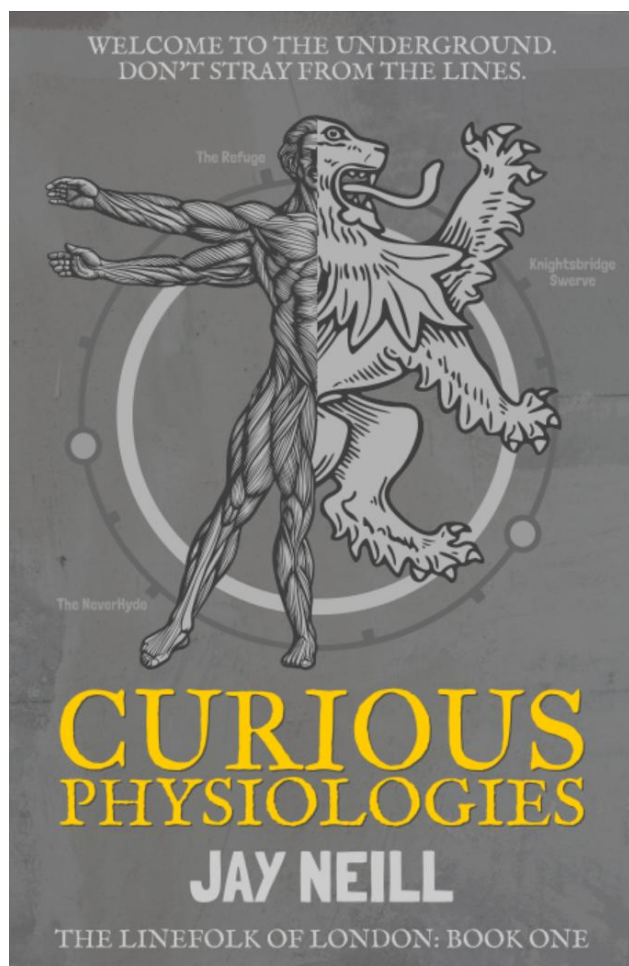


Curious Physiologies – Jay Neill

Synopsis



Hannah Chadwick is running from her past, but she just stumbled into London's most dangerous secret.

A fierce, professional nurse, Hannah found herself unfairly blacklisted after speaking out against corporate misconduct. Desperate for work, she takes the job at a nondescript clinic just off Harley Street, treating patients with "rare conditions" for an eccentric abclynician named Julius Wayworthy.

But this isn't a normal medical practice. Hidden throughout the city, their world is defined by a mysterious energy source lurking in the tunnels of London's Tube. These are the LineFolk: thousands of creatures—from elegant haemovores to monstrous shapeshifters—who use the city's network to conceal their true forms.

When Hannah witnesses her colleague, Axton Flynn, violently transform to save her life during a mugging, she learns two terrifying

truths: she is a human working in a world of monsters, and her predecessor was brutally murdered.

Now, caught between the LineFolk's lethal secrets and the growing curiosity of the Police, Hannah must quickly decide who she can trust. Because if Wayworthy hired her for a reason, that reason might just get her killed.

Author Bio – Jay Neill



Jay Neill is a British author of high-concept Urban Fantasy, specialising in the collision of the mundane and the magical. After 25 years in the corporate sector, he switched to writing fiction to build worlds hidden just beneath our reality.

His first novel, *The Terminus Of All Things*, is a standalone urban portal fantasy that explores the concept of Endland, a chaotic, mirror-dystopia built from the obsolete remnants of our own world.

Jay's new series is *The LineFolk of London*, a separate venture into British mythology where all UK mythological creatures are forced to live within the restricted boundaries of the London Underground's Circle Line, surviving only by harnessing a unique magical energy source: Linether.

Jay's witty, structured approach to modern fantasy has seen him compared to authors like Ben Aaronovitch (*Rivers of London*) for his use of real-world infrastructure and Robert Rankin for his eccentric, inventive British comedy and urban mythologising.

Book Data

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Reviews

Excerpts from reader reviews on GoodReads.

- "A really unique read that really sets up a curious world."
- "An amazing story, an amazing world, and I can't wait to read more!"
- "Jay Neill has crafted a world that is as fascinating as it is dangerous."
- "I absolutely loved this story from start to finish."
- "Curious Physiologies is a captivating and atmospheric read."
- "A binge-worthy read that balances worldbuilding, character, and story with skill and care."

For more reader reviews see - <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/243883796-curious-physiologies>

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An excerpt from Chapter 1 of *Curious Physiologies*

"Hello Zazi," said a voice, and she yelped, stumbling back into the car park. Every fibre of her being was urging her to head further away from the street, but the boundary was too close and she daredn't.

The woman emerged from around the corner of the archway, unnaturally tall and thin. Her eyes were wide and sunken, her black hair clinging to the sides of her face as the damp atmosphere condensed onto her cool skin. "Why did you stop? I thought you would scamper straight home tonight."

"What are *you* doing here?" squeaked Zazi, backing up against a car. "Have you been following me all the way down the Corridor?"

"From the Vee, actually. You were never very observant." The woman stood in the centre of the archway as though she knew her silhouette was impressive, and terrifying.

"What do you want?"

Zazi's stalker sighed. "I won't beat about the bush. I want you, of course."

"Want me to do what?"

"Not to *do* anything. You've overstepped. You never know when to stop. I am here to make you back off. Permanently."

"They put you up to this?" Zazi looked over her shoulder, deeper into the car park. She hadn't strayed from a safezone since she was a child. For two decades, elders had drummed it into her never to cross a boundary. Not without consequences. All LineFolk had the same imperative. Keep hidden. Don't reveal your true form.

"It's irrelevant. You need to die." The woman reached into her coat and drew out a knife, maybe eight, ten inches long. "No more blabbing from you."

With a last glance over her shoulder, Zazi realised she only had one chance to get away. She spun and bolted deeper into the car park—thirty yards, forty yards, every step taking her closer to a no-go area. She was counting on the woman not following. Surely she wouldn't risk it?

It was impossible to tell precisely when she hit the boundary. It should have been around the fifty-yard mark, but it was never exact. That was why the Folk gave the fringes a wide berth. The lines didn't run straight. They twisted, curved, and flared. You could feel it, but only the most sensitive could put the pin precisely on the edge of a no-go zone.

All she knew was that her back suddenly shrieked with pain. Was it the knife?

No, it was her wings.

They folded out of nowhere, autonomously shimmering into existence for the first time in a decade with exquisite agony. Pearlescent membranes stretched and unfurled like a dragonfly shedding its nymph skin. Her coat burst apart, unable to constrain the new tissue. Her steps felt lighter as long-neglected muscles

spasmed into life, and her wings danced in the streetlights, lifting her onto tiptoes, before lowering her down, now easily a hundred yards from the road. The wall of the car park was there.

Zazi gulped in air, the cardiac pressure of the transformation, and the additional metabolic load of resurgent fast-twitch muscles, taking their toll. She turned, empowered by revealing her true self—ready to dare her opponent to cross the threshold, knowing that she wouldn't, and couldn't.

But she already had.

The woman, still striding towards her without breaking step, appeared to unfold from her sternum out, her ribs stretching backwards, her skin growing pallid as it rippled hideously and took on new form. Her clothes disintegrated with the contortion, ripping and tearing in protest at the shapes they were being asked to constrain. Her head snapped back, either in joy or agony, her lips peeling from her gums to reveal row after row of black lizard-like teeth. Any resemblance to a human vanished. Zazi pushed herself against the wall as hard as she could, her wings grating on the brickwork.

Its convulsions subsiding, the creature looked at its quarry calmly, as a cat looks at a mouse before it strikes. The knife clattered to the ground near its clawed feet. It wouldn't need a blade to finish the job.

"You're a cyoeraeth," whispered Zazi, glancing into the night sky, weighing up if she could fly so soon after morphing. "You're real."

It didn't reply. It probably couldn't speak. Instead, it moaned, an otherworldly noise that echoed off the parked cars and set dogs barking.

Zazi had never been so terrified in her life, not through all the hiding, the subterfuge, and the deception. Cyoeraeths were mythical, even in the world of the LineFolk. Those living in a fairy tale still needed their legends. She knew that unless she got away fast, it was over.

In a split second, she threw her shoulder-bag at the monster's head, making it duck slightly to one side. The instant it broke eye contact, she flung herself upwards, pushing as much strength into her hardening wings as she could muster. Muscles screamed, and she swore she could feel fibres tearing with the effort. She was moving up as quickly as this early stage of her transformation would allow, and for a brief moment she managed to look over the wall into the gardens of the houses behind.

Then she felt a yank on her ankle and yelped as she looked down to see the cyoeraeth grasping her foot, spittle flying as it scrabbled up the bricks. The additional weight was too much, and she plummeted to the ground, feeling fragile tissue bend and snap as her wings crumpled beneath her against the tarmac.

The creature moaned again, resorting to crawling toward her on all fours, claws ripping up concrete in a way that suggested unbelievable power.

Zazi didn't regret what she'd done to lead her to this moment, but she was scared that her life was ending. She whimpered as the cyoeraeth placed a massive hand around her neck and leaned closer, its breath wheezing in a repulsive approximation of human speech.

It squeezed mercilessly. "I don't care if they see me."

The last thing Zazi felt was her shattered wings reabsorbing into her body as it desperately diverted its resources into keeping her heart beating. Eventually, even that was not enough.