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Twisted Ladder, A (Book)

A Twisted Ladder Forge Books Rhodi Hawk Southern Gothic



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Reviewed by **Elaine Lamkin**

Written by **Rhodi Hawk**



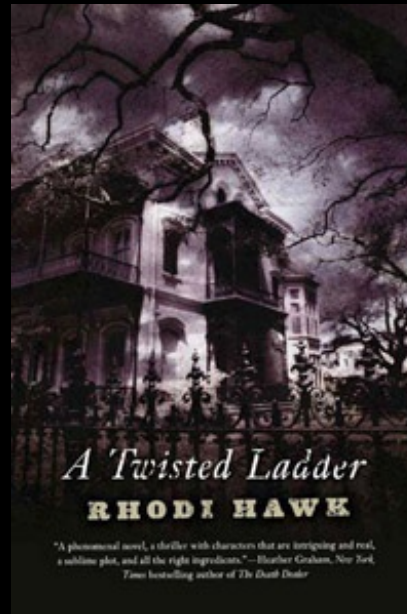
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Southern Gothic writer Flannery O'Connor once remarked, "Anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic." And Southern playwright Tennessee Williams described Southern Gothic as a style that captured "an intuition of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience." First-time author Rhodi Hawk is definitely following in the footsteps of these Southern Gothic masters with her first novel, *A Twisted Ladder*. A cursed family, decaying plantations and an equally decaying way of life – post antebellum New Orleans, voodoo, insanity – all elements that have driven the Southern Gothic genre through the years. And Hawk does a masterful job, weaving all of these elements into a 21st Century story with flashbacks to a 20th Century lifestyle one can only imagine nowadays.

With the wildly popular HBO series *True Blood* getting people back to the bookstores (hopefully) to read the original Charlaine Harris books, I am hoping that some of that *True Blood* magic will wash over Hawk's novel. No, there are no vampires in Hawk's book, but the setting -- Louisiana, the bayous, New Orleans, crumbling plantations, family secrets and several characters who DO have "powers" similar to some of those in Harris'




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series -- should resonate with fans of the show and the books.

Madeleine LeBlanc, a psychologist trying to understand her father *Daddy Blank*'s schizophrenia and her brother Marc's sudden suicide, begins a journey into her family's strange history. A history made stranger when she meets her 114-year-old great-grandmother, Chloe LeBlanc, and the strange little girl, Severin, who seems to be her *arrière grand-mère*, Chloe's other great-grandaughter. Then there is Zenon Lansky, Madeline and her brother's friend from childhood who seems to have the power to *will* people, animals, etc. to do whatever he wants. And he wants Madeleine. And he has some horrifying secrets of his own.

Traveling back and forth from 2009 New Orleans to a Prohibition-era Louisiana plantation life, *A Twisted Ladder* introduces fascinating characters as Maddy tries to put together the pieces of her family's secrets to discover why Marc killed himself, whether she herself is falling victim to the schizophrenia which is destroying her father and whether there is anything she can do to save him. A neurologist at Tulane, Ethan Manderleigh, is there to help Maddy with her search as well as with the disease and its various manifestations.

This book is creepy – the swamps, the bayous, the decaying plantation, Madeleine's family – everything seems a bit *off* but in a good, horror-lover's way. The comparison I have read in another review to Michael McDowell's *Blackwater Saga* is well-deserved as the reader comes to realize the importance water has to the LeBlanc family (and it's spooky). And if you aren't familiar with McDowell's six-part creepfest (a brilliant serial horror novel which came out long before Stephen King's *The Green Mile*), while it IS out-of-print, there are copies still available at reasonable prices on Amazon and it might make an interesting companion to Hawk's novel.

For a 540-page novel, Hawk's writing flows like the Mississippi she writes about. The characters are all believable and colorful, and the story itself just gets under one's skin like a cypress splinter. I have heard that this is not the last we will see of the LeBlanc family, and I hope that rumor is true because I know that I want to read more about Madeleine, Chloe and Severin as well as the other characters, both real and *unreal*, that make up this amazing book. Summer may be over, but this book will chill you just as much in the autumn and winter.

And the twisted ladder of the title? It is a representation of something none of us can escape. Our DNA.



nonnaulxxx I give credit to venture bros writers for not using the "Can You Read My Mind" poem when the Monarch is riding his glider.
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UncleCreepy @xdarkridex that too shall pass bro. Hang tough.
7 hours ago

xdarkridex Difficult day. Very tired.

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4 1/2 out of 5

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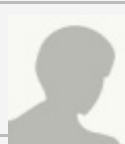
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