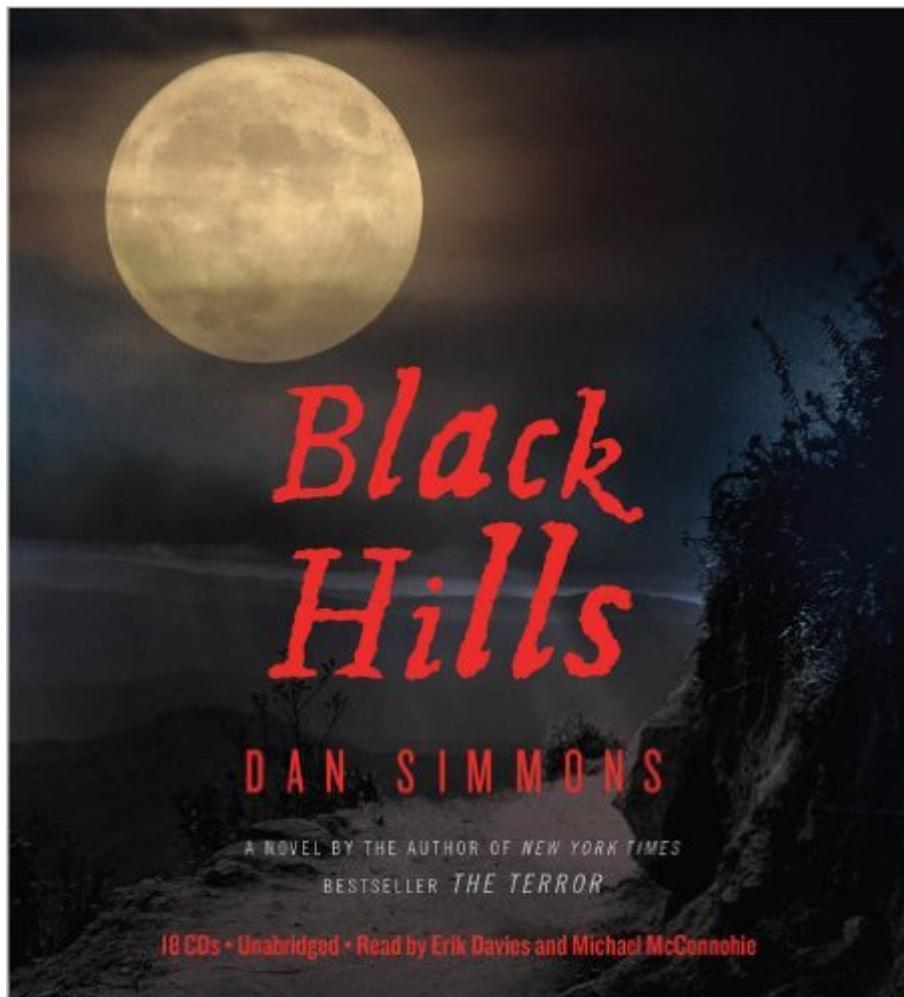


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Black Hills: A Novel



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

In June of 1876, a gifted young Lakota Indian boy named Paha Sapa touches a dying white soldier at the Battle of Little Big Horn, little realizing that he is "counting coup" on the fallen General Custer himself. In that moment, the boy's life changes forever, as the ghost of the slain war leader mysteriously enters his soul, where it will reside, speaking to him at odd moments, for the next sixty-plus years. **Black Hills** comes from the vivid imagination of Dan Simmons, author of previous lengthy best-selling historical novels *The Terror* and *Drood*. The book is long, entertaining, and wonderfully descriptive, though it lapses into excessive wordiness at times. The epic story encompasses seven decades of Paha Sapa's life and treats the reader to diverse settings ranging from the Black Hills of South Dakota to the "White City" of the Chicago World's Fair. Told in a

nonlinear fashion, much of it in present tense, the story can be difficult to follow, particularly toward the beginning of the book before the reader is accustomed to the back-and-forth, decade-skipping flow of the narrative. The main plot centers around the construction of the Mount Rushmore memorial, carved into a mountain sacred to the Lakota tribe. Paha Sapa signs on as a powderman on the blasting crew, hoping to fulfill a destiny revealed to him as a child in a vision: to stop the wasicus--the white "fat takers"--from destroying the Black Hills. Other story lines include Paha Sapa's wonderful coming of age as a Lakota visionary, a too-brief romantic interlude in Chicago, and the underlying saga of America's growing-up years through the early twentieth century.

Black Hills, by Dan Simmons, begins with Paha Sapa, a young Lakota boy, touching the body of the dying General George Custer at Little Big Horn. In that moment, Custer's spirit enters Paha Sapa's body. It doesn't leave for over sixty years. Paha Sapa experiences this more than once with people. He has Custer's spirit in his head, but he also can see the pasts and futures of many people he meets, including Crazy Horse. During his initiation ceremony to become a man, Paha Sapa also experiences a terrible vision of the future; four large stone presidents of the United States careening across his beloved Black Hills, eating everything in their sight and leaving all behind them to waste. Paha Sapa grows up as his Lakota family and the other native tribes of the Great Plains die out. He comes to the decision that he must destroy these stone presidents before they destroy his land. So he sets out on a plan to blow up Mt. Rushmore before the monument is complete. Paha Sapa is a wonderful character; he is so good and so kind and so aware of his culture disintegrating around him. He is a complicated person who hates what the white settlers have done to his land but who also respects and admires their ingenuity and passion. He is one of the most achingly lonely characters I have met in a very long time. He is kind to everyone, but is set apart by his race and by the ghost in his mind and by other people's memories crowding out his own memories. I fell in love with him and his quiet dignity. I also enjoyed the story and Simmons' storytelling approach. There is a true sense of immediacy for the reader in each chapter. The narrative jumps around a lot, from the 1870s to the 1930s and between Paha Sapa and General Custer.

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