



Marlena Frank, acclaimed author of "The Seeking," discusses her inspiration and creative process in an exclusive interview with Reader's House Magazine.

Unraveling Shadows with MARLENA FRANK

Exploring Inspiration, World-Building, and Character Dynamics in "The Seeking"

Marlena Frank discusses "The Seeking," drawing from dreams, wildlife inspiration, and familial dynamics, crafting a gripping tale of resilience and revelation

Embarking on a journey into the world of literature often means venturing into realms where the ordinary merges with

the extraordinary, where characters traverse landscapes both familiar and fantastical. Marlena Frank, a luminary in the realm of young adult fantasy and horror, invites readers into such realms with her gripping narratives, each page a portal to worlds both wondrous and eerie.

With several bestsellers under her belt and a slew of accolades from platforms

like Readers' Favorite, Frank has carved a niche for herself in the literary landscape. Her latest venture, "The Seeking," beckons readers into a realm where the

line between dreams and reality blurs, where the forest teems with creatures both enchanting and ominous, and where a young protagonist named Dahlia navigates a labyrinth of ritualistic challenges and unsettling truths.

In a recent interview with Reader's House Magazine, Frank delves into the genesis of "The Seeking," unraveling the threads of inspiration that wove together to form its tapestry. Rooted in a vivid dream that gripped her imagination, Frank's narrative unfolds with the surrealism of a haunting reverie, drawing readers into a world where every shadow conceals a secret, and every step

leads deeper into the unknown.

Central to Frank's narrative is Dahlia, a protagonist whose journey mirrors the author's own penchant for resilience and determination. Through Dahlia's eyes, readers witness a world fraught with peril and possibility, where the bonds of family and the solace of love serve as beacons in the darkness.

But it's not just the characters that captivate in Frank's tale; it's the world itself, meticulously crafted with an eye for detail and an ear for atmosphere. From the eerie depths of the forest to the enigmatic presence of the Gray People, every facet of Carra

breathes with a life of its own, inviting readers to lose themselves in its mysteries.

As the interview unfolds, Frank peels back the layers of her narrative, offering insights into the dynamics that drive her characters and the challenges she faced in bringing their story to life. From the intricacies of world-building to the pulse-pounding crescendo of the novel's climax, Frank's journey is as riveting as the tale she weaves.

In "The Seeking," Marlena Frank beckons readers to embark on a journey into the unknown, where every page is a step closer to unraveling the secrets that lie shrouded in darkness. With her trademark blend of fantasy and horror, Frank reminds us that sometimes, the most terrifying truths are the ones we seek to uncover.

What inspired the concept of "The Seeking" and the ritualistic challenges faced by Dahlia and her community?

The initial inspiration came from a vivid dream I had. The scene with the Ritual came almost directly from it, straight down to the creatures watching from the shadows and the horrible feeling that something was very wrong. When I sat down to write the book, I crafted a world and characters that I wanted to lead to the bizarre and unsettling moment. I wanted that scene to feel surreal, dreamlike, and unsettling, and I think it delivers.

How did you approach the world-building in your novel, particularly in creating the eerie atmosphere of the forest and the creatures within it?

When I sat down to craft the creatures of the forest, I drew inspiration from the book Writing Monsters by Philip Athans. I created monsters out of things

I found terrifying or unsettling, things that would prevent the people of Carra from stepping out of line. As a wildlife enthusiast, I honestly had a great time creating these nightmarish creatures.

The Gray People were more subtle. I wanted them to feel like something that stepped out of folklore, something that shouldn't exist but does. That you would have to get used to living your life with creatures staring at you from the forest all the time, never really knowing if they were gentle or monstrous, is both terrifying and fascinating to me. Setting the world around Halloween just added to the spooky atmosphere.

Dahlia is a compelling protagonist; what qualities did you want her character to embody, and how did she evolve throughout the story?

Dahlia is the middle child of the Priest family, much like I was as a child. But the dynamics of her relationship with her siblings aren't very good. She wants to protect her young brother, Dameron, so she's always trying to keep him safe against a town that wants to capture him. Her older brother, Darik, thinks he has everything figured out, but his hubris ends up being his downfall. Dahlia doesn't trust people enough to stay with anyone during the Seeking. She doesn't want to risk her girlfriend, Bisa's, life, or burden her mother with finding a place to hide her. She's independent, determined, and sometimes a little too focused on her own goals to see the real danger in her plans.

At the beginning of the story, she takes a lot for granted. She thinks she can hide from everyone and that her hiding place is foolproof. She can't imagine the real danger that she and her family are in. As everything

falls apart around her, Dahlia sees the horror she has lived under for so long. She rejects it and is determined to find an alternative path forward. She loses that naivety that she once had and takes hold of her future with both hands.

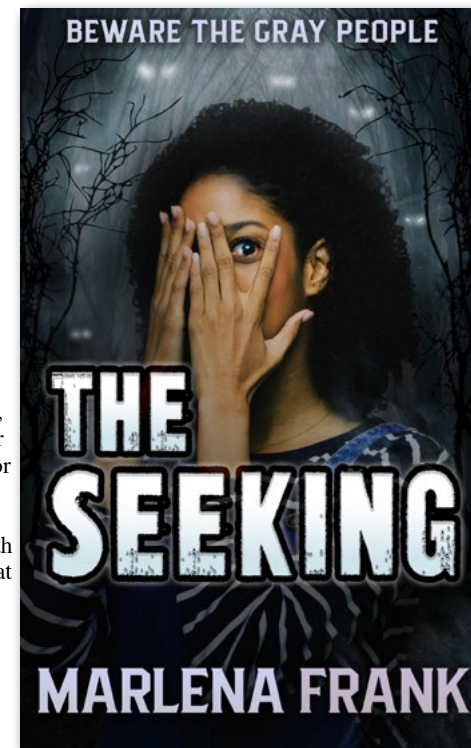
The relationships between characters, such as Dahlia and Bisa, are central to the narrative. Can you discuss the importance of these dynamics in the story?

Bisa is Dahlia's strength. She has the independence that Dahlia wishes she could have. Bisa is raising her little brother on her own meager income. She's happy with the life she now has, the life that Dahlia helped her fight to get. While Dahlia loves her own family, the family's reputation, their power plays, and all the demands of being part of an Exalted family hold her back from who she wants to be.

As everything falls down around them, they rely on each other even more. Bisa grounds Dahlia with reason. She supports her, and she is always there to hold her when tears inevitably come.

The Gray People add a fascinating layer to the story. What was the inspiration behind their inclusion, and what role do they play in the world of "The Seeking"?

I wanted the Gray People to be mysterious. They remind me of nature spirits at first, treated like folklore or deities. Nobody knows why they are there or what interest they really have in the people of Carra. All they have is the tradition of the Ritual and the promise of their protection. The more Dahlia learns,



the more the veil of mystery gets pulled back on these people. There are clues scattered throughout the book about how they came about and how the world wasn't always this way. But to Dahlia, this is the truth and has always been the truth. Until everything falls apart.

The climax of the novel is intense and action-packed. Without giving away spoilers, what challenges did you face in writing such a pivotal moment?

As with any action scene, especially one with so much build-up as in The Seeking, the trouble is trying to make sure the action makes sense. I want to make sure every character gets a perspective and a chance to be seen. But also, the ferocity of the adversary is important. If they aren't terrifying, threatening, and tearing into the protagonist, then the climax wouldn't have the impact it does. A hero is only as good as their villain, and the big bad in The Seeking is truly awful. When pushed against the wall, Dahlia must make a terrible decision and deal with the consequences.