

Darwin's Blade



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著者:Dan Simmons

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Dr. Darwin Minor is an expert in accident reconstruction, probably the best in the business. He uses a combination of science, math and logic to solve even the most implausible accident. At one time he worked for the National Transportation Safety Board and was part of the team investigating the Challenger accident (until he came up with the unpopular theory that the occupants of the shuttle were alive until they hit the water). And then later, he was a member of the NTSB-GO Team staged out of Fort Collins investigating plane wrecks. But one of these planes included his wife and son.

Now he works for a small husband-wife company that investigates vehicular accidents for insurance companies in Southern California. He's just coming back from an interview at a mobile home park regarding a fatal electric cart accident when a Mercedes pulls alongside, matches speed and begins firing on him with a Uzi or Mac-10, "something industrial and ugly and fully automatic." Darwin's driving his Acura NSX, a street legal race car, and manages to spectacularly outmaneuver the Mercedes resulting in the car and its occupants "flying" to their death. It turns out that these two thugs are Russian or Chechyan Mafia enforcers believed to be tied to an organized insurance fraud ring. And Darwin Minor has found himself in the middle of "Operation SouthCal Sweep" led by Sydney Olsen, a brilliant and attractive woman.

For sure this novel does not read like the same Dan Simmons, the Hugo Award winner who wrote the Hyperion Cantos. Because of this, it took several chapters before I was willing to accept this novel for the thriller that it is. Once I got "past it" (as my sister would say), I started to enjoy the novel. Simmons deserves credit for writing on a subject so current that it was making headlines even as it released. Moreover, he writes on a subject that does ultimately affect most of us in one way or another - insurance scams. The action in Darwin's Blade centers on a scam that makes use of illegal aliens for "swoop and squat" insurance fraud and the network of crooked lawyers and doctors. The "swoop and squats" are hard to catch and result in everyone footing higher insurance bills. It is Sydney Olsen's mission to catch the people at the highest level and break up this ring. And it looks like Darwin Minor is the perfect bait.

Given that Darwin is an accident investigator, we are also privy to the behind the scenes calculations of some fairly entertaining accidents. Naming a character who is an accident investigator Darwin is a pretty funny, especially in light of the recently published The Darwin Awards: Evolution in Action. In fact the novel opens with Darwin investigating an accident that is straight out of the book. Some people have expressed disappointment at how readily many of these fictional accounts of actual accidents can be found on the Internet. Even at that, Simmons can't be accused of entirely taking the easy way out. He provides a thorough technical explanation, complete with calculations, on how these accidents happen or more precisely how one would figure out how the accident occurred.

Where Simmons falls a bit short is in his portrayal of the two main characters, Darwin Minor and Sydney Olsen. The writing of the characters is not the problem, the characters are consistent (maybe overly so) and thoroughly sketched. I have trouble with the personalities that he's given them; essentially each is based on a shared and almost competitive cerebration. This is obviously what attracts each to the other and that attraction grows through normal back and forth banter. But the banter isn't average talk. Infallible, superior intelligence is not natural in a thriller and thus gives the book a contrived feeling. Simmons spends way too much time proving just how eclectic and above the general population that the two of them are. It's one thing that Darwin surrounds himself with exclusive items such as an authentic Eames chair, original Strickley Mission dining room, a Mission lamp and Russell Chatham oils, but it's irksome that Sydney recognizes them as she "plays chief investigator" on her first visit to his home. It's stuff like that that put me off. At times I had the feeling that Simmons was compensating for writing a thriller and decided to offset it by trying to appeal to the intelligentsia. I really don't believe that was his intention, but that was the impression I had while reading it. I suspect his goal had more to do with juxtaposing intelligence and stupidity, as would be indicated by the book's title.

On the lighter side, Simmons has fun with this book and right off hints that the reader shouldn't take this too seriously. Chapter 1 is titled "A is for Hole," and that sets the naming style for the next 25 chapters. The novel works as a "headline thriller." Between the technical details, the many breathless action scenes pitting good guys against bad guys and the smirkish humor, Simmons ties together a plausible plot, one in which fiction could get confused for reality.

作者介绍:

Dan Simmons was born in Peoria, Illinois in 1948 and grew up in various cities and small towns in the Midwest. Dan received a B.A. in English from Wabash College in 1970, winning a national Phi Beta Kappa Award during his senior year for excellence in

fiction, journalism and art. Dan received his Masters in Education from Washington University in St. Louis in 1971. He then worked in elementary education for 18 years, the last 14 of which were in Colorado.

Dan has been a full-time writer since 1987. He is one of the few novelists whose work spans the genres of fantasy, science fiction, horror, suspense, historical fiction, noir crime fiction, and mainstream literary fiction . His books are published in 27 foreign counties as well as the U.S. and Canada. Research for his books has taken him to India, Transylvania, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Hawaii and Peoria, Illinois. Hyperion won the Hugo award in 1990. The Rise of Endymion was nominated for the 1998 Hugo.

He lives in Colorado along the front range of the Rockies. When he's not at work writing, he enjoys camping, hiking, reading, art and music.

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