

Tracey Hecht founded Fabled Films Press in 2014 and is the author of the critically acclaimed middle grade series, *The Nocturnals*. The stories feature three unlikely friends: Dawn, a serious fox, Tobin, a sweet pangolin and Bismark, the loud mouthed, pint sized sugar glider. The first book, *The Mysterious Abductions* was published in April 2016 followed by *The Ominous Eye* September.



Q: What inspired you launch Fabled Films Press? Why start with a middle grade series like *The Nocturnals*?

A: I started Fabled Films Press with the hope that we could create and support literature as mainstream 'entertainment'. We believe in the book as something that can be enjoyed together in a social way, with families and with friends.

When I thought to write a middle grade series, I had two things in mind. The first was that I wanted to create a voice that was unique to the series and distinguishable to kids. The second hope was to create a world of stories that could be enjoyed by kids as a group in the way that television and movies are shared and watched among friends. The two of these things together, the appeal to readers as group entertainment and in a distinct voice, were the goals that guided me in developing *The Nocturnals* and what we call a 'literary cinematic vernacular'.

Q: What surprised you most while writing *The Nocturnals*?

A: How much I love the research! It's one of the most fun things about the series, to learn about unusual animals and let their physical traits and physiologies inform their characters. We use their physical attributes to inspire action and plot lines as well. The pangolin tongue is so unusual it comes up again and again in the series. Actually, pangolins in general are completely irresistible! Spend 10 minutes watching YouTube videos or reading about pangolins and you'll understand why I had to have a pangolin as one of the brigade.



Q: What animals did you discover that you think kids will get excited about while reading the series?

A: Adventure mysteries are always fun, but setting them at night with animals that are spectacularly unusual makes them even more fun. Kids have really responded to that. We've also found kids love the 'voice' of the series which is more conversational and 'cinematic'. It's strongly rooted in literature, but because it's dialogue based, it sounds similar to a movie which is the vernacular of their generation.

Q: Why did you create a three person protagonist voice with The Nocturnal Brigade?

A: I have been told, though I didn't know it when I conceived it, that a three person protagonist voice is unusual for middle grade fiction. The Nocturnals does not have a classic narrator voice, or single protagonist point-of-view. The Nocturnals has three characters- a sugar glider named Bismark, a pangolin named Tobin, and fox named Dawn- that all speak together. These three characters speak in a 'singular' voice that work in a loose 3-2-1 iambic pentameter: for every three words from Bismark, there are two words from Tobin and one word from Dawn. The ration is not literally 3 words, to 2 words, to 1 word, but it is the guiding rhythm and helps distinguish the voice of the series.

Bismark is a tiny marsupial who yammers on and on (and on!), Tobin chimes in to frame the things in which Bismark is ranting, and then Dawn speaks a word or two to punctuate the conversation. It's snappy, cheeky, and from what we have seen, compels a kid to read (and share it) out loud which is our goal.

Q: Do you have a writing schedule that gets you through the drafting phase?

A: It's more that I need to carve out of my schedule time and space. Quiet, open, time and space, and for a sustained period. That's what I need most. My ideal writing dynamic is from about 5:30am until about 10am at the kitchen table of my house in Maine. Everyone in my family sleeps late so I get to be all alone. As I write, I watch and listen to the day wake up all around me. It's perfection. I do that everyday except for Sundays when I let myself sleep in! I love Sundays too.

Q: Can you describe the daily role reading and books play in your family's life?

A: We're the "weird" family. I have 4 kids, ages 7 to 25, and we read aloud all the time. We read at breakfast, we read at dinner (though we usually argue, parents vs. kids, over the ratio of "talking time" to reading time!), we read in the car, we read at bed, we read on the subway. And we do 85 percent of that reading aloud. I've noticed that we're extreme outliers--most families stop reading aloud when their kids start to read on their own. We just kept on reading

together. We watch movies and TV too, and now that there is a boy in our family, video games have made their grand appearance, but reading gets the greatest time allocation. We love it.

Q: How do you think librarians can use your personal read aloud experience when sharing books with kids? And how do you think *The Nocturnals* can be used?

A: The kids we've given *The Nocturnals* immediately start to mimic the wacky phrasing and staccatos of the characters and text. When their memories fail them, they reach for the book to extend their mimic into longer phrases and passages. It's like a built in read aloud program! On our website we have animated shorts and supplemental materials such as a Common Core Language Arts and Next Generation Science guides that can be used in the library or classroom to extend the read aloud experience even further with kids.