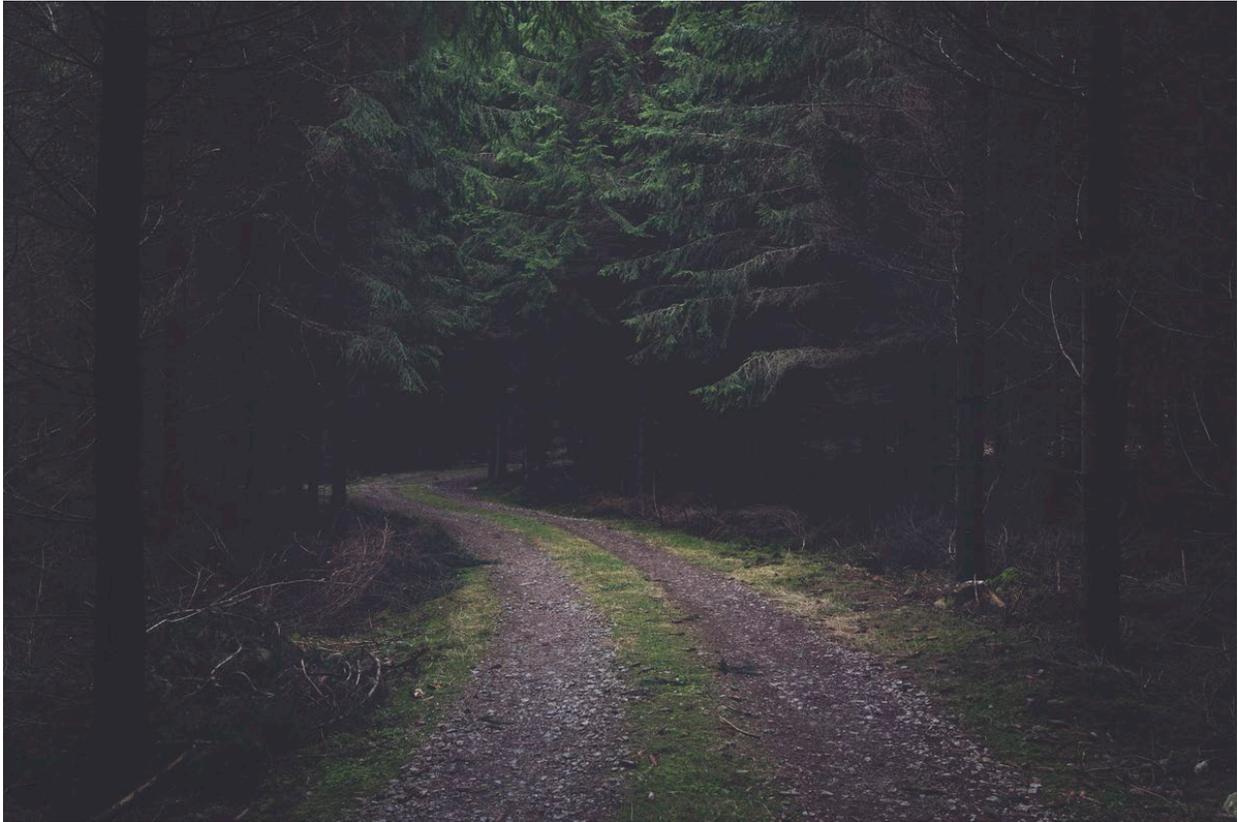


New podcast "Dark Woods" treats listeners to suspense, shocks and stellar acting

By: Todd Vaughan



When a movie starts off with action, it's a good sign that viewers are in for a thrilling journey. Well, the same can be said of a podcast. Within the first minutes of "Dark Woods," a park aide named Chelsea Brewer is murdered despite her desperate pleas. It's the first of many dramatic moments throughout this scripted fiction podcast. From heated exchanges and lies to plot twists and suspense, "Dark Woods" has all the ingredients of a good crime thriller. Its storyline is heightened by a diverse cast that delivers superb acting. With eight episodes available, "Dark Woods" is a binge-worthy podcast that will leave you thirsty for a season 2.

The top-notch production of "Dark Woods" should come as no surprise. The podcast is the brainchild of [Wolf Entertainment](#), the same production company behind the "Law & Order" and "Chicago" franchises. The story takes place in 2004 in Eureka, CA, and revolves around the Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

Before each episode starts, a recording states that the podcast is based on "real threats to California's national and state parks." While many may fear a bear attack, few would worry about being the victim of organized crime in a state park. However, writer David Pergolini and director Takashi Doscher take listeners on a gripping journey that explores this little-known dark side of California's parks.

"Dark Woods" is a complex story with multiple pieces that come together by the final episode. The main character is Mark Ellis, the park's hard-nosed Fish and Game Warden. From the beginning, he relentlessly works to solve Chelsea's murder, even enlisting the help of an unsuspecting young teacher's assistant named Miguel. But Mark is in for more than he bargained for when he and Miguel stumble upon a shocking find in the park.

Additionally, the story follows city councilwoman Laura Romero—who also happens to be Mark's ex-wife—as she runs for reelection. The town is in the midst of a recession, and many residents are struggling to get by. If Laura wants to win reelection, she'll likely need to sign a deal with Petras West, a major corporation that wants to set up mining operations in the park. Although this deal will bring much-needed jobs, Laura is reluctant to sign out of concern for the environmental impact mining will have on the park. However, her hesitancy to strike a deal causes worry among residents, including her boyfriend and prominent Eureka businessman, Arthur Hedley.

"Dark Woods" plays out like a television series, with each episode building upon the previous one. Executive Producer Elliott Wolf [told CinemaBlend](#) that his goal was "to make it feel like you are listening to a television show without the visual. And that, in turn, lets your imagination create the rest of the story for you." Wolf accomplished just that. Listeners can easily visualize each scene as it happens thanks to the realistic sound effects that support the dialogue, from a helicopter flying above to water flowing in a creek. Some scenes were even recorded on-location to capture the authentic forest sounds.

What makes "Dark Woods" spectacular, though, is the cast. "House of Cards" actor Corey Stoll excels at playing the stubborn and unruly warden, Mark Ellis. The role required some intense emotion, and Stoll always delivered. A standout moment occurs in the fourth episode when he ferociously questions his ex-wife about her fidelity during their marriage. The torment in his voice as he demands an answer could be felt by any listener who's ever been cheated on or deeply hurt by their partner.

Like Stoll, "Chicago Fire" star Monica Raymund tapped into an array of emotions to bring Laura Romero's character to life. Whether pleading through tears or shouting in rage, Raymund consistently delivered a heartfelt and believable performance. Her sharp, tough persona also made for entertaining conversations with the equally savage Petras West employee, Maria Campbell, played by "Shazam!" actress Marta Milans.

With such great acting, on top of some unexpected twists, you may find yourself enthralled in "Dark Woods" even if you're not too keen on similar television shows like "Law and Order" or "CSI." The state park setting puts an interesting and unique spin on this crime-solving series. But it's the podcast format itself that takes "Dark Woods" to the next level. There's just something about having no visuals and only seeing each scene play out in your mind, that makes it more exciting than watching a television show.

Back in the olden days, scripted audio shows were a regular source of entertainment before television took over. [Many popular television series](#) like "Guiding Light" and "I Love Lucy" initially entertained audiences on the radio. Thanks to podcasting—where anyone can put out a show without the approval of a big-budget studio—audio fiction shows have gradually made a comeback. As [Fiona Pepper of Radio National Fictions notes](#), listeners gravitate to well-told stories and get "attached to characters." Thus, audio fiction podcasts like "Dark Woods" are growing in popularity.

If podcasts aren't your thing though, you're in luck because "Dark Woods" is hitting the small screen. Following in the footsteps of "Homecoming," "Dirty John" and other podcast-turned-television shows, ["Dark Woods" is being adapted for the screen](#) by Universal Television. The cast nor a release date have been revealed yet, but if the show is anything like the podcast, viewers are in for a real treat.