

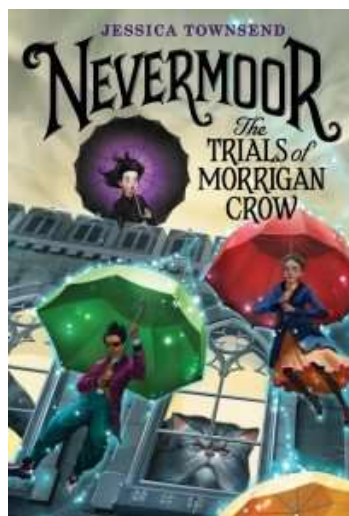
ACCESS DIGITIZED EDITION

Putting "Wunder" into the Ordinary: An Interview with Jessica Townsend

by [Emma Carbone](#)

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Jessica Townsend's debut middle grade fantasy *Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow* has already created a sensation with the sale of world English rights to Little, Brown Books for Young Readers and film rights to Fox. The novel follows Morrigan Crow, a girl who is cursed to die on her 11th birthday. Her fate abruptly changes when the mysterious adventurer Jupiter North whisks her away from the dreary town of Jackalfax in the Wintersea Republic to the vibrant Free State city of Nevermoor. With his help, Morrigan has the chance to compete in a series of trials to join the prestigious Wondrous Society and earn a place in her new home.



Throughout the novel, Morrigan navigates the trials while learning to trust her new friends and, with a bit more difficulty, herself. Morrigan and her world have been part of the author's life for the better part of a decade. "I spent a long time just creating the world, just plotting. I have files and files and many gigabytes of information," reveals Townsend. Now 31, she began writing Morrigan's story in her early 20s during her own sojourn to London from Australia's Sunshine Coast. "In my head, I always think of Nevermoor as an imaginary London but really it's a reflection of the place that I was in at the time. A lot of the creation of Nevermoor happened when I was in my 20s and traveling," she explains. "There are definitely elements of London in there but a lot of it is just places I was discovering and loving at the time like Marrakesh, Venice, and Edinburgh." Throughout the novel, Morrigan explores places like her new home at the Hotel Deucalion where she finds the Smoking Parlour that fills with scented, therapeutic smoke and Nevermoor's transportation system, the Wunderground. Morrigan's discovery and sense of wonder reflects Townsend's own travels and

mindset. "She walks into this world and everything feels brand new to her and it's like Nevermoor belongs to her. And that's how I felt about

London," says Townsend.



Photo by Lani Carter

A common factor in both the book and in Townsend herself is an upbeat outlook and an ability to find the extraordinary in the seemingly ordinary. The Wunderground, for instance, is heavily inspired by London's Underground subway system. As Townsend explains, "I know it's a weird thing to have a fixation on the Tube. But the Tube is amazing—it's a wonder." In *Nevermoor*, Townsend has characters travel via umbrella rail as well as something called the Gossamer Line. Names are another important part of her writing process. Townsend explains that "the name is so important in getting a grasp on a character. I feel like when I finally settle on the right name the character's voice becomes so much clearer in my head." Set over the course of a year, *Nevermoor's* plot is framed around Morrigan's four trials which are "an important way to show Morrigan's insecurities and let them play out across the entire book." These insecurities are most apparent as Morrigan contemplates the dreaded Show Trial where she will have to demonstrate a special talent, called a knack, which can be anything from riding a dragon to playing beautiful music. "The thing about the knacks," says Townsend, "is that...some of them are really fantastical things. Then alongside them, you have the kid who can play the violin really well and the kid who can speak a lot of languages and the kid who sings beautifully." Townsend considers these varied talents in the same light: "I can't draw so when I see someone who can draw a near-photographic likeness of something, or someone who can paint beautifully, that's like a superpower. People who can speak

multiple languages blow my mind. How is that not a superpower as much as reading minds? How is that not as magical as riding a dragon?" This knack for finding the magical in the mundane would likely have garnered Townsend her own spot in the Wondrous Society but she may develop even more talents soon. "I'm in this weird in-between phase where writing is my full-time job and it's also still my hobby and obsession. It's kind of all-consuming right now. But I'm taking suggestions for weird hobbies that I can develop." Townsend revealed that kitesurfing is definitely off the list but crochet remains a strong contender for her next hobby.

Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow comes out on October 31. *Emma Carbone* is a librarian at Brooklyn Public Library, a writer, SLJ reviewer, and blogger. More of her work can be found at missprint.wordpress.com.

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