

★ **City of Last Chances**

Adrian Tchaikovsky

Head of Zeus (May 2, 2023)

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Adrian Tchaikovsky's *The City of Lost Chances* is a gritty adventure fantasy of uncommon breadth, fashioning a universe brimming with magic and treachery.

Illmar was recently conquered by Pallesand, an authoritarian nation. The shocking murder of a Pallesandian official and the theft of his magic wards sets off a wild chain of events that leads the city toward an uprising. Through multiple perspectives, the novel takes a kaleidoscopic look at the diverse levels of Illmar's society, including laborers who enslave demons from alternate dimensions to do their work; rabble-rousing thieves looking to create chaos; scholars and students struggling to preserve Illmar's past even as they come under fire in the present; and foreigners from the wild territories just outside of city boundaries with their own powers and secrets.

Events spin out of control. There's both irony and drama in the situation: every person—from the highest-ranking Pallesandian official to lowly tavern owners—has a key role to play in the incipient rebellion. The cast of dozens and numerous crisscrossing plots demand close attention, but Tchaikovsky's muscular prose propels the story forward even as he sketches in each character with deft strokes.

While violence erupts often, there are plenty of humorous eccentricities as well, including a magical "god" who moves from person to person and prevents his companions from committing hurtful action—a quirk that leads to some sticky situations. The worldbuilding is equally immersive, covering intriguing historical backstories, political intrigue, and idiosyncratic uses of magic, especially in the most riveting passage: a nightmarish visit to a cursed section of town called "The Reproach" in which almost all who enter are driven mad.

A satisfying self-contained tale that also suggests a multitude of possible future stories, *The City of Lost Chances* is an accomplished, imaginative fantasy novel.

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