

# Preface to CALIFORNIA ROLL

*by Roger L. Simon*

At the beginning of the eighties, I was determined to be what the high-tech industry now fondly refers to as an "Early Adaptor." My father was a radiologist surrounded by giant, complicated machines and I suppose, subconsciously, I thought that was what men did. Besides, I couldn't stand fussing with white-out and scribbling on a yellow pad seemed hopelessly Nineteenth Century, so I was one of the first of my writer friends to get into word-processing.

My first brush with the computer was in the year 1980 when working on a Richard Pryor movie called 'Bustin' Loose.' The director, an elegant fellow named Michael Schulz, showed up at the production office with a rather humungous machine that today would only be used in Los Alamos and proceeded to type my screenplay into this monster, a process I recall taking weeks. I never quite got the hang of how to edit it myself, but I knew I'd better learn or other less courtly directors would be mangling my future work with a vengeance.

So in the next few years I was an eager purchaser of many of the first personal computers - the "luggable" Osborne, a couple of Kaypros, and, of course, an Apple II, as well as several chugging dot-matrix printers whose irregularities made me yearn for the days of white-out. (Naturally, like an idiot, I either gave away or threw out all of those dinosaurs instead of carefully stowing them in my garage to sell today for a bundle as "antiques.")

This incipient technophilia led almost inexorably to the composition of "California Roll." I was fascinated by - really jealous of -- the founding legends of the Silicon Valley, Jobs and Wozniak and the garage and, with a writer's avidity, I wanted to be part of it. (Even then, I think I suspected they would end up billionaires while I would be here, in 2000, painfully punching out a preface to a novel I wrote sixteen years ago.) Part of the fascination too was the rise of Japan as our competitor/collaborator at that time. I wanted to go there and this would be a good excuse.

I arranged two research trips for myself - one to the Silicon Valley and one to that Asian nation. The former was something of a bust. In those days, 1984, there wasn't much to see in the Valley - a couple of restaurants where the computer geeks were supposed to hang out (I never met any) and one measly techno bookstore with a handful of monographs about the emerging "nerd culture" and a few shelves of dense programming guides I couldn't read even if I wanted to.

I tried to get into Apple but was stopped at the door (they weren't interested in detective writers, screenwriters or any other form of writers I

could pretend to be), so, through a family connection, I visited the Rolm Corporation instead, one of the earlier telecommunications outfits. That provided some of the background for what became Tulip Computers in the book, but mostly Tulip was a product of my dream of what was behind that forbidden door at Apple.

Paradoxically, I had much better access in Tokyo. I was welcomed by the Maltese Falcon Society of Japan whose president, Jiro Kimura, happened to be the Japanese translator of my books. I gave a reading in his tiny Shinjuku apartment crammed with more people than I have ever read to since while being plied with out-sized tumblers of Wild Turkey, the brand of bourbon that provided the title for my second Moses Wine novel and which, they assumed, was my liquor of choice. I barely ever drank it. But I did that night - a lot of it - and ended up more smashed than I had been since college, reeling around the neon-lit streets of Tokyo, getting into a (perhaps fatal) fight with my second wife, but learning far more than I would have sober.

My Japanese host's generosity continued and I ended up seeing a lot of their country in a short time with many of my experiences, including the Maltese Falcon Society and its members, ending up in the novel as characters and sub-plots. The book was subsequently published in Japan and to this day I have no clear idea of their reaction. Maybe I don't want to know.

But, ironically, the only purely fictional sub-plot, invented out of whole cloth, as the cliché goes, the appearance in the story of an agent of Russian military intelligence (the GRU), became the object of peculiarly intense scrutiny several years later when I was visiting the then Soviet Union. The late Julian Semyonov, the most popular Soviet thriller writer (called the Russian Robert Ludlum) and putative colonel in the KGB, had invited a group of his colleagues from the recently founded International Association of Crime Writers to Yalta for a conference.

Each of us was assigned a personal "translator" whom we assumed, probably correctly, was a Russian intelligence agent of some sort. Mine, Oleg, informed me that "everyone" (whoever they were) was reading my book "California Roll". They said they found it "very interesting, very... complicated" but wanted me to know there was something inaccurate. The GRU would never, under any circumstances, operate in Tokyo. Japan was a sovereign nation. Would I consider changing the book? Readers of this new edition will see that I did not.

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*The trade paperback edition of CALIFORNIA ROLL will be published by [ibooks, inc.](#) in 2001.*