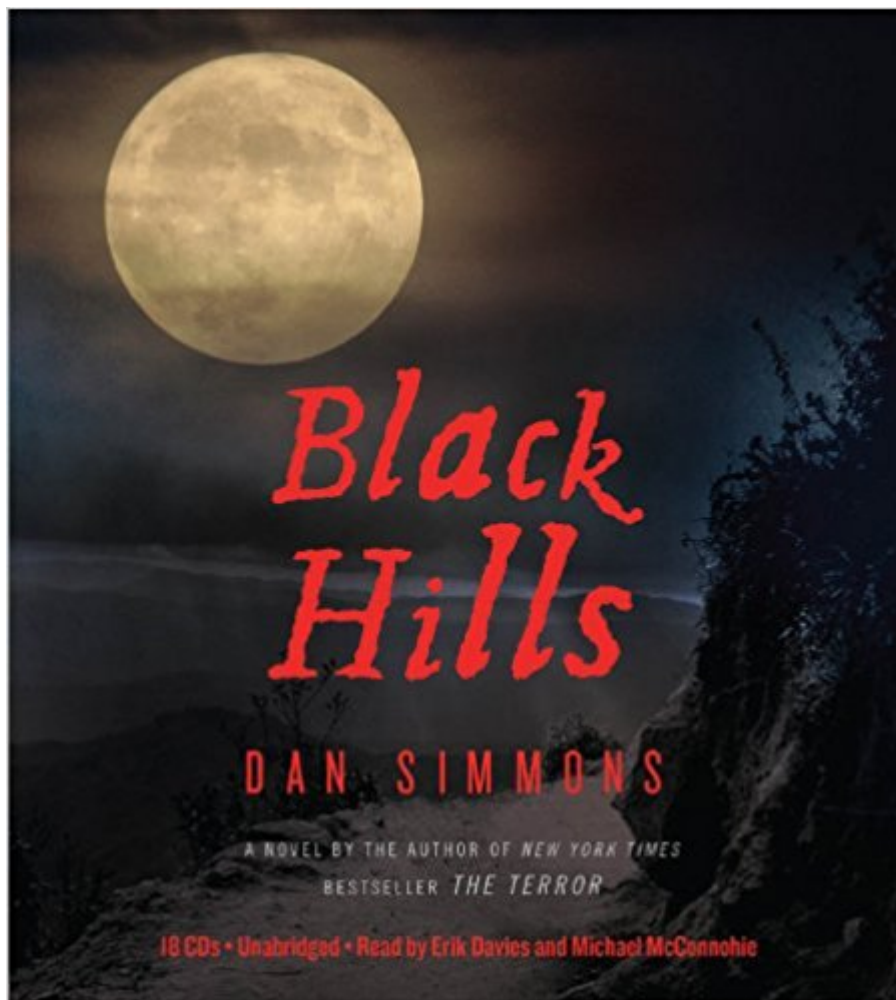


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# Black Hills: A Novel



## Synopsis

Paha Sapa, a young Sioux warrior, first encounters General George Armstrong Custer as Custer lies dying on the battlefield at Little Bighorn. He believes--as do the holy men of his tribe--that the legendary general's ghost entered him at that moment and will remain with him until Sapa convinces him to leave. In *BLACK HILLS*, Dan Simmons weaves the stories of Paha Sapa and Custer together seamlessly, depicting a violent and tumultuous time in the history of Native Americans and the United States Army. Haunted by the voice of the general his people called "Long Hair," Paha Sapa lives a long life, driven by a dramatic vision he experiences in the Black Hills that are his tribe's homeland. As an explosives worker on the massive Mount Rushmore project, he may finally be rid of his ghosts--on the very day FDR comes to South Dakota to dedicate the Jefferson face.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Hugo-winner Simmons, the author of such acclaimed space operas as *Hyperion* and *Olympos* as well as *Drood*, an intriguing riff on Dickens's unfinished last novel, displays the impressive breath of his imagination in this historical novel with a supernatural slant. In the author's retelling of Custer's last stand at the Little Big Horn in 1876, the dying general's ghost enters the body of Paha Sapa, a 10-year-old Sioux warrior who's able to see both the past and the future by touching people. The action leaps around in time to illustrate the arc of Sapa's life, but focuses on 1936, when, as a septuagenarian, he plots to blow up the monuments on Mount Rushmore in time for a visit to the site by FDR to atone for his role in constructing the stone likenesses. In his ability to create complex characters and pair them with suspenseful situations, Simmons stands almost

unmatched among his contemporaries. 6-city author tour. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Simmons's previous novels *The Terror* (2007) and *Drood* (2009) meld historical figures and events to occult phenomena, and *Black Hills* follows a similar pattern. Here, Simmons fuses the triumph of American Western expansion and the marvels of early 20th-century science and engineering with Native American spirituality and mysticism. Simmons is a gifted storyteller whose meticulous research and evocative prose deftly transport readers to another time and place. However, the *Christian Science Monitor* found the frequent barrage of historical minutiae tedious and criticized the novel's interpretation of Manifest Destiny and the harsh treatment of native populations, which it considered obnoxious and disrespectful. However, most critics praised *Black Hills* as a highly imaginative, interesting novel and a worthy addition to Simmons's oeuvre. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Dan Simmons did his research in order to write this book. He researched the Lakota language, customs, and beliefs extensively. Of course, it involves Custer, but in a unique way. The time goes back and forth between the late 1800s and early to mid 1900s. Superbly told. I cried the last 50 pages or so becoming emotionally involved. Wonderful!!

If you like Historical fiction, and you would like to learn a lot about the Black Hills a little over 100 years ago, you will enjoy this read. Dan Simmons is my favorite author, and I can't remember ever giving him a poor review, but I honestly believe that you will enjoy reading him too! Robert D Moore

I've been a fan of Dan Simmons for years and this one is imaginative and unique even by his standards. What a strange and interesting book.

Now that Dan Simmons has moved into writing historical novels with a parnormal twist (*The Terror*, *Drood*) there seems to come a point halfway through his novels where I have to put them down and read something fast, light and insubstantial to clear my head before jumping back in to Simmons' occasionally dense prose and abundance of details. The good news about *Black Hills* is that I managed to make it straight through the novel without a break. The bad news is that after enjoying the story, I was befuddled when I came to the end. And the end after that. And then the next end.

And so on. Simmons knows how to write novels, but if there's something he's weak on it's figuring out how to end a story. That weakness is fully on display in *Black Hills*, the story of a young Lakota boy who is "counting coup" on the dying soldiers at Custer's Last Stand and somehow picks up the ghost of the Custer who would be his constant companion for the next six decades. The premise was intriguing and Simmons handled it well, jumping back and forth along Paha Sapa's life and the memories of Custer. Likewise, Simmons handled the settings very well - from the Black Hills at various times in history to the Chicago World's Fair to New York in the 1930s where Paha Sapa and his unwilling companion meet the aged widow of Custer to the Mount Rushmore monument where Paha Sapa works setting charges and plans to destroy the sculpture. But as the book spins out the last threads of the story it seems as though Simmons loses faith in his story and begins hurling endings at the reader in the hope that something will stick. Granted, if Simmons had stopped with the first "ending" most readers would have considered it weak (if not a complete "deus ex machina" cheat). Perhaps Simmons decided to make up for Paha Sapa's last minute reprieve as he waits for his death by tacking on endings where he lives, dies, has visions of the past, has visions of the future, etc. Ninety percent of *Black Hills* is great. Simmons is a good enough writer to keep the Paha Sapa/Custer-sharing-a-body concept from slipping into slapstick or parody like an Old West version of the Steve Martin/Lily Tomlin comedy "All of Me." He's also a good enough writer to hold my interest as the plot jumps back and forth in time. I just wish the last 10 percent of the book could have been up to the same level of the first 90 percent.

Great book I love how Dan Simmons makes history more interesting by making it fiction I quite enjoyed this book.

Dan Simmons is a good writer -- fluid, straightforward -- and he puts together good plots. The premise of *Black Hills* -- the ghost of George Custer leaps to a Lakota boy counting coup on him at the moment of his death -- is very interesting, and opened up all sorts of possibilities. I don't feel like Simmons ever did much with the premise, though; what I thought would be the central motif of the novel turned out to be an occasional excursion that really didn't have much to do with the overall plot. And, frankly, the last 50 pages or so are both melodramatic and implausible. This was an enjoyable read, but Simmons could have done much more with his central idea, and would have profited by accepting an ending that wasn't happy.

Dan Simmons has written a classic here. Paha Sapa leads an incredibly interesting life. From the

opening of the book and his chance encounter with Gen. George Custer, Paha keeps finding himself in places and in situations that you would never expect him in. Paha Sapa is second only to Larry McMurtry's Augustus McRae in Lonesome Dove as my all time favorite character. An outstanding character who will be my friend forever!! One of my all time favorite reads!!!

I had just received it before my trip to THE BLACK HILLS. It certainly altered my feelings as I traveled through and saw so many of the places mentioned in the book. I would recommend it to anyone who is planning a trip there or even if they have already been, this book gives you an entirely new perspective of the area. I bought another copy for my friend, she hasn't read it yet but feel it will effect her in a similar way since she was with me on the trip to PAHA SAPA. I will probably be purchasing more of Dan Simmons' books looking for the same enlightenment from them even though I know that they are fiction. .

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