

Neverwhere by Neil Gaiman

The tube network is synonymous with London. It's the adventure every commuter and visitor to our great city must go on at some point. There is nothing like being on the 8.37 Bank branch train from Highgate to Angel and hurtling through the clay earth at 35mph while being forced to hug a strangers backpack to make you feel alive.

Every city I go to I try to travel on their tube network, from the Clockwork Orange in Glasgow to the chaotic and rickety metro in Prague – and all in between. I love it. All life passes there and there is no better way to understand the locals than to see them when they're focussing on the day ahead. I try to read about tube networks, but for something so ingrained in our society there seem to be surprisingly few pieces of fiction set there.

Neverwhere by Neil Gaiman is to me one of the finest books about life beneath the streets to have been written. It straddles the line between reality and sci-fi in a manner that makes it accessible to fans of sci-fi and more traditional fiction.

The book begins with Richard Mayhew, a Scot living in London and living what is apparent to the reader as a life of dissatisfaction. His world seems to be sliding into a mediocre pit of nothingness until one evening, while accompanying his fiancée who clearly doesn't like him all that much to dinner, he finds an injured woman in the street. Despite protests from his girlfriend, Richard stops to help her.

Richard carries a blood covered young woman called Door back to his flat where she reveals to him that she is from a place called London Below and is being chased by assassins. Richard lets Door stay in his flat that evening and in the morning,

after he receives a call from said assassins, Door disappears – and so does Richard's world.

His fiancée has forgotten him, estate agents are showing people around his flat, and his friends and colleagues act like they've never seen him. Terrified, Richard he finds his way to London Below and goes in pursuit of Door to try and get his life back.

London Below is a subterranean London, far below the streets of London Above and its residents are the people who have fallen far down the cracks in society. London Below is a mysterious

and murky world of shadows and danger; its inhabitants are the homeless, but also people from other times, such as Roman legionaries and medieval monks – as well as fictional and fantastical characters – and there is seemingly no way out for Richard.

In London Below, there really is an Earl of Earl's Court, a Baron at Baron's Court, shepherds at Shepherd's Bush and an angel, called Islington. It is also the home of the Great Beast of London, an ancient and terrifying creature dwelling somewhere deep in the Labyrinth, at the very heart of London Below. None of these characters seem particularly keen to welcome

Richard with open arms to London Below.

Neverwhere is the perfect read for any adult looking to while away time this summer reading in one of our borough's fine parks, and it is ideal for parents to give to a child as encouragement to keep them reading over the school holiday's. Neil Gaiman is one of our finest writers but is less well known that his friends and contemporaries such as graphic novel writer Alan Moore or the late, great, Terry Pratchett – nevertheless, all of his books are worth a read and the summer time with its long evenings is a great time to get going.

