

GRAD GREETINGS



September 2021

Volume 13, Issue 8

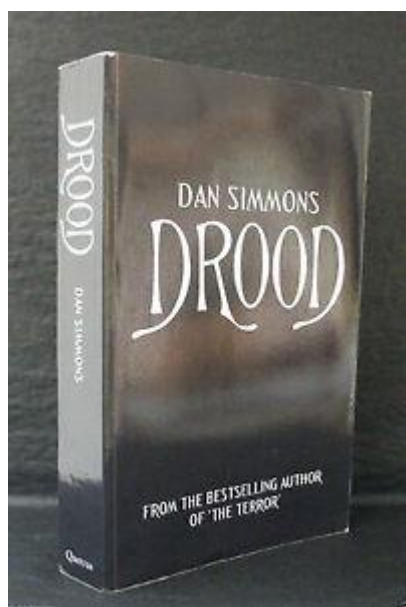
NEXT MEETING

Date: Saturday, September 11, 2021
Time: 11:00 am – 1:00 pm PDT

Place: Riverside Main Library
Address: 3900 Mission Inn Ave.
Riverside, CA 92501
(w/ Hybrid ZOOM)

Discussion: **DROOD** by Dan Simmons
Ch. 1-13

Presenter: **Nancy Smith**



The Greater Riverside Area



A Proud Branch Member (#204) since 2009

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Happy September Everyone! Fall is only mere weeks away!

We present to you our eighth issue of our Volume 13 2021 newsletter. We are very excited about our upcoming Fellowship meeting, as we begin our study and discussion of *DROOD*, by Dan Simmons.

The book is a fictionalized account of the last five years of Charles Dickens' life told from the viewpoint of Dickens' friend and fellow author, Wilkie Collins. The title comes from Dickens' unfinished novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The novel's complex plot mixes fiction with biographical facts from the lives of Dickens, Collins, and other literary and historical figures of the Victorian era.

Mr. Simmons, at age 74, is still a very active and prolific writer. We thought that we would introduce you to him in this issue, offering a brief biography from his personal website; along with a 2009 interview by Cat Rambo, just as *DROOD* was hitting the bookstands.

Your **GRAD GRIND** features interesting tid-bits about Wilkie Collins, whom Simmons chose as his narrator throughout the historical fiction novel. This was a brilliant choice, as Wilkie never fails to be maddening and extremely entertaining.

Due to the immense enormity of this book, we are going to devote the next four months to it, so the required reading is manageable. It is our intention to meet monthly in a hybrid setting: physically at the new Riverside Main Library, along with zooming in.

Please check out our back page for upcoming Fellowship Dickensian-related Zoom events.

Dan Simmons Biography

Dan Simmons was born in Peoria, Illinois, in 1948, and grew up in various cities and small towns in the Midwest, including Brimfield, Illinois, which was the source of his fictional "Elm Haven" in 1991's *SUMMER OF NIGHT* and 2002's *A WINTER HAUNTING*. 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 Master's in Education from Washington University in St. Louis in 1971. He then worked in elementary education for 18 years -- 2 years in Missouri, 2 years in Buffalo, New York -- one year as a specially trained BOCES "resource teacher" and another as a sixth-grade teacher -- and 14 years in Colorado.

His last four years in teaching were spent creating, coordinating, and teaching in APEX, an extensive gifted/talented program serving 19 elementary schools and some 15,000 potential students. During his years of teaching, he won awards from the Colorado Education Association and was a finalist for the Colorado Teacher of the Year. He also worked as a national language-arts consultant, sharing his own "Writing Well" curriculum which he had created for his own classroom. Eleven and twelve-year-old students in Simmons' regular 6th-grade class averaged junior-year in high school writing ability according to annual standardized and holistic writing assessments. Whenever someone says, "writing can't be taught," Dan begs to differ and has the track record to prove it. Since becoming a full-time writer, Dan likes to visit college writing classes, has taught in New Hampshire's Odyssey writing program for adults, and is considering hosting his own Windwalker Writers' Workshop.

Dan's first published story appeared on Feb. 15, 1982, the day his daughter, Jane Kathryn, was born. He's always attributed that coincidence to "helping in keeping things in perspective when it comes to the relative importance of writing and life."

Dan has been a full-time writer since 1987 and lives along the Front Range of Colorado -- in the same town where he taught for 14 years -- with his wife, Karen. He sometimes writes at Windwalker -- their mountain property and cabin at 8,400 feet of altitude at the base of the Continental Divide, just south of Rocky Mountain National Park. An 8-ft.-tall sculpture of the Shrike -- a thorned and frightening character from the four Hyperion/Endymion novels -- was sculpted by an ex-student and friend, Clee Richeson, and the sculpture now stands guard near the isolated cabin.

Dan 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 countries as well as the U.S. and Canada.

Many of Dan's books and stories have been optioned for film, including *SONG OF KALI*, *DROOD*, *THE CROOK FACTORY*, and others. Some, such as the four *HYPERION* novels and single Hyperion-universe novella "Orphans of the Helix", and *CARRION COMFORT* have been purchased (the Hyperion books by Warner Brothers and Graham King Films, *CARRION COMFORT* by European filmmaker Casta Gavras's company) and are in pre-production. Director Scott Derrickson ("The Day the Earth Stood Still") has been announced as the director for the Hyperion movie and Casta Gavras's son has been put at the helm of the French production of *Carrion Comfort*. Current discussions for other possible options include *THE TERROR*. Dan's hardboiled Joe Kurtz novels are currently being looked as the basis for a possible cable TV series.

Guillermo del Toro is scheduled to direct a film adaptation of *Drood* for Universal Pictures. As of April 2021, the project is still listed as "in development."

In 1995, Dan's alma mater, Wabash College, awarded him an honorary doctorate for his contributions in education and writing.

GRAD GRIND

By Tim Clark, Chairman



Did You Know?

(Interesting Wilkie Collins tid-bits to whet the Dickensian Whistle)

Did You Know?

- Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) wrote 25 novels, 50 short stories, 15 plays, and over 100 non-fiction pieces.
- Collins (28) met Dickens (39) in 1851; the two remained close friends until Dickens' death in 1870.
- Collins and Dickens collaborated on many short stories for both Household Words and All The Year Round. Collins served as editor for the latter.
- Collins wrote the play (The Frozen Deep) that would bring a young actress by the name of Ellen Ternan into Dickens' life in 1856.
- Collins led a non-married double-life with two women (Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd); Collins fathered three children (all with Rudd) and served as stepfather (Graves' daughter).
- Rudd was a 19 year-old servant for Collins' mother when they met (he was 40). They maintained their familial relationship as Mr. and Mrs. William Dawson until the day he died.
- Although Graves married, she left her husband after three years and resumed her residency with Collins. She is buried in the same grave as Collins.
- The volume publication in 1860 of The Woman in White broke all previous sales records for any novel.

- Much to Dickens' dismay, his daughter Katie (20) married Wilkie's younger brother Charles (32) in 1860. This created an estrangement between the two friends. A peace-offering came in 1870 when Dickens allowed Charles to design the binding for the novel The Mystery of Edwin Drood.
- Serialized in 1868 All the Year Round, The Moonstone has been hailed as the landmark novel of the Detective Fiction Genre.
- Collins suffered from rheumatic gout (inflammatory arthritis). He became addicted to laudanum (a concoction of alcohol and opium).
- Due to his opium addiction, Collins suffered from paranoid delusions. The most notable among these was his conviction that that he was constantly accompanied by a doppelganger (a ghostly double) that he referred to as "Ghost Wilkie."
- Collins (65) died due to complications of bronchitis and a stroke, while still convalescing from being thrown from a cab nine months earlier.



Wilkie Collins, 1864

The AV Club Drood Interview with Dan Simmons

By Cat Rambo



Since winning the Rod Serling Award in 1982 for his first published story, “The River Styx Runs Upstream,” Colorado-based writer [Dan Simmons](#) has remained a major player in the field of fiction, though his location on that field keeps changing. Simmons’ first novel, *Song Of Kali*, snagged the World Fantasy Award in 1986, while his second, the horror tale *Carrion Comfort*, took the Bram Stoker Award three years later. Since then, his work has included noir, suspense, literary fiction, and an acclaimed, four-volume science-fiction epic, *The Hyperion Cantos*. Simmons’ bestselling 2007 historical thriller, *The Terror*, imagines the fate of the lost Sir John Franklin Expedition, which mysteriously disappeared in the Arctic in the 1840s while searching for the Northwest Passage. Now Simmons has produced *Drood*, an unsettling, intricate thriller that tells the story of Charles Dickens’ last years, as narrated by Dickens’ friend and literary rival, laudanum addict Wilkie Collins. Simmons recently spoke to *The A.V. Club* about research, genre-hopping, and what’s holding up Guillermo Del Toro from adapting *Drood*.

The A.V. Club: *Drood*, like *The Terror*, references the real-life Franklin Expedition and mentions *The Frozen Deep*, an actual play written by Wilkie Collins in 1856. Did you discover something while researching *The Terror* that sparked *Drood*?

Dan Simmons: The truth is, I had the idea and impulse to write *Drood* long before I came up with the idea for *The Terror*. I actually became interested in writing *Drood* when I read *Dickens*, Peter Ackroyd’s biography, around 1999. I was aware when doing research for *The Terror* of Dickens’ response to the charges of cannibalism among the Franklin Expedition. I would have been surprised if Charles Dickens *hadn’t* responded with lots of horror and outrage and public denials that Englishmen were capable of eating each other. It made for a nice little in-joke segue between *The Terror* and *Drood*. And perhaps a few of my readers picked up on the fact that after *The Terror*, which is set in the 1840s, *Drood* starts in the 1860s with Charles Dickens obsessing over the events of the lost Franklin Expedition.

AVC: What is it about the Victorian Era that fascinates you?

DS: You’ve probably heard about the theory of steam-engine time—that even after the steam engine had been invented, it had to wait until people were ready to make use of it.

(Cont. pg. 5)

(Rambo, cont. from pg. 4)

The same thing happens in literary circles. The truth is, I'm not terribly interested in Victorian times; I'm interested in Victorian writers. I'm interested in most eras of history, but not the Victorian Era especially. I was interested in the John Franklin Expedition. I was interested in these last five weird years of Dickens' life. And I just have to take the age that comes with all that when I write about it.

AVC: *Drood* has a very rich backdrop. When you're researching a historical novel, what kinds of details do you look for?

DS: Everything. That sounds silly, but I don't know which details will be important until I immerse myself in the place and space and time. And smell. When I was doing a book about Ernest Hemingway in Cuba in 1942, my wife said, "So you're going to Cuba?" I said yes, and I arranged to get permission to go to Cuba. But then I got lost in my literary research, and I never did go to Cuba. It had all been arranged, though; I had a house down there for a month and everything. The same thing happened when I started writing about Dickens. My wife said, "We are going to England first, right?" And I said, "I think I should," but I never did. I disappeared into the research, as I had before. When I'm reading so many details from letters and from things written at the time, like great biographies and period pieces, they become so alive for me. The Victorians, they were like the Germans in World

War II. They could not stop recording details about their lives and their age.

AVC: They were the bloggers of their time.

DS: They really were. They never quit writing. And that material was the beginning of sociological studies and health studies and so forth. So after disappearing into that for a few months, I came out with enough details to choose from.

AVC: In *Drood* as well as in real life, Wilkie Collins believed he was shadowed by his doppelgänger. What made you think "I can really have fun with that"?

DS: I made little noises of joy at the thought of Wilkie Collins, the narrator of *Drood*. I always enjoy unreliable narrators and gravitate toward them, and Wilkie Collins may have been the ultimate unreliable narrator. He was unbalanced and had been since childhood. He really did believe he had a double wandering around who came to visit him frequently. He was also, as a doctor points out in the book, a serious laudanum addict whose daily consumption of opium mixed with brandy or wine could have killed 20 strong men. His grasp of reality was tenuous at best, which I needed going into this novel. And finally, I just loved Wilkie the rake, Wilkie the anti-Victorian, who lived with one woman and had a child with another, while married to neither.

(Cont. pg. 6)

(Rambo, cont. from pg. 5)

AVC: Your Dickens loves to call himself “the most important writer in England,” but he manages to be simultaneously bombastic and self-deprecating. And Wilkie Collins has this sort of wan resignation. Which character was more interesting to write?

DS: Wilkie Collins was more fun to write, although Charles Dickens was infinitely more interesting. It all comes down in the end, like Salieri and Mozart, to genius. Wilkie Collins was a rival and competitor of Dickens. His novel *Moonstone* sold more copies at the time than Dickens’ last two books. But that meant nothing in the long run. Right now, to be honest, Wilkie Collins is what he deserved to be back then: a footnote, an almost lost memory. And he knew he would become that. On the first page of *Drood*, Wilkie broods on this fact. He’s buried this manuscript for what he hopes is 120 years, and he says to the reader, “You won’t know me.” Most writers do deal with that. Most of us do know we have no immortality. And when you’ve found a genius, someone who has already purchased his immortality in musical or literary terms, it’s maddening.

AVC: How much of *Drood* is a commentary on the writing life, or the writing community as a whole?

DS: Well, I *should* say there’s nothing in there about me and my fellow writers. But if you had me hooked up to a polygraph and forced me to tell the truth, I’d admit that

the never-ending competition between writers hasn’t changed between 1868 and 2000. I used to belong to writers’ workshops with other professionals, but that becomes impossible after a while. Everyone’s on a different step of the career ladder. Jealousy doesn’t have to erupt into murder and burying someone in Wells Cathedral, but it is always there.

AVC: There are some beautiful, horrific cinematic moments in the book. Do you think it would lend itself well to the screen?

DS: I do. But for it to be as effective on the screen as it is as a novel, it has to be quite different. That’s not up to me, though. A while ago, Guillermo del Toro asked to see *Drood* in manuscript. I sent him a thousand pages worth, not even the final revision. And he got to page 628 and went to Universal and said, “I want to do this.” It’s been optioned. I just got the check. Unfortunately, Guillermo has to go off to New Zealand to do some minor motion picture called *The Hobbit*. So once he gets that little thing out of the way, he’s going to come back and do *Drood*. The fun part is, he asked me, “Would you like a blurb for the book?” I thought that was fun, the idea of a movie director blurbing a book that he hasn’t even adapted yet.

AVC: You draw on the classical tradition of literature a lot, whether it’s referencing Dickens, Chaucer, or going as far back as *The Iliad*. Where do you see yourself as fitting in that tradition?

(Cont. pg. 7)

(Rambo, cont. from pg. 6)

DS: Woo, that's difficult. In the sense that real literary tradition doesn't start until you've lasted about a century, I don't see myself fitting in anywhere. I suspect I will be part of the 99 percent of authors who wrote period pieces and who are forgotten after their time. I also think that the vast majority of those authors we lionize now, not just the bestselling ones, will also be in that bin with me. So I'll be in good company. I do see myself as part of a long and joyous chorus, because I can write about Dickens, about Hemingway, about some of these authors—and write within the same tradition that they did, whether it's a suspense thriller or a serious biographical novel. I'm playing in the same sandbox that they were.

AVC: You've been kept in a number of different genres and marketing slots over the years. Has the diverse nature of your books been a help or hindrance?

DS: It's definitely been a hindrance. The best advice that an accomplished writer could give a beginning writer is probably, "Find your slide and then grease it." Almost every writer that wants a rewarding career, in terms of money and status and number of readers, finally finds a certain genre or certain style that he or she sticks with until reaching a critical mass of readership. And I've violated this from the get-go. When I get about five readers I can rub together in one genre, I leave that genre and go somewhere else. And this is due to a vow

that I made myself when I started writing, back in 1982—that if I had any success at all, I would not be bound to one form of writing. That I would write what moves me. The only way I can see me surviving and doing more than one book is to do that, to present the readers with a Dan Simmons novel, with whatever tropes and protocols from whatever genre I want to borrow them. If that builds a Dan Simmons readership, well then, okay. Otherwise, forget about it. I'd rather drive a truck.

AVC: Are there any genres you haven't tried yet that you'd like to?

DS: Right now I'm looking forward to finishing the novel that I'm working on, which is called *Black Hills*. It's another "go back into history and try to make it exciting and a little spooky" novel. But it's quite different from *Drood* or *The Terror*. It starts with a young boy named Paha Sapa—whose name means "Black Hills"—in the Black Hills of South Dakota. He's 11 years old, and he happens to be at Little Big Horn on the day in 1876 when Custer dies, and he counts coup. That's the most courageous thing a young Plains Indian brave could do: Not to kill an opponent, but to touch him in battle. Not hurt him, just touch him. This was usually done with coup sticks, but Paha Sapa uses his bare hands. This young boy touches General George Armstrong Custer the second Custer dies, and Custer's ghost flows down the boy's arm and enters him. So he's got to go through his whole life with Custer gabbling in his head.

(Cont. pg. 8)

(Rambo, cont. from pg. 7)

The book ping-pongs between 1876 and 1936, when the boy, now a much older man, is working on the construction of Mount Rushmore. He's determined to destroy it.

AVC: You also wrote a story recently for the upcoming anthology *Songs Of The Dying Earth*. Did you enjoy working within someone else's fictional world?

DS: I loved that story, although it violated the only other vow I've ever made about writing, which was never to write in anybody else's universe. But I love Jack Vance's work to such a degree that when offered a chance to write a story in the Dying Earth universe, I set aside the novel I was working on and jumped right in.

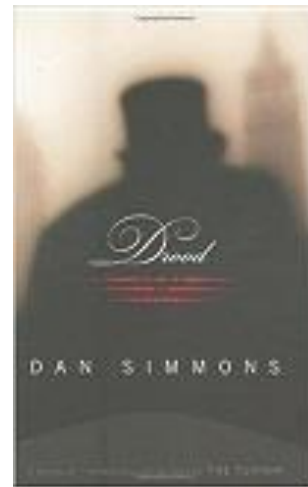
AVC: Are there other writers that you'd break that vow for?

DS: I don't think so. There are many other writers whose work I admire tremendously, but none whose work struck me at just the right young age. Jack Vance taught me that speculative fiction, science fiction, could be wonderfully and liberatingly stylistic. It didn't have to be pulp stuff. He really changed my writing and my view of science fiction, so if nothing else, my little homage to him in the novelette I wrote for that anthology is my thank-you to him. He helped me see that any genre can have excellent writing in it.

AVC: *Locus Magazine* said "Challenges appear to be what Dan Simmons is all about." Is writing a challenge for you?

DS: I think challenges are what any decent writer would be all about. If you actually do find your slide and grease it, shame on you. Me, I get bored very easily. As a writer I get bored even faster than I do in real life. I mean, I like fast cars; I've driven a lot of racecars. You need some stimulation. If I find something that seems too difficult to do, too difficult to research, or beyond your writing abilities, it's a perfect invitation to try it.

(The AV Club, February 24, 2009)



This is our monthly request for you to consider our Annual Fellowship dues. Nothing has changed, \$20 for a single, \$30 for a duo. Memberships are rolling, so once you pay, your renewal is not due until a year has elapsed. And of course, we do not discourage any donation that exceeds the renewal!

GRAD Fellowship Officers

<u>Chairman</u>	Tim Clark poohclark@earthlink.net
<u>Corresponding Secretary</u>	Vikky Pickett vikky.pickett@twc.com
<u>Recording Secretary</u>	Nancy Smith dragonsmith@verizon.net
<u>Treasurer</u>	David Pickett davidjpickett2018@gmail.com

Future GRAD Meetings

- Sept. 11: DROOD (Ch. 1-13)
- Oct. 16: DROOD (Ch. 14-27)
- Nov. 20: DROOD (Ch. 28-40)
- Dec. 11 DROOD (Ch. 41-53)

We plan on meeting live with hybrid Zoom* at the brand-new
Riverside Main Library The Carnegie Room
3900 Mission Inn Ave.
Riverside, CA 92501
(located now two blocks west of the old location, across the street from the Fox Theater)

* Join Zoom Meeting

<https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/93306449804?pwd=elpFZXBwRTkzbU10TUZoQ1VSVFpwdz09>



What is this? Anyone know?

UPCOMING Dickensian EVENTS

- **Monday, September 13th**, 6:00 pm GMT:
Canterbury canterburydf@gmail.com
John Bowen presents *TBA*
- **Wednesday, September 15th**, 7:30 pm GST:
Aberdeen eadsummers@me.com
Paul Schlicke presents *An Introduction to Pickwick*
- **Thursday, September 16th**, 7:30 pm GMT
Rochester & Chatham
stevemartin54@hotmail.com
Branch AGM meeting (no speaker)
- **Saturday, September 18th**, 1:00 pm EST **Dickens Fellowship New York**
www.dickensnewyork.com **Mark Halperin** moderates *Barnaby Rudge, Ch. 37-44*.
- **Tuesday, September 21st**, 6:00 pm, BST **London Central** dickensfellowshiptalks@gmail.com
Paul Graham presents *How 'the gent who rose from the antiposes' rid Mugby Junction of its tyrannous Missus, and inaugurated Anglo-Australian cricket*.
- **Sunday, September 26th**, 2:00 pm PST: **Santa Cruz Pickwick** www.dickenscommons.com
John Jordan presents *Bleak House, Introduction, Ch. 1-16* (Hybrid)
- **Saturday, October 2nd**, 1:00 pm EST: **Friends of Dickens, NY** [The Friends of Dickens New York](http://TheFriendsofDickensNewYork.com)
Kate Foster moderates *Martin Chuzzlewit, Ch. 9-15*.
- **Wednesday, October 6th**, 7:00 pm BST
Broadstairs
info@broadstairsdickensfellowship.com
Carolyn Oulton presents *'I couldn't bear to spend Eight months with these people'*.
- **Monday, October 11th**, 6:00 pm GMT:
Canterbury canterburydf@gmail.com
Peter Van de Merwe presents *Dickens and Clarkson Stanfield*