



## MAC

(aka Melissa A. Calderone)

is a freelance writer for *Popular Science Magazine*. She has interviewed NASA scientists and covered topics ranging from asteroids to weapons design. Born and raised in Manhattan, MAC first started writing *Anna Smudge* on the back of dozens of dupe pads while waiting tables at a downtown diner.

## Q & A WITH MAC

*How is Anna Smudge different from the other popular books out there?*

I think the biggest difference is that there's no magic, fairies, or elves in the book! Let me preface that I absolutely love that kind of escapism. But over the last few years I've noticed that the fantasy genre has really taken over the children's section of bookstores. I guess that made me want to try my hand at something different. So, I started working on a mystery series that was set in the real world...

*What is the premise for the series?*

"The Professionals" series centers on a motley crew of eleven-year olds who've all been affected in a pretty personal way by the evil criminal mastermind, Mr. Who. I see them as a team of superheroes who must band together to stop him, but instead of being endowed with super-human powers, they each have their individual professions. It's kind of like the *A-Team* meets the *Justice League*! Each book focuses on a different kid, and each kid's profession acts as a vehicle through which another piece of Mr. Who's Master Plan is revealed.

*I take it you're a big comic book fan?*

That's an understatement. I'm a *huge* comic book fan—you should see my apartment. Comics are actually the main reason why the series is structured the way it is and why the book looks the way it does. Comic books have been doing these incredibly dynamic layouts for years, and we thought it would be exciting to introduce it to the world of children's books. In *Anna Smudge*, there are 12 full-page, in-your-face, bone-chilling portraits of all of the antagonists in the book—every scary dude that Anna comes across is literally lunging right at the reader. They're not your traditional children's book illustrations.

*And you're working with some very famous comic book artists as well...*

Yes. I can hardly believe the people who have come on board! Glenn Fabry is doing the interior art for the series, and Greg Horn is doing the covers. I've been immense fans of both of these guys for about 11 years, so it's really such a "pinch me" moment in my life. Waking up and having their sketches in my inbox—I feel like I'm dreaming!

*And you wrote most of the book while you were working at a diner?*

(Groan) Yeah. That was a miserable time. Honestly, I think I created this character—a kid-shrink—when I could've benefitted from a little therapy myself. Waiting tables is rough. I think it should be a requirement in America. Kind of like joining the army is in Israel. Everyone should do it for a year. Then the world would be a kinder, more understanding place.

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