



The Thing about Growing Up in Jokertown

Carrie Vaughn

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The Wild Cards universe has been thrilling readers for over 25 years. In Carrie Vaughn's "The Thing about Growing Up in Jokertown," a group of teenage jokers yearn to explore outside the confines of their strange little neighborhood and get a real taste of the Big Apple.

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The Thing about Growing Up in Jokertown Details

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From Reader Review *The Thing about Growing Up in Jokertown* for online ebook

Jennybeast says

An interesting story in a sort of Gotham-overlaid NYC, with teens and powers and the problems that brings for them.

E. says

A cute romp; probably more impactful if you're a longtime reader of the series--this was my first intro, and it covered ground well.

TL says

But if both your parents are wild carders? If they both have the virus, and therefore the gene is written into their DNA? You're gonna have the gene, and you get the same odds as anyone who gets the virus: ninety percent chance of death. One percent chance of becoming an ace. Nine percent chance of being a human whippet, or octopus mermaid, or whatever.

*Jokertown gives you some weird ideas of what's normal, but if you never leave, you never need everybody else's normal. **Normal** normal.*

"It's a free country," Beastie says. Out of us all, he looks like the monster, but he's the calmest. The most sensible, even. He only scares people when they deserve it. "We're not in a cage. We can go anywhere we want."

"Yeah, right," Splat says, laughing.

*We all know what he means: Sure, it's not like there are any laws that say a bunch of joker kids can't go walking up Broadway and then buy a hot dog and hang out in Times Square like anyone else. But hardly anyone actually does it. People would stare. We might not be able to find someone to actually sell us a hot dog. Splat would do okay; so would Kris. But Beastie? Me? A cop or two would start tailing us, and maybe even stop us and ask questions. **What're you kids doing so far from home?** —because they wouldn't have to ask where we're from. And if we were lucky, the encounter would end with them saying, "Maybe you kids ought to get on home before you get in trouble," and there'd be just a little bit of a threat in the statement.*

Read the story here

You are dropped into this world without much explanation but just enough was hinted at for me to enjoy the story and for none of that to be an issue.

This was so much fun :) Wish this had been longer so I could spend more time with these people... hopefully

they show up again in one of these *Wild Card* volumes.

Seems I have some catching up to do haha

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Review first published on Fantasy Literature:

In this fairly lighthearted short story, a Tor.com online freebie, we enter the WILD CARDS universe, originally based on a role-playing game, developed into a story concept by George R.R. Martin and Melinda Snodgrass, and now shared by some thirty authors. In this alternative history, an airborne alien virus that was released after WWII has spread worldwide. The virus kills 90% of the humans who come into contact with it and mutates the rest, with 9% (the “jokers”) developing useless and/or repulsive deformities and just 1% (the “aces”) gaining superpowers without an adverse effect on their appearance.

Miranda, known as Rikki, lives in Jokertown, a community on the outskirts of New York City where Aces and Jokers have gathered to live among their own kind and avoid the stares and prejudices of natural people (the “nats”). Rikki’s parents both have the wild card mutation ? her mother is a woman with an octopus’ bottom half who delights in startling sightseeing nats who come into the convenience store where she works ? so she inherited her wild card gene from them. Rikki has superspeed, but she’s burdened by a whippet’s shape, with a miniscule waist and barrel chest, as well the mongoose-like fangs that led to her nickname.

Rikki and her group of teenage friends, all jokers as well, are restless within the safe confines of Jokertown. So Rikki talks the group into taking an excursion to Central Park, which they’ve never seen before. It’s an amusing tale, a little slight and predictable, but charmingly told, and given some depth by the group’s universal desire to spread their wings, despite their fears of trouble from those who aren’t like them. And the unusual (semi) superpowers of Rikki’s group of friends are captivating.

James says

A pretty great short story. Story is about a Rikki who is a joker (body shaped like a Whippet) who lives in Jokertown. Rikki and her friends take a trip to Central Park. Even though no major events happen within this story. Its get to get another view into the Wild Cards universe. So far I have really enjoyed what I have read within the Wild Cards universe. Hope Tor releases more stories. Especially the novels that are currently out of print.

Luci says

This was a quick and fun read with a unique view into the Wild Card universe.

Michael D. Kanner says

This is a great story and my only wonder is why it has not become a YA series (besides Vaughn is writing other great stuff).

Maggie Gordon says

Yeah, another Wild Cards story! This one features a group of teens who decide to venture outside of Joker Town to visit the rest of New York. For a Wild Cards story, it's surprisingly uplifting. There's the usual racism comparisons, but for once there's so hope and acknowledgement that maybe not everyone is terrible!

Jams says

Precise and fast paced. This is excellent short story telling.

Molly says

The thing about growing up in Jokertown. It's a great short story. I loved the characters and the protagonists insight into living in Jokertown. It doesn't link in with any bigger plot in the books and it doesn't have some big twist but I loved it all the same.

Anthony says

The Thing About Growing up In Jokertown, is another short story single from Carrie Vaughn, set in the Wild Cards universe.

This is a very nice slice of life story. Is it huge and impactful? No. Is it needed for previous continuity? No. What it is, is a low key story that touches the heart in all the right places.

Sort of a coming of age story about the young people of Jokertown, that lower Manhattan neighborhood that those lucky enough to survive the Wild Card Virus, but unlucky enough to turn over a Joker, call home. What makes this story of Jokertown different from some others however, is that this isn't about the more well know villains or heroes of that place. Rather, it is about the everyday people who call Jokertown home. We see that though this "Bad Neighborhood" may be home to gangs and powerful friends and enemies, it is also the home of families that just try to get by and raise their kids.

This is the story of one of those kids: Miranda Michaelson, known to friends and family as Rikki, for her Mongoose-like looks. She is in her own way one of the "special" Jokers, those with a super power to go with the freaky appearance that normal "Nats" find frightening or offensive. She is super-fast. But what good is it when you are 15 years old, and can't even go out for the track team at school because you would have an unfair advantage?

Rikki is her parent's miracle baby. She was born with the Wild Card, because both parents are Jokers. She lived; her mom and dad look at her as the most important thing they ever made. They worry about her on the gang infested streets at night, but are lifted up because she's such a good and sweet girl.

But for Rikki, a 15 year old girl that can run the length of the city in an hour if she wanted, the little Jokertown New York environment is like a prison. There must be more. I have never even set foot out of Jokertown, she thinks. A whole legendary town is only a short subway ride (or a super quick run for her) away.

The story kicks into its main focus as she hangs with her posse of fellow Joker teens; good kids who are just wondering how to spend a warm day in the city. We meet Rikki's friends:, Kris, Beastie, and Splat.

Kris: a teenaged girl whose skin changes color at the slightest change in her mood or feelings. She is always hiding her face and arms in her hoodie. Imagine being a teenager unable to cover up the slightest change in emotion. That's Kris.

Beastie: he could be a star on his high school football team. He loves football. But he can't play because people fear his strength and size. Covered in hair with horns sprouting from his head, he is what would be an obvious Joker-Ace, with super human strength and durability. People are frightened of him, but his friends know he's the gentlest of any kid at school.

Splat: you would think he has it easy. He looks pretty much like any Nat. But his Ace is a Deuce. He can flatten himself against anything like water spilled on the floor, but he is completely helpless in this state. For him it's like being given a power to do nothing but be annoying to his friends. That is his power.

Hanging out in a tiny park on a warm day puts ideas in Rikki's head. The idea she would like to see Central Park! Turns out none of her friends have ever been there either. Why not us Rikki thinks, we aren't breaking a law by going, and have just as much right as anyone else to head north to the playground of the city. Thus begins a trip on the subway and on foot to see what they can see.

This is a gentle adventure, and our hero Rikki discovers that she has more to offer and be than just a store clerk in Jokertown. She wants to live and see and be and help the world around her. This is the story of a kid making her parents proud, by being what and who she is; but also looking for more.

Fiona says

My first foray into the Wild Cards series - I feel like there'd be a bit more context if I'd read other books, but an intriguing introduction nevertheless.

Joe Pranaitis says

Author Carrie Vaughn brings us into the universe of Jokertown, Jokertown is a place where people who have been mutated go to live out their lives in peace and they have kids, this story is about one of those kids a teenager named Rikki who has what can be called the speedforce for a joker but she is a cut above her

friends because she wants to get involved and have adventures which she does as her and her friends take a trip to central park. This is a great story and one not to be missed.

Keith Bowden says

Wild Vaughn

Wild Cards is a fun series and Carrie Vaughn is a captivating author. Combined, this makes for a solid short YA/SFF piece. We've got the travails of otherness, growing up, dealing with parents, and hanging out/having fun with friends. Recommended.

Michelle Hearne says

Great short story

It's pretty entertaining but way too short. Leaves you clamouring for more. Thoroughly enjoyed the premise only wished there was more to come
