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FRIDAY, MAY 25, 2012

REGIONAL EVENTS

MisCon starts today; George R.R. Martin featured guest

By JAKE SORICH
Tribune Staff Writer

George R.R. Martin, one of the most prolific and popular fantasy writers today, makes his first visit to Montana this weekend at the 26th annual MisCon Science Fiction and Fantasy Festival in Missoula.

Joining Martin at the festival will be author and role-playing game designer Kenneth Hite and artist Rob Carlos.

Martin will discuss his books, the art of fantasy writing and the HBO series "Game of Thrones," which is based on his novel series "A Song of Ice and Fire."

The four-day festival takes place at the Ruby Inn and Convention Center. This year's theme is "MisCon 26: A Fairy Tale."

Registration starts at 10 a.m. each morning. The opening ceremonies start at 7 tonight, while closing ceremonies get going at 3 p.m. on Monday. For a complete schedule of events, visit misoncon.org.

Festival highlights will include a discussion on the "X-Files" television series, a "Gameshow of Thrones" event involving the iron throne and people dressed as characters from "Game of Thrones," multiple book signings, writers workshops, gaming sessions and an outdoor demonstration on how to throw axes, knives and spears.

Bob Lovely, chairman of the MisCon, said the festival committee picks a theme each year based on what they find most interesting.

"George Martin has no fairy tale connection, but we decorate that way," Lovely said. "People wear costumes in fairy tale ways, and my wife makes cupcakes that have fairies on them this year."

Another highlight this year is the iron throne from the "Game of Thrones" series, which will sit at the Ruby Inn all weekend.

Martin said more than book signings, he's found conventions allow both he and his fans to visit and talk about the books, shows or anything else.

"It's a chance for me as a writer to meet my readers and interact with my readers," he said. "When I have a book come out, my publisher usually sends me out on a book tour. Book



George R.R. Martin, author of the "A Song of Ice and Fire" series, will be a special guest at this year's MisCon along with role-playing game designer Kenneth Hite and artist Rob Carlos. COURTESY PHOTO

ESSENTIALS

What: The 26th annual MisCon Science Fiction and Fantasy Festival
Where: The Ruby Inn and Convention Center in Missoula
When: Today through Monday. Opening ceremony is at 7 tonight and the closing ceremony is at 3 on Monday.

Who: Guests of honor this year are author George R.R. Martin, role-playing game designer Kenneth Hite and artist Rob Carlos.
Admission: Admission for the festival is \$20 for an adult day pass, \$40 for an adult weekend pass, \$10 for a youth day pass and \$15 for a youth weekend pass. Youths are classified as children ages 7 through 12. People can register at the hotel starting at 10 a.m. each day.

signings are a great place to get your book signed but not a place for conversation.

You have long lines and hundreds of people who get to be in front with the writer for 12 seconds.

At a sci-fi convention, it's a more conventional environment — people ask questions, you can get your book signed, but there are parties at night and you can go and have a beer with a guest and talk about anything."

Lovely said he's found Martin, like most of their guests over

the years, is friendly and down-to-earth.

"We've been fortunate in that we hunt down people who are interesting famous people who do neat stuff people enjoy," he said. "But maybe more than that, they're all incredibly nice human beings who are approachable and friendly."

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'Song of Ice and Fire' series and HBO's 'The Game of Thrones' boosting fan base

George R.R. Martin has long been a staple of sci-fi conventions since he began his career as a fantasy writer in the 1970s. He said he enjoys attending sci-fi conventions, mostly because he gets to see his returning fans while also meeting new ones.

His fan base has grown considerably as of late on the heels of his latest book in his "A Song of Ice and Fire" series, and "The Game of Thrones" television series on HBO. Martin said he's had to schedule appearances three years in advance because he's involved with so many projects.

The world Martin created in the book series is rich with relatable characters, multiple languages, cultures, religions, family histories and wars. The books follow seven noble families who fight for control of the mythical land of Westeros. The first season of the show was nominated for 13 Emmys and won two.

The latest book in Martin's series, "A Dance of Dragons," came out last year and debuted at the top of the New York Times best-seller list. It is the fifth of seven books in the series.

Martin said before the television series was made, he had multiple offers from several Hollywood studios.

"You could do a dozen feature films and even then you could not get it all in. I definitely thought this television series was the way to go." Martin said as the series con-

tinues the stories get more intricate and involve more characters.

"We're only in the second season, which follows the second book," he said. "The books only get bigger and bigger.

When I wrote the books I've always thought they were unfilmable because of the size of it. I'm writing the books as books and not thinking in terms of how it's translated to film or television. David (Benioff) and Dan (Weiss) have some challenges going forward. So far they've done wonderfully at

(translating) it. I hope that continues, but I'm glad it's their problem and not mine."

Martin writes in a style that follows the perspective of each of the characters for extended periods of time throughout the books. He said what makes that style work is that each character must deal with major decisions in a relatable and human way. He said while characters often get painted as "good" or "evil," that's not how people act in the real world.

"If you look in the real world, you don't see purely good people, you don't see purely evil people, you don't see purely good people," he said. "We're all capable of being heroes or saints on occasion and cruel or selfish on other occasions. That dividing line is narrower than we'd like to think. Those contradictions and the sense of not knowing how something is going to come out and what decision a character is going to make is a crucial part of the story."



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