



The Crown of Columbus

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Plotted to capitalize of the Columbian quincentennial, *THE CROWN OF COLUMBUS* traces the exploits of two romantically involved Dartmouth professors as they seek to recover Columbus's lost diary and a priceless crown he reportedly presented to an Indian leader during his first visit to the New World. The adventure begins when Native American anthropologist Vivian Twostar stumbles across an uncatalogued packet in the Dartmouth library while researching an article on Columbus. The contents of this cache eventually lead her to a letter by Samuel Cobb, one of the school's early benefactors. Accompanying the letter are two pages which Cobb claims to have torn from Columbus's lost journal and several oyster shells etched with signs mapping the whereabouts of a fabulous crown, "Europe's gift to America." When Vivian shares these discoveries with her Anglo lover and colleague, the eminent Columbus scholar Roger Williams, he rejects their authenticity. Nevertheless, he agrees to accompany her to the Caribbean retreat of Henry Cobb, one of Samuel's predatory scions, who wishes to exchange the remainder of Columbus' journal for the information he believes Vivian possesses regarding the location of the crown. The lengths to which Henry is prepared to go to retrieve the crown constitute the greater part of the story's many twists and turns.

Though nearly scuttled by a preposterous climax and "surprise" ending, *THE CROWN OF COLUMBUS* remains a satisfactory potboiler. Unfortunately Dorris and Erdrich have attempted to refine their low entertainment with existential musings on the enigmas of our actions and interactions. The effects are jarring, suggesting *KING SOLOMON'S MINES* as rewritten by Michel Foucault. Still, approached as trash, the book delivers a fast, often pleasurable read.

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