

BOOK REVIEW –
EVERYBODY
KNOWS THIS IS
NOWHERE BY
ALICE FURSE

by Noel Maurice



**EVERYBODY KNOWS
THIS IS NOWHERE**

A NOVEL BY ALICE FURSE

Picture the office of a firm called Weblands, where they've only just started allowing women to wear trousers to work. And faces peeping out of secretarial collars, sipping tea from pseudo-funny gift shop mugs, cracking PC jokes. Our recently-graduated and under-employed heroine starts work here. It's meant to be temporary, but with the job market being the way it is, it may turn out to be rather more permanent. She makes friends, reluctantly. After all, they're strangers, and they're in suits, and how can anybody want this.

Now that she always takes the 17.26 train home, there are certain faces she always sees. Slowly, these many strange people in their dull work attire, who hide behind screens and papers, become anonymously familiar, and begin to grow souls in the eye of the beholder. Nobody wants to be friends with a suit, and certainly nobody wants to be the woman in a black skirt and a white shirt. We have all been there: It feels like being no-one at all.

Ok, I speak only for myself. But my thoughts aren't incompatible with the black-humored, scintillatingly ironic tone in which office life

and other white-collar goings-on are depicted in this story.

"Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere" painfully skates around feeling as if you are no-one, when really you know you are, or you could be, someone.

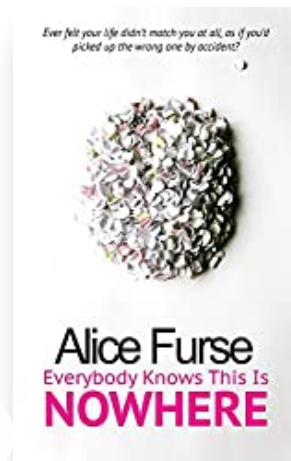
Alice Furse's deadly deadpan tale of life between a a moldy rented apartment somewhere in suburban Brighton and this infuriatingly generic office, zooms in on the half-earnest and half-aborted friendships between colleagues thrown together by the necessity of secretarial work. Why wouldn't they all, in their own way, be interesting and lovely individuals, with a warm and bustling home life, and quirky personalities? But, she dreams, there has got to be more to life than this...

Our poor narrator-girl is more and more internally cut up, and begins to go semi-insane as the job market situation won't look up, and the man she lives with, her soulmate boyfriend from university days, seems to have given up altogether. He is happily a traffic warden, and most of the excitement disappears in his x-box. Latent misogyny rears its ugly head in the relationship, and a

resignation to fading into nothingness spreads its gooey tentacles further and further, all over the young woman's life.

The couple life gets worn down and breaks up, but the big break for our heroine doesn't come. Like all single people, she can now freely indulge in all the things he used to hate, and she can stay up late whenever. But like working in an office grandly allowing women to wear trousers if they so wish, the ability to be alone rather than with someone who has given up prematurely, doesn't cut it to make this picture happy. Drink comes in and out of the picture, too, and the knowledge that things could well go on like this forever. And of course in real life, they really do.

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If we imagine the girl in the book and the author of the book to be one and the same person, we can happily state that the very product in our hands, this sparkling and satiric, tragicomic work of fiction, itself is living proof that she got away. But the book's

ending certainly doesn't suggest this. The book ends on a tender note. The traffic warden comes back to pick up his x-box, and a masterfully understated conversation follows between the ex-lovers as they part ways. Since the whole story is dotted with hints to an apocalyptic event brewing under the surface, and a mental breakdown too, we're led to wait for that—but it never comes. We are led to wait for drama, gore, and splashing colours to lift the fuzzy veil of this grey scenery with tedious offices, uneventful train rides, slowly fading romance, and the muted noises from dodgy upstairs neighbors. But no. Nothing ever happens here. Everybody knows his is nowhere. And also, everybody knows places like, and lives like this, really do exist. Scary.

I know it sounds clichéd, but I couldn't put it down. Mind-bending. Razor-sharp. Grimly hilarious. Cannot recommend highly enough.

What's more, Alice Furse self-published this book first, before Burning Eye bought it off her and re-published it, so how's that for a success story. If I were a publisher, I too would have pulled out my wallet right away. This book is so hot. Must read.