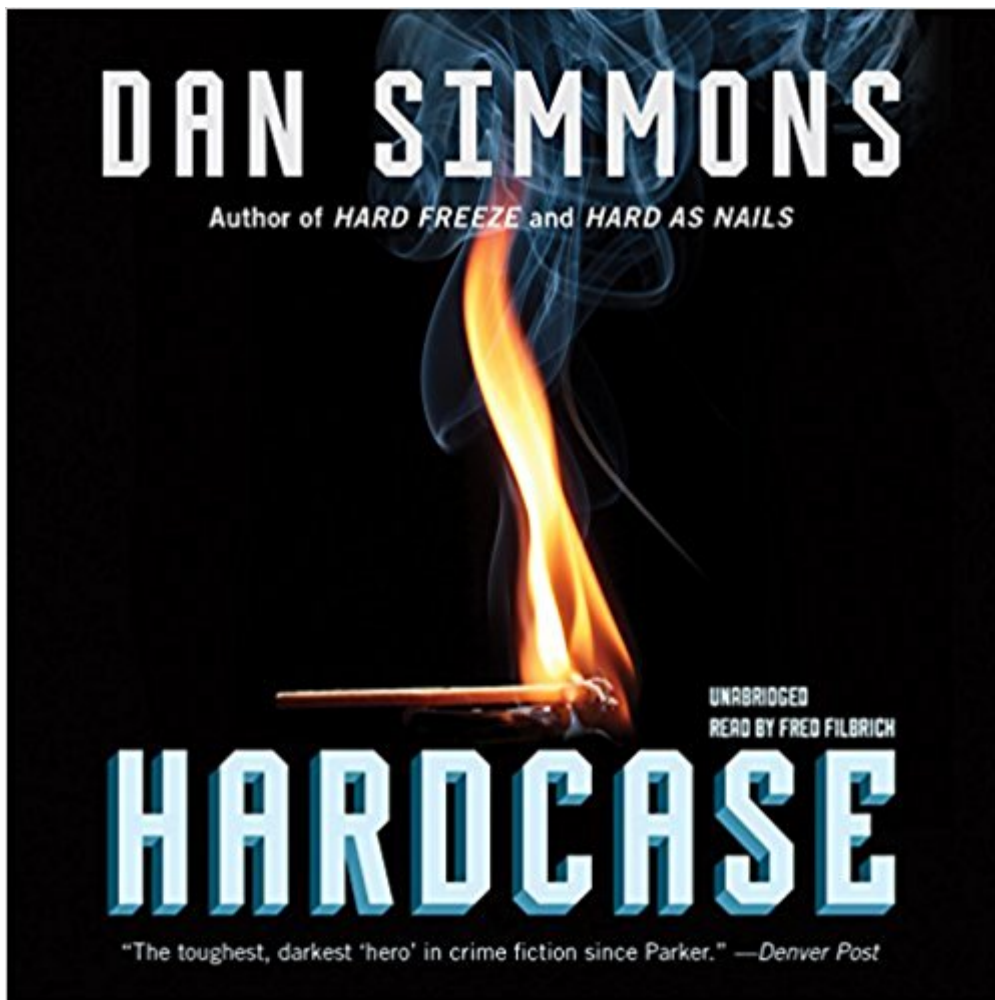


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## Hardcase (Joe Kurtz Series, Book 1)



## Synopsis

Award-winning author Dan Simmons takes the reader on a trip with Kurtz through the cold, windy streets of Buffalo where one wrong move could mean a belly full of lead. Once Joe Kurtz needed revenge - and revenge cost him eleven years in Attica prison. Now Kurtz needs a job, and the price is going to be higher. Out of prison, out of touch, Kurtz signs on with the Byron Farino, don of a mob family whose son Kurtz had been protecting on the inside. Farino enlists Kurtz's help to track down the family's missing accountant - a man with too much knowledge of family business to have on the loose. But someone doesn't want the accountant found - and with enemies inside the family vying for his throne, and turf warfare just around the corner, Farino needs an outsider like Kurtz to flush out who's really behind this latest affront. As the story twists and turns and the body count rises, Kurtz no longer knows who he can trust. Everyone seems to be after something, from the mob boss's sultry yet dangerous daughter, to a hit man named The Dane, an albino killer who is good with a knife, to a dwarf who is armed to the teeth and hell-bent on revenge. Kurtz has always been an ace investigator. Now he's about to discover that to get at the truth, sometimes you have to go after it - hard.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Penzler Pick, July 2001: Dan Simmons is not an author who writes the same book twice. He doesn't even come close. Since switching from fantasy/horror to mystery, Simmons has written Crook Factory, set in Cuba and starring Ernest Hemingway, and Darwin's Blade, featuring a genius

insurance claims investigator who only has to look at a demolished vehicle to be able to know exactly what led up to the crash. With *Hardcase*, Simmons both pays homage to over-the-top pulp fiction and writes a remarkably good example of it. Joe Kurtz has no intention of giving up his chosen profession of private investigator, even though he's just spent 12 years in jail. He believes it's only a matter of finding the right case. But that case will never come to him, so he pays a call on Byron Tatick Farino, mob boss, and suggests that for \$400 a day plus expenses, he'll try to find the Family's missing accountant and also figure out who's hijacking the Family's trucks. Farino is inclined to let him do this since he has nothing to lose, and Joe did save his son from a fate worse than death in Cell Block D. So Joe is off and running, and after picking up his ex-assistant, Arlene, he opens an office in the basement of a porn store and begins looking into the Mob's business. He no sooner interviews the accountant's wife than she is found dead and horribly mutilated. The list of those who want Joe to butt out is long, and they are evidently very serious about preventing Joe from finding out too much. There's the person who is hijacking the trucks, and wants to continue. There's also a couple of sociopaths (if not psychopaths) named Malcolm and Cutter who work for the Mob's lawyer. Unsurprisingly, they are not exactly loyal and know that there's a \$10,000 reward for the guy who wasted Ali, one of the Death Mosque brothers in Cell Block D. Finally, there are the Levine brothers, Manny and Sammy. Joe hasn't heard of either of them, but word is that Manny blames Joe for Sammy's death. These numerous and varied storylines remain remarkably lucid as Simmons treats us to a fast-paced thriller with excitement on every page. --Otto Penzler --This text refers to the Kindle Edition edition.

In books such as *Darwin's Blade*, *Carrion Comfort* and *Hyperion*, Simmons has shown a chameleon talent for mastering the colors and shadings of the horror, suspense and science-fiction genres. He adds one more tone to his palette with this terse hardboiled crime thriller, set in an upstate New York town bathed in Conradian darkness. When ex-PI Joe Kurtz emerges from Attica after an 11-year-stretch, he is still being sought by the brother of a man he iced for murdering his partner, as well as by disciples of a Black Muslim group whose leader he killed in stir. Not the most obedient parolee, Joe clandestinely resumes detective work, tracing a vanished mob accountant for aging don Byron Farino much to the aggravation of the don's family and associates, who are secretly double-crossing one another and jockeying for power. Simmons sets up the paths of crossfire necessary for the story's few surprising twists, then simply lets the bodies start falling once the bullets start flying. His narrative is all sinew and bloody gristle, stripped of the deep reflection and lively character-development that usually give his books a plusher texture. His plot depends on

coincidence, exploitation of the raging Niagara Falls backdrop and Joe's superhuman capacity for taking and dishing out physical abuse, but his rapid pacing keeps the reader from dwelling too much on its improbability. This tale is unlikely to advance modern crime-fiction's literary ambitions, but it will be hard to beat for a pulp-fiction beach-read. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Kindle Edition edition.

Five stars? It's a five star hard-boiled detective novel, sure. Simmons is one of my favorite writers, mind-blowing Hyperion to Custer in 'Black Hills'? Amazing breadth, I'll continue to read everything he writes.

Dan Simmons has made a name for himself as a writer of very cerebral science fiction and horror novels. Lately however, he seems to have taken to reinventing himself as a mainstream genre novelist (if there is such a thing) and to this end he has written a superb novel of World War II espionage (The Crook Factory), a mediocre urban legend novel (Darwin's Blade) and now with Hardcase, a hard boiled gangster novel. Joe Kurtz murders the drug dealer who killed his girl friend. It's a revenge killing and Joe makes sure that he gets every ounce of revenge going. The murder is brutal, excruciatingly painful and bloody and, for Joe, enormously satisfying. He gets eleven years in Attica jail, but they pass in the turning of a page. When Joe gets out, he uses the contacts he made inside to wangle a job with a Mafia big boss. The boss wants Joe to track down one of his comrades who has vanished with a lot of the Mafia funds. It seems straight forward, but there are wheels within wheels, loyalties within loyalties and Joe is soon up to his neck in ultra-violence. Everyone wants him dead. The tension never lets up and the violence never ends. Blood drips off the page, agony screams from every chapter heading, mangled bodies litter the paragraphs. The carnage never stops. It's a dark, dismal novel and I felt slightly dirty when I'd finished it.

Hard charging, non conventional...not Patterson like...,and creative! A master of the writing craft. Chalk up the detective genre as one of his victories as well!

I'm new to Dan Simmons's fiction, previously having read only the two Hyperion novels. Hearing that Simmons writes in other genres, I decided to tackle Hard Case. Wow. The guy really has range! The dialogue is liberally sprinkled with F-bombs, so if this gets in the way of your enjoyment, avoid this novel. It's hard, of course, to imagine the sorts of creeps, perverts, and sadists who populate the criminal world Simmons creates who do ~not~ speak like this. So, the coarseness of

the speech certainly doesn't clash with the context. But, I've read about a gazillion crime novels by this time in my life, so I wasn't expecting Simmons to come up with something new. He didn't. But, he did -- though obviously following a very well worn path -- render the various plot devices, characters, and situations with such panache that I found myself erupting in belly laughter at how predictable scenes crystallized on the page as something surprisingly fresh. Some of this derives from Simmons' sprinkling allusions -- sometimes quotations, from the original Latin, no less -- to classical Western literature. An argument between two homeless men that slides in and out of English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew comes off as incredible and plausible at the same time, no mean feat. And, something certainly beyond the pitiful powers of a hack novelist. I'm irritated with novelists who insert long passages into their fiction that serve no purpose beyond padding the manuscript. I detected only one such passage in *Hard Case*, and as it flowed by like molasses I wondered if some editor were leaning over Simmons' shoulder, demanding he up the page-count by two or three. The novel is short, after all. But, that's one of its beauties. Excepting this one laboriously descriptive rendering of rural scenery, the novel zips right along. The ending is abrupt and leaves a few dangling threads. But, after everything before this ending, thread-weaving would definitely have come off as anti-climactic and ... yes, page-count padding. I'm really looking forward to the follow-up novel.

To be honest I'm not a big fan of the genre as such, but Dan Simmons has a knack for compelling storytelling that seems to work as well for detective stories as for SF and horror. In summary, this should be a good read for any Simmons fan. I'll leave any comparisons to other writers of detective stories to those better oriented in that genre.

Simmons' PI turned rogue-PI is a hard case for sure. Would love to see it made into a movie IF they chose the right lead. Be sure and start with the first of the series because the stories build in a meaningful way.

Can't believe it took me so long to read this book since I am a big Simmons fan. This is him at his best. Very good tempo and great characters. Will buy the next two books in the series right away.

Gritty and rough and not just buffalo. Kurtz's fits right into Simmons' anti-hero character we all cannot help but love. Look out Jack Reacher here he comes.

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