



AN INTERVIEW WITH NEVERMOOR AUTHOR JESSICA TOWNSEND

Article Author:

[Imogen Russell Williams](#) [1]

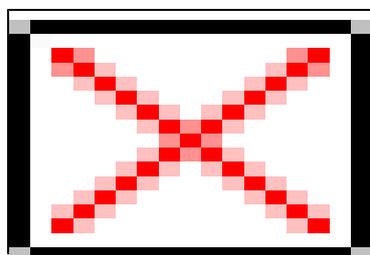
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Jessica Townsend talks about the fantasy adventure **Nevermoor**.



Jessica Townsend is an Australian author, who has also lived for several years in London.

Her debut novel, [Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow](#) [3], features a heroine apparently cursed to cause ill-luck all around her ? and, worse still, to die at the stroke of midnight on Eventide. When the mysterious Jupiter North transports Morrigan to the secret state of Nevermoor, however, her trials are not yet over ? she must now win a place in the Wondrous Society by demonstrating a unique, extraordinary talent. But there?s nothing special about Morrigan ? except the curse? Imogen Russell Williams spoke to Jessica for **Books for Keeps**.

The idea of the Chosen One is a well-worn one in fantasy. But your take on it ? the Cursed Child, a doomed scapegoat ? is thoroughly original. Why did you decide to give Morrigan such an inauspicious beginning?

Poor Morrigan! Why did I treat her this way? It was very much a deliberate choice to subvert the device of the Chosen One. I wanted to say this is a *downtrodden* child ? a persecuted minority, as terrible as that sounds! Weirdly, I love stories like that. When I was young. I had this fixation with witch trials, and that idea never left me ? that someone?s life could be ruined and taken away from them because of external forces deciding: this is our scapegoat, this is the person that we?re going to blame for everything. How powerless that makes someone, and what a terrible beginning! I think that you need to treat your heroines quite badly to give them the opportunity to rise, to step up ? and I did it in the worst possible way. I?m sorry, Morrigan.

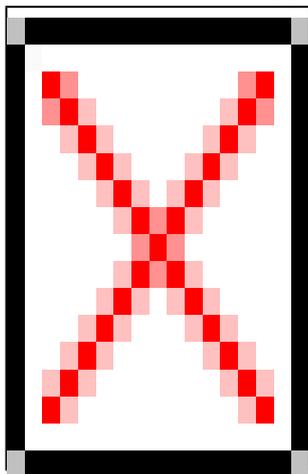
And you go on to worse still! Saved from her dreadful fate by Jupiter North, Morrigan is barely allowed to acclimatise to Nevermoor before she faces a new challenge: demonstrating a talent that will allow her to stay there in safety. Why did you make Morrigan work so hard to win a place where she belonged?

Morrigan has grown up in an extreme environment where she has never felt like she belonged; and that is the entire thrust and heart of the story for me. There?s all the bells and whistles of Nevermoor and the Wondrous Society, and the villains ? but for me, it was always going to be a story about a girl who felt very much an outsider. I guess I always felt like that as a child. I was beloved and protected in my family, but generally, I was quite introverted, different in many ways to my peers, and with every kind of group, I felt outside, as if I was always looking for the place where I would really belong. (And that, of course, was with the nerds ? as I eventually realised!) But I wanted the story to be a search for family ? that had to be the whole arc of the book.

Morrigan's own family relationships are superbly dysfunctional, too. Was it important to you to emphasise that found family? can sometimes be warmer and more loving than blood relations?

Absolutely. There are a lot of children in the world who don't get on with their own family, or aren't treated particularly well – sometimes the family that you're born into isn't your true family. And I wanted that to be a surprise to Morrigan, too – that's something she learns. She wants those brothers and sisters, she wants to join the Wondrous Society specifically so that she can feel that. It's a common feeling – [to be] not even the isolated child, or the victim of child abuse, but the black sheep in a family of high achievers, or whatever it is – and I wanted to show that you can go ahead and find community, find family, somewhere unexpected.

You've created a world of staggering complexity, from the five states of the Republic of Wintersea to the



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Clock that drives its chronology – not to mention the huge scope of the plot! How did you keep track of it all?

Chaotically! I have this folder of folders of folders of folders of folders, that goes about a hundred deep – kind of a graveyard of the last fifteen years – that I've carried from laptop to laptop. And a lot of it is just in my head. The only way, really, that I was able to finish this book – because it did take such a long time to write! – was that with every shiny new idea that I had, instead of going off and writing something new, and abandoning the story while it was in the murky middle, the doldrums – I just thought well, I can put that in **Nevermoor**! So it became more and more sprawling and ridiculous?

It's very much a book of contrasts – like recognisable technology side by side with mythical beasts (not to mention the enigma of Wunder itself). Were you keen from the outset to create that sense of meetings and intertwinings?

Yes – and also it was important to me that you weren't able to place the time and place. It's a second-world fantasy – it's not our world, and I don't want people to be able to pinpoint it. I didn't want to write a medieval story with a feudal system and kings and queens and lords, and I didn't want to write a particular kind of sci-fi, or steampunk. I wanted to write *my* world, and have it feel classic and timeless and unplaceable – and it was the fusing of all these things that I hoped would make that possible.

What part of the book did you find most challenging to write?

I call it 'the cartilage' – you know, the little bits marrying everything up. A lot of my favourite books growing up were quite episodic – like **Little Women**, episodic little morality tales – and I find now that even though I plot a lot, and do a lot of planning, that things naturally end up quite episodic for me too. So it's the fusing of everything together, and making sure that that interconnecting bone marrow is there. I found the ending a bit challenging as well, too, because I know so much about what's going to happen and what's coming down the line that I have this horror that I'm going to reveal something too early!

And can you give me a hint at what the future might hold for Morrigan?

Yes! Morrigan is going to age with all these books, so we will see her through her teen years. I have planned this as a nine-book series, and I'm hoping that will come to fruition. There is an ongoing arc over the series, but in my head there are also three acts, in terms of the way that Morrigan will grow. They will get darker; hopefully, they will also continue to be quite silly. We'll see a lot more of Nevermoor in Book Two, which is called Wundersmith. We'll get to go into the Wondrous Society and see how it operates; we'll get to go to all these interesting places, including the Museum of Stolen Moments ? but it's tricky to say more without giving too much away! But there are lots of these installations, these places, hidden in Nevermoor, and waiting for Morrigan, specifically, to discover them?

Imogen Russell Williams is a journalist and editorial consultant specialising in children's literature and YA.

[Nevermoor: The Trials of Morrigan Crow](#) [3] is published by Orion Children's Books, 978-1510103825, £6.99 pbk

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