

A photograph of a subway station interior. In the upper right, a rectangular sign with horizontal stripes and the text "Way out" is visible. Below it, a small digital display shows the number "144236". In the foreground, an open electrical panel is shown, revealing internal wiring and components. The panel has two warning labels: one with a "no open flame" symbol and the text "No open flame", and another with a lightning bolt symbol and the text "DANGER Electric Shock". The panel is mounted on a wall, and the background shows the curved structure of the subway station.

It's About Time

A DÉTOURNEMENT

REFERENCE WORKS

253 by Geoff Ryman

Quadrilateral Cowboy by Brendon Chung

U. S. A. Trilogy by John Dos Passos

Homestuck by Andrew Hussie

CREDITS

A détournement for the underground railroad by *Transport pour Londres*

15:45—Witching hour

PLATFORM 1

You walk out of the howling wind in the stairwell into a solid mass of lukewarm subway bilgeair that reeks of Windows XP. There's one minute until the next Southern line train to Mornington Crescent and four people on the platform. By reflex you pick up your phone and, guess what, no service on the Tube. This isn't the Circle and District line.

LOOK AROUND

There's a girl listening to a portable vinyl player. It's an 8-inch vinyl spinning in a light pink plastic case that she's wearing like a bag. It's bluetooth enabled and connected to her moulded black headphones.

There's a large tunnel ad about life insurance. Two smiling faces peer down at you as they talk about "Passing on with dignity".

There's a large tunnel ad about investing safely with AI powered finance advisors.

There's a large tunnel ad, blocked out by the rapidly approaching train.

YOUR OPTIONS

Board the 15:46 train on the Southern Line to Mornington Crescent.

Car 5 (3 stations remaining)

The girl also boarded the train. She's in between vinyls right now, a complicated procedure that involves balancing the player on her knees (frayed jeans) and carefully slipping the vinyl off, while taking out another from an album of sleeves in her actual V&A tote bag. In the process the headphones slip off and nearly knock the setup off-balance, but she gives it a flick and the whole thing starts spinning again. There's a moment when all the little parts click together and all of a sudden life stops being a student film and starts looking like an Apple advert. It's not often you get to live through a moment like that

SCREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEECH

It's a mess. Vinyls rolling around on the floor. There's a horrible tearing sound, partially masked by the train, as the V&A tote bag rips while the girl tries to lean over. The player loses bluetooth connection and all of a sudden you're treated to the world's tinniest rendering of *Clair De Lune* coming from cheap chinese speakers as everyone else in the car guiltily shuffles away. The next station is coming up.

You, too, look away.

The girl has gotten a hold of her vinyls. One station down.

Car 5 (2 stations remaining)

There's a man coming through, coming through, coming through—

“I'm homeless on the streets of London, could anyone spare any change please...”

“Any change please...”

“Any change please...”

“Any change please...” he's getting closer closer closer

“ANY CHANGE PLEASE”

You're looking away. For a moment two souls, manufactured by an incredible set of cosmic circumstances and destined by a million billion stochastic fluctuations to meet, cross paths. It's an event that will never recur in the history of the universe until heat death breaks down the last molecules into their constituent atoms and the last atoms into heat, entropy, and microscopic microwave radiation.

Then it's over and he shambles down the train and the car heaves a collective sigh of relief.

LOOK AROUND

The girl's still here, still fussing around with her torn bag.

Someone's checking their phone, somehow.

Someone's doing a crossword.

Car 5 (1 station remaining)

THINK AN ORIGINAL THOUGHT

This stylistic free-writing train of thought bullshit's getting a bit old, isn't it?

CHECK YOUR PHONE

No new messages. Duh.

You try and see if you still have a news article or a website loaded but the only thing you opened before you came down was something about "sdoc" replacement web standards and honestly trying to read this while the train jolts every five seconds is incredibly unappealing. So you close the phone again.

LOOK DOWN

Down, a novel direction. Some ratty shoes that were probably trendy, once. Now they just remind you how many miles you have left today. From the station to the crossroads, then to the roundabout past the round church, all the way down most of the dead high street, then a left turn into a secluded alley where you always wonder if you're going to get mugged...

There's a song playing in your head and it's *Ren's Bittersweet symphony* (*The Verve Retake*).

There's poetry inside the city if you listen enough...

Car 5 (0 stations remaining)

Up, up, grab the jacket, check your seat, the girl's left already, up, up.

Then through the doors into the expectant masses, push through again, the music's still going in your head and you've left.

The train picks up the pieces behind you.

PLATFORM B

Much like Platform 1, to be certain. There's a large ad for a Brainbox that will, apparently, "adapt to and inform you about your surroundings dynamically". It looks like a portable cassette player, probably on purpose. There's another large ad for KFC rendered in the style of an iMac.

Someone coming from the windswept stairwell tunnel leading to the exit bumps into you. It's time to go.

YOUR OPTIONS

Exit Mornington Crescent Station, taking a left until you reach the crossroads, then to the roundabout past the round church, all the way down most of the dead high street, then a left turn into a secluded alley where you always wonder if you're going to get mugged, then right again, to home.

Transport
Pour
Londres