



# Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge

*Paul Krueger*

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**Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge** Paul Krueger

**In this sharp and funny urban fantasy novel, booze is magic, demons are real, and millennial Bailey Chen joins a band of monster-fighting Chicago bartenders instead of finding a “real” post-college job.**

Bailey Chen is fresh out of college with all the usual new-adult demons: no cash, no job offers, and an awkward relationship with Zane, the old friend she kinda-sorta hooked up with during high school.

But when Zane introduces Bailey to his monster-fighting bartender friends, her demons become a lot more literal. It turns out that evil creatures stalk the city streets after hours, and they can be hunted only with the help of magically mixed cocktails: vodka grants super-strength, whiskey offers the power of telekinesis, and rum lets its drinker fire blasts of elemental energy. But will all these powers be enough for Bailey to halt a mysterious rash of gruesome deaths? And what will she do when the safety of a “real world” job beckons?

This sharp and funny urban fantasy is perfect for fans of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World, and grown-up readers of Harry Potter. Includes 14 recipes from a book of ancient cocktail lore.

## Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge Details


Date : Published June 7th 2016 by Quirk Books

ISBN :

Author : Paul Krueger

Format : Kindle Edition 288 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Urban Fantasy, Fiction, Paranormal, New Adult, Magic

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# From Reader Review *Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge* for online ebook

## Marvin says

In reading *Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge*, the first thing I noticed was the emphasis in the promotion to call this a "New Adult" Novel. Once I figured it was a targeting ploy and not a "new novel for adults", I endeavored to find out what it meant. Goodreads to the rescue. Their explanation: "New Adult fiction bridges the gap between Young Adult and Adult genres. It typically features protagonists between the ages of 18 and 30". So okay. In our status-focused and age-focused civilization, I guess the typical 20 year old is not ready to bridge the gap between Suzanne Collins and Jackie Collins yet. You need to take baby steps.

That new targeting ploy becomes even odder when I finally got into the novel. Let's look at the premise. Bailey Chen has just graduated college. She has no real prospects yet and is not sure what to do with her life. She has taken a job at a local bar as a barback which has the dubious distinction of keeping her around her old friends, especially her friend Zane with whom she has an unreturned infatuation. But one night she makes herself a Screwdriver (vodka and orange juice if you are not a drinker) on the sly and finds she has special powers for about an hour. On top of that, vicious creatures called tremens begin showing up. She soon finds out the bartenders are really an old form of magicians/warriors whose ability to mix drinks is really an ancient form of potion making. In other words. making a drink right does way more than giving you a buzz.

It is a very clever idea, maybe even inspired. Equally inspired is the inclusion of several drink recipes and background on that drink and its ingredients. But problems come up very quickly, not the least that "new adult" designation. The characters are in their twenties but the dialog is in the teens. It just doesn't feel right. The protagonists in this novel have no business near a liquor bottle not to mention bar tending. But there are other issues. While the premise is fine, the necessary background and build-up isn't. We are given a cursory background for the bar tending gig but the threat they fight is uncomfortably vague. What exactly are they and where do they come from? We never really find out. What we have is a good premise with a thin story and little atmosphere. That is not a good thing when you are writing a fantasy, even an urban one.

And that is the problem. When all is said and done what we have is a rather regular and nondescript urban fantasy that doesn't know if it wants to be teen or adult. Most of the characters are formula driven with the exception of Vincent, a blind bartender, who is a noble and feisty addition. A cute gimmick only goes so far in making a novel stand out. This one doesn't stand out.

Overall, it's a cute story. But without something to make you care or to immerse yourself in this alternate reality, it falls flat. Perhaps it is too obviously trying for that target audience. It isn't really ""New" or "Adult". And that is why I have to say give it a pass. Maybe you can try to make one of those cocktails. But if you are reading and enjoying this "adult" book you probably should be carded.

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## Eve Recinella (Between The Bookends) says

Simply put, this book was FUN.

A little bit Harry Potter and a little bit Buffy The Vampire Slayer. Except it isn't vampires they are slaying,

and the Slayers are bartenders that make magic cocktails that give them superpowers to slay demons.

I mean COME ON, who cannot love such a premise. The plot flowed nicely. It had some interesting World building. The characters were likable (if sometimes cliché). I also really enjoyed the between entries from the "Devil Water's Dictionary" the fictional mixologist's guide that the bartenders used for mixing their magic drinks.

Really just an enjoyable read from beginning to end.

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## Madeline says

"College grad Bailey Chen has all of the usual new-adult demons: no cash, no job offers, and a rocky relationship with Zane, the only friend still around when she moves back home. But her demons become a lot more literal when Zane introduces Bailey to his cadre of monster-fighting bartenders."

I appreciate that the description for this novel doesn't pull any punches about how straight-up silly the premise is, and doesn't try to dress it up as something more complex than it is: this is a book about bartenders who fight demons, aided by mixing cocktails with magic liquors that give them enhanced abilities. If that's not your jam, you can move on.

Krueger's heroine is Bailey Chen, who, with no other job prospects, gets hired as a barback in a Chicago bar run by her friend's uncle. One night after work, Bailey finds an unlocked cabinet of mysterious liquors and mixes herself what she assumes is an ordinary screwdriver. Walking home, she is attacked by a demon called a tremens, and fights it off because the drink she mixed gave her temporary super-strength (the magical cocktails' powers always last an hour, because it takes one hour to metabolize the alcohol in one drink - very clever, Krueger). Then Bailey's friend Zane tells her the truth: he's part of an ancient and secret society of bartenders who use mixology to help them fight demonic forces. Bailey convinces Zane to let her join up, and soon she's learning to use magical liquor to fight evil.

Obviously, this is a fantastically dumb concept for a fantasy story (if only for its central concept, that alcohol enhances your abilities instead of hindering them, but I guess that's part of the joke), but that shouldn't turn you off reading it. After all, you can start with an incredibly dumb premise and make it into something great - I call it the *Pacific Rim* paradox. And overall, Krueger's book is fun, demon-fighting, magic-making good time. We got gruff blind mentors, awkward romantic tension, wisecracking sidekicks, scheming villains...often, the book reads like a fun episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Supernatural*.

I liked a lot about this book, honestly. Krueger sprinkles the book with chapters from a fictional guide to magical bartending, and they're a good mix of real cocktail information and fun made-up history. (I want an entire book about Hortense LaRue, the French amateur bartender who amazed the competitors at the first National Symposium of the Cupbears Court in 1852 by being the first person to add an orange peel to an old fashioned) The fight scenes are coherent and exciting, and the tremens are well-drawn and scary. The supporting characters, while sometimes grating (Paul Krueger's dialogue isn't nearly as funny as he thinks it is), were similarly fleshed-out and entertaining.

It's not perfect, though. There's a running subplot dealing with Bailey's romantic past with Zane, and it falls

flat at every opportunity because the two characters have, like, *negative* chemistry. I didn't even really buy them as *friends*, much less two people who have apparently been romantically pining for each other for years. The two of them keep dancing around a huge fight they had years ago that was a huge turning point for their friendship, but by the time we finally learn what happened in The Fight, it lacks weight and importance. Also Zane has a girlfriend for most of the book, a girl named Mona, and I'm pretty sure we're supposed to dislike her, because other women are competition, right ladies? The problem is that Mona is *so goddamn cool*, and I didn't want her to break up with Zane so Bailey could date him - I wanted Mona to break up with Zane because he's not good enough for her. Mona is a goddamn demon-fighting queen, and also she reminded me of Rosa Diaz on *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*.

And even though the fight scenes are good, there's a weird mental disconnect when it comes to the violence involved in slaying demons. The ways that Bailey kills demons are almost disturbingly graphic (in one scene, she kills a tremens by psychically *forcing a chunk of concrete down its throat*, choking it to death), but she doesn't seem affected by it at all. She's afraid of the tremens the first time she sees them; after that, she brutally kills them with an ease and detachment that rang very false for me. Remember, Bailey is brand new at this - slaying mythical monsters should not be this ho-hum for her yet!

Speaking of moments that rang false - I should mention here that I'm a bartender in real life, and so I spent *way* too much time picking at Krueger's portrayal of the industry and looking for mistakes. I honestly can't tell if Krueger has worked as a bartender or not, because even though most of the bar scenes seemed accurate, there were a lot of little details that nagged at me. Like, in one scene Bailey is working at the bar, and it mentions that customers are ordering "drinks that Bailey barely knew how to make - shooters, twisters, Jack and Cokes..." Uh, what? She doesn't know how to make a Jack and Coke? The drink where the ingredients are literally *in the name*?

(also apparently the one supreme all-powerful magical cocktail is...the Long Island Iced Tea. Reader, I almost spat out my drink when I read that. Long Island Iced Teas are garbage drinks for garbage people, and most bartenders I know practically wince when they have to make one.)

I have to take issue with one of the core aspects of the book, when Bailey learns how being a bartender/demon hunter works. So she's expected to work at the bar serving normal drinks to normal people, and then periodically mix herself a magic cocktail and go out into the neighborhood to patrol for tremens. How does she disappear from the bar, and what is assumed to be her only job? The demon-fighting bartenders excuse themselves on the pretense of taking a smoke break. That's it. You're expected to walk around the neighborhood, locate a tremens, slay the tremens, and go back to the bar, all in the time it takes to smoke a cigarette.

I don't smoke (despite what my profile picture may suggest to people who don't know it's from a movie), but I've worked with enough people who do, and I can tell you that (at least in the service industry) a smoke break is fifteen minutes, max. I simply do not believe that a bartender in this universe can do everything that patrol involves, all in the space of a smoke break.

And honestly, I think Krueger missed an opportunity here. What if it was the barbacks who went demon hunting, I remember thinking to myself? Wouldn't that make so much more sense? The bartender mixes the magic cocktail and gives it to the barback, and *they* go out slaying demons while the bartender stays behind and takes care of customers. It's perfect, because a) customers don't really notice barbacks, so they wouldn't think it was weird when one disappeared for a long period of time, and b) it fits in with the idea of barbacks being the unobtrusive but vital backup to the bartenders. I think it would have been really cool to explore that relationship in the context of demon-fighting-bartenders (similar to how Krueger establishes that coffee has

healing properties, making bartenders and baristas natural allies), but oh well. Maybe in a sequel.

(Note: the copy I have is an ARC that was given to me by a fellow reader, so quoted passages may be different in the final published version)

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## **Elise (TheBookishActress) says**

♥?♥? to my fav Melanie for getting me this awesome-looking book

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## **Milliebot says**

This review and others posted over at **my blog**.

I received this book for free from Quirk Books in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review. All opinions in this post are my own.

*Bailey Chen has graduated college and, like many typical graduates, has ended up moving back in with her parents, with no money and no job. An old friend, Zane, offers her a position as a bar back at his Uncle's Chicago bar, Bailey jumps at the chance. When she decides to sneak a drink on the job and it starts glowing, Bailey finds there's more to the bartending job than she ever imagined. Turns out there are magical types of alcohol that the local bartenders are consuming to help them battle the nightmare demons that literally drink the life from unsuspecting patrons.*

This book was clever and funnier than I expected. Krueger's infusion of urban fantasy with bartending lore made for a unique read. I liked Bailey's character – she was a relatable college grad, a bit down on her luck and her smarts and degree underutilized, yet she kept a positive attitude and was determined to make the best of her new job – especially after she learned it involved fighting monsters. I also like that she stuck to her beliefs and fought for what she felt was right, even when it seemed like she was fighting alone.

Bailey, Zane and Vincent were the most fleshed out characters. I feel like the other secondary characters were a little flat and I would have liked to know more about how they came to be part of the elite realm of demon-slaying bartenders. Krueger has put a lot of thought into this world, giving different types of liquor their own base powers and each cocktail its own magical effect (for example a martini will make you invisible) to help the drinker fight the powers of darkness. He even created a Cupbearers Court that rules over those who mix magical cocktails.

The book also contains real recipes from The Devil's Water Dictionary (a mystical bartender's bible), that regular old folks like you and me can use to mix our own drinks (magic not included) and witty "historical" commentary about each recipe and the origin of its elements.

This was a refreshing (pun?!) urban fantasy and I certainly hope there's a sequel because I deeply enjoyed the effortless and humorous way Kruger told his tale. If you're looking for something funky, funny, and alcohol based, check out Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge.

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## **Brittany (The Book Addict's Guide/Novelly Yours) says**

### **Initial Impressions 6/23/16: 3.5 - 4 stars**

This was a lot of fun and yet I found myself not totally hooked. I think I would have liked to spend more time in the development and explanation and theory of mixology for magic but that's the Ravenclaw in me. There were recipes and explanations in between chapters but I get REALLY into magic systems so I would have loved more of a breakdown of which alcohol did what and whatnot.

Characters were fun, book was fun, concept was fun. A really clever book and enjoyable all around. I was hoping for a BIT more attachment or involvement but all-in-all cute and unique!

**Full review as originally posted HERE on The Book Addict's Guide 7/27/16:** I immediately jumped on the chance to read *LAST CALL AT THE NIGHTSHADE LOUNGE* after seeing it in Shelf Awareness and at BEA 2016. Quirk Books asked me to be a part of the blog tour and with a description that calls it “Harry Potter for adults,” naturally I couldn’t refuse. I was also anxious to check out the new adult/adult feel of the book and watch magic and mixology collide!

What I loved the most about this book was the magic of mixology. There’s a magical underground where bartenders are the keepers of the paranormal and mixing just the perfect drink provides them with special powers in the form of some sort of physical or mental strength. I really, really loved this concept because it was something that I’ve truly never seen before. I loved the unique magical system and how there was a real structure for each power that the drink endowed. The type of liquor determined whether an ability was mental or physical and the various ingredients affected, enhanced, or shaped that overall idea. It was so neat and really well done! The only thing was that it was so well structured that I would loved to have had more details on each drink like maybe some sort of chart, or even just spent more time really getting into what each cocktail did. Most of them were mentioned as the characters were using them but I would have loved a little lesson within the book breaking things down even more. It’s the fantasy-nerd and school-nerd in me! If there happened to be a sequel (which I’d totally read), I’d love for even more detail!

I really enjoyed the tone of the book as well! It was quite entertaining and maintained a lighter tone with characters who made bad jokes, silly puns, fun atmosphere, and a just a really great cast. The terrors were dark but the feeling was light and I really love that sort of feel in an urban fantasy sort of setting. The book wasn’t terribly long but it was easy reading that also made it breeze by!

I think overall, *LAST CALL AT THE NIGHTSHADE LOUNGE* could have used a little “more” — a little more background, a little more detail, a little more plot, a little more romance — but despite that, I really did enjoy it! It was still a solid read but if there’s ever a sequel for some random reason, I’d love to see more development come in book two. I guess that means I just have to check out future works from Paul Krueger, which I am definitely interested in doing!

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## **Bryony Nelson says**

Such a fun read! Massively enjoyed this book and would definitely recommend it.

I received this book via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

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## Sarah says

Have you ever wondered why there are so many pubs and bars? I bet you never considered it's because the bartenders who work in them also have a side job fighting demons that prey on drunk people! Well that's exactly the premise of **Paul Krueger's** debut novel **Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge** and what a fun and quirky story it is.

Bailey has just finished college and is supposed to be looking for a serious, grown up job like her parents have always expected her to but she's kind of having fun working at a bar run by her childhood best friend Zane and she's not quite ready to grow up and face the real world yet. The more she looks at sensible jobs the less they feel like the best choice for her and then when she finds out about Zane's sideline fighting demons she knows she's found her true calling.

I loved the premise for this story, the idea of magical mixologists who are able to give themselves superpowers by creating very special cocktails was a fun one and totally different to anything else I've read about. At the end of most chapters you get a little information about the history of the magical cocktails mentioned, the powers it gives the bartenders and how to mix the perfect version at home so if you enjoy cocktails I'm sure you'll love these little additional recipes. I really enjoyed these little snippets into the history of the bartenders and how they discovered the magical properties each ingredient adds to the drinks they make but what I really wanted was a little more information about the demons they fought. Where did they come from? Why did they only attack certain people? If they're drawn to alcohol why were they more prevalent at certain times of the month? I'm hoping that if we get a second book in this world we'll get answers to some of these questions.

I love that we have such a diverse range of characters but I did find the way Bailey acted was a little immature at times. This is a new adult urban fantasy so Bailey and most of the other characters are in their early 20s but they quite often came across as much younger than that which could be a little frustrating. I also got a bit fed up with Bailey mooning around after Zane and trying to make a move on him when she knew full well he was in a relationship with someone else but that's a personal bug of mine that probably won't bother everyone as much. I think my favourite character actually ended up being another bartender who was known as Bucket, he was a really fun guy and stole every scene he appeared in.

**Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge** was an entertaining and fairly quick read, it has such an unusual concept that I'm hoping it might end up being the start of a new series - there's definitely a lot of potential here for **Paul Krueger** to create something wonderful.

**Source:** Received from publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

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## Mogsy (MMOGC) says

2 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2016/05/29/...>

Unfortunately, my high hopes for this book were not met, possibly a case of “wrong book, wrong time” or I’m simply not the right audience for this kind of urban fantasy (which I think is probably more likely).



Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge is billed as a “new adult” paranormal UF about a secret society of monster-hunting bartenders who gain super powers by imbibing their magical cocktails. The story stars Bailey Chen, a recent grad who returns home to Chicago with a business degree but no job prospects. To keep her parents off her case, she agrees to work as a bar-back at the Nightshade Lounge, a bar owned by the uncle of her childhood friend Zane.

Then one night at the end of a closing shift, a liquor cabinet left carelessly unlocked by one of the bartender leads to Bailey fixing up her own drink—what she figured to be a totally ordinary screwdriver. But walking home afterwards, Bailey encounters her very first tremens, a kind of beast-like demon. To her shock, she finds she is suddenly gifted with inhuman strength, enabling her to defeat the creature quite handily. Only then does her friend Zane let her in on the big secret: he and the other bartenders at the Nightshade are actually part of a large underground network of magical mixologists. By accidentally mixing the perfect screwdriver and killing a tremens with the powers it gave her, Bailey has suddenly come to their attention. For centuries, this group has been keeping the world safe from monsters by tapping into the magical properties of alcohol, and now Bailey has the opportunity to join their ranks.

So, this novel had a really great hook. After all, alcohol magic sounds like a boatload of fun. I also grant that it is unique, and not your typical urban fantasy. That said, though—and the irony does not escape me—had the story turned out to be a bit more conventional, it might actually have worked better for me.

The main problem I had with this book is the humor. I understand the story is meant to be a bit outlandish, or “sharp and funny”, but I personally found little to nothing that really amused me. The premise felt ridiculous, in an awkward and puerile sort of way (which is ironic too, given how this one is described as New Adult, but I’ve read Young Adult and Middle Grade books where the characters are more grounded and mature). I might have rated this book higher too if the story had been more fleshed out, but the plot was your standard paranormal fare and formulaic to boot.

It was also hard to take Bailey or any of her friends seriously when they all came across like cartoon characters—almost like clichés of clichés. Don’t get me wrong; I can totally understand wanting to give each and every one of your characters their own personality traits or quirky mannerisms in order to help make them stand out, and it might even have worked had the author not gone way overboard with it. While it was charming at the beginning, over time their idiosyncrasies just became unbearably silly. Case in point, the villain in this novel literally talks like a villain. Another example is Bucket, a character from Canada who cannot seem to stop talking about the fact that he’s from Canada. As a transplanted Canadian living in the States myself, I admit I smiled at the first couple of times he made references to Canadian bacon or milk-in-a-bag...that lasted for about ten seconds before the repeated jokes felt about as funny as nails on a chalkboard. Then there was our protagonist Bailey, an overachieving elitist who actually seems proud of the fact that she learns by rote rather than through any real kind of creativity or free thinking on her part. No, Bailey, that just makes you predictable and boring. Oh, and she also kissed a guy knowing full well he had a girlfriend. That’s just disgraceful. Bad, Bailey, bad.

There was one aspect of this book I truly adored though, namely those “excerpts” you can find between some chapters which are taken from The Devil Water’s Dictionary. This is the fictional mixologist’s guide to all things alcohol and magic, and includes the recipes, secret histories, and effects of all the various cocktails. These tidbits provide extra flavor to the story and I found them fascinating and creative.

However, overall this book and I just didn’t mesh. I’ve always preferred a more subtle kind of comedy, so no surprise that while I love the concept behind alcohol magic, I didn’t care too much for the over-the-top way it was handled. The characters were also way too unrealistic (and unlikeable). Still, given the subjective

nature of humor, just because this book didn't click with me doesn't mean it won't click with you, and if the novel's description sounds like something you'd enjoy, it might be worth a shot. Unless his next book will be in a completely different genre and written in a completely different style though, I think this author and I will be parting ways for now.

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## Mieneke says

When *Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge* arrived at my house, it came accompanied by a mini bottle of vodka and an invitation to cocktail hour. I was intrigued and the book sounded really good. Paul Krueger's debut novel was a lovely surprise and has turned out to be one of my favourite reads of the year so far.

*Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge* is the kind of urban fantasy I always forget I love, as my usual urban fantasy fare is more of the police procedural/crime variety. *Last Call* however deals with a hidden magical world co-existing with our world, where the uninitiated are blind to the existence of it, but for those who can see, there is a whole different world out there. I loved the set up of this world, where the magic is contained in cocktails and coffee is a healing potion. The latter revelation made me go: I KNEW IT! I've always maintained coffee is a magical brew.

The book is set in Chicago, which I enjoyed as it is a setting that isn't as familiar to me as New York or Los Angeles (and no, I haven't read the *Dresden Files*). What I know about Chicago — that it's windy, has lots of snow and the L train system — I've mainly learned from watching ER back in the day. But even not knowing much about Chicago, Krueger gave the city in his book a firm sense of place and a great vibe, different from NY or LA. The Chicago in *Last Call* is drenched in magic, but it is a magic that is largely invisible and unknown to the majority of the populace. The magic is accessed through mixing specific cocktails to perfection, with certain types of hard liquor giving different sorts of powers. The concept was really fun and I loved the cocktail recipes that were interspersed throughout the book, both because there were some cocktails I didn't know and because they are an essential way of fleshing out the magic system and the Cupbearer's Court's history.

The reader gets to discover this world together with the book's heroine Bailey. She's a fantastic character, who it was very easy to relate to, especially as that sense of aimlessness and having to find your groove after finishing university is so very recognisable. She is also very witty, sharp, and smart; her back-and-forths with Zane and Bucket were brilliant. The undeniable attraction Bailey feels for her childhood friend Zane and her struggle to overcome it in light of his being in a relationship was wonderfully drawn, showing how much Bailey doesn't want to get in the way and how much she simultaneously really wants to get in the way. The easy rapport she had with Bucket was lovely and Bucket almost always made me laugh. The entire core group of bar tenders was amazing, including Vincent and his guide dog Poppy. I loved that they were all interesting in their own right, with complex histories and their own issues beyond the bartending. But the one who truly stole my heart — and the spotlight every time she appeared on the page — was Mona, international lady of bad-assery. I loved Mona. Frightfully competent, unapologetically cool, and very, very mysterious, I could read an entire book about her.

Together the team fights the ugly, scary tremens, the strange monsters who roam the streets in search of prey each night. They are the bartenders' natural opponents, yet they aren't the only evil the team need to defeat. The plot is an intricate combination of mystery and holy grail quest, and we know those never end well for the questers. Krueger manages to weave in some seemingly unrelated plot threads, such as Bailey's alternate job search and her cluelessness when it comes to relationships, in really surprising ways.

My very favourite thing about *Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge*, however, was its forceful inclusivity. This book has diversity along every intersection, but it never feels shoehorned in or as if Krueger was working from a checklist pokemoning all marginalised groups to fit in with the cool kids. No, his diverse world feels lived and real and I really, truly loved the way the author reflected the world around us every day—minus the tremens that is.

*Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge* was a delightful surprise and I fervently hope we'll get more adventures featuring Bailey and the Cupbearer's Court. Paul Krueger's debut is definitely one of my favourite reads of the year so far and if urban fantasy is your jam, you should check it out pronto, preferably while enjoying a lovely cocktail or a strong cup of coffee.

This book was provided for review by the publisher.

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## Aditi says

*"Never trust any complicated cocktail that remains perfectly clear until the last ingredient goes in, and then immediately clouds."*

----Terry Pratchett

Paul Krueger, an American author, pens an incredibly exciting and gripping young adult fantasy tale in his new book, *Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge* that unfolds the story of a young female college graduate goes back to her home city where she starts working as a bartender for her long time friend's bar, with little idea that the bartenders as well as her friend are actually involved in protecting the city from deadly demons with the magical powers of cocktails.

## Synopsis:

*A sharp and funny urban fantasy for "new adults" about a secret society of bartenders who fight monsters with alcohol fueled magic.*

*College grad Bailey Chen has a few demons: no job, no parental support, and a rocky relationship with Zane, the only friend who's around when she moves back home. But when Zane introduces Bailey to his cadre of monster-fighting bartenders, her demons get a lot more literal. Like, soul-sucking hell-beast literal. Soon, it's up to Bailey and the ragtag band of magical mixologists to take on whatever—or whoever—is behind the mysterious rash of gruesome deaths in Chicago, and complete the lost recipes of an ancient tome of cocktail lore.*

Bailey Chen has just got back to Chicago, her home city, after finishing and graduating with a business degree. Unfortunately, she isn't so lucky when it came to jobs, thus she moved back to her parents' house, and to earn some money and to save time, her long-time friend-cum-ex-boyfriend, Zane, offers her a job in his bar called the Nightshade Lounge as a bartender's job. Bailey takes up the offer but little did she knew that Zane as well as the bartenders in his bar are actually tremens (pink elephants) slayers thereby protecting the city of Chicago with the help of some magical power inducing recipes of cocktails from a book of mixology containing some old cocktail folklore. And soon Bailey to learn her hands on mixing vodka, rum,

whiskey and other ingredients together to protect the city by slaying those demonic beasts. But it seems there is a whole new agenda to steal and make the one of the most powerful magical cocktail to attain immense power like immortality, can these group of supernatural bartenders stop them or those demons?

The story line, the plot might sound a bit vague, and yes that it did to me, but as you know, I'm forever arrested to the unusual story lines, especially when it comes to fantasy. Every time a fantasy YA or new adult book comes up, it always feels like "been there, read that!" but this time, Paul Krueger really created something magical with the right ingredients, I mean the idea. The story line revolves around bartenders who are supernatural and can mix cocktails in a way that they will induce magical qualities or powers to those who drink them. And yes, thank god, in this book, instead of vampires or werewolves, there is a new kind of supernatural creature called tremens. So that's really fresh and I applaud the author for his creative imaginative skills and for giving them wings in the form of a compelling story.

The author's writing style is really articulate and is laced with a bit of tension mixed with mystery that is unraveled rather at a gradual momentum with the progress of the story and that really kept me hooked till the very end. The narrative style of the author is free flowing and quite engaging and is often hilarious, and I believe the modern day youth can easily relate to those real-life dialogues. The pacing is really fast as there are so many adrenaline rushing moments and events that kept me on my edges till the very end, although those moments or scenes lacked depth terribly.

The world building is really well structured with proper and enough logical explanations that I easily comprehended with. The world that the author created is modern and that exists behind the darkness and the shadows of a night, where demons lurk the cities which are aware about the magical cocktails and want to drain or rather say suck them from those who drink it, and thus there comes the bartenders who uses those powers to kill those demons. The development of such a fantasy world is believable as it is backed by enough supporting story from old folklore and real life facts.

Now the characters here are not the stronger aspect of this book, as they lack depth or back stories that will make the relatable in the eyes of the readers. The main character, Bailey, is not only brave but also has a witty and sharp mind, yet she is kinda loser when it comes to real life issues. Her demeanor felt a bit vague and neither her backstory supported her character. The character of Zane is someone who the readers will start hating after few chapters, but later evolves into a saint, moreover the rest of the characters are okay, and so many logic or reasons are missing as to why or how they became what they are doing presently in the story line. This is here the author could have penned a few more pages about each and every one from that group of badass bartenders for his readers.

In a nutshell, the story is captivating, completely edgy with an unusual and unique story line that will keep the readers rooting almost till the very shocking and dramatic climax.

*PS: You can't miss this book, when you'll know that the author has included the correct and striking recipes of some of your favorite poison, I mean, your favorite cocktail drinks, that you order the bartender to make almost every other Friday night!*

**Verdict:** *A promising read that involves magical cocktails and supernatural bartenders.*

**Courtesy:** *Thanks to the author, Paul Krueger and his publishers, for giving me the opportunity to read and review this book.*

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## **Chessa says**

2.5 stars maybe? This was a very clever premise and I was really looking forward to this, but the execution was verrrry predictable and meh.

I'm not usually one to eschew a romantic side story, but I wanted to set fire to the one in this book from the beginning and never changed my mind about it.

Also, I can't help but think that some of the stuff Bailey did to Zane would have been SO UNCOOL if their genders were reversed. People would be upset and rightfully so, but for some reason it's cool in this book with the romantic aggressor being the woman. Total lack of boundaries. And Zane really was NOT COOL for his own reasons, and I just really don't get the attraction. I guess they can suck together.

The bad guy was so one-dimensional. The twist character was very obvious. I may have muttered, "Oh for fuck's sake," and "Well, THAT was convenient..." more than once while reading.

All that said, I didn't hate it - I just feel let down. It was...cute. A good beach read, maybe? And now I really want to expand my cocktail horizons, so there's something.

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## **Stewart Tame says**

Bailey Chen is a young woman in her early twenties living in Chicago. She's living with her parents while job-hunting, and is working part-time helping her best friend from high school, Zane, tend bar at his father's tavern. One night, after being called away on an emergency, he leaves her to close on her own. She finds a cabinet of various liquors--vodka, tequila, and so on--from a distillery she doesn't recognize. Mixing herself a drink, she notices that it seems to glow strangely, but downs it anyway. On her walk home, she finds herself attacked by a demonic creature, but somehow has gained extraordinary strength and vanquishes it easily ...

And so we have yet another entry in the burgeoning urban fantasy field. Bartenders keep humanity safe from soul-sucking demons, known as tremens, through the use of mixed drinks which grant them special powers. But not just any vodka or whatever will do; it has to be specially distilled. The concept is ludicrous, but Paul Krueger actually makes it work fairly well. His characters are fun, his action scenes exciting, and his pace page-turning. The chapters are interspersed with excerpts from *The Devil's Water Dictionary*, a guide to mixing just the right drinks. I particularly love the motto, "Bibo Ergo Sum." Yes, it's the single most obvious Rene Descartes pun, but it's still fun. It's also worth reading the Acknowledgments section at the end. Krueger clearly had great fun writing them. Recommended!

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## **Emily says**

I MISSED MY BUS STOP DAMMIT PAUL

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## Jeannette Nikolova says

*Also available on the WondrousBooks blog.*

Well... here's for trying. I mean, Mr Krueger certainly tried to make this different and interesting. But I think it turned out just a bit *too different*.

First of all, I tried explaining this to several people and most laughed me off at "supernatural, demon-fighting bartenders". In an age when everything has been written, it is true that one needs an original idea, but the point is for it not to be so original that it is laughable. I gave it a chance, because I am weird and I like experimenting with my books. But I can assure you that many would just drop it right where they took it from with no more than a look of surprise.

That being said, generally, for someone like me, this sounds like something that might have some potential: *A Chinese-American girl (I am pointing it out because the author was extremely intent of us not forgetting it throughout the entire book) starts working in a bar and not long after she finds out that her boss, and practically everyone who works at the bar, are "bartenders", magical soldiers, fighting the tremens, demons which like sucking the life out of drunk people. The bartenders prepare special magical cocktails and go fight the tremens, while at the same time trying to find the Holy Grail - the magical recipe for the philosopher's stone, the Long Island ice tea.*

I had my reasons, okay?

The book is just messy. There is this entire bartenders lore, but aside from the cocktails themselves, little is explained about the bartenders, how they came to be, how they found magic and so on and so on.

*Bailey* is just an intolerable human being and so is *Zane*, her male counterpart. She is either referred to as very smart, in fact, brilliant, very educated and hard-working and yadda-yadda-yadda, or as the loser that she actually is, because she is not really doing anything with her life whatsoever before **accidentally** stumbling into the bartender life. And she has no clear aims, aside from being able to afford gel nail polish, apparently. She is a downer, has serious issues with competition, despite having no grounds to think of herself as brilliant, and is way overpraised by everyone. All of her powers and abilities were plain and simple *~magical~*. She didn't work to gain anything in this book, she was just kind of able to do it, which is... yes, you guessed it, just the author making her cooler than he could by actually building her as a character and letting us decide without shoving it in our faces.

*Zane* was even worse. And after all of his disbelief, meanness, rudeness and plain stupidity, he was still shown to us as a good guy and *Bailey* just forgave and forgot all of his crap. The scene after the court was just a giant proof that he is a horrible person, but that was miraculously forgotten by everyone.

I really did not care about anyone in this book, sadly.

And that was basically it, bad characters and an insane story.

The only thing that I did like about **Last Call at the Nightshade Lounge** were the *cocktail recipes*. Those were handy first, because they explained many details I did not know about different beverages, as I was not aware that vermouth is dry wine, and second, because they provided recipes. I approved of that a lot, at least.

*PS. Bailey? Baileys? What? Anyone?*

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