

Dark Scribe

M A G A Z I N E

A Virtual Magazine About The
Books That Keep You Up At Night

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By, *Vince A. Liaguno*

It's hard to believe that nature aficionado and would-be adventurer Rhodi Hawk could sit still long enough to pen her weighty debut novel, *A Twisted Ladder* (Tor/Forge, 2009). But the banjo-playing, road trip-loving Texas belle is both disciplined and dedicated to the craft that's earned her high praise from industry stalwarts like F. Paul Wilson and Joe Lansdale.

As the self-described "compulsive traveler" prepares for the mass market release of *A Twisted Ladder* this month, the one-time transcription linguist in US Army intelligence has already wrapped the second installment of her ambitious six-part series. And although her fictional world drips with gothic moodiness, the woman behind the words is decidedly affable and high on life.



Hawk took some time to sit down with *Dark Scribe Magazine* to discuss her adventures on the road promoting *A Twisted Ladder*, why no man should be an island unto himself in the publishing business, and why her parents

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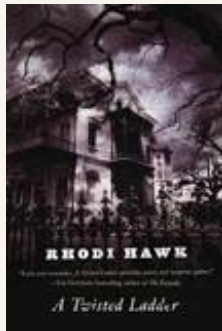
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are her favorite readers.

Dark Scribe Magazine: So, we're a few months late to the party, but tell us a little about *A Twisted Ladder*.



Rhodi Hawk: It's a Southern Gothic thriller that follows two threads, one that runs from 1912-1927 on a homestead along the Mississippi River, and one set in modern day. The story centers around a New Orleans psychologist, Madeleine LeBlanc, whose father is schizophrenic and whose brother has just committed suicide. But, she's starting to uncover signs that there may be something more to the recurrence of mental illness in her family, something that leads her down a path into the darkest, most extraordinary reaches of the human psyche.

Dark Scribe: The book seems to defy genre labels, easily fitting into everything from suspense to mystery to horror to thriller – all with decidedly gothic trappings. Have the cross-genre elements of the book helped or hurt? Which audience has seemed to gravitate most to the book?

Rhodi Hawk: Me, I think horror is the best category, and it seems that it was ultimately presented to the world that way, too. But I've received emails from fans who read everything. I think most people read all kinds of books across different genres. I know I do.

Dark Scribe: You've been out on the road heavily promoting *A Twisted Ladder*. Have you been surprised by who your readers are – or are the fans attending your signings exactly who you had expected them to be?

Rhodi Hawk: The fans seem to be a pretty broad mix. I don't have any short stories out and *A Twisted Ladder* is my first book, so most of the folks who came to the signings hadn't read any of my work yet. I've been learning about my readers after the fact, mostly from those who get in touch with me online or by sending me books to sign. The time spent "touring" was actually a five-month road trip that was thinly disguised as a book tour. The route zigzagged all across the



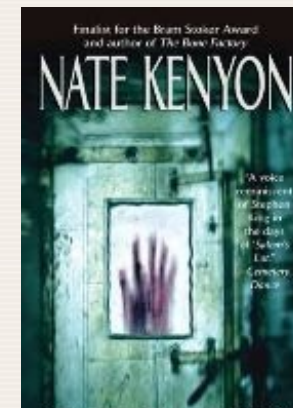
C O M I N



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US. I did in-store signings on Saturdays, and during the other six days of the week I would drop in on random bookstores to sign stock, or I'd call in for the

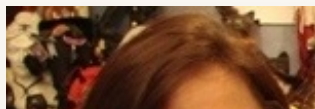


odd radio interview. But mostly I went exploring. I would often wake up in the mornings with no idea where I was going to be that night. Sometimes I wasn't even sure whether I wanted to head east or west, just so long as I made it to the next Saturday signing. Facebook friends sometimes voted me in one direction or another. It was a unique opportunity to formulate the backdrop of the sequel, which focuses on drifters and the homeless, because there I was, going from place to place with my banjo and my dog, meeting all sorts. Being on the road is isolating and liberating—both can be good for a writer. But I admit I'm glad to be settled down again.

Dark Scribe: You're an avid traveler, so a book tour seems right up your alley. What has been your favorite place to visit while promoting the book and why?

Rhodi Hawk: You know, I have to say that Kentucky was my favorite. Strange things came together when I went to Kentucky. First off, the day I woke up in Shepherdsville, KY, I found that my dog Maggie had broken her front teeth and they were horribly infected. There was a veterinarian in town who fixed her up, but he recommended she lay low for a few days. So I stayed. It turned out to be so much fun! It just so happened that the Bourbon and Bluegrass festival was going on in nearby Bardstown. I play the banjo and for once during the journey, didn't have to drive, so the bourbon-bluegrass combo was perfect. That corridor down below Louisville is called "the bourbon trail" because of all the distilleries along the way. Also, there were miles and miles of trails for me to jog in the mornings (sometimes that's a challenge on the road), with limestone hills and spring-fed caves. Just luscious, beautiful countryside.

Dark Scribe: What has been your favorite encounter with one of your readers to date?



Rhodi Hawk: Probably my parents. The day my book was released we had a huge party in New York, but I myself had no books. My things were already packed

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R E C O



myself had no books. My things were already packed away into storage so I had no physical address where my publisher Tor could send my author's copies. So when my parents came to the party, I asked them not to buy a book because I wanted to give it to them as a gift, and I thought one way or another I'd be able to get my hands on some copies. Secretly, though, I was nervous about them reading it. I mean, there's s-e-x in there! Well, the road trip was much more frenetic than I'd expected and I never did get my author's copies, so I figured I'd just buy one along the way to give to them. But when my route finally brought me down to Texas, they'd already bought and read a copy. I was weirdly relieved that it was all over without my even knowing. They were great.

Dark Scribe: Back to the book for a moment. How long did *A Twisted Ladder* take you to write? I understand the International Thriller Writers awarded you a scholarship along the way?

Rhodi Hawk: It took seven years. And yes, it won the scholarship award from the International Thriller Writers Association, which was really exciting. The competition was tough.

Dark Scribe: The book has garnered some hefty praise by genre heavyweights like Tess Geritsen, F. Paul Wilson, Joe Lansdale, and Sarah Langan – among others. We're going to put you on the spot a bit, by asking which of the blurbs you've received from established writers is the most meaningful?

Rhodi Hawk: The quote from F. Paul Wilson meant a lot to me, because he'd acted as sort of a mentor. He actually redlined the manuscript when I sent it to him for a blurb! The things I learned during that (quite painful, actually) process brought my writing to a new level.

Dark Scribe: How does so much positive notice for a debut novel influence the writing of your second novel, or does it? Is there any pressure to "live up" to such words of high praise – or can you tune it all out?

Rhodi Hawk: I'm delighted it's been so well received. Putting a book out, you have no idea whether it's going to sell or hit dead air. But the second book has come fairly easily. I think it's just because I know exactly how the story goes.

S U B S C

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just because I know exactly how the story goes.

Dark Scribe: Your bio lists “transcription linguist” as your first writing job. Tell us a little about that.

Rhodi Hawk: Yeah, that was kind of a joke in the bio. It was many years ago, when I was in the US Army and Uncle Sam sent me to the Defense Language Institute of Monterey, CA to learn Polish. Being a transcript linguist doesn’t really have much to do with being a writer. It’s just transcribing a series of codes in a foreign language, and it doesn’t involve actually cracking the code so the messages seem pretty meaningless. But up until that point I’d done nothing but wait tables and run cash registers, so for me it was the first time I sat down at a desk and got paid to write anything, meaningless codes or otherwise.



Dark Scribe: Who was your favorite *Twisted Ladder* character to write – and why?

Rhodi Hawk: I liked writing Chloe. She never had any obligation to be good or bad, so she evolved into her own thing. She’s a survivor.

Dark Scribe: Time for our favorite game here at DSM. You’ve been granted power – and an unlimited budget – to cast the roles for the big-screen adaptation of *A Twisted Ladder*. Who’s getting what roles?

Rhodi Hawk: I can see Morgan Freeman as Daddy Blank and Miss Beyoncé Knowles as Madeleine.

Dark Scribe: We have quite a few aspiring writers who read this particular column with great interest. What would you say is the best piece of writing advice you’ve received – and from whom?

Rhodi Hawk: Show up every day. Meaning, sit down at the same time every day to write. I can’t even tell you who said this to me first, because the advice is so spot-on that everyone pretty much agrees that it’s the best thing you can do for the writing.

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W E B

Recognizing that the professional writing fields that fall under the umbrella of dark fiction needed a dedicated media voice, Dark Scribe Press proudly launched **Dark Scribe Magazine** as the premiere publication under its independent press banner in 2007.

The focus of this non-fiction virtual magazine is to spotlight the creative forces behind dark fiction and non-fiction - horror, dark fantasy, suspense, mysteries, and thrillers - and those committed to promoting it. For more information about our parent company, please visit www.DarkScribePress.com.



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Dark Scribe: How important would you say that networking is to the success of launching a writer's professional career?

Rhodi Hawk: Oh, it's very important. On the road to publication, it helps to make contacts that lead to finding an agent or an editor. The thing about networking, though, that I think is the most undervalued among aspiring writers, is the fact that you really benefit from the fellowship. You get to hear each others' war stories. You get to learn anything about craft, publication, promotion, sales, goals, broadening your base of readers, or whatever aspect of the process most interests you. You get to help out other writers who are working to get where you are, too.

Dark Scribe: We hear through the grapevine that when you're not writing or traveling you can be found in the kitchen. Is this true?

Rhodi Hawk: Ha! Yes, I love to cook. And fiddle with other things in the kitchen.

Dark Scribe: We've got to ask the requisite question, no doubt on your readers' minds: What's next for Rhodi Hawk? Can you give us some tantalizing morsels about the next book?



Rhodi Hawk: Yes, the next book is the sequel to *A Twisted Ladder*. There will be a total of six books in the series. I'm also collaborating on a project with Sarah Langan, Alexandra Sokoloff, and Sarah Pinborough.

Dark Scribe: Finish this sentence: If I wasn't writing, I'd be _____.

Rhodi Hawk: ...outside.

For more information about Rhodi Hawk, visit her official [author website](#).

[Purchase *A Twisted Ladder* by Rhodi Hawk.](#)

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