



Neverwhere

By Neil Gaiman
ISBN: 9780380973637

Introduction

Richard Mayhew is an unassuming young businessman living in London, with a boring career in finance and a pretty but demanding fiancée. Then one night he stumbles across a girl bleeding on the sidewalk. He stops to help her, and the life he knows vanishes in an instant.

Several hours later, the girl is gone, too. And by the following morning, Richard Mayhew has been erased from his world. His bank cards no longer work, taxi drivers won't stop for him, his fiancée doesn't recognize him, and his landlord rents his apartment out to strangers. He has become invisible and inexplicably consigned to a London of shadows and darkness -- to a city of monsters and saints, assassins and angels -- that exists entirely in a subterranean labyrinth of sewer canals and abandoned subway stations. He has fallen through the cracks of reality and has landed somewhere different, somewhere that is Neverwhere.

Neverwhere is the home of the Lady Door, the mysterious girl whom Richard rescued in the London Above. A personage of great power and nobility in this murky, candlelit realm, she is on a mission to discover the persons responsible for her family's slaughter and, in doing so, preserve this strange underworld kingdom from the malevolence that means to destroy it. And, with nowhere else to turn, Richard Mayhew must now join the Lady Door's entourage in their determined and possibly fatal quest.

For the dreaded journey ever-downward -- through bizarre anachronisms and dangerous incongruities, and into dusty corners of stalled time -- is Richard's final hope, his last road back to a "real world" that is growing disturbingly less real by the minute.

Discussion Questions

1. Like *The Odyssey*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and many mythological stories, *Neverwhere* involves a descent into an underworld. What is the appeal of exploring a world that exists beneath the surface of our everyday lives? What does the marquis de Carabas mean when he tells Richard that "London Below -- the Underside -- is inhabited by people who fell through the cracks in the world"?
2. In what ways is it meaningful that Richard enters the world of London Below through an act of compassion for Door? Where else in the novel does he prove his willingness to sacrifice his own safety and comfort to help others? Why are these acts of courage and selflessness so important?
3. What are the major trials that Richard must face in his journey underground? What inner qualities do these trials bring forth in him? What kind of hero is he?
4. In what ways can the world of London Below be seen as a kind of inverted mirror of London Above? In what ways does this magical world, with its outrageous characters and floating markets that sell everything from rubbish and lost property to "first-class nightmares" and "things that might have been hats and might have been modern art" comment on the world above? In what sense is *Neverwhere* satirizing the "normal" world and its values?
5. The narrator describes the bodyguard Ruislip as resembling "a bad dream one might have if one fell asleep watching sumo wrestling on the television with a Bob Marley record playing in the background," and suggests that Mr. Vandemar's voice sounds like "night wind blowing over a desert of bones." Where else do we find this kind of highly metaphoric description in the novel? How do such descriptions make the book more vivid? In what ways is this kind of writing suited to the story being told?
6. What makes the characters Richard meets in London Below -- Lord Ratspeaker, Door, the marquis de Carabas, Hunter, Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar, Serpentine, the Earl, and others -- so engaging? What magical powers do they possess? What character traits make each of them so distinctive? How do their reactions to Richard change over the course of the novel?
7. What is the significance of the Angel Islington turning out to be the betrayer and perhaps the most evil character in the novel? What motivates his treachery? In what ways is it appropriate that a man like Arnold Stockton owns the The Angelus statue through which Islington may be reached?
8. At the end of the novel, when Richard tries to explain to Jessica why he can't resume their relationship, he says "I've just changed, that's all." In what important ways has he changed? What has his journey in the underworld allowed him to discover about himself? Why would it be impossible for him to marry Jessica now?
9. While in London Below, Richard longs to go home where "Everything is going to be normal again. Boring again. Wonderful again." Why does he find "normal life" so empty and dissatisfying when, after such a heroic effort, he finally does get home? Does he make the right decision in returning to London Below?
10. What does *Neverwhere*, as a whole, say about the themes of trust and betrayal, loyalty and disloyalty, selfishness and compassion?

About the author

Neil Gaiman is the critically acclaimed author of the novels *American Gods* (winner of the 2002 Hugo Award for Best Novel), *Stardust* (winner of the American Library Association's Alex Award), and the award-winning *Sandman* series of graphic novels, as well as *Smoke*

and Mirrors, a collection of short fiction, and *Coraline* (winner of the 2003 Hugo Award for Best Novella), a tale for readers of all ages. His first book for children, *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*, illustrated by Dave McKean, was one of Newsweek's Best Children's Books of 1997. In 2003, Gaiman and McKean teamed up again to produce another illustrated children's book, *The Wolves in the Walls*. His small press story collection, *Angels & Visitations*, was nominated for a World Fantasy Award and won the International Horror Critics Guild Award for Best Collection. Originally from England, Gaiman now lives in America.