

# An Underground City

"The museum is now closing," a robotic voice announced over the speakers.

Nathan turned to his friends Tia and Umar, crestfallen. They were standing in the lobby of the Waychester Air-Raid Shelters, a museum which they had been hoping to visit. Unfortunately, thanks to the snail's-pace traffic they'd been stuck in for what felt like years, it seemed they'd missed out altogether.

"Never mind," Nathan's dad said. "Maybe we can have a quick look at these photos instead?" Nathan rolled his eyes and let out a heavy sigh as his dad pointed to the black-and-white photos that decorated the lobby walls. He walked over to look at them, but Nathan didn't follow him. Instead, his eyes lit up as he noticed a door standing ajar nearby.

"Come on," he said to Tia and Umar, who moved closer towards him. His dad's attention didn't even flicker from the walls — he was completely absorbed by the old photos. Taking advantage of his distraction, the three slipped around the door and ran down the flight of metal stairs that followed, the sound of their shoes clanging like steel drums.

Finally they emerged into a tunnel. Nathan stared, mouth wide open. The domed corridor, which was formed from dusty, rust-coloured bricks, stretched away into the darkness. A dim amber light flickered like a firefly, and a strong, earthy smell informed him that they were now far below the town's streets, under a thick blanket of rock and soil.

Deciding to venture further, they headed down the snake-like course of the tunnel. Eventually they came upon a square chamber, which resembled a prison cell due to its cramped size. Inside, the room was crowded with three bunk beds, complete with striped bedding, plus a few other odd bits of furniture.

The sight confirmed what they had already known about the air-raid shelters. They had been used during World War Two by local residents, who would rush there for refuge when bombs were being dropped. Some people had stayed so frequently that the shelters became a second home.

Umar's eyes were bright as he wandered around, examining each piece of furniture closely. "Imagine sleeping down here!" he said, grinning.

Nathan thought about trying to drift off knowing that bombs were raining down on the streets above.



"I'm not sure I'd like that," he murmured.

The three wandered along to a different set of chambers. One appeared to be a medical room, littered with pieces of old equipment. The yellowed letters strewn around the next room, as if whipped up by an angry ghost, suggested they were now standing in a long-forgotten post office. Then came what must have been a kitchen, as rusted pots and pans still lay abandoned on the shelves.



"It's like an underground city," said Nathan in astonishment.

They continued browsing until Tia, glancing at her watch, remarked that they had been gone for nearly half an hour. They began to move, then froze.

"Did anyone keep track of the route?" asked Nathan tentatively. Tia and Umar shook their heads.

"Now we're really going to have to stay the night," said Umar. The panic in his voice suggested he no longer considered it such a pleasant prospect. Tia began muttering about her growling stomach, and Nathan remembered the narrow, uncomfortable-looking bunk beds with a shudder.

Suddenly, a voice called out from the darkness, and a woman in a crisp, navy suit appeared. Her name badge identified her as Amanda, the museum manager.

"There you are," she said. "You're Nathan, Tia and Umar, I presume?"

"Yes," replied Nathan nervously.

Amanda frowned. "One of you has a very anxious parent upstairs. You do know how dangerous these tunnels can be? It's very easy to get lost — it's a miracle I found you so quickly."

"We needed information," Nathan blurted out. Then he explained to Amanda why they had been so eager to see the shelters. They had been doing a homework project about Waychester during World War Two, but had been struggling to find anything helpful in the library or on the internet. They had hoped to find out the facts they needed by visiting the Waychester Air-Raid Shelters.

Amanda's face softened slightly. "Well, I suppose you meant well — and when it comes to history, curiosity is always a good thing. Perhaps I can give you a quick tour, as an exception."

They collected Nathan's dad, who looked stern, but reluctantly agreed that they could continue exploring the tunnels. Then the real tour began in earnest. As Amanda spoke, the experience of wartime Waychester began to come to life for Nathan, Tia and Umar. When they got back home that evening to complete their project, the ink poured out of their pens — they had found inspiration.