



Technology has enabled artists to express themselves and materialize their artistic visions in ways that

would have seemed like fanciful science fiction just a few years

ago. Take big-budget

motion pictures, for

instance. But strip away

the hi-resolution, com-

puter-enhanced dress-

ing, and the core of great art remains the same as it's

been since the earliest cave drawings: You've got to tell a

good story.



Cosmic computer animation is great, but is rendered meaningless without a foundation of creativity, discipline and idea development. And for that you don't need advanced technology—you need a great storyteller. Boulder County is home to one of America's greatest storytellers, author **Dan Simmons**.

Simmons is well known for his work in the genres of mystery, science fiction and horror, but a common thread in all of Simmons' writing is the

deep imagination of the unassuming author. And with more than 20 years of published fiction and non-fiction under his belt, Simmons' voice is still as fresh as the most ambitious up-and-comer. This is partly attributable to his three-headed career as a novelist.

"I enjoy the switching of

gears. Every genre that I like writing in demands a certain type of attention, and it's a relief sometimes to enter into another project for nine months to a year where you're using a whole different set of skills," says Simmons. "I sometimes compare it to when I was growing up in the Midwest. We had to rotate the crops or the soil would become pretty useless."

A good story

Dan Simmons weaves words into worlds

By Vince Darcangelo

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Leftover Salmon perseveres

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The Motet's Tower of Power

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Here's to the servers

Web watch

<http://www.darklinks.com>

Into the black

The shadows grow long as the days grow short. Crisp, shriveled leaves of burnt yellow, ochre and crimson fall from crooked tree branches and skid across cracked sidewalks in the chill evening wind. Twilight sets a pale, yellow backdrop and makes ominous silhouettes of familiar sights. A dank, frosty chill rolls up your spine. You pull your jacket tighter and increase your stride. You whistle as you pass Columbia cemetery. You consider what danger could be lurking around the next corner.

As Halloween approaches, this is the best time to bed down with a nice horror book, or gather round a campfire



to tell ghost stories with your friends. If you're looking to keep pace with the electronic age, you can light a candle and surf the darker streets of the World Wide Web.

For the most comprehensive links, check out the legendary Dark Side of the Net at www.darklinks.com—the Internet's original home for horror since 1993. From classic literature to the goriest flicks, Halloween haunts to year-round Goths, kiddie sweets to adult deviance, Dark Side of the Net has something for the closet ghoul in everyone. **Z**

—Vince Darcangelo

In science fiction circles, Simmons is best known for his *Hyperion* series of novels. In the area of mystery, he's known for his Joe Kurtz books, *Hardcase*, *Hard Freeze* and *Hard as Nails*, the last of which was released earlier this month. In horror, he's recognized for *Song of Kali*, *Carion Comfort*, *Song of Night* and 2002's *A Winter Haunting*. Writing in these voices allows Simmons to explore all his writing interests.

"It depends on what itch needs to be scratched," he says. "When I most want to engage with language, surprisingly enough science fiction is the most attractive genre to me because I've suggested to some people that it's rather close to poetry... The sheer amount of linguistic invention is delightful to me. At other times I get sick of that and I just want to write very lean and mean, and at both times the mystery stuff comes in very handy."

"I still enjoy horror fiction a lot, but not so much for the linguistic dance," he continues. "That's more for getting in touch with some very basic emotions... You're not so much trying to raise goosebumps on everybody all the time as to just light a lantern and take people into the basement where they don't want to go all too often."

To date, Simmons has taken millions of eager readers into that basement, and they keep coming back for a return trip. Simmons' most recent horror offering, *A Winter Haunting*, is tied in

with his 1991 classic, *Summer of Night*. *Haunting* is a psychedelic page-turner that adds a unique, user-friendly twist to the classic haunted-house tale. It's as much about the horror of isolation and personal failure as it is about a haunted Midwestern farmhouse. Both books make for a great holiday read this Halloween.

Fans of the books will be glad to know Simmons is taking another trip to that haunted farmhouse on the big screen.

"Next summer I am re-engaging with *Summer of Night* / *A Winter Haunting*. Two producers have asked me to do a screenplay incorporating elements of both books, so they've optioned both books," says Simmons. "It'll be *A Winter Haunting* per se, with more flashbacks to the kids 40 years earlier that were in *Summer of Night*. I'm really looking forward to that because it will in no way be a literal translation of my novel. I want it to be much more frightening; I want it to be exquisitely cinematic. I'm working with a director friend just to use modern technology—not super-special digital effects—just to use the technology because one of the points of view in *A Winter Haunting* is a kid who's been dead for 40 years who's still in this house, but he's not a ghost. He's a cyst of memory in the character's mind."

Many writers are nervous about

seeing their creations up on the big screen. It's difficult to fit 300-plus pages of character development, dialogue and conflict resolution into a 90-minute feature film. And in Simmons' case, it will be the condensing of two books. But unlike most authors, Simmons is excited by the possibilities.

"I think the movie can be superior to the novel," he says. "I'm the only novelist who thinks that."

A Winter Haunting is not the only movie project on the horizon for Simmons. The *Hyperion* series is slated for a big studio release, and there is the possibility of an ambitious, big-name production of his first published book.

"My first and in some ways scariest book was *Song of Kali*, set in Calcutta. Regency Films has optioned that, and the director they've chosen, who's on board and working on it, is Darren Aronofsky, who did *π* and *Requiem for a Dream*," says Simmons. "Quite honestly, I can't think of any other director who might go at this material in *Song of Kali* better than Aronofsky because it would take tremendous guts and it has certain other things that nobody in Hollywood wants to put in a movie. And just the act of shooting in Calcutta, which he insists he wants to do, is very daunting."

But despite his Hollywood forays, Simmons still maintains a low profile,

often receiving more notice on his book tours away from home than along the Front Range.

"Obviously, when you're producing, on average, two books a year, you're not out having too much social life. But over here in Longmont, I have a great advantage," says Simmons. "I was a teacher in the district for 14 years. I taught and ran gifted programs for 18 years before I started writing full time. So when people know me here at all, they just know me as old Mr. Simmons, the former teacher. So I'm pretty anonymous."

"I've been in the phone book forever. It's rather nice," he continues. "I'm better known most places that I travel than I am here in Boulder County."

Simmons recently completed a book tour supporting his 2003 science fiction release *Ilium*. *Ilium* is the first of a two-part epic that will close with *Olympos*, the book Simmons is working on now. *Olympos* is set for release in the spring of 2005. Until then, readers can enjoy the prolific writer's back catalogue and keep an eye trained to the local movie listings.

But whether he's writing interplanetary epics, hard-boiled noir, disturbing horror or big-budget screenplays, Simmons' greatest gift is that timeless creative component that is often forgotten in the boisterous business of the entertainment industry.

That is his gift to tell a great story. ②

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