



Welcome to New Haven: The Journey to Enlightenment

Rashan Bryant

Bryant Industry

(124pp)

979-898705860-2

In the series-opening spiritual novel Welcome to New Haven, an ordinary office worker awakens to his superpowers.

An ambassador from New Haven retrieves the man who can save the world in Rashan Bryant's fantasy novel *Welcome to New Haven*.

Malachi is on his way to the gym after another frustrating workday when a stranger, Sebastian, asks him if he's brave enough to save the world—and offers Malachi money to listen to his proposal of how he could. Though Malachi is prepared to take the money and run at the end of the spiel, Sebastian persuades him with his account of Malachi's history and his role in New Haven—Sebastian's and the Creator's home, the origin and destiny of all humanity. Sebastian and Malachi enlist Malachi's best friend, Peter, and sister, Lily, to the cause of fighting Malachi's evil twin brother and New Haven's enemy, Donovan. With D, Sebastian's second-in-command, the group trains until they are ready for a battle back on Earth.

The characterizations emphasize the team's unity: Peter and Lily tease serious Malachi, for example, as he assumes his big brother role. Their camaraderie is infectious, and their strong combined superpowers exist in comforting contrast to the dangers they face, including closed-mindedness, resentment, and anger. In contrast to their developing personalities, though, Sebastian and D seem stalwart and unchanging. Like the idols they are fashioned after, they are patient examples and teachers to the real heroes of the book, who learn to combat evil through their growing friendships.

The story falls into a familiar good-versus-evil structure, and the omniscient wisdom with which Sebastian convinces Malachi to attempt his life-saving mission also works to the narrative's benefit. Sebastian's metaphysical quest is appealing—an antidote to the drudgery of the opening scene in Malachi's office. The orderly descriptions of New Haven's chain of command and peaceful, justice-fueled mission convince Malachi to join its ranks and prepare to head off the foe of this vision of perfection. With Sebastian's guidance, Malachi is tasked to remember who he is and recalls the powers of heroes in his past, including Jesus and other freedom fighters. He rediscovers his own heroism in time.

While its prose is passive and somewhat formulaic, the book's worldbuilding is convincing—if also often stagnant. Long discursive passages result in a plodding pace, and the urgency of the team's mission is muted as Sebastian's explanations and meditations are prioritized. The book's true action sequences are saved for its ending, but their style is also staid, and the group's new powers have a limited impact. Malachi's thoughts about his superpower of warping time consume more space than his use of it, for example.

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MARI CARLSON (September 29, 2023)

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