General

The Lost Band: Spanish Bit Series
Don Coldsmith
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“Life is good. It only has bad times.” This is what the Indian maiden White Moon decides early on after she is taken captive and her husband killed during a raid on their tribe by an invading new people, the “Shaved-heads.” One of only a handful of survivors remaining of the Forest Band of the People, she plots a course that enables her peoples’ traditions to secretly survive for nearly 200 years in Coldsmith’s recent addition to his Spanish Bit Saga. This story came out of an unanswered question from his earlier books about the traditional empty seat of honor in the Council Circle at the annual Sun Dance gathering of the nations of the Great Plains. One year the Forest Band simply failed to return, but the seat always remained open for this “Lost Band.”

In the prologue, the annual ceremony (this is the late 1700s) is disrupted by a stranger, claiming the council seat. His name is Story Keeper and to the disbelief of those around him, he announces that he is the chief of what they refer to as the Lost Band. In his tale, he recounts the story of White Moon, her son Striker and his wife, Pretty Moccasin and the first search for “their people.” Coldsmith uses Story Keeper to weave the past with the present as he tells about Stumbling Bear and his family, friends and vision-quest and many years later the appearance of the married couple Blue Horse and Lark, who in the guise of traders, continue the search. The bulk of Coldsmith’s more than thirty works of fiction is his series of historical novels set largely on the Great Plains beginning with Trail of the Spanish Bit, published twenty years ago. It’s not necessary to have read any of the earlier works to understand and enjoy this novel.

Coldsmith, a lecturer on the American Indian, the Great Plains and the lore and literature of the American West, writes what he knows best and fills it with memorable characters (such as White Moon and her confusion and guilt on taking a second husband from the tribe who made her a widow) and events (the annual buffalo jump). It's a fast, fulfilling read similar to White Moon's realization near the end of her time: "Life is never what one expects, but always interesting."