Hyperion author Dan Simmons dies from stroke at 77

Dan Simmons, the author of more than three dozen books, including the famed *Hyperion Cantos*, has died from a stroke. He was 77.

Simmons, who worked in elementary education before becoming an author in the 1980s, produced a broad portfolio of writing that spanned several genres, including horror fiction, historical fiction, and science fiction. Often, his books included elements of all of these. This obituary will focus on what is generally considered his greatest work, and what I believe is possibly the greatest science fiction novel of all time, *Hyperion*.

Published in 1989, *Hyperion* is set in a far-flung future in which human settlement spans hundreds of planets. The novel feels both familiar, in that its structure follows Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and utterly unfamiliar in its strange, far-flung setting.

Seven characters, seven stories

At its heart are the background stories of seven characters on a pilgrimage to the Time Tombs, which move backward in time. There, they may possibly confront a legendary, mythical, terrifying, and time-bending creature known as the Shrike. Each of the stories told by the seven characters is done so in a different subgenre, from tragedy to political thriller to military science fiction, and so on.

I went into *Hyperion* blind, decades ago, knowing almost

nothing about it. I was never the same after finishing it. For a book that is, essentially, “hard” science fiction, *Hyperion* is also one of the most emotional books I have ever read.

The first tale is that of a priest, Lenar Hoyt, and the dying religion of Catholicism. By the end of this story of cruciforms, isolated civilizations, tesla trees, and more, I was floored. And that was just the first story of seven! Most powerful, for me, was the Scholar’s Tale, the story of Sol Weintraub and his daughter, Rachel. The first of my two daughters had just been born when I read this book, and for the first time ever, when reading, I cried. Cried like a baby.

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