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Opening Extract from...

Welcome to Night Vale

Written by
Joseph Fink and Jeffrey Cranor

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WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE

PRAISE FOR *WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE: A NOVEL*

“A marvellous book ... full of people we love and root for, full of frightening things, and full of dramatic tension that pays off beautifully ... shot through it all is the love and integrity that made *Night Vale* a success from the beginning” *Boing Boing*

“This is a splendid, weird, moving novel ... It manages beautifully that trick of embracing the surreal in order to underscore and emphasize the real – not as allegory, but as affirmation of emotional truths that don’t conform to the neat and tidy boxes in which we’re encouraged to house them” *NPR*

“All hail the glow cloud as the weird and wonderful town of *Night Vale* brings itself to fine literature ... The novel is definitely as addictive as its source material”

Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

“Brilliant, hilarious, and wondrously strange. I’m packing up and moving to *Night Vale*!”

Ransom Riggs, author of the No. 1 *New York Times* bestselling *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children*

“*Welcome to Night Vale* lives up to the podcast hype in every way. It is a singularly inventive visit to an otherworldly town that’s the stuff of nightmares and daydreams” *BookPage*

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“As weird and surreal as I hoped it would be” Wil Wheaton

BY JOSEPH FINK & JEFFREY CRANOR

Welcome to Night Vale: A Novel

Mostly Void, Partially Stars:

Welcome to Night Vale Episodes, Volume 1

The Great Glowing Coils of the Universe:

Welcome to Night Vale Episodes, Volume 2



WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE

A NOVEL

JOSEPH FINK AND JEFFREY CRANOR



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*To Meg Bashwiner
and to Jillian Sweeney*

The history of the town of Night Vale is long and complicated, reaching back thousands of years to the earliest indigenous people in the desert. We will cover none of it here.

Suffice it to say that it is a town like many towns, with a city hall, and a bowling alley (the Desert Flower Bowling Alley and Arcade Fun Complex), and a diner (the Moonlite All-Nite Diner), and a supermarket (Ralphs), and, of course, a community radio station reporting all the news that we are allowed to hear. On all sides it is surrounded by empty desert flatness. It is much like your town, perhaps. It might be more like your town than you'd like to admit.

It is a friendly desert community, where the sun is hot, the moon is beautiful, and mysterious lights pass overhead while we all pretend to sleep.

Welcome to Night Vale.

Pawnshops in Night Vale work like this.

First you need an item to pawn.

To get this, you need a lot of time behind you, years spent living and existing, until you've reached a point where you believe that you exist, and that a physical item exists, and that the concept of ownership exists, and that, improbable as all those are, these absurd beliefs line up in a way that results in you owning an item.

Good job. Nicely done.

Second, once you believe you own an item, you must reach a point where you need money more than you need the item. This is the easiest step. Just own an item and own a body with needs, and wait.

The only pawnshop in the town of Night Vale is run by the very young Jackie Fierro. It has no name, but if you need it, you will know where it is. This knowledge will come suddenly, often while you are in the shower. You will collapse, surrounded by a bright glowing blackness, and you will find yourself on your hands and knees, the warm water running over you, and you will know where the pawnshop is. You will smell must and soap, and feel a stab of panic about how alone you are. It will be like most showers you've taken.

Before you can offer Jackie your item, there will first be some hand washing, which is why there are bowls of purified water throughout the shop. You need to chant a little as you wash

your hands. You, of course, should always chant when you wash your hands. It is only hygienic.

When you have been properly purified, you will lay the item on the counter, and Jackie will consider it.

Jackie will have her feet up on the counter. She will lean back.

“Eleven dollars,” she will say. She will always say, “Eleven dollars.” You will not respond. You are, ultimately, unnecessary to this process. You are, ultimately, unnecessary.

“No, no,” she will say, waving her hand. And then she will name her actual price. Usually it is money. Sometimes it is other things. Sometimes it is dreams, experiences, visions.

Then you will die, but only for a little while.

The item will be given a price tag. Eleven dollars. Everything in the pawnshop is that price, no matter what she loaned you for it.

Once you are no longer dead, she will give you a ticket, which later you will be able to exchange for the item, or at any time you may look at the ticket and remember the item. Remembering the item is free.

You are leaving this story now. You were only an example, and it is probably safer for you not to be in this story anyway.

Jackie Fierro squinted out the window at the parking lot. There was no one coming. She was closing soon. Relatively speaking, she was always closing soon, and also always just opening.

Beyond the window was the parking lot and beyond that the desert, and beyond that the sky, mostly void, partially stars. Layered from her vantage, it was all distance, equally unreachable from her post at the counter.

She had recently turned nineteen. She had been recently nineteen for as long as she could remember. The pawnshop had been hers for a long time, centuries maybe. Clocks and calendars don't work in Night Vale. Time itself doesn't work.

For all her years as the newly nineteen owner of the pawnshop, she left the shop only when it was closed, and then only to her apartment, where she sat with her feet up on the coffee table, taking in the community radio and the local cable news. Based on what the news told her, the outside world seemed a dangerous place. There was always some world-ending cataclysm threatening Night Vale. Feral dogs. A sentient glowing cloud with the ability to control minds (although the Glow Cloud had become less threatening since its election to the local school board). Old oak doors that led to a strange desert otherworld where the current mayor had been trapped for months. It seemed safer to not have friends or hobbies. To sit at work, head down, doing her job, and then sit at home, glass after glass of orange juice, radio on, safe from anything that might disrupt her routine.

Her days were spent in silence, mostly void, partially thought. Some days she would recatalog her inventory. Other days she would clean the shelves. Every day she would sit and think. She would try to think about the day she took over the store. There must have been a day like that, but she could not think of the specifics. She had been doing this for decades. She was very young. Both of these were true at the same time.

She knew college was a thing nineteen-year-olds did. She knew being unemployed in a difficult job market and living at home was a thing other nineteen-year-olds did. She was content doing neither of those, so she continued on and on and on at the pawnshop.

She understood the world and her place in it. She understood nothing. The world and her place in it were nothing and she understood that.

Because of the lack of working time in Night Vale, she went off her gut feeling about when the shop should close. When the

feeling came, it came, and the doors had to be locked, removed from their frames, and safely hidden.

The feeling came. She swung her feet off the counter. A decent day.

Old Woman Josie, who lived out by the car lot, had come in with a great number of cheap plastic flamingos. She had carried them in a large canvas sack and emptied them onto the counter like loose change.

"It is not for myself that I give up these little ones," said Old Woman Josie, addressing a bare wall several feet to the right of Jackie in a strong, formal voice, making the occasional sweeping gesture with her palm, "but for the future."

Josie stopped, her palm still out. Jackie decided the speech was over.

"All right, man, I'll give you eleven dollars," she said. Old Woman Josie tightened her eyes at the bare wall.

"Ah, okay"—Jackie softened, prodding at one of the flamingos and looking at its weak plastic belly—"tell you what, I'll give you a good night's sleep."

Old Woman Josie shrugged.

"I'll take it."

A good night's sleep was a wildly generous offer. The flamingos were worthless, but there were so many of them, and Jackie couldn't help herself. She never refused an item.

"Be careful not to touch those directly," Josie said, after she was finished being dead.

Using shop rags, Jackie laid the flamingos out side by side on a shelf, each one tagged with a single handwritten eleven-dollar price tag. Most things shouldn't be touched anyway, Jackie thought.

"Good-bye, dear," said Josie, taking the ticket that Jackie had

filled out. “Come by sometime and talk to the angels. They’ve been asking about you.”

The angels lived with Old Woman Josie, in her small tract home whose tract no longer stood, leaving it alone at the edge of town. The angels did chores for her, and Josie made a modest income selling items they had touched. No one understood why the angels lived with her. Very little was understood about the angels. Some things were.

Of course, angels do not exist. It is illegal to consider their existence, or even to give them a dollar when they forget bus money and start hovering around the Ralphs asking for change. The great hierarchy of angels is a foolish dream, and anyway is forbidden knowledge to Night Vale citizens. All of the angels in Night Vale live with Josie out by the car lot. There are no angels in Night Vale.

Around the middle of the day, Jackie had acquired a car. It was a Mercedes, only a few years old, and offered with urgency by a young man wearing a gray pin-striped business suit stained with dirt. It was impressive how he got the car onto the counter, but there is a way these things are done, and it had to go on the counter. He washed his hands and chanted. The water went brown and red.

She settled on an offer of five dollars, talking him down from eleven, and he laughed as he took the money and the ticket.

“It’s not funny at all,” he explained, laughing.

And finally a woman named Diane Crayton arrived late in the afternoon—almost closing time according to Jackie’s gut.

“Can I help you?” Jackie asked. She was unsure why she asked this, as Jackie rarely greeted people who came in the store.

Jackie knew who Diane was. She organized PTA fund-raisers. Diane sometimes came by to distribute flyers that said things

like “Night Vale High School PTA Fund Drive! Help give kids the municipally approved education they deserve. Your support is mandatory and appreciated!”

Diane, in Jackie’s mind, looked just like a woman who would be an active PTA mom, with her kind face and comfortable clothing. She also thought Diane looked like a woman who would be a loan officer, with her conservative makeup choices and serious demeanor. She would look like a pharmacist if she ever were to wear the standard white coat, gas mask, and hip waders.

She looked like a lot of things to Jackie. Mostly she looked like a person lost in both a place and a moment.

Diane took a handkerchief from her purse. Without changing her upward, distant expression, she wept a single tear onto the cloth.

“I’d like to offer this,” she said, finally looking at Jackie.

Jackie considered the handkerchief. The tear would dry soon.

“Eleven dollars. That’s the deal,” she said.

“I’ll take it,” Diane said. Her loose-hanging arms were now drawn up near her purse.

Jackie took the tear-dabbed handkerchief and gave Diane her ticket and the money.

After her brief death, Diane thanked her, and hurried out of the shop. Jackie tagged the tear with its eleven-dollar price tag and placed it on a shelf.

So a decent day. Jackie flipped the sign on the door to CLOSED, her hand touching the window, leaving its ghost upon the glass, a hand raised to say “Stop” or “Come here” or “Hello” or “Help” or maybe only “I am here. This hand, at least, is real.”

She looked down to adjust the items on the counter, and when she looked up, the man was there.

He was wearing a tan jacket, and holding a deerskin suit-

case. He had normal human features. He had arms and legs. He might have had hair, or maybe was wearing a hat. Everything was normal.

“Hello,” he said. “My name is Everett.”

Jackie screamed. The man was perfectly normal. She screamed.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Are you closed?”

“No, that’s okay, no. Can I help you?”

“Yes, I hope so,” he said. There was buzzing coming from somewhere. His mouth?

“I have an item I would very much like to pawn.”

“I . . .” she said, and waved her hand to indicate everything she might have said next. He nodded at her hand.

“Thank you for your help. Have I introduced myself?”

“No.”

“Ah, I apologize. My name is Emmett.”

They shook hands. Her hand continued to shake after he let go.

“Yes, well,” he said. “Here is the item.”

He set a small slip of paper on the counter. On it, written in dull, smeared pencil, were the words “KING CITY.” The handwriting was shaky and the pencil had been pressed down hard. She couldn’t stop staring at it, although she didn’t know what about it was interesting.

“Interesting,” she said.

“No, not very,” said the man in the tan jacket.

The man washed his hands and quietly chanted, and Jackie forced herself to lean back and put her feet on the counter. There is a way these things are done. She looked a few times at the man’s face, but she found she forgot it the moment she stopped looking.

“Eleven dollars,” she said. The man hummed, and other small voices joined him, apparently from within the deerskin suitcase.

"Where did this come from?" she asked. "Why are you offering it to me? What would I do with it?"

Her voice was high and cracked. It did not sound like her at all.

The man was now harmonizing with the voices from his suitcase. He did not seem to register her questions.

"No, no, I'm sorry," she said, fully aware of, but unable to stop, her poor negotiating technique. "My mistake. Thirty dollars and an idea about time."

"Done," he said, smiling. Was that a smile?

She gave him the thirty dollars and told him her idea about time.

"That is very interesting," he said. "I've never thought of it that way. Generally, I don't think at all."

Then he died. She usually used this time to finish up the paperwork, get the ticket ready. She did nothing. She clutched the slip of paper in her hand. He wasn't dead anymore.

"I'm sorry. Your ticket."

"There's no need," he said, still possibly smiling. She couldn't get a good enough look at his face to tell.

"No, your ticket. There is a way these things are done." She scrawled out a ticket, with the information tickets always had. A random number (12,739), the quality of light at time of transaction ("fine"), the general feeling of the weather outside ("looming"), her current thoughts on the future ("looming, but fine"), and a quick sketch of what she thought hearts should look like, instead of the pulsing lumps of straw and clay that grow, cancer-like, into our chests when we turn nine years old.

He took the ticket as she thrust it at him, and then, thanking her, turned to leave.

"Good-bye," she said.

"KING CITY," said the paper.

“Good-bye,” waved the man, saying nothing.

“Wait,” she said, “you never told me your name.”

“Oh, you’re right,” he said, hand on door. “My name is Elliott. A pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

The door swung open and shut. Jackie held the slip of paper in her hand, unsure for the first time in however long her life had been what to do next. She felt that her routine, unbroken for decades, had been disrupted, that something had gone differently. But she also had no idea why she felt that. It was just a slip of paper, just clutched in her hand, just that.

She finished her paperwork; on the line that said “pawned by,” she stopped. She could not remember his name. She couldn’t even remember his face. She looked down at the piece of paper. “KING CITY.” She looked up to get a glimpse of him out the window, just to jostle her stuck memory.

From the counter, she could see the man in the tan jacket outside. He was running out to the desert. She could just barely see him at the edge of the parking lot’s radius of light. His arms were swinging wildly, his suitcase swinging along. His legs were flailing, great puffs of sand kicked up behind him, his head thrown back, sweat visible running down his neck even from where she sat. The kind of run that was from something and not toward. Then he left the faint edge of the light and was gone.