

INA CAPSULE

Black Hills

Author: Dan Simmons

Publisher: Reagan Arthur / Little, Brown

THIS supernatural story revolves around some real-life characters who had a big part to play in the history of America.

The book begins with young Sioux warrior Paha Sapa (which means 'black hills' in the Sioux language), who is in the Battle of Little Big Horn against General Custer's army.

Poor Paha Sapa then finds his body taken over by Custer's ghost and is soon babbling to Custer's wife Libby about their sexual escapades and his early life as a soldier. The possession, with all that choking and gagging when Custer's ghost enters his body, causes Paha Sapa to come under scrutiny. It is discovered that he has the ability to read a person's life by merely touching the person.

Sioux war chief Crazy Horse becomes paranoid about Paha Sapa's abilities and orders him to be executed but Paha Sapa manages to escape and begins a new life far from his people. The reader is then taken to various important eras in American history as seen through Paha Sapa's eyes and his visions.

Simmons weaves an interesting tale about a man who tries to make his way across the world and doesn't for once try to romanticise any of his experiences. The Native Americans, namely the legendary Crazy Horse, are shown to be just as ambitious and devious as their white counterparts while Custer is depicted as a soldier who reluctantly goes to war and towards the end, regrets much of his actions as a soldier.

Simmons moves from era to era very quickly and that gets a bit confusing at times. However, the story is engrossing, especially Paha Sapa's visions, which he keeps mostly to himself but which the readers are privy to. - S. Indra Sathiabalan

