

COVER STORY

Mega sci-fi dreams spring to life with Infinity Con

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Mega. Super. Infinity. Community organizer and writer David Heringer dreams big.

"I consider myself a hopeless creator in the way that I seem to take my own creative path in everything in my life," says Heringer, who strives to think as large as the worlds of science fiction and fantasy that he consumes. "I think everyone has a little bit of this inside. We were made to be creative, and I feel Infinity Con is about bringing that out."

Heringer is heading up Tallahassee's first Infinity Con on Saturday, a family-friendly comic book convention that celebrates comic, sci-fi, video game and entertainment fandoms. Heringer's interests in these genres stem from a childhood proclivity for exploring the woods around his small town Florida home and making up stories.

He wrote them down as they transformed into ideas for comics. Science fiction, fantasy and horror are his favorite genres, while Spider-Man and Batman top the list as far as superheroes. His father loved diving into these unknown realms with him, while his mother would read him the "Chronicles of Narnia" at bedtime.

"I've always wondered what's out there," says Heringer. "Growing up in a Christian home and seeing spiritual things in the church, I've always wondered about what we don't understand."

Music was another burgeoning passion in high school. Heringer learned saxophone and joined a ska band. He loved being a singer and traveled around as a front man, writing lyrics and melodies. However, he struggled to trim down his ideas into the traditional song-writing format.

"I was trying to write stories in song," says Heringer, who eventually started working on a solo concept album.

The plot of this album revolved around a nano-technological future based on stories of skin grafting and heart transplants. The backstory was so extensive that his wife questioned if he truly was a songwriter or if he had another calling.

As Heringer began writing more of-



Dex Mccullough enters the at the Cosplay Contest at Infinity Con in Lake City
INFINITY CON

ten, he started several novels and collaborated with a hip-hop artist on a comic book series. For his other works, he used television shows like "The Twilight Zone" and "The Walking Dead" as jumping off points into new material.

"I generally write a concept, then do some world-building describing what kind of a world I want to create," says Heringer. "I make some loose rules of what that world will be, then I'll start writing the first few chapters."

At one point, Heringer helped run an

indie music event, The Objective, in Nashville. Coordinating nearly 500 musicians, he saw firsthand what it took to be behind the scenes, as well as how to handle the logistics of creating a fun atmosphere for attendees.

When he attended MegaCon in Orlando for the first time a few years back, he marveled at the sheer scale of the event. As an attendee, Heringer was delighted to meet and speak with leading industry creators about his aspirations as a comic book writer.



David Heringer is heading up Tallahassee's first Infinity Con on Saturday. Infinity Con a family-friendly comic book convention that celebrates comic, sci-fi, video game and entertainment fandoms. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

If you go

What: Infinity Con

When: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday

Where: Tucker Civic Center, 505 W. Pensacola St.

Cost: Online: \$12, children (6-11) \$8; On-site: \$14, children (6-11) \$10

Contact: For more information, visit www.infinityconally.com

"You see comics piled high and towers of T-shirts," says Heringer. "It creates this atmosphere of walking in somewhere like Disney. You see these elaborate costumes like they're walking out of Marvel comics. It was mind-blowing being a part of that."

When his friend and former bandmate, Ray Hancock asked him to step in and help with Infinity Con in Lake City in 2014, Heringer jumped at the chance. They hoped for a few people and were surprised with hundreds. They promoted the event in Tallahassee comic book shops for the past six years and began to see an interest in bringing the event to the capital city.

For Heringer, that meant expanding their usual 1,000-square-foot venue in

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Lake City to 33,000 square feet at the Civic Center. With so much room to play with, they brainstormed on how to raise excitement levels for this summer's seminal event. Envisioning the venue in his mind's eye, Heringer sat surrounded by whiteboards, where he sketched out different area compositions and placed himself to an event-goer's shoes.

"What will be the first thing that hits them since this memory that might stick with them the rest of their life? What is the first thing they're going to see?" questions Heringer. "I look for things that have that 'wow' factor. Seeing it all come together for me is my own

creative symphony."

This year, Heringer is expanding Infinity Con's special effects panel, hosted by Jeh Howell, which will up the ante to include parkas for a gory "splash zone." A Japanese anime "Maid Cafe" will serve up desserts and small cakes by costumed characters while a local robotics group runs demonstrations in another area. Heringer is also proud to be partnering with the Hang Tough Foundation to create a sensory-friendly area for children and families who need a quiet moment away from the hustle and bustle of the event.

Artist Alley will be comprised of local all-stars and vendors, while featured creators include Mark Maddox, an award-winning illustrator and Christopher Burdett, concept designer for Magic the Gathering, "Star Wars" and Dun-

geons & Dragons. Ultimately, Heringer is excited to provide a space where anyone can transform into the most fantastical version of themselves.

"One of the cool things about a comic book convention is you get to see this melting pot of people," says Heringer. "People come in and feel like they can let go of how they're supposed to act and look. You can be any character, you can make your own character, and you can see people from all groups come together under this sci-fi, horror, fantasy, gaming umbrella and enjoy each other's company for a day."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).



Infinity Con is coming to the Civic Center on Saturday. DAVID HERINGER/INFINITY CON