



## **Ilium**

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The Trojan War rages at the foot of Olympus Mons on Mars—observed and influenced from on high by Zeus and his immortal family—and twenty-first-century professor Thomas Hockenberry is there to play a role in the insidious private wars of vengeful gods and goddesses. On Earth, a small band of the few remaining humans pursues a lost past and devastating truth—as four sentient machines depart from Jovian space to investigate, perhaps terminate, the potentially catastrophic emissions emanating from a mountaintop miles above the terraformed surface of the Red Planet.

## **Ilium Details**

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Author : Dan Simmons

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## From Reader Review Ilium for online ebook

### Kane says

"Literary science fiction". One of the words in this phrase struggles and strains against the other two like an 18-month old who doesn't want to be picked up. It doesn't want to be associated with a genre that often is long on ideas and short on quality prose and sharp and distinct style. It often succeeds in escaping the pull of science fiction's weak gravity. Occassionally, an author creates a story that is so dense that the word is held in place in an unstable orbit. Ultimately many of those fail under their own weight and implode into the speculative fiction black hole. Rarely, very rarely, O Muse, an author has the incredible imagination, literary style and guts to weave together a story with just the right mix of literary competence, adventure, science and kickassness to balance needed to sustain the phrase. Dan Simmons did it with Hyperion with inhuman aplomb.

And yes, he does it again with Ilium. It's freaking awesome.

While Hyperion gave us a structure loosely based on the classic Chauceresque frame story, Ilium is straight up Homeric Trojan War. On Mars. With robots from Jupiter obsessed with Shakespeare and Proust. With the Greek gods and quantum teleportation. On Mars. Oh and dinosaurs. We take in a lot of the action from the point of view of a formerly dead scholar. Oh yes, Simmons has taken his favourite weapon of intertextuality and speared himself doozy.

I have yet to read how Sai Simmons came up with this idea but I would not be shocked if it involved a bet and a half-empty bottle of whiskey. I can just imagine him waking up on the bathroom floor in the morning with some indecipherable napkin notes ending with the phrase "good luck with that". Stack on top of this Achillian challenge three seemingly unrelated plot lines that span the solar system and you have what I like to call, the impossible.

But that's what makes this book so good. Simmons takes the impossible and shapes it with Zeus like vision into something that I read in a little over a week, smiling the entire time. The pace will have you gasping in the thin air of Olympus Mons.

There is absolutely no way I can give this less than 5 stars considering the pure effort it must have required to conjure up this opus and for the resulting amusement park for your brain. However, if I had any critique, it might be the same as I had for the Fall of Hyperion and it's only in (an unfair) comparison to their predecessor: many characters in Hyperion are so unique and familiar that it's difficult if not impossible to reproduce that feeling in subsequent works. I did identify with Hockenberry fairly well though and even with the damn robots.

To continue my theme from my review of Carrion Comfort, five Dan Simmons books into it and I can say he remains at the top of my list.

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### Simona Bartolotta says

~ 15/02/17

I've only read one chapter but I can already tell the writing is so unbelievably brilliant. Insta-love for me.

~ 18/03/17

•I'm a little past page 100 and the writing is still brilliant, but all the rest isn't doing it for me -sure enough I've only been able to read 100 pages in 30 days. I've no doubt the world-building is complex and thought-out, but **nothing is explicitly explained and the reader is supposed to glean all the information from the story itself as it unfolds; normally I would love this**, but in this instance, at page 100 I still have no idea what's going on and this disturbs me, because I feel that I can't enjoy the story if I don't understand what's happening and who these people are.

•Briefly, I needed the world-building to reveal itself more quickly and more clearly. This proved to be such a big problem for me because since the book is set in a world completely different from and alien to ours, **the world-building becomes fundamental and should work as the glue keeping all the events of the plot together**. Without glue, all crumbles. And that's what kept happening when I was reading: **the plot went on crumbling under my eyes**, and in the end I found I had no patience for it anymore.

► **But** I'm not ruling out the possibility to give *Ilium* another try in the future. As I said, the writing won me over in a split second, and I think that further in the book things should work better, and therefore I could enjoy it more. But at the moment I feel that I have better things to read.

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## Nicholas Armstrong says

A book should not be hard to read. To pick up a book, and to read the words and enjoy them should not be hard, it should just be. Reading this book was hard. Every moment I normally would pick up a book to read a little I would pick up this, and every time I did not look forward to it.

It baffles me; I could have sworn that I enjoyed *Hyperion* and that it was well-written, could I have been so wrong? This was not enjoyable, it was not well-written, and it was so hugely disappointing.

700 pages is a lot to ask of a person, especially when the story is divided into what could be three books and each book filled with characters who are not in the slightest interesting or fleshed out. What bothers me most is the gods and the heroes of the *Iliad*. This was my chance to see some characterization of all my favorite mythological badasses and it failed so astoundingly. Diomedes, my favorite character from the *Iliad*, is nothing more than a spear or a weapon, and the only descriptions of him are as a bumbling greedy oaf. Odysseus is a bulky, bear of a man who seems neither cunning nor clever, and most of the characters seem rather monstrous. At least in the Homeric versions there is no authorial opinion given for actions, just statements of fact. If Jason (who was a total douche) wanted to love and leave women then he could damn well do it without the writer telling us what a dick he was, all of the characters here are colored by perspectives I don't care about and find rather frustrating.

Ultimately, it felt as if Simmons wanted to show off what he had studied, not a story or characters or any of the things that I tend to like in a book. 350 loooong pages into the book nearly nothing has happened. There is lots of posturing and pondering but very, very, little has progressed the story forward. It is as if most of the novel is filler, Simmons just plugging away to fill some page quota. Additionally, and more irritatingly, the prose is awful, really just awful. Adverbs are awesome, but I don't need them for something that is obvious, dammit. Typing DO NOT DISOBEY ME in caps and bold makes me believe Zeus is angry, you don't have to follow it with, 'Zeus bellowed angrily'. Seriously, it is like a high school paper. Every event is reiterated and things pointed out earlier are reiterated again, as if I couldn't just look it up if I forgot something.

This is a jumbled mess of showboating and condescension (or at least underestimation) of the audience and I can no more tolerate it from an author I thought I liked than by one I know I do not.

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## **seak says**

If someone were to describe this book to me (if they even could), I don't know if I would believe how much I absolutely enjoyed it. Dan Simmons is a mad genius.

Shakespeare-quoting humanoid robots, Greek Gods, post-humans, and old-style humans somehow make the craziest awesome story imaginable.

Ilium is a story told through essentially three unrelated viewpoints. First, there's Hockenberry. This is told in first person. Hockenberry is called a "Scholic," a human from our the 20th century (our time) who was rebirthed in a future where Homer's Trojan War is being fought. His job is to report on the war ... to the Greek Gods.

At first, this is completely confusing. Why? is a question I asked myself over and over, but it begins to make sense with time. Plus, it's hard not to be fascinated with the events of the Iliad. It's also impressive how much research went into it, though that's only an assumption since my knowledge of the Trojan War is essentially from the movie, Troy (but I have read the Odyssey!).

The second viewpoint is the humans, mainly Daemon. Daemon is a self-involved fool who is unlikeable to say the least. But who wouldn't be when you have everything handed to you on a silver platter by robots called servitors (sp - I did listen to the audio so forgive me), like all humans everywhere. Pleasure is their life, knowledge ... is lacking.

The third viewpoint is that of a sonnet-loving humanoid robot called a "moravec" and named Mahnmut. Specifically, and only, Shakespeare's sonnets. It's work consists of exploring the moon of Jupiter called Europa. Mahnmut is called in on a mission with a group of moravecs to explore some occurrences on the planet mars.

At first, I was highly entertained, though confused, with the events of the Trojan war and the other parts were just above boring. Slowly, the story takes hold and it had me hook, line, and sinker.

Listening to the audiobook, I was looking forward to my morning and evening drives and not too sad to do errands on my lunch hour either. Somehow, it ALL makes sense even though it sounds like the oddest collection of classics to make up a cohesive story all its own. What does Shakespeare have to do with the Iliad or Proust (his work makes appearances too) for that matter, all set in the future with technology that gives humans everything they ever want or need?

It's crazy I tell ya. Crazy! How did I like this book this much? I'm telling you, Simmons is a mad genius. I will just sit back and let him take me on his journey. It's amazing. I question not.

Kevin Pariseau is the narrator of this audiobook and while at first I thought he over-acted the part of Hockenberry, though somehow not the other parts, I really grew to like him and found out that it was literally just the character of Hockenberry that he was playing. And it's impressive given how many Greek words and names he's got to ...erm... name.

The only problem is that *Ilium* is only half the story. It stops at a huge cliffhanger and I'm already heading to *Olympos* to see how this ends.

5 out of 5 Stars (Mind ... blown)

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### **Scott Rhee says**

I can't seem to say enough in the way of praise for Dan Simmons. The guy is a frickin' genius and one of the best writers working in any genre today.

"*Ilium*" is his science fiction magnum opus. It is a grand epic in the same way Tolkein's "*Lord of the Rings*" trilogy and Frank Herbert's "*Dune*" series were grand epics in their genre. The funny thing is Simmons's "*Ilium*" is a sci-fi epic ABOUT one of the greatest epics of all time, Homer's "*The Iliad*". Well, it's not so much about "*The Iliad*" as it is a very strange and wonderful re-imagining of the greatest epic poems in Western Civilization.

The book is hard to describe, but here goes my attempt at explaining it: In the distant future (it is very unclear how distant), the planet Mars has been taken over by the Greek gods. Zeus, Hera, Aphrodite, Apollo, et al live on their new Mount Olympus, appropriately located on the peaks of Olympus Mons. Not only that, but the ancient city of Troy, along with all its Trojan citizens, as well as all the Greek warriors, led by Agammemnon, Menelaus, and Achilles, have been miraculously resurrected to play out the entire 10-year Trojan War. Again.

Strangely enough, 20th-century college professor Thomas Hockenberry has also been resurrected (along with other scholars) to report to the gods on how accurately the participants of this Martian re-creation are adhering to the original. Having no clue as to how (or even why) he has been resurrected along with the others, frustrated Hockenberry decides to switch things up and "interfere" in the classic story.

Meanwhile, the few remaining human survivors (roughly 3,000+) on Earth are blissfully unaware of what's happening on the neighboring planet until some curiosity-filled Earthlings decide to find out where all the other billions of Earthlings went, who (or what) keeps providing them with a continuous source of food and shelter, and why they only have a 100-year life expectancy, no more and no less.

Then a 600+ year-old woman named Savi shows up, claiming to remember the days when the world was filled with people, and she introduces the Earthlings to a friend of hers, an even older gentleman who calls himself Odysseus. There's also a pair of Shakespeare-and Proust-quoting robots from Jupiter's moons who arrive on Mars, investigating some strange readings that would indicate the existence of a presence more powerful than anything they have ever studied before. Unfortunately, they are shot down by one of Zeus's lightening bolts, and immediately rescued by hundreds of adorable mute LGMs (Little Green Men).

I know it all sounds strange, and I'd be lying if I said it wasn't, but it's one of those books that sucks you in and never lets up. A grand and weird blend of space opera, fantasy, hard science fiction, humor, and literary criticism, "*Ilium*" is definitely one of the best and most original science fiction novels I have read in a long time.

Nominated for a Hugo, "*Ilium*" is the first of a series, continued in the second book "*Olympos*".

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## Jake says

My review of Ilium in a nutshell:  
“I liked it?”

AMBISHUN: DAN SIMMONS HAZ IT.

I’m not sure if it is possible to be too ambitious when creating a plot for a novel, but Dan Simmons seems to be on a mission to find out. There are concepts, there are high concepts, and there are Dan Simmons concepts.

When it’s time for Simmons to begin a new novel, I picture something like this:

Dan Simmons is smoking a pipe (made from the bones of an aurochs), deep in the bowels of Stately Simmons Manor. Inspiration hits. He must write a novel about the Trojan war! But ANYONE could do that. How does Dan Simmons make his version stand out? TO THE TOPICS BARREL!

He dramatically opens the oversized mahogany double-doors to his study and PickWick, the Simmons family butler, is already cranking one of those super-sized bingo barrels. Thousands of ping pong balls –nay, sliced baby eyelids, each bearing a single topic tattoo- are skittering about. When the barrel stops barreling, out slide three moist subjects.

Robots.

Mars.

Shakespeare.

Dan Simmons downs the last of his chilled cognac, freshly squeezed from the teats of a three-breasted whore. He twirls an imaginary mustache. “Yes,” he mutters. “Only Simmons could set the Trojan War on past and future Mars and tell it from the perspective of two cyborgs (one who will be shaped like...a CRAB!!!!) who constantly bicker about Proust! ONLY SIMMONS!”

He jauntily skips across campus to his vintage moveable-type machine (the ink contains the semen of Ben Franklin!) and writes 1,200 words in 4 days.

-END SCENE-

Seriously. Does he do this with every novel? Just off the top of my head:

Arctic Exploration + Yeti = The Terror.

Charles Dickens + Serial Killer = Drood.

Vampires + A Dangerous Game. Nazis = Carrion Comfort.

I really liked Ilium, even if I have no idea how the concurrent randomness actually ties together. I know there’s a sequel that should explain everything, but man, my brain is far too tired to risk another multi-pronged mind-asplode scenario. For a while, anyway.

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## Cathy (cathepsut) says

Update: After thinking about the book for three weeks and comparing it with the other books read and ratings given this month AND despite my misgivings about the beginning and not really liking the parts about the Greeks all that much, I decided to upgrade the rating to a full five stars. The scope of the book was just so great, it really deserves the highest rating.

\*~\*~\*~\*

I did not enjoy the first 50 pages or so. I was confused and wondering what was going on. I thought I would DNF this, before I hit a hundred pages.

But the moravecs had me at „Mars“...

*They passed Mars's orbit and there was nothing to see; Mars, of course, was on the opposite side of the sun. They passed Earth's orbit a day later and there was nothing to see; Earth was far around the curve of its orbit on the plane of the ecliptic far below.*

The humans eventually grew on me, too.

A third of the way into the novel, I still did not like the parts taking place during the Trojan War though. They felt superfluous, too detailed and bored me. Greek mythology has never really been my thing. But even here Hockenberry finally managed to win me over.

Great world building, great ideas, very dense and not for a casual read. Good, in the end. I might read the next book, Olympos, eventually. I am a little scared it might not be as good.

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## Mark says

The Iliad serves as the starting point here ("Sing, O Muse, of the rage of Achilles..."), and from there Dan Simmons proceeds to amaze you with some of the most literate science fiction you'll ever read. The story unfolds in three parts, which are skillfully woven together to increase dramatic tension as the plot lines spiral closer to each other. The end of Ilium is a soft stop, there is some closure but it leaves much open for the next book Olympos.

The science fiction is the good stuff that sci-fi fans want and need. We're talking quantum teleportation, nanotechnology, sentient cybernetics, a light hint of time travel... the works. The literature references are numerous and impressive. You don't have to get all the references to make this book enjoyable; but getting some of them will make you feel quite well read. When you get a little Proust, a lot of Shakespeare, a dash of Browning, mixed in with twists on Homer, Aristophanes, and Virgil, you know this isn't lightweight stuff.

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## J.G. Keely says

I love the idea of a throwback, an author who takes cues from classics and puts a new spin on them. Mieville took rollicking pulp and updated it, Susanna Clarke made fairy tales and the Gothic novel sing for a modern audience--but if you're going to adopt a bygone style, take only the best, and leave the dross.

By all means, copy Howard's verve and brooding, but skip the sexist titillation. Copy Lovecraft's cosmic horror, but skip the racist epithets. Dan Simmons's *Illum* feels like 50's sci fi for all the wrong reasons--less a throwback than a relic.

Each of his intertwining stories features a slight variation on the standard science hero, that idealization of the author that we all roll our eyes at: the adventurer who is a bit dorky, out of place, more at home in the safety of a library, but who is now stuck on Mars, or floating in space, or trapped in a dystopian conspiracy (respectively), and must get by with only his smarts and good character.

Like most such stories, the plotting is convenient--instead of being motivated by their own desires, the story is imposed upon the characters. They are vessels for the reader to inhabit instead of thinking, feeling beings. The main plots roughly parallel classic sci fi texts: like *Riverworld*, we have powerful, advanced beings recreating humans to toy with them, taking on the role of the gods. The next combines elements of *Brave New World*, and *Dancers at the End of Time*: we follow a man on a dying Earth as he tries to uncover who's *really* behind it all.

This latter story also has a more interesting antecedent in Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*--as several characters, images, and relationships are drawn from that work, yet it is not an expansion upon Nabokov's sci fi foray, but a regression of his themes back into titillating pulp. The main character goes on and on about how hot his cousin is, and how he wants to sleep with her--however, since he is rebuffed and mocked at every turn, we have to assume that this is meant to be a satire. Yet, we're still getting those descriptions, that same primary point of view, so I'm not sure Simmons is doing quite enough to differentiate the satire from the object of ridicule. Likewise, it's so overstated and repetitious that it becomes tiring.

The literary turn is curious, seeming to promise that more thought has gone into this work than the average genre adventure. One character lives in a Nabokov story, the next has constant discourses on the meaning of Shakespeare's Sonnets and the philosophy of Proust, and the last is full of literary interpretations of Homer. Simmons is aiming high, deliberately drawing comparison with the literary greats, trying to borrow depth from them--but it's not enough to simply invoke the names, to place their thoughts into the mouths of this or that character, if he fails to integrate these ideas fully into the structure and prose.

Simmons' language is disappointing--overly explanatory, nitpicking in that familiar sci fi way, where everything is reductive. The inner lives of the characters, their motivations, the finer points of the plot, all are stated outright, then rehashed and restated. The reader is told what to think, how to react, and what it all means--it all becomes rather overbearing. Much of the bulk of it (and it is bulky) comes from the fact that the author is never willing to leave well enough alone. At one point he mentions Hector's son's nickname and what it means twice in as many pages--at which point I wondered if anyone had actually bothered to edit this thing in the first place.

A grand and strange idea needs grand and strange prose to propel it. Narrowing down and simplifying it for the crowd just isn't going to do it justice. If you've decided to write a complex book, with various story threads drawing on both classic sci fi and great literature, at a certain point you need to have faith that it will

come together, in the end. Otherwise, the anxious urge to control every aspect and get it *just right* is going to strangle the life out of it, until there is no room left for mystery or strangeness.

In bad fantasy, it often feels like the author has set themselves the masochistic limitation of constructing a book solely using words and phrases cut from an antiques catalogue--which would explain why, by the end, the swords, thrones, and banners have more developed personalities than the romantic leads. Likewise, in bad sci fi, it feels like authors are forced to do the same thing with an issue of *Popular Mechanics*--filling out the text with little gadgets and a blurb on the latest half-baked FTL propulsion theory.

We can go back as far as Wells and Verne and see the split between social sci fi and gadget sci fi: Wells realized that it was enough to simply have the time machine or airplane as story devices, things that might change society. He did go on his preachy tangents, but they were always about the *effects* of technology, not particulars dredged from an engine repair manual.

Verne, on the other hand, liked to put in the numbers, to speculate and theorize about the particulars--yet here we are, *still* waiting on the kind of battery banks he describes as powering the *Nautilus*. Going into intense detail simply isn't useful in a work of fiction.

A communicator or phaser or transporter is just as inspiring and fascinating on *Star Trek* without bothering with vague pseudoscience for how the thing is supposed to work. In the end, focus on the story itself, on the characters and the world, and leave out the chaff. The *Nautilus* is no more (or less!) interesting for a few paragraphs about its engine room, so as in all editing, if nothing would be lost by the omission, best to cut it.

It's odd to still be getting this in the post-speculative age--Dick, Ellison, and Gibson have already paved the way for the odd, literary, genre story--and their works ended up being far more predictive of the future than any collection of gadget-loving writers. Gibson didn't even own a computer at the time he wrote *Neuromancer*, and certainly didn't go into great detail about the technical aspect of 'decks' or 'cyberspace', but that didn't prevent him from being remarkably prescient about how those technologies would change our world. So why, thirty and forty years after the Speculative Fiction revolution, should we end up praising a regression like this?

It's bizarre how much a modern sci fi novel can end up feeling like Tom Swift, with the character constantly mentioning his 'shotgun-microphone baton', 'levitation harness', and 'QT medallion'--going into long theoretical digressions about how precisely his 'morphing bracelet' might work, on the quantum level--as if it makes any difference. And then, of course, he just gives up and says he doesn't really know--so then, what was the point of the digression?

You know you're reading bad sci fi when the author takes a basic concept that we already understand and have a term for--like teleportation--and then invents his own, new term for it--or better yet, a whole phrase. Sci fi authors can't seem to get enough of pointless convolution, that extra layer of complexity that doesn't actually add anything to the story.

Or they'll have some gadget, and every time a character uses it, they explain it all over again. Sci fi is about tech, so of course you want the bits and bobs in there, but once a piece of technology has been established, you don't need to reintroduce it every time--we'll take for granted that the dude still has it and that it works in the same way. If you want to write a book about robots reading Proust, that's admirable--but don't then turn around and treat the audience like a bunch of mouth breathing idiots who need to be reminded what the servo wand does even though it's the fifth time we've seen it.

Beyond that, the technology in the world makes no sense--they have advanced in huge steps in things like teleportation and energy conversion, and seem to be able to create whole new people and races from thin air, and yet their ability to heal injuries is extremely limited, slow, and cumbrous. It makes it difficult to believe that this book was published as recently as 2003.

*Then came that fateful phrase upon which so many a sci fi and fantasy review has turned:*

And then there's the depiction of sexuality. It feels quite adolescent--physical instead of emotional, women described at length and men not at all--and not just in the *Ada* section, where it makes a certain sense as an homage, but throughout the book.

Strip it down to the bare facts of the description, and it becomes the sort of erotica Beavis and Butthead would come up with:

Beavis: So this chick is like, in the bath, and she's totally of touching her boobs.

Butthead: Yeah, and she's super hot. And then she stands up, and she's naked.

Beavis: Whoa, that's cool!

Butthead: And then she puts on a robe, but you can totally see through it.

Beavis: Heh heh, that's good, Butthead. And then, she like, rubs her boobs on a pole.

Butthead: Huhuhuh, and then she rubs her *thigh* on the pole.

Beavis: Like, her inner thigh ...

Butthead: Yeah. And then she goes over to this dude, and she takes off the robe, and she's, like, totally naked!

Is this list of body parts supposed to be arousing? If you were an alien learning the ways of human culture through sci fi novels--firstly, I'm sorry--and secondly, you could be forgiven for assuming that a 'woman' was like any other human being, except that all her limbs had been replaced by breasts, and all her locomotion was achieved by squishing them together and pressing them against things. Is this what passes for seduction? Just *'here's my naked body, have a go'*?

A few chapters later, the same characters are forced to undress together (because 'reasons'), and so we get this long, loving description of what the ladies look like, what the young man is thinking while looking at them, how naughty and exciting it is--and yet, no description of the men undressing, nothing about what the women might be thinking, what their point of view might be. In the original *Ada*, Nabokov uses first-person perspective, so the gaze makes more sense, but *Ilium* is third-person omniscient, so instead of the character's bias, we're just getting the author's.

One of these women is probably the closest we have in this book to a strong female character, and yet we only experience her through the eyes of the chubby, naive dude who keeps trying to sleep with her. Later on, we get a scene that is ostensibly about her desire, about someone she wants to sleep with--and yet, once again, the whole thing is painted in terms of what she looks like, of her body, of how a desirous man might

see her--even though this doesn't seem to be coming from the man's POV. It's such a blatant contradiction: the focus on female physical attractiveness is so pervasive that the women's sexual thoughts are presented in terms of what their own physical bodies look like.

We get an insight into his desires, which might actually have contributed something to his character, and neither are we allowed to understand what draws her to him--the description keeps turning back to her breasts and skin and hair, so that the consummation ends up feeling less like personal, carnal fulfillment and more like smacking two dolls together--except the child has only bothered to undress Barbie.

Then we get to the scene that convinced me to give up on this book entirely:

Our mooky, bookish hero has been led around by the nose for a few hundred pages, thrown into the plot without any choice in the matter and maneuvered from one scene to the next by forces beyond his comprehension--until finally, he starts to see that unless he changes his current course, it's not going to end well for him. At last, he begins to exercise some free will, to play the role of active agent in this book instead of just a passive observer. So, what's the first thing he decides to do? That's right, rape a woman. That's the *first decision he makes*, the first thing he does that he wasn't directly made to do by some greater power.

But hey, at least it's not a violent rape--no, he's too mild-mannered for that. Instead, he just uses his super science gizmo to make himself look like her husband and then orders her into bed--though he's so nervous he can barely get the words out, because he's one of those shy, bashful rapists--you know the type.

He also talks about how many times over the years he hung out in disguise outside her window, just watching her and thinking about her--and then makes a joke about '*the boobs that launched a thousand ships*', because there's no better time for humor than when you're about to sexually violate a stranger. Of course, he remonstrates himself for being a 'jerk' for thinking something so inappropriate and crass, because he's so mild-mannered and sweet--though this momentary self-awareness in no way slows down his rape plans.

And it's not like up to this point, he's been some intriguing, fraught, conflicted character who the author built up to be morally questionable, someone whose actions we must come to terms with. No, so far he has been a generic reader stand-in, a pure observer of the action (that's literally the character's job), just a standard nerdy sci fi protagonist who barely has a personality.

To switch *immediately* from such a flat character to such a fraught moral situation just doesn't work. I'm not saying authors shouldn't explore sexual assault, or the type of person who commits it, but in order to actually deal with that idea, you have to first build up the characters to the point where they have sufficient depth to actually delve into it in a meaningful way. Otherwise, why include it at all?

There's no reason I can see that this scene couldn't have just been a normal sexual encounter. The assault doesn't add anything to the book, and as soon as it's over, the author seems happy to whitewash and ignore it. I read a bit beyond this scene just to see if the author was going to try to deal with it, but instead the victim realizes what's happening and doesn't care in the least, then immediately starts questioning her rapist about other things--and after that, happily has sex with him a couple more times.

Is this supposed to excuse it, somehow? Like, if a guy fires off a gun into a house that he suspects is full of children, and then we later find out that it was empty, is that supposed to make him somehow less reprehensible? '*Oh, no one got hurt, so everything's okay--move along.*' If it doesn't provide new understanding of the main character (or of the victim), and the author is happy to ignore the fact that it

happened at all, and just move on with the plot, then what was the point? Why include it at all?

Of course, in a book about false Greek gods, we can't forget how often Zeus himself liked to pull this trick--a story about a man who gets godlike powers and starts treating his fellow humans like toys would have been interesting--but we're not getting the psychological buildup to support that story. Likewise, the idea that he had been forced into it could work, that he is nothing more than a pawn of the gods (which is altogether likely), but that also requires the proper setup: bits of foreshadowing and signs of internal conflict--all the details that would make such a plot turn interesting instead of merely convenient.

Then again, perhaps it's just exploitation, pure titillation--a hallmark of cheap, thoughtless sci fi everywhere. And yet, here's an author who spends large sections of chapters having characters discuss Shakespeare's concept of love, or Proust's. Clearly, Simmons is attempting to present himself as thoughtful and deliberate.

The problem is, if you don't actually bother to explore those themes through your characters, their personalities and actions, then it simply doesn't matter how often you have them lecture the reader on the subject--because all you've managed to do is write a book that tells us one thing, but where the action contradicts what we've been told. It's like having a protagonist who the supporting cast constantly praises for being smart and clever, but then every decision he makes ends up being short-sighted and thoughtless.

Maybe it's supposed to be some kind of cosmic frat bro slut-shaming. In the preceding scene, the victim gives this whole long speech about what a whore she is, how the current conflict is all her fault, and how she's been sleeping with these different dudes because she just can't help herself, and then she seems to be trying to seduce her husband's brother. So perhaps we're supposed to sit here and think *'well, this is all her fault, and she's just been whoring around for years, causing all this trouble, so really she's asking for it'*

And yet, as any genre fan knows, that's clearly not the worst you can expect--indeed, while Simmons' portrayal of sexuality is one-sided, it's not deliberately so, like so many writers--he's not lecturing us on the inferiority of women--it's just blandly and thoughtlessly sexist. Beyond that, the reader can see that Simmons is trying very hard to *do something* here, and between that and the passably interesting turns of the plot, it was almost enough to keep me reading. The concept itself should make a fascinating book--this hyper-tech recreation of the Trojan War on Mars, interconnected with Nabokov's 'Antiterra'.

All Simmons' overt connections with literature are meant to establish a place in the canon (as his genre has been trying to do for a century) perhaps that's why this book was shortlisted for awards, and has been widely praised, because of its obvious attempt to connect to Great Works. And yet, it makes the same mistake as any bad writing: trying to force through repetition and overstatement instead of doing all the difficult work of integrating those ideas into the book. Simmons just isn't doing enough, it's lip service, and the approach is just too rudimentary, flawed, and old-fashioned.

This isn't a forward-looking book, as sci fi should be, it's a weirdly nostalgic attempt to redeem the past of sci fi--despite how goofy, exclusionary, and horribly Gernsbackian it all was. Certainly, we should take lessons from the past, but good sci fi is always searching out the new thought or experience, exploring what it is to be human, and what it might be like in the future--the scree of gadgets is just a distraction, the same urge some shallow folk have to get the newest iphone. That isn't a mind seeking the future, it's one trapped in the ever-consumptive obsession of the present, the self, the now.

And I get it, because running on that treadmill feels like moving (especially when you buy a new, cooler treadmill every year) but all that lurching and twitching and shivering is nothing but an ague, and it'll drain you in the end.

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## Stephanie says

Prepare to have mind blown.

I like dense reads, and I like immersing myself in complex worlds created by brilliant minds... but never, NEVER have I read a more astonishingly complex novel. 1/2 the way through this gigantic mind bender I was still completely without a clue about what was going on in the book. The fact that I and so many others rate this book so highly tells you a little something about our Mr. Simmons and the quality of his writing. Who get's away with this?? Nobody does... excpet for Dan. Read this book, dont give up because you dont understand it, it is well worth it.

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## Becky says

Hands down the best scifi that I've read in the last ten years. This was the first time that I'd read Dan Simmons and I was floored by the depth of his characters, the complexity of his plot, and the intricate and fascinating world(s) he created. I personally liked the feeling over never really knowing more than any of the characters. I enjoyed the mystery of being on level with the characters, unsure of what would come next. Nothing about this is a light read. The book treats you like an adult, and you're going to have to work for it. You'll never guess what comes next.

I'm also ecstatic to see a return of "monsters." I've been so sick of reading about the cliché evil human, terrible bad person, delighting in torture, etc that all modern authors seem to use as the arch villain. Yes, we get it, people have a huge capacity for doing evil. I watch the news nightly and I already know that. To see a return of Cetebos, Voynix, and other creepy-crawlies was exciting and refreshing.

Robots, monsters, Greek gods, humans fighting for survival, Gaia Hypothesis, dinosaurs. This book has it all, and it has it all well. Its takes a true master to weave this sort of story together. You will not be disappointed by Simmons.

I was absolutely floored by this book. It is simply genius. It got my blood pumping, my mouth watered, I was stressed and in love with the characters.

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## David says

A fantastic sci-fi epic in the tradition of Simmons's *Hyperion Cantos*. In *Ilium*, as in the Hyperion books, Simmons really shows off his knowledge of classical literature. He obviously knows the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* inside and out, but the author (through his characters) also fills this book with literary and historical references to Shakespeare, Proust, and a dozen other sources. It's ingenious and it made me to resolve to finally get around to reading the *Iliad* myself once I've finished this series.

Set in the 40th century, *Ilium* is a retelling of the *Iliad*. Kind of. We begin with "scholic" Thomas Hockenberry, who was an early 21st century classics professor revived by the Olympian gods in the 40th century to monitor the ongoing Trojan War — which is taking place on Mars.

"Wait, what?" you are thinking. The "gods" are creatures of super-science, using unimaginable powers of quantum manipulation and nanotechnology to take on the roles and attributes of the classical Greek deities. And not just the big names either — while all the old familiar gods like Zeus and Athena and Aphrodite of course figure heavily into the plot, Simmons, through his educated protagonist Hockenberry, encounters scores of minor named gods and heroes as well.

Just why the gods are reenacting the Iliad on a terraformed Mars is not made clear by the end of this volume, but the heroes — Achilles, Hector, Paris, Odysseus, etc — are also as epic as the gods, thanks to both nanotech enhancements and literal interbreeding between gods and mortals, just like in the myths.

Hockenberry and his fellow scholics are basically embedded journalists for the gods, but although they all know how the Iliad ends, they have been forbidden by Zeus to tell any of the other gods. The gods know that the scholics know how Homer said the story is supposed to end, but they've been forbidden to ask the scholics. So they continue playing their games with mortal lives.

And then Hockenberry is recruited by one of the gods for a clandestine mission to kill another god. And with the "magic artifacts" he's been given, he's able to change a key event. And suddenly we're not in the Iliad anymore. And Hockenberry, who's now a dead man as soon as the gods catch up to him, decides to change the story completely.

This would be a pretty awesome story all by itself, but in fact Hockenberry is only one of three main protagonists. There are two other subplots which eventually merge into the Iliad on Mars. A pair of "Moravecs" — a race of sentient robots built by post-humans before they disappeared, now living out among the moons of Jupiter — is on a mission of their own. Not having paid much attention to the inner system for generations, they discovered a lot of dangerous quantum manipulation and advanced terraforming on Mars. When they go to investigate, their ship is shot down... in orbit, by a bearded man in a chariot throwing a lightning bolt at them.

Mahnmut and Orphu, the only two survivors, try to make it across Mars, aided by mysterious "Little Green Men" who seem to be creations of neither early humans nor the gods. The two robots, whose dialog is kind of reminiscent of R2D2 and C3PO, if C3PO were a Shakespeare scholar and R2D2 were fond of Proust, add a bit of comedy relief to the story, but eventually have a role to play in the climactic confrontation between gods and mortals.

Finally, there are the last surviving humans on Earth, a tiny population of laborless dilettantes with little to do but go to parties and play musical beds. Their world has been created by the long-gone post-humans, who created teleportation networks around the world, set up a system in which all remaining humans are carefully population-controlled and do not have to work or want for anything. They are granted perfect health until their "fifth twenty," when they report for ~~extermination~~ ascension to the outer rings, *Logan's Run*-style. But as Eloi-like as the remaining human race may be (they are actually called "Eloi" by one of the old-time humans they later meet), the spark of curiosity hasn't completely died in all of them. A few set off on an unplanned adventure, and discover truths about their world... and that there are Morlocks.

*Ilium* is so rich in world-building and has such a tangled plot that there were occasional bits that lost me — I am still not sure of the role of Caliban, the Little Green Men are just strange, and we don't yet have an answer to the question of why super-advanced godlike beings have resurrected the entire cast of the Iliad on a terraformed Mars. But hopefully those questions will be answered in the second book, which I will be reading soon.

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## James Williams says

According to the cover for *Ilium*, it was nominated for the Hugo Novel of the Year in 2004. It absolutely deserved it. It also didn't win, and it deserved that as well.

Don't get me wrong. It's a great book and I loved reading it (indeed, this was the second time I read it and I think I enjoyed it more the second time). It's really three stories all happening in different places in the solar system at the same time, inevitably approaching one another. It's rare to find a book tries this and does it well, and *Ilium* does it well.

The main hook of *Ilium* is that it's a science fiction book set in the Trojan war of Homer's *Iliad*. It also mixes in a healthy dose of Shakespeare and even Proust. And this all contributes to a fine and wonderful story, but it's also *Ilium*'s downfall. At parts, the *Iliad* thing starts to feel gimmicky. It's not often, but it's enough to keep me from giving the book five stars.

On the whole, it's well-written. Every once in a while, the author tries to conjure up some convoluted imagery which is ridiculous enough that I just laughed at the poor sentence structure instead of being struck by whatever he was trying to tell me. But that was rare and for the most part I didn't notice the language at all.

So I loved the book, but it's ever-so-slightly flawed. Still, it was much better than even this review is, and I'll definitely be reading it a third time in the future.

But now, I'm looking forward to starting the sequel *Olympos*. Onward.

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## SAM says

Just like *Hyperion* you're thrown into the middle of complex plot with no point of reference. There's unfamiliar words, odd sounding places and the live battle of Troy being overseen by a 21st Century teacher. Having prior knowledge of said battle isn't really a requirement. My only insight was the underrated Brad Pitt film, which did me just fine. (yes, i said underrated. I loved it!)

It took around 300-350 pages until i finally started to get into this book. Up until then it just felt clunky and a bit of a hash job. I could see where the story was going i just thought it could have arrived there more smoothly but by the end i couldn't part company. I read the last 240 pages in one day, which i rarely do.

Will definitely read *Olympos*.

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## Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

Most excellent.

I like SF, and I like much of what gets lumped under the rather stuffy title 'classic literature'. Clearly, so does Dan Simmons. Set in a very distant future, long after both AI and posthumans have merged, this novel contains three main storylines, all of which ventually intersect.

First, there's a group of languid, pleasure-seeking old-style humans living on old earth, all their needs taken care of by mechanical servitors left for them, presumably, by the posthumans. Upon completing a century of life, they are supposed to ascend to the orbital rings where the posthumans reside, and join them. A small group of old-style humans decides to find out what's really going on in those orbital rings. Which, as it turns out, involves Prospero and Caliban from Shakespeare's 'Tempest'.

Simultaneously, a group of AI robots left to pursue their own ends in the Jupiter moon system note anomalous amounts of quantum activity on Mars, and launch a mission to find out what is going on. Among them are Mahmmut, who is obsessed with Shakespeare's sonnets, and his friend Orphu, who prefers Proust.

Oh, and there's the Olympian gods too, who have all the powers ascribed to them in Greek myth. Only, it seems they can't see the future, so they've brought back a bunch of scholars from the future to confirm if the events taking place as they observe and interfere in the Trojan war correspond with Homer's account.

Simmons has pulled off quite a coup here. His novel bristles with the up-to-the-minute hard sf concerns about posthumanism, quantum science, AI and so on. At the same time, he's found a way to bring in heroes from antiquity and great works of literature from our past and use them to illuminate what our future might be like.

ILIUM is the first part of a duology. The second is OLYMPOS, which I'm currently reading. There is so much left over to be tied up in the first book that I think the two would best be considered as one long story split into two books.

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## **Josh says**

Ilium defies description. It's epic sci-fi with huge twists, characters tempting fate, some fickle and furious Greek gods, Achilles and Hector from Homer's Iliad, Shakespeare-spouting robots from Jupiter, oh, and some trippy worm holes. It's good stuff. Video thoughts at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIeLP...>

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## **Anthony Ryan says**

Masterly far-future sci-fi epicness from Dan Simmons. Thousands of years into Earth's future the human population has stagnated into a contented form of indulgent immortality; no-one dies and no-one goes hungry, but also no-one really does anything more interesting than take part in the occasional sex party or get eaten by a cloned Allosaur. Meanwhile a present-day historian has been resurrected on Mars, apparently at the whim of the ancient Greek gods in order to act as observer to the siege of Troy, a legendary event that has somehow been transformed into gruesome historical reality. Into this heady mix come two highly evolved 'Morivek', sentient descendants of robotic probes to the outer planets of the solar system grown curious about the fate of their human progenitors. Simmons mixes Greek myth and Shakespeare into a complex and often demanding story that nevertheless rewards the reader's commitment. You may need to read it twice though.

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## **Javir11 says**

Primero de todo decir que he leído este libro en la versión de dos volúmenes y por lo tanto solo me he leído esta primera parte.

La historia de cada una de las tres tramas me parece muy original y fresca, pero si tuviera que quedarme con alguna sería sin duda aquella que hace referencia a la Ilíada de Homero.

Esa mezcla de Guerra de Troya, Dioses griegos posthumanos y ese toque de ciencia ficción, me ha parecido una verdadera locura. Ojala todo el libro fuera sobre ello XD

La incertidumbre de no saber por donde van los tiros, aunque tengo una hipótesis en la cabeza, ayuda a que uno se enganche a esta lectura.

El libro esta muy bien escrito y solo la irregularidad de las otras dos tramas, algo más lentas y con quizás más necesidad de tiempo para madurar, evitan que le ponga las 5 estrellas por ahora. Igual cuando me lea la segunda parte la cosa cambia.

Lectura muy recomendable para cualquiera que le guste la buena ciencia ficción.

Como siempre, os dejo el enlace a mi blog por si queréis leer la reseña más completa que he colgado allí.

<http://fantasiascifiymuchomas.blogspot...>

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## **Mitch says**

In spite of the violent content, I really like Dan Simmons' Hyperion and its sequel.

This book looked like it had potential. For reasons unknown, the Greek gods are kicking it on Mars and the Trojan War is being fought with a lot of their participation.

Now the book starts throwing in all sorts of sci-fi wonders...nice, but not enough to save this.

First- it's far too detailed and has too many repeated references to the Iliad. Second, some seriously unbelievable things happen several times. And third, it's crippled by too much withholding of revelations. You could feel the author doing this over and over.

Proof positive for this is that, after seven hundred and twenty-five pages of reading, you are just now STARTING a major conflict and many things are as yet unexplained and unresolved. The sequel takes you there, if you have the staying power.

I made it through the first one, but even though I bought the second one inexpensively at the same time as I got the first, I won't be reading it.

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## Clouds says

**Christmas 2010: I realised that I had got stuck in a rut. I was re-reading old favourites again and again, waiting for a few trusted authors to release new works. Something had to be done.**

**On the spur of the moment I set myself a challenge, to read every book to have won the Locus Sci-Fi award. That's 35 books, 6 of which I'd previously read, leaving 29 titles by 14 authors who were new to me.**

**While working through this reading list I got married, went on my honeymoon, switched career and became a father. As such these stories became imprinted on my memory as the soundtrack to the happiest period in my life (so far).**

In 2004, *Ilium* won the Locus Sci-Fi award. In my opinion, if the award had been a motor race, the other contenders would have got their asses lapped. That's not to say there weren't some good books in the running that year, *Quicksilver* is epic and I've heard good things about *Pattern Recognition*, *The Speed of Dark* and *Singularity Sky* – but *Ilium* is so far up my alley that it's sitting on my lap and fiercely tonguing my tonsils.

When I embarked upon my Locus Quest, I picked the Locus Sci-Fi Award over other more highly regarded genre awards (Hugo, Nebula, BSFA, Arthur C. Clarke) for one simple reason: *Ilium*. I looked at my bookcase, saw this book and thought "I want to read more books like that". Glittering on the cover was a little silver sticker 'Winner of the Locus Award for best Sci-Fi novel'. I looked online and discovered that none of the more prestigious awards had recognised and rewarded Mr Simmons' mind-blowing madcap genius. "If the good people at Locus share my sensibilities regarding Señor Simmons," I thought to myself, "then perhaps I'll share theirs regarding other books." Just like that, the decision was made and I committed myself to reading every winner of the Locus Sci-Fi award – a reading list that has taken me best part of two years to complete.

My introduction to *Ilium* set my spider-sense a-tingling. My Mum popped her head round the door and said 'I've got one for you, I couldn't get into it – it was all a bit *much*'. Now, that may not sound like an encouraging description, but where my Mum's tolerance for high-concept sci-fi drops off a cliff my personal sweet-spot begins. Previous authors to elicit this response that it was 'all a bit much' included Stephen Baxter, Greg Egan, and Alistair Reynolds – a warm welcome to the new chairman of the 'bit much' club, Dan Simmons!

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy has already done a superb job of summarising the story-strands so I advise you to pop over to his review to wrap your head around them.

This mash-up of classic literature with razor sharp sci-fi is audacious and inspirational. It's the kind of book that I wish I could write. It's the kind of book I wish I could trace back to the creative spark that initiated it to try and spin in a new direction. I read the book with a delighted grin stretching my cheeks throughout. The kind of book I'd risk walking into lampposts for because I simply could not tear it away from my face. I've read it multiple times and it never fails to delight me. I suppose you could call me a fan?

Off the back of *Ilium* I read its sequel *Olympus* (obviously) and then ventured further into Simmons' work – The Hyperion Cantos, *Song of Kali*, the Joe Kurtz Trilogy, *The Terror* and *The Hollow Man* were

all good reads and I've got *Drood* on my shortlist and *Carrion Comfort* and *Summer of Night* on my longlist to read as soon as the chance arises.

It's fair to say I've become a big fan of his work – he consistently pushes my buttons.

I am happy to acknowledge that *Ilium* won't be for everyone (like my Mum) but whenever anyone asks me if it's worth a read I can't help but gush. If you have even a passing interest in sparkling, original, intelligent, playful sci-fi – give it a try!

**After this I read:** Hyperion

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