

Underground

By : Steve E Barry

An ordinary geezer is studying welding in college. This is his monologue where he explores the train ride of thoughts and assumes to know what other commuters are sometimes thinking. This is a 20 minute ride on an ordinary day on any subway in any major city of this planet styles out using London as a template.



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One chair or three, one soundtrack where necessary: The sound of underground trains. Projected backdrops of London Transport's finest pictures.

GEEZAH: Deep in the underground people get shunted round, these giant steel worms they travel inside - get shoved about from side to side. Don't make a sound. Don't look anyone in the eye

Look above their heads, read those adverts you've read a hundred times before. Look at the ceiling, look at the floor, that turgid dank chewing gum ridden corner where someone, no doubt, has relieved themselves after a heavy beverage session one dark depressing night. A million thoughts rattle inside the brain!

Look at your reflection in the window now - but don't be vain!

Coz right opposite you the glass echoes the curvature of the tunnel:

This is where the ghastly distortions takes place as your face starts to elongate. Oh my God! Look at my forehead. It goes right tip to here! And now my jaw drops, long drawn and thin. Then in between. the eyes stretch wide, like two eerie black strident pools. *(pause)* Don't make a sound.

Now, if I were standing and had nowhere to plant my arse, I'd have to become a predator with keen sight and awareness to look for a likely opportunity to appear. The shuffling of bodies getting ready for their stop, furtive glances, eyes drop. No sign of competition so hop into their place, like an act of contrition: Thy holy bum space.

Hold tight! These are the sounds of the London Underground:

DUGDUGDUGDUGDUGDUGDUGDUGDUGDUGSWOOOOOSSH! HISSSSSSSS. *(stand, walk to doors, mime open with sound)*

MIND ... THE GAP. (balancing act to bridge the gap)

STAND CLEAR OF THE DOORS PLEASE. WHOOSH! *(trapped!)*

The electronic dissonance tortures in discord, pure noise grinding - grating in your mind, you don't get a chance to truly unwind, then a deep lurchful bass rumbling beneath your feet, the depressing drone makes you want to weep. Then a high pitched metallic screech, high above tolerable levels, not unlike the sound a man might make sliding down a forty foot razor blade using his left testicle as a brake.

It goes right through you. Those metal wheels turning on steel track, sparks fly, going round and round! Don't make a sound. Don't you dare strike up a conversation! The other people here don't want to talk, hard days work, pure long graft, I'm knackered mate, I need a bath.

The lullaby hum rapidly lulling me into a travel slumber ... zzzz

SHNORT! The first grunt of a snore wakes you with a start.

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betray, then after such a long time, we're off on our way.

All and sundry shift about on their seats to establish new body positions. Elbows independently struggling for a little bit of extra space. Heads all glued to newspapers, reading books. Don't look up. Hold tight to your text. Immerse yourself in your own little virtual world reading love, war, conspiracy, espionage, U.F.O.s. DISAPPEAR. Coz you don't have to face the discomfort of having to travel with people who you do not know. That you did not choose to be with, in your company. People who you don't have time for. You don't know who you might get involved with. Could be a mass murderer right next to you. Whether he or she has done the deed yet or not. I mean, I ask you, what are they doing if they're not reading? Thinking a thousand different thoughts. Making decisions about other peoples lives. Yeah. Like what is the more financially beneficial situation. Clerical wheeling, ducking and dealing, diving to the depths of the bank balance. Balancing other peoples bank statements. Reading between the lines. Perpetuating the capitalistic machine. Economic awareness? More like whose getting what. We know the people at the top gets the bleeding lot. You don't see them travel like a high speed rat under the metropolis. Down here underground where the only sound is the noise of the train and the words in your brain.

GENT: Ahh. Relaxing reading on the railway. I do enjoy a good sit down at the end of the day. Still, bit of a shame I didn't get the company car, maybe next promotion, yes, then I'll go far. Well, I don't mind as long as I get a seat. I've simply today been rushed off my feet. The office world, damnit don't you know. Strangling collar, tie to tight, can't sleep a wink, I stay up all night! Getting quite hot in here don't you think? Ahh cool swimming pool into which I must sink. Bloody suit boiling sizzling with sweat. Daren't take it off for I would regret, the assault on the public and upon myself. Quite a stink I think it would generate, the air in here it would simply desecrate. Wouldn't want to give anyone the idea that they could do the same.

GEEZAH: The plonker to your right in a suit done up tight, gets out the Times or next largest newspaper to date. Now, rarely will he fold it up to focus on a single article. Instead, he annoyingly flicks through page by laborious page. Completely oblivious that he is invading so many peoples personal spaces with his black and white, sometimes colour, monstrosity. So, naturally, you try to read a headline or two, but his own space shrinks into himself as he counteracts your attempt to invade his privacy. To read alongside him and gander at the latest tabloid victims. The paper now is at a precise right angle. Straight up to his ear, sliding down to a sharp corner, so now you can read the front page! If only the train ride were a bit smoother, and if ponce features here would stop clearing his throat and rattling the paper in your face!

GENT: I wish that unbearable fool next to me would stop trying to read my paper! Why didn't he get buy his own rag! Honestly, its so damned rude of him. Blasted working class parasite! I'll just maintain that stiff upper lip. Loosen the tie a tad perhaps. But I'll wear my suit, tailored and proud, I'll wear it to the last, even if I pass out! My Status symbol. Yes. My pedestal in society. Well respected. Wealthy. Stressful. Exhausting. Phone calls, appointments, reports, meetings, coffees and lunch with beverages. Pieces of paper piled high. Not anymore. Not with paperless office technology. Meetings with slim files. Board meetings with bored faces. Pass the brown envelopes to see them smile. Spectacled gentlemen talking computers - I wonder how all these other commuters spend their time thinking probably about the super information highway and their bosses praises. Not like the poor git to my left. Looks like his jeans are rusting â he's not the sort that I would be trusting to be at all polite or business like. Salt of the Earth? Too much salt makes me vomit. GEEZAH: You turn away thinking about how to surreptitiously cause said paper to ignite over the sneaky flame of a stray match. I'll bet he's got 2.4 kids, nice little wife tucked away somewhere, unless she's got the Mercedes today for a spot of shopping or an afternoon on the horses in Ascot, â coz he's probably got himself a driving ban for being on the old juice, detached house in Suburbia, ongoing affair with the secretary, impending divorce, ulcer six months away from possible eruption, his teenage son's gonna get chucked in the nick for drug offences, the judge can't be bought - but then what would I know about those I travel with? Making assumptions, casting aspersions on the way they look. Well, if it's all you've got. They look at me and what do they see?

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GENT: Another tall dark handsome stranger to that career girl seated over there, further left. Thank God we're both sitting, for if she stood near me, I'd have to offer her victory to my warm awaiting chair. A selfless act of proper gentlemanly conduct with no self pity or shred of despair. I'd rise silently and smoothly, cool as the breeze ne'er touching though gasping for embrace. Trembling for titillation. A gentle curve of the hand near one of her buttocks, indicating the warm awaiting pleasure of sitting in leisure, so you can watch her move into position.

GEEZAH: The geezer to your right, on the other hand, is clad in bright leather, with death metal emblazoned upon his sleeves. Like an urban warrior of darkness, one of Satan's horde, whose sole purpose and mission in life is to assault everyone with not just the sound of metal dying in his megablast headphones, but the demise of every style of music there ever was. I swear he's got them speakers on backwards, or are the extreme decibels necessary to penetrate his thick skull and blasted hearing capacity, coz he's the sort of bloke who needs to be right up against the amps so he can feel the sound shake his bones coz the ears ain't gonna hear it... He does not look at you, he hides behind a sunglassed mask and stiffens his whole body; so as not to be moved by you, the toing and froing of the train or any other earthly force.

Hold tight to your right to be there in the middle of it all.

When we as people climb aboard the tube, we're all guilty deep down, in the underground, of joining the rat race, the vermin scuttling round. Scampering through tunnels, going to offices, hiding in bubbles, rushing and raving about how little time there is. Well, me - I just want to get from A to B as fast as possible - I don't want to be caught in the limbo of transit. So, is it any wonder, when the train slows down, that I am suddenly right up at the doors, nose pressed against the hairline gap in between. The doors begin to slide as I pop out like a pea from a pod. I march down the platform, two tonne rucksack on back, leap up the stairs three at a time, dart through a tunnel, up the escalator clomping heavily on the metal where my steel toecaps land, crash through the turnstiles, up some more stairs, then out into the street where the squawling masses of people are pretending and believing and hoping that they all have some kind of synergy holding them together! Thrown together from all cultures, BLACK WHITE BROWN PINK YELLOW GREEN BLUE ASPHYXIATING ON THOSE FUMES TOGETHER!

Red. Stop. Just for a minute. Why not make it bearable for the others, have a crack at kindness, pull a face, tell a joke. Don't sit there like the rest of them and start to mope. All easier said than done, but by having some fun you can increase the day.

Coz deep in the underground, people make lots of sound, but you can't hear it coz it's the machinations of the brain, exploring every possible thought, fear, emotions sizzling underneath the surface. Narratives emerging like on some sort of production line. Factory style, mini soap operas, meditations on life, the universe and everything. So, you can sit there and natter away to yourself inside your head, or watch other people do the same. At least reading gives us a structure in the head, instead of looking like lost souls or nearly dead. Beware! The universal tube face. (*Demonstration of the gormless, mouth slightly open catatonic state*)

INSPECTOR: (*gets up, mimes taking out a notebook, places cap on head*) Snap out of it! All kinds of people from every walk in life. Goodness me, is that my wife, 'allo darling wotcha doing here?

WIFE: Going to see a lawyer, I'm divorcing you my dear.

INSPECTOR: I don't blame you, I spend too much time drinking beer I fear, must be the pressure of working on the tube as a ticket inspector, annoying everyone with that fearsome question: TICKETS PLEASE.

WOMAN: Ooh, 'ang on. I've got it in my handbag somewhere. Here yâ go.

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INSPECTOR: I'm sorry, but this monthly pass is out of date.

WOMAN: Oh, please let me go, I'm gonna be late.

INSPECTOR: That's not my problem, you are now a criminal in the eyes of the state. Fare evasion is a serious crime, theft, no less, from a corporate giant. Now, wossyamame?

WOMAN: Calvin Klein!

INSPECTOR: Don't waste my time. You will have to come with me to the next station office. I'll tell you about the penalty. I'll even do it in mime ...

GEEZAH: The height of rush hour travel. People squashed together like a tin of sardines, the train pulls into Picadilly Circus, a mob of commuters line the platform. Oh no! Not more people! Let the others off first. Multiple peas from a pod. Pop pop pop. Out they go. Now three times the amount that left get on. Then as the doors close, some bright spark wedges his briefcase in the doors, stops the train delaying all. Selfish men rudely rushing to take vacant seats before pregnant women, O.A .P.s, refugees.

GENT: Well, after all, it is the age of equality.

GEEZAH: And never mind who you press up against, limbs going in ail directions, left, right, centre; trying to grab onto something solid. Oops! Someone's handbag strap. Sorry missus! I wasn't THWACK trying to nick your bag THWACK! Ooh! Umbrella handle up the rear. SWISH. Blinded by long hair as someone turns their head too fast.

Oh no! I've got to kop hold of something quick! NO, NOT THE RED HANDLE. £50 FINE FOR IMPROPER USE. PLEASE GIVE UP THIS SEAT TO THE ELDERLY OR HANDICAPPED. NO SMOKING. MAXIMUM FINE £1000. WE ALL HAVE THE POSSIBILITY OF GOING COMPLETELY MAD! YIELD. EMERGENCY EXIT.

So, go all the way on the underground, until you're so far out that you're Overground.

Take a look around you and tell me what do you see?

A completely different reality.

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