

Tense Suspense & Family Secrets

Author of the bestselling *Hex* trilogy, Rhiannon Lassiter is a favourite name in teenage writing. Her new book, *Bad Blood*, deals with the tensions of combining two broken families, family secrets from the past and elements of the supernatural that play on real-life issues.

Born in 1977, Rhiannon Lassiter is the oldest daughter of award-winning children's author Mary Hoffman – whose fantasy *Stravaganza* series was published to high acclaim. Having been immersed in the world of writing and publishing from an early age Rhiannon unsurprisingly became a voracious reader, devouring every book she could find, even skipping classes at her first secondary school to go to the library. Rhiannon discovered her favourite author, Diana Wynne Jones, when she was nine years old. It was this which started her life-long passion for science fiction and fantasy, and inspired her bestselling *Hex* series.

Rhiannon's first novel, *Hex*, was accepted by Macmillan while she was still a teenager. Since then she has published nine further novels, a non-fiction book about the supernatural, and co-edited an anthology of war poetry and prose, in addition to several short stories. Rhiannon lives and works in Oxford, where she attended university, reading English Literature at Corpus Christi College. In addition to writing, Rhiannon maintains her own website and web-edits *Armadillo Magazine*, an online quarterly children's books review publication. She has also worked as a journalist and web designer. Rhiannon's books have been widely reviewed and translated into more than ten foreign languages.

We put some questions to Rhiannon about *Bad Blood*, amongst other things:

What's your favourite book that you've written?

For a long time I would have said *Waking Dream*, because I felt that in it I managed to convey my vision of that world effectively and I learned so much while writing it. Now I might have to change my answer to *Bad Blood* because I feel my writing has greatly improved in this novel and because I found the characters and the story so compelling – even as I was writing it.

Do you read horror novels and watch horror films?

When I was ten I fell in love with the incredibly sinister *Marianne Dreams* and recently I was very impressed by Chris Wooding's *The Haunting of Alazabel Grey*. I've read some Stephen King and like his Bachman Books most of his writing. In adult fiction I read Barbara Vine and Minette Waters. I'm not overly attracted to blood and gore – although a lot of characters do meet violent deaths in my *Hex* trilogy, so I tend to prefer psychological horror to gore-fests. I recommend the anime film *Perfect Blue* but generally I don't watch horror films. *Marianne Dreams* was made into a film called *Paperhouse* and I found it so frightening I couldn't finish watching it.

Why did you decide to write a horror novel?

I didn't exactly set out to. But after several novels that have had science fiction or fantastical settings I wanted to



write something that would take place in the real world. While I was staying in the Lake District I found the scenery very evocative and the house where I was staying made me think about hidden rooms and old secrets. The story that grew out of that became very sinister and I realised that I wanted to write something frightening. *Bad Blood* turned out to be psychological horror about sinister secrets hidden in a make-believe game.

What is it like to write horror novels?

I get very involved with stories, and with horror fiction you are not in control. Even as a reader or watcher, it's nerve-racking wondering what will happen when someone opens a door or turns out a light or goes for a walk in the wood . . . I find it easier to write horror – where I am in control – than to watch or read it. ■

Bad Blood by Rhiannon Lassiter is one of this issue's featured books. See page 62.



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