

# BLACK HOLE SUN

BY DAVID MACINNIS GILL

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### About the Book

Durango will take on any mission—as long as it is dangerous, impossible, and hopeless, and as long as it pays enough for him and his crew to get by. He doesn't have a death wish, exactly, but he's got a lot to run from and a whole lot to forget. Fortunately for Durango, he also has Mimi, a symbiotic nano-implant, to keep him on the straight and narrow, as well as a crew of loyal soldiers. Because he's going to need everything he's got for his latest mission—defending a rag-tag clan of helpless miners from a ravenous horde of feral cannibals and their enigmatic but brutal leader, who is hellbent on taking on the miners, and Durango along with them.



### Questions for Discussion

1. Durango is something of a reluctant hero, preferring to remain an anonymous Regulator, rather than drawing attention to himself. What does this trait say about his ability to act as Chief to his Regulators and as leader of the miners? Why do you think he decided to accept the job to fight the Dræu? What does this decision reveal about his character?
2. At the end of Chapter Three, Durango says that he “was born to become the lord and sovereign of Mars.” What expectations does Durango’s father, John Stringfellow, have for him? What steps did his father take to help his son meet his “destiny,” and how does Durango feel about them? How does his relationship with his father change how Durango makes decisions?
3. When Durango says that he listens to his “little voice,” he means it. How was Mimi, the artificial intelligence that controls his body armor, embedded in his brain? Who was Mimi in real life? Why was the relationship that Durango had with the real Mimi important to his acceptance of the AI?
4. It could be said that Ockham is an older, battle-weary version of Durango. Other than a missing eye, what traits do they share? What are the key differences in their personalities? What lessons does Durango learn—intentionally and unintentionally—from Ockham’s behavior and philosophy?
5. The Durango at the end of *Black Hole Sun* is different from the Durango at the beginning. In what ways does he change as a character? Do you think that he grows or regresses? Why? How do you think you would behave if you were put in his position? Explain.
6. Regulators are governed by a set of guiding principles called the Tenets. How do the main characters feel about the Tenets? Are there any unwritten rules that you follow in your life? Why do you think that Regulators are known only by nicknames and not their given names?

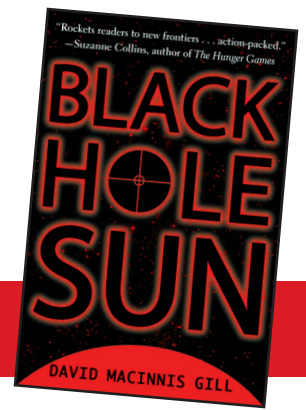
*Questions for Discussion continued on the next page . . .*

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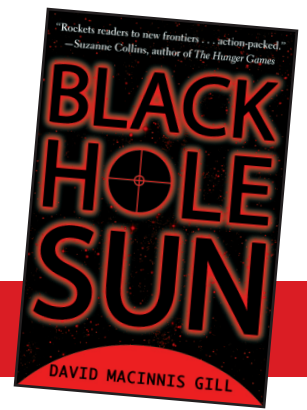
7. One source of conflict between Durango and his second in command, Vienne, is her very strict adherence to the Tenets, while Durango sees them more as guidelines for behavior. Do you think that one way of behaving is more “right” than the other? If you were a Regulator, which character would you most be like in terms of following the Tenets?
8. For a Regulator, the one way to reach a glorious afterlife is to experience what they call “a beautiful death”—to die heroically in battle. Which character fails to die a beautiful death? Do you think, as Vienne says, that Durango cheated him out of the afterlife? Did Durango make the right decision?
9. Define the word *dalit*, in terms of its use to describe a Regulator. Why is it an insult? Why is Durango not particularly insulted by it?
10. What role do Fuse and Jenkins play in the story? How do they bridge the gap between the miners on one side and Durango and Vienne on the other?
11. Although the founders of the Mars colony thought that they were creating a perfect society, a utopia, Mars actually became the opposite, a dystopia. Based on some of the background details you can glean from the text, what were some of the factors that led to this outcome? What does the outcome say about societies? About the individuals within them? Would you prefer to live in a utopia or dystopia? Why?
12. Early in Mars’s history, mines were a valuable part of the planet’s development. Now, they are useless, and the miners who worked them are ostracized. How does this change of status change how the miners view themselves? Why does it make them easy victims for the Dræu? What parallels do you see between them and the *dalit*, and why is Durango so willing to help the miners?
13. In what ways does the existence of the chigoes add tension and conflict to the story? How does Durango’s attitude about them change from the beginning of the novel to the end? Why is this ironic?
14. The Dræu and their leader, Eceni, are feared predators, but they are more than they seem to be. How were the Dræu created? Who is responsible for their existence, and why does Eceni have “special feelings” for Durango?
15. The themes of honesty, duty, and betrayal run throughout *Black Hole Sun*. Which characters betray themselves and others? Do they do it for personal gain or for a greater purpose? Do you think that Durango and Vienne stay true to themselves? Explain.

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### Extension Activities

1. **Colonization of Mars.** NASA has been exploring Mars for several years with robots, and Russia is planning a simulated human landing. Do you think that Mars could be colonized in the future? If a colony were established in your lifetime, would you be willing to become a colonist?
2. **Terraforming.** Durango sums up his planet by saying, "Mars stinks." The stink comes from the methods that have been used to terraform Mars, to turn it from a dead planet into a living one that can support life. Research the concept of terraforming. What methods do scientists think would be most effective at terraforming Mars? How long would it take to complete the process?
3. **Dystopian Worlds.** *Black Hole Sun* can be described as a "future dystopia." Dystopian stories are very common in literature. Examples include Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World*; Kurt Vonnegut's short story "Harrison Bergeron;" and the films *The Matrix* and *Blade Runner*. Compare and contrast the dystopian vision of Mars in *Black Hole Sun* with worlds you see created in these other novels and films.
4. **Soldiers of Fortune.** The Regulators are very similar in origin and behavior with soldiers of fortune, such as Texas Rangers from the wild west and Samurai from feudal Japan. Select a film, novel, or story that features these types of characters and compare how the soldiers of fortune are portrayed. Some possible selections are:
  - a. *Stagecoach*, directed by John Ford
  - b. *Star Wars*, directed by George Lucas
  - c. *Ender's Game*, the short story, by Orson Scott Card
  - d. *Dorsai Spirit*, the novel, by Gordon R. Dickson
  - e. *The Magnificent Seven*, directed by John Sturges

### About the Author

David Macinnis Gill is an associate professor of English education at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, specializing in young adult literature. He is a past president of ALAN, the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE. *Black Hole Sun* is his second novel. His first, *Soul Enchilada*, was an ALA Best Book for Young Adults in 2010, a *Kirkus* Best Book in 2009, a Bank Street College Best Books of the Year selection in 2010, and an NYPL Stuff for the Teen Age selection in 2010. He lives with his family in Wilmington, North Carolina. Visit him online at [www.davidmacinnisgill.com](http://www.davidmacinnisgill.com).

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