; the cover was the first thing that lead me to this book as it's gorgeous; the story-line of the goddess Aya, although not big, it was mysterious and added another layer of depth and wonder; the magic system, known as thaumaturgy, was so fun to learn about and fit in perfectly with this world; the character Max's quest to find the Great Library in the Sunken City, Caeli-Enas was my favorite story-line; all the references to books that make the world so real and the lore so deep; the philosophical discussions Kata has with the Minotaur; and lastly, the astounding writing, among the best I have read, Rjurik Davidson gives a masterclass in prose writing with this book. Not since I read Prince of Thorns by Mark Lawrence have I been this enthralled and enamored with a writers style.

Highest possible recommendation for all fantasy readers. If you love to read refreshing and unique fantasy this is a must read. If you enjoy fantasy filled with mythology and lore this is an excellent book. If you love books with great magic systems, this has one. If you love steampunk elements, this book is full of them. If you love books about books, this has that. If you love quests for knowledge, this has one. If you love beautiful writing, it doesn't get any better. If you love political intrigue, this is full. There is nothing about this book I didn't love. Nothing. I can't wait to buy a hard copy for my library.

Matthew says

Unwrapped Sky tells the tale of the city of Caeli-Amur and its inhabitants. The Houses who rule Caeli-Amur have guarded their power jealously. But in the bowels of the city a group of seditionists are plotting to take control and overthrow the Houses. As events unfold and spiral out of control, and violence and terror erupt, only one thing is for certain... the city of Caeli-Amur will change forever.

Review -

Where do I begin... perhaps with an opening statement?

I LOVE this book!

Seriously... it was that good. Any review will not even come close to expressing just how much I enjoyed

reading Unwrapped Sky, but I suppose I will give it a shot anyway!

Unwrapped Sky is an original, riveting, and mind bending read. Wielding beautiful and poetic prose, Davidson weaves an epic tale of power, class and revolution that crosses over genres ranging from fantasy through to steampunk and new weird. I loved so many things about this book. Davidson's use of language had me savouring each and every page, and I adored how his wordplay filled me (a English and History teacher) with warmth and fuzziness as I worked through the story.

The city of Caeli-Amur and the world building in Unwrapped Sky are incredibly well done and detailed. I fell in love with Caeli-Amur early on, and as I read I could easily visualise myself strolling down its streets taking in the sights, smells, and sounds. Davidson's characters are fascinating and diverse, and his use of points of view drive the story brilliantly. The reader views the revolution from all sides and from all levels of society, and his characters are as 'grey' as possible. This made them incredibly interesting and accessible to me, and I really enjoyed how there was no one true protagonist or antagonist. Did I mention the Minotaur's? No? Well there are Minotaur's as well... FREAKIN MINOTAUR'S! This was a entirely new level of awesome for me... and I found Davidson's use of different races wonderful and gripping. The magical system in Unwrapped Sky also blew my mind! As a magic system nerd (Sanderson is my Lord!) I supped happily and heartily on Davidson's thaumaturgy, with its system of mathematics and ideograms (the harvest of Minotaur body parts for magical works was both gory and strangely satisfying). The story in Unwrapped Sky also moves along at a nice pace. It does become slow in some parts, but I found that I didn't mind those sections as they were still beautiful to read and integral to the overall story. The action was well written and gripping, taking me on an emotional roller coaster ride of laughs, cheers, and tears.

Arguably, however, the best part of Unwrapped Sky is its breadth and scale. Davidson has taken on everything in this book. Caeli-Amur is firmly sat in a wider history that stretches (yet remains relevant to current events in the book) far into the past. Add to that everything ranging from philosophical discourse and revolutionary and class theory through to freedom and love and machinery and myths, and you barely scratch the surface of what Unwrapped Sky has to offer. And it works! It works bloody well!

Unwrapped Sky has raced up to the top echelon of my favourite books of all time... it has satisfied me on so many levels that even now I find myself going back to certain scenes and chapters just to reread them and enjoy. I suspect it will also become one of the books I read once every year just so I can relive its beautiful and fascinating story.

A truly magnificent story, and from a fellow Australian too (bonus points solely for that). I cannot wait for the next instalment!

5 out of 5 stars!

smashdragons.blogspot.com.au

Rjurik Davidson says

This review is mainly to point people towards some online pieces relating to Unwrapped Sky that people might find interesting.

First, if you want to read an excerpt:

<http://www.tor.com/stories/2014/03/un...>

Then the non-fiction, most importantly, finding Unwrapped Sky:

<http://torbooks.co.uk/2014/04/24/find...>

A co-interview with Ben Peek:

<http://fantasy-faction.com/2014/rjuri...>

Other interviews:

<http://www.adventuresinscifiublishin...>

<http://thebookplank.blogspot.nl/2014/...>

<http://qwillery.blogspot.fi/2014/04/i...>

<http://www.nathanburrage.com/news/an-...>

<http://blog.boomerangbooks.com.au/pla...>

Blog posts:

Creating wonderful worlds:

<http://qwillery.blogspot.fi/2014/05/g...>

Magic and Technology:

<http://www.notyetread.com/2014/05/rju...>

Fantasy and Violence (and Game of Thrones)

<http://torbooks.co.uk/2014/06/10/game...>

Nathan says

One could be forgiven completely for not knowing what to expect from Unwrapped Sky)going in. The cover suggests that Minotaur are present, which is true but gives no clues as to the greater substance. The back cover hints at dissent within a city, perhaps violence in said city's future. But what this book is really about is power, pure and simple. Who has it, who wants it, and what people are willing to do with it when they control it.

Things are changing in Caeli-Amur. The three major houses still show full control on the surface, but their

ways are breaking down the common man beyond typical labor problems. New technological marvels can be made, but the magics required to completely them warp those who wield them. Hoarding the secrets of thaumaturgy for their own uses the houses pass along only enough help their goals, withholding the protections the workers using them daily. Strikes are common occurrence, and put down with deadly force. Within this a resistance grows, holed in the relative safety of the underground, willing to stand up to the houses and start a better future. But even the idealist must contend with a power struggle to bring forth their vision.

A dark tale with a new weird vibe, for the first time I actually understand the Mieville comparisons that are inevitably thrown out for any new book that plays games with reality. Not just with its weirdness, of which there is plenty. Mutants coming in from a wasteland, creatures from the other side, minotaurs and sirens. But this is a political tale through and through. Almost every aspect of this book is rooted in the cause of the proletariat class of Caeli-Amur. And it doesn't hurt that Davidson seems to have Mieville's talent for turning a phrase. Though more accessible than, say, early Bas Lag books, Davidson's way with language rises above the average fantasy tale.

While some dark tales are easily summed up with the flippant 'everyone is an asshole,' in Unwrapped Sky this isn't the case. Indeed, each and every major character genuinely seems to and to improve things for all. They all have a heart. But to the last it will always require just one more step up the power chain to make it happen. Within the houses there is the power struggle one would expect from those exploiting the workers. Boris rose from the exploited to work with the houses and wants to make things better for his former colleagues. It genuinely pains him to watch a strike shut down with extreme prejudice. If only the seditionists would calm down and let him work from within.

Kata is the closest thing to a protagonist we see, and she is the least idealistic to start the book. In fact her early chapters make it very hard to root for her later. Yet by the end I wanted so much for her, and was pained when she disappointed me with actions less true. She works with, and works to betray, the dreamer Max, he with grand visions based on philosophies and ideas of unification.

Woven into it all is the life of the city itself. Caeli-Amur itself should be considered a character, and what a character it is! A deep history, multi layered society, still suffering from the abandonment of the gods and the loss of rights of common men. Philosophy is more than a study in this land; for many it is a way of life, for others a path of violence. A corrupted vision of the underground that can't be explained, the invasion of new-man technology, and there is a threat from the outside only slightly less dangerous than the threat from within. A promise to those who fall in love with mythical cities; Caeli-Amur will join your list of the best.

I have few reservations about this book. At times Max's story seemed to be watching from the outside toward the end. A pivotal character throughout, he gives the illusion of importance in the second half without actually affecting anything. Though rape is often an act of power vs lust, and this is a tale of power and man's struggle with it, I do feel the need to put a rape warning out there. I wouldn't recommend this book so wholeheartedly if it was handled with anything other than realism and respect, but it is hard to read.

As a debut there are few I have read that are better. Political tales seem to be in right now in fantasy. This one joins The Goblin Emperor as books I read within a month that features politics more than action. And if this niche of the genre continues to put out such high quality outings, I say bring on more of it. Let's have political tales released every month.

5 Stars

Tabitha says

3.5 / 5

Unwrapped Sky has an amazingly realized fantasy world both beautiful and harsh. The city of Caeli-Amur is a place where thaumaturgical magic and ancient technology are melded together in such a way I haven't seen before. The citizens are ruled by three Houses that hold ultimate power in the city. If you do not work for one of these Houses then you are likely to be used up and trampled beneath their maneuvering.

Let's start a revolution

?The city has quite a few interesting fantasy races and has a unique yet familiar feel to it. But at its heart, it is a city in turmoil. The general populace are unhappy with the treatment they get from the Houses and how the bulk of thaumaturgical knowledge is hoarded by the Houses. Rather than helping protect the people they employ, by granting them techniques and skills to aid them, the workers are left to flounder risking their lives and sanity using the magic necessary to do their jobs. Rather like working on a radioactive generator without a protective suit. This eventually warps the people's bodies and minds. That isn't even the worst the Houses are capable of, they will kill people indiscriminately and have completely enslaved a few other non human races. As *Unwrapped Sky* is told mostly from 3 points of view we get to see a little bit of everything.

Kata: a philosopher assassin who has crawled her way out of the streets is indebted to House Technis for all that she has. She must commit an act that breaks her heart and also goes undercover to expose a seditionist group that is hiding in the city.

Boris: a House agent who has spent practically his whole life working for House Technis and is reviled by his former friends and even his own daughter. He sympathizes with the plight of the everyday man but ultimately what is he willing to do about it?

Max: A young seditionist (revolutionary) who is also a thaumaturgist that is a member of a the seditionist group hiding within the city. He has big aspirations to free people from the rule of the Houses and believes this can be accomplished through thaumaturgy.

There were points while reading I found myself so captivated and yet I would also feel so disconnected from what I was reading. I really believed this was because of the characters themselves. While I loved the story and found the world building fascinating there simply wasn't a character that I actually liked. By the time I was 40% into the book I realized I didn't much care for any of the main characters. Where was the sympathetic character that I could latch on to? While all of them had some tragedy in their past and had good qualities about them, they also had an equal number of things that made it hard to like them. Perhaps because we got to know each character so intimately with all of their fears, desires and overall motivations, that I ended up finding their personalities unpalatable. That in turn made my reading experience unusually slow because I found myself just not caring what happened to them as much as I should have.? When I think about it – I support I can't really say I didn't like the character – because if I truly felt that way I would have stopped reading. But even though I wanted to be sympathetic to them I found myself not. Luckily I did find this changing toward the end of the novel and I believe I will be very interested in what happens to them.

?No happy champagne bubbles for you

I have to admit despite not personally caring for the characters as much as I would have liked, I still really enjoyed the world. For me that is what this book was all about. Learning about this extraordinary city, magic and this worlds mythology. It is a world rife with disastrous magic and cultures that I would love to see more closely. The details and amount of depth that was went into allowed me to see the world itself as a character, which is something I look for in a really good fantasy. Now prepare yourself, there is a lot of bleakness and sad realities to this world that make it a much more somber read than I normally enjoy. But I definitely

appreciated how rich and real the world building was. I definitely think based on the way things left off that the next book might take on a different tone which I anticipate seeing. I consider *Unwrapped Sky* to be one of those 'thinker' fantasies. It wasn't asking me to love it, it wanted me to think about everything it was offering up. Why do people do the things they do, what would have happened if this or that were done differently, what can be done, and who is willing to do it? What would you do? What more can you have, will that one more fulfilled desire give you the happiness you want. That sort of thing. I don't think of myself as a deep thinking reader. I'm in it for the pleasure of it and because I like to see new worlds – so on that point *Unwrapped Sky* delivers, not a thrilling roller coaster fantasy but a slow moving scenic train ride.

Daniel Polansky says

A nemesis is someone whose funeral you would attend in a black suit with red hands, mourning quietly and without histrionics, tossing your handful of dirt upon the coffin, offering honest condolences to the bereaved. In that spirit, and with his blessing, I will hereby offer an honest review of Rjurik Davidson's *Unwrapped Sky* (my second, in fact, though the first was tendered without having actually read the book.) Doing so goes against my own instincts and the code of our shared guild, one of the tenants of which is, to my mind at least, that a non-professional review ought to be entirely and unequivocally positive. In an age where novels are rated along side coffee machines the slightest expression of dislike echoes loud as a thunderclap, and it is a cruel bastard indeed who would do anything to lessen the likelihood of a sale.

I suppose I am that cruel bastard.

To mention all of the ways in which Davidson eschews standard fantasy tropes is to damn the novel with faint praise; at the same time, they deserve a brief mention, if only because it is sadly still so rare. Here you will find no golden children, no forgotten sons of gods, no magic swords, no Tolkien-inspired races, and no satanic analogues. The themes being handled are of weight and import, are more than the standard sad masculine power fantasies which tend to define most of the other books being shelved in next to his, 'what if I could shoot fire out of my hands!?! Everyone would have to listen to me then!'

Knowing Rjurik, I expected all of this going in, and so accord him no particular points for not putting out drivel. Where I do credit the man, where the book does deserve praise, is first and foremost in its lively and original world building. Davidson has a fertile if rococo imagination, and innumerable small bits of Caeli-Amur proved memorable to me – the watery wonderland in which an aristocrat takes his siren ingenue, the endless shifting castle of the House of Technic. The minotaurs were were cool. The magic system is likewise deftly sketched, believable without being intrusively elaborate, and from one specialist to another, I tip my hat. Within the framework of a relatively traditional narrative, Davidson likewise manages to juke left a couple of times when I figured he was moving right. The secret plan of the demonic overlords (I'm not going to look up the real names of these, he is my enemy after all) was weird and cool and different, and so was the resolution of the Boris storyline.

Davidson is, of course, an unreconstructed Marxist (isn't that adorable! It's like someone wearing a cowboy outfit, I want to take a selfie to chronicle the anachronism) and there are points in the novel which will seem, shall we say, over-familiar to anyone with a passing knowledge of the Russian revolution. But Davidson's politics, though informing his world, do not become didactic or deform the story. His revolutionaries are flawed, imperfect figures – they would not make it past the scrutiny of the Politburo without serious revision.

Enough with the kindnesses, lets make with the knives. When I told Rjurik I was reading his book he suggested I read his second. This is a common reaction among clever people to their first book (Get me drunk some time and ask me to name all the things wrong with *A Straight Razor Cure*, I could write a book

of all but equal length). I felt at times that he relied too much on inner monologues to express the point of view of his characters, rather than revealing it in some subtler fashion. His scenes of physical violence did not thrill me, though it must be said that scenes of physical violence very rarely do.

On balance, the pros far outweighed the cons, from my POV at least, though it's only fair to point out that I am more or less the exact target audience for this, as someone who has read Victor Serge and also knows the feel of a D20. Rjurik and I hold quite similar slates of obsession –can a person truly be called free, given the historic circumstances which limit our choices? What is personal morality in a world going rapidly off a cliff? Are human relationships defined exclusively by power?

It's worth your time to ask these questions in the company of Maxamillian, Kata et al. I guess what I'm saying is this – if you were to read one pasty, bald-faced Marxist, you would be better off picking this up than say, Perdido Street Station.

Your move, Rjurik.

Carly says

****NOTE: All quotations are taken from an uncorrected digital galley and are therefore provisional. Quotes will be corrected when the book is released.****

Long ago, so the legends say, a war between the gods ripped the world asunder, poisoning the lands of the northern wastes, sending the ancient city of Caeli-Enas into the depths of the seas, twisting the art of thaumaturgy so that it warps the body and mind of its practitioners, fracturing the veil between this world and the horrors that wait on the Other Side. The gods turned their faces away from their people, leaving the world broken, burned, and corrupted. The once-great city of Caeli-Amur survived, but only barely. Since the war of the gods, the city has been controlled by the Houses, and the Houses themselves ruled by the mysterious Elo-Talern, the disturbing beings that exist between the world and the Other Side. Inside the crumbling city of Caeli-Amur, unrest is growing. Even inside the Houses, the Elo-Talern have stirred from their apathy and new talents are emerging within the leadership. Workers in the mills and plants are mutilated and murdered by the dangerous thaumaturgic powers that the industry employs. Small bands of seditionists distribute pamphlets and posters and plot revolution in the dark.

Something has to give.

Unwrapped Sky plummets the reader into an utterly alien, infinitely complex world, a gritty, often grotesque world filled with breathtaking imagination and incredibly broken, problematic characters. The story is told from the perspectives of three characters: Kata, a philosopher-assassin who starts out with the task of murdering two of the sacred minotaurs and all too quickly finds herself entangled in the city politics; Boris Autec, a self-deluded ex-tramworker who has risen through the House ranks by betraying all those around him; and Maximillian, a seditionist whose vision of change is polluted by his own ambitions. While the characters' lives intersect, each explores a different facet of the city and a different set of misdeeds. The world and plot are best classified as "grimdark", with a full quota of graphic violence, murder, abuse, torture, and rape. While several members of the cast are irredeemably, horrifically evil, no character is without a taint or blemish.

Personally, I found Boris to be the most disturbing of the three, to the point that I found it extremely unpleasant to have to view the world through his thoughts. When we are introduced to him, he exhibits a

disturbing lack of self-knowledge and insight, viewing himself as a "sensitive soul" and considering every failure to be everyone else's fault. As one character says to him:

"Boris, you have talent, you have...the necessary mercilessness for greater things."

"I'm not merciless," he said. "I'm not cruel."

"Oh, but you are, Boris. You are." [...]

"I only do what is necessary."

Max's perspective supplies the most direct viewpoint onto one of the main themes of the book: the inherent contradictions of revolution. I found the seditionists both troubling and fascinating. When the story opens, the seditionists are using conspiracy and violence to drive the people towards revolution:

"[The citizens] are too complacent and only act when they are personally under threat. We must be the catalyst for their actions. We must force events, provoke confrontations, so that the citizens take sides."

This aspect of the story reminded me strongly of *Les Misérables*. Despite their lofty goals, the seditionists--just like the Houses they despise--treat the citizenry like cattle, like a force to be prodded and mobilized and trained and abused. The seditionists claim that the ends justify the means:

"We cannot be representations of the new world. We are only here to usher it in."

Max himself has something of Enjolras in him; while he does desire change, he also has a sneaking desire to be in control, to gain fame and power, to "take a special place in seditionism." At first, he believes that greater control over thaumaturgy will give the seditionists the edge they so desperately need, but, as one character tells him, his quest for knowledge is, at its core, utterly selfish.

Like the revolutionaries of *Les Misérables*, the seditionists initially appear to have no real vision of the future; they will destroy stability and replace it with a power vacuum. They justify their actions with the claim that

"The death of innocents: that was the cost of politics."

But who decided that the purchase was worthwhile? Why does this tiny group get to make a choice that forces the whole city to pay?

Of the three, I liked Kata best, for she is the least self-deluded and hypocritical of the three. Kata sees herself as immoral and desperate; while she still does truly terrible things, at least she doesn't convince herself that her actions are anything other than self-preservation.

My favourite aspect of the book was the worldbuilding. The sheer breadth of imagination is staggering; the world is inhabited by minotaurs and sirens, by the fishlike Xsanthians, the peculiar Anlusian New-Men, and the skeletal and partially disembodied Elo-Talern. Within the city, the philosopher-assassins muse about the world and kill people on the side, while desperate factory workers risk invasion from the Other Side each time they invoke the thaumaturgical components. Life in Caeli-Amur may be brutal, but it remains one of the more habitable places in this harsh world. Mutant refugees flee the corrupted northern wastelands, the abandoned city of Caeli-Enas gleams from the depths of the oceans, and across the savage landscape lies Valentis, trapped in the iron grip of twelve pitiless sorcerers. Even the basic philosophies felt strange; the characters see their souls, their humanity, as a product of their memories, so losing memory becomes a kind

of death.

At the same time, the sheer breadth of the worldbuilding meant that details were necessarily a little scant. I would have liked to understand what made the three fields of thaumaturgy incompatible; in our world, any layman can explain in a sentence why relativity and quantum are contradictory, but all we are ever told about the fields is that they require incompatible worldviews and that crossing the streams is dangerous. I was also fascinated by the New-Men; I would love to know where they came from, what their goals are, and how these "new" people were created in the first place.

Unwrapped Sky struggles to reveal what differentiates animals from men and men from gods; what principles must be kept and what must be discarded for expediency. Overall, while the characters were more flawed and story was grimmer and more grotesque than I would usually prefer, the book was so incredibly imaginative, the worldbuilding so infinitely complex, that I was captivated.

Will I keep an eye open for the sequel?

Definitely.

~~I received this ebook through NetGalley from the publisher, Tor, in exchange for my honest review.~~

Excerpted from my booklikes review.

Aoife says

Unwrapped Sky follows three different characters all living in a city called Caeli-Amur. Kata is a Philosopher-Assassin and in debt to one of the Houses that makes up the 'governing body' of the corrupt city. Boris Autec is a sub-officiate for one of the houses, raised up from a simple transmancer, and while trying to do the right thing may do an awful lot of bad things. Finally, Maxamillian is part of a rebel group attempting to initiate a revolution among the people against the houses. This story also included magic called thaumaturgy that warps users physically and mentally after years of use and a sister city beneath the sea with a giant library full of secret knowledge.

Overall I really enjoyed this though it took me a while to get into the swing of it. I really enjoyed all the characters particular stories, especially Kata who I think had one of the more interesting arcs. She starts off as a cold assassin but we quickly see she's someone much more than that - a person with deep feelings and someone trapped in their own position with no way out. Her journey to Max and how she ends up really becoming a seditionist was interesting to see and she really evolved as a character and came into her own as part of the group.

Boris Autec was also great just because of his warped way of doing things. He was so interesting to follow because it was clear he wanted to do things to help the poorer people in the city, and the people he grew up with, but in a way that wouldn't mean they were all slaughtered by the Furies. In doing so, Boris ultimately sacrificed everything he was and became more and more ruthless and evil while at the same time still holding this ideal of helping everyone eventually in his own mind.

I thought Max's journey would be one of my favourite but ultimately he became the most boring character with little to no character development. He quickly became too involved with the journey to the library and seemed content to let everything else he worked for in the group fall to the plans of Ejan. What happens to Max near the end will definitely be interesting to follow in the next book but I think I would have liked him to eventually meet Kata again and see what happens between them.

The descriptions and world-building of Caeli-Amur was pretty good and I felt like I really got a good idea of how the city worked, how it was governed and which house controlled different sections. The history of the Aya and the gods and their links with the city and then the Elo-Talern and their control over the city as well were interesting, plus who exactly they were, to read about. I am looking forward to reading the next one.

Mark Lawrence says

So, this book has quite a low average rating on Goodreads (3.25) and I can understand why to a degree.

It's not written like most fantasy books and many fantasy readers may find it moves them out of their comfort zone. It's more intellectual than most books with a minotaur on the cover. For some reason the style puts me in mind of classic 20th century Russian literature. You want a clear and advancing plot with definite goals? You're not getting it. You want likeable characters? Nope, not really. You want compelling characters? ... again ... not really, not in the 'bursting with personality/attitude' way.

On the other hand, 17 of my Goodreads friends (people who like my work) have given it a very high average of 4.35.

Let me back pedal quickly to the cover. I have the UK edition with a gorgeous cover of a sky, a small boat on the sea beneath, and a city beneath the waves. The US cover with a woman and a minotaur promises a more traditional fantasy ... and lies ... though there are women and minotaurs in the tale.

The setting is, a lower tech (though not low tech) society, among the ruins of a distant higher tech society. The conflict is a social one, seditionists trying to stir up and aim the downtrodden people against the elite.

The book might well be called part of the new-weird. I've only read 100 pages of Meville but they share a 'feel' in as much as we have weird creatures, tentacles, things growing off people, mutations ... I'm no expert but I'm going to stamp NEW WEIRD on the book. So there.

The main concern of the book (it seems to me) are its themes. The characters exercise the themes of exploiting others and being exploited, the desire to do good, the inevitable compromises that tarnish ideals, the failure of philosophy when faced with raw humanity and messy human problems.

This doesn't mean that the characters stride back and forth on the stage declaiming long ideological tracts ... but there is that vibe to it. We have philosopher-assassins who are eager to expound on their particular schools of thought as they end you.

The characters not infrequently indulge in dialogue that might come from the aforementioned Russian novel or a play by Chekhov - short profound declarations sealing off topics or relationships.

But perhaps I'm over-playing the differences. It certainly is a fantasy novel and the characters do have their wants and goals. Spells are cast, monsters encountered, fights take place.

The book is clearly part of a series - the end sees a lot of new plot-lines open though some issues are definitely laid to rest.

I'm having difficulty pinning down what I thought of the book. It's certainly an interesting read with lots of good writing and lots of fascinating ideas. It is perhaps a little 'dry' (despite all the water and slimy things),

lacking the emotional heart that I often enjoy in a book. I wasn't cheering for a victory or 'oh no-ing' for a hero for whom things were going wrong. But I was intellectually engaged and it made a pleasant change from my recent reads.

Branch out, why don't you, and give it a try?

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