

THE LOST COAST -- Preface

by Roger L. Simon

Of all my books, my mother thinks "The Lost Coast" is the best. I don't know if she's right or not, but the publisher certainly didn't feel the same way. HarperCollins dumped the book unceremoniously, giving it far less attention than any of my previous publishers gave any of the other Wine novels. Not only did they not advertise or promote the book in any way, they printed it on paper so cheap the pages started to brown around the edges before the books even got out of the stores. Then they canceled my contract for the sequel before I had a chance to tell them my next idea, let alone to write it.

Worse yet, I had to read about all this on the front page of the New York Times. In an article about the wholesale cashiering of author's contracts at HarperCollins, meant to illustrate the new hard-nosed business practices in book publishing, there I was in the second paragraph, achieving a lifetime ambition to be above the fold in the Times, only in ignominy. (In defense of HarperCollins, I was a couple of years late delivering the novel, making them ninety percent venal rather than a hundred.)

Naturally, almost no one read the book. It is appearing here for the first time in paperback and I hope it finds an audience now because it was an attempt to expand the form slightly. Crime writers are always trying to get mainstream recognition, pointing out that the Shakespeare of "Hamlet" was a crime writer and Dostoevsky and Conrad wrote thrillers, etc., etc., ad nauseum, ad tedium. And in the "The Lost Coast" I did try to be more "novelistic," enriching characters and making the book less obviously "plot driven." This, of course, did not impress HarperCollins. They wanted the book to be somehow "funnier" and "faster," giving me endless, almost incomprehensible rewrite notes. I did my best to disregard them. For me, perhaps luckily, this was my first encounter with the growing Hollywoodization of book publishing. Immediately, I saw there were two major differences between the two coasts -- the movie people did it better and they paid more.

Although all the Wine books are personal, this one may also be the most directly revealing, using more of my own history and melding it with the detective story. In order to preserve whatever small bits of privacy remain, I leave it to the reader to figure out what I mean by this exactly, but it shouldn't be too difficult.

Apropos of the book being late to the publisher, I have often been asked why there are so few Wine novels (this even though Chandler and Hammet didn't write many either). Other than natural human laziness, my only

excuse is that I never wrote a book in the series unless I had something specific to say with the genre, some crime in society I wanted to expose or background I wanted to exploit. This had the fallout, I hope positive, of allowing Moses to grow up and times to change between the individual novels. For this reason too, the books have become, in a sense, a diary that in retrospect I seem to have been writing sporadically for twenty-five years as women and wives come and go, children mature and the world goes crashing through the millennium. I wrote "The Big Fix" in 1972 at the age of twenty-nine and it wasn't until I crested fifty that I sat down to write "The Lost Coast." It's not surprising Moses Wine has a lot to look back on -- and a lot of it may be bitter, but some of it is sweet.

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