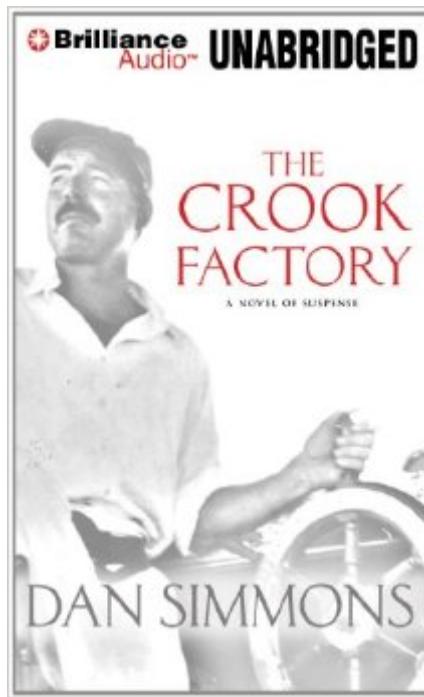


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The Crook Factory



Synopsis

At the height of World War II, the famous writer Ernest Hemingway sought permission from the U.S. government to operate a spy ring out of his house in the Cuban countryside. This much is true. It is the summer of '42 and FBI agent Joe Lucas has come to Cuba at the behest of J. Edgar Hoover to keep an eye on Hemingway. The great writer has assembled a ragtag spy ring that he calls the "Crook Factory" to play a dangerous game of amateur espionage. But then Lucas and Hemingway, against all the odds, uncover a critical piece of intelligence and the game turns deadly. In *The Crook Factory*, award-winning author Dan Simmons expands a little-known fact into a tour de force of gripping historical suspense set in the sensual Cuban landscape of the early 1940s.

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Customer Reviews

The Crook Factory is about the semi-covert intelligence operations which Ernest Hemmingway coordinated in Cuba for the War effort in 1942. The events during this period are recounted by a fictional FBI agent who is assigned by J. Edgar Hoover to keep an eye on Hemmingway and make sure that any 'real' intelligence makes it back to Washington. As always Dan Simmons employs a very tactile writing style which puts the reader in the center of the action. He does an excellent job of blurring the lines between his artistic embellishment and the actual events which took place during this time. He makes nice use of real people, e.g. J. Edgar Hoover, Ian Fleming, Marlene Dietrich and others, to provide authenticity to the book. Thankfully enough, in his afterward, he lets the reader in on the secret of which parts were fact and which were fiction. I should mention that Dan

Simmons is one of my all-time favorite authors. Everything he writes I end up reading eventually. Unlike many current-day authors he jumps across genres, Science Fiction, Horror, Fantasy, in an adroit manner. Like Simmons' *The Fires of Eden*, a book about Mark Twain's adventures in Hawaii, this book falls into category of Historical Fiction, i.e. real events told in a fictional way to make them more palatable to a modern-day audience. Compared to others in that genre, of which I must admit some unfamiliarity, I guess *The Crook Factory* stands quite well. But for me, compared to the best of his other works, it wasn't that exciting. The whole exercise reminded me a research project on Hemmingway gone awry. Strangely enough I have noticed a recent tendency of some of my favorite authors to broach related subjects.

(from "The San Antonio Express-News," Feb '99) Writer sui generis Dan Simmons refuses to be pigeon-holed. His first novel ("Song of Kali," a psychological thriller) garnered a World Fantasy Award. Horror novels like "Carrión Comfort" and "Summer of Night" earned awards and admiration from peers like Stephen King and Dean Koontz. And his critically acclaimed, award winning quartet of SF ("Hyperion," "The Fall of Hyperion," "Endymion" and "The Rise of Endymion") are perennial bestsellers that have cemented his reputation in that genre. Not one to rest on his laurels, Simmons new novel, "The Crook Factory," explores an entirely different genre: literary espionage. Like those before it, this book is filled with crackerjack writing, a page-turning plot, and characters which will haunt the reader long after the book is finished. Joe Lucas, an amoral special agent in the FBI, finds himself assigned to a case that seems designed as punishment. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover has tasked him with keeping tabs on an amateur spy network in Cuba. The network has been coined "The Crook Factory" by it's ringleader - none other than Ernest Hemingway. Completely unaware of Hemingway's stature and celebrity as a writer (he doesn't read "make believe" books), Lucas' perspective and growing awareness of Hemingway is offered through fresh, unspoiled eyes. Upon reaching Cuba, Lucas is thoroughly unprepared for what he finds. In Hemingway, he discovers a braggart who embellishes upon every life story, and a writer who, despite an awareness of his own talent, constantly questions his own worth.

Hemingway always liked to present an image of being a 'man's man', and the side of him that acutely observed and recorded those around him and their swirling tide-pool of emotions was normally hidden from view. Simmons, delving deep into the minutia of what is known about the man, managed to catch this ambivalence in this spy-vs-spy novel. Hemingway's braggart, macho face is clearly in evidence, but also much that is deeper: his genuine feelings for his children (and his

'children' were a much larger group than his biological family), his own realistic opinion of both his own and other's writing abilities, his fears and depressions, his charismatic presence, his dominance of almost any group he was part of, his real appreciation of what excellent art is, his total arrogance towards those whom he felt did not meet his standards.Beyond this fine character portrait, we find a plot that seemingly came strictly from the land of make-believe, that is until you look at the documented facts surrounding the creation and operation of Hemingway's contribution to the WWII effort, his self-named Crook Factory. Nominally a strictly amateur counter-espionage group, which should have occupied the attention of the Washington bureaucrats for all of two minutes, is instead shown here to be the focus of not one but at least four professional intelligence-gathering organizations. Simmons weaves a finely complicated tale within the documented facts, some of which paint a very frightening picture of certain American organizations, and which become even more frightening in light of certain recently passed legislation allowing these organizations even more effectively unsupervised power.

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